

HTSI Beauty

## Gucci Westman is hitting the spot

In its first six years, Westman Atelier has become the go-to brand for a flawless complexion. What's next? A cover-up, of course

**Jo Ellison.** Photography by Weston Wells AN HOUR AGO



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Gucci Westman is trying to pin down a description for Westman Atelier, the skincare and beauty line she founded in 2018. It's not organic, that's for sure. "I did try to start with an organic line-up. Yeah, I wasted nine months doing that," she says. "I wasn't educated enough to know that organic didn't perform... I was trying to find a way to make it perform. But it just doesn't work. You need the science." And it isn't "clean". "It's so much more than that," she says. "Eurgh! I hate that word."

Neither is it a celebrity offering, although Westman – one of the best-known make-up artists in the world – is the woman responsible for Julianne Moore’s poreless porcelain appearance, Jennifer Aniston’s sunkissed luminosity and Taylor Swift’s crimson lip. “There aren’t too many people you genuinely thrill to open the door to and see at 4am, but Gucci Westman is one of them,” says the actor Anne Hathaway, for whom Westman has created countless looks. “She is someone who enhances our collective culture with her values, taste and sophistication. She’s who I call when I need a recommendation for literally anything.”



A selection of Westman Atelier products © Weston Wells

[Westman Atelier](#) is the product of Westman's two decades of industry experience combined with stringent quality controls: her formulations are free from petrochemicals, such as polyethylene glycols and silicone. She first got the bug for product development while working with the labs at Lancôme and then Revlon, but the spur for her own particular brand was rosacea, a condition she developed in her 40s when her skin became over-sensitised.

“There are so many ingredients on our blacklist,” says Westman. “For example, I don't have a liquid eyeliner in the range at the moment because there's an ingredient in that formulation that is on the list.” Now in her early 50s, Westman still looks schoolgirlish in her uniform of shirt and knitted tank. Her skin – which is still prone to periods of inflammation – looks flawless, a fact she attributes to her use of the [Skin Activator serum](#) (£138) she launched last year.





Anne Hathaway, the actor, is one of Westman's long-standing clients © Lucas Possiede/WWD via Getty Images

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## **I'm always honoured when she chooses to work with me**

**Anne Hathaway**

For Westman, who was raised between California and Sweden by hippie parents (her father is a pioneer of transcendental meditation), the holistic approach is in her DNA. Her name, incidentally, is not an homage to the house of horsebit hardware, but a diminutive of Gurucharan,

the name given to her as a child on an ashram, meaning “he who sits at the lotus feet of the guru”. She adds: “They didn’t really believe in giving a girl a feminine name.”

A lifelong vegetarian, she claims her childhood in Sweden instilled in her a cultural obsession with quality. “I took so much from living there from 10 to 25,” she says. “There, it’s not about how many houses you have, it’s about *your* house. And it’s quality over quantity all day, every day.”



Westman Atelier Vital Skincare Concealer, £45

Her team at Westman Atelier, based in New York, is tiny, consisting of herself and “a formulator who’s in charge of R&D”. Westman is focused “on the performance, on the innovation and the ingredients. It’s not only that we don’t allow certain ingredients, but they have to be sourced sustainably. I’m extreme so I don’t want to compromise on anything.”

Westman Atelier originally launched online and then through an exclusive deal at Barneys. It now has 400 points of distribution in 27 countries. Says Westman: “We have experienced exponential growth; 100 per cent year-on-year since inception in 2018.” It has a high number of returning clients, and there are now 18 products in the line, including a [lightwear foundation](#), [Vital Skincare Complexion Drops](#) (£62), [Suprême C](#), a potent vitamin C serum (£300) and the bestselling blush stick [Baby Cheeks](#) (£44).





"I'm extreme so I don't want to compromise on anything," says Westman © Weston Wells

This month, she launches a concealer, which will come in 16 shades and has been four years in the works. Concealer is a “tricky one”, says Westman, because “it’s a disaster when it’s too liquid and there’s too much play time on the face”. The resulting Westman Atelier Vital Skincare Concealer (£45) has satisfied her requirements that it has a short “setting time, lifts the undereye area, blurs the pores and lasts all day”. Each product is carefully tested – in this case, by 30 people for a period of four weeks. Westman used to be sceptical of such studies – “I thought it was more like mass branding” – but the results were impressive so she kept doing them. She reports: “Forty-five per cent of people noticed fewer dark circles after four weeks.”

## The Westman way



[Westman Atelier](#) Baby Cheeks Blush Stick, £44



[Westman Atelier](#) Lip Suede palette, £78



[Westman Atelier](#) Suprême C vitamin C concentrate serum, £300 for 20ml

Westman, as befits a person who routinely touches people’s faces for a living, is patient and good-humoured. Hathaway describes her as “generous, gracious and unspoiled”. It’s a talent she’s been honing since childhood when she would “fix” her classmates’ make-up on the school bus: in a Freudian denouement it turns out her parents forbade her from wearing anything herself. Following a short – “fairly crappy” – training at a beauty school in Los Angeles, her first break came via Hollywood. She worked on Spike Jonze’s early projects, including *Being John Malkovich*, for which she transformed Cameron Diaz from blonde bombshell into the dowdy Lotte by “adding eyebrow hairs, brown contact lenses and a little tooth implant”.

Her move into fashion editorial was championed by [Grace Coddington](#), then creative director of US *Vogue*, who booked Westman for a shoot in 2001, and was so impressed she asked her to join her team. There, Westman gained a reputation for delivering the flawless “no make-up” beauty embodied by actors such as Kidman, Aniston and [Gwyneth Paltrow](#) – many of whom she works with to this day. “Gucci’s work is like her personality – chic and effortless,” says Kidman. “I love the way she does my make-up but just as much I love the time we spend together while we’re getting ready.”



© Westman Atelier



Westman used to bristle at “being known as the ‘skin’ make-up artist” when her portfolio was so diverse. She’s since learnt to use it to her brand’s advantage: “We’ve become the place to go for the most perfect complexion,” she says proudly. “And that’s from soup to nuts.”



Westman Atelier was initially self-funded. Her husband and co-founder, David Neville, who also co-founded the fashion line Rag & Bone, is the CEO. They haven't got divorced yet. So what's the secret to their partnership? "Well, yeah," says Neville. "You know, we have a lot of mutual trust... And there was definitely some pressure from a pride perspective, and our being self-funded, on doing something really beautiful and differentiated, that really represented her."



Nicole Kidman has worked with Westman for many years © Vanni Bassetti/Getty Images for Balenciaga

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## **Gucci's work is like her personality – chic and effortless**

**Nicole Kidman**

asked about the brand's potential. "It will take its place in the highest ranks among the legacy beauty brands, thanks to Gucci's impeccable talent for delivering desirable product, packaging and experience."

Westman Atelier has been widely touted as an acquisition target for many big-name portfolio brands. Seventy per cent of Westman Atelier's market is in North America, with 30 per cent rest of the world. It's now stocked in 240 Sephoras internationally, with the LVMH-owned multi-brand store accounting for a significant chunk (estimates say a third) of the brand's sales. Europe and the UK have been a recent focus – both in traditional department and in more independent luxury apothecary stores. But they have yet to dent the Asia market except for a distribution partnership with Mecca, the Australian multi-brand giant for which, says Neville, "Westman is a top-20 brand."

They have since taken on investment, from Prelude Growth Partners and more recently Imaginary Ventures [co-founded by Natalie Massenet], and launched a strategic push. "We believe Westman Atelier is uniquely positioned at the intersection of luxury, artistry and clean," says Massenet when



Westman Atelier Liquid Super Loaded Illuminator, £53 for 30ml

Asked of her ambitions for the business, Westman remains sanguine. “I was probably more romantic a few years ago,” she says. “I just want this brand to be everything it can. And, you know, acquire new clients.”

“We want to be developing more into categories like skincare and fragrance,” adds Neville. “I think this is really key.”

“That was a more fun answer,” cries Westman. “Jesus! Can I answer again? Yes, I’ve been secretly working on a fragrance and expanding skincare. And I love the lifestyle collaborations [with leather brand [Métier](#) and the Swedish [Skultuna](#)] that we do.”

Whether clean, conscious or something other – Westman Atelier is cooking now. She barely has time for her famous clients who still clamour for her skills. Lately, she’s been fixing Nicole Kidman for most of her media appearances and primping Kirsten Dunst and Sofia Coppola with matte-finish, cocoa-scented lips. Everyone wants a piece of Westman, a fact confirmed by Hathaway: “Gucci is a very in-demand make-up artist and businesswoman so I’m always honoured when she chooses to work with me. We recently did *The Tonight Show* with Jimmy Fallon together. When he saw her [Fallon] exclaimed: ‘Gucci Westman is the *best!*’”

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