

There couldn't be a better fucking example of what I'm talking about than *this*," says an amused and exasperated Sarah Creal as we battle to hear each other in the lounge of a central London hotel. The 56-year-old beauty entrepreneur is trying to tell me about all the male investors who "didn't get why women over 40 needed more representation", but is barely able to make herself heard over a group of loud baseball-capped young men at a nearby table.

Creal, as tall, glamorous and self-assured an adoptive New Yorker as you'll find, is not the sort of woman to be drowned out by the sound of louder men. She has enjoyed a three-decade career as a product formulator and developer for other people. Much of it was spent at Estée Lauder, where she masterminded product development for the high-profile beauty collaborations of both Tom Ford and Victoria Beckham, which spawned their blockbusting standalone brands. In 2024 she launched her own: a collection of make-up, skincare and brushes. Created to suit 40-plus women, Sarah Creal Beauty will finally be available in the UK next month when it arrives in Space NK.

She also had to counter arguments that other brands were already speaking to the demographic she was targeting. "You're telling me that women of 40-plus only deserve two brands when Gen Z gets 20,000? That's kind of the problem right there," Creal says. She may appear NYC ice-queen but her personality is anything but. She's sharp, funny and relentlessly upbeat. A girl's girl, she tells anecdotes that centre around conversations with her friends, sisters, life with teenage daughters (her ex-husband lives in the same building; their daughters ride the lift between him on the 16th floor and her on the 29th).

She canvassed the opinions of 2,000 women before launching the brand. Now she's on a mission to ensure that those "shockingly under-served" make-up customers get what they deserve. "No one wants to be told they look good 'for their age'. But equally we want make-up that works well for our age," she says.

As a formulator, she found that most of the frustrations older women experience with make-up – creasing, smudging, settling into fine lines – arrive because products are traditionally formulated for

twentysomething skin. A younger person's skin is "like working with a rubber mat. It's bouncy. It's smooth. It's uniform. It can take anything," she says.

From around 40, skin gets noticeably thinner. "It's more like tissue paper. You need even better performance because of fine lines and sagging eyelids. It's about working with things like film-formers that are going to set but not be brittle, flex when the skin flexes." Creal believes unconscious ageism is an issue in the way beauty products are tested. "I was part of that problem for a long time and I didn't even



BEAUTY

THE CREAL DEAL

She created hit brands for Tom Ford and Victoria Beckham. Now Sarah Creal is focusing on 40-plus skin.

By Nicola Moulton

PHOTOGRAPHY BY OLIVIA MALONE

know it," she says. Now she tests her products exclusively on 40-plus skin.

The standouts in her collection are the ones that offer solutions. Through research she realised how many 40-plus women were "quiet quitting" mascara and eyeliner because their drooping eyelids were causing products to smudge. She formulated Victoria Beckham's much-loved Satin Kajal liner, but made her own Eyes Up liner so that it was "creamy but does not move".

Likewise the Face Flex concealer, which offers fairly comprehensive coverage in a tiny application – good for older

women who are less comfortable wearing an entire "face" of foundation. "It has a great creamy texture, blends in super well, stays put, no creasing into fine lines and lasts all day," says British make-up artist Val Garland. The Complexion Brush, which is somehow soft but sturdy, makes concealer application look much smoother. The pHlip liner changes colour so you get a perfect lip match.

"Sarah is known for creating the most epic liner in the industry [Victoria Beckham's Kajal], then levelling it up to work on specifically mature eyes," says American make-up artist Erica Taylor, who shares advice and recommendations on 40-plus make-up with her 1.9mn Instagram followers. "She creates colours and formulas that are so real-life wearable and usable. She makes the 40-plus club one you want to be in."

THERE ARE OTHER global brands championing a more grown-up approach to make-up. Minimalist brand Merit – which was created around a no-nonsense "five-minute morning" philosophy – reached around \$200mn in retail sales in its fifth year. While it won't share latest figures, Bobbi Brown's Jones Road Beauty, launched in 2020, was on track to generate more than \$150mn in 2024. But Sarah Creal is the first to be so committed to her audience that she's printed "For Babes 40+" on every box. It's a characteristically bold move in a market where brands are reluctant to skew so specifically to a certain demographic for fear of, as Creal says, "leaving money on the table". But it's also part of the appeal. "It's highly considered and quietly confident," says Shannon Monteith, make-up and fragrance director at Space NK. "Sarah brings a rare clarity to the positioning of the brand."

Retail presence was key to Creal's early success. She opened in 22 Sephora stores just three months after launching, and will have 102 by the end of this year. She reported \$10mn in turnover after her first full year and is on course for triple-digit growth by the end of 2026. The UK is the brand's first international outpost, and she thinks that it will resonate here. "So much of this brand is about having a sense of joy, because honestly, I'm sick of brands being like, 'You're getting older, oh poor you.'"

The "Babes 40+" label may be "divisive", she shrugs. "But it's not an objectification. It's how I see myself, my friends. My fight isn't about whether [our customer] should be using make-up. My fight is to make her feel fabulous and seen in a landscape that is making her feel less seen." ■HTSI

SARAH CREAL BEAUTY: FIVE TO TRY



Face Flex Concealer & Complexion Enhancer, £44: innovative flexible formula in 21 shades



Eyes Up Creamy Kajal longwear liner, £28: smudge-proof and waterproof for up to 24 hours



pHlip liner, £25: reacts with the skin's pH to deliver a natural look



Complexion brush, £38: sturdy enough to spot-treat, soft enough to blend



Just Like Paradise 12H Peptide Sculpting bronzer, £40: light, creamy enriched bronzer



SKY HIGH FARM GOODS ALL-PURPOSE TALLOW BALM, \$38 FOR 50ML

YES Rich in fat-soluble vitamins A, D, E and K, oleic acid, stearic acid and conjugated linoleic acid, beef tallow – or rendered cow fat – has been much touted on social media as a moisturiser, but its use in skincare is not new. "Beef tallow was used on the skin in Ancient Egypt and the Middle Ages, since there was nothing else available," says Dr Juliane Stüven, dermatologist at the Lanserhof Sylt medical resort in Germany. "It's being hyped again now because its fatty acids are very similar to the skin's natural structure." The lipid structure of beef tallow resembles our own sebum. "This allows it to strengthen the skin barrier and help the skin to retain moisture more effectively," says Stüven.

Michaela Bolder, a London-based facialist and skincare expert, uses it to treat her eczema. "It's beneficial in small doses for people with very dry, dehydrated or damaged skin that isn't broken," she says. She advises a five-pence-piece-sized amount daily "to help give the skin an instant moisture surge through its high-content fatty acids and vitamins, and prevent trans-epidermal water loss in the long term". But she also warns: "It doesn't have a very pleasant scent." She adds a drop of frankincense oil to alleviate the odour. Or try tomato: Sky High Farm Goods, the New York lifestyle label, recently relaunched its tomato-leaf-scented All-Purpose Tallow Balm (\$38 for 50ml). The grass-fed beef tallow now also contains Nuturn, a skincare complex using biodynamic calendula flowers, hemp and ozonated olive oil.

Stüven emphasises the need to apply any tallow product sparingly. "For oily or acne-prone skin, beef tallow can quickly become too rich. It's a simple product for dry and sensitive skin, not a miracle cure for wrinkles, scars and other skin problems."

Tallow has also been touted as a healthier frying fat than seed-oil. "Animal fats were the default cooking fat for most of our history," says Dr Charlie Cox, longevity and performance focused doctor at London's Reborne Longevity clinic and a cardiothoracic intensive care consultant in the NHS. "Seed oils replaced them in the mid-20th century." Tallow is thermally stable and requires no industrial refinement to be edible, but how does it affect metabolic health? "The conjugated linoleic acid and fat-soluble vitamins found in grass-fed tallow have legitimate roles in metabolic regulation and cellular repair. They're not miracle compounds but nutrients with a reasonable biological rationale that have largely disappeared from western diets as animal fats have been phased out."

IS IT WORTH IT?

BEEF TALLOW

Should you put cow fat on your skin? By Ellen Burney

NO "A trend should not be mistaken for a breakthrough," says Paris-based facialist Sophie Carbonari. "Beef tallow sits at the intersection of ancestral intuition and modern misunderstanding." She points out that studies of the use of the fat on humans are still sparse, and evidence remains limited. "Any benefits attributed to tallow are not necessarily superior to well-formulated moisturisers grounded in clinical research – ceramide creams, squalane and petrolatum-based products." At best, she says, tallow can support barrier integrity. "But barrier restoration is not the same as skin health. Chronic dryness, sensitivity and inflammation often have root causes in nervous system dysregulation, somatic stress or gut imbalance that no topical ingredient can address alone."

"IT'S A SIMPLE PRODUCT, NOT A MIRACLE CURE"

There's still a lack of evidence on its potential benefits," says nutritionist Rhian Stephenson, the founder of supplement brand Artah. "A high-quality beef tallow can also provide choline, which supports cell membrane integrity, and a small amount of vitamin E, but because tallow is a niche product these levels aren't standardised or reliable." Adds nutritional therapist Kat Chan: "Eczema isn't something you fix by adding in a single ingredient. It's a multifactorial condition involving the skin barrier, immune activity and, in some cases, dietary and environmental triggers." Instead, she advises eating "adequate protein, a balanced intake of fats such as olive oil to provide monounsaturated fats and polyphenols – which have been studied in relation to inflammation – and enough fibre to support gut health, linked to immune function".

Is rendered bovine fat rendered useless then? Says Chan: "Claims that it is good for gut health are mainly just marketing: reviews on dietary fat show that high intakes of saturated fat can promote dysbiosis and drive inflammation when they're a part of the typical western diet." ■HTSI

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