

Work stations in the laboratory at the Asia Innovation Center PFDC in Shinjuku, Tokyo

Pharmaceutical Formulations for Asia from Japan

Pierre Fabre, a leading French manufacturer of pharmaceutical products and dermatological cosmetics, opened its Asia Innovation Center PFDC in Japan in 2014 and began formulations activities in the laboratory in May last year. We asked Jean-Baptiste Grieu, the Center's director, about the investment.

ALEX HENDY

PIERRE Fabre has had a presence in Japan for more than thirty years, beginning in 1986 with its establishment of Pierre Fabre Japan (PF-J), a joint venture with the major Japanese cosmetics company Shiseido Co. The initial goal of PF-J was to introduce to the Japanese market a line of skin-care products utilizing the French spring water Eau Thermale Avène. These products would come to be marketed under the brand name Avène, for which line the company is best known in Japan today.

In 2002 the Pierre Fabre Group established a second entity in Japan, Pierre Fabre Dermo-Cosmétique Japon (PFDC-J). This 100% subsidiary runs the local activities of hair care specialists René Furterer and provides support for sales of the drug Hemangioli®, which is used in the treatment of infantile haemangioma. Hemangioli® is produced by Laboratoires Pierre Fabre Dermatologie and distributed in Japan

All photos: Yuichi Itabashi

in partnership with the dermatological pharmaceuticals company Maruho Co.

In April 2014, PFDC-J opened the Asia Innovation Center PFDC, Pierre Fabre's first overseas R&D center outside France.

"The Asia Innovation Center PFDC is a product of our desire to speed up PFDC's internationalization," says Center director Jean-Baptiste Grieu. "The Asia-Pacific region is dynamic, varied, innovative and forward-looking. Its cosmetics and dermo-cosmetics markets are sizable, representing 32% and 19% of the global market, respectively. The consumer base is sophisticated, demanding and well informed. Beauty rituals are comprehensive, with between seven and nine products being used at morning and night, though the tendency is to reduce the length of the rituals. Cosmetics spend per capita in the region is the highest in the world."

In the laboratory at the Asia Innovation Center PFDC, formulators including Grieu himself develop



Jean-Baptiste Grieu, director of the Asia Innovation Center PFDC

Originally formulated for the Japanese market, products utilizing Eau Thermale Avène have been developed for markets worldwide.

new products for Avène, René Furterer, Klorane and other lines under the Pierre Fabre umbrella. The Center's location in Tokyo enables the team to keep a close eye on Asian markets, with trips to subsidiaries in Taiwan, Korea and China being scheduled at least once or twice a month.

"The countries of Asia all have their particularities," says Grieu. "For the Japanese market, a high level of quality is important. Korea is more trendy and very reactive to consumer demands. China used to be strongly influenced by Europe but is now a lot more affected by trends in Korea and Japan."

Innovation in cosmetics in Korea in recent years is epitomized by local companies' development of BB creams, all-in-one moisturizing foundation products that have found worldwide success. Pierre Fabre is only marginally engaged in the make-up market being more focused on skin and hair care, but the vibrant Korean markets are nevertheless an obvious focus of interest for the company. Avène Hydrance Water Gel-in-cream, an all-in-one moisturizing gel developed at the Asia Innovation Center PFDC in 2016, may be one response to trends being set outside of Japan.

"There are some areas where Korea has been more innovative in terms of textures and marketing than Japan," says Grieu. "But Japan used to be very innovative in these areas and that's the reason we decided to establish the Asian R&D center here. The technology level is still very high and knowledge of cosmetic science formulation is strong."

A second reason for establishing the R&D center in Japan is the nature of the regional markets. In the Asia-Pacific region generally, skin care accounts for almost half of the beauty care market compared with the global average of a third. Beauty rituals naturally vary according to country, and in South Asia, for example, the hair care segment dominates, but Pierre Fabre is a strong performer in both these segments.

"The synergies between our subsidiaries and our distributors are important," says Grieu. "This can be seen clearly in the Avène products catalogue, where almost 20% of our turnover comes from Asia. The formula was originally developed for Japan,



but Avène products now meet the expectations of a broad base of Asian customers. This synergy is not limited to products. On the management front, too, best practices are exchanged between all collaborators throughout the region."

Pierre Fabre has traditionally focused on dermocosmetics, a concept which in fact the company invented. Pierre Fabre, the founder and a pharmacist, opened the company's first research center in 1968, wanting to formulate safe skin-care products and treatments for skin conditions such as atopic dermatitis. In 1975, in a visionary move, Fabre purchased the thermal spring source at Avène in southern France and began using the water in the company's formulations. The spring water has soothing and softening properties even when applied directly to the skin without creams or lotions. Pierre Fabre began selling a spring mist spray in Japan in 1986, and to this day the product is immensely popular with Japanese women.

Pierre Fabre began selling its spring water-based products under the Avène brand name in 1990 and now sells a full range of products for such varied applications as wound healing, moisturizing, anti-aging, whitening and sunscreen. Through continued formulation and adaptation, now beginning at the Asia Innovation Center PFDC, Avène and other brands in the Patrice Fabre portfolio will be caring for Asian hair and skin for many more years to come. 