

MOTHER MUSE

Meet Koala Eco

Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us! Can you tell us what inspired your business, [Koala Eco \(https://www.koalaeco.com/\)](https://www.koalaeco.com/)?

My husband Paul and I have always tried to live in an environmentally conscious way, and we were constantly on the hunt for safe, non-toxic products that not only could make our home smell (naturally) fabulous but would also actually work. During our younger son's infancy, a health scare spurred us to reassess the products we were using at home.

Unable to find brands that were truly natural and safe yet powerful, we were convinced many people like us were looking to make better product choices. So, working with a chemist, we decided to create our own. We designed a range of cleaning and personal care products to deliver a better performance than conventional brands using plant-based ingredients while offering an unmatched sensorial experience. Koala Eco was born.



[Koala Eco](https://www.koalaeco.com/pages/about-koala-eco) (<https://www.koalaeco.com/pages/about-koala-eco>) was founded by husband and wife duo Jessica Bragdon and Paul Davidson in 2017

I love that Koala Eco (<https://www.koalaeco.com/>) is a family-run passion project that truly paved the way for authentic, pure, natural, and safe cleaning products. Can you walk us through a typical day for you and your partner?

Ok, so it starts pretty much as the sun rises for Paul and me, if not before! We've always embraced early morning exercise, but in the last year or so, Covid-19 rules permitting, we've made a particular effort to sustain this. Paul surfs at 5:30, and I try and go for a run or attend Pilates or yoga classes.

We have two boys, Emerson and Arthur. If it's a school day, we start with the family getting ready to go in different directions, the school for them and the workplace. We used to work from home, this being a lovely two-storey mid-20th century modern home with lots of glass, right on the edge of a really leafy park in Sydney. But now we have an office near where we live, and so it's a walk to work with our dog, an Aussie Shepherd called Matilda.

From there, the day typically involves meetings with our team to discuss strategy, branding and distribution. We may visit our labs to check on the progress of any new products we are developing; this can be a lengthy process because we won't launch until something is entirely right. We also may have a product or PR campaign shoots to factor into our working day. I'll also talk at least once to my twin sister Adrienne, who is based in the States and is looking after our operations there. While Paul and I are fully over every aspect of Koala Eco, we also have a small but incredible team of some very talented people.

It can be a challenge to grab a few minutes to sit and centre myself with a bit of meditation during a working day, but I endeavor to do this. There are some rituals I like to make time for, whatever happens: like reading the New York Times every day. I like the New Yorker and The Economist too. I also make time to have an excellent coffee. At home in the evening, Paul often cooks, I will clean up. We try really hard to build quality family time into each day.



Let's talk about parenthood and the environment. A huge part of the inspiration behind Koala Eco (<https://www.koalaeco.com/>) was when you experienced a health scare with your younger son. Can you tell us a bit about that time and what makes parenthood an eco-opportunity?

At the age of only five weeks, when we were living in Perth, Western Australia, our younger son Arthur was diagnosed with a life-threatening illness called Neuroblastoma. I had already taken him to see several GPs and pediatricians and visited Emergency two or three times because he was in constant pain and wouldn't stop crying. He was my second baby (Emerson was 18 months old by then). I just knew there was something wrong. We weren't dealing with a breast-milk allergy, lactose intolerance, or colic.

Luckily, when we took Arthur to the hospital, a surgeon (who ended up performing all of Arthur's surgeries) decided to run another ultrasound on him. That's when we found a tumor the size of a golf ball in his para-spinal region. The tumor was pushing into the spinal canal, which is why Arthur was in such extreme pain. Arthur's diagnosis was one of the worst days of our lives. Nothing can prepare you for hearing your child has cancer. Paul and I functioned on adrenaline and went into survival mode during his treatment with a lot of support from our family and friends. We tried to make things as normal as possible for Arthur and Emerson. Thankfully, our son's life was saved by the most incredible care and treatment.

When you have been through an experience like that as a family, you really understand life needs to be lived as well and healthily and happily as possible. I never want to suggest that the existence of Koala Eco is down to Arthur, however, because environmental causes, such as exposure to infectious and toxic substances, are unlikely to be the cause of childhood cancer.

That said, of course, we wanted to create a non-toxic environment for our family and promote habits of healthfulness. But this is not a new thing for us, Paul and I have always tried to be as mindful of health as possible. We were constantly on the hunt for safe, affordable, toxin-free cleaning products that not only could make our home smell (naturally) fabulous but also would actually work. We felt the boys and our pets shouldn't have to hold their breath to avoid absorbing toxins every time we cleaned the family home. But we couldn't find what we wanted, so ultimately, we thought: why don't we make our own?



Starter collection available [here](https://www.koalaeco.com/collections/all-products/products/starter-collection-save-15)
(<https://www.koalaeco.com/collections/all-products/products/starter-collection-save-15>)

What other steps have you and your family made to be greener?

The most straightforward way we became greener was by being more aware of what we are bringing into and using our homes. Seek out products that do not harm. 'Not harm' is a medical mantra, but it makes sense for ethical shopping. I don't want to buy things that will damage us or the environment. So, I buy local and choose seasonal produce whenever possible. I would encourage everyone to buy (and buy into) recycled, recyclable and refillable, and avoid plastic at every opportunity. I keep cloth bags in my car for grocery shopping or any shopping, so I always have them and never rely on store bags. I avoid plastic water bottles and take my own reusable glass or metal water bottle everywhere. I use stainless steel containers for lunches and leftovers, and our children know never to use drinking straws. If you have kids, maybe involve them in managing the household recycling; even kids will respond to the responsibility of gathering all the family's recyclable materials ready for collection. Use each shopping expedition as a learning opportunity, getting kids to help choose eco-friendly products. There will be days when everyone's tired, and nobody wants to cooperate, but try to keep modeling these positive choices.

I feel the pandemic has made all of us realize good hygiene means so much more than cleanliness. Koala Eco (<https://www.koalaeco.com/>) recently became available in the US. How has the launch been into these markets? In my opinion, Koala Eco is so needed, and I am so excited you're available beyond just Australia.

We're really excited about it too. Being both American (me) and Australian (Paul) co-founders, we want to be local in both markets. The launch into North America has gone really well. We're thrilled that our brand messages about the mental health benefits of connecting to nature resonate with customers, along with our range. It's fantastic to think that Koala Eco (<https://www.koalaeco.com/>) is part of offering more choices for the growing numbers of people who don't want to harm themselves or the planet with toxic cleaning and body products. As I've mentioned, my sister Adrienne oversees Koala Eco (<https://www.koalaeco.com/>) in the US, so it's still truly a family company. We run it on the same principles as the Australian operation, direct to consumer and in stores, and putting ethical production and packaging at the top of the agenda. We are locally made and sourced in both countries, but we use Australian essential oils for their incredible properties. It is wonderful that there are many more eco-friendly brands to choose from than there were only a handful of years ago (before the pandemic).

In hopes to stand out against our conscious competitors, we've always given back to environmental conservation; We only use pure Australian essential oils and 100% biodegradable and eco-friendly plant-derived ingredients. We are vegan and 100% do not test on animals; we know our products are effective because they are extensively lab-tested and proven to kill 99.99% of germs; we're absolutely transparent about what goes into every product; the divine aroma comes only from the essential oils in our ingredients (absolutely no artificial fragrance), and we also think our packaging is pretty good-looking! Our labels are all hand-drawn illustrations from a botanical artist whose images represent the botanicals used in the product. Our ingredients are natural and sustainably sourced, with recyclable bottles made from 100% recycled post-consumer Australian curbside plastic. No new plastic is created with our bottles.

The launch in other markets has exceeded our expectations. We are very popular in South Korea, Japan, and the Middle East and have a strong following in the US. We are sold in over 2,000 stores. We are stocked across Australia and now sold in Hong Kong, Korea, the USA, Japan, Singapore, and Taiwan. We have just set up an office in the USA and are now selling in the exclusive Erewhon stores across California and other select retailers in the USA.





Which was the first product produced in the collection?

This was our [Natural Multipurpose](https://www.koalaeco.com/collections/all-products/products/natural-multi-purpose-kitchen-cleaner) (<https://www.koalaeco.com/collections/all-products/products/natural-multi-purpose-kitchen-cleaner>) with Lemon Myrtle and Mandarin. We worked so hard with our chemists and labs to make a real winner of a cleaner launch our company, and it's been one of our top sellers ever since. Lemon Myrtle (*Backhousia citriodora*) has fresh, evergreen, lemony notes and is really effective at deodorizing and removing bacteria while acting as a natural mood booster. Mandarin (*Citrus reticulata*) is nature's perfect pick-me-up, its scent promoting happiness, contentment, and calm. But it also has fabulous antibacterial, antimicrobial, antifungal, and antiviral properties, which make it a potent cleaner when combined with other essential oils.

We wanted to start with a product that could do everything, and I find I use this everywhere: the fridge, benchtops, kids' lunchboxes, wherever. I've also used it for many other places around the home – door handles, desks, furniture – it's a true multi-purpose cleaner, and the essential oils in the formula will be effective on all sorts of surfaces. And it also never streaks. We get lots of lovely feedback about it from our customers too, and I can't resist sharing a couple of comments:

"Love, love this product. Not only does my kitchen smell amazing, but I have also used this product when dusting my furniture (upon recommendation from the Koala Eco support team), and the result was outstanding. The dust doesn't seem to settle on dark surfaces as much, and the smell goes right through the house."

"I use it everywhere in the house: this is my favorite multipurpose cleaner. I use it everywhere in the house since it works well and leaves a wonderful scent."



Natural Floor Cleaner available [here](https://www.koalaeco.com/collections/all-products/products/24oz-floor-cleaner)
(<https://www.koalaeco.com/collections/all-products/products/24oz-floor-cleaner>)

Will [Koala Eco \(https://www.koalaeco.com/\)](https://www.koalaeco.com/) be expanding its collection?

Yes, that is the plan. While natural cleaning and body products remain the core of our collection, we're starting to focus on ideas that help people connect with nature in other meaningful ways in the home. Products that support creating a restful environment in places like the bedroom. We've developed a Natural Pillow and Linen Spray from the essential oils of nature's three best stress-relieving and anti-inflammatory botanicals: Eucalyptus, Peppermint, and the beautifully aromatic Australian bush lavender, Rosalina. We've intentionally taken the Transcendentalist message to heart in developing our ideas in this direction for [Koala Eco \(https://www.koalaeco.com/\)](https://www.koalaeco.com/). The Transcendentalists believed immersion in nature to be a deeply spiritual and enriching experience, the key to [Koala Eco's \(https://www.koalaeco.com/\)](https://www.koalaeco.com/) purpose. This spray is about using the beauty and power of nature to promote calmness and sleep and tapping into the mental health benefits and general wellbeing that can come from being soothed and well-rested. We aspire to develop more products of this kind, to enhance healthy and pleasurable nature-based practices in people's daily domestic lives.

I want to touch on the price point. [Koala Eco \(https://www.koalaeco.com/\)](https://www.koalaeco.com/) is sustainable without the price tag that usually comes with it. Do you think it's important for brands to make sustainable efforts and maintain affordability?

There has been a major shift in consumer buying, with more consumers willing to pay extra for environmentally friendly products. It is important to keep a healthy price point while considering the differentiation of your product in the market. We are a very transparent brand, so our consumers know exactly what they are buying and the benefits that come along with a purchase of a \$13 multi-purpose cleaner.



Lastly, What are your daily affirmations?

Well, the Transcendentalist message is incredibly important to me. Connection to nature is a daily ritual that I nurture because it is essential to maintain positivity and balance. For me, it's both a conscious and unconscious need, so while sometimes I may be intentional about going to the ocean, or taking a walk, so often it's the little random, sensory moments of connection that are particularly precious. Hearing bird song through the window; inhaling the scent of the earth after rain; focusing on a tree to watch the play of shadow and sunlight on the leaves; it's just about noticing something then paying closer attention. It's wonderful to share these moments too. We were recently on vacation by the coast down south, and I took Emerson and Arthur to explore all the little tidal pools. We spent ages just looking at the tiniest creatures, learning their names, exactly like I did when I was a kid. I want to think maybe the boys will do likewise in their lives in the future. Making time for nature and sharing that love of nature are affirmations I try to honor every day.

