



THE ALTERNATIVE

Founder of natural skincare line Koko Kollection **Cleo Johnson**'s passionate about alleviating poverty, skills development and empowerment. She believes in making a difference no matter how small.

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MY INSPIRATION

My natural skincare journey and my love for kimonos, candles, kitchenware, self-care and comfortable clothing inspired my skincare range Koko Kollection. Starting it was something I'd dreamed of, but I'd been unsure whether I'd get around to realising it.

My quest for natural alternatives began when I decided to come off the pill and tackle my acne head-on. As with most skincare journeys, I tried various products on the market, both chemical and natural, but I was frustrated with the sheer volume of products I had to use, and with the results, which were often disappointing. After doing some research, I began experimenting with facial oils for combination, acne-prone skin, which left my dehydrated skin moisturised and revived, dried out my blemishes and minimised my scarring.

I don't wear makeup often because I hate feeling like I have to cover up my uneven skin tone and blemishes. I strive to have healthy skin in general. Occasionally, of course, that does mean I experience a breakout, but I aim to create an environment for my skin to thrive with the assistance of natural ingredients and formulations. Thus, the Flawless Potion was born.

In addition to facial oils, I've also launched a natural deodorant, a tonic for beard growth and a product for people who suffer from pain and anxiety.

I test all my new formulations before launching them to the market, and I use my products daily – excluding the beard tonic, of course.

BE UNIQUE

We firmly believe in making a difference, from our business practices to our packaging, the ingredients we use, and

EMBRACE WHO YOU ARE

It's taken me a long time to feel comfortable in my skin and to embrace it no matter what it looks like on the day. Now, I play with my look, express my creative side, follow authentic and positive women on social media and, most importantly, be kind.

being mindful of our carbon footprint and sustainability. We produce our products locally, are 100% female-owned, and Koko Kollection focuses on health and inclusivity.

I want to build a community that caters to all genders, sizes, sexual orientations and faiths. I've seen how brands can unite people, stopping them from feeling isolated and divided, so I wanted to curate a space and brand that does that too.

Our product development relies on feedback and recommendations from our community, family and friends. We cater to peoples' needs and concerns, as well as what they're struggling to find in the market.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

I don't want the Koko Kollection to come across as a 'pretty brand'. I want it to make a difference. Our customers should feel included. Many mainstream brands only cater to a select few or don't focus on peoples' struggles adequately.

WHAT OUR CUSTOMERS NEED

Our customers want effective products for their skin and grooming concerns for a fair price. They want to find clothing that fits their body shape, and they want the tools to help them cope with and work through anxiety.

INNOVATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

We'll launch a self-care range that goes beyond bath products and

aromatherapy. We're also developing a range of unique, natural ingredients for a complete range of natural skincare, which will be simple and effective to use, and minimise the time you spend on your skin daily.

THE SHOP TO GIVE INITIATIVE

I set up all my businesses to give 10% back to charity or a social development initiative because I learned to give back from a young age. Owning a business is a blessing; it should be about more than making a profit. My businesses are a vehicle to help those less fortunate.

We donate 10% of every purchase to the Imbumba Foundation, which we chose as a long-term partner and recipient when I climbed Mount Kilimanjaro back in 2018 in aid of their programme, Caring 4 Girls, which provides sanitary products to women and girls from disadvantaged backgrounds. I nominated a school and donated sanitary pads to 360 girls for a year.

The Foundation aims to bring about social change and economic upliftment in rural and economically marginalised communities in South Africa by investing in and mentoring individuals and communities who seek to uplift and empower themselves. It's an innovative, nonprofit, social enterprise that understands the contemporary challenges facing today's society.

THE REWARDS AND CHALLENGES

The most rewarding parts of my journey, to date, have been receiving samples and clothing labels, formulating different products, my first sale and, of course, my first product review – and the satisfying feeling of knowing I'd helped someone. Launching during a pandemic has been challenging, especially with limited resources, a lack of capital investment and slowly having to produce the line with the cash that I have.

SAGE ADVICE FOR YOUNG, FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS

You don't need to have large amounts of capital, the latest devices or a full business plan to start a brand. You must be willing to start, but not everything has to be perfect or thought out before you put your idea, product or service out there.

I love the quote: "You can 'someday' your way out of having a life." It's a reminder to take the next step.

I remember borrowing a laptop when I started my business, and I didn't have Wi-Fi at the time, so I'd sit in McDonald's or in cafes that had Wi-Fi so that I could deliver work to clients and attend meetings.

Also, don't let social media fool you into thinking that your come-up story must be glamorous.

I FEEL MOST COMFORTABLE WHEN...

...I embrace my authentic self, surround myself with positive energy, allow myself to be vulnerable, and put healthy boundaries in place.

For more information visit: koko-kollection.com

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