



The Benefit Cosmetics clan, from left: Annie Ford Danielson, Jean Ford, Jane Ford, and Maggie Ford Danielson, in Jane's backyard in Tiburon, California



THE FAMILY FORD

Twin sisters Jane and Jean Ford started Benefit Cosmetics 35 years ago with a little San Francisco shop and a lot of pluck. Now the next generation of Ford women is entering the fold. By Christine Lennon

Outside Jane Ford's kitchen window is the view that Tiburon, California, a Marin County suburb of San Francisco, is famous for. The clouds race through the wide sky above Richardson Bay, homes cling to the Sausalito hillside across the water, and the city's famous skyline is visible in the distance. But the real drama is what's happening inside, around a table covered in tiny pots of sparkling powder and stray fake eyelashes. A quartet of six-foot-tall brunettes—Jane and her twin sister, Jean Ford, along with Jean's daughters Maggie and Annie Ford Danielson—have gathered to get ready for the *Town & Country* cameras, and it's not a somber event.

"Come on, do the 'Jane face,' Auntie," Maggie pleads. Jane obliges, turning her angular jaw

slightly, lighting up a mischievous grin and opening her dramatically lined eyes wide in her own version of the "Blue Steel" model gaze. All of them erupt in laughter.

"We are not humble women," laughs Annie, 24, her long hair wrapped in rollers. "Have you noticed how many shiny surfaces there are in this house? We can't walk by them without checking our reflections."

Maybe it's a professional hazard. The elder Ford ladies, 60, are the founders of Benefit Cosmetics, the whimsical beauty brand known for skin-perfecting products, like the line-filling Dr. Feelgood balm and the pimple-erasing Boo-Boo Zap! stick, and quirky, cartoonish packaging. Back in 1976 the sometime models and actresses, who

had moved to San Francisco from Indiana, were at an impasse in their careers. ("Mostly I was a cocktail waitress in a bowling alley," Jean says with a laugh.) "It was either casseroles or cosmetics," says Jane. "We were Midwest girls. We wanted to open a little place where you could get something nice, like a slice of pie, and be treated well."

But instead of baking they decided to draw on their experience doing their own makeup as models, and they opened a small beauty boutique in the raucous Mission district called the Face Place. (In 1990 the name was changed to Benefit after a trip to Italy had Jean shouting "*Bene, bene, bene!*") With Jean's artistic, creative perspective and Jane's business acumen, the twins steadily built a brand around

Style BEAUTY



Jean and Jane Ford in a 1973 modeling shot; Benefit's Dr. Feelgood balm; the new B.Right eye cream

easy-to-use flaw-fixing makeup. Their first product, Benetint, a liquid stain sold in a nail polish bottle, was originally conceived for an exotic dancer who wanted to make her nipples more rosy. Now the universally flattering deep rose pink is the best-selling lip and cheek stain in the world, with more than 10 million bottles sold and another bought every minute.

What started out as an eccentric little West Coast beauty destination quickly morphed into a nationwide phenomenon. Geographically and philosophically, the Fords were so isolated from the rest of the beauty business, which is operated mostly out of New York and Paris, they did their own thing their own way. And perhaps because of that goofy, uninhibited independent streak, they attracted the attention of

French luxury goods conglomerate Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy. In 1999 LVMH made an offer for a controlling interest in Benefit. The details of the deal were never disclosed, but apparently it was a sound investment: Benefit generated more than \$500 million in global sales in 2010.

In the meantime, Maggie and Annie Ford Danielson were growing up as suburban tomboys with only a vague idea of what their mom did at work. "Makeup wasn't a big focus of our lives at home. We never talked about it, never once discussed whether we'd come to work for Benefit when we graduated," says Maggie, now 30.

Though Jean insists she wasn't grooming the girls to be the Benefit Sisters 2.0, on a subliminal level they must have bought into what their mom and aunt were selling. Three years ago they called to set up a business meeting at

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Benefit's San Francisco office. At the time, Maggie had graduated from Tufts and was working as a junior marketing executive in Manhattan, and Annie was finishing up at UCLA and contemplating a career in interior design. "They sat down and said, 'We want to devote our lives to this brand,'" says Jane. "That was one of the happiest moments of my life. I felt a big weight taken off my shoulders." Jane still steers the business end of the brand, while Annie and Jean work together on product development.

Maggie is in sales, managing the company's Home Shopping Network account from her New York City apartment.

The current task ahead of them: launching the brand's first comprehensive skin care line, B.Right, which consists of nine products designed

to brighten and hydrate skin and create an ideal canvas for makeup. Even though the four of them communicate "about a thousand times a day," they take the challenge of maintaining and growing the business quite seriously.

"Oh no, it's just *her*-vana," jokes Jane, making it obvious where some of the punnier product names originate. "Everything isn't just fun, fun, fun. It's been a lot of work, but we use laughter to get through tough times. That and some hysterical customer experiences."

These days those interactions are likely to happen through bloggers who have been charmed by the younger Fords, or during live appearances on HSN, where Maggie and Annie appear, often channeling their mom and aunt. "There is such a performance aspect to this brand," says Maggie. "The other day Annie shouted, 'BA-boom!' on air and I thought, My God, she sounds just like Mom." •