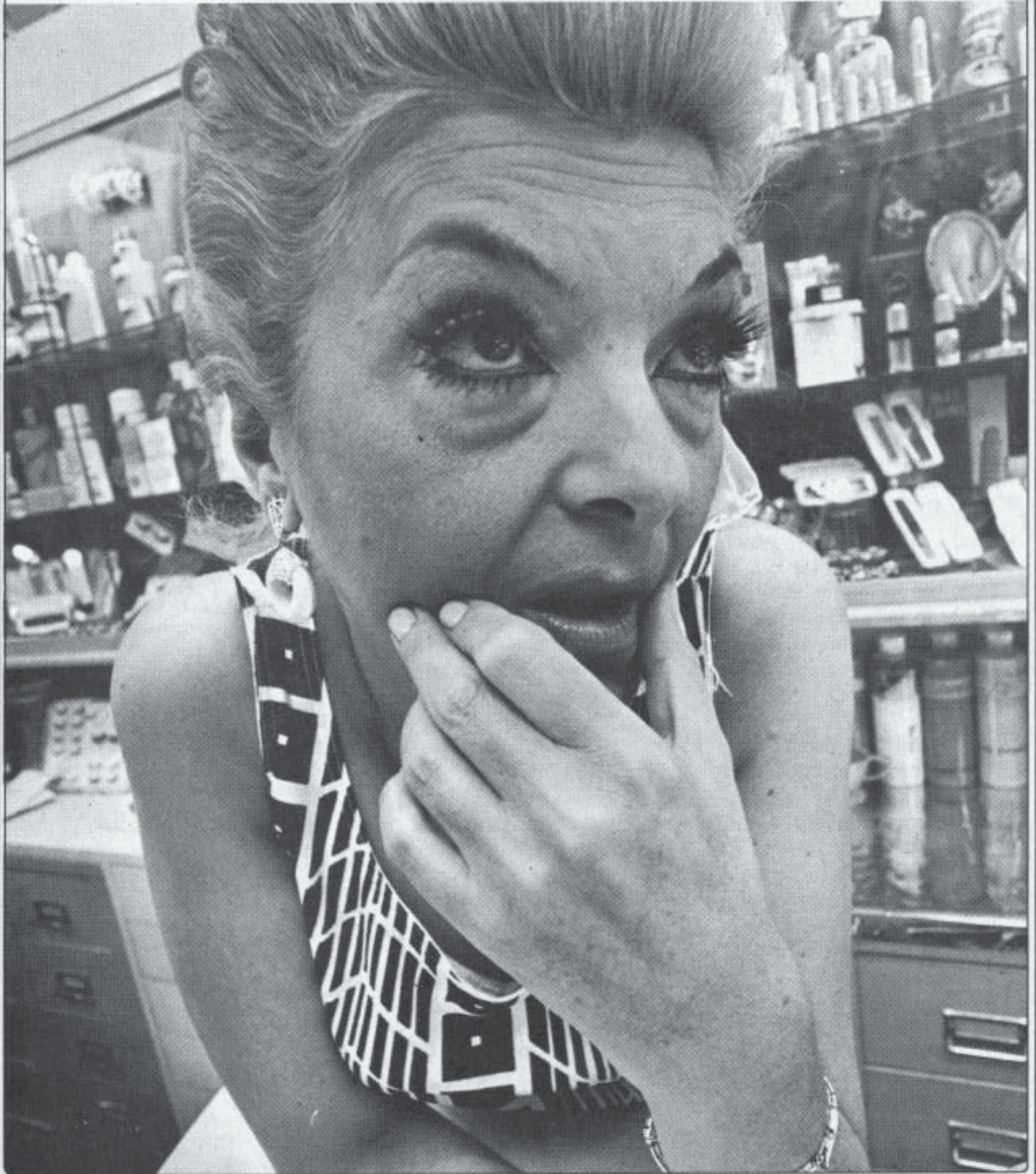


Oh, Those Painted Ladies... Where Do They All Belong?



Cosmetic-counter ladies are fast becoming an extinct breed and no wonder . . . who feels the need for their strong-arm advice?

by Blair Sabol

You run across them every time you enter the first floor maze of a department store. Their visuals alone remind you of a Las Vegas chorus girl—a frustrated actress who's wearing the orange pancake and heavy eyelined mask of what she honestly thinks is beauty. They stand out behind their counters like caricatures of the Forties—but they're fascinating far beyond camp. These women really believe in their line of work (in this case their make-up "lines") and what better way to dedicate yourself to your product than to wear it all over your face? Most of the cosmeticians we ran into have been counter selling for fifteen to twenty years, and not because they're bored as housewives but because they're hung up on this thing called "beauty."

Makeup has always been a sky-rocketing, million dollar business but lately who cares to invest in multi-variations of facial flack? It's fine for fantasy . . . like tattooing a wrist . . . or moucheing a cheek . . . or even clown-diamonding your eyes. But for basic living the feeling is "let my real face hang out."

False eyelashes are dropping off and "foundation" had its foundation knocked out five years ago with the advent of the "natural look." But cos-

metic firms have managed to sell more shades, pencils and tints to achieve "naturalness" than for any other cosmetic promotional. At the moment, of course, it's back to the purple, heavy-lidded look of the Thirties.

And the cosmetician remains true to her calling. She wears every latest sample of her manufacturer's brand—and what's more wears it with pride. Her teeth may be smudged with "Amethyst" lipstick, her eyelash glue may be visibly bubbling in her eye corners and her foundation may be cracking in her laugh lines but she holds her head high and barrels on through, giving stern advice, chastising when necessary. The hard corps cosmeticians can deliver a convincing rap. And most of the older clients go under and end up buying what the oracle behind the counter tells them to buy.

But then, beauty products are basically hope-in-a-jar and maybe, magically, \$89 worth of highlighters, toners, shadows, glue, lash curlers and mascara will bless the buyer with "dewy-morning, sunrise freshness . . ." or a little "rose petal-softness."

On the other hand, a new kind of customer has left her mark. Nowadays, girls don't buy "cosmetics," only a few necessities . . . lip gloss, maybe a little eye shadow, but nothing

Photos by Shalmon Bernstein

(ABOVE) FRIEDA BASS: DOROTHY GREY LINE AT BLOOMINGDALES. "Everyone needs help . . . really . . . there isn't a woman in the world that couldn't do with some cosmetic touch. And that's what I'm here for—to help them gain confidence in their appearance no matter how gorgeous they think they are to start with."

(BELOW) BRENDA SMITH: KORVETTES. "Man, I wouldn't force a product on anybody unless they asked me how I felt about it. I just couldn't put somebody through those head changes. People know what they want. As for what I'm about . . . I don't tell them how I'd like to see them look. Most people instinctively know how they look and feel. I know I do . . . I'm brown, I'm feeling fine and I'm looking for a man. And all of that ain't got nothing to do with make-up."

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Painted Ladies . . .

too concealing. (Does this generation still bother to "erase" bags?) And they get it all at the nearest drugstore or five-and-ten.

The effect of this new shopping scenario is affecting the ranks of the Painted Ladies. The older, fast-acting pros are being replaced in department stores by young, non-made-up, non-dictatorial sales chicks.

Perhaps even they will be replaced by computers, since nowadays most girls know what they want when they go up to a cosmetic counter in the first place. Folks don't want to hear that "what's-best-for-your-shaped-face" talk anymore. "Makeovers" don't exist and frankly never did (except maybe in magazines).

But I hope the old school

cosmeticians won't die out completely because they are the visual version of Pygmalion . . . Ugly-Duckling-turns-Swan with the flick of a brush. And that spirit is worth preserving, even if the whole make-up mess often looks more like drag dazzle. However you see it . . . we salute the Painted Ladies and their cosmetic consciousness. 🐾



(LEFT) JEAN LETO: REVLON LINE AT MACY'S. "I'm giving more advice now than I ever did. Yes, the women today are more cosmetically educated and don't need quite the sales talk of say ten years ago. But they also ask more questions and that's where I fit in . . . I'll supply the answers and the look they want.

(RIGHT, ABOVE) GLORIA PRINCE: BOYDS CHEMISTS. "I have standing room only here every day. Young and old women alike need and ask for my comments. I've been in the business 18 years and I see no let up now even with the "natural look." I tell all my customers that you can have the naturalest of looks with the heaviest of lashes . . . but I have to teach 'em how to do it."

(RIGHT, BELOW) BROOK STEPHENS: BLEN DI ROMA. "Everything a customer thinks she knows—we know more. I try to promote this shop not only as a make-up outlet but as a face salon, and I like to educate them the way a doctor or analyst does. We even have "out patients" who return to us regularly asking us to re-apply their lashes. Makeup is everybody's security (including the young girl with her barest lip gloss) since most of us are always striving to look better than we are."

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