



WEARING A MINI DRESS that's stark white, but far from clinical, Lena Korres stands at a podium with her fingertips touching gently in front of her waist. All eyes are on her, scanning from her milky stilettos to her glowing visage. In New York to celebrate the launch of the Korres Black Pine anti-aging range in North America, Lena (pronounced Len-a; not the Dunham way), co-founder of Korres, is every part the Greek goddess we'd expect her to be. After all, she's spent 18 years developing natural elixirs in her hometown of Athens.

## INSIDER *natural* BEAUTY

*Launching a beauty brand that's adored worldwide wasn't part of Lena Korres' plan. It was a happy accident that her customers brought to life.* BY EMILIE DINGFELD

Yet despite being at the helm of Korres as brand development director, she doesn't play the glamour card. In her world, simplicity reigns. Up close and personal, she appears barefaced, save for a touch of mascara and bronzer. Her fragrance of choice is not a spritz, but rather a slathering of Korres Guava Body Butter. Her "bling" is an oversized silver watch, and three string bracelets in red, aqua and black. Most indulgent, perhaps, is her skincare regimen. "If I spend 20 minutes getting ready in the morning, 15 will be skincare and five will be makeup..." she says. "Skincare means a lot to us because we have so much sun."

Be it seaside or city centre, the sun-soaked country of Greece—among the most biologically diverse places in the world—might hold a key to the proverbial fountain of youth. Within many Korres products are native agricultural riches: Thyme is harvested from the island of Samos in the Aegean Sea; wild rose is plucked from the city of Larissa. Lena, now →

Whether black-on-black or head-to-toe white, Lena Korres' fashion sensibility is simply elegant.

in her early-40s, began her intensive study of the country's flora in 1996, after an ad in an Athens newspaper sealed her fate: George Korres, who had taken over Tzivanides Pharmacy, Greece's first homeopathic pharmacy, was looking for someone to help formulate the thousands of herbal remedies he offered. A newly minted chemical engineer (of 100 students, only 16 were female), she had to dig deep to discern her future. "My heart wasn't in working in a lab," says Lena, with a soft Greek inflection. "I thought, 'This is something that speaks to my heart.'"

Lena was hired, and that same year, she and George launched the Korres brand with an herb-infused syrup of aniseed and honey, inspired by a warming alcoholic drink George's grandfather used to concoct on the island of Naxos. (You could argue it was equal parts love potion, because the duo also married.) Their subsequent foray into the realm of skincare was driven by a remedy customers were crazy about.

"People were coming in for [wild rose oil] to treat acne marks, pigmentation and even scars," says Lena. "[They] asked, 'Why don't you guys make beauty creams and cosmetics?' They came for homeopathic remedies. They pushed us to create beauty products." Wild Rose 24-Hour Cream was born of that fervent demand and it became a cult product. "We started getting calls from other pharmacies in Greece asking, 'What are those products?' 'Can we sell them?' Then we started thinking about growing the business outside our pharmacy."

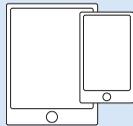
Opportunity for expansion arose again in 1999, when an American buyer vacationing on the isle of Crete spotted the products in a pharmacy, importing them to the U.S. shortly thereafter. Then, a year later, the line caught the attention of a buyer from London who was visiting New York, and he later brought it to the U.K. Little by little, the natural, apothecary-inspired brand proliferated in metropolises around the world, from Paris to Perth to Prague.

While juggling all this, Lena also became a mom. "Those years between, say, the late-20s to late-40s, women live with all kinds of requirements to do everything. You're

## LENA'S ETHOS



**On her exercise regimen:** "I learned the expression 'gym rat' from the U.S. I like the gym. I like the outdoors. I adore the sea. I have my gym routine, which happens a couple times a week. I also like bicycling and running.... In Athens, we have post-midnight cycling tours."



**On digital detoxing:** "I don't check [emails] all the time.... Usually on the weekend, I go through everything that's happened during the week. I read emails, I file them, I make a to-do list."



**On natural ingredients:** "Natural ingredients are similar to the composition of our skin. That means that the skin accepts it and recognizes it...it's a compatible and friendly product."

building your career. You're working long hours. Then, you're also starting a family," she says, without a hint of complaint. "I'm the type of person who isn't much into babies," she adds, with a laugh. "I really enjoy the age my children are now [her daughter and son are both in their teens]." With their maturity comes some relief for Mom: Travel is easier and they've begun to understand why their parents were always working long hours. "That can be difficult for a child," says Lena. "As they grow up, it becomes interesting. They start to understand what's going on." Her children are not, however, predestined to work for Korres. Lena insists: "I would wish for them to have other experiences so they find out what they like."

Lena's unwavering faith in youth extends beyond her offspring and to her workforce, for which she and her colleagues initiated an internship program so coveted, last year more than 400 students applied for 30 spots. "I really, truly believe young people can change the world," says Lena. "At that age, you feel like you have superpowers. You have optimism, you have openness—you open your heart and your mind.... Spending time with [the interns] was the best thing that's happened to me in a long time."

Within the Korres headquarters is a close-knit group of employees, many of whom take time to enjoy each other's company. "My team here, we all eat lunch together," she says. "One person cooks one day, one cooks the next day. It happens naturally; we don't need to be official about it." Meals often revolve around the Cretan diet, which is "the healthiest diet to protect you against heart disease." It includes vegetables, virgin olive oil, good fish and "a lot of yogurt!" Eating the ubiquitous dairy product is, actually, Lena's advice to us Canadians on how to get a slice of her gorgeousness. "It's really good for you," she says. "Start with [something simple], because if you try it, you'll see what it does."

"For us, ingredients tell a story," Lena continues. "For example, Greek yogurt: Every grandmother in Greece knew if you had a sunburn, you'd put yogurt on your skin. Wild rose is the first product we made—it's our pharmacy heritage. Black pine is [the result of] research. There's an emotional connection for me, because it's a plant that lives forever. So, you observe the plant, you know there's something that makes it very strong—it goes back to our country and our heritage."®



**Black Pine** is known as nature's chameleon: It can survive at the tops of mountains and in the driest deserts. Full of natural protective properties and powerhouse antioxidants called polyphenols, it helps boost collagen production, firming and lifting skin, while reducing the appearance of fine lines. (And it smells subtly of the fragrant tree.) The range includes a day cream, night cream, serum and eye cream.



ONLY AT SHOPPERS

From left: **Korres Black Pine Firming, Lifting & Antiwrinkle Serum**, \$86; **Black Pine Firming, Lifting & Antiwrinkle Day Cream**, \$75.