

FASHION

COMPLEX QUESTION OF 'CLEAN' BEAUTY

Insiders weigh in on the burgeoning industry of eco-friendly products

New line delivers colourful tropical vibes

Collection reflects supermodel's Caribbean roots

ALEESHA HARRIS

Jamaican-Canadian supermodel Winnie Harlow recently teamed up with U.K. fashion retailer PrettyLittleThing for a chic and colourful collaboration.

The Toronto-born fashion model, who rose to fame following her appearance on America's Next Top Model in 2014, has since worked with a growing number of major fashion houses, including Tommy Hilfiger, Diesel, and Fendi.



Winnie Harlow

Harlow is also a prominent spokeswoman for the skin condition vitiligo, which sees skin colour loss in patches, and boasts an online following of nearly nine million fans. We recently caught up with Harlow to chat about the new collection, her personal style and more.

Q How would you describe your personal style?
A I would say my personal style is comfort, but glam. I love bright colours and bold prints and lots of accessories.

Q On any given day, what's your go-to look?
A I love sweats and matching sets. Anything that's easy and colourful, I love. I have to dress up constantly for my job, which is great, but means comfort and ease really is key for my day-to-day looks.

Q How did the collaboration with PrettyLittleThing come about?
A I have known Umar (Kamani, founder and CEO of the brand) and the PLT team for many years and we have always wanted to work together, and the timing has never aligned until now. I am so happy we could finally work together.

Q How would you describe the collection?
A Tropical and colourful. It was inspired by my Caribbean heritage.

Q Who is the collection for?
A I feel it's for everyone, and I hope it makes women feel sexy and confident this summer.

Q And, lastly, do you have a favourite design from the range? If so, which one and what makes it your top pick?
A I have so many! But anything tie-dye is my go-to — so I love those pieces.
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Gregg Renfrew points to the 2006 documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, as the jumping off point for her deep dive into environmental health.

"Subsequent to that was watching so many people struggling with fertility issues and giving birth to kids with significant health issues," Renfrew says. "As well as people being diagnosed with different types of cancers in their 30s and 40s, and most of them had no pre-existing genetic link to the disease."

These factors combined to ignite a personal passion for change within the American entrepreneur.

"I started to question what was going into the products and what was going on," Renfrew says. "And one thing I came to realize is that we had introduced all these tens of thousands of chemicals into commerce, most of which has never been tested for safety for the Earth or for human health."

"Those ingredients are showing up in everything — it's in our food, it's in our household cleaning products, it's in our cars and clothes, and it's also in our skin and personal care products."

Renfrew set out to create a brand that offered products that met her "new expectations."

Launched in 2013, Beautycounter was meant to fill the void between the "eco-friendly, earthy brands" that were available at the time and the "traditional brands that we've all grown up with and love that were high-performance and aspirational but were still filled with certain chemicals of concern," according to Renfrew.

The brand was about more than products though, it was designed to start a movement to "lead by example." In fact, the brand's name was meant to be a double entendre, Renfrew explains, to go up against, or counter, the beauty industry.

"I do think there are certainly people who have never wanted this story to be told," Renfrew says. "There's always backlash when you go up against an institution or an industry and you are going against the status quo."

In recent years, an ever-growing number of "clean beauty" brands and products have been introduced into the market. With many more expected to follow.

According to a 2021 report from Brandessence Market Research, the global clean beauty industry garnered revenue of more than US\$5.4 billion in 2020. That number is expected to grow to more than US\$11.5 billion by 2027.

With this increased interest, has come a growing debate about what exactly is "clean"?

"There's a lot of misinformation floating around. It's a complex issue. Creating safer, cleaner, high-performing products is not an easy thing to do," Renfrew says. "So, there's a lot of complexity in general around this whole process."

The lack of defined standards around what makes a product 'clean' or 'unclean' also hasn't helped to make things more clear. "Clean is not very regulated," Amy Liu, founder of the beauty brand Tower 28, says. "Because of that, brands can say what they want, to some degree."

It's this ambiguity that prompts Liu to point to retailers as a good resource for consumers who are confused about the true meaning of 'clean.'

"It's so important for brands to collaborate with retail partners like Sephora," Liu says. "Because they work with a 'no list' and we do have to be verified. And we do have to sign a contract that we do not have these certain ingredients in our products."

Realizing the demand for cleaner beauty options will not to continue to grow, many retailers have set out to help simplify the selection process.

Since 2018, beauty retailer Sephora has boasted a growing selection of conscious options under the umbrella of its Clean at Sephora seal.

"It really is confusing," Jane Nugent, the senior vice-president of



"It's a complex issue," Beautycounter founder and CEO Gregg Renfrew says of the "clean beauty" debate.



Sephora has expanded its line of clean beauty products since 2018. **SEPHORA**



Beautycounter Think Big All-In-One Mascara, \$35 **BEAUTYCOUNTER**



There's a lot of buzz around the word "clean." Models wear the Think Big All-In-One Mascara from Beautycounter. **BEAUTYCOUNTER**

merchandising at the company, says of the identification of clean products. "And that is exactly the reason we set out... to clarify it and to make it very transparent for the beauty community and for consumers in general.

"Because there was a lot of noise around what it was becoming." The Clean at Sephora designation started with products that met the list of 13 ingredients on the company's "without list." That list has evolved to include more than 50 ingredients, according to Nugent, also considering elements such as responsible packaging, a brand's climate commitment and ingredient sourcing.

"It evolves," Nugent says of the clean definition and ingredient lists, which is available on the brand's website. "We care about transparency, we care about putting all the information out there."

Shoppers Drug Mart recently revealed a product category called Thoughtful Choices, which offers a curated selection of cruelty-free products from various brands that are billed as being "mindful of our planet, featuring either partly- to fully recyclable packaging, ethically-sourced ingredients, or sustainable ingredients," according to the company.

Understanding individual ingredients is one of the trickiest elements of the clean beauty conversation, insiders say.

"It's really looking at every ingredient individually," says Greg Gonzalez, a co-founder of the skin

care company Youth to the People. "How can we look at the individual ingredient, and how can we look at the dose?"

"It really comes down to the dose of everything, even when it's something good, or potentially harmful."

Contrary to what some people might think, natural doesn't always mean safer. Just like clean doesn't always mean clean.

"I think people make 'clean' synonymous with 100 per cent natural, which is not always true," Liu says. "I actually believe in safe synthetics."

With any multi-faceted issue, especially one that is garnering so much consumer interest, education is essential.

"Continuing to educate on the words that can create fear is something that I'm really passionate about working on," Gonzalez says.

"We don't need to be afraid of the word 'chemical.' We're all chemicals, really. The air we breathe is chemicals, plants are made of chemicals. All matter, including ourselves, are chemicals. But that doesn't mean that all chemicals are good, either."

"And that's where there is so much education to be done."

The government of Canada has a list of banned or restricted ingredients, called the Cosmetic Ingredient Hotlist, available online. The "science-based document" is reviewed and updated periodically, according to the site. The list is used as an "administrative tool" by

Health Canada when considering products for release on the market within the country.

The Beautycounter team is pushing the governments in Canada and the U.S. on the topic of cosmetics reform in order to see more ingredients added to lists like this.

"The laws that exist in the U.S. are dated, they date back to 1938. They don't protect the health and safety of the citizens of our country," Renfrew explains. "And, while Canadians are farther along than we are, they also have citizens who are being unnecessarily subjected to toxic chemicals. From time to time, or every single day."

The company keeps a running list of more than 1,800 ingredients deemed "questionable or harmful" on its website that they say will never appear in their products.

According to Lindsay Dahl, the SVP of Social Mission at Beautycounter, the list is just one step in helping consumers better understand what 'clean' really means.

"Clean for us is not just banning ingredients," Dahl says. "Yes, there is a body of science that shows us that certain ingredients are harmful and should not be used in personal care products. But that doesn't tell us a lot about the safety of the products we're actually using every single morning."

"So, for us, everything that comes after banning ingredients is actually the most important thing for what 'clean' means to us."

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