

Joel Lachman,

president of Guinot USA/
Lachman Imports, Inc.



Joel Lachman didn't grow up envisioning himself as an importer or company president. In fact, he earned a film degree from Pennsylvania State, and spent five years in "Happy Valley" doing anything but living a business-focused lifestyle.

When asked why he turned away from film, he responds frankly. "I didn't think I'd be successful as a director or producer."

So Lachman switched gears, and after earning his MBA at Wharton School of Business, he established clear-cut criteria for his ideal job.

"I was in my 20s, and I realized that for the job I would hold for the rest of my life, I wanted something that involved travel, that was high-end but not mass-market," he explains. "I wanted a position that would allow me to employ my marketing skills and give me a business lifestyle—I wanted to be challenged."

Post-MBA, Lachman launched a chain of vitamin shops in the northeast U.S. "We were ahead of the curve," he says of his 15 small stores, which were established before giants like Vitamin Shoppe and GNC sprung up. Although his business was financially successful, the Pennsylvania native found himself restless. "Once the concept worked, it no longer challenged me," he recalls. "There was so much more I hoped to do."

Eager to leave the vitamin world behind, Lachman moved to France. After two years of living in Paris, he began to notice a prominence—and higher stature—of skin care in Europe that he hadn't seen across the pond.

"There's that old adage that a secretary in the States will spend her last dime on makeup, but a secretary in Europe will spend it on skin care," he says. Seizing upon a gap in the American market, Lachman selected French skincare line Guinot as an ideal company to bring to the U.S. Despite the professional line's pedigree, Lachman was drawn to the physician-founded company for its absence of corporate culture. Partnership in place, Guinot USA/Lachman Imports, Inc. was born, and he began importing Guinot Paris to the States.

Several decades later, both New York City-based Lachman and Guinot Paris chairman Jean Daniel Mondin are still at the head of the companies. There's no doubt Lachman challenged himself and found success—on his own terms.—*Rachel Kossman*

What do you enjoy most about working with Guinot?

I've created an office environment that I love. It's not like every day here on 5th Avenue in New York City is a day at the beach, and believe me there are days I want to jump out of the window, throw someone out of it, or both! But in all seriousness, I've hired people who work hard and who have been with me for many years. I never wanted to be an investment banker or work in the corporate world, so I created the business environment I wanted.

As a company president, what's your guiding philosophy?

The goal is for my general managers, customer service and field representatives, training directors—even the people at my warehouse in New Jersey—to all be consistent. I really believe that you're only as strong as your weakest link. In terms of personality, demeanor and knowledge, they all have to be on the same page.

You've built Lachman Imports and Guinot's U.S. branch from the ground up. What's your secret?

With a business that's your own, there are plenty of times when you're tested. Because there are times when you're starting out—or even many years down the line—with major challenges, and it seems like you're running up against a wall. You have to be committed to success and really want it, because having a great idea is one thing, but being able to execute it is another.

What advice would you give people entering the world of skin care today?

I think at this point, you really have to do something different. There's always room for inventiveness, but the skincare market is pretty saturated.



There's a lot of 'me too,' and that copycat mentality doesn't always work. Have a vision.

You've traveled the globe quite extensively. What has been your favorite place to visit?

I spent a month living on a houseboat on Nigeen Lake in Kashmir, which I rented for about \$10 a day. The world has gotten a little homogeneous, and I like going places where I'm shocked, where I get off the plane and immediately say, 'Wow, I'm somewhere different.'

What's the last good book you read?

My Lunches With Orson (Metropolitan Books, 2013), which is a series of conversations between film directors Henry Jaglom and Orson Welles. Welles is extremely opinionated and has such interesting things to say. My favorite quote of his was, 'I've always thought there are three sexes: men, women and actors. And actors combine the worst qualities of the other two!'

What are three things most people don't know about you?

1) I'm a pretty private person, except within my long-standing friendships, many of which have lasted more than 25 years. 2) I rarely eat red meat, only one steak a year, and I haven't had a burger in five years. 3) I have a big eat-in kitchen, yet I don't know how to cook. Isn't that shocking? ■