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Dallas beauty á la Mercier

Area distributor helps French makeup artist reach local, worldwide clients

By Dena Hill
Staff Writer

Glamour is the name of the game at Gurwitch Bristow Products, L.L.C., where a walk inside the 20,000-square-foot distribution center in Plano takes visitors from a regular office facade to an interior source of international high fashion. A distributor of the immensely popular Laura Mercier product line of cosmetics and skin care, Gurwitch Bristow's walls are filled with magazine covers such as *Allure*, *GQ* and *Harper's Bazaar*, depicting the cosmetics and wizardry of celebrity makeup artist Laura Mercier.

Stars who use Mercier's products include such luminaries as Julia Roberts, Sarah Jessica Parker, Catherine Zeta Jones, Angelina Jolie, Liv Tyler, Gwyneth Paltrow and Susan Sarandon. Mercier, who grew up in France, began her training at a painting school in Paris at age 17. She shifted her artistic focus to makeup application and trained at the Carita School where she became a makeup artist and teacher.

In 1985, Mercier moved to New York where she worked with American *Elle* magazine and then on advertising campaigns for Bergdorf Goodman, Bloomingdale's and Clairol, as well as editorial pieces for such magazines as *Elle*, *Vanity Fair*, *Glamour* and *Seventeen*. She then began working as a makeup artist with high-profile celebrities such as Madonna. Since that time, Mercier has won awards for her involvement in a number of campaigns repre-

senting such names as Calvin Klein, Donna Karan, Versace and Valentino, among others.

According to Deborah Kaplan, vice president of product development and marketing for Gurwitch Bristow, company CEO Janet Gurwitch Bristow became acquainted with Mercier while working as executive vice president of feminine apparel, cosmetics and accessories at Neiman Marcus in Dallas. Kaplan said Gurwitch Bristow had realized in the mid-1990s that department stores' cosmetic counters hadn't changed much in the previous 10 to 15 years. In response, she started calling beauty editors at magazines looking for the top makeup consultants they used for their covers.

"Laura was one of them," Kaplan said.

"Janet really saw that Laura had a point of difference from the other makeup artists. Laura knew what she wanted in terms of tools and formulas. Laura came up with the technique to create the 'flawless face' (her signature look involving technique, tools and formula). Janet came up with the strategy and how to position it."

Utilizing her background and experience, Mercier worked with Janet Gurwitch Bristow to launch her product line in 1996. In a phone interview from New York, Mercier said that she truly enjoys putting on a lab coat and working with chemists to create new products. She was in the lab in 1995, she said, helping to develop the original product line.

"The formula is different — it's more heavily concentrated,"

Mercier said, regarding the products that set her foundation "camouflage" makeup apart from others. "You feel you have no makeup on but it's so light."

"The colors are well balanced," she explained, discussing the makeup, and how different techniques apply to different products. "We paid a lot of attention to the efficacy of the product — efficient it's going to be, what it's supposed to do."

In fall 1999, Mercier launched her skin care line, designed to complement makeup applied to the surface. In fall 2001, she launched her first fragrance, *L'Heure* (The Magic Hour). This year, she has introduced Mercier Body & Bath — *Crème Gourmande*, with creams, lotions, scrubs, baths and washes, as well as a new fragrance — *Eau de Parfum*.

Laura Mercier products are manufactured by laboratories in the United States, Germany and Italy according to the company's specifications, said Bob Hurt, senior vice president of operations at Gurwitch Bristow. The distribution center in Plano, which comprises a staff of 40 employees, sends all product packaging to the labs where makeup is produced, Hurt said.

"The lab actually does all the assembly," he said. "They take the makeup product into the country and then they place the items into our packaging. The finished products are then shipped back to the central distribution center in Plano, he said, and shipped out all over the world. Kaplan said the company's products are distributed