

A Heritage More Than Skin Deep

Since 1934, the Gardiner Family have been producing the purest, gentlest formulations for dry and sensitive skin in Ireland. Here Joanna Gardiner, CEO, reveals how a proud tradition of purity, heritage and family values has seen the business thrive.



Joseph Gardiner was a practical man with a hard work ethic. He was also a man with a good idea back in the days when moisturising bases for dry skin, eczema and rashes were made at the back of the chemist shop with a pestle and mortar.

Joseph saw an opportunity to make up products like Silcock's Base, Emulsifying Ointment and Calamine Cream to save chemist shops the bother, and to hand deliver them across the nation under the brand Ovelle.

In 1934, he established the family skincare apothecary in Dundalk and Newry and, together with his sons Gerald and Sean, steered the family business through the 1930s, World War 2 and the Troubles in the border area.

Traditional Formulations

"It sounds strange now, but there really weren't any dermatologists on the island when the business

was founded," explains Joanna Gardiner, who is Joseph's granddaughter and the current CEO of the business.

"For example, Dr Silcock, originator of the eponymous Base, was a Liverpool dermatologist who visited Temple Street and the Mater Hospital Dublin on a monthly basis to treat patients with eczema. Today, his formula is still widely recommended as an alternative to soap to wash and moisturise dry skin.

"Joseph made Ovelle traditional formulations to soothe and repair dry skin. Later on, we created Elave sensitive skincare, to provide a daily regime of shampoos, lotions and creams that work to prevent flare-ups of eczema and other sensitive skin conditions."

Joanna's late father Sean and his wife Rosemarie, both pharmacists, led the way in investing heavily in research and development, literally creating a war chest of

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traditional and pharma grade formulations, as well as forging incredible business relationships with aid agencies worldwide.

Patrick Gardiner, the Research and Quality Director and Joseph's grandson, has been hugely successful in combining the achievement of manufacturing excellence which complies with multiple global quality standards with innovation in high performing skincare formulation.

Global Reach

Today, the business is a global concern exporting over 55% of

their skincare solutions across the world. But, insists Joanna, it is still a family values business at heart. Everything is manufactured in Ireland - they are Guaranteed Irish - and they are proud to support local suppliers.

"It is a philosophy that has served us well," she says. "We have evolved as a company over the decades, of course, but we remain loyal to our staff and customers and always endeavour to put them first.

"We are very grateful for the support of healthcare professionals and remain very hands-on,



Joseph Gardiner, Founder

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delivering skincare directly to pharmacies. We believe that pharmacists and pharmacy assistants recommend us because we are a trusted solution for dry, sensitive skin with decades of experience.

“Over the past 86 years we have employed three generations in Dundalk, many of them brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, fathers and sons, mothers and daughters. The people who have worked with us have been a great asset and remain so.”

The business is now proudly flying under the flag of ‘Gardiner Family Apothecary’ as a way of connecting their two brands, Ovelle and Elave, as well as saluting the values, tradition and heritage that have seen the business thrive.

Significant Investments

That has included significant investment in quality systems to enable operating to the highest Pharma standards. They are stringently audited to GMP by the HPRA for licensed medicines, and to globally recognised standards for medical device skincare, Ecocert organic and cosmetic GMP formulations.

“Sustainability is a massive commitment and will remain a priority going forward,” says Joanna. “We operate to ISO 14001 environmental standard and strive at all times to reduce our carbon footprint.

“We were the first manufacturer in the North-East of Ireland to use lithium-free solar panels to generate our own energy on site, and over the past year have upgraded our packaging to meet the highest recycling standards.”

Recently, they were accredited with PETA Vegan for 92% of their formulations and Gluten-Free to support their long-standing

Peta Cruelty-Free standards in everything they manufacture.

In 2020, Gardiner Family Apothecary was awarded 4 Green Parent Awards and are hugely pleased with their most recent accolade of the Global Health & Pharma Best Cruelty Free Skincare Brand Award.

But, at the end of the day, Joanna insists it’s what’s in the bottle that matters.

“In short, Gardiner Family Apothecary is where you can find all your skincare needs for even the most sensitive, eczema or rosacea prone skin,” she says. “Your skin is your largest organ and the skin barrier has to be cared for properly.

“Medical experts confirm that it is ingredients like foaming sulfates and harsh preservatives such as parabens and MI, that trigger flare-ups and have led to the dramatic rise in sensitive skin.

Facing Challenges

“Did you know, for example, that some of the perfumes used in other moisturisers contain at least 100 chemicals - how could that be good for your skin? And that is just scratching the surface!

“Our longevity as a business underlines our success in creating safe and effective formulations which reduce flare-ups and promote a clear, healthy hydrated skin barrier. To us, ‘clean skincare’ means avoiding any unnecessary reactive ingredients that could upset the skin.”



Joanna Gardiner, CEO

The past 18 months have been challenging for most businesses. Unlike other sectors, Pharma was protected through the pandemic - not least because pharmacies remained open, even if footfall was down – so Gardiner Family Apothecary was fortunate in being able to continue trading.

As they have been manufacturing disinfectants and sanitisers for years for aid agencies, they could adapt quickly to produce Ovelle Hand Sanitiser Gel, which is as gentle as an alcohol hand sanitiser can be, as well as very gentle hand washes and moisturisers to create a protective hand hygiene category.

The business currently partners with TinyLife, an incredible premature baby charity in Northern Ireland, are proud skincare

partners of Dundalk Football Club, and sponsor Dundalk Rugby Football Club.

Indeed, the future for Gardiner Family Apothecary looks green. Joanna says: “We are so grateful to Irish medical professionals, particularly Pharmacists, who have put their trust in us and our formulations to soothe and repair sensitive skin. We intend always to stay close to our roots and community across the island.”

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