

VOGUE BEAUTY

Aerin Lauder in the sitting room of her home in East Hampton, New York, surrounded by her grandmother Estée Lauder's china collection.



DIARY OF A ...

BEAUTY LAUNCH

Sigourney Cantelo visits a hallmark American home in search of the true meaning of luxury.

Wednesday, 5pm

"What is luxury in the post-apocalypse of the GFC?" I wonder as I trudge through the arrivals gate at New York's JFK airport, cabin-rumpled and juggling a suitcase, a carry-on and a broken laptop bag. After 21 hours in the air, luxury seems a rather absurd concept. But that's about to change. I am making my way into the very lap of luxury, visiting Aerin Lauder's famed East Hampton home to learn about Estée Lauder's new top-of-the-line Re-Nutriv Ultimate Lift Age-Correcting collection. And there, in front of me, stands the answer to my question: a uniformed driver with my name on a placard. Of course. Luxury is never having to deal with your baggage (emotional

notwithstanding). We climb into a shiny SUV and hit the road, splicing away from the Manhattan-bound traffic onto the Long Island Expressway and, two and a half hours later, pull up at The Maidstone, a chic Scandinavian-styled boutique hotel. Each of the 19 rooms is decorated in homage to Nordic icons. I am in architect Josef Frank's room, all soft blue florals and clean white lines. On my bed is an LL Bean canvas tote with my initials embossed on it. It's full of delicious local treats: chocolate chip cookies, cheese sticks and saltwater taffy, along with a welcome note from Aerin. Luxury is not having to eat breath mints to tide you over until dinner. I take my meal solo at the hotel's trendy restaurant before sliding between the umpteen-thread-count sheets and slipping into a luxuriously long sleep. ▶

SIMON UPTON

VOGUE BEAUTY

Thursday, 9am

After breakfast, beauty editors from all over the world gather at reception. I amuse myself by playing “guess which country”. Miu Miu platforms, hot pants and sequined jacket? Korea. Deep tan, Marni shift and Dolce wedges? Italy, for sure. We climb into town cars and disembark at Aerin’s tall, white pillared home, which is surrounded by huge blue hydrangea bushes. After iced tea on the impossibly green lawn, we head through to the pool house for a presentation. Once we’re settled, Aerin welcomes us and introduces model Carolyn Murphy, a spokesperson for the brand, and doctors Daniel Yarosh and Nadine Pernodet, who will talk us through the science. The air is soupy with humidity and the distant whirr of lawnmowers competes with the chirrup of birds beyond the garden. Aerin apologises for the heat, then tells us that they decided to hold the launch here in her Hamptons home because to her grandmother Estée big white homes with pillars represented true success and luxury, and the Re-Nutriv line has always been about luxury. When it first launched back in 1956, Re-Nutriv was priced at an exorbitant \$115 (the average price of moisturiser was \$10), it contained the most expensive and rare ingredients of the time (royal jelly, turtle oil and shark oil) and was packaged in a gold jar. Despite the steep price, it flew off shelves and was an early example of the power of clever beauty marketing.

Over the years the ingredients were updated as science progressed. In 2002 Re-Nutriv Ultimate Lifting Creme was the first skincare product to use the breakthrough antioxidant resveratrol. Yarosh explains that today’s launch has been inspired by the field of epigenetics (the study of how genes are switched on and off) and, in addition to the Ultimate Lift Age-Correcting line launching today, all the Re-Nutriv products will soon be reformulated to contain a new ingredient, “life-renewing molecules”, a high-powered blend of substances designed to support cell and gene activities.

Thursday, 11am

Aerin takes us on a tour of her home. Dressed in a white Stella McCartney shift, with her hair scraped back in a topknot, she is every inch the Hamptons heiress as she glides seamlessly ahead. The house, which as built in the 1960s, was purchased by Estée in the 70s, who employed famed decorator Mark Hampton to create her summer oasis. Aerin and her husband Eric Zinterhofer inherited it after Estée passed away in 2004, and renovated to create more room for their two young boys. She kept elements of Estée’s classic taste, but added fresh vibrant touches: a zebra rug here and a beach-comb coral chandelier there. One of the sitting rooms is exactly as Estée left it. “All I did was paint the walls lavender to make it more modern,” Aerin says. It is still decorated with Estée’s beloved blue and white china and there’s a table groaning under the weight of ubiquitous blue hydrangeas and photographs of Estée, the family and notables like the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, Princess Grace and Nancy Reagan. On a whim, Aerin decides she will show us the back of the house and leads us into the kitchen, where local caterers Loaves and Fishes are busy preparing lunch. In the family room, which is decorated in wall-to-wall blue batik fabric, the mantelpiece is lined with clam shells painted in a childish hand. A basketball game is playing on the TV and there are toys behind the couch. It looks like any other functioning family room – with an added dose of chic. “We weren’t expecting



The white columns of Estée Lauder’s Hamptons home inspired the design of her lipstick packaging.



For lunch in the garden, tables are swathed in Carolina Irving tablecloths. Right: dinner in the barn at Aerin Lauder’s parents’ home.



to have anyone in here, so excuse the mess,” she smiles apologetically. Luxury is having a home as lovely as it is lived in.

Thursday, 12.30pm

The lawn by the pool house is decked out with long tables lined with small pots of daisies and ferns. We dine on a cold salad selection and drink chilled rosé. It’s getting hotter. Suddenly, Aerin excuses herself and heads into the poolhouse. Returning with a dozen different straw hats, she hands them out to anyone not shaded by the umbrellas. Only a cosmetics executive could know the extent that beauty editors fear pigmentation. As she settles back down, Aerin tells me that she throws similar “casual” dinner parties for her friends. Casual? Luxury is dressing up a simple poolside lunch with good taste and manners, and calling it casual.

Thursday, 2pm

When I sit down to interview Murphy in her role as the brand’s spokesmodel, she tells me she’s been using the new cream. “This is when I feel very infomercial!” she laughs, and adds sincerely, “I’m a connoisseur of products, I try everything and, along with eating well, staying out of the sun, there’s definitely a difference. Especially ▶

SIMON UPTON WILLIAM WALDRON



The family room is decorated in batik and features an image of Aerin Lauder and her sons by American photographer Tina Barney.



On the dressing table in Estée Lauder's former bedroom are original bottles of her fragrances Youth Dew and Beautiful. Below: spokesmodel Carolyn Murphy.



Estée Lauder Re-Nutriv Ultimate Lift Age-Correcting Serum, \$410, and Creme, \$410.



mannered nature of cosmetics, but I can't imagine business moguls in other industries inviting the media into their homes and humouring them with interviews. Suitably humoured myself, I'm dispatched to my driver to dress for dinner.

Thursday, 7.30pm

Aerin is hosting tonight's dinner at her parents' nearby home. Despite the fact that it's their 42nd wedding anniversary, her father Ronald comes out to the white-pebbled drive to welcome us to his historic home. As dusk gathers we walk through the palatial shingled house to the huge garden beside a serene lake. Our dinner is served in a barn, on a long white table dotted with sunflowers. I'm seated next to Murphy, in prime position to surreptitiously monitor her diet. I'm pleased to report: she eats! Like most of us here she tucks into gazpacho, two servings of southern-fried chicken with potato salad, and berry crumble and a chocolate brownie for dessert. By 11pm, jetlagged journalists are ferried home before they nod off into their rosé.

Friday, 10am

I head to a nearby hotel for interviews with doctors Yarosh and Pernodet. I grill them on the science of the new products and learn that the life-renewing molecules contain an algae that the Lauder labs found would help support the repair of mitochondria (the energy factories of cells) and ergothioneine, an amino acid and supercharged antioxidant that mops up free radicals. These two work in conjunction with silketare, a sea plant that supports the function of the genes that control how well skin adjusts to its environment. The Ultimate Lift Age-Correcting Creme, Serum and Eye Creme all contain this scientific cocktail along with tourmaline, colloidal gold and ground South Sea pearls which give skin a clean, luminous glow.

Our time is up and a driver is waiting to take me back to Manhattan. I say goodbye to the Lauder team, not ready to go back to the real world where drivers don't carry my bags for me and "casual" pool house luncheons don't flow into "rustic" dinners in glamorous barns. But, decadent details aside, I've learnt that today's luxury is not about the gaudy or the "bling". It's a state of being, of grace. Time out with loved ones. Authenticity. Quality and good manners. As Estée famously said: "Look for a sweet person. Forget rich."

ERIC BOWAN ANDREW COWEN SIMON UPTON
ALL PRICES APPROXIMATE DETAILS LAST PAGES

around my mouth, and under the eye area the puffiness has gone down." Whatever she's doing, it works. She looks younger than her 37 years, with high, chiselled cheekbones, bright, darting eyes and a thin, perfectly formed nose. Her white silk Givenchy shirt sets off a golden complexion and the creamy blonde hair pulled back from her face. She is doll-like with a touch of California surfer girl thrown in. And she does surf. She loved the breaks at Bondi when she came a few years ago, and visits friends in Hawaii regularly. When it comes to luxury, the ultimate indulgence for Murphy is down time. "Curling up on the couch on a Sunday afternoon, a fire going, a cashmere blanket, a good book." I couldn't agree more: in today's manic existence, isn't luxury just another word for time out?

Suddenly our time is up and I'm ushered into Estée's blue and white room to talk to Aerin. As we sit, I notice a photo of the cosmetics doyenne gazing down at us. Aerin must be used to the feeling of her grandmother looking over her shoulder. So how does she keep the dream alive?

"Doing events the way we did today, in her home with her belongings, her linens, her glasses, in a world that she loved," she says thoughtfully, sitting poised, legs crossed at the ankles above snakeskin Manolo Blahniks. "I think maintaining and respecting the heritage of the brand and who Estée was, and her sense of style, keeps it alive."

Aerin tells me that the Re-Nutriv line is targeting all ages from 28 up. "Anyone who loves the ultimate in skincare, luxury and quality," she says smoothly. So, is luxury back? "Luxury is back, but in a different way, and that's why Estée Lauder and Re-Nutriv are doing so well, because people want luxury but they want quality and value." I quiz her about how she relaxes ("a hot bath, a glass of wine and spending time with my children,"), diet (she has a weakness for jellybeans), fitness (she loves spin class) and maintaining a good work/life balance. She answers questions without hesitation and divulges details without the usual guarded nature of media-trained society girls. Maybe it's the