

ANNETTE FOLEY-CRAIGEN



Making a *b-Line* for beauty

From theatre footlights to feet of a totally different kind, Annette Foley-Craigen's story has taken her from Wales to Scotland via London and finally to Lincolnshire where for the past twenty-one years she has run her own independent beauty company.

Annette's story started in the theatre after training with the prestigious Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. In between engagements, when not on tour or resting, her glamour, natural poise and clear diction made her much in demand for promotional work around the country for one of the top French skincare houses.

It was during one such period, in a store in Edinburgh that she met her future husband Brian and in the 1980s the couple moved to Harrowby Hall, near Grantham – a beautiful period property in much need of renovation. Time flew past as the imposing house was brought back to life, while Annette built a second career with an international beauty company.

Always in the back of her mind - 'I never truly gave up the theatre' – were the lessons learned as an actress spending many hours on stage. Treading the boards reinforced the importance of good posture and of looking after the feet. Her vision of foot care as 'an investment in overall health and wellbeing' became reality in 1989 when she created her first three luxury products for the feet, which she felt had been completely neglected.

b-Line Health and Beauty was born, based on an exclusive combination of Tea Tree Oil and Oil of Lavender which remains the heart of the range today. Annette was one of the first in the UK to recognise the potential of tea tree for its natural antiseptic, soothing and anti-fungal properties which made it an ideal ingredient in her foot treatments.

"We were the first to present foot care as a

fashionable and contemporary treatment when no-one else was really focused on it," said Annette. b-Line broke new ground by raising awareness, educating therapists and the wider public to take feet more seriously.

"I not only felt there was a need for luxury foot care beyond the very basic products available at that time but I also wanted to raise awareness of the importance of the feet to a person's wellbeing," explained Annette.

"I have always enjoyed the research and development phase, working with my chemist on creating new products. The real excitement comes from devising treatment concepts which can be taught and delivered by therapists in spas and salons." One of b-Line's first orders came from nearby Ragdale Hall Health Hydro and Spa, where Annette is now a familiar face as she pops in regularly to keep therapists and staff updated. They were among the first to try her latest innovation, an anti-ageing serum for the hands called 'Skin Treat'.

As the business grew, Annette explored the connection between feet and the female psyche, extolling the sensual nature of this part of the body that is reflected in women's love of shoes. Fascinated by the customs and rituals associated down the centuries with feet and footwear, she is acknowledged as a leader in this field and over the years has shared her passion through a magazine column and a series of lectures within the professional beauty industry.

Over the years b-Line has been extended to include a comprehensive range for feet, body, hands and nails and the top floor of Harrowby is now a small training suite for therapists. Annette's knowledge and interest in all things 'feet' has never waned despite the company adopting a more holistic approach and creating products for the whole body.

"The foot is a very complex device, a brilliant piece of engineering," added Annette. "It contains over twenty-six bones and every day comes under intense strain. Women (and some men) squeeze their feet into shoes that are often too tight and too high and then

wonder why they feel so bad!" Harrowby contains an impressive collection of vintage and contemporary shoes. "They are my interest and my indulgence, I suppose," she acknowledged. "I find them not only fabulous to wear but also decorative and attractive to look at." Annette is clearly a firm believer that beautiful shoes deserve beautiful feet!

b-line is a name inspired by many things in Annette's life. Her late husband Brian, best, British, beauty... all combining to create a brand name with values that appeal equally to therapists and the wider public.

"I suppose the beauty industry usually works from head to toe," Annette said. "I have definitely done it the other way round." As a pioneer and innovator, it is an approach which has earned her a unique place in the industry.

b-line products are sold to professional spas and salons in the UK and overseas, enjoying a particularly high profile in Japan. Annette is supported by a close-knit team including recently-appointed managing director, Paul Cranwell, who has spearheaded an initiative to re-package the range ready for a move into retail to complement the professional range.

After twenty-one years Annette does not feel she has exhausted her search and inspiration for new products. "I am very proud that we have remained an independent British company and our customers tell us they are faithful to our products because we use only the finest, natural plant-based ingredients which are very effective. My plan is to extend the range still further so in time there will be a b-line product to treat every part of the body and 'sole'."



Therapist Claire Stokes of Elysium Beauty and Complementary Therapies

Where you can find B-line Health and Beauty Products:

Online: www.b-lineharrowbyhall.com

Tel: 01476 590788

Elysium Beauty and Complementary Therapies, Grantham

Tel: 01476 563000

Ragdale Hall Health Hydro Spa, Leicestershire

Tel: 01664 434831

