

# LOOKING GLASS

BEAUTY, HEALTH, AND WELLNESS

SKINCARE

## Unnatural SELECTION

WE'RE REGALED DAILY WITH NEWS ABOUT THE POWER OF ORGANIC EVERYTHING. BUT WHEN IT COMES TO BEAUTY REGIMENS, ALL SYNTHETICS ARE NOT AS EVIL AS THEY SEEM.

They are, as Mr. McGuire suggested, the future.

"I think the big demand now for natural and organic in the beauty world stems from the food industry," says Lauren Hoffman, co-founder of Onomie, a new line that bridges the gap between skincare and makeup. "But there have always been safe synthetics that get great results."

So what exactly falls under the umbrella of synthetic? A lot, in fact. "Synthetic simply refers to anything that doesn't spontaneously come from nature," says dermatologist Dr. Dennis Gross. That means any ingredient, even one that is initially nature-derived, that has been manipulated or modified in a lab. Many of the most prized synthetic skincare ingredients do occur naturally but for various reasons are reproduced in a lab. Take peptides, which are

commonly considered the most valuable ingredients for cell regeneration. "They might not exist without synthetics," says Dr. Daniel Stangl, director of innovation for La Prairie. "Peptides are a complex chain of amino acids, and the order determines their efficacy. It's hard to get peptides in a precise sequence from natural sources, and if you do find them they usually are not present in high concentrations."

Case in point: La Prairie's new Anti-Aging Rapid Response Booster. To create it Stangl employed biomimetic peptides, which get their blueprint from nature ➤

"I want to say one word to you. Just one word: plastics. There's a great future in plastics."

So said Mr. McGuire to an impressionable Benjamin Braddock in *The Graduate*. And when we hear the word *synthetic*, it's plastic that comes to mind. Applied to skincare, the concept doesn't hold much appeal, but not all synthetics are created equal. While some do indeed deserve wariness—including parabens, sulfates, and phthalates—others are safe, effective, and on the cutting edge of what science has to offer in the race against aging.

By Fiorella Valdesolo  
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## LOOKING GLASS SKINCARE

► but are created synthetically. The same is often true of hyaluronic and alpha-lipoic acids. “Hyaluronic acid, which is a highly effective humectant, and alpha-lipoic acid, a powerful antioxidant, both occur naturally in the body, but the reason we’re using synthetic versions is that there is simply not enough available,” says Marisa Vara Arredondo, the brains behind pH-driven skincare brand Phace Bioactive.

Then there are natural ingredients that function better with the help of synthetics. The best example is vitamin C, “one of the few ingredients that can build collagen, because it both promotes it and preserves it,” Gross says. “It’s natural, but apply a little science and you can make it even better.” Synthetic ingredients can not only stabilize vitamin C; they can make it suitable for use in higher concentrations, as well as help it travel to the deepest layers of skin. “In order for a product to make you look younger, you need to get ingredients into both the water-soluble and lipid-soluble phases of skin,” Gross says. “Vitamin C alone is water-soluble, but if you piggyback it onto a lipid molecule it can get to areas it wouldn’t normally reach, promoting collagen and protecting skin against free radicals.”

Beyond skincare, the world of perfume has been steeped in synthetics ever since

Guerlain launched Jicky, in 1889. Besides permitting perfumers to conjure scents outside the natural realm, synthetics are the only way to capture the essences of certain more ephemeral flowers. “When molecules cannot be extracted from a flower, the only way to get each piece of the puzzle is through a chemical process,” perfumer Frédéric Malle says. Gardenia, lily of the valley, magnolia: None would exist in perfume without synthetics. And, like skincare scientists, perfumers are manipulating naturals to enhance their effects. “Today superinteresting naturals are molecularly distilled, to be stripped from their unwanted parts,” Malle says. “These extractions are the best alliance of nature and technology, the utmost luxury.”

Though there haven’t been specific studies impugning the topical use of synthetic powerhouses like hyaluronic acid, some people, like natural beauty pioneer Tata Harper, prefer to play it safe. “There are not nearly enough extensive or up-to-date tests to prove they’re healthy, so I believe in practicing the precautionary principle,” Harper says. Her upscale line avoids all synthetic ingredients lest they add to our body’s “toxic load”; she claims to have found plenty of effective natural alternatives. In fact, Harper is currently testing a

new natural preservative that would give her products an impressive 24-month shelf life. “In my experience natural alternatives to synthetic ingredients, like hyaluronic acid or peptides, are higher in quality and can produce better results because they’re biocompatible.”

Marla Malcolm Beck, the savvy co-founder of Bluemercury and creator of m-61 skincare, argues that while some synthetics can be bad for the skin, “others have such an impact that they are better than the natural versions. There is a set of things clients can’t compromise on. Paraben- and sulfate-free are absolute musts, and the same goes for synthetic fragrance and color—since people have reactions to them. But glycolic acid, vitamin C, hyaluronic acid, peptides—I would tell a client they are missing something in their skincare if they don’t have these in their routine.”

Harper and Beck do agree on one thing: In the end, personal skincare really comes down to preference. “The truth is, everybody makes their own choices about how natural they want to be,” Beck says. “You might drive a Prius, but you’re drinking a latte with milk, or you take a SoulCycle class and then go get a burger. And you see the same thing with products.” Indeed, today’s greatest luxury just might be choice. «

## PERFECT UNION

Spring’s new skincare offerings are an ideal marriage of naturals and choice synthetics.



**MIEHEI PEPTIDES, PEONY ROOT EXTRACT**  
Offers broad spectrum sun protection, an anti-aging boost, and a blurring effect on imperfections.

**SISLEY**  
*Intensive Dark Spot Corrector*, \$165, SISLEY-PARIS.COM  
**KEY INGREDIENTS:** VITAMIN E, SALICYLIC ACID, BARBARY FIG BLOSSOM EXTRACT  
Targets dark spots with a lightening and exfoliating action.

**MURAD**  
*Invisiblur Perfecting Shield Broad Spectrum SPF 30*, \$65, MURAD.COM  
**KEY INGREDIENTS:** SHIITAKE MUSHROOM AND MUCOR

**STRIVECTIN**  
*Radiance Refining Moisturizer*, \$89, STRIVECTIN.COM  
**KEY INGREDIENTS:** VITAMIN C, BELLIS PERENNIS FLOWER EXTRACT, BROWN ALGAE  
Counteracts discoloration and uneven skin tone with a multiphase approach that inhibits melanin production.

**PHACE BIOACTIVE**  
*Regenerating Night Cream*, \$94, PHACEBIOACTIVE.COM

**KEY INGREDIENTS:** VITAMIN C, NEUROPEPTIDES, LICORICE ROOT, ALPHA-LIPOIC ACID  
Biotech and botanical ingredients help to maintain an acidic skin pH.

**DR. DENNIS GROSS**  
*Triple C Peptide Firming Oil*, \$62, DGSKINCARE.COM  
**KEY INGREDIENTS:** VITAMINS A, C, AND D, PEPTIDES, EVENING PRIMROSE OIL  
Formulated with three kinds of vitamin C and peptides to firm and condition skin.

**ONOMIE**  
*A.C.E. Illuminating Eye Treatment*, \$30, ONOMIE.COM  
**KEY INGREDIENTS:** VITAMINS A, C, AND E, SODIUM HYALURONATE, KONJAC

**ROOT POWDER**  
“The primary synthetic we use—a silicone—acts on the skin like a tea bag immersed in water,” Lauren Hoffman says. “It stays on the surface but allows actives, like 10 percent vitamin C, to seep through.”

**LA PRAIRIE**  
*Anti-Aging Rapid Response Booster*, \$290, LAPRAIRIE.COM  
**KEY INGREDIENTS:** PLANKTON EXTRACT, SILVER VINE EXTRACT, PEPTIDES  
The new liquid-gel hybrid serum from La Prairie claims to visibly reduce wrinkles within two weeks using natural extracts.