



LEFT
The sultry, sarong-wearing actor Dorothy Lamour in 1941 film *Aloma of the South Seas*. Though she was not a descendent of the region, Lamour came to symbolize the “exotic” southern Pacific bombshell, free from the restrictions of Western “civilization.”

TOP RIGHT
A 1949 menu from Le-Do Restaurant in California is emblematic of the growing fascination with the exotic and faraway.

BOTTOM RIGHT
African American hairstylist Rose Morgan’s forward-thinking Rose Meta House of Beauty in New York catered to women of color.

represented the sexy and rebellious side of a woman’s personality while the “ice” embodied her demure and shy side. Questions asked: “When a recipe calls for *one* dash of bitters, do you think it’s better with *two*?” “Have you ever danced with your shoes off?” and, “Do you close your eyes when you’re kissed?”

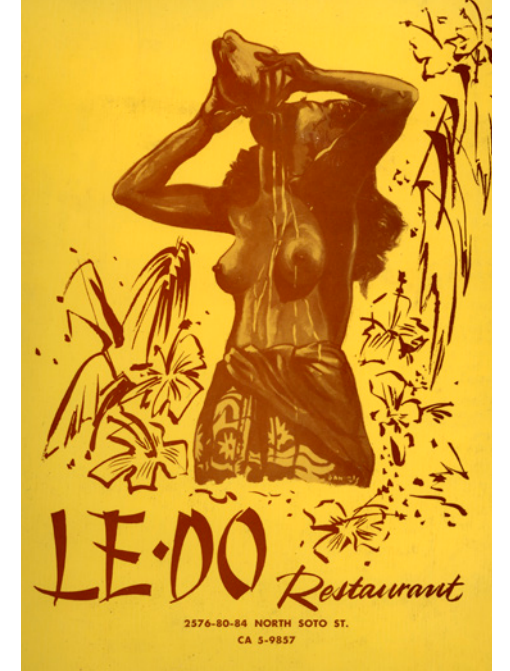
Josephine Esther Mentzer didn’t need a quiz to tell what she wanted. Born in Queens in 1906, she dreamed of being an actor. In 1930, she married Joseph Lauder, changed her name to Estée Lauder, and moved to New York City, where she started concocting beauty products using a former restaurant kitchen stove. Rather than pursue acting, she found more success peddling her skincare products—a Cleansing Oil, Skin Lotion, Super-Rich All-Purpose Creme, and Creme Pack—to elegant women in hair salons, often giving makeovers while clients sat under the dryer hood. In 1946, Lauder launched her namesake brand. A year later, she got her first large order when Saks Fifth Avenue requested \$800 worth of products—which sold out in two days.

To help spread the word about her fledgling brand, Lauder included a free gift with purchase, a pioneering practice that’s now an industry standard. In 1953, she released one of her most enduring hits, Youth Dew, a fragrance oil that doubled as perfume. Until the 1950s, most women reserved fragrance for special occasions—and they waited for their husbands to buy it for them as gifts. Lauder realized that if she sold her patchouli jasmine concoction as bath oil, not perfume, women would feel free to buy it, and wear it every day. She was right. Youth Dew became one of her most successful products; even 40 years after its debut, it was bringing in \$25 million in sales.

Lauder wasn’t the only female entrepreneur carving out a name for herself in New York. In 1938, African American hairstylist Rose Morgan moved from Chicago, and started building her vision for the Rose Meta House of Beauty, which she opened in 1945 in the Sugar Hill section of Harlem. An established hairdresser, Morgan had a vision for an entirely different type of beauty salon that would cater to women of color and offer more than a rinse and set.

Spanning five floors where numerous employees worked as hairstylists, massage therapists, and skincare specialists, the salon took a forward-thinking approach to beauty, and eventually expanded to include departments devoted to fashion, health, and charm and etiquette. It was a sanctuary where Black women could go to be pampered—and not have to pamper anyone else—which was a rarity in those days. Clients were greeted by their surnames and decorum was extremely important, not merely as a formality but as a way to treat the clientele with the respect they deserved, but were often denied in the world beyond the salon’s rose-scented atmosphere.

Realizing that many Black women did not have access to beauty products that suited their skin tones, Morgan also



developed and sold her own line of cosmetics, which included face powder in Peach, Honey, and Brown shades. In 1955, Morgan married the boxing legend Joe Louis, an ill-fated union that was annulled after three years, but inspired her to create a cologne, My Man, before their split. Morgan eventually sold her visionary salon but not before it grossed more than \$3 million in sales and became a fixture in Harlem—offering beauty that extended far beyond surface.

The Impact

In the next decade, women of color would finally earn a place in the spotlight, in the midst of a revolution that would have lasting social and political consequences.