

Stuff We Love: Test Divas best of 2019

Valentine's Day is the perfect time to share some love for our favourite skincare companies. As Test Divas, we are often blessed with product samples that promise to make us look years younger – and in some cases, they might. It's hard to be purely scientific about the effects, but we do our best to put these products through a fair test by using them for at least a month or two – often much longer, depending on how long the sample lasts – and often, sharing among at least two Test Divas who have different skin types or preferences.

Sometimes it's just a matter of who likes what smell, or who doesn't. We also see big differences in what types of products work best for what types of skin – our Test Divas are a mix of 20-something (plus a teenager/daughter who is known to “borrow” the best products), all the way up to my-age-is-none-of-your-business – and we definitely don't have the same requirements. Here are the products that our Test Divas enjoyed most last year. We won't wait another year before our next installment of Stuff We Love, so stay posted!

A big thank you to all of the companies that sent products in 2019! And don't despair – even if you aren't on this list, you might be included in a future Test Divas blog.

Popi's Best of 2019

Stemology: The **Cell Renew Hand and Nail Creme Complex** is one of the most effective, soothing lotions I've ever used on my hands. It has an almost brown colour and a silky consistency that soaks right in; the all-natural, vegan formula is also free of soy, gluten and petrochemicals, which I'm always happy to see. The brand's **Cell Renew Overnight Moisturizer** also became one of my addictions – I would even put a light layer on after my morning shower because my skin seemed to love it so much. The

packaging is brilliant; a press-down dispenser ensures that no dirt or air enters the container, so it also appealed to my hygiene-conscious instincts. The **Serum Complete** and **Renovare Facial Oil** were two more of my favourite products this year; ingredients include organic argan oil, organic chia seed oil, sea kelp bioferment, gotu kola and many other herbal sources. After using several Stemology products, I can count myself among this brand's biggest fans. The company bases its formulas on stem cell technology; although I don't know exactly what magic is involved, I can attest to its effectiveness. At the very least, these products seemed to slow down my aging clock by a year or two.

Tofino Soap Company: When I first smelled the **Sandalwood & Patchouli Botanical Perfume Oil**, I made a few "West Coast hippie" jokes – which I'm allowed to do because I was raised by two of them (and I've been called one)! But within a week or two I was addicted to this scent. I enjoyed it so much, I started applying the oil to the tops of my hands as a moisturizer of sorts – which worked quite nicely, too. One of four "Botanical Roll-ons," each scented oil blend comes in an ample bottle size that is relatively affordable; I'd love to try them all!

Cara Skin Care: After my teenager coveted the **Multi-Active Scrub Foaming Exfoliant**, I decided to steal it back – and fell in love. I don't usually apply soaps or harsh cleansers to my skin, but this foaming scrub left it feeling perfectly fresh and not overly dry. I use it once a week to exfoliate, and its gentle mix of walnut shells and rice bran in a botanical, glycerin base truly leaves my skin feeling squeaky clean.

Seafloa: I've loved all of their products so far, but a few stand out, especially the **Seabright Moisturizing Brightener** and **Sea Silk Massage Oil Blend**, with CBD. First, the moisturizer: My skin always tells me when anything is irritating, and I've had no adverse reactions to this cream. It's hyper-hydrating and goes on smoothly. Whether it's helping with my pigmentation, I'd need more time to tell – but I do know my rosacea-prone skin absolutely loves it! The massage oil is a recent acquisition, and because I live with two people who suffer from extreme back pain, we were the perfect test subjects. The oil doesn't feel greasy and is quickly absorbed. The CBD is subtle, but its relaxing effect is definitely more intense than the average massage oil. It's become the first product we

reach for when it's time to apply for some muscle pain relief, even compared to a prescription cream.

Image Skincare: Once my teenage daughter discovered these products on my shelf, I had a hard time wrestling them away from her. The **Vital C Hydrating Intense Moisturizer** and **Vital C Hydrating Facial Cleanser** are her go-to's, and her skin is flawless. Both products seem to agree with my skin, too – and we have very different complexions!

Buck Naked Soap Company: When these products came into the office, the smell was so good I hesitated to bring them home because it was almost like coming to the spa every day when I sat down at my desk. I finally broke down and started bringing them home one by one, and so far I've loved them all (with two bath bombs still waiting to be tested). The delicious-smelling **Purple Brazilian Clay Coconut Milk Bath** is nice to use alone or combine with any of the bath bombs (I tried **Lavender & Rosemary** and **Rose & Moroccan Red Clay**), but be forewarned: herbal bits and grit will need a good rinse from the tub after you're done bathing. It's worth a bit of extra work – the heady aromas make any bath feel like spa time. The soaps are also excellent, hand-crafted in small batches; they were so pretty and smelled so good, I didn't want to use them, but eventually did. The **Coffee Start Up Soap** was one of my family's favourites, especially good for back scrubs in the shower.

Scentuals: I tested the **Balance** roll-on essential oil (“to help bring emotional balance”) and it became a ritual to use it on my wrists several times daily. The fresh, sweet scent includes citrus, cypress, ylang ylang and juniper berry. I'd love to try their other aromatherapy products because this little bottle was a powerful stress-buster! Another serum my skin loved was the **Vitamin C Facial Serum**, which is lighter than most of the others I prefer; for my skin, it was the first layer before a thicker moisturizer, but my daughter could use this serum without any other products. For someone who can't tolerate heavier oils, this is the ideal serum. Speaking of which...

I LOVE SO MANY SERUMS! In the past few years, I've discovered my skin will use as much serum as I can feed it. The following products are just a few of the best.

Zaman Skincare: Sleeping Beauty and **Rise & Shine** serums are designed specifically for night or day use, but I found that both agreed with my skin no matter when (or how often) they were applied. Black cumin seed oil is a primary ingredient in the night serum, and many other organic botanicals and nourishing ingredients combine to create the light but hydrating daytime formula. I had a hard time deciding which one I liked best, so I recommend both.

Bella Schneider Beauty: I tried two BSB serums, **Cupuacu Super Hydrating Oil** and **Revive Oil**, and I loved them both! The formulas are lightly scented and easy to absorb but might be too rich for a younger/oilier skin type. I do tend to break out with heavier oils, though, and neither of these serums caused any adverse effects. I was able to slather them on, and my skin kept asking for more.

Odacité: I've only tried the one product, but if the **All-Embracing Serum (Watermelon & Hibiscus)** is any indication of the rest of the line, there's no doubt why this company has become so popular. The serum has a rich scent and nourishing effect. When it was in my cabinet, it was often the first product I'd reach for. At the bottom of the bottle, I discovered what appears to be an amethyst bead – which might explain why it's labelled "crystal-infused." You can read more about the company [here](#).

Jana's Best of 2019

Alchimie Forever: Advanced Retinol Serum combines a high concentration of 0.75% retinol with time-release technology for a gentler delivery system. A cocktail of antioxidants including apple stem cell extract, edelweiss and green tea rejuvenated my skin by preventing and correcting sun damage. Signature ingredients like the European blueberry, in synergy with hydrating hyaluronic acid, jojoba and collagen-boosting red clover, not only invigorated my skin but helped minimize side effects typically associated with retinol. The end result after four weeks: a visible reduction in the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles and uneven pigmentation.

Swissline by Dermalab: This Swiss company combines the latest scientific research with the best natural ingredients the country offers,

driven by a guiding philosophy that combines “back-to-nature simplicity with paramedical sophistication.” Their **Water Shock Bi-Phase Make-Up Remover** won full marks for the gentle and silky feel of its alcohol-free lotion that beautifully soothed and smoothed my skin while effectively removing makeup. The lotion boosts water retention in the epidermis, detoxifies and fights fine lines. After applying it every night for eight weeks to all parts of my face, including eyes and lips, my naturally dry skin felt clean and dewy.

Seaflo: This company’s support of the environment gains them a special “feel good” spot on the *Spa Inc.* podium. I applied their **Sea Therapy Eye Contour Gel** and **Sea Therapy Recovery Facial Gel** for four weeks both morning and night. The light, creamy lotion felt as though my face had been softly sprayed with mineral-rich ocean waters. The skin around the eyes is thinner, so it’s important to avoid heavy oils that can clog sebaceous glands. Both products hydrate and help diminish fine lines and wrinkles. A natural scent, reminiscent of sea breezes, transported me to the pristine beaches of British Columbia.

Andrea’s Best of 2019

Kypris Beauty: Cerulean Soothing Hydration Recovery Mask is a part of my “self-care Sunday” ritual due to its soothing, hydrating and softening effects. The packaging, texture, botanical ingredients and results make it one of the most luxurious products I’ve ever tried.

Eminence Organics: Snow Mushroom & Reishi Masque is the ultimate de-puffing mask. I tend to use this mask after a long week to help remove impurities and give my skin a tighter appearance.

Sorella Apothecary: Make sure not to use the **Peach and Honey Mask** on an empty stomach... as it smells so good, you could eat it. It is developed for hydrating and brightening effects, with essential antioxidants, vitamins and minerals. This mask truly kept my skin hydrated for hours.

FRÉ Skincare: Protect Me Defense Facial Moisturizer comes with me everywhere; this product has become essential to my busy routine, which

includes a variety of activities. The moisturizer is ultra-light, deeply nourishing, absorbs quickly and features an SPF-30 and sweat resistance. **Laneige: Water Bank Moisture Cream** should be on every Canadian's winter remedies list. When my skin needs hydration, this superfood-infused cream is my go-to. Not only did it nourish my skin over the holidays, it also helped my skin feel more resilient.

Naked Skincare & Apothecary: Eye Treatment is a lightweight serum that has been my saviour after long restless nights. Its blend of coffee and chamomile oils, alongside carrot seed oil, rosehip oil and other blends helps to reduce puffiness and stimulate collagen. After only a couple of drops and a few minutes, puffiness around my eyes disappears.

GM Collin: If you looked into my purse, you would see the **Repair Lip Balm** sitting right on top. Through winter, this lip balm helped me to exfoliate my lips with one side and then strengthen, relieve and soothe my lips with the balm. It truly provides the ultimate hydration for dry, chapped lips.

Soon Skincare: This was my first experience with a lip mask, and I could not have been more pleased with the **Strawberry Lip Mask with Collagen**. It is the perfect treatment before a special event as it diminishes fine lines, plumps the lips and hydrates the entire mouth area. Not only is it effective, but it also creates an Instagram-worthy picture moment.

NIU Body: Piña Colada Sugar Lip Polish not only exfoliates and moisturizes your lips, but it also makes you daydream of being on a beach with an actual piña colada in your hand. This is a great product to use before a makeup application or as a daily lip lifesaver.

Buck Naked Soap Company: As someone who has eczema, it often can be hard to find a soap that doesn't irritate patches on the skin. The **Coffee Start Up Soap** has helped soothe my dry skin while also improving my eczema. It became like a morning coffee for my skin.

Tofino Soap Company: Calm Soaking Salts is a stress-relieving bath soak that has become part of my "self-care Sunday" routine, as it truly makes me feel calm. Add ¼ cup to your bath and get ready to relax.

Teaology: Green Tea Reshaping Body Scrub has become an important part of my shower routine. The exfoliating salts not only remove dead skin cells, but the antioxidants, green tea extract, caffeine and vitamins have helped to tone and rejuvenate my skin.

Graydon Skincare: Before Bed Spray has become critical to my sleep routine, and in my opinion, should be used in spa treatment rooms across the country. As someone who has a hard time falling asleep, I've tried countless diffusers, eye masks, music and phone apps with no luck. This spray has significantly improved my sleeping habits. I spray this on my bed almost every night. The pure lavender and sweet orange help to promote a sense of relaxation, while it also keeps my pillow and sheets smelling extra fresh.

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