

From treading the boards to going feet first into the beauty business, Louise Goss interviews Annette Foley-Craigen about the 'vital part of the anatomy' we often ignore.

# Annette Foley-Craigen

**W**HEN I met Annette Foley-Craigen it was the first time anyone has shown me their feet during an interview. But Annette does have very lovely feet, something which should come as no surprise as the Managing Director of B-Line Health and Beauty and the woman almost solely responsible for raising the profile of foot care in the professional beauty industry.

She is what one would describe as 'a character'; a lively, spunky personality with many a tale to tell at the age of 77 and who has played many a character herself after starting out in the world of theatre, studying at the prestigious Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. (She's even met one of her fellow alumni, Sir Anthony Hopkins.)

As an actress, Annette always built her characters from the feet upwards. She stands to show me that with feet as her foundation, they become the foundation to a character. "You automatically move, you build the body and it alters, depending on what part you're playing," she explains.

Today, feet remain core to her business. She entered the beauty industry almost by accident when as a glamorous young actress, working "any job to pay the rent" in London, she was asked to do some promotional work for Estée Lauder. Later she moved to Clarins and after years in various sales and marketing roles, Annette decided to branch out on her own. "I decided if I was going to work that hard for them, I could work that hard for myself," she says laughing.

She decided to focus on an area of the body which was not being covered by the big companies. "I thought I'll do something different. Instead of starting from the face down, I'll start from the feet up," she says. "I thought, and still believe, that feet are a vital part of the anatomy, which is totally and sadly neglected."

Annette and her late husband were renovating the beautiful Harrowby Hall near Grantham from where B-Line Health and Beauty launched in 1989. "B stands for Best, British and Beauty," she tells me.

She began her research, developed three unique products, gave lectures on foot care and was described as a 'foot guru' and 'sole sister' writing for top industry publications. "Everyone hated feet," she says. "Women would often say, 'oh I can't stand my feet' and therapists hated doing feet because products weren't nice."

At a time when foot care was medical, functional, corns and hard-skin, Annette was innovating, discovering the perfect blend of tea tree and lavender oils for a more functional but beautiful product line. "I wanted [the products] to be plant orientated and I wanted to use natural products," she says. "Tea tree was absolutely right because it's antiviral, antiseptic, just right for the

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feet. The lavender was healing, soothing, cooling with a lovely fragrance."

B-Line's first major customer was luxury spa, Ragdale Hall. "We are still with them and we are very proud of that," says Annette.

After years performing on the stage and experiencing tired and aching feet, Annette recognises the importance of looking after them. "I wasn't motivated by money," she says. "I loved the whole process and feel proud to have made a contribution to feet and foot care. It broadened my horizons. I travelled and lectured. I actually do believe, in our pioneering days, we made a big difference to the way people feel about feet."

Annette continues to be a pioneer and innovator, still bucking the trend well into her seventies. B-Line was applauded by environmentalists for removing plastic

microbeads from its exfoliating product in 2015, when many beauty brands were simply talking about doing it. They became the first independent British company to replace the plastic with bamboo, which, along with its sustainability, Annette says reflects her natural, plant-based ethos. They have also begun moving from plastic to aluminium bottles.

Around the room at Harrowby Hall I glimpse several pairs of decorative shoes, placed as ornaments. "I'm a shoe addict," admits Annette. "I'll never tell women not to wear high heels. I wear them myself, but if you're asking me if they're good for your feet, no they're not. You're never going to stop women wearing gorgeous shoes but always look after your feet, because fabulous shoes deserve fabulous feet!"

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