

JOURNAL / STORIES

# MODERN ICONS: Wendi Levy and Kim Etheredge

Mixed Chicks founders Wendi Levy and Kim Etheredge discuss the inspiration for their global hair care brand and how their products became one of Halle Berry's beauty must-haves.

Wendi Levy and Kim Etheredge are the founders of Mixed Chicks—a massively popular line of hair products sold in more than 40 countries. They're at the forefront of what they call "the curly revolution," and they each look the part with a cloud of curls that consistency inspires more than a few double-takes. But it wasn't until they launched their brand that they could find the right regimen that didn't involve a dozen different products. So, they concocted a genius leave-in conditioner for natural textures and changed the beauty game. "That, to us, was all that we needed," Levy says of the world-famous conditioner. "That answered every question for us—everything that was lacking that we needed." Today, Mixed Chicks includes some 25 products to create good hair days for women everywhere, plus more options for both men and children.

Here, they discuss the inspiration for the brand, why women are embracing their natural beauty, and how Mixed Chicks became one of Halle Berry's beauty must-haves.





***How did you initially meet?***

**WENDI:** We met at a barbecue at Kim's house. At the time, Kim wore her hair straight more often; I wore my hair curly, because it's so humid on the East Coast, and I played sports, so

straightening was too long of an option, and I had to figure out how to manage curls. Kim and I started sharing what products we used and also shared information about growing up, what we didn't have, what we needed, what our hair looked like—just exchanging really funny stories about hair.

***So you shared things that you liked and things you were looking for that you didn't find in the market?***

**WENDI:** Exactly. We were children of the 70s, and back then, they didn't have many options in the ethnic section. It was divided: there was a general aisle, which had a lot to choose from, but the products would have been drying if Kim and I had used them alone. We would have to go to the smaller ethnic aisle in the back of the store and buy something with more moisture, like [Luster's] Pink Lotion or V05.

**KIM:** We probably used every single product there was. And that's the thing: Just to get a look, you'd have to use products from *all* aisles.

**WENDI:** And the products in the ethnic aisle were too oily; they were too heavy for our texture. So being mixed, they didn't really allow us to embrace that at all in the 70s — not just by choice of hair products, but even the boxes we were allowed to check as children in elementary school. They ask you to fill out a form, and they're asking you your race, but you're not allowed to check two boxes. So, Kim and I, in creating it and naming it "Mixed Chicks," had something to do with that. We were tired of trying to define our race and ourselves in the limited space allowed to us. That's why our bottles say, "Whether you're black, white, Latin, Mediterranean, or any glorious combination of the above, this product is for you." For Kim and I, we wanted to create a product that allowed us to embrace our natural curls where we could just wash and go.

**WENDI:** At first, I wasn't as sold on the idea that we could start our own hair company. Kim was, and we thought, 'Why don't we do our hair nice and go to the mall to see how many people stop us?' We're so used to being stopped about our hair that we thought it was normal. That was our mission: to see how normal it was. We couldn't make it to three or four stores without someone stopping us and saying, "What do you use in your hair?" Whether somebody with curly hair or a straight-haired mother of a curly-haired child, they wanted to know what we used. We'd have to get a pen to write it all down, because it was a concoction of 10 to 15 existing products, crisscrossing the aisles to grab what we needed to create something for mixed texture and combination hair.





***When did it start to take off?***

**WENDI:** Kim came from a television production background and had access to a lot of beauty and hair on set, so she was able to get our samples into some famous actresses and famous stylist's hands. Fortunately, that got us some mentions, and the biggest one was Halle Berry in 2009. She gave us a shoutout in *Shape* and *InStyle*. We didn't know until the magazines called us looking for high-res shots of our products, because we were one of Halle Berry's top five must-haves.

***What are your thoughts on empowering women to embrace their natural beauty?***

**KIM:** I know we were one of the pioneers to do so. And there were a few of us, and there is a lot that has followed us. But at this stage, we really don't have to empower women; now women are in positions of power. They are embracing what God has given them, because they recognize they don't have to conform anymore. Women are being looked at not just on the outside, but for what's inside. Our brainpower is what's in demand. 10 years ago, it was all about what you looked like. Everything was so superficial. Now women are in positions where, again, it's their brainpower that have gotten them there, and they're powerful. They're becoming more expressive of how they look. I used to think I needed to look like this; now I realize I don't.

Because beauty has evolved, women can be who they are and not have to look like the next person.