



## Beauty Store Business, May 2019

### Skincare Spotlight



## What Is Clean Beauty?

With no clear, standardized meaning for clean beauty, retailers and spas are left to define it for themselves—and their customers.

By **Ada S. Polla** with research by **Anne Pouillot-Grandgirard**

**T**he beauty industry is constantly evolving. As scientific knowledge progresses and new ingredients become available, brands work to create better formulas to answer consumers' needs. Verbiage to describe our philosophies and products in ways that are transparent, clear and concise, changes too. A few years ago, the buzzword in skin care was "cosmeceuticals," followed by "paraben-free" and "natural." Today, the buzzword is: clean beauty. But how exactly does one define "clean beauty?"

## Consumer Context

Beauty consumers want products that work and that they feel good about using—usually from brands that provide truthful information and transparency. While some consumers do insist on 100 percent natural or organic products, many have come to understand that synthetics as a category is not necessarily nefarious (just as natural ingredients are not necessarily safe for the skin—such as poison oak or ivy, for instance). What consumers are looking for are formulations that are safe, free of controversial ingredients and overall, healthful. Most importantly, consumers want information, clarity, and transparency; they want to make the most informed decisions possible when it comes to their self-care.

## Regulatory Context

"Clean beauty" is not a term defined or approved by the FDA or FTC. While "paraben-free" is relatively black and white in terms of meaning (either products contain parabens or they do not), "clean" can be interpreted in a number of ways.

"Clean" can mean any of the following and much more:

- (Mostly) free of controversial ingredients
- (Mostly) natural

- Free of parabens
- (Mostly) free of synthetic ingredients
- 100 percent natural
- (Mostly) organic
- 100 percent organic

## Retail Context

Since the regulatory agencies that inform our industry have not defined the term "clean," a number of retailers have chosen to create their own standards. In truth, this trend is nothing new. Whole Foods, for example, has for many years had its own tiered-ingredient standards that all products need to abide by ("Baseline Standards" and more stringent "Premium Standards"). To carry the Whole Foods "Premium Standards" seal of approval, a brand has to stay away from 400+ ingredients.

A number of specialty beauty stores solely focusing on natural beauty offerings (or having clear, delineated natural product sections) are helping consumers better understand the term "clean beauty," by creating their own standards. Here is a comparison of how three leading retailers explain their ingredient standards, and how, in effect, they each define "clean beauty"—not just for consumers, but for manufacturers too. If you are a beauty retailer, these definitions might help you decide how you may wish to define the term for your business.

## The Detox Market

The company provides a "green" beauty definition on its website: "No toxic ingredients are allowed—only pure goodness. Products must be free of banned ingredients according to our comprehensive list that is continuously updated and available for review. This includes parabens, synthetic fragrance, PEGs (polyethylene glycols) and petrochemicals."

The company's verbiage focuses more on "green beauty" rather than "clean beauty."

The Detox Market does not carry any brand unless it is cruelty-free.

The full list of prohibited ingredients is available on their website.

## Credo Beauty

Credo's website explains its clean beauty standard on how manufacturers are required to comply with it: "We introduced The Credo Clean Standard to all partners in April 2018. All new companies needed to comply right away, and existing brands have until October 2019 to fully comply. Rest assured that the existing brands have been onboard with the foundation of the Standard, Credo's Dirty List. The Dirty List is a robust list of dozens of ingredients that we ask brands to avoid due to safety and/or sustainability reasons. But the Credo Clean Standard goes beyond the Dirty List. It addresses key aspects of bringing a product from the formulating bench to our store shelves—ingredient sourcing, manufacturing, backing up marketing claims, defining and disclosing types of fragrance ingredients. Clear communication and documentation are key to executing the Standard."

The company's verbiage focuses more on "clean beauty" than on "green" or "natural" beauty.

Credo does not carry any brand unless it is cruelty-free.

## Sephora Clean

The company's website states: "All brands with this seal qualify as Sephora Clean and are free of these ingredients: sulfates SLS and SLES (sodium lauryl sulfate and sodium laureth sulfate), parabens, formaldehydes, formaldehyde-releasing agents, phthalates, mineral oil, retinyl palmitate,

oxybenzone, coal tar, hydroquinone, triclosan, and triclocarban. All skincare, makeup and hair brands with the Clean seal have less than one percent synthetic fragrances."

It should be noted that Sephora carries multiple brands and products that do not feature this "Sephora Clean Seal," thus letting the consumer decide what he/she wants, rather than mandating what is available in store.

## **Ingredient Context**

While the beauty industry grapples to define the term "clean beauty," keep an eye on the following controversial ingredients.

**Sulfates.** This is a family of ingredients that are commonly used in shampoos and cleansers as foaming agents. The controversy surrounding these ingredients is that some have been found to be contaminated with ethylene oxide and 1-4 dioxane, which are carcinogens. The two most common members of the family are sodium-laureth sulfate and sodium-lauryl sulfate. The former is considered the more controversial of the two, the latter the more gentle of the two. Interestingly,

retailers are split in their assessment of both.

Credo, The Detox Market and Sephora Clean have chosen to ban products containing sodium-laureth sulfate. However, Credo allows products containing sodium-lauryl sulfate.

**Synthetic Fragrance and Phthalates.** The controversy around fragrance in skincare products continue to run high and is sometimes muddled by the conversation about phthalates. Phthalates are compounds used in certain fragrances that give the category a bad name. Products containing these specific compounds are not carried at Credo, The Detox Market or benefit from the Sephora Clean seal. Opinions about synthetic fragrances are more diverse—and indeed, synthetic fragrances can be formulated without phthalates. The Detox Market does not carry any brand that contains synthetic fragrances. However, Credo and the Sephora Clean seal do allow formulations that contain phthalate-free synthetic fragrances (as noted above, the Sephora Clean standard has a concentration threshold).

**Chemical Sunscreens.** This is a group of fourteen compounds used in chemical sunscreens to absorb

UVA and/or UVB rays, that differentiate themselves from physical blocks (such as titanium or zinc, which are generally considered safe). The Detox Market and Credo have chosen to avoid products containing chemical screens. However, the Sephora Clean seal does allow these. It also should be noted that Hawaii recently banned a number of these ingredients (specifically oxybenzone and octinoxate) due to concerns for the waterways, but not the category as a whole.

The beauty industry will no doubt continue the "clean beauty" conversation in order to come to a generally accepted definition. For brands, the most important drivers of this conversation should be transparency and authenticity. For retailers, the goal should be to help educate consumers about the most egregious ingredients to watch for—and that not all natural ingredients are safe and not all synthetics are harmful. ■

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*Ada S. Polla is the president, CEO and co-creator of the skincare line Alchimie Forever of Switzerland.*