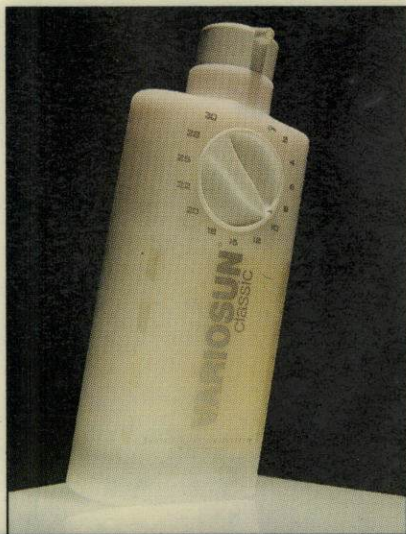




SUSAN IRVINE



BEST BUY

VARIOSUN WITH ADJUSTABLE SUN PROTECTION FACTOR

WHY: all the sun tan lotion you need in one bottle; dispenser mixes the right factor from two cartridges, one with SPF2 and one with SPF30; protects against UVA and UVB; with aloe vera and vitamin E.
PRICE: £11.99 (SPF2 refill £3.99; SPF30 £4.99).
FROM: Harrods, London SW1 (020-7730 1234) or mail order (0800 026 0220)

For years I have followed a foolhardy skincare regime. Most of the year I fiddle about with various skin creams for the morning, the night, the neck, the bit behind the ears, half-believing that if I keep this up as I move through life my face will not move with me. Then, on my summer holidays, I undo all these good works.

I start off well, heading for the beach with suncare products, sunglasses and those odd-sounding 'loose cotton clothes' we are officially advised to wear to repel the rays. I put all of this on and lie down in the sun, exposing, initially, only the bottom half of my legs.

And that is enough. My legs are whiter than any other legs on Earth. Not just normal white-person white, but blanched, boiled-egg, dead-fishbelly, highly-refined-sugar white. No one with legs as white as this can lie in a blinding glare, shin-by-shin with other legs, and not cave in. Everyone else's legs are a kind of biscuit colour before they have even started. Next to them my legs glow eerily, like those luminous fish that live deep in the darkest depths of the ocean.

In an effort to look alive, I strip off the loose cotton clothes, and apply less and less sun cream, first on the legs, and then on the face – the very face I spend so much time rubbing things into for the rest of the year. But, as Professor Anthony

Quinn, consultant dermatologist for the Imperial Cancer Research Fund, puts it: 'A two-week-long Mediterranean holiday gives the equivalent of a whole year's sun exposure in Britain.' The truth is, my skin would be better off if I

protected it with paranoid intensity during the two-week holiday, and ignored it for the rest of the year.

But this year I have concocted a cast-iron sun strategy. Step one: self-tan. But no ordinary self-tan. I will be using the Self-Tanning Age Prevention Cream (£22) in Decléor's new sun range (see 'Time and lotion', right). It's the first ever not to contain the chemical tanning agent DHA. Instead, Decléor has an organically grown plant extract, mahakanni, used in China and India to darken hair.

My in-situ suncare kit will centre on a spray. Unfortunately, most sprays offer less than SPF15 protection, which the Imperial Cancer Research Fund recommends as a minimum, but try Estée Lauder's Oil Free Sunspray SPF15 (£14). Everything else will be by Lavera, a sensitive skincare range from Germany (available at Farmacia, 169 Drury Lane, London WC2, mail order: 020-7404 8808; www.farmacia.co.uk). Its Sun Sensitiv products, which use plant extracts, mostly from certified organic farms, offer full-spectrum protection, and are free from petrochemical derivatives and synthetic additives. The Sun Milk SPF20 (£10) is also water-resistant and insect-repellent.

And finally, my hat. Frankly, when I'm wearing it, sunscreen is obsolete. This heavy-duty cotton flowerpot by Grab & Mac comes down to just below the nose. Set in it are two murky green circles of plastic to see through. With it on, I look, once again, like some strange deep-sea fish. But quite a chic, skin-cancer-free one. ■



Natalie Ferstendik

Beauty

Notebook

Well oiled

Put Sisley botanical sun oil on your shopping list and you might not run to a holiday in the Bahamas – the price is astronomical. But it is good. The oil is dry, so sand won't stick to you; it is also water-resistant; protects against sun, wind and chlorine; and repels insects. A really luxurious item, this is one bottle you won't be passing around the poolside. £49 for 125ml, from Harrods, London SW1 (020-7730 1234). CH



Time and lotion

Decléor's new pre-sun range is perfect for working yourself into a frenzy of excitement before your holiday. Apply the Tan Accelerator five days prior to sun exposure to activate the formation of melanin and increase the skin's self-protection, thereby reducing the risk of sunburn, and helping promote a deeper and more even tan. £16 for 75ml (020-7402 9474). Charlotte Harrison



Afterglow

Clarins has more after-sun lotions than you can shake a parasol at, including After Sun Moisture Supplement for the Face (£15.50 for 40ml), Anti-Mosquito Formula and Moisturizer with Self Tanning Action (£14.50 each for 150ml). Shimmer After Sun Moisturizer spray contains ultra-fine pearls to highlight that radiant glow, £14.50 for 150ml (020-7307 6700). CH

