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BEAUTY NOTES

For Alison Carroll, Skincare Is About Connecting With Yourself

The co-founder of the olive oil company Wonder Valley shares how she learned to treat her skin like a barometer for overall health.

by Andrea Whittle
10.22.21



Photographed by Jay Carroll

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Beauty Formula No. 7 Gamine / \$42

Alexis Smart Flower Remedies

See On Alexis Smart Flower Remedies →

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When Alison Carroll and her husband Jay decided to start their company, Wonder Valley, in 2014, California olive oil was still relatively obscure—there were a handful of people pressing it and selling it at local farmers markets and specialty food shops.

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Now, they're in their eighth harvest year, and their small-batch extra virgin olive oil—which comes in a sleek little light-proof bottle with a nude goddess on the label—can be found on stylish kitchen counters around the country. That same grade of oil is also the base for their cult favorite skincare line, which includes a luxurious oil cleanser, a body oil, a face serum, and a hinoki-scented soap with a rich lather. (You can find them at Goop, Credo, SSENSE, and CAP Beauty, among others.)

From the home she and Jay share on the Maine coast, Alison spoke with *W* about the holistic benefits of olive oil as an inside-and-out beauty ingredient, her daily wellness rituals, and how learning to approach her skin with curiosity led to a drastically improved complexion.

When you and your husband started Wonder Valley, was getting into skincare always a part of the plan?

We used to joke that this was “the brand without the plan.” We just loved olive oil, we loved designing things together and we kept putting our hearts into it and seeing what happened.

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The skincare started because of my own fascination. The face oil was our first product, and it was a result of my just trying to help and heal my own skin. I always struggled with acne growing up. My father's background is in pharmaceuticals and working in the dermatology field. And I was on a lot of prescriptions and spent a lot of time at dermatology offices growing up and nothing was really helping. As an adult, when I started to see a holistic doctor and addressed gut issues and diet issues, the shift I saw in my skin was pretty profound, and I started experimenting with oils in skincare around the same time.



Photographed by Jay Carroll.

I feel like a lot of people know that eating olive oil as part of your diet is healthy. But what are the benefits of applying it to your skin?

We harvest and press our olives when they're still green, and there's a higher concentration of polyphenols and antioxidants than if you harvest later. So you're getting those topically. Olive oil is also really rich in vitamin A and E and palmitic acid, so it's really emollient and skin softening. It has a high concentration of oleic acid, which is the ultimate hydrator, and linoleic acid and squalene, which help strengthen and fortify.

It can be a heavier oil versus other oils, though, which is why you probably shouldn't just put straight olive oil on your face. Ours is usually cut with a lot of jojoba or rosehip—things that have their own benefits, but also lighten the molecular density of the oil.

What is something that you learned from working in the skincare world that most people wouldn't know?

It's exciting to buy new products to consume new things, because they all promise you the world. But less is more, and it's important to be thoughtful and not change things up all the time. I'm not saying you're married to whatever cleanser you currently use until the end of time. But even with natural products, even with clean ingredients, it can be really taxing on the skin to be doing so many different steps of serums and exfoliators. I think a lot about the microbiome, and working with, not against, the functions and intelligence of my skin. It knows how to detox, it knows how to heal itself, how to repair: how can I support those functions rather than try to replace them?

How did you get to that place of understanding?

I think our skin can be a real dashboard. It tells us a lot of information and communicates with us all the time, like when we're tired or not drinking enough water or having food sensitivities. It's so easy to see a bump or a redness appear and just want to attack it, remove it, get rid of it, hide it. But the more you can approach your skin with curiosity and patience and tenderness, you can learn a lot. It's important to think beyond just the surface level expression of health to a whole body experience.

I grew up in New Jersey in an Italian family. I lived on gluten, and then it just kind of clicked: "This does not agree with me." It shows up on my skin every time: Here come the little bumps on my jawline, or red, flushed cheeks. I spent a lot of time in that cycle with no awareness.

Where do you shop for most of your skincare and beauty products?

I usually buy from retailers that carry Wonder Valley, like CAP Beauty or Credo, because I know their standards for clean products are pretty high. I'm still navigating SPF's and figuring how I feel about that.

Any preferred sunscreen brands?

I like Marie Veronique's sunscreen for my face. I don't love the tint, but I like that it's zinc based and it's not too heavy. At the farmer's market in Maine, there's this brand called Fresh Pickins. They're just blending zinc with beeswax—it smells great. We buy it each summer and use it as our body SPF.





Sunsifter Solar Cream, \$15

[Fresh Pickins](#)

[See On Fresh Pickins](#) →



Marie Veronique Everyday Coverage Tinted Sunscreen SPF 30, \$48

[Credo Beauty](#)

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If you had to narrow your skincare routine down to one product, what would it be?

Our cleanser. That's been a game-changer for my skin. I apply it to dry skin, and the almost tacky texture allows me to really decongest everything in my face, not just my pores, but also if I'm puffy from drinking too much wine the night before, or if I ate gluten, or my period is coming, or if I have tension because I grind my teeth too much. It allows me to have one to two minutes of a face massage and it has such an impact on my immediate mood and beautification.

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Wonder Valley Oil Face Cleanser /
\$65

Credo Beauty

See On Credo Beauty



What does your morning routine look like?

Right now, we spend six months of the year in Maine and six months of the year in the desert. And diet and lifestyle and environment couldn't be more opposite between these two places. Some days it might look like a morning walk in the desert. Here, it might be a swim. Then I try and get down a liter of water right off the bat, because I tend to forget, and gobble down a lot of vitamins. And a little bit of stretching, either qi gong or some light yoga. If I can have even a 15 or 30 minute buffer before looking at a screen in the morning, it profoundly affects my ability to take on the day and not get overwhelmed.

How do you wind down in the evenings?

I've always been an evening bather or shower-er. In the desert, we have a little outdoor clawfoot tub in the yard and it's pretty heavenly just to have a bath with a ton of Epsom salt and a little bit of our body oil. Sometimes I'll put oil in my hair and brush it out, or I'll do a hair mask. I like the ones from Tierra Sagrada, or I'll just mix some olive oil, honey and yogurt in a mug and throw that on. And then the cardamom candle from Le Feu De L'eau is like heaven for me, so I'll burn that. I like to do an olive oil sugar scrub, which is just coarse organic sugar, some olive oil, and my favorite essential oils. I'll do that outside once a week, because it's messy.





La Tierra Sagrada Treatment Hair Ritual, \$44

[Credo Beauty](#)

[See On Credo Beauty](#) →



Le Feu de L'Eau Cardamom Candle, \$60

[Le Feu de L'Eau](#)

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Any go-to makeup products?

I like Ilia's mascara—it holds up great for a natural product. And then I love everything from Kjaer Weiss: I use their eyeshadows, and they have beautiful, very matte lip colors. The packaging is so chic, the ingredients are clean, and they work really well.



Ilia Limitless Lash Mascara, \$28

[Sephora](#)

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Kjaer Weiss Eye Shadow Quadrant, \$34

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Do you have a beauty icon?

I have a whole network of women I admire and try to keep close: I think Amanda Bacon, who founded Moon Juice, is an incredible mother, friend, and business owner. The designer Pam Shamshiri, from Shamshiri Studios, is such a graceful female and strong leader, and she has incredible style. And Alexis Smart is really in touch with her intuition and ability to take care of and heal herself. She's pretty amazing.