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Is The Button Nose Contour The Most Pro-Black Makeup Trend Right Now?

India Espy-Jones | December 17, 2024



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“Contouring is a way of adding dimension and sculpting the face to bring out someone’s bone structure,” MAC Senior Artist Fatima Thomas tells ESSENCE. However, while higher cheekbones and sculpted jaw lines are often checkpoints behind contour placement, “you don’t see people trying to make their noses look wider.”

The hold Eurocentrism has on our noses is a beauty standard with a long history. For example, in cosmetic surgery, the standard approach to nose jobs in the ‘80s and ‘90s were systemically Eurocentric. “Historically, there was a sterilized surgical mold that modeled the features of a Eurocentric nose,” immediate former president of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons **Dr. Steven Williams** told ESSENCE last year.

While “ski slope” rhinoplasties—defined by their thin bridge and rotated, narrow tip—trend throughout pop culture, Afrocentric noses are seen as less desirable. Meanwhile, harsh contours often required to mask Black noses—which, according to the NIH, are often flat, wide, and short with a depressed bridge, less defined tip and flared nostrils—have their own history of misuse.

“For professional makeup artists, the intensity of the contour is dictated by the lighting that our client is going to be seen in,” Thomas says. “[Harsh contour] comes from theatrical and drag techniques specifically used to work with dramatic performance lighting,” which has, instead, been appropriated for an everyday look.

“When we see these extreme nose contours, we can still see the structure of your [natural] nose,” she says, and as a result, can appear incompatible with our features and everyday makeup look. “We’re using these techniques and we don’t understand the context.”

And, while most contour techniques use concealer to thin the nose bridge and tip, the button nose technique is the latest trend to enhance (instead of transform) Afrocentric features. This is because a button nose, described as a small, rounded nose, accentuates the shape of the bulbous tip. “People are putting a horizontal line right above the tip of their nose to give it that little upturned look,” she says.

Of course Black noses are nuanced—ranging in shape, size, width, and height—button nose contours still “respect the proportion of your nose and make it dimensional without changing the proportions,” she says. To contour a wider set nose, “[do not] bring your contour into the center of your nose and make a thin highlight,” she says. Instead, “let your bone structure tell you where the product goes.”

Following your natural bone structure from your upper eye socket down to your inner orbital arch, applying a cool-toned concealer (one to two shades darker than your shade match) to enhance your natural bone structure can have a profound impact on your makeup look.

“Any time we see a shadow on a surface, it’s usually a deeper and grayer version of the color of that surface,” she says. Which is why, for soft, button nose contour, she recommends using cool-toned neutral brown or golden brown like from the MAC Studio Fix Sculpt & Shape Contour Palette, instead of reddish brown concealer.

With the nose at the center of the face, transformative, heavy contours to mask your nose may unintentionally jump out even more. In resistance to Eurocentric beauty standards, “it’s actually more flattering to the entire face if you contour your nose a bit softer,” Thomas says. “I think when you historically have not been included in the broader beauty standards of the culture you live in, authenticity and owning and embracing yourself becomes that much more important.”

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