

Pretty Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Leigh Joseph

JVN // God, I feel gorgeous. Welcome to Pretty Curious, I'm Jonathan Van Ness, and every other week I sit down with a stunning expert to talk all things skincare, hair care, self-care, surgeries, injections, beyond; all of it! We are talking about beauty. But this week we're speaking with ethnobotanist and beauty brand founder Leigh Joseph. Leigh created Skwálwen Botanicals, which is an Indigenous skincare brand focused on using plant science and cultural knowledge to make amazing and effective products. She told us all about how they sustainably harvest and source their botanicals, as well as how we can all become more connected to the land. But before we get to Leigh and that gorgeous conversation, it's time for our Get Ready with Me segment.

Honey, welcome to Pretty Curious. Let's get into it. For our first recommendation of the week when it comes to body care; now, you know that I'm an Herbivore girlie. You probably know I love Herbivore, if you've listened to Pretty Curious before, because I really like that company, For body care this week, I am recommending an exfoliant. A lot of times when it is temperature changes, you know we're going through fall; if you're in the southern hemisphere, you're coming into spring: skin just get a little bit dry, a little bit dull when we go through big seasonal changes. I know that I've been having some really dry feet, really dry elbows, dry knees lately, so I'm busting back out my exfoliant. And also, I was going through a pretty bad psoriasis flare up this summer and it's really been at bay. I'm bringing out an oldie, but a goodie; I've been using this exfoliant for years. It's called Coco Rose Exfoliating Body Scrub by Herbivore. It has a beautiful scent, but it's just a really beautiful, clean formula. It's really effective. I like to apply it to dry areas and let it sit for like maybe 30 seconds to a minute before I actually start to buff. And it is just gorgeous. It doesn't over exfoliate the skin and I have pretty sensitive skin, so I'm kind of prone to like an over exfoliation moment. And this just doesn't do that. It also leaves this really beautiful hydration with the coconut oil in there. So try it out. Herbivore: we love ya. Coco Rose Exfoliating Body Scrub.

Moving on to skin care of the week. Okay, so I got to—full disclosure—try the whole Skwálwen line before we had Leigh on this episode that's coming up. And it blew me away. All of her products are incredible. There was one oil that really stood out to me, though. It's the Kalkay Wild Rose Nourishing Facial Oil. It is so beautiful. It's luxurious, but absorbs quickly. It doesn't feel greasy. It gave me a beautiful glow. I actually took it with me after using it, and it's like part of my normal skincare routine for these last few weeks since I got to interview Leigh. I've just been loving it. Try it out. I'm a huge fan of her line, so get into some Skwálwen when you have the time, honey.

Okay, haircare of the week. If you are a curly girlie, I am so excited that we have air dry cream, more back in stock. If you go on Sephora.com, air dry cream is back in stock. It's been kind of hard to find, but I just am loving it. And one hair cocktail that I have just been living for lately: Ouidad makes the most amazing curly foam. And I've been mixing that curly foam with air dry cream and it is so incredible. I like to put on the air dry cream first and then I go over the top of that with the foam. Curly girlies: if you have not been playing

with the foam, get into it, it's beautiful. I also like our Embody Foam for curls, but the Ouidad foam is just a little bit different. So I love that little mix up. Go for it, try it out if you'd like. Moving on. Y'all, I don't know if you've been noticing but I've really been living my life with eyeshadows; getting way more into using color and just being a lot more expressive with my eye makeup. And I have been having issues getting my color to really stick and not transfer and not kind of have a lot of fallout. So a lot of y'all were saying you got to try an eyeshadow primer. So I finally started using one; I've been using the Urban Decay Eyeshadow Primer; it's really is effective. It's nice. I don't necessarily know, you know, how "clean" the formula is, but it is really efficacious. It really works. I've been loving using it. Since I've been using the eyeshadow primer, my eyeshadow just looks so much better, less splotchy, more even; it last way longer, till the end of the night, still looking good. So if you've been having issues with like smudgy, too much movement eyeshadow, get into an eyeshadow primer. It really works.

Now moving into beauty trends and hot takes. I've been seeing really beautiful, more rich, tonal browns. I feel like a lot of clients are just not really scared of that warm brunette now; that cowboy red or like that cowboy copper, which is kind of like that beautiful, like red-brown has really been having a moment. So I just feel like warm hair tones, people are getting less scared of warmth, which I love; golden, rich, warm brunette tones. And we're even seeing that warmth through some really beautiful golden blonde. So I think we're in a season of warmth. Love to see it. Honey, that was all the time we have for our Get Ready with Me segment. Hope you're feeling beautiful. You have any beauty questions? Please submit them. You can slide into our DM's @curiouswithjvn. Any beauty questions, you can also submit them at askjvn.com. But without any further ado, honey, let's get to our conversation of the week with the founder of Skwálwen Botanicals, Leigh Joseph. Leigh, how are you today?

LEIGH JOSEPH // I am doing so well. Thank you so much for having me here.

JVN // First of all, congratulations on Skwálwen. What a beautiful line; y'all order it yesterday. This is a beautiful line. You also wrote this incredible book *Held by the Land: A Guide to Indigenous Plants for Wellness* by Leigh Joseph. This book is beautiful. So just congratulations. I'm so excited for you. Everything about your line is absolutely stunning. But before we get into it, what's an ethnobotanist?

LEIGH JOSEPH // An ethnobotanist is someone who studies the cultural interrelationships between people and plants. I have taken a very academic path with ethnobotany. I'm about to defend my Ph.D. and so I have kind of basically just exhausted the academic path. I'm going...I'm getting my doctorate. I've, I'm going to be going and sitting in front of my committee in my community, which is really cool. You know, they're all going to come here. We're going to sit two people who are involved in my research from my my Squamish community here, Indigenous community, can can sit and witness and ask questions. But so basically, I've taken this really academic path that is, has been part Western science because I love botany, I love learning about the biochemistry of plants, the ecology of plants. So I had my flashcards for my Latin plant names. I loved the science part of it. I loved it. When I started my masters, I received an audio recording from my supervisor that was of

my ancestors saying the plant names in Skwxwú7mesh sníchim, which is in our Indigenous language. This was such a treasure. I put it on my iPod at the time and listened to it as I commuted on the bus back and forth to the university. I, I reveled in it. And then I started to feel sad. And it was this feeling that I wanted this language, these sounds, these words to not be so foreign. I wanted them to be a part of me. I wanted to know them, to be able to speak them. And I couldn't because, you know, my my family, my grandparents on my dad's side are both residential school survivors. My ancestors have endured centuries of messaging, of barriers, of attempted conditioning and assimilation to say: your language does not belong here. You do not speak the language because it's it's evil, it's wrong. And the repercussions of that through my grandparents generation, my parents, have been, you know, an internalized shame and a literal fear of speaking the language. And so because of that, I didn't get a chance to learn the language growing up. My dad didn't get a chance to learn the language growing up.

And so by listening to these speakers speak it so beautifully, so easily; by feeling, you know, how I am on the outside of that, it really reflected back to me the first time like this, this critical lens that all of a sudden this field I'm studying: it was so clear to me that this field started in very colonial roots. It's a very extractive area of academic research. You know, how can we take these native plants and utilize them to our benefit and not give any benefits back to the community or even acknowledgment? Right. So so that's problematic. And then I'm in my masters and I'm looking at all the literature that I'm reading, and it's either old ethnographies from white ethnographers speaking about Indigenous people in very disrespectful ways—that being said, within those ethnographies there's these treasures of information—and then it's it's ethnobotanists and, you know, people in my field, none of whom are Indigenous. So what I felt in that moment was this like tenderness of like identity and belonging and questioning and around that. And then also this, you know, I didn't see myself reflected in the field. And so that's a really long way of coming around to say that Skwálwen came out of all of that. And then I got to this point where I just wanted to put out something beautiful. I wanted to put out something creative, and I wanted to unapologetically do that through an Indigenous lens. And so Skwálwen really has become the foundation to do that and to share the imagery, the language, the storytelling, the absolute like luxurious and beautiful aspects of our plant based medicines. And it's also brought a lot of joy and it's also created a platform that is very different than writing academic journal papers. And creates a different kind of conversation and ability to really make some tangible action-based decisions kind of through the business that really follow the ethos of everything else, so they just kind of laid out.

JVN // Uh, I am crying. That was like ah-mazing. So, okay, so, so Skwálwen was founded in...?

LEIGH JOSEPH // 2018.

JVN // Generally as a view to beauty, like getting ready, getting unready: what have been some of the problems that you've identified with like... were you just seeing folks with like bumpy skin and just...Or were you just like, "I'm sick of seeing all these problems and I

know that my stuff can fix it." Like, what were you trying to fix like from a, like, beauty standpoint or, like, help with?

LEIGH JOSEPH // The problem that I identify in that is, you know, in the skincare space, I saw a lot of plant based brands, but I was having trouble finding products that were really effective, that were like, I love plants, clearly. So, you know, this this area of like plant magic and active ingredients and gentle on the skin, that is what I was looking for. And so as I started to formulate these products and think about, okay, let's think about Kalkáy, which is the Squamish word for wild rose. Wild rose and rose is such a you know, that's not a new ingredient to beauty. It has such benefits, topically for soothing, for reducing redness, being generally well tolerated across so many skin types. And it also happens to be one of my absolute favorite plants in the summer. You can walk down a trail and smell it before you see it because of the heat of the day, it's just that fragrance of wild rose is so beautiful. It's delicate and it's not sort of that powdery rose smell. It's a really delicate, beautiful smell. So that is one of our key lines. The Kalkáy line draws on various aspects of rose ingredients, whether that be beautiful oils infused with organic rosehips, rose hydra salts blended with hyaluronic acid, you know, in the toner. It's really looking at, at again, yeah, that intersection between like luxury, plant based, having beautiful actives but still being really tolerated by sensitive skin.

JVN // You briefly touched on this earlier, but it's like because of your awareness for environment and because of your respect for the land and because of your history and your priorities; like the sourcing, the harvesting, the the awareness of where all of your ingredients are coming from with Skwálwen; can you tell us about like what your process like with, around that is?

LEIGH JOSEPH // When I started Skwálwen, it was literally in my kitchen making salves, making lip balms, making teas to gift to elders in community. Now we're widely distributed. We're looking at expanding into U.S. retail distribution. As the business has scaled, I've had to have this ongoing conversation with myself because it started; everything was hand harvested. It has started to necessarily move away from that because my ethos around sourcing botanicals is I don't want to be just scaling my impact on wild plant populations. So I've had to, to this point, take a blended approach of sourcing really great transparency, transparent botanical suppliers; so often small organic farms, Indigenous community community gardens and firms partnering with growers locally to grow some of these botanicals for Skwálwen. And then there are some really unique ingredients like in the Shkweñ Rainforest Rejuvenating Bath and Body Oil, that has some bark ingredients in it from a plant known as: in Squamish it's Ch'átyáy, the English name is Devil's Club and the Latin name is *Opllopanax horridus*. You know, it's not commercially available. It's very culturally sensitive and important. So this is one that I want to keep the hand harvesting in, within our team because we're able to apply all of the sustainability ethos, the cultural practices around harvesting. It's formulated to not require a large amount. So, you know, a harvest we can spread it out over the territory and our impact is very, very low. And then there's some sustainability practices with harvesting, which I love. With that plant, it has what's called nodes on the stem each year where it grows taller. If you snip this plant below one of those nodes and plant it back in the ground, each of those nodes can send out

roots. So that plant where you've harvested from, you're putting something back. And that's really a cultural teaching is: when you take something away, where is the reciprocity, how are you giving back?

JVN // Top three, like not... I know it's hard because ask me and I'm like I don't want to. But like: top three who's on your, who's your top three for the people; just like, go to the website yesterday, you have to get it because it's available at skwalwen.com?

LEIGH JOSEPH // Yes.

JVN // Uh, so yeah top three: if people asked you to do a top three right now, what would it be?

LEIGH JOSEPH // Yes! Our Tewin'xw Cranberry Rose Glow Facial Serum. Tewin'xw is a Squamish word for berry. This is a really antioxidant rich blend of cold pressed berry seed oils, squalene; just a gorgeous formulation that will leave you glowing, will leave your skin hydrated and moisturized. And it's just all the things we love. I love that product. The Kalkáy Wild Rose Refreshing Toner, which is formulated with Rose and Chamomile Floral Waters and hyaluronic acid. I love to use those together, actually. I'll do one pump of the serum with a spritz of the toner and then pat that, pat that on my face after cleansing and toning. And our Kalkáy Wild Rose Facial Oil is a really wonderful moisturizer. It's very simple in its formulation. It's beautiful oils that are infused with rosehip and scented slightly with chamomile. And it just has a really gorgeous, gentle, nourishing, light feel. All of my products—I don't like feeling residual oil or anything heavy on my skin—so all of the products are formulated to feel very fast absorbing, light, but still very nourishing, hydrating.

JVN // Oh, also, what are your earrings and are those for sale too or are there, are those custom? Like do you need to start an earring jewelry line too?

LEIGH JOSEPH // Oh, I wish. Okay, I have already started my earring jewelry collection and it has expanded to three different earrings stands. Pretty much like 90, no, like 100% Indigenous artisans. Honestly, beadwork, okay, this is Bronwyn Butterfield. She is an incredible Indigenous beader. She doesn't do very many drops, but on her Instagram she will announce them. She does these gorgeous...like because these are, these are like hanging beaded floral...

JVN // Chandelier. Beauty. Yes.

LEIGH JOSEPH // So, Bronwyn Butterfield: She is just an incredible beader and I absolutely love wearing her pieces. I love wearing other Indigenous pieces. It's just such a, you know...

JVN // These earrings are just like next fucking level. I try not to go off about things that people can't see too much but these earrings are just too good. So anyway. Are you excited for our rapid fire round?

LEIGH JOSEPH // I'm so excited.

JVN // What's your go to budget beauty recommendation?

LEIGH JOSEPH // Okay. My budget beauty recommendation in the winter time and really any time is actually our Kw'as lip balm. It is so nourishing. I have one in every single pocket and I cannot leave home without it.

JVN // Splurge recommendation.

LEIGH JOSEPH // So I really love using some products from a brand called Dr. Loretta that are really active but gentle. So the Concentrated Firming Serum with retinol is something that I love to use at nighttime a few times a week.

JVN // And maybe that's why, because there's like literally not like a pore. You have like the most, like gorgeous fuckin poreless-ass glowy like unbothered skin so, yes. Must keep in stock recommendation; never runs out; going to end up on hoarders; like the closet behind you is full of it.

LEIGH JOSEPH // Yes. So I hope I'm saying their brand name properly: Eadem, a BIPOC-founded, melanated-conscious skin brand: Eadem; their Dew Dream Cleansing Balm is a really wonderful addition, like to take off makeup at the end of the day, just to get that cleansing going and really melt everything off at the end of the day. I love that product.

JVN // Oh my God, come through. Okay, slayings, seconds or storage? Slaying: a new product that you're obsessed with right now.

LEIGH JOSEPH // Okay, I will tease a feature drop: every morning, I have been using the approved formula for our tinted SPF that will be coming out. It's a long process, but I have all these samples that I keep using in the morning. It's tinted; it has cranberry seed oil and it has squalene in it. So it's really like a functional SPF because that was really a gap that I saw in our you know, in our product offerings. And SPF is so, so key. So I love that product.

JVN // Damn! You guys, SPF is really hard, it has to go through like all these like approvals and like the government is like it's like; the government's always involved but it's like a little bit more involved on SPF cause you got to get all these different approvals because it's like health related and stuff. Congratulations Leigh, that's huge. I'm so excited for that. I'm so excited for you. Seconds: a product that deserves a comeback, honey. It was a thing in the '80s, '90s, but it's not now. What's up?

LEIGH JOSEPH // Okay, so this might be a bit random. When I was 12, I would take my allowance to the body shop and I would get skin care products. And there was this product called Japanese Cleansing Grains in a cute cardboard tube. It was literally like ground up grains that you would use as a gentle exfoliator or as a gentle mask. And I absolutely loved that product. And I don't think it exists anymore.

JVN // Oh my god that might be one the best answers we've ever done. I love like a classic bath or body works moment. Storage: something that's had its day in the sun. If you see this one more fucking time on social, you've had it.

LEIGH JOSEPH // Oh gosh, I would have to say any really, really, really thick kind of chalky, you know, facial coverage kind of foundation. I think it's just it just makes me feel a bit claustrophobic. I don't know. I'm sure there's a much broader conversation about that, but I think this is a moment to let our skin shine, to really look at inside out beauty and ways to really kind of just let that luminosity glow, if possible. And natural products can really help with calming the skin and letting that shine.

JVN // Yes! What's an iconic look that inspires you to this day, like she's giving vintage.

LEIGH JOSEPH // Honestly, I have some old photos of my Granny Rose. Her skin is just so gorgeous. She has understated, just beautiful makeup application. Her hair is like perfectly waved and just, you know, gorgeous. And when I think of this photo of my Granny Rose, I just think about, like, for me, just the kind of epitome of that, like natural, luminous, just beautiful skin and just composure and everything about her.

JVN // Centerfold beauty moment: what's an iconic look that inspires you to this day?

LEIGH JOSEPH // Okay, this is a recent one. Quannah Chasinghorse: Indigenous model and activist. Her second appearance at the Met Gala, she wore incredible Indigenous beadwork. She had this gorgeous flowing blue gown. She had makeup that incorporated Cheekbone Beauty, which is an Indigenous makeup brand out of Canada. She just was the walking sort of epitome of just like beauty and representation and just I'm here. And that look really just stayed with me as gorgeous.

JVN // Leigh!! Okay, is there any look that like, is there a beauty look that we've yet to see but absolutely need to see or like something you think is like just like on the precipice of like being at the forefront?

LEIGH JOSEPH // Okay, so I don't know, like, I hope I'm understanding the question correctly because what comes into my mind when I think about a beauty moment is more like this scene of...okay, because we're Indigenous beauty brand, it's like this scene of Indigenous models, you know, just like people, you know, representation, beauty, on the land, glowing skin, all different, you know, like just tones of beautiful, healthy, sensuous, glowing skin, standing strong, standing proud, wearing Indigenous designers, wearing Indigenous jewelry and stepping into that power and sharing that with the world.

JVN // With Skwálwen Botanicals as the skin care that, like, did all of the makeup like skin and then it'd be like Cheekbone Beauty does all the makeup or something. I'm obsessed with that moment, that's the best moment ever. It's happening. Leigh, thank you so much for coming on Pretty Curious. What's on the horizon for you and for Skwálwen Botanicals? Where can we follow along? Are you really active on TT? Are you over on IG girl, like, what's up with the social work? Where can we follow you? Is yours the same as Skwálwen

Botanicals? Are you more like I'm giving you botany over here and I'm giving you beauty over here. Like where can we really be all up in your grill?

LEIGH JOSEPH // So we are active on Instagram and it is S̄kwálwen Botanicals as the tag. On TikTok, we're really looking at doing more of that in depth botany education and we get a lot of engagement around you know, the talks and yeah, and then of course on our website we have newsletters and blogs that come out that can really kind of unpack, you know, more about our products and our ethos as a brand.

JVN // Leigh Joseph thank you so much for coming on. We love you so much. Y'all follow always S̄kwálwen Botanicals. Leigh, do you do like a personal gram on Insta or are you more like on the front facing of like S̄kwálwen?.

LEIGH JOSEPH // More on the front facing of S̄kwálwen. But I do have a personal Insta. But honestly it's like...

JVN // We're just going to push S̄kwálwen. We're going for S̄kwálwen. Yeah, follow S̄kwálwen, Leigh will be on there. You're not going to keep us thirsty for like Leigh content on S̄kwálwen right? Like you'll put yourself on there and like, be on there a lot.

LEIGH JOSEPH // On, I'm on there.

JVN // Okay, yeah, because we want to be all up on there too. We love S̄kwálwen Botanicals. Thank you so much for coming on.

LEIGH JOSEPH // Thank you so much for having me on. It's been such a pleasure to speak with you, Jonathan.

JVN // You've been listening to Pretty Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. You can learn more about this week's guest and the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on, and you can follow us on Instagram at @curiouswithjvn. Pretty Curious drops every other Monday, wherever you get your podcasts. Make sure to tune in next Monday for an episode of Curious Now and every Wednesday for Getting Curious. But you still can't get enough queen? I feel you! You can subscribe to Extra Curious on Apple Podcasts for commercial free listening, and our subscription only show, Ask JVN, where we're talking sex, relationships and so much more. Our engineer is Nathaniel McClure. Our theme music is also composed by Nathaniel McClure. Pretty Curious is produced by me, Chris McClure and Allison Weiss with production support from Julie Carrillo, Anne Curry and Chad Hall.