

new again

The evolution of clean skin care through the ages

by Julia Faller, licensed aesthetician



Although clean skin care seems to have emerged in recent years, its earliest inception is not entirely new. There is written evidence of plant-based oils used in beautification spanning back 3,500 years in early Egypt. With this in mind, delving into the history is relevant to where it has evolved. To understand why people living a cleaner lifestyle demanded this evolution, it is necessary to acknowledge what skin needs to remain healthy and therefore, youthful in an ever-changing industrialized world. How the new thinking paradigm gave people clean skin care is a reverse engineering of what was learned in the past. By looking to indigenous sources and people, it can be seen that every culture in time has utilized what has been accessible in their habitat to heal and regenerate skin.

BETTER LIVING THROUGH CHEMISTRY

By the 1950s, plastics, preservatives, petrochemicals, and a plethora of additives were added to enhance food, water, perfumes, dyes, and personal care products that were widely used. The counterculture of the 60s and 70s was not only about peace, love, and rock and roll but the unfolding of a society that looked to seek higher consciousness. The mind-expanding rhetoric of the day contributed to lifestyle shifts that introduced eastern practices like meditation, yoga, and healthier eating.

Many took to organic farming and living off the land. Farmstands grew to small stores that eventually became the health food industry. Take Whole Foods for example, which started in Austin, Texas as a small community store. They were one of hundreds around the country that not only contributed to healthy food and beverages but notably created a community culture that sought out all health and holistic practices, including plant medicine, homeopathy, herbalism, nutritional therapies, eventually natural skin care, and more.

“NATURAL” SKIN CARE

In the middle to late 70s, the natural skin care industry started to unfold. Initially, the concept was that merely the omission of mineral oil, made from petroleum and having no nutritional properties, produced a natural product. Nevertheless, bleached products with other petrochemicals, stabilizers, and emulsifiers were slowly becoming more scrutinized. These ingredients were included in products that were considered natural and to fool the consumer, were cleverly placed behind one or two botanical extracts, despite being at the bottom of the ingredient list. Deionized water, being the first ingredient, typically made up more than half of the product's composition. This type of formulation is still occurring today, with the addition of trendy constituents like phytonutrients, essential oils, and more.

THE WEST MEETS AROMATHERAPY

The term aromatherapy was created by René-Maurice Gattefossé, a chemist and perfumist who badly burned both of his hands in a laboratory accident on July 25, 1910. After days of bandaging with a burn ointment, he began to notice the smell of gangrene. Remembering his earlier years on lavender farms in Haute-Provence, France, he recalled that local farmers would use lavender essential oil on burns.

Two days after applying the lavender oil to his wounds, he was astonished to see his hands restored. His recovery led him to spend the rest of his life researching the thera-

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peutic and antiseptic properties of essential oils and coining the term aromatherapy. In 1937, he wrote his findings in his book, “Aromatherapy.” Fast forward to 1978, Robert Tisserand issued his book called “The Art of Aromatherapy.” It was a start for many wanting to know anything and everything on the practical uses of essential oils.

Marcel Lavabre, author of the “Aromatherapy Workbook,” grew up in France and spent his summers harvesting lavender. He eventually established the Aroma Vera company, one of the first purveyors of essential oils in the United States, selling to health food and apothecary stores.

Lavabre and other Europeans, like Dr. Kurt Schnaubelt, chemist and author of “Medical Aromatherapy,” created the aromatherapy certification courses and conferences. Subsequently, bringing in noted speakers and educators, like Dr. Daniel Penoel, changed the landscape of aromatherapy to be regarded as a healing modality, as opposed to an overly scented shampoo or candle.

This indeed was a resurgence in natural medicine that had been studied and applied in Europe, particularly in England and France, for decades. This new modality of acute and chronic applications of essential oils was, and is to this day, especially relevant in their topical use, paving the way for many companies to immerse and creating controversy about the quality as well as application. Suffice to say that essential oils are potent molecules and deserve better understanding when used by the formulator and, especially, the consumer.

INDIGENOUS PLANT MATERIALS EMERGE

Part of the new culture shift from synthetic to clean, vibrant, and fresh skin care is an evolving need to return to



nature and wellness. The botanical world has always been abundantly available. Indigenous tribes and cultures have always employed the use of medicinal and edible botanicals within their local habitat. There is a symbiotic resonance between the plant, insect, and animal life that has informed the people of their use. They are the original scientists, with an intuitive understanding of knowing when the botanical specimen will harm or heal.

The world has become much smaller and accessible, introducing new indigenous botanicals once unheard of that come from all ends of the globe. What has shifted is the demand and need to discover these old but new plant materials, study them, and find ways to process them without damaging their nutritive structure.

CERTIFIED ORGANIC & BIODYNAMIC

In 2002, the United States Department of Agriculture decided to put their federal seal of approval mandating that products labeled “certified organic” must go through a certifying process. Certifying bodies, both domestic and global, assure that food and plant materials are free of pesticides and herbicides and adhere to strict regulations. Certifiers audit farms to guarantee there are no unlawful chemicals in the soil and water supply, among other restrictions.

The regulation decided that they would follow the food industry protocol and require skin care manufacturers to use a minimum of 92% organic ingredients, with some controversy about the remaining 8%. This often can mean a preponderance of certified organic ingredients to meet that 92%, regardless of its efficacy.

Biodynamic agriculture was defined by Rudolf Steiner in 1924, along with naming Demeter as the certifying body. Both biodynamic and organic practices omit pesticides and chemical fertilizers and focus on the health of the soil.

However, biodynamic certification, or Demeter, goes beyond organic farming by treating the soil as a living organism to ensure its health and biodiversity with the integration of plants and animals. Along with cultivation and harvest in relation to moon cycles, this provides a measurable superiority and vitality of the plant material – all at a substantially higher cost for organic and even higher cost for biodynamic products.

CLEAN SKIN CARE DIFFERENCES

When asking if all clean skin care benefits skin, it is important to mention that it depends on the quality of the raw material, even if it is plant-based. Take lavender, for example. There are over 30 species and more than 450 varieties of lavender, with *Lavandula angustifolia* and *Lavandula hybrida*, or *Lavandula x intermedia* being among the most popular.

As demand has increased over the last 35 years with no slowing down in sight, the oil can be compromised by over-cultivation, overprocessing, and is often adulterated with lower grades to stretch the quantity, regardless of whether it is certified organic.

In the current health culture and oversaturation of clean skin care products, not only must the quality of raw materials be considered but also the intent and solution the preparation will deliver and why. This does not diminish the need for certified organic ingredients; it merely begs the question of what a formula can do for an individual’s skin.

Clean ingredients are more active and play a much greater role in botanical formulations, especially the higher the botanical count. All botanicals are active and alive if they are clean and free of adulterates. That being said, a formula may be compromised when chemical emulsifiers, stabilizers, and preservatives are added.

Addressing the needs of yesterday and today can be very different from one another. The current population is more concerned about oxidative stress and cellular damage than previous ancestors were. Modern society is faced with climate toxicity and skin that is far more dehydrated and damaged. Eating processed foods, daily fast-paced stressors, lack of sleep, pollution, and digital and chemical disrupters all contribute to skin’s overall needs. Products and regimens, therefore, have to progress to meet these demands.

The body will systemically utilize things it recognizes as logical processes. It makes sense to hypothesize that nutrients are received by that which is real and full of life. Consequently, what is not received as real often deposits in the body, benign or malignant. Skin cancers and atopic autoimmune responses have increased exponentially, not just from diet, drugs, and atmosphere but possibly by chemical assaults delivered topically – to the body’s largest organ. This is left to the interpretation of private laboratories, many of whom may have too much skin in the game to change.

THE EVOLUTION OF CLEAN

There are many that purport that “nonchemical,” clean products are void of immediate results. The truth is that botanical ingredients are comprised of plant chemicals and constituents that are scientifically relevant and more bioavailable than any laboratory-produced pharmaceutical.

Vitamin C, retinols, amino acid peptides, minerals, and hyaluronic acid have become the standard that people expect and rely on. The question is, which is better utilized and therefore, sustainable in the long term? Although pharmaceuticals may deliver quick results, they often have side effects, such as phototoxicity, dehydration, imbalanced oil production, and more – all contributing to unhealthy skin and premature aging in the long term.

The closer to nature, the better the largest organ can repair and renew. An organic botanical is better received when skin’s innate biological functions recognize nutrients that are alive and fresh. The body needs long-term reliable nutrition to thrive and so does skin.

Botanicals like Kakadu plum from the aboriginal tribes of Australia or amalaki from India both measured to have more than three times the effect of ascorbic acid, the key player in vitamin C formulas.

Skin is a cohesive unified system. The overall longevity of skin cannot be addressed without looking at systemic health. All contribute to an electrical structure scientifically calculated and observed through biological cell-to-cell communication that transmits wellness and health. Skin’s network of connective tissues, nerves, blood, and lymphocytes are receptive of these electrical pulses for necessary balance. It is in this balance that skin can radiate. Good nutrition, therefore, is best received when identified as real, whether it is food or skin care.

Aesthetic professionals are in a position to deliver results during and after a facial treatment with consistent and sustainable improvement. The future of skin is largely dependent on atmospheric changes, diet, water saturation, and mental resilience, determining skin’s daily behavior.

A vast majority of clients are demanding that they receive skin health through product ingredients. Individual ingredients are only as good as the formula as a whole, whether their nutritional profile suggests phytonutrients, like



omegas and antioxidants, or plant extracts and essential oils. There needs to be a result-based efficacy not dependent on just one or two active ingredients.

The functionality of a system or facial regimen will determine the desired outcome. The clean skin care movement should be based on skin’s well-being and its ability to receive nutrition from products and systems of use – providing functional results that endure.

Consciousness becomes the mother of invention. As people evolve in their need to be healthier, both inside and out, awareness and the need for more resilient and sustainable systems is raised, including but not limited to the evolution of skin care. ¶



A licensed clinician and holistic aesthetician, Julia Faller is the founder and formulator of Benedetta, the first and only skin care line formulated with 100% botanical ingredients. Seeking raw materials from organic and biodynamic local and global family-owned farms set the precedent for Benedetta’s farm-sourced ethic.

As an aesthetician in the mid-80s, Faller performed customized facial treatments using lipid plant and essential oils that were the catalyst to what would eventually become Benedetta. Faller utilizes only fresh botanicals and living, raw nutrients and rejects all harmful parabens, emulsifiers, preservatives, and even vitamin pharmaceuticals, then and now.