

# marin living.



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## spotlight marin.

14 **news.**

A new hub for Marin-MOCA; Marin Theatre onstage; rock out at Noise Pop festival and HopMank Tavern.

24 **local splurges.**

Get your New Year wellness routine off to a beautiful start.

26 **eat & drink.**

All about that mushroom coffee you've seen at the farmers market.

30 **local getaways.**

Two ideal spots for the ultimate spa day.

34 **take note.**

How an innovative local photographer found his work on a USPS stamp.

36 **game changers.**

A new way to honor loved ones starts with a seed.

going places.

76 **voyager.**

Technologically advanced treatments are helping people live healthier lives.

80 **drawn together.**

Keeping the skies dark in West Marin.

about this issue.

12 **from the team.**

## On the Cover

Local photographer Lori Eanes ([www.loreanes.com](http://www.loreanes.com)) loves to play with food. She is constantly developing new techniques, like the one shown on the cover.

## features.

38

### Leveling Up

Our annual list of some of Marin's top wellness practitioners.

42

### Sea Siren

Natural skin care with a key ingredient from the California coast.

48

### Happy Belly

Delicious and healthy recipes from some of our favorite local spots.



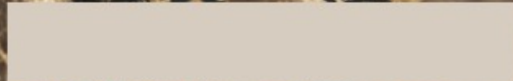


The pristine, protected waters off Big Sur provide mineral-rich salt for the Dara Kennedy Sea Soak; Dara Kennedy (inset)

# SEA SIREN

Natural beauty entrepreneur Dara Kennedy's bijou-size San Francisco store Ayla has a cult-favorite following – much like her newer but now equally coveted namesake skin care line made with sustainably sourced seaweed from California's Central Coast.

BY KERI BRIDGWATER





Dara Kennedy's best-selling Sea Serum (left); the most recent launch, Sea Retinal (right); Ian, Dara and Dara's son, Tobin, take sea kayaks to hand-harvest kelp off California's Central Coast (opposite)



**T**here are two things I'm religious about regarding my skin care routine. I never skip applying Sea Serum during the day or Sea Retinal at night," says Dara Kennedy, the founder of Ayla ([www.aylabeauty.com](http://www.aylabeauty.com)), a petite-but-powerful eco-conscious emporium in San Francisco's Japantown area.

A beauty industry veteran, Kennedy launched products at Elizabeth Arden and worked for Bliss founder Marcia Kilgore but saw a niche in the market for a natural beauty-specific space to share her passion for result-oriented, clean skin care. She started Ayla online in 2011, and her boutique on Bush Street, stocked with a carefully vetted range of "good for you" products by indie brands, followed two years later — along with a new devoted fan base.

With Ayla now a 2024 Beauty Shortlist Awards winner for Green Beauty Retailer of the Year, Kennedy's Sea Serum (the most recent addition to her line) was also nominated as a product finalist. Its star ingredient? Giant kelp hand-harvested off the Central California coast by local forager Ian O'Hollaren. Sourced in small batches a handful of times a year (giant kelp grows back in days, but if the beds don't look healthy, nothing is taken), each piece is meticulously triple-checked.

"Giant kelp has incredible antioxidant and hydrating properties, but we blend it with other coastal plants, including red seaweed from the Irish coast, to create this

**W**  
Giant kelp has incredible antioxidant and hydrating properties, but we blend it with other coastal plants, including red seaweed from the Irish coast."



Photo: Garam/istock (left spread and opening spread)



## W

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Carla and Dara head to the Big Sur cliffs in search of salt.

Daniel Garza/istock

multitalented vibrance booster that firms and protects the skin against photoaging," she says.

Using the term "biointegral" to describe her skin care philosophy, Kennedy sees relationships and circularity as pillars. "We work with incredible people to harvest key ingredients for our products, but in getting to know them, we also get to know the places they're from and do our part to give back." Five percent of every Sea Serum sale goes to advocacy network Climate Changemakers, while a portion of proceeds from each Sea Soak goes back to "citizen science" nonprofit Reef Check. "Beauty Independent, the industry organization that gave us another of our awards this year, called me the Alice Waters of skin care when I first developed the Sea Soak, and it's one of my favorite compliments ever," she says of her debut product, a DIY bath kit that launched in 2019 and has been lauded by everyone from Oprah to *Vogue France*.

"The Irish seaweed bath has been a cherished therapeutic tradition for generations, and Sea Soak highlights this remarkable synergy of two nature-sourced ingredients at their purest and most potent," she says. "Kelp dried under the California sun and sea salt from Big Sur, filtered nine times and greenhouse-evaporated by our salt artisan, Carlo."

Regarding new additions to her lineup, Kennedy teased she would introduce her next product in early 2025. "It's inspired by needs we've observed with our customers at Ayla and features our giant kelp to soothe and hydrate while a new proprietary formula goes to work." A beautifully designed space, the store (whose name means "bearer of light" and whose interior pays homage to Jean Cocteau's 1950s French Riviera home) serves as a natural beauty movement stronghold for longtime fans and newcomers alike. It's a place to discover Kennedy's growing edit of pioneering, eco-conscious brands she traveled the world to source (including MyHavtorn from Sweden and Sudtana from Thailand) paired with trusted, personalized guidance.

In addition to facials and master classes, Kennedy says, the rotating expert residency program is a customer favorite — in December it was holistic skin care guru Annee de Mamiel, the go-to facialist for Sienna Miller and Alexa Chung; this month it's TWELVE Beauty founder Pedro Catalá from Valencia, Spain. "A cool thing about skin care is what we need is always changing, but switching products up doesn't have to be a chore," Kennedy says. "I see it as a fun process and chance to learn something new instead." 🌊