

THE BIG CHILL

BECAUSE ALL-NATURAL IS TOO DELICATE TO BE SHELF-STABLE.

In 2007, Mila Busch came to the United States from Russia as an exchange student with $500 to her name. She attended Troy University, received her Masters of Business Administration and today she is taking the world of skin care to new heights. "I grew up under communism, where everyone had basically all the same things. If you wanted a specialty item, you made it yourself or traded with someone," she says. "Skin care was one such luxury. So we made ours out of garden fruits and vegetables, based on generations-old folk recipes."

In 2010 she met her now husband and business partner, Andrew, who was stationed at Fort Hood, Texas. He served in the army as a MEDEVAC pilot where his last assignment was flying crash rescue missions for the flight school at Fort Rucker in Alabama. It was Andrew who encouraged her to take her interest in high-quality, natural skin care and see if it could become a business. And with this, the line of Wild Ice Botanicals was born.



"I grew up with an appreciation for what has since become Wild Ice's three guiding principles—natural ingredients, efficacy and value," Mila says. "When I immigrated to the United States, these parameters were how I searched for skincare products for myself but I could never seem to find products that satisfied all three." Gradually as she ran out of products to try, she grew more determined to do something about that and began to create and test ingredients and products on herself and willing friends and family.

"As you undoubtedly know it's hot down South, so on instinct in May of 2018 we purchased refrigerators to keep all of our products and ingredients chilled for freshness," says Andrew. "By July we began to notice a spike in positive customer feedback but we weren't sure what was causing the surge. It wasn't until September when Mila was in a skin care retailer that she noticed canned coffee in a mini-fridge near the checkout counter and thought how silly it was that $2 coffee is chilled for freshness while skincare products—costing many times that much—didn't get similar treatment. That's when it hit us that our own customers' success with our products was connected to potency which of course correlates with product freshness."

Later in 2019 a major retail chain expressed interested in carrying the Wild Ice line to see if it could become a candidate for regional or even national distribution. "We asked them if they would be willing to display our products in a chilled display that we would provide. They promptly refused and told us our products would sit on the shelf like all the others," says Andrew. "Like any small family business we were desperate to grow, especially in a big retailer where the potential was practically limitless but we just couldn't bring ourselves to compromise on what we felt made our products effective. To put it bluntly, it felt like we would be selling out. We ultimately thanked them and went our separate ways and concluded that in order to avoid that ever happening again we would rebrand ourselves around cold preservation to ensure retailers would know what we expected and why." The couple prototyped their packaging, developed their cube-shaped glass, boxes, product names, formulas and more.

TEXT BY MEGHAN POWELL

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The couple bought a house in Seminole that had a building on site and went to work renovating it with every minor detail in place, including FDA guidelines. "We've since been growing entirely via word of mouth while we evaluate what moves to make in order to grow to the next level —without compromising on cold preservation," Mila says. "We're very mindful of how we scale Wild Ice because, unlike most other skin care lines, we don't outsource our production to anyone else. You'd be shocked at how often two competing products on a store shelf are made in the same facility from the same ingredient stocks. None of the major production houses are willing to chill their ingredients for freshness and potency as they simply are not equipped for it." So outsourcing production was a nonstarter for that reason alone. They also were not able to use Amazon or other big fulfillment houses to fulfill their orders as they will not chill non-food products. "As such we still batch, package and ship each and every jar and bottle ourselves," says Andrew. "It's a definite point of pride and we believe that same commitment to freshness and potency is a major reason why our loyal customers enjoy such healthy-looking skin after using Wild Ice products."

Instead of big retailers, the duo works with smaller boutiques who commit to chilling their products until the moment of sale. "In an industry





where outsourcing production is the norm, we craft small batches ourselves and securely ship our products without unsustainable bubble wrap, shredded paper or messy styrofoam peanuts," says Mila. "You'll also find us selling our skincare in person at open-air markets because we're still that small family business. In the end it's all about family. And when you choose to make Wild Ice the heart of your own beauty ritual, then that's exactly how you deserve to be treated—as family." For more information or to place an order to be shipped sustainably to you, visit *wildicebotanicals.com*.

