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BEAUTY The brains behind Georgetown's new Alchimie Forever has an eye for art . . . 32



## Counter Culture

Alchimie Forever turns a mod pod in Georgetown into its artful outpost

| By Janelle Nanos | Portrait by SOTA Dzine |



**THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER**  
From top: The uber-chic Alchimie Forever president and CEO Ada Polla brings the company's art collection to DC. "I would much rather spend money on an art piece than a new pair of shoes," she says. Pieces such as *Beast in Me* by Mat Collishaw and *Le jour qui n'arrive jamais* by Andrea Mastrovito will join her at the company's new Georgetown showroom.

Jockeying for a place in front of the mirror as the oldest of four girls would give any woman a certain amount of skin care expertise. But as the daughter of a Swiss dermatologist and internist, Ada Polla truly has a leg up on the rest of us. Beauty was defined broadly in the Polla household, and her parents, the founders of the anti-aging herbal crème and treatment line Alchimie Forever, trafficked as much in fine art as they did in fine lines.

The Forever Laser Institute, the company's Geneva medspa, is attached to a contemporary art gallery featuring the work of artists who, in exchange for the gratis treatments they're given, pay homage to the beauty line in original works of art. "Some people have a much more developed sense of aesthetics than others," the 31-year-old says, having grown up with many of these artists joining her family around the dinner table. "And I know that for me, it's probably developed to an extreme."

This summer, Polla brings that aesthetic to Georgetown with the opening of Alchimie Forever's flagship showroom, the company's first storefront in the U.S. The family's DC envoy launched the line in the States after earning a B.A. in art history from Harvard and collecting her MBA at Georgetown. "My first thought was to work in a contemporary art gallery," says Polla. "Or to become head of Sotheby's, but then their CEO was indicted on charges of setting prices with Christie's and that kind of turned me

off." Off auction houses, perhaps, but on to better things.

The beauty world's gain is hardly the art world's loss, as the Wisconsin Avenue space will soon embody the same gallery aesthetic as the Swiss medspa. It will be the "visual interpretation of the product line," Polla explains. The company's clinically designed serums and antioxidant-enriched scrubs and cleansers will be on display, along with a treatment area where these items will be demonstrated on clients to highlight "the corporeal aspect of our products," she says. But the *pièce de résistance* is the art itself—mixed-media works, a wall mural and other pieces culled from the Swiss collection. Eventually, they will be replaced by the artist-ambassadors she hopes to cultivate in DC.

These creative ambassadors are key to distinguishing Alchimie, says Polla, who acknowledges that as an "indie brand" they don't have the budget to dangle endorsements before Hollywood starlets. But it's a savvy strategy, one that equates their philosophy of product with art theory, and relies less on lab-coat praise than on word-of-mouth.

"There are very few beauty brands that try to mix with contemporary art," says Polla. "For us, it's very personal. If we want to talk to the world of art, then we need to find art ambassadors. We can't use an aesthetician for that." ■

*Alchimie Forever, Waterfront Center, 1010 Wisconsin Ave., NW, Ste. 201, alchimieforever.com.*