

I Tried a Beauty Editor's Absurd 20-Step Skin-Care Routine for a Month

Here are 10 things I learned.

[Anne Roderique-Jones](#)



Anne Roderique-Jones
ANYTHING ONCE

I am a minimalist when it comes to my skin-care routine. As a magazine writer, I've tried everything from the [drugstore lotions](#) to the fancy potions and landed somewhere that costs about \$20 and takes two minutes of my time.

But here's the thing: I'm no longer one of those fresh-faced gals who can get away with doing basically nothing. The whole, "Oh, I just slap on SPF and call it a day" thing does not work. I'm aging—as we do—and I'd like to take action.

So I called in a pro: beauty savant Courtney Dunlop.

Dunlop, a longtime beauty editor, consultant, and connoisseur, also happens to be my friend and former coworker. In our office days, she'd be the one with approximately 10 million products on her desk, continuously spritzing her face with a fancy mist while simultaneously fretting about an arm being [exposed to sunlight from the nearby window](#). I'd spend a lunch break sunning my face with a foil reflector. Dunlop and I both grew up in the same town (and both bolted for NYC), yet her skin resembles that of someone who was raised in a bunker, and it's obvious that my father owned a tanning salon that was run out of the back of a trailer (but that's another story).

Courtesy of Courtney Dunlop

Beauty savant Courtney Dunlop, queen of the no-makeup selfie.

"The thing that people most comment about with my skin is the texture, and I credit that to my extremely gentle approach. I definitely have some spots and lines, but no one seems to notice them because the overall texture of my skin is so smooth; I actually think people need to stop being so obsessed with lines and just focus on getting glowing, bouncy texture," Dunlop tells me. "I think anyone at any age can have healthy, glowing skin if they use the right products and stop sandblasting their faces off!"

Dunlop recently relocated back to our hometown in the Ozarks to open [Good Skin Day](#), a boutique featuring indie skin-care products that she personally

uses and recommends based on 14-plus years of editorial experience and research.

I tapped into her daily routine and promised to throw out the skin blasters. Here's what I learned after following her (insane) routine for one full month.

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Me (before) and my regular skin-care routine.

1. Beauty is work.

Having the skin of an adult angel requires serious effort—more than splashing your face with some Cetaphil, slapping on SPF 30 and going about your business. (Which, BTW, was my exact beauty routine.) Courtney's morning repertoire consists of [11 very precise steps](#), and in the evening she tacks on another nine steps before she tucks that lineless face into bed. To me that sounds borderline batshit crazy, but her skin looks like an ass cheek and I mean that in the nicest way, because ass cheeks never see the sun and are perfectly smooth. So, I arranged a total of 20 products on my bathroom counter, separated them into day and night, and went to town.

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My new 20-step skin-care regimen

2. You must know about the double cleanse.

Dunlop is adamant about many things, but nothing more so than the double cleanse. She tells me, "You have to double cleanse. HAVE TO. After all those products and sunscreens, regular ol' cleanser will not get it all off." Per her instructions, I start each prebed skin session with [Clinique Take the Day Off Cleansing Balm](#) (\$29), that I discover to be one of the greatest products invented. Upon first glance it looks like Crisco in a fancy purple tub, but when rubbed onto the face and neck, it easily whisks away my stubborn waterproof [mascara](#) and thick sunscreen then dissolves, leaving my skin incredibly soft. I

follow this with [Indie Rosehip Cleanser](#) (\$32). People, you HAVE TO double cleanse.

3. Fact: Harsh exfoliators are out...

My occasional skin-care splurge was St. Ives Apricot Facial Scrub, clocking in at under a five-spot, which left my skin feeling as if a layer was removed. Upon telling Dunlop this, she replied, “No! Cease using that horrible scrub immediately,” and suggested a twice-weekly application of a magical product called [Aqua Reveal Soft Water Peel for Face](#) (\$58). This gentle peel is safe for all skin types and when you massage it over dry skin, dead cells roll into little balls and then are rinsed off, which is [a gross but very satisfying feeling](#).

4. ...And toner is back.

When I was an acne-faced teenager, I lived for Sea Breeze—the astringent that felt like 100 bees landing on your face. Dunlop uses a toner that’s actually good for your skin. For the A.M., [Indie Lee Co Q-10 Toner](#) (\$32) is applied to the face, neck, and chest, using a cotton pad. She says, “I used to think toner was pointless until I discovered this one. It’s the dreamiest and so chic. Now I’m a toner fanatic. It preps your skin to absorb whatever comes next.” Evening time is meant for the crazy expensive (\$99) [SK-II Facial Treatment Essence](#) treatment (used by Cate Blanchett) that is sprinkled on the hands and patted on the face, neck, and chest. Dunlop says that it has brightening and moisturizing ingredients, and like the toner from the morning, it preps your skin for the next stuff. This product feels especially refreshing in the summer, and I immediately feel more chic using anything with the name “essence.”

5. There are actual legit products that combat young face/old body syndrome.

Even as I worry about the skin damage on my face, I treat the skin on my body terribly. Dunlop tells me to rub my arms and chest with [Cane + Austin](#)

[10% Body Retexture Pads](#) (\$70) that contain glycolic acid to help combat sun damage and smooth out rough body skin. It burns in an it's-working kind of way and I love it so much that I started using the company's version for the face. This can be topped with a sunscreen—her favorite is [Ahava Time To Smooth Age Perfecting Hand Cream SPF 15](#) (\$32). The broad-spectrum formula contains brightening agents to [help to correct dark spots](#). I rub it on my arms and hands while I hum Cher's "If I Could Turn Back Time."

6. Not all sunscreens are created equal.

I've spent my entire adulthood slapping whatever sunscreen I could find on my face until Dunlop introduced me to zinc-based products, which have changed my life (and face). [CōTZ Sensitive Skin SPF 40](#) (\$20) mineral sunscreen is the only sunscreen I've ever used that provides the editor-approved protection (with a whopping 20 percent zinc) and [did not irritate my skin](#)—especially around my eyes. The company also makes a Natural Tinted SPF 40 that's like a light foundation and proper sunscreen in one punch. Dunlop also introduced me to an eye cream-sunscreen combo: [A Perfect World Age-Defense Eye Cream With SPF 20 from Origins](#) (\$38) along with [Coola's Mineral Liplux SPF 30 Summer Crush](#) (\$18) for the lips. I love the soft shade, but even more, I love that it doesn't have that nasty sunscreen taste that every other product seems to have.

Courtney Dunlop (l), Anne Roderique Jones (r)

How skin-obsessed people do a day at the beach.

7. And not all sunscreens come in bottles or tubes.

Courtney tells me that she has a collection of UPF swimwear and directs me to a fashionable collection of [rash guards](#) and swimwear-style clothing, where I purchased a single [long-sleeved number from Land's End](#) (\$49) with 50 protection. This glorious piece of material alleviates the whole "who's gonna do my back?" sitch, plus adds extra coverage, which equals extra confidence. Do they make pants? Dunlop also suggests walking around in the broad

daylight with an umbrella and a pair of UV protection driving gloves while in the car. Baby steps, baby face.

8. Skin care is my new me-time.

Yes, this routine is more than a bit more time consuming, but I've come to enjoy the ritual of taking care of my skin. Time that I'd normally spend mindlessly scrolling through Instagram [is now used on ME](#), which is indulgent and far more beneficial to the mind and the body. What was once something that I dreaded (ugh, have to wash my face) is now a part of the day that I've actually come to enjoy—especially the last step of the evening when I get to slather [One Love Organics Skin Savior](#) (\$49) over my entire face and feel like a true kween.

9. Products can be pricey as hell.

Many of the products in my haul are affordable, and there are plenty of drugstore products that derms recommend. But a handful of the things in Dunlop's routine are high-dollar, like the [37 Extreme Actives High Performance Anti-Aging Cream](#) that clocks in at \$195. (Disclosure, the brands provided me with trial samples for this story.) I was instructed to use only a pea-sized amount. Dunlop says, “This product is very expensive, but I really like it. It has tons of ingredients in it for collagen, redness, spots, etc. I used this for just a few days and I noticed a lot of redness went away.” This stuff feels like I'm rubbing liquid silk on my skin and has zero irritation, which is a big problem for me. Postuse, my face certainly feels softer with noticeable bounce. Licensed esthetician and cosmetic formulator Mary Schook's powder-to-cream [vitamin C](#) formulation, [Liquid Gold Radical C](#), looks like cocaine and, at \$59 for a half ounce, is priced like it, too. Still, I rub in this magical pixie dust nightly, both on my [mustache melasma](#) and on my dark circles, and pray to Cate Blanchett for a miracle.

Anne Roderique Jones

Left: Skin time = me time. Right: Me, with no makeup, after a month.

10. In a nutshell: All this skin-sanity works.

Spoiler alert: I don't look like Dunlop or Cate Blanchett, but after just one month of using a boatload of products, my skin is noticeably more dewy and plump. And I most definitely see a difference in the melasma and undereye redness, which I thought was impossible. I found products that I can't live without, spent countless minutes misting, and have a newfound appreciation for [skin care](#). And who knows, maybe I'll be rocking a pair of driving gloves this year.

Full product arsenal used for this story:

A.M. Routine:

[Indie Rosehip Cleanser](#) (\$32)

[Cane + Austin 10% Body Retexture Pads](#) (\$70)

[Indie Lee Co Q-10 Toner](#) (\$32)

[Indie Lee Squalane Facial Oil](#) (\$32)

[Mary Schook Liquid Gold Radical C](#) (\$59)

[37 Extreme Actives High Performance Anti-Aging Cream](#) (\$195)

[A Perfect World Age-Defense Eye Cream With SPF 20 from Origins](#) (\$38)

[CōTZ Sensitive Skin SPF 40](#) (\$20)

[Coola's Mineral Liplux SPF 30 Summer Crush](#) (\$18)

[Ahava Time To Smooth Age Perfecting Hand Cream SPF 15](#) (\$32)

[Aqua Reveal Soft Water Peel for Face](#) (\$58) (used about twice weekly)

[Mary Schook Liquid Gold Detox Mask](#) (\$59) (used about twice weekly)

P.M. Routine:

[Clinique Take the Day Off Cleansing Balm](#) (\$29)

[Indie Rosehip Cleanser](#) (\$32)

[Simple Cleansing Micellar Water](#) (\$8) (if wearing eye makeup)

[SK-II Facial Treatment Essence](#) (\$99)

[37 Extreme Actives High Performance Anti-Aging Cream](#) (\$195)

[Cane + Austin 10% Body Retexture Pads](#) (\$70)

[One Love Organics Vitamin D Moisture Mist](#) (\$39)

[One Love Organics Skin Savior](#) (\$49)

[One Love Organics Vitamin E Eye Balm](#) (\$49)

[Dermalogica Nightly Lip Treatment](#) (\$49)

Anne Roderique-Jones is a freelance writer and editor whose work has appeared in Vogue, Marie Claire, Southern Living, Town & Country, and Condé Nast Traveler. Twitter: [@AnnieMarie](#) Instagram: [@AnnieMarie](#)

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