

A woman with blonde hair is lying down, wearing a white lace-trimmed top. She has a light-colored, textured face mask applied to her face, covering her forehead, cheeks, and chin. Her eyes are open, and she has a slight smile. A large, light-colored rose is visible near her head. The background is a soft, out-of-focus white.

SKIN TYPE Dry

ANTIDOTE Hydrating mask

PRODUCT Sundari Rose and
Lavender Hydrating Mask

KEY INGREDIENT Rose oil

Rose oil, an antioxidant, reduces the inflammation that's often associated with dry skin and thereby improves skin's ability to absorb and retain moisture, says Alec Batis, head of product development for the Ayurvedic-inspired Sundari line. This mask also contains nourishing apricot-kernel oil and shea butter, and lavender flower water, which is thought to have antibacterial properties. Green clay gently draws out impurities and sops up excess oil, making this mask suitable for combination as well as dry skin.

Masquerade

BY ANN ABEL • PHOTOGRAPHY BY ONDREA BARBE

"IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT A PRETTY FACE IS A PASSPORT," QUIPPED English writer Julie Burchill. "But it's not; it's a visa, and it runs out fast."

In the arsenal of skin care, the mask is a mainstay in extending your visa. It has certainly stood the test of time itself—it's one of the oldest means women have employed to put their best face forward. They've used highly diverse substances, but often ones that are culturally emblematic. First-century Romans made masks of flour and water, the essential elements of pasta. (Some nobles used veal.) Third-century Indians used clay, which is a key ingredient in Hindu deity sculptures. As for the concoction of asparagus roots, wild anise, and lily bulbs steeped in goat milk preferred by 15th-century Frenchwomen, well, it sounds to me like French home cooking.

The beauty mask has an inherent mystique. You conceal your face in the hope that the unmasking will be a reveille (that's me?) or even a revelation (that's me!). A face may be too slight a foundation for happiness, as the 18th-century English woman of letters Lady Mary Wortley Montagu claimed (with good reason, judging by her picture), but the money women spend on masks shows that we don't believe it.

Practically speaking, the main idea behind any mask is putting the skin in contact with beneficial ingredients, so it can absorb them (a hydrating mask) or they can absorb part of it (a mask that soaks up excess oil). And therein lies the rub: A mask is almost as individual as the face it covers. It has to reflect who you are, at least on the surface, if it's going to take on your complexion.

On the following pages, we look at six common skin types and highlight a mask—all available in spas—that addresses the problem. (See page 101 for prices, retailers, and selected spas where the mask is used.) "Nature gives you the face you have at 20; it is up to you to merit the face you have at 50," said Coco Chanel. A regular mask regimen is one way of doing that.

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