

SKIN DEEP

Wendy Flynn meets the couple who are on a mission to make the 'Rolls-Royce of soaps' keeping everything natural





Natroma Pure Undiluted
Essential Oils, from £2



How could one little bar of soap change a life? Well it could, and it did for husband and wife Sarah and Paul King.

After buying soap on a holiday in Canada, Paul's eczema eased and when the couple twigged it was because he was using a natural product they returned from holiday with a supply of soaps. But the story didn't end there.

When Sarah couldn't find a replacement at home she decided to investigate making her own, and it eventually led to Paul, a telecoms manager, and Sarah, a senior civil servant, ditching their day jobs and setting up The Natural Soapworks in 2006. Two years later they launched Natroma, a range of skincare products and last year adopted Natroma as their company name because it best reflects the wider business. The small Stourbridge company has scooped prestigious Green Parent awards for its Carrot and Calendula soap; its Q10 facial oil serum and its nail silk balm. It has built a loyal customer base of people looking for a whole range of natural and organic bathing, aromatherapy and skincare products.

Sitting at her retail outlet at the Ruskin Glass Centre and looking back at that life-

changing moment, Sarah observes with a wry smile: "And all from one bar of soap!" But that soap really made a difference. She says: "With eczema a person tends to scratch and inflame the skin and broken skin can become infected. Paul had used various skin products and we had never given it much thought. But on that holiday in Canada I realised that Paul had stopped scratching and his skin was a lot calmer. "When we ran out of soap at home I began to make it and, me being me, I wanted to make the very best – the Rolls Royce of soaps."

Sarah spent three years researching and making soaps until she perfected a cold process soap formulation, a traditional way of making soap in which glycerine, which is naturally kind to the skin, remains in the soap. She also qualified as a clinical aromatherapist with the International Federation of Professional Aromatherapists. "Making soap is a very long process. It comes together quite quickly but it has to cure like cheese. You have to wait for four weeks to test it and when you find out it doesn't work you have to go back to the drawing board."



Natroma Organic Palm-Free
Soap, £4.75 per 95g

In Sarah's many test batches she experimented to get a soap that that was pleasant to use but didn't strip the skin of its natural oils. She was also looking for a soft, fluffy, bubbly lather and a bar that is long lasting. And that's not simple. In fact soap making is as much a science as it is an art. It requires careful calculation to get the perfect balance of ingredients to create the chemical reaction to neutralise the acid and alkali ingredients that create soap, and the formula differs depending on the oils used. "I love chemistry. It was the chemistry that really got to me," says Sarah, who can explain in ➔



full scientific detail the different production methods used in natural soap which is kind to the skin and their mass market equivalent which some people find hard to tolerate.

Today Sarah uses a palette of 20 essential oils in soaps including, lavender, chamomile, geranium, mandarin, lemongrass, bergamot, ylang ylang and patchouli and rosewood. Since the early days of handmade goats' milk soap and organic palm free soaps their range has expanded exponentially. Along with the bath melts and bath salts, you can buy organic cleanser, toner and moisturiser, lip balm and organic body balms as well as a range of natural home fragrance essential oils and diffusers, and a range of beautiful gifts. Like Paul, Sarah too has sensitive skin, and the skincare ranges started as her own personal quest to use natural products. Only skin-kind ingredients are used, such as organic botanical oils like rosehip, borage and jojoba with luxurious essential oils such as rose, argan, neroli, chamomile and jasmine. All Natroma skincare products comply with EU regulations on cosmetics and are on the EU's cosmetic database.

The company's green credentials are impeccable. Their products are not tested on animals and they are Leaping Bunny accredited, which means they are regularly audited to ensure there is no animal testing anywhere in their supply chain. Any oils they use are ethically produced from sustainable sources, the goats' milk used in their soaps is supplied locally by Vale Head Farm, owned by the Ruskin Land Trust, and their packaging is

simple, using recyclable materials, paper, glass and biodegradable cellulose bags.

Having trained in aromatherapy, Sarah offers aromatherapy massage and facials at Natroma Holistic. Paul, inspired by his wife, trained as a level four Sports Massage Therapist and is a member of the Federation in Holistic Therapists. The couple have big plans but they are aiming for organic growth which does not compromise on quality. They make their products in small batches so that everything on their shelves is fresh and they are careful who they partner with. "It is fair to say that we are picky about who stocks our products since we do not want them sitting alongside items that contain synthetic colours, fragrances or skin irritating ingredients. Typically our stockists are health shops, salons and holistic therapists."

Sarah and Paul keep their prices as low as possible. Their lip silk balm sells for £2.50; a large bar of organic soap for £4.75 and a facial moisturiser for £9.95. "We keep the prices down because we don't want it to be an unaffordable luxury. I know a lot of people buy our products as gifts but we also want people to be able to use our products every day. I don't see why you have to put chemicals on your skin when there are natural alternatives." **L**

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Natroma Goat's Milk Soaps,
from £4



Natroma Organic Fizzing Bath Melts,
£2.25 each



Natroma Organic Facial Skincare
Facial Cleanser, £9.95, Organic Hydrolat
Toner, £8.95, Q10 Oil Serum, £8.95,
Q10 Moisturiser, £18.75



Natroma Nail Silk, organic nail and
cuticle balm, £6



Organic Festive Soap Slice Hamper
Artisan aromatherapy soaps, £10