

## beauty

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## Elements Explores Nuance in Niche

By BELISA SILVA

AS INDIE BRANDS continue to gain consumer and retailer interest, beauty and lifestyle companies looking to differentiate themselves from the fray came to Elements New York on Monday and Tuesday to connect with buyers in search of standout product.

"In terms of niche, the integrity of distribution is important, but it's the quality of design that is the most important to us," said Frederick Bouchardy, founder of Joya Studio and cofounder of Elements. "Our goal is always to gain or keep the trust of our visitors."

Of the 75 exhibitors and 3,500 guests in attendance at the event, held at Skylight West in Manhattan, the sentiment seemed shared by most.

"Today everyone is saying, 'My product is niche,' but being niche is not about a price or a hard-to-get product. It's about a story," said Elements exhibitor Dhaher Bin Dhaher, founder of Middle Eastern fragrance brand Tola Perfumery. "I don't make up a story; I always tell the truth behind it."

The seventh installment of the beauty-centered trade show, which comes after Element's international debut in Dubai, expanded for the first time to categories such as edibles, jewelry and accessories that focused on artistry. Additionally, this year's show was meant to impart a sense of play and interaction with on-site nail services from RGB Cosmetics and Tenoverten, airbrush makeup applications from Temptu and mini facials from Sjal Skincare.

"Part of what's exciting about it is that we are starting to introduce new facets of what Elements is," said Jeff Lawson, owner of Jeff Lawson Associates Inc. and cofounder of Elements. "As we continue to evolve and develop the concept, we're going to bring a larger platform, presenting an edited version of all of these categories."

For Bin Dhaher, who launched his Dubai-based beauty line in 2010 after watching his sisters and mother mix their own scented oils, an authentic beginning is why he deems himself a true niche brand. "Seeing them smiling, having fun and bragging that each is doing it better, like typical Arabic ladies, I looked at them and said I will create a brand for you to share your smile with the world," he said, adding that he was at the show seeking American distribution for his six-piece Voyage collection.

Another brand that explored scent with a backstory was Atelier de Geste, a company that blends art, design and performance.

"I was inspired by Coco Chanel debuting a scent of hers with Les Ballets Russes. It was introduced in the theater and I thought that was amazing," said the brand's founding director Beau Rhee, who launched the first range of three unisex concept scents,

Blood Sweat Tears, The Good Earth and Wild is the Wind, at the show.

The range explores essences like additive fragrance notes and interprets a Charlie Chaplin quote from the 1940 film "The Great Dictator" about the preciousness of earth.

"This is a treasure trove of brands you can't find in department stores," said Erika Cohen, co-owner of Miami Beach fashion and lifestyle store Alchemist. Cohen, who spent a full day searching for products that would resonate with her highly discerning consumer, said she picked up about 10 new brands, including jewelry. "This year's

literal place. "The shields are a true crossover between beauty and jewelry," said Michael Miller, co-owner of Killer Collection. "It's really taken the next step into making nails an accessory."

Other beauty brands in attendance included newcomers like relationship-exploring fragrance brand Liaison de Parfum, locally produced bath and body line Smith & Chang and Rouge Bunny Rouge, a fantasy-inspired beauty range. Fashion model Leilani Bishop was on the floor showing her namesake line of fragrance oils inspired by her upbringing in Hawaii and global travels. "I've always worn flowers in my hair, so I wanted to create something that actually smelled like a flower," said Bishop, whose artful roller ball packaging is meant to feel at home in a clutch or evening bag. "I wanted to bring beautiful packaging to oils."

Brands also looked to differentiate themselves by launching new categories at Elements. Canvas & Concrete, for one, was showcasing a fragrance primer. "The Fragrance Primer stops your scent from mixing with the oils in your skin so it lasts four to five times longer," said Brad Parsons, vice president of distribution for the brand. "Right now we sell directly online for \$19.50, so it's a great impulse buy."

One retailer who quickly picked up the primer was Hayk Sargsyan, chief executive officer of Russian-based niche-focused "modern apothecary" Cosmothea. "We are not looking for trends here, we are looking for trendsetters," said Sargsyan, who said his best-selling U.S. brands are Malin + Goetz, Clark's Botanicals and Sjal Skincare. "I am in the market of artistic fragrances and interesting stories behind products."

For Letitia Wells, buying director for beauty e-tailer BeautySage.com, product packaging is paramount. "I'm looking for great packaging that will shoot well," said Wells.

For Ulrich Lang, Elements cofounder and owner of Ulrich Lang Fragrances, the event marked a time of expansion for the trade show. "I think this was the most diverse show to date, we had a lot of new additions not only in terms of new exhibitors and international exhibitors but also introducing new sections," he said. "We are onto something bigger. This was just a little taste of things to come."

Looking to the future, Bouchardy said visitors should stay tuned for an even more curated showcase, featuring additional subsections like wellness.

"The next thing is about alchemy and secret societies," he said, adding that in 2014 the show will go to London and Tokyo, as well as Dubai and New York. "The idea is until now it's been a free flowing and intuitive floor plan based on our instinct and our esthetic decisions. We are going to define the categories a little more and make them play off each other. This [show] was a bit of a segue into our new concept."



PHOTO BY TOM STREIBERT



The scene at Elements New York.

Elements caters more to our lifestyle aesthetic," said her husband and business partner, Roma Cohen. "The same girl who will buy the jewelry on display at Elements, or the fashion we carry, will also buy the beauty brands here."

That was just the point, said Bouchardy. "It makes sense for us to delve into other categories," he said. "All the senses should be addressed. Fragrance addresses more than just scent so we should be looking at all of these [categories]."

On the accessories front, jewelry brands like Bliss Lau and Killer Collection displayed stackable, interchangeable pieces and talonlike brass engraved nail shields, which brought the notion of "nail jewelry" to a quite