



PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRIE POINTER

Sarah Walker enjoys a yoga moment amidst the lavender at her annual charity fundraiser event called Lips and Lavender.

Boosh aims for natural beauty

Indie brand buzzing with chemical-free lipsticks

Sarah Walker assures me we are approaching happy bees. I can hear them buzzing in hives near the field of lavender. The bees disregard us. We could be strolling in Provence, France, surrounded by wildflowers. But this idyllic scene is on a farm near Ayr.

Walker wears a crisp floral apron around her waist. The apron suits her attire as co-founder of Boosh, a small cosmetics business that makes chemical-free lipsticks. The name is a play on the French word for mouth – bouche.

The sun shines as we leave the bees and head back to the Boosh workspace – a converted dairy parlour on this farm owned by Walker's business partner, Linda Van Der Heyden, and her husband, Peter. It's here



Lynn
Haddrall

that Walker brainstorms lipstick colours, drawing inspiration from the seasons and fashion runways. We settle in to talk about her business – and colour trends for fall and winter 2017.

“Purples were really big for spring and summer on the runways, so we added some colder purples. We have warmer purples for the fall and winter,” she says, displaying hues on her wrist. “That’s what’s nice about being so small and being online is that we

have the opportunity to be creative. We’re not limited or restricted by what’s in stock. We change things up with the seasons.”

Since launching the company two years ago, the 27-year-old entrepreneur has marketed it at events such as the Elora Riverfest in August and the Toronto International Film Festival in September. TIFF celebrities got a chance to sample and take home some Boosh.

Walker, an avid film fan, considers Boosh to be an indie beauty brand, a perfect fit for the TIFF crowd.

“We do not belong to any major company. This gives us complete control of our products. It allows us to influence the market by making what we want, when we want,” Walker said a few days before the



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Sarah Walker is inspired to create new lipstick colour combinations by people and places in her personal life. Her creative board is awash with possibilities.

PHOTOGRAPHY • LYNN HADDRALL



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film festival began.

“Indie films go through a circuit to fight for a spot in the exhibition arena with the big names. There is a perfect parallel with what I do along with the independent movie makers at TIFF. I make makeup; they make films. But we are one and the same – artists who want the passion for what we produce to be seen and enjoyed.”

Walker grew up in the west Galt area of Cambridge, attending French immersion. She loved being outdoors and volunteered for the Rare Charitable Research Reserve in high school.

“I’ve always gravitated to nature, being outside and preserving things,” she says. “I took an interest in the human body, zoology, the whole environment and how everything interacts together.”

The University of Waterloo graduate has a degree in environmental resource studies with a minor in geography. After university, she studied holistic nutrition, focusing on toxicity in the body. She sought out beauty products without food dyes because red dye

triggers headaches for her.

“I found that a lot of the products in the natural health market weren’t up to snuff. I couldn’t use a lot of them because they still use FDA-approved dyes, so I would still have a reaction.”

Walker tackled that problem by starting her own cosmetics company. The Van Der Heydens’ former dairy farm helps her draw on local ingredients and work in a natural setting.

“The area where I work is in the old barn. Farmers would bring the cows in there, milk them, and then take them out through the other door. We’ve torn everything out and renovated it for my production facility and office. I live in uptown Waterloo, but I do everything on the farm there. That’s where we harvest our beeswax.”

Her workspace resembles a modern kitchen, with a chic centre counter, sinks, moulds, a grinder and refrigerator. It’s light and bright with minimal furnishings. A vintage-style chandelier adds a feminine touch.

“It gets really dirty when I’m manufacturing, especially with the minerals, so my workspace is nothing over the top. It’s just minimal, but it’s what I need to get the job done.”

Linda Van Der Heyden gave Walker the confidence to move ahead with the business venture.

“She’s my mentor,” Walker says. “She’s taught me so much, not only just about being environmentally conscious and being aware of what we are putting on our bodies, but also about business because that’s what she does. She’s such a great help. We get along really well.”

As well as owning the farm, Linda and Peter Van Der Heyden run Goliger’s Travel Plus. There’s also a distillery on the property. Their sons, Jordan and Nolan, plus partner Cam Formica, started Willibald Farm Distillery in a refurbished barn not far from Walker’s office. Sarah Walker and Jordan Van Der Heyden are a couple, so she got to know the family and their entrepreneurial spirit.

“She hadn’t really been exposed to entrepreneurship, so she’s seeing us live the entrepreneurial life and it was just about encouraging her,” Linda Van Der Heyden says.

“She’s very talented. A lot of young women don’t have confidence in themselves; they’re not used to being on their own and having their own business.”

Van Der Heyden has always been interested in organic products. She took a lipstick-making course before the two women conceived of the venture. Van Der Heyden provides financial advice and is thrilled to see Walker bloom.

“I think the big thing is have confidence in your abilities. She has seen us work 24/7. It’s not a regular 9-to-5 job for sure. You have a dream. You have to work hard and put in a lot of hours. Keep that passion.”

Boosh is all about lipstick today, but Walker hopes to expand to other product lines, such as foundation and creams.

“The big-picture idea is to do full-face mineral makeup. I would like to make a liquid foundation and instead of using synthetic dyes and synthetic colours, I would just use minerals.”

The lipsticks are coloured with natural mineral pigments, such as carmine, yellow oxide and zinc. She avoids parabens, petrochemicals, sulphates and allergens, such as food dyes. The product base is wax from 20 beehives. A bee farmer from Ayr harvests and cleans the wax. Three acres of lavender is distilled for essential oil.

“Our bees wax gives a really nourishing and healing property to all the products. That’s the main thing,” says Walker.

The products are minimally packaged.

“We wanted a package that didn’t contain plastic,” she explains. “We designed and had them manufactured. They’re made of aluminum and they’re rose gold. Right now, we just ship the tube itself. We don’t have any other packaging. We might get into some recycled paper packaging. For retail, we will have to have that for Health Canada



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regulations, but right now we strictly just sell online so we just have the tubes themselves."

Walker, who still works part time at a health food store, hopes to get Boosh into retail outlets.

"We've got a couple of stores in Kitchener, Waterloo and around the area that are interested, so the ball's rolling right now."

There's science in the product but Walker humanizes the process by naming each new lipstick shade for people she knows or after personal experiences. There's a description of each shade on the website (boosh.ca) and a full list of all ingredients.

Stella, a popular shade, is named after a best friend's dog – "a sassy little girl who loves attention." The shade closest to Walker's heart is Ellie, named for her mother.

"When I am formulating, I just think of certain people and what they would want. My mother wanted a medium pink that had blue undertones and wasn't too warm."

Walker says strong women like her mother and Van Der Heyden sparked her entrepreneurial spirit.

"When I graduated from university they said: 'you're so smart, you're hardworking, you can really do whatever you want.' If they hadn't sparked that in me I never would have known that. It was never really a thought to me to start a business until they said that."

An annual highlight for Walker is a charity event held when the lavender is blooming. It's called Lips and Lavender and has sold out the past two years. More than 90 women visit the farm to do yoga in the lavender fields, play with makeup, and sip on customized cocktails at the distillery.

"We had 67 women in the field on mats, listening to the bees and all the sounds of nature. It's a different way to practise yoga," she says.

The success of that event and positive feedback from Boosh customers encourages Walker to think about new ways to grow her business. She's excited about showcas-



MAKEUP TIPS

Sarah Walker likes the natural beauty/bare-face trends on runways and offers these tips for fall/winter makeup, with shades to match at boosh.ca:

- Classic holiday red works at this time of year (Taylor, Ruby, Dahlia)
- Winter burgundy is also a strong choice for fall/winter.
- Match your eyes to your cheeks and lips with one multi-use shade, such as neutral pink (Rosie, Dusty Rose, Ellie)
- Go for neutral, understated and hydrated lips with a bold eye (Nova, Lip Plumping balm)
- Be strong and confident in what looks good on you; enhance your features

ing Boosh at the Indie Beauty Expo in New York City next summer and participating in pop-up events locally.

It was daunting to launch a business but this millennial encourages other young women to follow their dreams.

"If you're not scared, it's probably not worth it. There's so many female entrepreneurs in the beauty industry here. Everyone has just been so open and welcoming to me from the first day, making connections and introducing me to people. If I didn't have that, I don't know where I would be. Everyone is willing to help. It's amazing. It's a really great place to be."

Drawing on that love and support, she should have no problem coming up with new names for future Boosh products.