



Our Hen House

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Interview with Rachel Winard

By OUR HEN HOUSE

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*Following is a transcript of an interview with **RACHEL WINARD** conducted by **JASMIN SINGER** and **MARIANN SULLIVAN** of [Our Hen House](#), for the [Our Hen House podcast](#). The interview aired on Episode 237.*

ALESSANDRA: We'll start off today's highlight reel with Rachel Winard, the founder of the Brooklyn-based vegan skincare company Soapwalla, whose all-natural products are nourishing enough to eat. After developing an autoimmune disease that ravages the skin, Rachel stepped away from the drugstore aisles and into her kitchen to develop skincare products with the philosophy of "If I refuse to put something *in* my body, I don't want to put it *on* my body either." You can find Rachel's work at [soapwallakitchen.com](#).

JASMIN: Rachel, I'm so excited that you're joining us today in Our Hen House. Welcome to Our Hen House!

RACHEL: Thank you so much for having me, I'm so excited to be here.

JASMIN: We're so excited to have you.

MARIANN: We're totally excited.

JASMIN: You're the woman responsible for my armpits smelling good.

RACHEL: Yay!

MARIANN: Which we're all very grateful for, Rachel.

JASMIN: Seriously!

MARIANN: Honey, enough.

JASMIN: Well, listen, so I ordered your deodorant because I was having a little bit of an issue.

MARIANN: Yeah, you couldn't find one.

JASMIN: I couldn't find a good vegan deodorant with no chemicals and no animal testing. And I put on a kind of unofficial Facebook survey, like, "Yo, what kind of deodorants do you use?" And of course, this is a passionate subject amongst vegans.

MARIANN: No, vegans talk about little other than the things mentioned in that video and deodorant.

JASMIN: Yeah, pretty much. And someone was like, "Soapwalla. Stop looking, just order it." So I did, it came in the mail, and I saw that the return address was Brooklyn. So I looked you up and I found that you're here in Brooklyn, your company is in Brooklyn, all of your products are Brooklyn-made, they're all totally vegan and cruelty-free

MARIANN: We were so excited.

JASMIN: And they're really good! So I was so thrilled when you decided to join us today and you agreed to be our guest.

MARIANN: And we're all grateful about the deodorant thing.

JASMIN: Yeah, seriously. Do you want to take a little whiff?

RACHEL: Sure.

JASMIN: See?

RACHEL: Oh, it smells beautiful.

MARIANN: She's so much better of a person than I am.

JASMIN: Well, let's talk about what Soapwalla is. First of all, what motivated you to start it?

RACHEL: Sure. Ten years ago, I was diagnosed with systemic lupus, which is a chronic autoimmune illness. And it affects any and all systems of your body 'cause it's your body attacking itself. And for me, along with some internal issues, my skin went from like 0 to 60 as far as sensitivity like overnight. So I was, before that, the stereotypical consumer. If it was on a shelf, I didn't think any further. I just pulled it and started using it. And this whole diagnostic process really encouraged me to take charge of my life and my health and become much more proactive. So I taught myself about what was in our skincare products and found that almost 90% of them have never even been tested so we don't even know how they'll react.

MARIANN: That's crazy. I have to say I'm the same way. Except for the vegan thing, I'm really strict about that. But I don't really think about what else is in skincare products. I don't think of them as really harming me.

RACHEL: Well, and ideally we shouldn't have to. But our world is such that it behooves you to teach yourself about the ingredients.

MARIANN: Yeah, absolutely.

JASMIN: So did that lead to you kind of simplifying your consumption habits and what you were eating and putting on your skin? Was that what happened next?

RACHEL: Absolutely. Yeah, it was a holistic approach for me. Like, everything I was putting in and on my body. And that's actually, that was the philosophy I started with when I realized that products I was buying, even natural or organic, were still hurting my skin. I said, "Okay, that's it, I've gotta just start making them." So I went to my kitchen cabinets and I opened them up and I said, "If I can put them in my body, I can probably put them on my body." And I started from there, I taught myself.

MARIANN: That's an interesting concept. What other basic rules do you follow?

RACHEL: That's a big one. I really want it to be as close to its natural state as possible. I find that just with fresh food, fresh produce, the sooner you eat it from when it was picked, the more vibrant it tastes and the healthier it is.

MARIANN: We know that about food. We just don't think of it about skin.

RACHEL: Yeah, I really like people to think of this as food for their skin.

JASMIN: Well, some of it is actually edible.

RACHEL: Exactly. I do, I use food-grade ingredients for that very purpose.

MARIANN: And you follow some of the same rules that other people follow for food, like non-GMO.

RACHEL: Exactly.

MARIANN: And do you do, is it gluten-free as well?

RACHEL: Exactly. The line is entirely gluten-free.

JASMIN: Wow! See, I'm not gluten-free, but I know a lot of people are. And I think it's so interesting. I would never, ever have thought that gluten would affect your skin. I mean, I know for a lot of people it affects your diet, but that never would have even occurred to me. So what kind of changes did you see on a personal level once you started using this type of product?

RACHEL: Oh, it was night and day. I mean, really, my skin was in such an inflammation mode when I started making products. And I was guided by whatever I needed. If I needed a cleanser, I was gonna make it. If I needed a moisturizer, that's what I made. That's how my deodorant came about was I needed a deodorant that wasn't going to irritate my skin, would follow my basic principles and --

JASMIN: Okay, let's talk about my armpits.

RACHEL: Okay, let's do that.

JASMIN: Yeah, let's do it. Why does your deodorant work so well? What is in it? Because I have seriously tried every kind of cruelty-free deodorant on the market, and yours is the only one that has worked for me. And I'm a dancer, I'm a runner, I'm a sweater, and this works! What's in it?

RACHEL: So it's a combination of powders and clays that help absorb moisture. It's not an antiperspirant. Only aluminum zirconium or aluminum chloride can provide that antiperspirant quality. However this will help absorb sweat that you naturally produce, which is your body's way to cool down.

MARIANN: So you still produce the sweat, but it just absorbs it a little bit.

RACHEL: It'll keep it a little drier.

JASMIN: I've just heard horrible things about actual --

MARIANN: It does seem much healthier than stopping. When you think about it, stopping you from sweating, that just doesn't sound healthy.

RACHEL: And aluminum zirconium, it actually makes your skin cells swell shut. That's what stops you from sweating. And your lymph nodes are right there.

JASMIN: Right, I've heard that it's very tied to serious, serious diseases when you're using antiperspirant. It makes sense. So I love the deodorant, but what else did you bring today?

RACHEL: I brought a smattering of my products.

JASMIN: I love it when people use the word "smattering," by the way.

RACHEL: Oh, wonderful, that's one of my favorite words. I brought some of my soap bars, and I brought my lemongrass and green tea which is one of my best sellers and actually has green tea leaves in it. I steep the tea leaves when I'm making the soap.

JASMIN: Mm. Have you ever heard of -- I read somewhere that someone makes like a coffee soap, like that the caffeine gets absorbed into your body and gives you a buzz in the morning?

MARIANN: I've never heard that. I wonder if that happens with the tea.

JASMIN: No, but that kind of makes Rachel's point too that you are not only what you eat, but you are what you bathe with.

MARIANN: Yeah, totally.

RACHEL: Absolutely.

MARIANN: No, I'm totally convinced you should not put stuff on -- I mean, it makes so much sense that you shouldn't put stuff on your skin that you wouldn't put in your mouth. This smells unbelievable by the way.

RACHEL: I'm glad.

MARIANN: It's deeply lemony.

JASMIN: Are you gonna eat it? Put it in my margarita for some extra flavor?

RACHEL: There you go.

MARIANN: I know you *can* eat your stuff, but is it true that one would want to?

RACHEL: I mean, it's still soap.

JASMIN: Yeah. Right, exactly.

RACHEL: So it'll still have a soap-like flavor.

MARIANN: Yeah, no thanks.

JASMIN: What else did you bring?

RACHEL: I brought my body polish. I heard somewhere that you like almondy things.

JASMIN: Oh, love almonds!

MARIANN: My favorite.

RACHEL: So I wanted to bring my body polish. This is my almond luxe body polish.

JASMIN: This is my favorite scent actually is like almond oil. We burn it in, we have like this little clay thing that you put near a light bulb and you put a couple drops of it and some kind of oil and my favorite one is the almond. May I?

RACHEL: Yes.

JASMIN: Oh, wow. That's incredible. It's delightful.

MARIANN: Oh, I totally want to eat this. I want this for dessert.

JASMIN: After you eat the soap.

MARIANN: No, I don't want to eat the soap but I totally want to eat this. What is the scrub made out of?

RACHEL: So it's raw, organic, vegan sugar --

MARIANN: Oh, then I totally want this for dessert!

RACHEL: And it's powdered ginger, powdered cardamom, sweet and bitter almond oils, and ginger essential.

MARIANN: Yum!

JASMIN: And I know that you are also very charitable minded in your work. Can you talk about that a little bit?

RACHEL: Absolutely. I feel very grateful to be able to do this every day and I want to be able to give back. So every November I adopt turkeys from Farm Sanctuary.

JASMIN: Oh, Farm Sanctuary!

RACHEL: I love -- that's one of my favorite Thanksgiving traditions at this point.

MARIANN: I love turkeys.

RACHEL: And May, actually this is perfect because May is Lupus Awareness Month. So proceeds from Soapwalla sales during the month of May, I split them between the New York Chapter and the National Chapter of the Lupus Foundation.

MARIANN: Oh, that's great.

JASMIN: Really, really cool. And your products are also environmentally friendly as well, right?

RACHEL: Yes.

MARIANN: What else do we have? Oh, I'm sorry. I interrupted.

RACHEL: Oh, we have so many good things. Well, I will show you as I answer your question. So this is my facial toning mist, if you want to smell that as well.

JASMIN: Oh, I love that.

MARIANN: What does it do?

RACHEL: So you use it in between cleansing and moisturizing.

JASMIN: Mm, nice.

MARIANN: Oh, that's lovely.

RACHEL: It does smell nice. So when you're cleansing it takes off any residual and it also preps your skin for moisturizing so your skin's nice and ready to really receive any oil.

MARIANN: That's lovely for the summer. It just feels very cooling.

RACHEL: It's really good for the summer. I keep it in the refrigerator in the summer.

MARIANN: Oh, good idea.

RACHEL: Because, well, New York summers are quite warm.

JASMIN: And it's environmentally friendly packaging as well, too, so...

RACHEL: Yeah, I use -- anything that goes in a shower or a bathtub, I'm always mindful of how clumsy I am, so anything that would be in a tub is going to be in PET plastic which is BPA and PVC free. It's also 100% recycled. And then anything that wouldn't be in the bathtub will be in glass or as open packaging as possible. That's my soap bars.

JASMIN: Excellent. And I know that you are also a very strong proponent of not only having this kind of product available but making your own kind of facial products and toiletries based on ingredients. That's sort of how it began for you.

RACHEL: Yes, exactly.

JASMIN: And this is something you encourage other people to do, is that right?

RACHEL: Yes. Every time I send out a newsletter I always send out a recipe.

MARIANN: That's great!

RACHEL: For people to experiment on their own.

MARIANN: I love that.

JASMIN: Well, you consider yourself a chef. It's one of the ways you describe yourself.

RACHEL: I do. I call myself the Soapwalla chef.

JASMIN: Now, I hear that we are gonna make something today, a facial cleanser and mask?

RACHEL: Exactly, yes. I figure with the summer months coming up and people traveling and minimizing your skin care regimen, it is a two-ingredient, dry --

JASMIN: Seriously? Two ingredients?

RACHEL: It is, it is. And since it's dry, it's TSA-friendly, it's easy to throw in your bag when you're going to the gym or taking a dance lesson or whatever. It's easy to travel with.

MARIANN: And you can snack on it.

RACHEL: You can totally snack on it 'cause I bought both of these things at the local co-op this morning. So the first ingredient, I got Bob's Red Mill oat flour. I love Bob's Red Mill. His products are really fresh, really great. If you have oats at home, if you have rolled oats, you can always just throw a handful in the blender or a coffee grinder or food processor and just grind it up yourself. I like buying oat flour because it's a really fine grind and you want to be careful with anything that's harshly exfoliating on the face.

JASMIN: Now, is this also gluten-free?

RACHEL: This is. His oats are gluten-free.

JASMIN: Okay. We actually stayed in Portland for six months, Portland, Oregon, 'cause Mariann was teaching at the law school out there, Lewis and Clark. And we lived near Bob's Red Mill.

MARIANN: Bob's Red Mill became a part of our lives. They have a whole restaurant there, and it's amazing.

RACHEL: I would love to take a tour.

MARIANN: They have a whole vegan menu.

JASMIN: It's a really great experience. So how much of this am I gonna put in?

RACHEL: It's the simplest, it's equal parts.

JASMIN: Oh! That makes it easy.

RACHEL: So whatever measurement you'll use for the oat flour.

JASMIN: One tablespoon. And what's the second ingredient in here?

RACHEL: And then it's baking soda.

JASMIN: Oh, we all have that in our fridge.

RACHEL: Which we all have available.

JASMIN: In the back of our fridge.

MARIANN: Well, I don't think you should use the one in the back of your fridge. I think you should open up a nice, fresh box.

RACHEL: Yes, like a nice one that you'd use for baking.

JASMIN: Okay, so just another tablespoon.

RACHEL: Exactly.

MARIANN: Wow.

RACHEL: And then all you do is you just mix it. You can mix it with a finger, with a chopstick, with your spoon. It's very, very easy.

JASMIN: Okay, and so you would bring it like this to your trip on the plane or whatever, and then if I wanted to turn this into a face wash what would I add?

RACHEL: Well, you can also, at this time or later, you can add an essential oil if you'd like, one that you know you like the scent of and that works well with your face. So I brought lavender, 'cause that's pretty universal and it's common. And so depending on how much you use, you want to be gentle with essential oils. They're natural but they're very potent. So I would just put about four drops for this amount. One, two, three, four.

JASMIN: Excellent, mix him again.

RACHEL: Exactly.

JASMIN: I made it a him, I don't know why.

RACHEL: That's okay.

JASMIN: Genderizing -- genderizing is now a word, and we're genderizing the facial.

MARIANN: You're doing a good job there.

JASMIN: And I'm a chef too. And so I'm assuming that we're gonna add a little water.

RACHEL: Exactly, you can add water or oil.

JASMIN: How much?

RACHEL: You want enough so you'll start with just a little bit.

JASMIN: And then we're gonna thicken it up?

RACHEL: Exactly, so this is where you get to experiment. You may like it a little thicker, you may like it a little thinner. If you're using it as a wash you may want it thin so that it's easy to apply and then remove. If you're gonna keep it on your face for, say, five minutes, you might want it a little thicker.

MARIANN: So it's either a wash or a mask?

RACHEL: Exactly.

MARIANN: That's great.

JASMIN: Now I have to just kind of recognize the obvious, which is that your skin is fantastic.

RACHEL: Thank you.

JASMIN: So do you use this?

RACHEL: I do. And I mean, I use Soapwalla products all the time.

JASMIN: This is really, really exciting.

MARIANN: And it looks very tasty. I'd like to pop it in the oven.

JASMIN: Turn it into a cookie.

RACHEL: You could. I mean, you can make a biscuit out of it.

JASMIN: Well, speaking of biscuits and cookies, let's talk about these strawberries.

MARIANN: Yeah, what are these strawberries doing here?

JASMIN: Are we gonna have a fruit salad?

RACHEL: Yes, exactly. I think we should snack on the strawberries. But also, since strawberry season is coming up, one of my favorite ways to naturally whiten your teeth, takes 30 seconds flat, is you pop part of a strawberry in your mouth, you take a nice little bite, and then when it's open so that the white part, the interior is open, exactly, where the concentration of the Vitamin C and the alpha hydroxy acids are, you just gently buff your teeth.

JASMIN: No way! This is a teeth whitener?

RACHEL: It is a natural teeth whitener and it works really well. And then you just keep it on your teeth for like 30 seconds. Exactly! That's adorable, I love that.

MARIANN: We're so cute.

JASMIN: Yeah, we're so cute. It's the gay friendly moment of the Our Hen House show, as if there was a time it isn't.

MARIANN: How long do you keep it on?

RACHEL: 30 seconds, and then you continue eating your strawberry. And you go about your day with whiter, brighter teeth.

MARIANN: I have to say, great skin and remarkably white teeth.

JASMIN: Let's see. However, did you smell my armpits? 'Cause they are divine! Now, this is all very exciting and I strongly encourage people to get into the DIY behavior of making your own products.

MARIANN: And also to try out some of these great products that Rachel has made. You make them yourself, right?

RACHEL: I do, yeah. And I make them by hand. I've got a couple helpers, and yeah, I make everything by hand, hand mixing, hand pouring, labeling.

JASMIN: You're in Brooklyn.

RACHEL: Yeah.

JASMIN: Brooklyn pride!

RACHEL: Oh yes.

JASMIN: I like that. Well, this is all very exciting and I'm definitely gonna extend beyond just my deodorant for Soapwalla because I love all of these. And I'm also going to -- we have, I actually just bought some because I have a friend coming over who's gluten-free and so I bought this brand of oats, Bob's Red Mill, and I'm going to use it later on my face 'cause I actually do have skin issues.

MARIANN: Well, you have to grind them.

JASMIN: I'll grind them. I'll grind them!

MARIANN: You can grind them in the Vitamix since as according to the video we couldn't live without our Vitamix.

JASMIN: Exactly, and I do, I have skin issues, and they didn't come until my mid-20s and now I'm in my mid-30s.

MARIANN: I think that's very typical. A lot of women develop skin issues in their 20s and 30s.

JASMIN: Well, Rachel's gonna fix all of our skin issues. And she's gonna save some animals while we're at it. So thank you so much for being here with us today, Rachel.

RACHEL: Thank you so much for having me. I had so much fun.