



The interior view of the Coréana Cosmetics Museum atop Space\*C in southern Seoul, above. The museum displays the founder's private collection, which depicts the personal lives of Korean women from the prehistoric era to modern times. Some of the early modern makeup in Korea are seen at left. *By Inès Cho*



Yoo Sang-ok, founder of Space\*C, in his office on the building's seventh floor.

## The founder's comments

**Q.** How did you start your collection?  
**A.** I wanted to have a balance of all elements in a person — intelligence, emotions, sensitivities. I'm a businessman and accountant, who basically works in the frame of operational reasoning and figures. In order to develop my artistic side, a close friend advised that I should look into paintings. The early 1980s saw an antiques boom in Korea, so a lot of people began collecting Korean antiques. I began to buy a number of old paintings from Insa-dong dealers. After quitting Dongah Pharmaceutical, I worked at a cosmetics company, where I had to develop ideas for bottles and cases. Keeping in mind that our cosmetics should carry the Korean spirit, I wanted to better understand the history of Korean cosmetics and Korean women's way of staying beautiful.

As president of Coréana Cosmetics, I visited famous cosmetics companies abroad. I went to Wella in Germany, which specializes in hair products, and Estée Lauder's headquarters in New York. I saw that these headquarters not only come with spectacular views, but they also have their own museums that tell the history of their companies and cultures. I was so impressed that I wanted to do the same thing, and thought when I built a headquarters one day in Seoul, I would have a roof garden and a museum. So I really got into Korean antiques.

Most of the items I own now were bought one at a time, but at exhibitions sellers would urge me to buy the entire collection, so I did. At one point, I was selling my homes to buy antiques. I would have made a fortune if I had bought Park Soo-keun's paintings then.

### You're also president of the Museum Members Society of Korea.

Yes. In 1981, I took the one-year course offered at the National Museum where avid collectors and intellectuals alike studied Korean art history. Even when the course was over, enthusiasts continued to study in private groups. For the past 23 years, about 10 to 20 people, now all very old, have been gathering twice a week. Most recently, we had a discussion about earthenware from the Unified Silla Dynasty, of which I own quite a few pieces.

I also collect valuable ancient literature read by wise and learned women. The philosophy for Joseon Dynasty women taught four elements: virtue, speech, beauty and talent.

### How many items do you own?

Thousands. I also collect sculptures and crystal bells. There are two other locations, our R&D center in Cheonan in South Chungcheong province and Sinsa-dong in southern Seoul, which display similar collections. Here at Space\*C, we're showing about one-fifth of what I've collected, but frankly, the items are too cramped.

### This building just had its first anniversary?

Right, on Nov. 20. A lot [of precious culture] has been lost in Korea over the last 100 years or so, because of the country's troubled past and war. I've been trying to preserve the best of Korean culture, and the purpose of this building is to offer people opportunities to experience some of the finest culture from the past. Apart from the permanent collection in the museum, the gallery in the basement also displays my personal collections that are organized thematically. Last year, we presented ancient portraits of Korean beauties. The exhibition was so successful that it went on a national tour.

# Displaying the history of Korean beauty

By Inès Cho  
Staff Writer

What are the ancient beauty secrets of Korean women?

Ask Yoo Sang-ok, the founder of Coréana, a leading cosmetics brand in Korea, and he will tell you how a young maiden of the Silla Dynasty in the 6th century cared for her skin and hair. Or how a noblewoman of the 19th century Joseon Dynasty colored her lips scarlet and made her hair sleek with peony flower oil.

Mr. Yoo says that Korean ladies rose at dawn to gather dew that was used in mixing their cosmetics. Pointing to tiny potion bottles, jars and plates, which are no more than 5 centimeters (2 inches) wide, he explains, "They placed blushing powder, made from delicate rose petals, on a plate. And then they poured a few drops of water from a bottle and mixed them. The leftover makeup was kept in a jar with a lid for a few more applications." There was no trace of pigment in any of the containers, however. "You see, Joseon women used all natural things, which don't stain," he says.

The Coréana Cosmetics Museum, which occupies the fifth and sixth floors of Space\*C in Seoul's Gangnam district, is packed with mysterious and ancient items that may help unlock the secrets of Korean beauty. The approximately 1,000 items displayed there are from the personal collection of Mr. Yoo, who last year developed the building, which is intended to serve as a cultural complex.

Designed by a leading Korean architect, Chung Ki-yong, the minimalistic, seven-story building has the theme "Urban Garden." Evergreen atriums are visible from the founder's office on the seventh floor as well as the bar on the second floor. In addition to the museum, the building features a small green roof garden. Luz, a sleek coffee and wine bar, occupies the second floor; a skincare salon is on the third and fourth floors, and C-Gallery, an art gallery, has two floors in the basement.

Since its opening in November 2003, C-Gallery has shown works from a number of artists, including vibrant folk paintings by the late Park Saeng-kwang, as well as portions of Mr. Yoo's vast collections, such as Nam June Paik's sculptures and paintings, and portraits of Korean beauties. As a senior executive in start-up cosmetics companies that pioneered the Korean industry, from early on Mr. Yoo felt the need to understand the history of Korean beauty. He started collecting Korean antiques and paintings in the early 1980s, when the antique boom began in the country. His passion for Korean antiques and his brand, Coréana, grew exponentially in the 1990s. As the brand became one of the country's top five just five years after its establishment in 1988, his personal collection grew into the thousands. "I used to move to smaller homes to buy more antiques," he recalls with a chuckle. Each item in the collection, from ladies' makeup cases to wardrobe items, depict the life of beauty-conscious women throughout Korean history. Women's paraphernalia in the collection includes fine bamboo combs, brass mirrors, silver ear picks and lacquered dressing tables. The accessories on exhibit range from pendants to earrings and silver rings, featuring popular motifs of the time, such as peony blossoms, orchids, chrysanthemums, bats and even Buddhist images. The collection also includes ancient literature that taught important values needed by learned ladies. As befits the credo for proper upperclass women, many of the ladies' personal belongings are related to hand-sewn products or embroidery, which was considered one of the important skills to have. A section is dedicated to the brief history of Western-style makeup in modern times. One of modern Korea's first popular makeup products, called "Bakgabun," or Mr. Park's Powder, featuring the face of a modern beauty on its paper container, as well as Coty powder in its famous orange case, are also on display. Currently showing at C-Gallery in the basement is another private collection of the founder. Mr. Yoo says he has a vast collection of Korean calligraphy. At C-Gallery, more than 70 works, mostly on rice paper, are on view, either traditionally framed or unframed to show the condition of the paper. Calligraphy is an age-old tradition commonly found in Asia that represents heritage,



Space\*C, Coréana cosmetics company's cultural complex, is located at 627-8 Sinsa-dong in southern Seoul. The Coréana Cosmetics Museum on the building's fifth and sixth floors is open daily from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m., except for Sundays and national holidays. The center's current Korean calligraphy exhibition, "Scent of Scripts," runs until the end of December. Admission is 3,000 won (\$2.85) for adults, 2,000 won for students, and free for those over 65. A discount is available for groups of 10 or more. The nearest subway station is Apgujeong on line No. 3, Exit 3. Or take bus 141, 3422, 4411 or 9414 and get off at Singu Middle School. For more information, call (02) 547-9177 or visit the Web site ([www.spacec.co.kr](http://www.spacec.co.kr)). Luz coffee and wine bar on the second floor is open from 11 a.m. until 3 a.m. daily except Sundays. For more information or reservations, call (02) 3446-9488. Free parking is available.



Top: Luz coffee and wine bar shows the building's theme, "Urban Garden." By Ines Cho. Above: "Deliver Clear Virtues Through Generations" (1994) by Korean calligrapher Kim Chung-hyun, currently on display at Space\*C's art gallery in the basement. [C-Gallery]

dignity and style today. It is often used as an important means to extend good wishes, personally created by an artist, who writes a verse, poetry, proverb or motto. In Asia, such written messages are usually hung in the most important room in homes or major halls in public institutions, as they are cherished as spiritual guidance and treasure for generations. The exhibition, titled "Scent of Scripts," at C-Gallery is largely divided into two parts. One contains works by the leading Korean calligrapher Kim Chung-hyun, an acquaintance of the founder, who has offered fine writings to Mr. Yoo and his company. The second is a collection of writings by renowned poets, politicians and calligraphers from Korea's modern times, who adopted various artistic styles of calligraphy. [inescho@joongang.co.kr](mailto:inescho@joongang.co.kr)