

Jane Wurwand's journey building the Dermalogica skincare empire

 By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

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Dermalogica founder and chief visionary Jane Wurwand recently visited South Africa, journeying back to a place that holds special meaning to the entrepreneur as it greatly influenced the path she'd follow building a globally respected name in professional skincare.



Cofounder and chief visionary of Dermalogica, Jane Wurwand. Source: Supplied

In the 1970s as a young beauty school graduate, Wurwand moved to Cape Town with just enough cash to fund a few nights in a small bed & breakfast. She quickly secured a job working as an aesthetician at a salon and immersed herself in the world of skincare.

South Africa is where Wurwand acquired her teaching credentials to become a licensed skin therapy instructor, and it's where she first crossed paths with her current husband, South African Raymond Wurwand, with whom she would later co-found the training institution International Dermal Institute (IDI) and skincare brand Dermalogica.

"Coming to South Africa pressed a reset button in my life. One of opportunity," expressed Wurwand during a recent event held in Cape Town to commemorate the launch of her book, *Skin in the Game*.



Source: Supplied



Self-made entrepreneur

Born in Scotland and raised in the UK, Wurwand attributes her strong work ethic to her teenage years working at a hair salon in England, starting as a "Saturday girl" handling tasks like laundry, cleaning and errands, and later transitioning to

the role of a "shampoo girl" when she reached the legal working age.

"There I learned that every job is important. We all contribute. When the team wins we all win, and no one has a lesser job than another. I feel exactly the same way now."

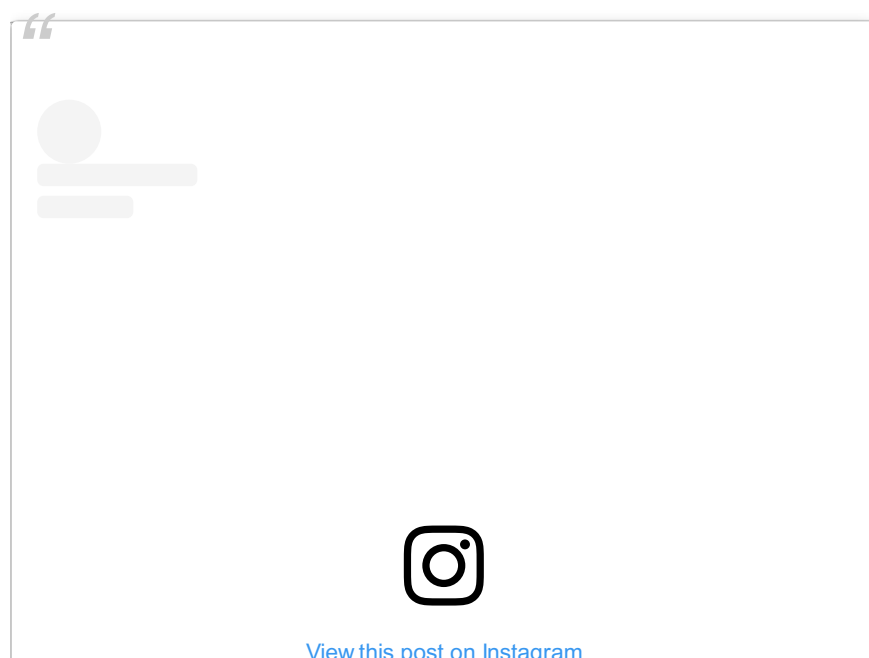
A self-made entrepreneur with humble beginnings, Wurwand heeded her mother's advice to "learn how to do something" and embraced the value of vocational training, knowing it would provide a solid foundation to fall back on in life. This mindset fostered her respect for skill-based education.

In 1983, the Wurwands relocated from South Africa to California, where they were confronted with the subpar quality of training available for skin therapists and the absence of post-graduate education opportunities in the field.

The couple invested \$14,000 of their personal savings to establish the International Dermal Institute (IDI) in a small classroom in Los Angeles. Their aim was to provide licensed cosmetologists with advanced training in professional skin therapy and to equip them with skills to build a client base and achieve financial independence, by earning a living on their own terms.

In 1986, they launched the acclaimed skincare brand Dermalogica, driven by the desire to provide skin therapists with best-in-class products and education.

Over the years, Dermalogica has flourished to become one of the top-selling professional skincare brands worldwide, trusted and used by over 100,000 skin therapists across more than 100 countries. The brand offers a range of in-home products and a specialist offering for therapists.





Clean skincare pioneer

Dermalogica broke new ground by formulating products that were free from fragrance, artificial colour and harsh chemicals such as mineral oil, formaldehyde, lanolin, and drying alcohol. While these features are now celebrated and more prevalent in the skincare industry, in the mid-80s the brand was a pioneer in the "clean skincare" space.

Despite scepticism from others who believed that consumers only cared about what was included in products, not what was left out, Wurwand remained steadfast.

She told *Bizcommunity* in an interview, "Dermalogica was 'clean' before being clean was trendy. Of course, our 'no list' has grown since then as new research and technologies have become available. Dermalogica is certified cruelty-free and vegan, and ingredients are chosen for their impact on the skin as well as the planet. I think it's important for all brands to view clean formulas as the future, and not use them as a sales gimmick."

Founded on Wurwand's belief in the power of skills-based professional training and high-quality skincare, Dermalogica's business model, which involved developing a range of skincare products and educating salon owners and therapists on their usage, propelled the brand to become a multi-million-dollar international success.

Blueprint for entrepreneurship

"My journey is an entrepreneurial one. It's the journey of a professional skin therapist. I didn't go to university, I don't have a business degree, and I'm not a cosmetic chemist," Wurwand said.

Through Dermalogica, Wurwand has not only developed a successful brand but has paved the way for women in the skincare industry to flourish as entrepreneurs.

"Dermalogica is the number one professional skincare product in the world, not only because the product is great, but because of the people: the hundreds of thousands of therapists who built this brand by building their own businesses."

Wurwand views the professional skincare services industry as a powerful model for entrepreneurship. "Women comprise 98% of skin therapists in our industry, and we're thrilled to have that number shifting. It's an inclusive industry full of people who deserve to have an incredible career and the opportunity to own their own businesses.

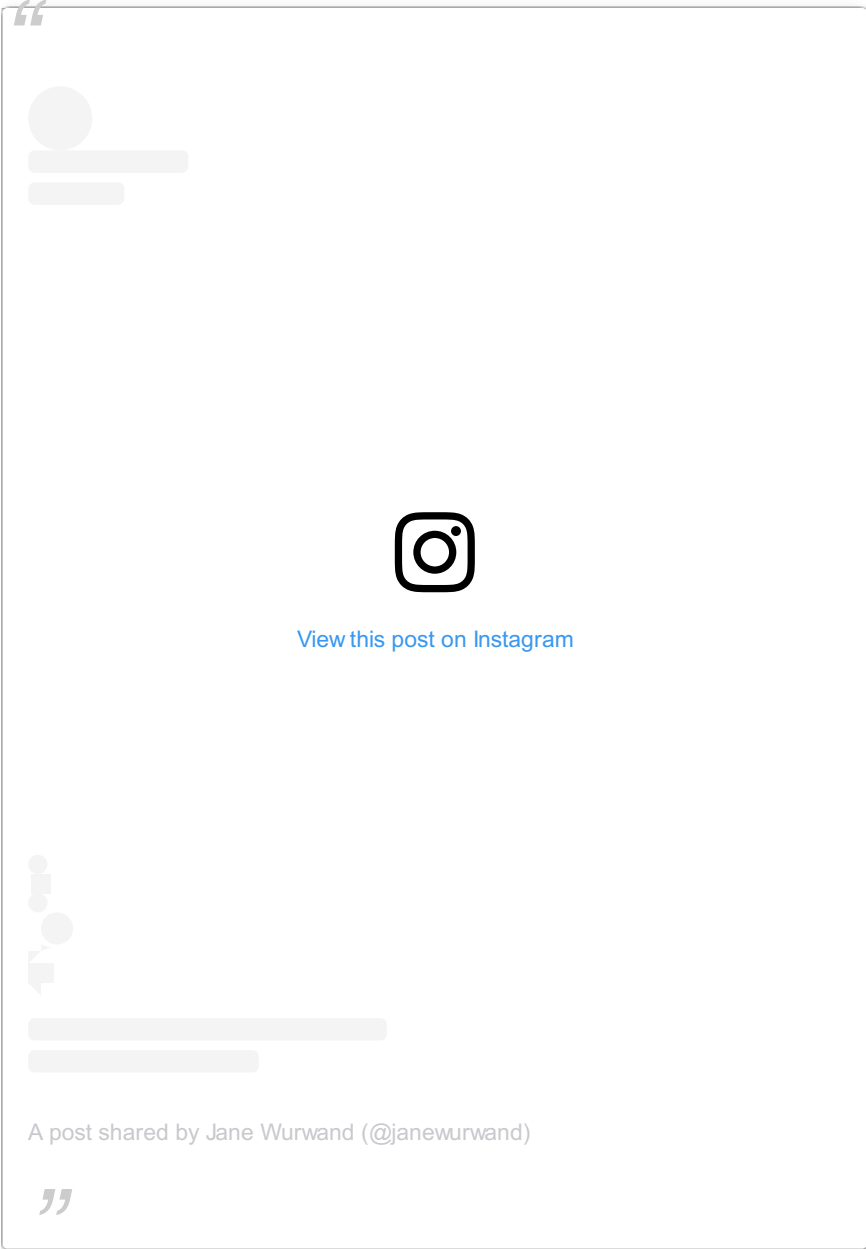
"Women own 64% of all salons in the world as opposed to 34% of businesses in any other industry. That is something we need to shout about. Our industry is a blueprint, not just for the empowerment of people, particularly women, but also for the incredible strength of entrepreneurship," she noted.

Cavalry of human connection

It's been 40 and 36 years since the launch of IDI and Dermalogica respectively, but their mission statement remains the same: "To define and bring respect and success to professional skin therapists through excellent education, innovative product and outstanding human connection," said Wurwand.

Beyond treating cosmetic concerns, professional salons have the capacity to provide a deeply human experience through personalised care. Therapists can offer empathy and solace, and their human touch can be a healing balm.

"We have never been more needed. The last few years have shown us that we as human beings cannot be disconnected. We have a mental health crisis around the world and we have a crisis of loneliness. We are the cavalry of human connection," said Wurwand.



Evolution of the skincare industry

While human connection is likely to remain invaluable in the profession, embracing technological advancements is essential to modernise the industry and remain relevant.

According to Wurwand, the integration of AI and other emerging technologies in running salons holds immense potential, especially in areas where data analysis and system-driven tasks can be optimised.

AI can streamline processes, enhance efficiency, and in the future, it could play a pivotal role in accurately diagnosing skin conditions by leveraging its ability to gather and analyse vast amounts of data quickly.

Reflecting on the evolution of the skincare industry over the years, Wurwand told *Bizcommunity*, “When we launched Dermalogica, professional licensing was inconsistent, and many people looked at skincare as a frivolous luxury. Back then, beauty magazines covered hair and makeup, but rarely skin, and almost never professional skincare.

“My, how things have changed! Today, licensing is standardised and this is more important than ever as advanced technologies have propelled the medspa boom, and consumers have an appetite to learn about skin science, ingredients and formulas. More importantly, people are realising that skincare and our industry – rooted in human touch and connection – are delivering a healthcare experience that is bigger than anything you can buy at the counter.”



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Expanding on the growth of ‘medispas’ and ‘aesthetic clinics’, Wurwand celebrated the strengthening connection between the medical fraternity and professional skin therapists.

“When I got into the industry, doctors and dermatologists said nothing we did had any impact. I'm thrilled we're finally getting the professional recognition that we deserve. We are partners, we work together in synergy because the goal is the best outcome for the client,” she said.

Sharing advice for budding skincare entrepreneurs, Wurwand said, “Be aware of what others are doing, but never follow or copy them. Keep focused on what is ahead of you and what fuels your own imagination. Be prepared to stand by your value system and vision, even if that polarises some.”

In 2015, the Wurwands [sold Dermalogica to Unilever](#) for an undisclosed amount, but the founders remain involved in the business in advisory roles.

ABOUT LAUREN HARTZENBERG

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