

The Water Cooler



RAISING SOAP

There are more than a few natural skin care lines bubbling up in Atlantic Canada. Here's some samples:

Nova Scotia Fisherman

Founded in Nova Scotia's Annapolis Valley, this self-proclaimed Xtreme line of all natural (and mostly vegan) skin care products ranges from ocean lotions made from Nova Scotia sea kelp to Sable Island Spice beard balm.

East Coast Glow

This Bonavista, N.L. company uses raw, living and whole plant-based ingredients and iceberg water they gather themselves to make products like their Wild Calendula and Orange Sea Salt Soak and Mint and Partridgeberry Protective Lip Balm.

Fiore Botanica

The Lunenburg, N.S. storefront of this all-natural skin care line opened in 2013 offering up vegetarian products from hair care to bug spray. Founding partner Kathleen Quinlan was a finalist for the 2018 RBC Canadian Women Entrepreneur Awards.

Quannessence

Based in Summerside, P.E.I., Quannessence has offered several lines of therapeutic and holistic products for both professional and home use since their inception in 2010. Their focus is on skin renewal and revitalization with products ranging from Sage Peel Gels to their infinity series Equinox Renewal Cream.

FEELING DUCKISH

How a Halifax-based natural skin care company is expanding across the country, smoothing skin and debunking myths about the cost of natural products

Sticker shock (or should we say sticker assumption) about natural skin care was the catalyst for Duckish. Carolyn Crewe and Josh Beitel (above) started the Halifax-based natural skin care line after Crewe's "spirited" debate with her sister about the cost of all-natural products when her nephew was born in 2013. While Crewe faced her own skin care challenges, it was her nephew's diaper rash that propelled her to look into the ingredients of diaper creams and to develop a line of natural products that was cost-effective for new parents.

"It just snowballed into a bunch of research about diaper creams. What goes into diaper cream? What did people use before?" says Crewe, who became accustomed to tinkering in her kitchen testing out recipes and giving out samples. "Our friends were very generous with their babies," jokes Beitel. The pair—partners in love as well as in skincare—met in Montreal in 2010 while completing MBAs at Concordia University and had been cooking up recipes for diaper creams for a few years before making the move to Halifax to set up shop in 2015.

"We wanted to change things up and when we started investigating, Halifax seemed to have a lot of the things we were looking for. Lifestyle wise and working wise," says Crewe, appreciative of the network of school friends from her undergraduate NSCAD days. Nova Scotia is also the midpoint between Beitel's family in Montreal and Crewe's in Corner Brook, N.L.

But it's not all smooth butts and bubble baths: growing a natural skin care business is not without challenges. Balancing the production of skin care—ranging from bath salts and lip balm to rash sticks and deodorant—and selling it at affordable prices can be slippery as shipping costs are higher on the East Coast, but they are offset with lower rent for their production space on Herring Cove Road and Halifax's lower cost of living compared to Montreal. As a result, they are able to sell their diaper rash cream stick for a reasonable \$15.99 plus tax.

"One of the big challenges for a small company like us is not just getting products on shelves, but then having people walk into the store and recognize them," says Beitel, highlighting the importance of Duckish packaging. They decisively opted-out of the trendy apothecary look or natural-looking beiges and greens, and decided to add a splash of (many) colours to stand out. Beitel and Crewe don't want to look like luxury brand, intent on changing the perception that all-natural means inaccessible. "We feel that people shouldn't have to have a lot of disposable income to have products that aren't filled with junk," says Crewe.

The pair hope Duckish will hit the U.S. online market eventually, but for now building sales on their website and across Canada are top priority. The past year has seen major expansion for Duckish with their brightly coloured products available in more than 70 stores nationwide, and counting.