



**SALI  
HUGHES**

**PRETTY**

**HONEST**

**THE STRAIGHT-TALKING BEAUTY COMPANION**

*'If it's on my face, it's because Sali recommended it.'*

*Caitlin Moran*

**PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAKE WALTERS**

# **PRETTY HONEST**

**SALI HUGHES**

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FOR CAREY LANDER AND JULIA MARCUS, WHO KEPT PUTTING ON THEIR LIPSTICK, NO  
MATTER WHAT.

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# INTRODUCTION

‘Pretty is something you’re born with. But beautiful, that’s an equal opportunity adjective.’  
*Ralph Waldo Emerson*





There are two mantras I live by. The first is my grandmother's. One day, as a very little girl, I sat on her bed watching her spritz on Yardley English Lavender perfume, powder her face from a gilt Stratton compact and slick on her fuchsia No7 lipstick. Transfixed, I asked her why she wore make-up. Clicking the lipstick shut she said, matter-of-factly, 'Because when I've got my make-up on, I'm always ready. Imagine if I was out and got some lovely invitation that I couldn't accept because I wasn't looking and feeling my best? With make-up, I'm always able to go on the adventure.' I never forgot it and I apply the same theory to most days. The other is one that I remind my friends of whenever they're feeling ill or blue, and I invariably send them a huge care parcel of beauty products and make-up. I believe that the only thing worse than feeling like crap, is looking like crap too. Often we can't do anything about the former, but I feel passionately that addressing the latter can only help.

I believe looking good to be an important and valid pursuit. All too often, women with an interest in their appearance are assumed to be stupid, shallow or unintelligent. Even traitors to feminism. But I see good grooming and feminism as entirely complementary. For some, beauty is a matter of pride and self-respect, of feeling your best and worthy of attention. While a man with an interest in football, wine, Formula 1 or even paintballing would never see his intelligence called into question, a woman with an interest in surface is perceived to have no depth. I believe it's perfectly normal to love both lipstick and literature, to be a woman who paints her nails while shouting at *Question Time*. Looking good makes us feel good, and the rituals involved are a pleasure in themselves. The implication that poor women are getting up half an hour earlier than we want to and miserably trowelling on slap because it's what society tells us to do is absurd. I know categorically that for very many women, putting on make-up is the one and only time they enjoy to themselves all day. It's an act of love, self-care and, crucially, self-expression. Make-up is such a powerful tool of creativity. I genuinely pity men for not having it.

People often ask me, 'Why do you feel the need to put on make-up? Don't you love yourself without it?' It's a rather offensive and highly patronising question but one that, as a beauty columnist I sadly come across every single day (primarily from people who seem to believe that washing their face in carbolic soap and cleaning their teeth with twigs makes them a much better and more intelligent person than me, obviously). The truth is, I go bare-faced constantly and my self-esteem is resolutely intact, thanks. But I would be miserable if I looked like that all the time. To me, deciding to be vampy one day, classic ingénue the next, painted Madonna on a Saturday night and bare-faced Jon Mitchell on a Sunday morning, is exactly what feminism is about: freedom.

And it has little to do with men (not that there's anything wrong with pulling make-up, frankly. We all like a jump, for heaven's sake). I wear make-up chiefly for myself, and apart from making me look better (I don't care who you are, everyone is improved by a little concealer and blush) and giving me confidence, it makes me happy.

Anyone who dismisses beauty and make-up as mere frippery, an irrelevance pursued by the vain, frankly knows nothing about women. During the best of times, we put on our face like armour, ready for whatever the day ahead throws at us. A slash of good lipstick has the power to make us feel more prepared for a big work presentation, a good base makes us more dynamic and ready to communicate confidently with others. I rarely even sit down and write in my pyjamas at home without a little tinted moisturiser and lip balm. Make-up, however subtle, provides the demarcation that the day has begun, and looking good bolsters us to get the hell on with it.

But for many women, looks become especially important at a time you'd perhaps least expect. During the darkest periods, beauty takes on an extra significance and, for many, can become one of our most effective coping mechanisms. When we've lost a job, are going through divorce, are grieving a loved one (I remember spending an hour or two choosing which lipstick to wear to my father's funeral. It seemed like the only thing I could control on such a tragic and unwanted day), we literally

paint on a brave face. Even in economic crisis, we turn to beauty. Statistics consistently show that during times of recession and austerity, the sales of lipstick go up, due to the instant feel-good factor of buying and wearing a nice lippy. This lifting effect is perhaps never more utilised than during times of illness, when either the condition or its treatment has dramatically altered our appearance. Beauty rituals can become so much more than simple grooming – they can become a therapy in themselves.

To say I love beauty would be an understatement. I adore and revere it. Nothing makes me happier than discovering an amazing product and spreading the love, or popping into Selfridges for a Chanel lipstick on a rainy day, or mastering some technique I thought I'd never nail, knowing I can now rush off and share it with my friends. I've always been the same. From the moment I bought my first Body Shop Morello Cherry lip balm, I was hopelessly hooked. Within weeks, I was drooling over the 'Clinique Directory', a black and white catalogue of products, and binging on *Just Seventeen* beauty pages like some dirty junkie. I try several hundred products a year, across all price ranges, and my dining room resembles a small regional branch of Boots. I obsess over other women's routines, putting together bespoke goodie bags and performing makeovers whenever I'm allowed.

But there's a difference between being a beauty fan and someone who was born yesterday. Packaging and glossy ad campaigns sell pipe dreams and make promises that simply can't be kept. Myths are perpetuated and need to be broken. We spend our hard-earned money in billions on this stuff – shouldn't we know that what we're getting will work? I have spent 20 years, first as a make-up artist and then as a journalist, testing literally thousands of beauty products. I never recommend anything I haven't personally tried on myself, or on someone I know well. There is nothing more satisfying to me than looking at someone's beauty kit and letting her know she simply doesn't need the £80 eye cream, that the £25 moisturiser will work much better, that one concealer swapped for another will make her look fabulous in photographs in a way she never imagined, or that a new way of using cleanser will fix a lifetime of skin problems. I know what works and what doesn't and I want you to know too.

When I took over as beauty columnist on *Guardian Weekend*, I was determined to write a new kind of beauty coverage. I wanted to speak as freely as I do to my thousands of forum members and Twitter followers who ask me every single day for beauty advice and product recommendations. Glossy magazines, although I adore them more than most, and their often excellent beauty editors, simply cannot be wholly honest with you about beauty. They are at the mercy of major beauty advertisers, relying on them to keep them in business. If a major brand releases a moisturiser, a good write up is a dead cert. The problem is that while they will sometimes deserve them, there will be other occasions when a brilliant product from a smaller company, which doesn't have the same advertising spend, will have no chance of getting noticed. I'm here to make sure you don't miss out. I also want you to know the insider tricks I've learned from so many years working with the pros. Those looks you write to me about every single day are much simpler than you imagine. Smoky eyes, better-than-Botox make-up, winged liner, salon-precision nail painting? I have foolproof tricks for these and a hundred others that you'll use for the rest of your life.

I strongly believe that all women, without exception, look better with beauty products. Not a Jordanesque faceful, or pillowy cheeks stuffed full of fillers, but some – whether it's a little tinted moisturiser and mascara, or a swooshy eyeliner and red lips. And the key word here is 'better', because contrary to what the ad men want us to believe, I know that most women don't dream of having Cheryl Cole or Angelina Jolie's face. We don't look at supermodels and want to look like them, and live on cotton wool and Marlboro Lights. Overwhelmingly, we just want to look like ourselves, only *beautiful*. I'll help you do it.



## WHAT'S YOUR SKIN TYPE?

'I'm tired of all this nonsense about beauty being only skin-deep. That's deep enough. What do you want, an adorable pancreas?'

*Jean Kerr*



Ask anyone what is their skin type and most will say 'combination' or 'sensitive' – or both. Neither is as common as that. Women with a different answer will usually say 'dry', when in fact they are dehydrated. This must be overcome, because nothing in a bottle will improve your skin until you really know what you're dealing with. Arming yourself with your skin type, whether you are a textbook case of one, or a combination of 2–3 different types (menopausal women often find they run the gamut of skin types through the process of change), will allow you to buy the right products and stop wasting money on the wrong ones.

Skin typing is very useful, but of course not an exact science. It's perfectly possible to be 'a little from column A and a lot from column B'. For example, my skin is both dry and dehydrated but I find it responds best to products targeting the latter. My skin is rarely sensitive (miraculous, given how many products it endures in the name of research) but when it does flare up, cold weather and sugar are almost always at the scene. At which point, it is time to drop certain beloved products (those containing AHAs, for starters) temporarily from my routine. I know mineral oil sometimes makes me break out, but shea butter doesn't (it often does others). I know that a serum without the inclusion of hyaluronic acid will do nothing for me, but a facial oil without it will. This methodical thinking comes from knowing my own skin and observing it closely when times are good and bad. Skin typing is not prescriptive business, it's really to help *you* to become an expert in your own skin, being aware of what your face loves and loathes and recognising when you can help and how.

Skin really is the beginning and end of beauty. With a canvas of great-looking skin, it's pretty hard to go wrong thereafter. And unlike make-up, hair and nails, skin is about so much more than appearance. It's your body's largest organ and the only one able to give you a daily visual update of your general health. Take advantage of that and listen to what it's telling you.

## DRY

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*Feels uncomfortable and desperate for moisturiser after cleansing or showering*

*Feels dry by the end of the day after proper moisturising in the morning. Make-up is patchy*

*Feels sore in cold weather but is aggravated by central heating*

*Shows fine lines earlier than others in your peer group*

*Prone to dullness and flakiness, especially in winter and around the nose, eyelids and cheeks*

*Feels dry when you wake up each morning without a rich night cream before bed*

*Small pores*

*Prone to milia, the little white lumps that can hang around for months, especially surrounding the eyes*

I find women are increasingly calling themselves ‘really dry’. I see this as a bit like wheat intolerance or Seasonal Affective Disorder – all are real, none are anything like as common as we’re led to believe. Some dryness is usual but, mercifully, many of us haven’t the faintest idea what it really means to be a genuine dry skin sufferer. Those with truly dry skin couldn’t contemplate leaving the bathroom for breakfast without first applying rich moisturiser (my skin is so dry that I have to clean my teeth before showering – there’s not enough time after exiting the shower to do so as by then my skin is so uncomfortable I have to grab some oil and cream immediately).

While summer generally offers some relief for sufferers, winter can be hell, and demands an extra emollient, take-no-prisoners, mega-moisturiser to avoid stinging, chapping, dullness and discomfort. Pharmacy and prescription brands like E45, Vaseline and Diprobase are often great on the body but can cause breakouts on the face (contrary to popular belief, dry skin can easily break out with trigger ingredients like mineral oil) and are very poor as a make-up base, which for me is almost as intolerable a predicament as the dryness itself. I’m of the opinion that the best treatment for a dry complexion – from slightly dry to parched and sore – involves the daily use of oily, soothing cleansing balms, high-grade plant oils, rich cosseting creams and gentle exfoliants.



## SENSITIVE

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*Sometimes feels hot and itchy after cleansing*

*Flares up easily after using new skincare*

*Is more irritated at certain times in the menstrual cycle*

*Can be oily, combination, dry, dehydrated*

*Can come and go*

*Is prone to hot, itchy red blotches that get worse if touched*

*Sometimes angry-looking after a shower*

*Burns fast in the sun*

Sensitivity is really bloody annoying if you love beauty. Lots of products contain active ingredients which, though perfectly safe, aggravate the skin of certain women to the point where they are either unpleasant or impossible to use. The problem is that very often women who believe themselves to be sensitive are actually only sensitive to one or two ingredients that are so prevalent in mainstream cosmetics that they seem impossible to avoid. Nonetheless, it's well worth working out what's causing the irritation. You need to do this through the rather tedious process of elimination: scaling your skincare right back then re-introducing each product one by one until you identify the offender. Fortunately, you may only have to do this once or twice in your life because a proper scan of a product's ingredient list may give you a good idea of what's causing the problem. You can then avoid it more easily because increasingly niche brands are ditching common irritants – mineral/palm/paraffin oils, fragrance, parabens, alcohol and so on (lots of people are perfectly fine to use these). It may occasionally mean paying a little extra, but this also seems to be changing. You can now buy decent non-irritating skincare in most high-street chemists and health-food shops. Sensitive types should also check their diets. Many experts will tell you there's no link between diet and skin but nothing will change my mind – I have known too many women, including myself, who see increased sensitivity when consuming too much sugar, and a significant decrease when we have a word with ourselves and stop. I am a decidedly orthodox person, I am big on chemicals and pretty sceptical on alternative therapies, but this is one area in which I believe in 20 years' client experience over science.

# COMBINATION

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*Pores are larger around the nose, forehead and chin*

*Cheeks are generally normal, but prone to mild to moderate dryness*

*The T-zone: forehead, nose and chin are more oily and spot prone, especially at certain times in the menstrual cycle, during pregnancy or menopause*

*It's hard to find a moisturiser that leaves the entire face matte and comfortable*

*Make-up becomes patchy throughout the day*

Most women I meet believe they have combination skin to some degree or another and I certainly agree that the majority of us will experience it at some point in our lives.

Combination skins are typically more likely to be sent off-kilter by hormones (period-related breakouts are common in combo types) and are particularly exacerbated by menopause. Sensible skincare is very important; I find that very often combination skin actually started out as relatively balanced skin that suffered ill treatment from either very harsh oil-stripping or inappropriately rich moisturising. Subsequently, the main goal is to not exacerbate either problem (forcing skin to opt for either extreme), so gentle, sympathetic skincare is essential. Most combination types prefer the texture, feel and staying power of oil-free moisturiser by day. This is fine, but I advise using balancing plant oils in the evening and regular use of a mild liquid exfoliant. I would counsel against the use of foaming face wash particularly those containing sulphates (SLS). A balm, oil or cream cleanser is more sympathetic to unbalanced skins.

# OILY

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## *Shiny*

*Pores are large and easily visible (often with blackheads)*

*Prone to spots and/or acne (easily affected by hormones)*

*Ages more slowly, with fewer fine lines than others in your peer group*

*Comfortable upon leaving the shower, or after cleansing (one could happily wander off for a cup of tea without craving moisturiser)*

*A single-ply tissue pressed to the chin and nose an hour after cleansing will show translucent patches of oil*

Oily skin is a double-edged sword and probably the trickiest and most unpredictable skin to treat. Double-edged, because it can make you quite miserable in your youth and even middle age (I see more older oily skins than ever), repaying you somewhat later by ageing more slowly overall. Dry skins enjoy greater clarity in youth but wrinkle more quickly as you age. Oily skin is tricky to treat, partly because of the skin itself but also because there is so much utter guff spoken about this type of skin that those who have it don't know what to do for the best. Oily skin can provide a short-term base for make-up, sending it packing almost as soon as it's landed, re-surfacing it with shine. (See the chapter on acne for the best way to care for oily, spot-prone skin.)

In summary, moisturisers and oils are certainly not to be avoided, but mineral oils are, shea and cocoa butters are, super-rich emollients are. I feel sad and frustrated by how many women have been convinced they must avoid oil to prevent oiliness. I am entirely understanding about why oil-free moisturisers are a more comfortable, matte and practical make-up base by day, but I would still advocate a light facial oil at night. It is simply not true that all oils are created equal. A good one will help oily skin, not harm it. Along with a gentle cleanser, it is your oily skin's best friend.

# NORMAL

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*Neither oily nor dry (but occasional shine and dryness)*

*Comfortable, smooth*

*Small pores*

I'm generally not a fan of the word 'normal' when applied to anyone's appearance but in this case, normal means well balanced – a skin that is neither dry nor oily, rarely a confused combination of the two. It hardly ever breaks out and mostly feels comfortable. If this is your skin, accept my congratulations. Your skin will be easy to manage and relatively forgiving during the ageing process. It may, at various times of the month or your life, temporarily wander into oily/combo/dry territory, at which point, you can adjust to more specific but mild products until it returns to normal. A little dryness during cold weather is to be expected in normal skin, as is mild oiliness and slightly larger pores in the T-zone, but this is rarely problematic. Don't go nuts and try to blitz momentary lapses in your otherwise great skin – over-zealous treatment of oiliness or dryness may endanger your usually normal state long-term.

# DEHYDRATED

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*Prone to dullness, often lacklustre in appearance*

*Fine lines, some of which seem to come and go*

*Pinker (Caucasian)/brighter (Afro-Caribbean and Asian), plumper and healthier-looking immediately after showering (but before drying)*

*Responds positively to steam rooms, looks and feels better in humid weather conditions*

*Feels desperate for product after showering*

*Sometimes flakes and peels when make-up is applied, especially around the eyes and nose*

*Dry-feeling lips*

Until quite recently, dehydration has been hugely conflated with dryness by the beauty industry, when in fact they are not the same thing at all. Dry skin lacks oil. Dehydrated skin lacks water (which is why dehydrated skins can easily be oily, not just dry). Dehydrated skin typically looks ten times better when soaking wet, then dull and drab when dried off with a towel. It comes alive in humid weather and looks grey in the cold. Some skins retain water better than others – there's no scientific proof that drinking water makes skin more moist, though there's a great deal of anecdotal evidence (most women I meet feel their skin looks better when they are drinking plenty of water). A senior dermatologist once told me, rather plausibly, that the body prioritises water consumption, allocating first to vital organs. When the body becomes dehydrated, it will steal water from the skin, where it's less important. This makes complete sense to me, though true dehydration is obviously not the same thing as drinking two glasses of water per day, instead of eight.

What we do know is helpful to dehydrated skin are humectant ingredients that bind water to the surface. Glycerin (an oldie but a goodie) and hyaluronic acid are brilliant for this and agree with the vast majority of skins. I can't remember the last time I really loved a moisturiser that didn't include hyaluronic acid, it is truly miraculous at re-plumping the skin and imparting a nice, healthy-looking glow that is otherwise lacking in dehydrated skin. As one of the skincare ingredients we know absolutely does the job, it's becoming an increasingly common addition to products, from high end to mass market. Look out for it – it will make all the difference.



## **MANAGING COUNTER STAFF**

**‘The most beautiful make-up of a woman is passion. But cosmetics are easier to buy.’**  
*Yves Saint Laurent*





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