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FASHION

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"I'VE ALWAYS KNOWN THINGS WOULD
GET BETTER WHEN I WAS OLDER"



TRUTH *Be Told*

For Uoma Beauty founder and activist Sharon Chuter, inclusivity is about more than just shade ranges.

By **SOUZAN MICHAEL GALWAY**

“I wanted to make products that the majority of the world could use,” says Sharon Chuter over a Zoom call from London, England. “It sounds silly to even say this out loud because it’s not a genius or radical idea.” Chuter is the Nigerian-born founder of makeup brand Uoma Beauty, a line of high-impact, pigment-dense face, eye and lip products (think eyeshadow palettes featuring vibrant metallics and jewel tones and luxe skin-blurring finishing powders) inspired by Africa’s rich cultural diversity. The brand also pays homage to culturally influential female icons like Sade and Cleopatra via product names and campaign imagery.

Chuter has been a natural outspoken leader for as long as she can remember. For example, she was the brains behind 2021’s viral Pull Up for Change campaign, which encouraged companies to reveal how many Black employees and employees of colour they had on staff, especially in leadership positions. “My mom quickly realized that I wasn’t going to live a conventional life; I wasn’t ‘Nigerian wife’ material,” she laughs. “Where I’m from, you’re supposed to be polite and not too outspoken. And you’re supposed to get married. I said: ‘Screw it! I’m going to focus on other things.’” So, after working in a variety of industries—including pharmaceuticals, music and the corporate side of beauty as an LVMH executive—Chuter launched Uoma (which means “beautiful” in Igbo, the native language in southeastern Nigeria, and is pronounced “oma”) in 2019. She did so with an ambitious

51 shades of foundation straight away—not because she had to answer to anyone or appease investors but because she believed it was what consumers needed. “I didn’t have any restrictions, and I hadn’t dealt with any big conglomerates, which meant I could bring a new voice into the conversation.” Chuter says that others suggested she came out with an impressive shade range simply because of Rihanna and the now-famous launch of Fenty Beauty’s 40 shades of foundation in 2017. (Many other brands did just that, and the trend was dubbed the “Fenty Effect.”) “They’d say ‘Fifty-one shades? Because of Fenty?’ No! Fenty was an anomaly. It was the power of Rihanna—who, by the way, is the queen of all queens,” Chuter is quick to clarify. “It was a combination of a huge celebrity and a company with a massive infrastructure. You can’t replicate that story.”

To Chuter, inclusivity is common sense. She says that brands that still haven’t even entered the shade-range conversation (or have done so thoughtlessly and purely for optics, producing poorly developed darker shades) are blinded by



short-term thinking that will inevitably be their downfall. “The brands that aren’t allocating resources to developing wider ranges because they say America is 75 per cent white are forgetting that by 2045 that number is going to be 49 per cent,” she says. “The face of America is changing. Over time, people of colour are going to be the majority of the population, so you have to start perfecting your formulas now if you want your business to survive.” So, what does thoughtful makeup formulation look like? “Thirty-one of Uoma Beauty’s 51 shades are for darker skin tones because our undertones are so nuanced,” says Chuter. Uoma Beauty’s Say What?! foundation is available in six custom formulas, to best suit different skin tones, and multiple shade options for cool, neutral and warm undertones.

Refreshingly, Chuter is also eager to address additional facets of inclusivity that many other brands don’t—or won’t—acknowledge. “Inclusivity is about so much more than just shades,” she says. “Yes, beauty comes in every colour, but it also comes in every budget and every lifestyle. And a lot of the marginalized groups who have been left out of the beauty conversation have also been left out economically. Are there marginalized people who are very wealthy? Sure. But are the majority of marginalized people very wealthy? No. To ignore that fact is delusional.” That’s why, in 2021, Chuter launched Uoma Beauty’s more affordable sister line, Uoma by Sharon C. Uoma Beauty, which is available at Shoppers Drug Mart, falls in the mid-price range (think \$21 for a lip liner and \$56 for an eyeshadow palette), while everything from Uoma by Sharon C, which is carried at Walmart, is in the \$6 to \$30 range.

Chuter’s willingness to have these complex and nuanced conversations is what sets her apart in an industry that is more saturated than ever. Just don’t call her a rule-breaker. “The difference between a rule-breaker and a disrupter is that the latter is constructively dissatisfied with the status quo. They offer solutions. Rule-breakers, on the other hand... Well, anyone can break anything,” she laughs. Uoma Beauty has grown rapidly since its 2019 launch, but Chuter says that brand success isn’t what she’s chasing. “It’s much better to have your mission intact, even if you don’t survive. After all, most of the activists who changed the world didn’t see that change happen in their lifetime.” As for her legacy, Chuter wants to be known for action: “I saw a problem and was brave enough to raise my hand and offer a solution, whether it was right or wrong. I tried to fix it. That’s what I want my legacy to be: the girl who tried.” ■

Top Shelf

Sharon Chuter’s tried-and-true makeup and skincare essentials.



1. “I use Uoma Beauty foundation, but this Danessa Myricks product has really caught my attention. It takes a lot to do that, but it’s so beautiful. The way it sits on skin is just perfect.” **Danessa Myricks Beauty** Yummy Skin Blurring Balm Powder, \$49

2. “This has been my go-to nighttime product for many years.” **Estée Lauder** Advanced Night Repair, \$99

3. “I’m a huge believer in not using physical exfoliators with beads because they traumatize the skin. I like to keep things very mild on my skin.” **Dr. Sebaqg** Deep Exfoliating Mask, \$144

4. “I use Pat McGrath eyeshadow palettes. I love the packaging, the storytelling and how she brings this sense of couture to beauty. I love it when people are truly innovative.” **Pat McGrath Labs** Mothership VII Eyeshadow Palette: Divine Rose, \$174

5. “This is a 20 per cent vitamin C serum with niacinamide and hyaluronic acid. It’s very effective and affordable.” **Uoma by Sharon C** Supa’ Natural Glow Serum, \$30