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Belying up to the beauty bar

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If anyone can edit the volume of anti-aging products marketed by the \$6 billion anti-aging industry, a cosmetic dermatologist can.

At least that's what we figured when we invited three of them — Dr. Mary Lupo, Dr. Katie Rodan and Dr. Susan Weinkle — to shop with us at CosBar, Aspen's chi-chi version of Sephora.



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Turns out, the experts can get just as overwhelmed as the rest of us by big label claims and fancy packaging.

"I'm shocked at how these products don't really have a lot of stuff in them," said Lupo, a clinical professor of dermatology at Tulane Medical School, as she combed the ingredient list on the back of Lancome's Absolute Night premium recovery cream (\$132 for 2.6 ounces).

Moving down the shiny beauty bar, she drooled over La Prairie's Skin Caviar Luxe Cream that claims to use alpha hydroxy acids to smooth and retexturize the skin's surface (\$350 for 1.7 ounces).

"If I'm going to spend a lot of money, I'm going to spend it at La Prairie," she said.

Is it the only line that works?

"Absolutely not."

What about the science behind it? Is there any proof that any anti-aging products available over-the-counter work?

"It costs a lot of money for a product to get FDA approval and for so many companies there's no motivation for spending that kind of money when women are buying it anyway."

So, how are women supposed to know which ones are worth buying?

"Talk to your friends and your dermatologist; try different things," Lupo suggests. "Just because the evidence is anecdotal doesn't mean it's not true. I really do think that most cosmeceuticals work. You're going to look better if you consistently do something."

Unfortunately, Rodan says, "women have really low expectations for what they think will work" so they waste their money on products that aren't formulated with meaningful ingredients.

The Stanford-trained dermatologist proudly points out CosBar's display of her eponymous Rodan & Fields line.

"I formulate with medicine," she says, referring to the bleaching agent hydroquinone found in over-the-counter strength in Rodan & Fields' Reverse line for sun-damaged skin.

Weinkle, who has spent the morning hiking while wearing a T-shirt and baseball cap (plus a diamond necklace, diamond earrings and diamond watch. "I slept in them," she says apologetically) gets a playful chastising from Rodan.

"You shouldn't wear a cap," Rodan chastises her. "It doesn't block sun from the side!"

The ladies are all friends. And they have made enough money to think little of plunking down big bucks for expensive potions. But they still get giddy over beauty products.

"My husband hates the taste of Chanel!" Weinkle says after gushing over the La Prairie lipstick display.

As they rattle off beauty tips — "sleep on your back, not on your side, to avoid wrinkles" — shoppers begin to congregate. One digs inside a gigantic Fendi bag for a pen so she can scribble down the products the doctors are recommending.

"Will they give me an opinion on the work I've had done?" one Aspenite asks a clerk.

"No, but you can follow them around and pick up a few tips."

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