

## From kitchen startup to supermarket shelves: Meet the innovators behind Shoprite's R5 soap and shampoo

In a family-run factory in Pinetown, Durban, Yasheen Modi and his team of scientists and chemists at Zeta Laboratories have grown into one of South Africa's largest manufacturers of personal care products. Their latest venture involved the development of the country's most affordable toiletries.

Focused on making basic hygiene accessible for all South Africans, Shoprite approached Zeta Laboratories to develop a body wash, as well as a 2-in-1 shampoo and conditioner, that retail for only R5 each. [Launched on-shelf in July 2025](#), the products are sold as 50ml concentrates that make approximately 200ml of product - enough for up to 20 washes - when mixed with water.

The new affordable toiletries are welcome additions to the supermarket chain's existing R5 product range, that was introduced in 2016 with a loaf of brown bread, and now also includes sanitary pads as well as various deli meals.

"Shoprite's goal was simple but powerful – similar to their focus on providing South Africans with access to affordable food, they also wanted to make it possible for people to afford essential toiletries," explains Zeta Laboratories founder, Yasheen Modi. "Many years ago, we developed technology to concentrate lotions, creams, and washes. Being able to apply this to a solution that helps restore dignity through access to something as basic as shampoo or body wash, is what made this project so meaningful for us."

Zeta Laboratories was founded by Yasheen's father, who obtained a qualification as a cosmetic chemist in the UK. On his return to South Africa in 1991, he opened a well-known retail chain of pharmacies and cosmetic stores in Durban, and Zeta Labs served to supply these stores with house brand health and beauty products.

The factory closed down in 2000 after the passing of Modi Sr, but it was in the family kitchen, six years later, that Zeta Labs was brought back to life when Yasheen rediscovered his father's formulations for skin- and haircare products. Dropping out of his Bachelor of Commerce degree, Yasheen decided to continue his father's legacy.

"I was not passionate about debits and credits but instead became increasingly intrigued by science and chemistry. When I put together my first skin cream, I knew instantly that this was what I wanted to do forever."

It wasn't an easy start for Yasheen though: "Not many people took a young student seriously who was trying to start a cosmetic business from their home. Many suppliers were dismissive and unhelpful, and it took a lot of convincing to get raw material samples to make my first products."

He began whipping up his father's formulas with a kitchen blender and experimented daily to create different creams and lotions. Investing his life savings, Yasheen was eventually able to move operations into a small storage room outside his mother's home, producing 100kg batches of lotions for local pharmacies and small independent retail stores.

Today, with a large array of developed production lines and refined formulas, Zeta Labs occupies a 30,000m<sup>2</sup> plant, employing more than 600 people across various factory roles - about 80% of which are held by women workers - as well as administrative and warehouse operations.

The R5 soap and shampoo are not the only products that Zeta Labs produce for the Shoprite Group - the company is also behind the retailer's comprehensive private-label toiletries range Renew, available from Shoprite and

Checkers stores nationwide. The work generated through this relationship with the Group has enabled Zeta Labs to hire approximately 100 more people to support increased production demands. And they do good work: in recognition of its excellence, Zeta Laboratories was named one of the retailer's top suppliers in 2024.

For the R5 toiletries, Shoprite tabled a brief that established a very low price point, whilst setting the expectation of a quality product that customers would be proud to use. This served as the motivation for Zeta Labs to create a cost-effective formulation that still felt and smelled good, as well as a packaging format that reduced costs.

"There were numerous challenges in developing the R5 toiletries to ensure it was affordable, high quality, and packaged in fully recyclable materials," offers Yasheen. "We had to structure the formulation to be extremely hydrophilic (having a strong tendency to attract water) so that, when water is added, the product mixes easily – which took many iterations, but we finally got it right."

This particular answer has also contributed to Zeta Lab's own sustainability goals, with the new concentrated formulations saving millions of litres of water during production. At the same time, the sachet itself is fully recyclable, and the product helps to reduce single-use plastics as consumers no longer have to buy a new bottle with every purchase of handwash - any bottle will do, and it can be used again and again.

"At Zeta Labs, our vision and pursuit have always been noble, as we prioritize the needs of people and the environment over profit. The greatest gratification we receive from our work is knowing that, through collaborations with like-minded companies like Shoprite, millions of South Africans can access and enjoy our products due to their affordability and quality," concludes Yasheen.

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