



FEATURE

SYDNEY'S NEW SPACE FOR vegan beauty

A CAREER SPANNING OVER 25 YEARS AND 15 COUNTRIES HAS SEEN CHARMILLA HERATH SHAPE THE BROWS, PERFECT THE COMPLEXION AND STAIN THE CHEEKS AND LIPS OF SOME OF THE WORLD'S MOST WELL-KNOWN FACES. HERE SHE SHARES HER TOP TIPS FOR CRUELTY-FREE BEAUTY.

Charmilla Herath is sitting pretty. Quite literally. She is perched atop a stool in her perfectly pink beauty parlour in Sydney's Strand Arcade, long golden legs crossed, eyes sparkling and a wide smile on her exceptionally pretty face.

She is reminiscing on her journey from the six-year-old girl who would tame her best friends' unruly brows in the bathroom of her family home, to the global brow and make-up artist who shaped the arches of the world's biggest supermodels at London, Paris and New York Fashion Weeks.

Milla, as she is better known to her friends and clients, has an impressive resume, having worked with and launched collections for global heavyweights including Laura Mercier, Becca and pout.



Pictures by: Zakari Kha (parlour), Tim Fy (Milla and products)

But back to brows and her parents' bathroom ...
 'I have always been obsessed with brows,' she laughs, when I quiz her about her salon-style set up in the suburbs, at the age of six. Why not a bake sale or lemonade stand, like most kids mess around with? (It's worth noting, the beauty entrepreneur charged her clients back then, too, and they kept coming back. She was that good).

'I've never been one to follow the pack, or pursue trends,' she reveals. 'Plus, I had very thick brows as a child and hated them. I was always looking for ways to make them thinner, lighter and tamer. So, I helped all my friends, too!'

She adds with a dry laugh, 'that all fell to dust when Brooke Shields came along proudly owning hers! Seriously though, I was thankful, as it allowed me, and thousands of other women, to feel less conscious. This experience, as frivolous as it may seem to some, made me realise at a very young age, exactly how important brows can be to a woman's self-confidence and esteem! I then went from there, to helping women grow back overlooked brows!'



BEST IN BEAUTY SCHOOL

It was inevitable that Milla's career would be in beauty, specifically as a make-up artist and of course, specialising in brows and brow shaping.

She completed a diploma in Make-up and Special Effects, with the aim of becoming the best make-up and brow artist she could be. She's succeeded, and then some.

At the time, the young graduate was seeing women who were plucking their brows within an inch of their existence. It horrified her, and she was quick to take action.

She laughs: 'I hated that thin, over plucked, fake looking brow look as much as I loathed the thick, unruly brows I was forever trying to tame on my own face!

'If I was doing a client's makeup and they asked me not to fill in their thin brows, I felt it detracted from the entire look and ruined the overall result. So, I would start by doing the brows first. This gave the client time to see their face come alive from the brows as a framing point.

'As the rest of the make-up was applied, and indeed by the time I had finished, they could see that a fuller, well defined brow that suited their face shape was the way to go. I have always applied this theory to my work and 99.9 percent of the time, it's worked!'

You could say back then, in the late 1990s, Milla championed the return of the fuller brow, a trend that has never since waned.

FROM SYDNEY TO GLOBAL SHORES

A stint with Laura Mercier when the make-up brand first launched in Sydney at David Jones, saw Milla become a prized team member. It wasn't long before Laura herself was luring Milla overseas.

'I feel very lucky to have had my start with Laura Mercier in Sydney.

'I ended up working for the brand in London and many other international cities, which opened so many doors for me. I worked with Laura Mercier herself on week-long events, as well as with top brands and celebrities. I was so chuffed to discover that Laura was just as obsessed with eyebrows as I was, and I was even paired to work with the brand's brow expert Maribeth Madron, from whom I learned so much!'

'Spending time in big cities that are fashion capitals of the world taught me so much. I was at the forefront of emerging trends working with the best artistic talent in the world. I built lifelong relationships with amazing artists and other leaders in the industry working on incredible projects.

'All of this has helped shape who I am as a person and importantly, a has made me a much better make-



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up artist and brow stylist. Working with such big names and incredible talent drove me to be the best version of myself. I am always humbled that whenever I travel, these incredibly successful people always make time to catch up with me. And of course, if I am ever working on a new project, they are always happy to lend an ear and offer invaluable advice!'

A GREENER FUTURE

As inherent as beauty was in Milla's DNA, so too was the environment and animal welfare. As a 16-year-old, Milla participated in a school walk-out against the French nuclear testing in the Pacific Ocean in 1995. While

Q&A WITH MILLA

Q: What do you think is the biggest mistake women make with their brows?

A: Treating it like a hair removal exercise. You are not removing unwanted hair – you are shaping your brows. It is as important as having your hair cut or coloured!

You also shouldn't have your brows done on a whim, or just anywhere. You should have the same relationship with your brow stylist that you have with your hairdresser.

Q: What is one thing you wish every woman did for their brows on a daily basis?

A: Eat well! Food is medicine and is the best skin care out there. Applying oils to nourish and strengthen the hair and also gentle scrubbing every few days to remove dry skin and help new hair come through.

I have created a three-step program for brows.

1. A cleanser;
2. A scrub/mask; and
3. An oil that can be applied daily to heal, cleanse, strengthen and grow back healthy brows and maintain them.

Q: Which celebrities do you think have the best eyebrows and why?

Jennifer Connelly

Her full, effortless shape suits her. She has kept her natural brow shape instead of trying to put in artificial arches.

Lilly Collins

Her gorgeous brows sit exactly where they should, right along the natural brow bone. The shape suits her and creates a youthful appearance.

Keira Knightly

Her beautiful brows appear untouched, but at the same time are polished and well groomed, although not overly tamed.



protesting, she encountered an animal liberation group and took home some of their reading material.

'I had always been passionate about animal welfare, but after reading this, I was 100 percent committed.' Joining the cause was a natural step for Milla. 'I didn't want to subsist at the expense of our animal friends, so I became a vegetarian and soon after, a vegan.'

In 2006, Milla launched her own luxury vegan, carbon neutral and cruelty free skincare brand in London, Nicky & Milly.

'It was crazy. Helena Christensen somehow got her hands on it and raved about it in the Sunday Times Style. I sold out of my first batch before it even hit the stores and had to go straight back into production!

'Sadly, the good times didn't last, as none of us saw the GFC coming! My brand had received a lot of press and was picked up by all of the department stores prior to the GFC. I poured my heart and soul into that business. However, in the midst of the GFC, I found myself bootstrapping a premium price point product business. It was not easy, or sustainable. With nothing lined up and having been away for nine years I decided to close up shop and head home to Australian shores.'

HOMeward BOUND

Coming back to Sydney in 2008 was a difficult time for Milla, but she was quick to recognise and seize opportunities.

'My mind never stops, and it did not take me long to identify opportunities to bring international trends to Australia. I quickly realised there was a gap in the market for an express beauty bar reminiscent of the ones in London and New York – a high-end, luxury experience but express. One where busy corporate women could walk in and walk out in their lunch break.

'I had never run or worked in a beauty salon, I was always in cosmetics, fashion and freelanced as a makeup artist. So, I had no idea how to do it.

'However, I believe that was why it was unique. I ran it a little like a backstage hair and makeup area at a major fashion show. I had three people working on clients at once, to get them pampered and polished, but also in and out without wasting time. It was always elegant stools, open-plan, no private beauty rooms, lots of noise and a walk-in-walk-out concept.

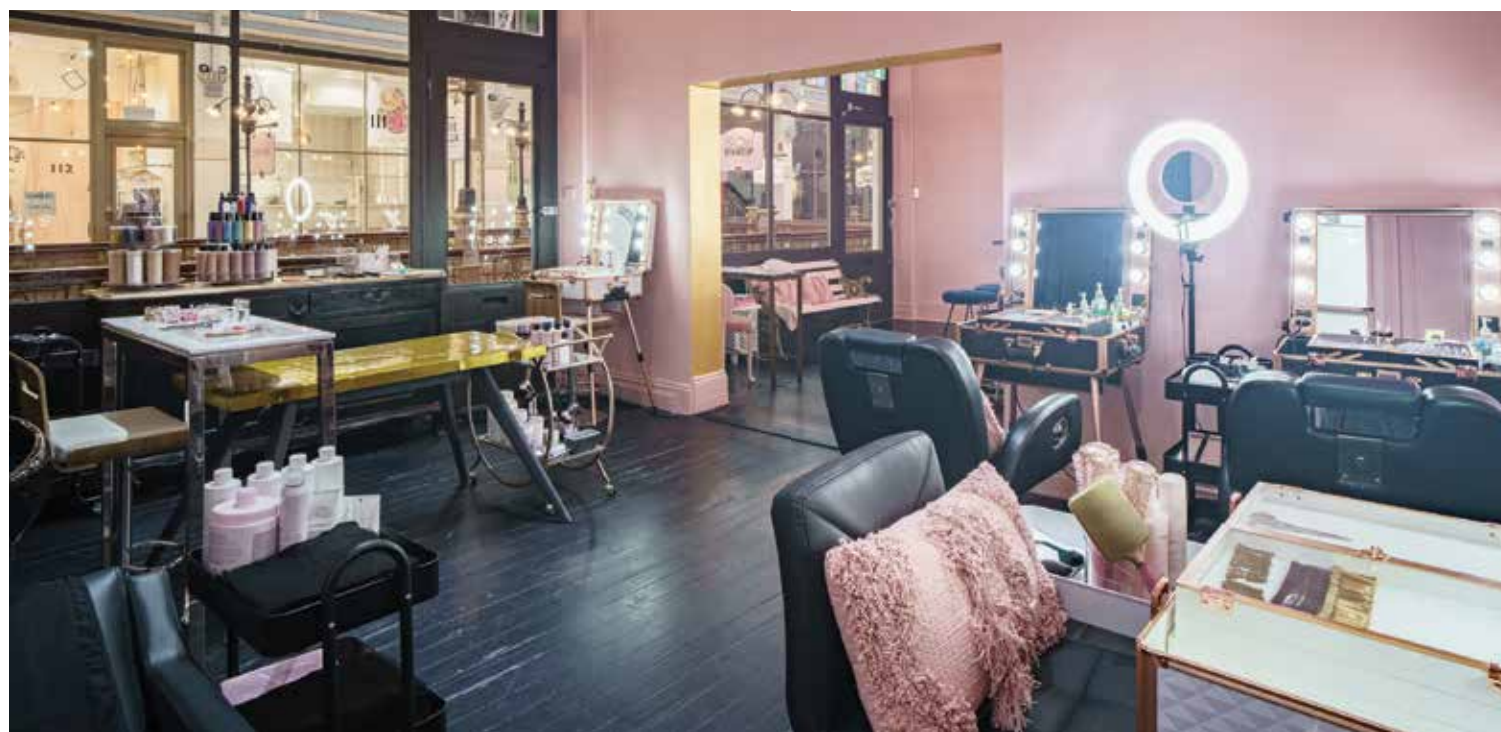
'I was one of the first in Australia to introduce threading and brow shaping, which quickly became my most sought after service, located in the Dymocks Arcade.'

ONE STOP GLAMOUR SHOP IN THE STRAND ARCADE

After a debilitating illness, which Milla helped to heal herself through her vegan diet, Milla scaled business back to have her first child Arya Rose. As her health improved and little Arya became old enough to attend day care, Milla decided it was time to get active again. And so, Coterie by Milla, a glamorous parlour in Sydney's Strand Arcade was born.

'I don't see it as a salon,' she reveals. 'Rather it is a studio with like-minded creatives working together and collaborating. I hope to have some of Australia's leading hair stylists and beauty professionals working alongside me in the space, as I focus on my brow and makeup clients, as well as teach and make custom blended vegan make-up and skincare products in my open lab. I intend to relaunch my old brand Nicky & Milly, but this time it will be even more modern vegan formulas, and I will name after my greatest love, my daughter – Arya Rose Apothecary.

'Clients can enjoy the convenience of an online booking and paying system, as well as a fully licensed bar, late-night trading and sustainable environmental practices using vegan, cruelty-free products that are natural, organic and without harsh chemicals. **CBM**



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Milla's Tips FOR THE PERFECT BROW

A perfect brow is the perfect brow for your face, not someone else's. It is natural, not overly shaped, or too dark and defined. It should not pull focus but frame the eyes and face. It should not be the main feature, but rather create balance and symmetry to the face and be the supporting act.

The perfect brow should work with the client's bone structure to create beautiful, custom brows. There is no 'one brow suits all'. With a tailored, bespoke approach, you can't go wrong.

Achieving the perfect brow can take time if you have over tweezed or waxed or threaded or had chemo. Be patient. It is not to be rushed in one visit. I shape the brows over a three to nine-month period and for some it is even longer. It is a commitment.

Never follow fashion trends. Your brows should be customised for your facial features. Colour can be adjusted through my signature service with a bespoke tint. I lighten and apply various shades to create depth, volume and even lighter shades to balance the brows out and make them look more natural and more manageable.

I have a special technique for trimming, and reducing the thickness based on skills I picked up when I worked as a teenager at the iconic Synergy hair salon as a salon assistant. I learned so many things about how to work with hair.

Remember, brow hair has a cycle of growth in four stages (Anagen stage One) and then goes back to resting phase (Anagen stage Four again). Hair can take three to five years to grow from resting phase, so patience is imperative.

I also use topical products that I custom blend based on analysing someone's skin and hair condition. I am almost a qualified nutritionist, so I also recommend dietary shakes and supplements that you can take orally to boost hair growth.

Small gaps can be filled in with a henna tint, brow lamination and brow extensions. These can last four to six weeks. Microblading is of course an option, but for me; it is always a last resort, and only after growing back as much hair as you can and being happy with a shape. Then, I would only get small areas done, not the entire brow.