

Mondavi Courts 'Neiman Marcus Woman' With 29

By Rachel Brown

LOS ANGELES — Lydia Mondavi's lifelong operations manual has been Stanley Marcus' book, "Minding the Store," a gift from her grandfather at age five.

So, when the 35-year-old wife of Robert Mondavi Jr., grandson of the Robert Mondavi Winery founder, decided to enter the makeup business, the book's lessons rushed back to her. "You never jeopardize quality. It always has to be the best of the best," she said.

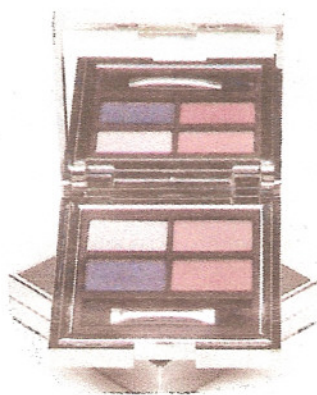
Mondavi spent four years incubating her 29 Cosmetics color line to ensure she'd tantalize Neiman Marcus buyers with what she considered ideal products. She contended that the positioning of the color cosmetics line's 70 stockkeeping units is unique — antiaging benefits come from grape seed extracts used throughout the line — its Italian manufacturing is top-notch and the packaging is classic in silver and aubergine brown.

"In every single thing that we focused on, we thought of the Neiman Marcus woman," said Mondavi. "She is 48-years-old. She travels. She is extremely well educated."

But the true test for the line was a meeting in November with Neiman

Marcus. Mondavi wore an Escada suit and Yves Saint Laurent heels, and her 29 Cosmetics partner and mother, Anita Wilbanks, wore Prada pumps and a Ralph Lauren skirt and jacket — all in 29 Cosmetics' signature aubergine brown and white colors. Twenty-nine-themed necklaces designed by jeweler Lulu Frost topped off the outfits.

"The concept [and] the packaging were very unique and different," said Hazel Wyatt, divisional merchandise manager for Neiman Marcus. "When we add a brand, we really want it to have a significant point of difference."



Eye shadows from 29 Cosmetics.

Natick, Mass.; San Francisco; San Diego; Newport Beach, Calif.; San Antonio; Austin, Tex., and Scottsdale, Ariz.

"We had not planned to roll it out

quite as quickly as we are, but the demand for the product has been exciting, and we are getting repeat purchasers," said Wyatt.

The 29 Cosmetics backstory of oenophiles distinguishes it from most competitors. The name is derived from the highway that winds through Napa, Calif., where the brand is based. Red wine grapes that provide the building

blocks of the products are grown in Napa and Italy, and Mondavi claimed the oil that's netted is "50 times more

powerful" than Vitamin E.

The three best-selling products are lip exfoliator First Crush, lip balm Wine Blot and Hint of Honey lip shimmer. Each item costs \$23, but 29 Cosmetics products range as high as \$52, for the Varietals hydrating foundation.

"We focused on lips because it is the one area where women are applying lipstick every day," said Mondavi, "but they are not taking care of their lips like they take care of their face."

Mondavi estimates that 29 Cosmetics will generate \$1.5 million in first-year sales.

For now, Mondavi has no plans to expand beyond 29 Cosmetics' exclusivity with Neiman Marcus. She said she has been turning down spas that have requested to carry the brand, but that doesn't mean that Mondavi won't capitalize on the brand's growth herself — she indicated she is interested in opening a store or spa, which would carry the 29 Cosmetics brand, in Napa in the not-too-distant future.

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