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With VMG Investment, Shani Darden Hires New CEO and Plans Growth

The brand has hired Michelle Shigemasa, who was previously with Murad, as CEO.

By **Allison Collins**

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Shani Darden's skin care line. COURTESY OF SHANI DARDEN

Shani Darden's eponymous skin care has big plans for growth.

The business received a minority investment from VMG Partners in December, and has hired Michelle Shigemasa from Murad as chief executive officer. Shigemasa was most recently with Murad, but before that, she worked at The Estée Lauder Cos. for more than a decade.

Darden is one of the most in-demand aestheticians on the West Coast, with a celebrity client roster that includes Jessica Alba. She gained a cult following for her Retinol Reform product, \$88, and **raised a seed round** (<https://wwd.com/beauty-industry-news/skin-care/shani-darden-lands-investment-hires->

[ceo-plans-expansion-1203226440/](#)) from BAM Ventures and Beechwood Capital in 2019. At that point, industry sources estimated the brand would do about \$5 million in sales for the year.

These days, the Shani Darden team is focused on building out the brand's product lineup and deepening relationships with existing retail partners, Shigemasa said. Darden's line recently rolled out with Sephora North America, and entered Canadian stores a few weeks ago.

Shigemasa said her goal is to set up the company "for long-term, sustainable growth."

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"The primary reason to partner with someone like a VMG was to really expedite plans and bring that Shani Darden product with that cult following and experience to more consumers," Shigemasa said. Growing brand awareness is currently her top priority, she said.

"The investment allows the brand to pull more levers more quickly, to invest in growth and of course to invest in capabilities and resources," Shigemasa said. She said that the current team is "outstanding," and that the business will need to make several more hires as it continues growing.

Already, the business has hired Ella Lawrence, a veteran of Urban Decay and Drunk Elephant, as chief marketing officer, and Lauren Barrett, formerly of Too Faced and Drunk Elephant, as chief operating officer and chief financial officer. VMG backed Drunk Elephant before [selling it to Shiseido \(https://wwd.com/beauty-industry-news/skin-care/shiseido-acquires-drunk-elephant-845-million-1203338755-1203338755/\)](#) in 2019.

For Shani Darden, Shigemasa and the team will work to build out the product assortment with simple, effective skin care products, in line with Darden's philosophies.

"It's her passion for simple yet effective solutions that's really earned the trust and loyalty of her clients," Shigemasa said. "We have obvious plans to expand products, but the philosophy will stay the same."

Darden's retinol products have had a cult following for years, but she's also seen success with her Intensive Renewal Eye Cream, \$68, and Facial Sculpting Wand, \$399, Shigemasa said. The brand plans to increase launch cadence, from one to two new products per year, to three to four products per year. Devices are also likely on the roadmap, given the success of the wand, she noted.