

— BEAUTÉ —

The best backdrop for your exquisite new necklace? Skin so smooth and supple that your décolletage looks just as amazing sans adornment. Here's how French women do it.

— Focus —

Treasure CHEST

The French have gifted we English speakers many poetic, evocative words and expressions to pretty up our language in the absence of a linguistically pleasing alternative. Think après-ski, chic, femme fatale, coquette, je ne sais quoi ...

And where would the beauty world be without the concept of décolletage a twist on décolleté: French for the area of skin between the breasts and the neck, and the part of the body most prone to premature ageing.

"French women are extremely aware of their décolletages," says beauty entrepreneur Gabrielle Requena who spent her teen years in France where her many aunts and older cousins taught her the beauty secrets traditionally passed down from one generation of Françaises to the next.

"They don't stop their skincare at their jawline," she continues. "Their facials treat the décolletage as much as the face. And they wear scarves to protect this area—even when they're in a bikini on the beach in the South of France."

After a number of years living back in Australia, Requena woke up one morning alarmed to find lines etched into her décolletage. "We are in a warm, sunny climate and wear low necklines, and sun damage accumulates to the point where

almost overnight you seem to see the visible signs of loss of elasticity, which can look like creping on the skin and result in deeper lines and wrinkles."

Requena also realised a major contributor to her own décolletage dramas was her habit of side-sleeping. "If your skin is ageing and you can't train yourself to sleep on your back, the lines will just keep coming," she says.

After scouring the beauty market for effective skincare creams and treatments, and despondently finding nothing suitable, Requena saw that there was a market for a product that would stop sleep lines in their tracks. Her research led her to adhesive silicone sheeting, traditionally used to treat scars.

"Studies show that silicone adds extra moisture to the skin and plumps it up, and it's also proven to stimulate collagen," says Requena, who reasoned that the adhesive aspect would physically prevent wrinkles from forming. "It's like

Botox—if the skin is unable to crease it won't form a permanent wrinkle over time."

Enter Wrinkles Schminkles, a range of reusable pads for the décolletage, as well as various other line-prone parts of the face, designed to be worn from as early an age as possible.

"Active ingredients such as AHAs, retinol and antioxidants are extremely effective in treating and preventing damage."



While prevention is great in theory, the reality is that many Australian women already despair over signs of décolletage damage; unprotected sun exposure can lead to blotchy brown spots, roughness of texture and general ageing of skin due to depleted collagen levels. "I see so much sun damage on the décolletage, even in women as young as 25," says Melanie Grant from Double Bay Clinic. "I also see red irritated skin from misuse of harsh scrubs, products and fragrance on this sensitive area."

Here's the rub: the décolletage is not only easily damaged, it's also tricky to treat due to its ultra-delicate nature. "The skin here has far fewer sebaceous glands to keep it firm and supple," explains Grant. "It also has much less underlying fat and tissue to support the skin, and the cell turnover and renewal process is slower."

Grant treats her clients' décolletages with a variety of technologies, from IPL ("to remove brown pigment and diffuse redness") to Fraxel ("to soften creases and lines") to Omnilux light therapy ("to promote collagen and elastin") and chemical peels ("to resurface the skin and even the tone"). She also recommends a concerted skincare-oriented effort. "Active ingredients such as AHAs, retinol and antioxidants, when prescribed by a skin professional, are extremely effective in treating and preventing damage," she says. "And I always advise my clients to apply their regular skincare to the neck and décolletage as well as their face, as most women don't do this."

Her top advice, however, is simple: "The most important thing is to apply a good-quality, broad-spectrum high-SPF sunscreen every single day of the year to the entire décolletage—as well as the face and neck."

"Oh," she adds. "Get into the habit of wearing a scarf all year round, even at the beach." So Frenchy, so chic. ■

Divine décolletage



> Guinot Ultra UV Defense Very High Protection Sun Cream



> Elizabeth Arden Prevage Anti-Aging Neck & Décolleté Firm & Repair Cream



> Wrinkles Schminkies Chest Smoothing Kit