

## Clyde Ross

An epiphany brought on by a near-death experience changed the course of this chemical mixologist's life.

By Mary Duan

**C**armel resident Clyde Ross tangoes like there's no tomorrow. He lifts weights. He runs anywhere from 20-48 miles a week. He keeps himself in optimum shape because once, not too long ago, he very nearly didn't have a tomorrow.

And he keeps himself in shape because he wants to be around long enough to spread his gospel of authenticity: That what we put on our faces matters not only for our faces, but for the world.

Ross, a veteran ingredients developer—someone akin to a chemist—for the cosmetics and skin care industry, launched the company he calls AspireLIFE in 2010, less than a year after undergoing emergency double bypass surgery. The six-person company works out its formulas and tests them in Carmel, and blends and manufactures its line of five products—including sunscreen, cleanser and moisturizer—in Southern California. Ross touts the use of natural and safe ingredients as hallmarks of the line.

The single father of three now-grown sons spoke to the *Weekly* at The Press Club gallery and gathering space on Fremont Boulevard, about coming back from the brink, and stepping out on the brink of what he hopes is about to

become a wildly successful endeavor.

**Weekly:** You had already been keeping in shape when you figured out something was wrong with your health. What was the process you went through?

Ross: I had a feeling something was wrong. I felt tired and I felt something was off. I went to the doctor and he found two arteries were clogged, one 100 percent and the other 80 percent; four days later I was having surgery. Between the angiogram and the surgery, I went home to get things in order for my kids, because at that point, my youngest was still in high school, a senior at Carmel High. When I went back to the hospital for the surgery, I walked down those white hallways prepared to meet my maker. I didn't know what would happen, but I know it changed my perspective of the world around me. I didn't want to live my life the way I had been living it anymore. I wanted to do something different.



Nine months after surgery, I ran the Big Sur Half Marathon for the first time. In January 2010, I launched AspireLIFE.

**Being an ingredients developer, your line of work, is not something you hear about often. What does it involve?**

I worked with skin care manufacturers and their formulation teams, at companies like Shiseido, Estee Lauder and L'Oreal, helping them develop new products using new ingredients that were hopefully efficacious. I found I really didn't like what some of these companies were doing. Safety to me is everything, and I didn't like the way these companies were manufacturing their products. They were using bad ingredients—parabens that have been linked to breast cancer and heavy metals. To me, that was just completely unacceptable.

AspireLIFE founder Clyde Ross gravitates toward local and independent stores to sell his local and independent line of products.

able. If you're going to produce something that goes on people's skin, that's precious. I wanted to build something that was safe in every aspect, not just driven by profit.

**So how does that translate into your company?**

I wanted to offer an alternative to traditional products, an alternative that is honest and safe and effective. I despise the way the skin care industry creates vulnerability in women. It makes women feel as if they're not good enough, and the industry knows this, and they feed off of that vulnerability. What we've done is designed products to maximize skin wellness and let women show their authentic selves, with minimum or no makeup.

We have five products total. We don't make a lot of products, on the belief that people should buy less and live more. There's no one else who has the skin that you do; we help you present it in its healthiest state.

**How did you fund the company, and how is it doing so far?**

I used my life savings to start up, and once we launched, I obtained a \$500,000 Small Business Association loan from Monterey County Bank. We're not profitable yet, but we're very close to breaking even. We have customers who order from all over the country, and even customers in Asia, Croatia, Serbia and Turkey.

In five years, I hope to be profitable and successful in terms of the bottom line, and to have made a positive difference in people's lives. That's what I live for. ★

AspireLIFE products are available at Ordway Drugstore and Carmel Drugstore, or online at [www.aspirelife.com](http://www.aspirelife.com).