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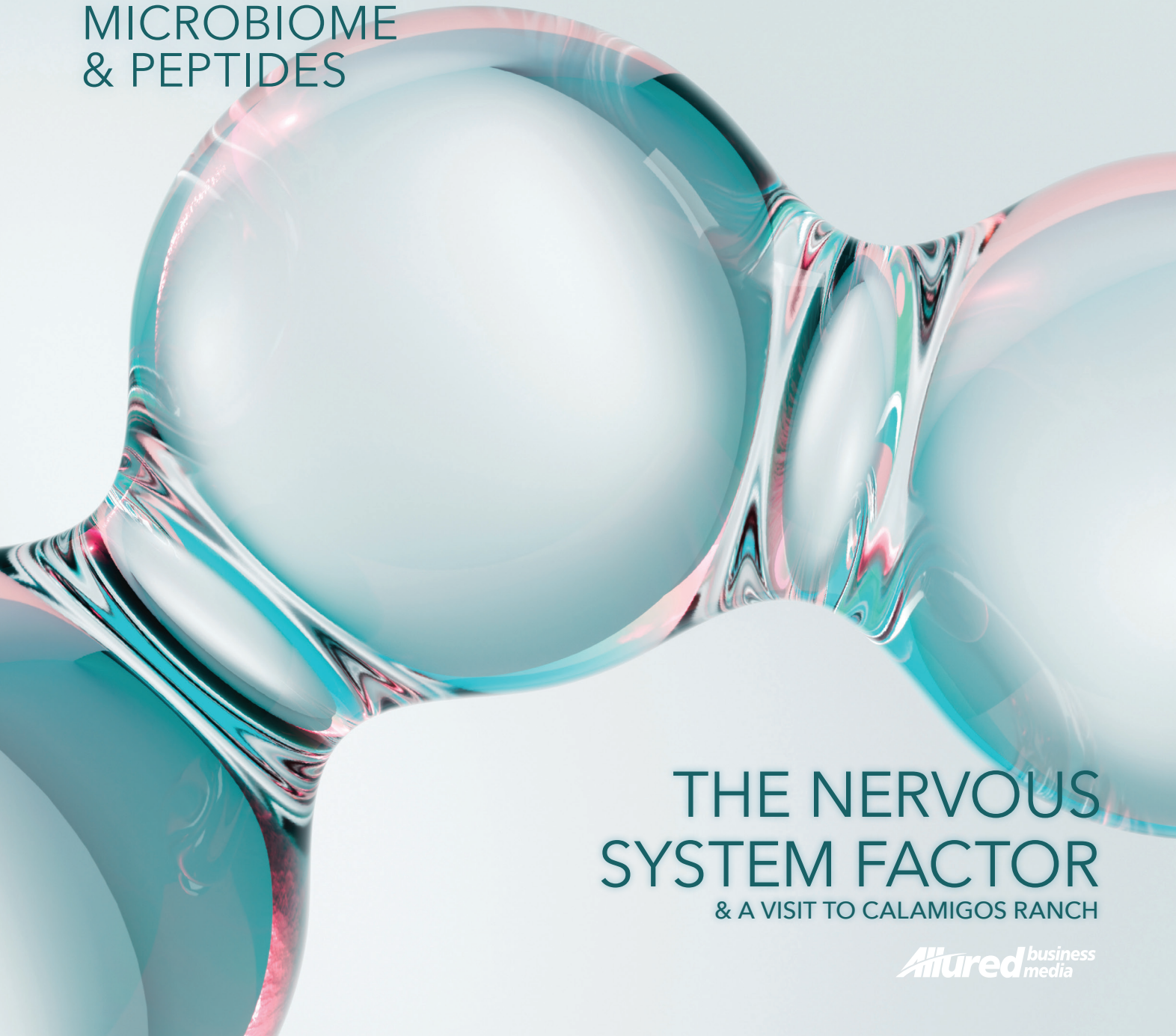
THE SKIN MICROBIOME & PEPTIDES



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& A VISIT TO CALAMIGOS RANCH

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***Journal of Cosmetic Dermatology - 2023

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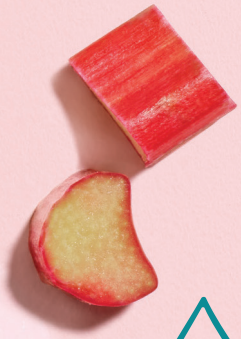



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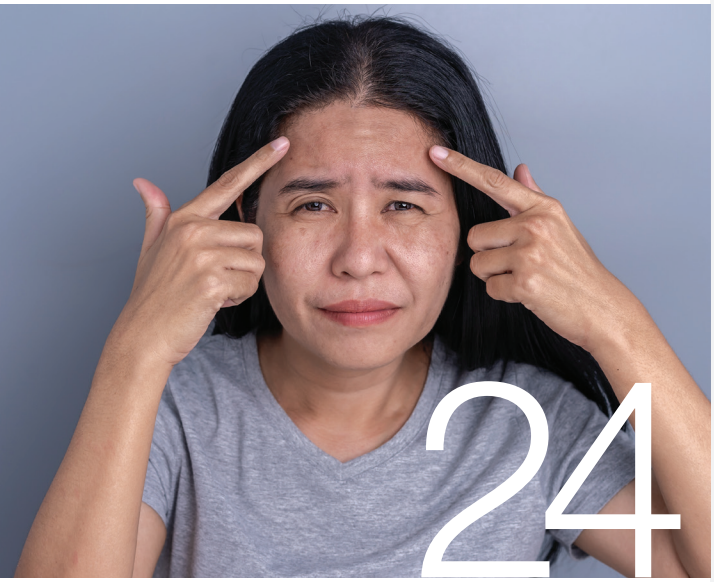



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TIA JONES
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Treatments and Products that Enhance

Skin Inc.'s Associate Managing Editor Tia Jones shares what's on her mind.

People are looking for ways to enhance their natural beauty, whether that is through products or treatments. Professionals can help guide their clients toward the products that are right for them. Professionals can recommend products that extend the life of their treatments, through personalized treatment plans and other post-treatment care.

Giving clients their own specialized plan that is catered to their skin issues and needs is one way to make them feel cared for. Professionals can also use tools aimed at engaging the client in-between appointments. Personal touches can make a professional stand out and can make a difference when clients are choosing where to get their treatments done.

In this issue, readers can find valuable insights that can help them, whether they are a solo professional or work at a spa. Readers can learn how to source and sell products, how shifting your focus from scarcity to problem solving can make estheticians better at selling retail products, learn about the importance of the nervous system in treating the skin, and protocols for people experiencing rapid weight loss.

Wishing you all the best,



Tia Jones



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Feeling the Warmth of the Sun

By Tia Jones

We're in the hottest and brightest part of the year. The days are longer and people are looking to make the most of the time. Summer can be a time of healing, balance and a focus on restoring your health, whether it is by using body care with healing properties, tinted moisturizer that has skincare ingredients, cleansing and healing the scalp or using an LED mask to help with acne or other skin concerns.



1 Plant Medicine in Skin and Body Care

Skin and body care that uses plant medicine and traditional ingredients to heal the skin connects people to holistic practices that have been around for centuries. N8iv Beauty uses acorn oil as the primary ingredient. It can heal the skin and is based on the traditional medicine of the Rincon Band of Luiseno Indians.

www.n8ivbeauty.com

2 Tinted Moisturizers

Tinted Moisturizers and tinted SPF are a way to enhance the natural look of skin, while not being too heavy. The Mented Cosmetics Cloud Cream Skin Tint Tinted Moisturizer is the brand's first liquid foundation. It is infused with hyaluronic acid and squalane, which improves overall texture, controls moisture, and supports elasticity. It enhances the look and feel of skin and provides lightweight, buildable coverage with a smooth, blurring finish.

www.mentedcosmetics.com

3 Scalp Exfoliation

Scalp exfoliators can break down and break up the buildup that comes from using hair products. The Tgin Balance Collection scalp exfoliator is powerful enough to remove the buildup from the scalp, while still being gentle. It has niacinamide and lemon oil in it and was developed in partnership with a trichologist.

www.tginatural.com

4 Advanced Skin Care Tools

We've all seen the photos of people sitting on their couch in an LED Mask. The ZAQ Noor 2.0 Pro LED Face Mask targets wrinkles, acne, and inflammation simultaneously. It addresses diverse skin concerns, including aging and blemishes, with three intensity settings and it complements existing skin care products.

www.zaq.com

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Macole Moody

By Tia Jones



Macole Moody

Macole Moody believes that healthy skin isn't achieved through quick fixes but through consistency and the right strategies. Moody has been a licensed esthetician for seven and a half years and is the owner of Skin Sculpt Spa in Chicago's Old Town neighborhood.

Moody's journey into esthetics started when she went to get a facial that left her more confident than she had ever felt before. It wasn't just about how her skin looked after the treatment; it was about how her skin felt. It made such an impact on her that she enrolled in esthetics school two weeks later because she wanted to give others the same confidence that she felt after her service.

"I consider myself a results-driven esthetician. Every treatment I perform has a purpose and every recommendation is tailored to the individual that comes into my spa," she says. "My goal is to transform skin from the inside out by combining professional treatments and customized home care and education."

Throughout her career, Moody invested heavily in advanced education and hands-on training. Every class, certification and treatment helped her develop a customized approach for her clients. Since everyone's skin is different, creating individualized treatment plans that address their specific skin concerns, while giving them realistic expectation and long-term results, has been the key to Moody's success.

"One size doesn't fit all with clients. I see clients that have different backgrounds and lifestyles, so every time I sit down, I have to heavily customize treatment plans," she says. "Every routine that I put together has the same technique but the products and different ingredients that I tailor to their specific lifestyle and skin concerns."

Moody combines her customized care with education, teaching her clients how to apply the products that she recommends for their skin. As a result, clients have seen positive changes in their skin and have told her that her approach has really made a difference, one they can see and feel.

Most of the clients Moody sees come in for acne, hyperpigmentation and aging. She has a list of treatments that she does, which took her two and a half years to curate. Her goal is to provide services and treatments that will give her clients the best results.

Multicultural Skin

As a multicultural skin care specialist, Moody wishes more estheticians knew that skin of color requires intention, patience and the right formulations.

"It isn't about simply just treating every skin the same, you have to understand how to safely treat concerns like hyperpigmentation, acne and sensitivity without causing further damage, which is critical," she says. "Once you truly understand the science behind treating melanated skin, you can consistently deliver life changing results for all of your clients."

Moody says that treating melanated skin starts with education and that before investing in any advanced training or introducing a new treatment into your practice, ask the educator whether it is safe and effective for melanated skin.

"If they say yes, ask them to show real results and case studies on skin of color, not just tell you. Seeing proof helps ensure the treatment has been tested on diverse skin tones and allows you to make informed decisions that prioritize your clients' safety. Our clients trust us with their skin, so it's our responsibility to seek education that is inclusive, evidence-based and designed to protect the integrity of melanated skin," she says.

Skin Sculpt Spa

Moody opened Skin Sculpt Spa in 2021, because she couldn't find a space where she felt truly represented. Her goal was to create a results-focused spa that recognized and celebrated skin of color, while welcoming every client who wanted help with their skin. Her vision was to build a place for education, inclusivity, real results and real transformation.

Images courtesy of Macole Moody; this_baker at AdobeStock





While those first five years were challenging, she was able to learn the most valuable lessons of her career. She says passion may start a business, but systems, leadership and consistency are what allow it to scale. She says the reason why it was important for her to create an inclusive space at Skin Sculpt Spa is because she wants people to feel welcomed when they enter the spa.

"We all have skin concerns. People come in and they are wearing filters all the time and some of my clients don't feel comfortable without makeup. I wanted to create a space for clients where they can come in and really let their hair down and talk to me about their issues without feeling judged and they can get the results that they are looking for with an esthetician they feel comfortable coming to every single month," she says.

When it comes to educating her clients about post treatment care, Moody takes time to educate her clients about how ingredients work, why she recommends certain products, and how to build a routine that fits their lifestyle and skin goals. After every treatment, the client receives that education with the customized routine when they buy products.

Moody's vision for Skin Sculpt Spa is for it to become premier destination in Chicago for corrective skin care and skin transformation. She plans to continue to expand her education into advanced modalities, including laser technologies, while building a team of passionate professionals who share her commitment to delivering exceptional results.

"Ultimately, I want Skin Sculpt Spa to set the standard for personalized results-driven skin care and become a trusted name in the industry," she says.

Advice to Aspiring Estheticians

Her advice for aspiring estheticians who want to start a business is to spend time working for someone else first to learn inside treatment room and the business side of the industry.

"Master your craft, whether that's corrective skincare, acne, waxing or another specialty and become known for it. Most importantly, educate your clients. Knowledge builds trust, and trust is what creates long-term success," she says.

Moody adds that it is important for estheticians who are just starting out to learn the day-to-day operations of a spa, including scheduling, client retention, inventory management, and the business side of operations.

"Strong customer service skills are essential because creating a great client experience is what keeps people coming back" she says. "Finally, learn how to confidently recommend and sell retail products. Retail sales are a major part of building a profitable spa and helping clients maintain their results at home."

Tia Jones is Associate Managing Editor of *Skin Inc.*



Image provided by author

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HOW CALAMIGOS RANCH BECAME A LUXURY WELLNESS DESTINATION WITHOUT FORGETTING ITS ROOTS

By Nancy Trent

Many family-owned resorts attempt to chase luxury by replacing the very character that made guests fall in love with them in the first place. At Calamigos Ranch Resort & Spa in Malibu, the opposite approach helped create one of Southern California's most sought-after luxury destinations.

Nestled among hundreds of acres of oak groves, vineyards, and winding canyon trails in the Santa Monica Mountains, Calamigos has quietly evolved from a beloved family ranch into a wellness-focused luxury resort recognized by Leading Hotels of the World, one of the hospitality industry's most selective collections of independent luxury properties. The resort recently earned acceptance into the prestigious organization following an extensive evaluation of its service, design, sustainability, and guest experience.

According to Calamigos President Jason Felts, the secret was surprisingly simple.

"The biggest challenge has been knowing what not to change," says Felts. "Calamigos has always been a beloved, family-owned property with deep roots in the community, and our work has been about refinement rather than reinvention, elevating every touchpoint while preserving the soul, history, and sense of place that made it special in the first place."

That philosophy is evident throughout the property, where luxury feels less manufactured and more naturally discovered. Rather than imposing wellness onto guests, Calamigos has woven it into the fabric of the experience.

"Luxury today is about intention and how people feel, not excess," says Felts. "As wellness becomes central to travel, true luxury means creating a sense of ease, restoration, and belonging, where guests feel grounded, sleep well, connect with nature, and leave feeling genuinely restored." The spa serves as one expression of that philosophy.

During my recent visit, I experienced a 90-minute Deep Tissue Massage that completely changed my perspective on the old "no pain, no gain" mentality. Before the treatment began, I quietly wondered whether my therapist would be able to tackle the tension that had settled into my neck, shoulders, and back. I quickly learned not to judge a healer by appearances.

By the end of the session, the aches and pains I had been carrying for weeks had seemingly melted away. The treatment was therapeutic without being punishing, powerful without being painful. When my therapist later described herself as a healer, I understood exactly what she meant. I left feeling physically lighter, more mobile, and genuinely restored.

The Malibu Glow Facial delivered a similarly impressive result. At my request, the facialist performed a thorough extraction process that could only be described as transformative. Despite the depth of the treatment, there was no redness or irritation afterward. Instead, my skin appeared noticeably clearer, brighter, and smoother for days. More importantly, it was obvious that I was in the hands of a highly skilled professional who understood exactly what my skin needed.

The treatments were excellent on their own, but what struck me most was how they fit naturally into a broader wellness culture that extends well beyond the treatment rooms.

These experiences are intentionally integrated into the overall stay rather than positioned as separate amenities.

"The spa and our wellness programming are core to the Calamigos experience, not stand-alone amenities," says Felts. "Wellness is embedded into the entire stay, from the natural setting to the programming and pace of the experience, so it feels organic, approachable, and integrated rather than prescriptive."

For guests seeking a deeper commitment to wellness, Calamigos offers the Renew Retreat, a multi-day curated immersion that combines targeted fitness, restorative practices, mindful culinary experiences, and baseline health testing through Dr. Darshan Shah's NextHealth program. Rather than offering wellness as an occasional add-on, the retreat reflects Calamigos' belief that restoration can be woven into every aspect of the guest experience.

What ultimately distinguishes Calamigos from both traditional luxury resorts and highly structured wellness retreats is its balance.

"What sets Calamigos apart is the balance between sophistication and authenticity," says Felts. "We are not a traditional luxury resort. Instead, we offer a warm, grounded experience where luxury is quiet, personal, and rooted in nature, allowing guests to engage with wellness in a way that feels natural and unforced."

Felts believes that many family-owned properties misunderstand what it takes to successfully make the leap into luxury hospitality.

"Luxury is built through thousands of small decisions made every day, and it requires patience, alignment, and a long-term view," he says. "Boutique properties sometimes underestimate how much clarity, discipline, and consistency it takes to become a true luxury brand."

Perhaps that mindset explains why Calamigos feels so different. Rather than chasing trends, the property has focused on enduring shifts in traveler expectations.

Image provided by author



"I pay far more attention to enduring shifts than to momentary trends," says Felts. "Inspiration comes from listening to our guests, our team, and the broader cultural move toward wellbeing, authenticity, and meaningful experiences. Being early matters less than being right and being sincere." Felts is quick to note that the property's success is not the result of one person's vision.

"While I'm often credited personally, this transformation has been driven by a world-class team, including CEO Garrett Gerson, who is very hands-on, and seasoned hospitality and wellness leaders with deep respect for the property and its history," he says. "Their care, consistency, and shared commitment to excellence are the true foundation of what makes Calamigos work."

That team-first mentality may be the most important lesson of all. In an era when luxury hospitality often feels increasingly manufactured, Calamigos demonstrates that authenticity remains the ultimate luxury.

The ranch has not forgotten where it came from. Instead, it has elevated what was already there, creating a destination where wellness, hospitality, and nature coexist in a way that feels effortless. And after leaving the spa with fewer aches, clearer skin, and a renewed appreciation for thoughtful hospitality, I found myself already planning a return visit.

Nancy Trent is a writer, speaker, lifelong wellness activist, trend watcher, and founder and president of wellness PR firm Trent & Company. A former journalist for New York Magazine, Trent has written seven books on healthy lifestyles and travels the world speaking at conferences and trade shows. She is a recognized expert in PR, with more than 30 years of experience creating highly successful campaigns.



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THE SKIN REBOUND BODY TREATMENT

By Susanne Schmaling

A dry brush, aromatherapy, hydrating, and firming body protocol for clients experiencing rapid weight loss.

There is a moment many clients do not expect during rapid weight loss. The number on the scale is moving. Clothing fits differently. Then they look at their abdomen, arms, thighs, or knees and realize their skin is trying to catch up with a body that changed faster than the tissue was prepared for.

That is where estheticians can do meaningful work.

This is not a medical treatment, a weight loss treatment, or a detox treatment. The Skin Rebound is a supportive body protocol designed for clients experiencing dryness, texture changes, visible laxity, and loss of skin resilience during or after rapid weight loss including clients using GLP-1 medications. The goal is straightforward: improve how the skin feels, support the barrier, encourage a smoother surface, and help the client feel more at home in a body that is changing quickly.

What Rapid Weight Loss Does to the Skin

Skin is adaptable, but it is not magic. When weight loss happens gradually, the dermis has time to reorganize. When it happens fast, the tissue does not always follow. The result shows up on the abdomen, upper arms, inner thighs, breasts, and knees first. Common client presentations include:

- Skin laxity and loss of bounce
- Increased dryness and visible fine wrinkling on the body
- Rough or uneven texture from slowed desquamation
- Barrier sensitivity from depleted lipids

There is also a less-discussed variable for clients using GLP medications specifically: intestinal integrity. GLP-2 activity (present in dual-agonist therapies like tirzepatide) affect nutrient absorption. Clients may be taking in less of the fat-soluble vitamins and essential fatty acids their skin depends on regardless of how carefully they are eating. Their skin is running with a smaller supply kit than you might assume.

These changes are not failures. They are normal tissue responses to a major body shift. And they are exactly the kind of skin concerns a licensed esthetician is positioned to address.

Scope Notes

- Estheticians should document medications during intake but should not advise on dosing, side effects, or medical management. Refer clients to their prescribing provider for medication questions, nutrition concerns, dizziness, or unexplained symptoms.
- Massage movements in this protocol are product application movements. If your state license does not authorize massage, keep all contact within application technique. If body treatments are not explicitly excluded by your state rules, they are generally considered within esthetics scope but know your state's language and proceed accordingly.

Image by Dasha Petrenko at AdobeStock



Who This Treatment Is For

The ideal client has intact skin and is looking for improved softness, hydration, texture, comfort, and a temporarily firmer-looking finish. This treatment works well for clients who have lost weight through nutrition changes, bariatric surgery, medical weight management, or GLP-1 medication use.

Be honest with them up front: topical body care supports the skin. It does not reverse structural laxity from significant tissue loss. Clients who understand the distinction tend to be far more satisfied with results and far more likely to book a series.

Contraindications and Cautions

Do not perform this treatment on clients with active skin infection, open lesions, sunburn, active dermatitis, unexplained rash, unhealed surgical sites, bruising of unknown origin, or areas with impaired sensation.

Use caution with clients reporting uncontrolled diabetes, peripheral neuropathy, blood pressure instability, frequent dizziness, nausea, recent bariatric surgery, active cancer treatment, pregnancy, or any condition affecting heat tolerance or skin healing. When in doubt, get medical clearance.

For dry brushing specifically: skip it over fragile skin, inflamed skin, eczema, psoriasis plaques, raised or painful varicose veins, open scratches, irritated follicles, and any area the client reports as uncomfortable. This step should feel like a wake-up call for the skin not a punishment.

For aromatherapy: avoid strong fragrance, sensitizing essential oils, and direct essential oil application to the skin unless properly diluted in a professional product. For clients with asthma, migraine history, fragrance sensitivity, pregnancy, nausea, or known allergies, omit aromatherapy or use only unscented warm towels.

The Protocol

- **Service time:** 75 minutes (90-minute expanded option available)
- **Frequency:** Weekly or every other week for 6–8 sessions, then monthly maintenance

Room Setup (before the client arrives)

- Warm the room to a comfortable temperature—clients eating less or losing weight rapidly often run cold and will not tell you until they are already uncomfortable.
- Pre-warm the table with a table warmer or thermal blanket. Have a second blanket within reach.
- Warm product bottles in a professional warmer or warm water bath (not above 100°F).
- Prepare aromatherapy inhalation or infused towels, if appropriate for this client.
- Set out a soft-bristle dry brush and a packaged take-home brush for the client.
- Have water or herbal tea available post-service.
- Use proper PPE and high-level disinfectants (You are absorbing products too—protection matters regardless of how natural the formulation is).

Intake and Skin Assessment

Review the intake form and ask what changes the client has noticed in their skin. Keep questions skin-focused. Confirm contraindications, note medication use without probing into medical management, and have the client sign their treatment waiver. Help them onto the table and confirm they are warm before you begin.

STEP 1
Aromatherapy Opening

- Place one to two drops of a professional aromatherapy blend on a cotton round or towel near the client—not directly on the skin.
- Ask the client to take two or three slow breaths if comfortable. The goal is a clean sensory opening, not a guided meditation.
- If using infused towels, keep the aroma fresh and light, not overpowering.
- For any client with fragrance sensitivity, nausea, or asthma: skip or use plain warm towels.

STEP 2
Dry Brushing (Exfoliation)

- Begin on clean, dry skin. Use a clean, soft-bristle brush with light pressure.
- Work from the extremities toward the center of the body in short, controlled strokes on smaller areas and longer strokes on larger areas.
- On the abdomen: gentle clockwise circles only, if the client is comfortable. No deep pressure.
- Timing: back body 5 min, legs and thighs 5 min, arms 3 min, abdomen if appropriate 2 min.
- The skin may pink up lightly. It should not become red, scratched, or irritated. If it does, stop.

STEP 3
Warm Towel Refresh

- Use warm aromatic or plain towels to remove loosened surface debris after dry brushing.
- Gentle wiping movements only—the brush has already done the exfoliation work.
- Pat the skin dry before applying the active serum.

Image by Dasha Petrenko at Adobe Stock



STEP 4
Firming and Hydrating Serum Application

- Apply a hydrating or firming body serum to primary concern areas using long smoothing strokes, gentle circular application, and light movements to distribute product evenly.
- Common focus areas: upper arms, abdomen, flanks, thighs, knees, décolleté.
- Keep movements within product application scope. No deep kneading, deep abdominal work, or lymphatic drainage claims unless your license supports it.
- Look for serums containing peptides, niacinamide, copper peptides, hyaluronic acid, polyglutamic acid, green tea extract, caffeine, bakuchiol, or a body-appropriate retinoid when tolerated.

STEP 5
Hydrating Body Mask or Wrap

- Apply a generous layer of hydrating mask, rich cream, or body wrap product over treated areas.
- Wrap with a body wrap sheet or plastic occlusive wrap. If using an infrared blanket, layer a breathable wrap or sheet underneath for hygiene.
- Cover the client fully with a thermal blanket. The goal is comfort and occlusion, not heavy sweating.
- Process 15 to 20 minutes. Check in at 10 minutes to confirm warmth, comfort, and absence of dizziness or nausea.
- Never leave the client alone in the treatment room.
- Look for masks containing ceramides, shea butter, squalane, aloe, glycerin, phospholipids, panthenol, or nourishing botanical oils.

STEP 6
Removal

- Remove the wrap carefully. Use warm, damp towels to remove the mask.
- Pat the skin dry—do not rub.

STEP 7
Finishing Application

- Apply a rich, barrier-supportive finishing cream, balm, or oil in long, smooth strokes to seal the treatment.
- This is a final application step, not a second massage.
- Apply sunscreen to exposed areas if the client will have daytime sun exposure.
- Assist the client slowly from lying to seated, and seated to standing. Clients losing weight rapidly or adjusting to medication are more prone to feeling lightheaded, stay present for this transition.

STEP 8
Take-Home Dry Brush Education

- Include a take-home dry brush as part of the service. Pull all home care product recommendations while the client is dressing.
- Teach them to use it on clean, dry skin before showering, with light pressure, 2 to 3 times per week.
- Avoid irritated, broken, sunburned, inflamed skin, eczema, psoriasis plaques, painful varicose veins, wounds, or active breakouts.
- Wash the brush regularly and let it dry completely.
- Apply body moisturizer after showering while the skin is still slightly damp.

Pricing and Product Cost

Position this as a premium corrective body treatment, not a basic body scrub. Suggested retail pricing:

Target supply cost at 20 to 30 percent of service price, depending on whether the treatment includes a retail-size finishing product in addition to the dry brush.

Ready-to-Use Menu Description

- The Skin Rebound Body Treatment is a 75- or 90-minute hydrating and firming body protocol designed for clients experiencing dryness, crepey texture, and visible skin changes associated with rapid weight loss.
  The treatment includes professional dry brushing, aromatic towel therapy, barrier-supportive hydration, firming active ingredients, and a take-home dry brush with client education.
- This treatment supports smoother, softer, more hydrated, firmer-looking skin. It does not treat obesity, cause weight loss, eliminate cellulite, detoxify the body, or reverse structural skin laxity.

The Bigger Picture

The GLP-1 era has created a new skin conversation in the treatment room. Clients are not only asking how to lose weight. They are asking what to do with the body they are living in after the weight starts coming off.

Estheticians are well-positioned to answer the skin part of that question. Not the medication part. Not the medical management part. The skin part. (That distinction matters, it keeps the service inside scope, protects the client, and lets the esthetician do what this profession actually does well.)

Rapid weight loss can be empowering. It can also be emotionally complicated. A client may be thrilled with their progress and still uncomfortable with the texture, looseness, or dryness they now see in the mirror. Both things can be true at the same time.

A treatment like this gives the esthetician a practical, honest way to meet that client. No miracle claims. No inch-loss promises. Just: your skin is changing, there are reasons for that, and there are supportive steps we can take.

That is good esthetics. It is exactly the conversation this industry should be ready to have.

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THE NERVOUS SYSTEM FACTOR: WHY TREATMENT RESULTS ARE CHANGING

By Toshiana Baker

A decade ago, most clients came into the treatment room with straightforward goals. They wanted clearer skin, fewer breakouts, better hydration, or support for visible signs of aging. While every client was unique, treatment planning often felt relatively predictable.

Today, many practitioners are working with a very different client population. They are making similar demands, but how we get them there has shifted.

Increasingly, clients arrive describing themselves as exhausted, overwhelmed, burned out, anxious, chronically inflamed, or sensitive to seemingly everything. Most report poor sleep. Many are recovering from illness, surgery, caregiving responsibilities, hormonal transitions, or prolonged periods of stress.

Their skin often reflects what is happening beneath the surface. Redness, impaired barrier function, delayed recovery, unpredictable sensitivity and reactivity, and treatment outcomes that seem less consistent than they once were have become common concerns in treatment rooms across the country.

After conversations with estheticians, spa leaders, and educators over the past several years, I found myself wondering whether we are witnessing the influence of a variable that has historically received far less attention in professional skin care: nervous system health. As research continues to expand our understanding of the brain-skin connection, a growing body of evidence suggests that nervous system regulation may strongly influence inflammation, skin barrier function, wound healing, sensory perception and overall skin resilience. More importantly for practitioners, it may help explain why treatment outcomes can vary so dramatically from one client to another—even when the same protocol is used.

The Client Has Changed

The conversation around stress and skin is not new. Most estheticians understand that stress can contribute to breakouts, inflammatory conditions, and accelerated signs of aging. However, what feels different today is the scale of the issue.

According to the American Psychological Association's Stress in America research, a significant percentage of Americans continue to report stress levels that negatively impact both physical and emotional health. Sleep disturbances, fatigue, anxiety, and chronic health concerns remain common experiences for many adults. At the same time, estheticians are seeing more clients living with autoimmune conditions, chronic inflammatory conditions, sluggish post-treatment recovery, hormonal changes, and ongoing life stressors that do not always fit neatly into traditional consultation forms. Many are not acutely ill. Yet they are not fully well either. They exist somewhere in between.

That "in-between" space has become increasingly important for practitioners to understand because it often influences how clients respond to touch, stimulation, products, treatment environments, and even the experience of receiving care itself.

Looking Beyond Stress

The term stress is often used as a catchall explanation, but from a physiological perspective, nervous system regulation may be the more useful lens. The autonomic nervous system helps regulate countless functions throughout the body, including heart rate, digestion, immune activity, and recovery processes. When the body spends prolonged periods responding to physical, emotional, environmental, or psychological demands, it can become more difficult to shift into restorative states. The skin is intimately connected to these processes.

Both the skin and nervous system originate from the ectoderm during embryonic development. Researchers now recognize the skin as a complex neuro-immuno-endocrine organ that communicates continuously with the brain and the immune system. This connection has helped give rise to fields such as psychodermatology, which examines the relationship between psychological factors and skin health.

Research has demonstrated associations between stress and conditions such as acne, psoriasis, eczema, and atopic dermatitis. In psoriasis, studies have found that stress may precede disease flare-ups in a

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substantial percentage of patients and may contribute to recurrence in susceptible individuals. None of this suggests that skin conditions are "all in someone's head." Rather, it highlights the reality that skin function is influenced by a broader physiological environment than many practitioners were originally trained to consider.

Why Treatment Outcomes May Be Changing

One of the most interesting questions emerging from this research is whether nervous system state influences not only skin condition but also treatment responsiveness. Most practitioners have encountered two clients with remarkably similar concerns who experience dramatically different results.

One responds quickly. Meanwhile, the other progresses more slowly despite strong compliance and consistent professional care. Of course, multiple factors influence treatment outcomes, including genetics, lifestyle, health status, medications, and environmental exposures. Nervous system regulation is not the sole explanation. It may, however, be one of the missing variables. Practitioners willing to assess things from this lens are able to provide feedback and pivots to treatment plans that are driving greater success.

Inflammation

Chronic physiological stress has been associated with increased inflammatory activity throughout the body. Since many skin concerns involve inflammatory pathways, it is reasonable to consider how ongoing nervous system activation may contribute to persistent redness, flare-ups, or slower resolution of symptoms. This is especially essential when adding the use of certain actives in treatment whose outcomes depends on controlling inflammatory response in the treatment room and also in post-care regimens.

Barrier Function

Barrier repair has become one of the defining conversations in modern skin care. And rightly so.

While product selection remains critical, practitioners are increasingly observing clients whose barriers appear fragile, compromised, or slow to recover. Emerging research suggests that stress physiology may influence barrier recovery processes, potentially affecting the skin's ability to maintain resilience over time.

Recovery and Healing

Clients frequently ask why their skin seems to take longer to recover than it once did. The answer is rarely simple. So many factors come into play, such as age, health history, medications, sleep duration and quality, nutrition, and inflammation. Nervous system state may be another factor worth considering, particularly when recovery appears slower than expected.

The Missing Conversation: Treatment Perception

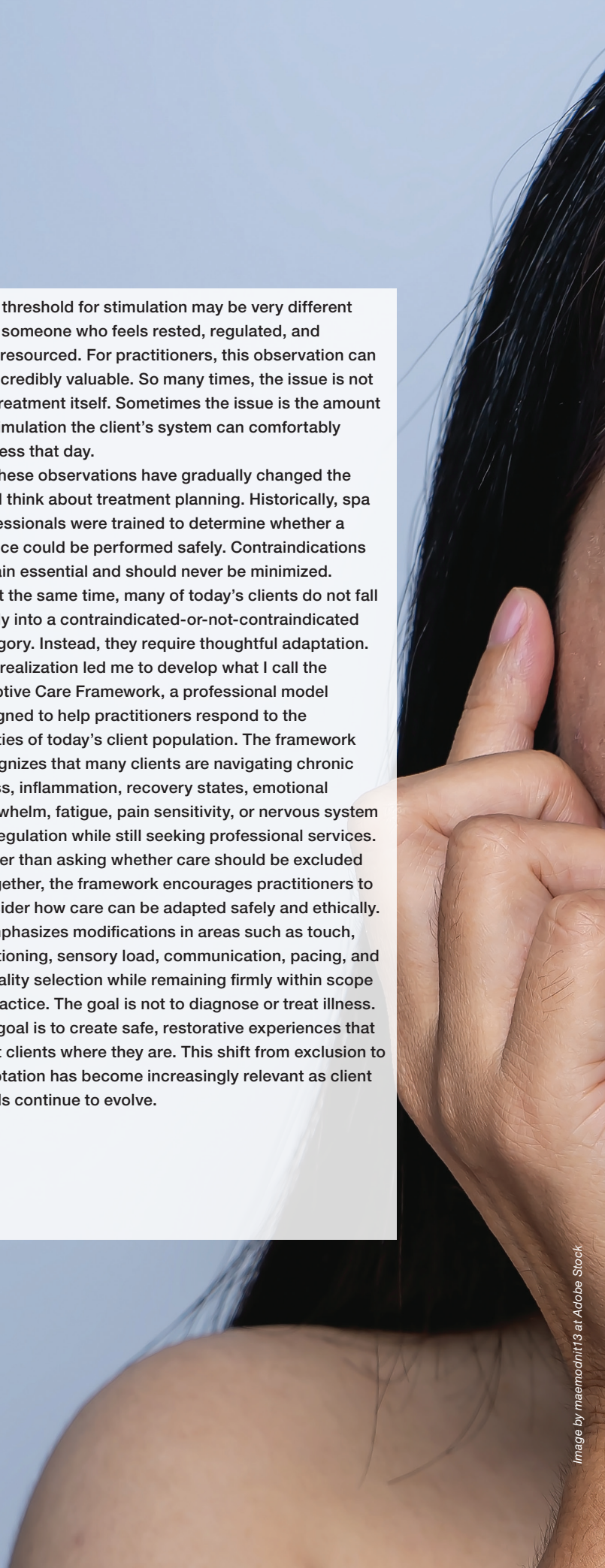
One aspect of nervous system regulation receives surprisingly little attention within professional skin care. Treatment perception.

In recent years, I have noticed that clients often experience treatments differently than they did a decade ago. A pressure level that once felt relaxing may suddenly feel overwhelming. A room fragrance that previously enhanced the experience may now feel overstimulating. Music volume, lighting, temperature, and sensory input that once seemed insignificant can become major factors in client comfort. It is tempting to view these situations as individual preferences. Increasingly, I am led to believe they also provide clues about nervous system state.

The nervous system helps determine how sensory information is processed and interpreted. When someone arrives in a heightened state of activation, their threshold for stimulation may be very different than someone who feels rested, regulated, and well-resourced. For practitioners, this observation can be incredibly valuable. So many times, the issue is not the treatment itself. Sometimes the issue is the amount of stimulation the client's system can comfortably process that day.

These observations have gradually changed the way I think about treatment planning. Historically, spa professionals were trained to determine whether a service could be performed safely. Contraindications remain essential and should never be minimized.

At the same time, many of today's clients do not fall neatly into a contraindicated-or-not-contraindicated category. Instead, they require thoughtful adaptation. This realization led me to develop what I call the Adaptive Care Framework, a professional model designed to help practitioners respond to the realities of today's client population. The framework recognizes that many clients are navigating chronic stress, inflammation, recovery states, emotional overwhelm, fatigue, pain sensitivity, or nervous system dysregulation while still seeking professional services. Rather than asking whether care should be excluded altogether, the framework encourages practitioners to consider how care can be adapted safely and ethically. It emphasizes modifications in areas such as touch, positioning, sensory load, communication, pacing, and modality selection while remaining firmly within scope of practice. The goal is not to diagnose or treat illness. The goal is to create safe, restorative experiences that meet clients where they are. This shift from exclusion to adaptation has become increasingly relevant as client needs continue to evolve.



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In practical terms, adaptation may be as simple as reducing sensory stimulation, adjusting pressure, modifying positioning, allowing additional transition time, or changing expectations around treatment intensity. These adjustments often require very little additional equipment or cost. What they require is awareness.

The Future of Skin Care May Be More Human Than We Expected

The future of professional skin care will continue to be shaped by advanced ingredients, innovative technologies, and increasingly sophisticated treatment modalities. Those advancements matter. Yet as our understanding of the brain-skin connection grows, another opportunity is emerging. It asks us to look beyond the skin itself.

The clients entering our treatment rooms today are carrying more than visible skin concerns. They are carrying the physiological effects of modern life, ongoing stress, recovery journeys, caregiving responsibilities, health challenges, and countless experiences that may never appear on an intake form. Assessing skin condition will always be part of our role. Understanding capacity, resilience, and regulation may become just as important. Because the question may no longer be limited to, "What treatment does this client need?" Increasingly, practitioners may also need to ask, "What state is this client arriving in?" The answer could influence far more than the treatment plan. It may influence the treatment outcome itself.

Toshiana Baker is the founder of SpaWorx (spaworx.biz), a consulting and training development agency that educates, enlightens and empowers spa, beauty and wellness organizations, while supporting growth in their financial performance. She is also the founder of the Network of Multi-Cultural Spa and Wellness Professionals (NMSWP), a community to create a sense of belonging for underrepresented and marginalized spa pros. Baker is a passionate organizational leader, dynamic speaker and bestselling author who has served the spa and beauty industry as a licensed skin care therapist and global educator for nearly 15 years.



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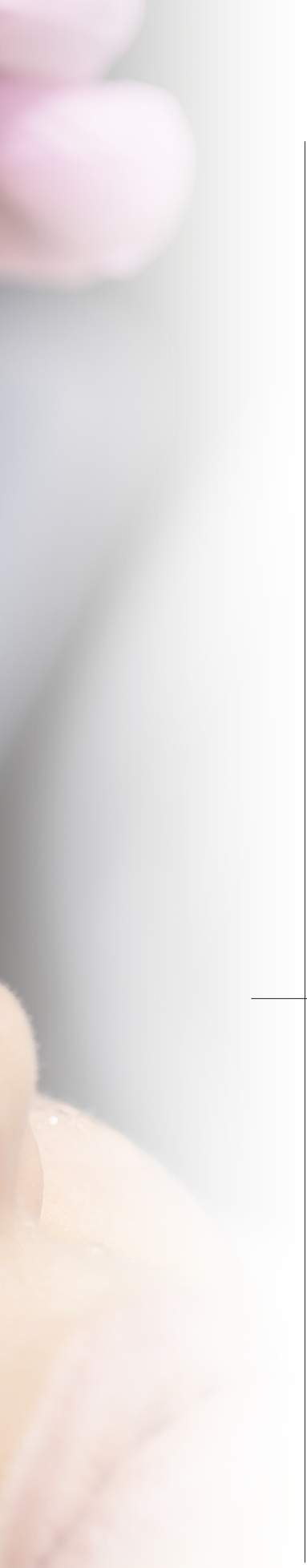

SMART SOURCING: HOW SPAS, MED SPAS, AND SOLO AESTHETICIANS CAN BUILD PROFITABLE, RESULTS-DRIVEN SKINCARE INVENTORIES

By Ewelina Aiossa

For today's spa, med spa, or solo treatment room, the skincare you stock is as strategic as the services you offer. Thoughtful sourcing can elevate results, drive retail revenue, and differentiate your brand, while poor choices can tie up cash, confuse clients, and erode trust. This article walks through how to source wisely, build an efficient back bar and retail assortment, and avoid common pitfalls—especially for newer or solo estheticians stepping into purchasing roles for the first time.

Along the way, we'll layer in perspectives from experienced practitioners in different settings—solo, wellness, luxury, and medical—and reference a few of the professional brands they rely on, while keeping the strategy and framework firmly in a unified, professional point of view.

Step 1: Clarify Your Identity and Client Profile

Before you look at brands, get clear on who you are and whom you serve

- Are you a solo holistic studio, a wellness center, a clinical med spa, or a luxury destination?
- What are your top three booked services?
- What skin concerns do you see most often (acne, sensitivity, pigment, aging, rosacea, post-procedure care)?

Your sourcing strategy, price point, and product mix should directly reflect these answers. A result-driven med spa that offers injectables and energy-based treatments will need robust post-procedure and barrier-repair products, while a holistic studio might prioritize gentle, botanical formulas and sensory experience.

Luxury environments often lean into heritage or prestige brands and elevated textures, packaging, and storytelling.

Lana Mar, Celebrity Esthetician, Speaker & Educator, and Founder of Skin Sports Society based in Miami, FL, serves celebrities, models, media personalities, executives, and wellness-focused clients who need visible, non-invasive results on tight timelines. She selects products that are compatible with her Face Workout Method and The Backstage Facial™, including formulas that support massage, lymphatic drainage, and visible, immediate results without heaviness or irritation. Her sourcing lens is highly practical: products must perform beautifully on the skin, work under makeup, and enhance skin function rather than overwhelm it.

On the medical side, Grace Di Giovanni, at a luxury Avabello Aesthetic med spa owned by a plastic surgeon in South Beach, starts with safety and healing in a laser-heavy environment. Her team's gold standard for post-procedure care is Alastin Skincare, particularly Skin Nectar as a non-negotiable post-treatment product, paired with a gentle cleanser and nourishing moisturizer from the same line in the early healing phase. Once the skin has recovered, they layer in clinically potent actives such as retinols to help maintain and enhance results.

In a different environment, Irini Sevdalis, LE owner of By Irini New York based in NYC and Savannah, GA, builds her assortment around energetic and philosophical alignment: "If I don't use it, I won't serve it to my clients." She leans toward high-quality, luxury, clean, organic, cruelty-free skincare and cites lines like May Lindstrom and TOPICAL SKIN as examples where she connects with both the performance and the energy of the founders. In practice, she often reaches for a multi-tasking facial oil such as TOPICAL SKIN Phyto AOX Facial Oil N°10 when she wants to combine nourishment, glow, and a more sensorial, energetic finish to her facials. Her decisions are grounded in how products behave in real treatments, not just in how they are marketed.

At the wellness intersection, Bozena Patrosz, LE, esthetician at Wellness Insight Integrative Medicine in Darien, CT, takes a holistic view of skin health that bridges internal and external care. Her typical client is interested in both visible improvement and whole-body support, so her product decisions naturally extend into ingestible and lifestyle-oriented categories alongside her topical toolkit.

These four examples illustrate why identity and client profile must come first: the same ingredient or category is sourced and positioned very differently in a holistic studio versus a medical laser practice or a celebrity-driven facial studio.

Step 2: Build a Purposeful Back Bar

Your back bar is where results happen. It should be tight, versatile, and aligned with your core services—not a graveyard of half-used jars.

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BACK BAR ESSENTIALS

At a minimum, most treatment rooms benefit from:

- TWO TO THREE CLEANSERS: One universal, one for sensitive/reactive, and optionally one keratolytic or prep cleanser for resurfacing services.
- TONER OR PREP SOLUTIONS: Low-cost, high-utility options to refine pH, prep for peels, or calm skin.
- A THOUGHTFUL RANGE OF EXFOLIANTS: Both chemical (AHAs/BHAs, enzymes, lower-strength peels) and, where appropriate, very gentle physical options to suit multiple skin types.
- TREATMENT MASKS: A few workhorse formulas —hydrating/soothing, purifying/clarifying, and brightening/antioxidant—chosen based on your most common concerns.
- MASSAGE MEDIUMS: Noncomedogenic oils, gels, or balms that give enough slip without clogging pores.
- SERUMS AND ACTIVES: A focused set of clinically relevant ingredients like retinoids, vitamin C, niacinamide, peptides, and barrier-supporting humectants/emollients.
- MOISTURIZERS: Light, medium, and occlusive textures to cover oily, combination, and dry/compromised skin.
- BROAD-SPECTRUM SPF: Face and body options that your clientele will actually wear—ideally cosmetically elegant and suitable across diverse skin tones.

For med spas, you may extend this with specialized post-procedure products (barrier ointments, growth-factor or peptide serums, pigment inhibitors, calming masks) and targeted peel systems.

In a laser-heavy practice like Avabello Aesthetics, a post-procedure recovery system is non-negotiable: Alastin Skin Nectar, a gentle cleanser, and a barrier-supporting moisturizer form the backbone

of the first weeks after treatment. Only after that phase does the team gradually reintroduce active ingredients such as Skinbetter AlphaRet Overnight Cream and Alto Advanced Defense and Repair Serum to maintain results and keep the complexion healthy and radiant throughout the year.

Across different practice types, certain active categories consistently stand out as high-value back-bar and retail workhorses:

- VITAMIN A (RETINOIDS)
  Bozena describes vitamin A in all its forms—especially ester forms like retinyl palmitate—as a "Swiss Army knife" that can address acne, wrinkles, hyperpigmentation, inflammation, and sensitivity when the skin is well-trained and receptors are built. She has personally seen the difference in her own skin after committing to vitamin A and appreciates the step-up philosophy of brands like Environ that make it easier to introduce retinoids low and slow.
- MASKS AND OILS
  Bozena likens intensive masks and face oils to help condition and transform skin in 10–20 minutes. A deeply hydrating, soothing mask can create a dramatic before-and-after in feel and appearance, which makes them powerful both clinically and commercially. She often uses a nourishing facial oil to seal in treatment, sometimes combining it with cryotherapy as a finishing step to refine pores and create a glossy, healthy finish.
- PEPTIDES
  She also leans on peptides as "messengers" that support cell communication. A well-formulated peptide serum or eye gel can make a noticeable difference in tone and firmness with just a few drops, making them excellent candidates for both back bar and retail.

For someone like Lana, non-negotiable categories include a quality antioxidant serum or facial oil, a deeply hydrating mask, and a barrier-supporting moisturizer. These allow her to perform intensive facial sculpting, lymphatic drainage, EMS, and cryotherapy while keeping skin calm, hydrated, and resilient under makeup and stage lighting.

Step 3: Design a Retail Assortment That Supports Your Services

Your retail shelves should make it easy for clients to maintain the results you create in the room. Think in terms of "protocols to go": simple homecare systems that mirror your professional logic.

RETAIL MUST-HAVES

Most environments can build a strong retail foundation with:

- Daily cleanser tailored to key skin types you see most.
- Leave-on exfoliant or serum (e.g., gentle acids or enzymes for texture and congestion).
- Antioxidant or brightening serum (vitamin C or equivalent) for environmental protection and glow.
- Barrier-supporting moisturizer calibrated for local climate and typical skin types.
- Daily SPF that layers well under makeup and feels good on the skin.
- "Hero" targeted treatments: one or two solutions for major concerns like acne, pigment, or fine lines, chosen for both efficacy and good tolerance.

Med spas often stock medical-grade lines that pair with in-office procedures, as Avabello does by combining Alastin for post-laser healing and Skinbetter for long-term correction and maintenance. Luxury spas may retail curated prestige and niche brands, such as Valmont or Biologique Recherche for clients who want a sensorial, status-driven experience alongside results.

From a sales standpoint, Bozena's experience aligns with what many practices see: retinols, treatment masks, and peptide-rich serums tend

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to be among the top sellers, provided they are well-explained and matched to the client's skin. Her success with retinoids is tied to education—setting expectations for a gradual start and reinforcing that retinoids are a long-term investment in skin health.

For Lana, the retail stars are the products that help clients recreate her signature "Backstage" glow at home: TOPICAL SKIN Phyto AOX Facial Oil N°10 for radiance and glide, G.M. Collin Hydramucine Hydrating Mist to refresh the complexion, and G.M. Collin 4D Visible Lifting Cream for an instant, camera-ready finish. For Grace, post-laser kits built around a restorative serum, gentle cleanser, and nourishing moisturizer are seen as essential components of the procedure, not optional add-ons, which naturally drives higher compliance and retail uptake.

In Irini's boutique holistic studio, the retail story is relational: her clients often gravitate toward the same brands she personally trusts and uses because they believe in her philosophy and feel the difference in treatment. Retail becomes an extension of the client's experience and values, rather than a separate sales pitch.

Where and How to Source Products

1. PROFESSIONAL AND MEDICAL BRANDS
   - Professional and medical-grade lines are still the core of many spa and med spa back bars. Look for brands that:
   - Provide clear clinical data or at least well-supported ingredient rationales.
   - Offer a professional-only back bar along with retail sizes.
   - Have robust education, protocols, and marketing support.
   - Understand your regulatory landscape, especially in med spas.

In a medical environment like Grace's, a post-procedure line is evaluated on its ability to support each stage of the patient journey—from immediate wound-healing support to long-term collagen maintenance—with clear protocols. Additional lines then fill the role of high-performance, clinically validated actives once the barrier has recovered.

2. WHOLESALE DISTRIBUTORS AND BACK-BAR SPECIALISTS
   Distributors that focus on esthetics and med spas can simplify sourcing and pricing, whether you are working with medical-grade brands, clean-leaning lines, or niche holistic ranges.
3. PRIVATE LABEL: PROCEED WITH CAUTION
   Private label can be powerful for established spas with strong branding and repeat clientele, but it can be a resource drain for a new or solo practice. Many practitioners find it more strategic to begin with one or two strong professional lines that fit their philosophy—clinical, holistic, or hybrid—and then consider private label once demand and cash flow are stable.

Irini's lens is particularly helpful: your first back bar is a functional toolkit, not a showpiece system. Whatever the brand, you should be using it extensively in treatment before you commit to deeper inventory or retail.

PRODUCTS AND INGREDIENTS TO BE CAUTIOUS ABOUT

The core cautions remain the same: avoid overly aggressive, one-size-fits-all exfoliants, trend-driven "miracle" products without substantiation, and low-quality formulas with vague INCI lists.

Lana, who works extensively backstage and on set, avoids aggressive exfoliation, heavily fragranced formulas, overly occlusive oils, and any products that pill under makeup. Her kits must be compatible with makeup and leave the skin calm, and balanced.

Irini adds a philosophical filter on top of standard safety concerns, steering clear of harsh bleaching creams and any ingredient profile that feels misaligned with barrier integrity. She is also increasingly attentive to potential hormone disruptors and prefers a "less is more" approach for long-term skin health.

PROFITABILITY, CASH FLOW, AND SKU DISCIPLINE

Especially for solo estheticians and small teams, inventory can quietly drain profits if unmanaged.

START NARROW, GO DEEP: launch with a streamlined assortment you can talk about confidently, then add selectively once products prove themselves.

ALIGN BACK BAR AND RETAIL: prioritize products that work both professionally and at home, so using them in treatment naturally leads into retail recommendations.

USE DATA: track best-selling SKUs, treatment pairings, and seasonal shifts. Drop or rotate out underperformers rather than "hoping" they move

NEGOTIATE: ask vendors about opening order flexibility, testers, samples, and marketing materials; look for education that helps you convert and retain clients.

Bozena's experience is a useful cautionary tale: she has regretted bringing in too many lines at once and trying to mix them in customized facials before fully understanding each product's behavior. Even with strong brands, she finds it essential to know exactly how products will perform on different skin types before layering them. Her takeaway: two to three well-understood brands beat a crowded, confusing mix.

Irini sees another common trap: new solo esties trying to look established by over-stocking. She points out that brands often encourage this with large opening order specials or tiered discounts that reward overbuying. Her guidance is to resist comparison, choose fewer brands that fit your philosophy and clientele, and remember that a back bar should feel like an extension of your decision-making—not a burden you're forced to "use up."

For multi-location or busier environments like Lana's, standardized core back-bar and retail

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assortments ensure consistent client experience and easier training, while a limited number of optional SKUs allow for customization.

Wellness Integration: Inside–Out Skin Support

In integrative settings like Wellness Insight Integrative Medicine, Bozena's sourcing naturally extends into internal support. Alongside topical tools, she recommends ingestible supports like collagen, peptides, hyaluronic acid, omega-3 fatty acids from flaxseed, fish oil, chia seeds, walnuts, targeted vitamins, electrolytes, pre- and probiotics, including fermented foods and cultured dairy, and antioxidants like astaxanthin. These choices reflect her belief that healthy, resilient skin starts from within and that topical routines are part of a broader wellness strategy.

Final Thoughts

Whether you are running a solo studio or you are part of a wellness center, owe a multi-location med spa, or practice adjacent to a plastic surgery center, the most profitable and trusted skincare inventories share the same DNA:

- Clear identity and client focus.
- Purposeful, streamlined back bar.
- Retail that directly supports your in-room work.
- Discipline around SKUs, cash flow, and brand relationships.

The voices of Grace, Bozena, Lana, and Irini point to the same conclusion: it isn't about carrying more. It's about choosing better, understanding those choices deeply, and aligning them with the treatment philosophy and client journey you want to own.



Ewelina Aiossa is a medical aesthetic industry expert and award-winning skin care product developer with 15 years of experience in global beauty. She is the founder of TOPICAL SKIN, a clean dermaceutical skin care line that bridges biotech with nature-inspired ingredients and incorporates advanced science and longevity principles. Aiossa has led marketing for major brands, including Skinceuticals and Glytone, and is a sought-after thought leader regularly featured in trade publications, peer-reviewed journals and industry panels.



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SHIFTING SCARCITY MINDSET IN THE TREATMENT ROOM

By Shawna Rocha

Retail is not the problem. Your mindset is.

Retail has long been one of the most underutilized opportunities within the treatment room. Despite its direct impact on client outcomes and business growth, many estheticians continue to approach retail with hesitation, discomfort, or avoidance altogether. The issue, however, is not a lack of knowledge, product access, or even client interest. The true barrier is far less tangible and far more influential.

It is mindset. More specifically, it is the presence of a scarcity mindset that continues to limit both client results and professional success within the esthetics industry. Until this is recognized and addressed, retail will remain an uncomfortable and inconsistent part of the treatment experience.

Why Retail Matters More Than You Think

At its core, retail is not about selling products. It is about supporting results. Professional treatments account for a small percentage of a client's time, while daily home care determines the majority of what happens to the skin between visits. In many cases, up to 80% of treatment outcomes are influenced by what the client is doing at home.

Without proper home care, even the most advanced in-treatment services can only deliver partial or temporary improvements. Retail extends the work performed in the treatment room, reinforces the treatment plan, and ensures continuity of care.

Beyond results, retail also contributes to the stability and growth of a business. It creates recurring revenue, increases client retention, and strengthens the professional relationship between esthetician and client. Most importantly, it positions the esthetician as a trusted authority, someone who not only performs treatments, but guides long-term skin health. Retail is clearly tied to both outcomes and business success, yet it continues to remain a challenge for many estheticians.

The Real Block: Scarcity Mindset

Scarcity mindset is one of the most common and most limiting patterns seen among estheticians. It often presents subtly, disguised as consideration or empathy for the client, but ultimately results in hesitation, under-recommendation, or complete avoidance of retail.

It sounds like:

- "They probably can't afford this."
- "I don't want to push products."
- "I don't want them to feel pressured."

While these thoughts may feel considerate, they are rooted in assumption rather than reality. Estheticians begin making financial and emotional decisions on behalf of the client before the client has even been given the opportunity to choose.

In doing so, they unintentionally limit both the client's results and their own potential. Studies and industry observations suggest that financial assumptions alone can prevent up to 40–60% of potential retail sales. More importantly, they prevent clients from receiving the full support they need to improve their skin. Clients will buy skincare, they will just buy it somewhere else. Scarcity mindset shifts the focus from service to limitation. Growth mindset, on the other hand, shifts the focus to value, outcomes, and trust.

Why Estheticians Fear Retail

The hesitation around retail is rarely about the product itself. Instead, it is rooted in deeper concerns tied to identity, confidence, and perception.

Many estheticians fear being perceived as "salesy." Others lack confidence in how to communicate product recommendations effectively. Fear of rejection can also play a role, as can personal beliefs about money and value.

Imposter syndrome further compounds the issue. When an esthetician questions their own expertise, they are less likely to confidently recommend higher-level solutions. Instead, they may downplay recommendations, offer minimal guidance, or avoid the conversation altogether.

The result is not neutrality, it is inconsistency. Clients sense hesitation. When recommendations are unclear or uncertain, trust decreases, compliance drops, results, and outcomes suffer.

Stop Selling Ingredients—Start Educating Skin

One of the most common mistakes in retail conversations is overwhelming clients with ingredient lists that hold little meaning to them. While ingredient knowledge is essential for the professional, it is rarely how clients understand or make decisions about their skin. Clients are not concerned with

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memorizing ingredients. They are focused on results. When estheticians begin listing complex ingredient names without context, it can create confusion, disengagement, and hesitation rather than trust.

Instead, the conversation should shift from ingredients to skin conditions, from what a product is to what it does, and from information to understanding. Clients need clarity on what is happening in their skin, why it is occurring, how the product will support improvement, and what results they can expect over time. When ingredients are discussed, they should always be connected back to purpose. What the ingredient is doing, why it is included, and how it helps the client reach their goals. This approach transforms the interaction from technical to meaningful, positioning the esthetician as a professional who translates science into results. Clients are not buying ingredients, they are investing in outcomes, and it is the esthetician's role to clearly connect the two.

Reframing Retail: From Selling to Service

To move beyond scarcity mindset, retail must be reframed entirely. Retail is not selling. It is problem solving. Retail is not pushing products. It is providing education. Retail is not an add-on to the treatment. It is a continuation of care.

When viewed through this lens, retail becomes a natural extension of the treatment plan. Just as an esthetician would not perform a treatment without a purpose, they should not conclude a service without providing the tools necessary to maintain and enhance results.

Clients are not coming in simply for a service, they are seeking guidance. They want to understand their skin, improve it, and maintain those improvements over time. When an esthetician confidently provides that guidance, trust deepens and the relationship strengthens.

Understanding Client Buying Behavior

A key shift in mindset comes from understanding how clients actually make purchasing decisions.

Clients do not buy products, they buy outcomes. They invest in clearer skin, reduced sensitivity, improved confidence, and long-term results.

Emotion often drives the initial purchase, while logic reinforces continued use. When an esthetician communicates clearly, confidently, and with purpose, the client feels supported—not sold to.

It is important to recognize that discomfort during retail conversations rarely originates from the client. It is most often a reflection of the esthetician's hesitation. Confidence creates clarity. Clarity builds trust. Trust drives action.

Overcoming Scarcity Mindset

Shifting out of scarcity mindset requires intentional change. It is not about becoming more aggressive in retail, it is about becoming more aligned with the role of a professional.

STOP MAKING FINANCIAL ASSUMPTIONS

It is not the esthetician's responsibility to decide what a client can or cannot afford. Present the recommendation clearly and allow the client to make their own informed decision.

SHIFT FROM COST TO VALUE

Focus on outcomes, not price. When a client understands how a product supports their skin and contributes to their results, value becomes the driving factor, not cost.

OWN YOUR EXPERTISE

Clients seek professional guidance. When recommendations are delivered with confidence and clarity, they are received as part of the service, not a separate transaction.

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MOVE FROM SCARCITY TO SERVICE

Withholding recommendations does not protect the client, it limits them. Not providing the necessary tools for success is ultimately a disservice.

USE EVIDENCE, NOT EMOTION

Anchor recommendations on what the skin needs. Remove personal discomfort from the equation and rely on clinical reasoning, treatment goals, and visible outcomes.

NORMALIZE RETAIL AS PART OF THE TREATMENT PLAN

Retail should not feel like a separate conversation. It should be integrated seamlessly into the service, presented as part of the overall strategy for achieving results.

The Shift That Changes Everything

Retail is not the obstacle in the treatment room. Mindset is. When estheticians shift from scarcity to service, everything changes. Recommendations become clearer. Clients become more compliant. Results improve. Confidence grows on both sides.

The most successful estheticians are not those who "sell more." They are the ones who think differently. They trust their knowledge, communicate with purpose, and provide complete care, not partial solutions.

Retail, when approached correctly, is not about increasing revenue. It is about elevating outcomes, strengthening relationships, and stepping fully into the role of a skin health professional. When you remove limitation and lead with intention, retail no longer feels uncomfortable. It becomes essential.



Shawna Rocha is the owner and founder of Awaken Esthetics Retreat and Awaken Day Spa in California and Washington. A licensed esthetician, mentor and educational development consultant, Rocha is dedicated to elevating the esthetics industry through advanced education and community. Specializing in sensitive and compromised skin, she holds multiple advanced certifications, including Oncology Esthetics, Immuno-Esthetics and NCEA certification. She is an educational consultant for multiple skin care lines; Rocha was named Dermascope's 2024 Educator of the Year. Known for her expertise, passion and mentorship, she continues to inspire estheticians nationwide through education, collaboration and advocacy for skin health.



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THE SKIN MICROBIOME: CELLULAR COMMUNICATION AND THE ROLE OF PEPTIDES IN MICROBIOME HEALTH

By Mark Viktora

The skin microbiome is a highly organized biological ecosystem made up of bacteria, fungi, viruses, and other microorganisms that coexist with the skin in a tightly regulated relationship. This ecosystem is not passive. It contributes to immune defense, barrier maintenance, inflammatory regulation, hydration, and overall skin function. Healthy skin is therefore not defined by surface appearance alone, but by the stability of the microbiome, the strength of the barrier, the quality of cellular communication, and the extracellular matrix that supports the skin as a whole.

For skincare professionals, this shift in understanding is important. Many visible concerns, including sensitivity, chronic redness, acne-prone conditions, impaired healing, inflammation, and barrier dysfunction, are not isolated surface problems. They are often signs that the skin's internal communication systems and microbial balance have been disrupted. When the microbiome is unstable, the skin becomes more reactive. When the skin is inflamed or compromised, the microbiome becomes more vulnerable. In essence, dysfunction can become a self-reinforcing cycle.

The Skin Microbiome as a Functional Ecosystem

The microbiome is best understood as a living extension of skin physiology. Microorganisms on the skin interact continuously with keratinocytes, immune cells, sebum, sweat, lipids, natural moisturizing factors, and the acid mantle. Beneficial microbial populations help protect against pathogenic overgrowth, support immune tolerance, and contribute to barrier integrity.

A healthy microbiome is defined by balance rather than elimination. The goal is not to over-process the skin, but to preserve diversity and create conditions where beneficial organisms can thrive. When microbial balance is maintained, the skin is better able to tolerate stress, maintain hydration, and regulate inflammation. When diversity is reduced, opportunistic organisms may become more dominant, immune reactivity can increase, and visible dysfunction becomes more likely.

This is why microbiome health cannot be separated from the skin's broader functions. It is not an accessory to healthy skin. It is one of the central regulators of skin function.

Why Cellular Communication Matters

Cellular communication is the biochemical language of the skin. Cells communicate through cytokines, chemokines, peptides, growth factors, antimicrobial peptides, receptor-mediated signaling pathways, and other messenger systems. These signals determine how the skin repairs, defends, hydrates, and responds to environmental stress.

The microbiome is influenced by this communication at every level. Keratinocytes release signals that affect microbial tolerance and immune response. Immune cells interpret the presence of microbes and decide whether to initiate a defense response or maintain tolerance. Fibroblasts and structural cells help support the quality of the cutaneous environment, including the extracellular matrix, which indirectly shapes microbial stability.

When signaling pathways are balanced, the skin is better able to maintain microbial equilibrium and a controlled immune response. When signaling becomes dysregulated, dysbiosis, or imbalance, may follow. Beneficial populations can decline, inflammatory signaling can rise, barrier efficiency may weaken, and the skin can become more susceptible to sensitivity, delayed recovery, acne, rosacea, dermatitis, and other chronic inflammatory skin concerns. This is where professionals can look beyond the symptom and toward the conditions that allowed it to develop.

What Disrupts the Microbiome

Several common factors can compromise microbiome health. Over-exfoliation and aggressive resurfacing can disrupt the stratum corneum and alter the skin's ecological balance. Harsh surfactants and overuse of strong actives can strip essential lipids, weaken corneocyte cohesion, and impair microbial stability.

Disruption of pH is another major factor. Healthy skin maintains a slightly acidic surface environment that supports beneficial organisms and discourages the overgrowth of less desirable organisms. When the surface becomes more alkaline, microbial composition can shift, barrier enzymes are affected, and inflammation may increase.

Environmental stressors such as ultraviolet radiation, pollution, heat, and oxidative stress also influence the microbiome by damaging lipids, proteins, and cellular membranes. Chronic inflammation amplifies this disruption by increasing cytokine activity and altering normal cellular behavior. Even the overuse of antibacterial products can create problems for acne-prone skin by reducing microbial diversity rather than supporting balance.

The cumulative result is often barrier impairment, elevated transepidermal water loss, increased reactivity, and destabilization of the skin ecosystem.

Barrier Function, Hydration, and the Microbial Environment

The skin barrier is one of the most important determinants of microbiome health because it provides both structural protection and environmental regulation. Corneocytes and intercellular lipids create a protective architecture that limits water loss and shields the skin from external stress. Natural moisturizing factors help retain water, support enzymatic activity, and maintain the hydration required for proper desquamation.

When barrier integrity, pH, and hydration levels are supported, the microbiome has a more stable environment in which to function. When these systems deteriorate, the microbiome becomes more vulnerable to imbalance. This is why barrier repair should be prioritized as a microbiome-supportive strategy, not simply a symptom-relief approach.

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Peptides as Biological Signaling Molecules

Peptides are short chains of amino acids that function as signaling molecules in the skin. Their value lies in their ability to participate in cellular communication. Rather than forcing the skin into a response, peptides help influence existing pathways and support more efficient function.

This is especially relevant in microbiome-focused skincare because microbial balance depends on the skin's ability to regulate inflammation, repair the barrier, maintain hydration, and support immune tolerance. Peptides can contribute to these processes by helping restore communication pathways disrupted by stress, damage, aging, or chronic inflammation.

Importantly, peptides do not support the microbiome by stripping or over-processing the skin. Their role is more nuanced. Some help calm excessive inflammatory signaling. Others support repair, hydration, and barrier resilience. Antimicrobial peptides are especially relevant because they are part of the skin's natural defense system, helping discourage pathogenic overgrowth while supporting an environment where commensal organisms can remain in balance.

From a professional perspective, this makes peptides valuable not because they are trendy ingredients, but because they work within the logic of the skin. They support regulation, repair, and communication, the same biological processes that allow the microbiome to remain stable.

Clinical Relevance for Estheticians and Skin Professionals

For the skincare professional, microbiome-supportive care represents a more advanced and biologically aligned approach to skin health. The focus is no longer simply on suppressing visible symptoms. It is on identifying the underlying conditions that contribute to those symptoms: weakened barrier function, inflammatory reactivity, poor hydration, pH disruption, and impaired cellular communication.

This approach changes how treatments are designed. A client with chronic sensitivity may not need more correction; they may need barrier support and inflammatory regulation. Acne-prone skin may require more than exfoliation or oil control; it may require support for microbial balance and immune signaling. Aging or stressed skin may benefit from ingredients that improve cellular responsiveness and resilience rather than relying only on stimulation.

Peptides integrate well into this type of strategy because they can support both professional treatments and home care without requiring aggressive disruption. Their role is not to replace foundational skincare, but to elevate it by improving how the skin communicates, repairs, and responds.

A Smarter Approach to Skin Health

The health of the skin microbiome is a reflection of the health of the skin as a whole. A stable microbiome depends on balanced immune signaling, strong barrier function, appropriate pH, adequate hydration, efficient cellular behavior, and the structural support of the extracellular matrix. When these systems are disrupted, an imbalance can develop, and skin function declines.

Peptides provide a science-based method for supporting this balance. As signaling molecules, they help guide inflammatory regulation, barrier repair, immune stability, and cellular resilience. Their greatest value lies in their ability to work with the skin's biology rather than against it.

Healthy skin is not achieved through stripping, suppression, or force. It is achieved through communication, regulation, and support at the cellular level. In this context, peptides are not simply functional ingredients. They are strategic tools for protecting the microbiome and advancing the future of skin health.



Mark Viktora is CEO and head biochemist of Viktoria DeAnn Peptide Cosmeceuticals, a professional skincare company focused on peptide science and advanced skin biology. His work centers on translating emerging biochemical research into practical applications for skincare professionals.

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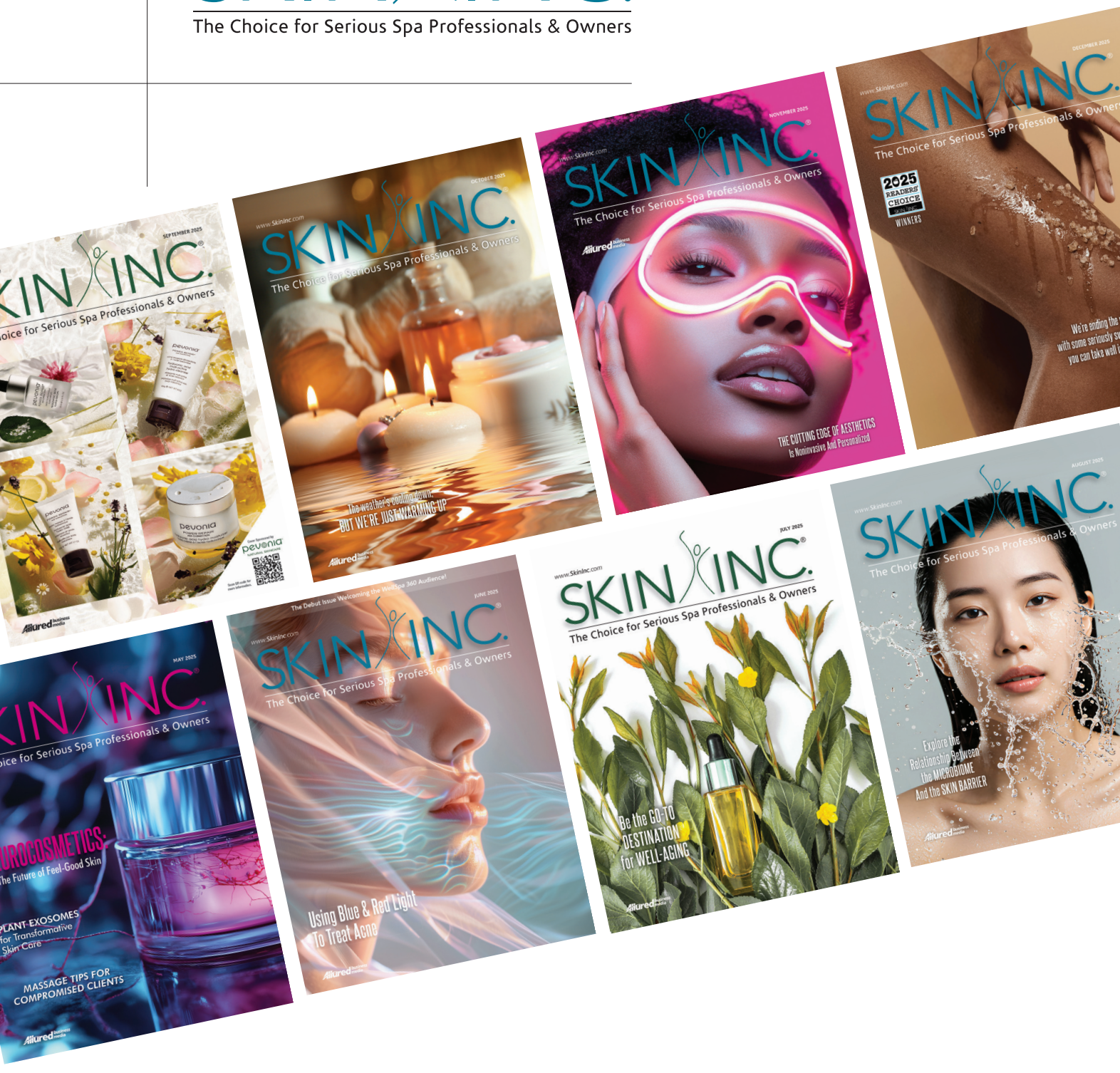

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