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[www.alchimie-forever.com](http://www.alchimie-forever.com)

When Geneva native Ada Polla wanted to sell the moisturizers, cleansers and scrubs her parents formulated in Switzerland to help post-surgical patients in the United States, she knew Washington was the place to do it.

“When I started Alchimie, everyone that I talked to was quite concerned about the fact that I was starting a beauty company in the District and thought I should be in New York or I should be in L.A.,” said Polla, who came to D.C. in 2002 to earn an MBA from Georgetown. “I’m very proud to be a D.C.-based beauty brand because there’s not a lot of us and I feel like I’m doing my part reminding people that D.C. is a lot more than dark navy suits and Capitol Hill.”

Local dermatologist Tina Alster gave Polla her first order in 2004. Since then, the company has experienced double-digit annual growth. The products, all infused with anti-aging and antioxidant ingredients, are sold through partnerships with spas, specialty boutiques and dermatologists.

Polla’s father, Luigi Polla, is recognized as the first medical doctor to introduce pulsed dye laser technology to Europe to help with skin issues such as discoloration. Her mother, Barbara Polla, is a biomedical researcher whose work with heat shock proteins, antioxidants and iron chelation forms the basis of Alchimie’s anti-aging formulation.

In 1997, they founded the Forever Laser Institut, the first fully integrated European medical day spa.

“Post-procedure skincare is really how we got started,” Ada Polla said. “While [my father] thought about the products exclusively for his own medical spa clients, I thought there was an opportunity in the marketplace to distribute the line more broadly.”

She felt the American beauty market had a gap in its options for sensitive skin. “If you look at most of the anti-aging lines here or the dermatologist-formulated lines, they’re extremely effective, but they’re all on the quite aggressive side, and so if you’re prone to sensitivity or to allergies or to rosacea, for example, they’re not necessarily products that your skin can tolerate,” she said.

Washington has proved her business instincts right. “D.C. as a whole, whether thinking about fashion or restaurants or even the number of glossy magazines that we have, has evolved, and beauty is obviously a part of it,” Polla said. “People in D.C. are extremely well educated. They’re also aware of countries outside of the U.S. and they’re very curious and happy to shop outside the box.”



PHOTOS: ALCHIMIE FOREVER

Geneva native Ada Polla chose Washington, D.C., as the base for her beauty line Alchimie Forever.

