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Apples of youth

RACHAEL PHILIP

In winter, one particular apple tree keeps its leaves long after all others have shed theirs. Skin specialist Dr Harald Gerny was intrigued. RACHAEL PHILIP finds out why

SPORTING a healthy tan and a genial smile, Dr Harald Gerny was in Kuala Lumpur recently to promote his line of skincare called Med Beauty Swiss.

The fascinating thing about this premium range is that it lists stem cell extracts of a particular variety of apples as an active ingredient.

The rare apple variety is called Uttwiler Spätlauber (Uttwiler is the name of the village in the German part of Switzerland where the tree is found while spätlauber roughly translates to "the tree which loses its leaves last").

"In this part of the world you have green leaves all year round. Despite my travels around the world and four previous trips to Malaysia, I still find this fascinating," says the 63-year-old Swiss doctor who enjoys being outdoors under the sun.

"In Europe, winter's very bleak. The trees are bare... all except the Uttwiler Spätlauber."

According to him, there are very few such trees around now as the proverbial forbidden fruit is not even given a second look these days. The thick brownish-red skin of the ripened fruit looks wrinkled and its slightly acidic tang makes it unappealing as a food. But there was a time when it was highly valued.

A rich source of phytonutrients and proteins, these apples have long-living cells. "You can store it for six or seven months, over autumn and stretching into winter, and it would not rot. It was certainly a very special fruit back in the old days," says Gerny.

When he began his research into the fruit four years ago, Gerny and his team knew they had found a natural solution for skin rejuvenation.

They then created the technology to isolate the stem cells of the fruit and Cell Premium, Med Beauty's top range, was launched late last year.

Gerny had always known he would become a dermatologist. He says his mother, Dr Anna Maria, was his inspiration.

"She was the first woman in Austria to study medicine. She was a very active woman who represented her university in tennis as well as skiing. She was my role model and a friend. We were very close," says Gerny, an only child. His mother passed away in 1992 at the age of 82.

His mother convinced women to try her new treatment which combined medical research with



Gerny's inspiration was his mother

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cosmetic components.

"She was one of the first to grab the opportunity to work with cosmetics and chemistry in her own centre. At that time, there was no micro-dermabrasion, laser or Botox, but the idea was to ameliorate the condition of the skin without going under the knife," says Gerny.

Today, with the help of technology, he is doing the same thing, depending heavily on stem cell extracts from plants and even fish.

Besides the rare apples, he also extracts various acids from sugarcane, grapes, monk's berries and many types of citrus fruits as well as peptides from milk and flavonoids from soya bean.

Currently 18-year-old Med Beauty Swiss has 60 products to suit all skin types and operates 12 centres in Switzerland.

With its collaboration with The Spa in The Club, Saujana KL, the Swiss brand will see the launch of its first Med Beauty Centre in Asia in November. The Spa, which offers a holistic approach to beauty, will also feature Asian-inspired body treatments and massages.

Med Beauty, meanwhile, also hopes to penetrate the market in Hong Kong, Japan, Korea and The Philippines soon.

Despite his hard work in and out of the lab, Gerny makes time to ski and play tennis. In his younger days, he says, he would take part in competition dancing and was part of the Swiss team.

Although he's been in the business of helping women look beautiful for nearly 30 years, Gerny says that love, happiness and a stress-free life – things one can never bottle – are just as potent for anti-ageing.

"Be happy, don't smoke, not too much alcohol, a good sex life. That's the other part of the secret to looking young," he says, laughing heartily.

Gerny is married to his second wife of 2½ years. His children from his first marriage, aged 26 and 21, still live with him.

So what's next after apples? Gerny, who believes he will be in the business for at least another 10 years, is keeping mum but believes that extracting active ingredients from plants is the way to go for the industry.

Who knows, maybe an expensive but effective pot of durian moisturiser will be coming this way. If so, it's good to know that most scents are kept neutral.

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Regular Section

FEATURES



Hands-on heritage

THERE'S something cooking in inner-city George Town next Saturday — and it's more than just food.

MUSIC/DANCE



Game for gamelan

Rhythm in Bronze, or RIB, will celebrate its 12th birthday this coming weekend. But not everyone has heard of this eclectic group of performers who created the concept of "Gamelan Theatre".

STYLE/FASHION



Couture Karachi

Pakistan's top designers and models put on their first ever fashion week in Karachi against a

SAVOURS



Vive la brasserie!

At the newly-opened Pressroom, the accent is definitely on flavoursome no-frills French food, writes INTAN MAIZURA AHMAD

KAMAL

CINEMA/THEATRE



Deadly Rain

WHEN Jung Ji Hoon, more popularly known as Rain, went to Los Angeles in 2008 to make his debut in his first Hollywood film, Speed Racer, he was unknown.

PERSONALITY

Mane issues

The numbers are shocking – one in three men will go bald. But of the 46 types of hair problems, most are curable, trichologist Mark Birch assures