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## **VAL HARDING COLLECTION: COMPANY BACKGROUNDER**

Australian businesswoman Val Harding credits her passion for travel and luxury hotels and resort as the impetus for founding the Val Harding Collection of fine hotel toiletries and custom-formulated hair and body care products. When Harding and her family relocated from England to Australia more than a decade ago, the former hotel interior designer found herself searching for a new career option.

"I'm not very good at doing nothing and sitting home as a corporate wife, so I thought what could I do?" the elegant entrepreneur explains. "I love hotels. I love traveling. I thought, 'What can I identify that's in hotels that really require attention?' The more research I did, the more I realized that the quality of hotel toiletries nine or 10 years ago wasn't that good, and the quality of the service offered by the suppliers wasn't good either, so we set out to improve both of those things."

The Val Harding Collection was born, and Harding began by importing such luxury guest amenities as Molton Brown and Gilchrist & Soames for the upscale Australian hotel market. Later, she developed her own sophisticated body and bath line called Serendipity, working closely with a chemist to make sure everything was just right. "I thought it was really important with hotel toiletries to not be overpowering and to be acceptable to both men and women," she explains. Today, her ranges are distributed to some of Australia's top hotels and resorts, including Crown Ltd., Golden Door Retreats, Hamilton Island Resort, The Lyall Spa, Pepper Retreats & Resorts, Hayman Island, Stella Resorts and Voyages Hotels & Resorts.

As her client portfolio has grown, so has Harding's business. The savvy small business owner was named Ernst & Young Southern Region Entrepreneur of the Year in 2007. Harding credits the award with giving her the confidence to branch out and conquer new markets, including the U.S., Europe and the Middle East. With a growing staff, which includes her daughter Kate, Harding enthuses, "I thought that it was time to give it a go."

While researching the fine hotel and resort marketplace in the States, Harding decided to launch a new product line, Halcyon Blue, designed for the U.S. The Australian-made luxury hair, body and facial products will make their U.S. debut in August 2008 as the official in-room amenity of the exclusive Hotel Bel-Air in Los Angeles, Calif.

"Serendipity means a happy discovery, while Halcyon means calm, peaceful, tranquil and blissful," explains Harding. "We include essential oils in our products, and

hotel products don't traditionally contain these. We don't use artificial colors. For example, if you see a very slight amber color in the shampoo, that's the mandarin essential oil. And, we don't test on animals, with perhaps the exception of our family dog!"

Harding is proud of her product lines, but she also believes that her business philosophy plays a key role in her company's success. "We listen to people, and we try to respond to their needs," she explains. For example, both Serendipity and Halcyon blue products are packaged in tubes rather than bottles to accommodate clients who found it was more difficult to remove all of the contents from a small bottle. As for the shampoo, conditioner, body balm and body wash, each product features a different logo variation, so they are easier to differentiate in the shower.

In addition to hotel toiletries, the Val Harding Collection also offers customized guest amenities, necessities such as dental and shaving kits or beautifully packaged embossed soap trios and thoughtful turn-down gifts. Working with a young Australian designer, Karin Heller, to create a chic white leather cosmetics bag embossed with the company logo and lined with a colorful Aboriginal print, Harding created one turn-down package that spanned a resort's average stay of five nights. Each evening, guests received a different body product treat at turn-down, and on the final evening, they are presented with an alluring bag to carry their new collection of products home. "I'm very excited about working with Heller, and I hope we can continue to develop new products with her," says Harding.

Harding has found her products to be so popular with hotel guests that she has expanded her lines to include consumer packaging, available in spas and boutiques and will soon be available online at [www.valhardingcollection.com](http://www.valhardingcollection.com). "We continually receive requests from hotel guests about where they can find the products once they return home," she says. "It's satisfying to know our products are making such a good impression on hotel guests."

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