

A large, faint, circular watermark featuring a portrait of Scarlett Johansson, which is partially visible in the background of the page.

PERSON OF INTEREST

Scarlett Johansson on Motherhood, Superhero Workouts, and Her New Minimalist Beauty Brand

The *Black Widow* star launches her clean skin-care line today—never mind if she's famously off social media. "I am really excited to create content for The Outset and be involved in our brand in that way," she says. "But I don't need to share pictures of my breakfast in order to do that."

BY LAURA REGENSDORF

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The start of spring is weeks away, but small signs of renewal keep presenting themselves. Clothing in petal-soft pastels. Fresh haircuts. Offices steadily humming back to life. That all manifests in the Zoom window, where **Scarlett Johansson** (salmon-colored sweater, crisp blond bob) is smiling from the Manhattan headquarters of **The Outset**, her new skin-care brand. Nothing about the six minimalist products suggests the star power that comes from Marvel juggernauts and art-house darlings like *Lost in Translation* and *Her*. In lieu of the actor's name on the white boxes, there are tiny logos denoting cruelty-free formulas, a carbon-neutral facility, and cartons made using wind energy. If there's a whiff of *Johansson* at all—a surname passed down by her Danish architect father—it's in the Scandinavian simplicity of the design: frosted-glass jars with cornflower blue type.

"We kept coming back to the beginning, a restart, every day feeling like a new opportunity, elevating your every day, the essentials—all of these words," the actor says of the early brainstorms. "And, I don't know, Kate had this stroke of genius." The Outset, as christened by cofounder and CEO **Kate Foster**, taps into a spirit of optimism—a bright coda for a project that coalesced over a downbeat two years. "The first time we met in person was right before the pandemic exploded—we actually met at a restaurant that's unfortunately no longer there," Johansson recalls. Ramping up a business amid global upheaval had its obvious challenges, but the state of things also offered a window of opportunity. "We were just like, 'Okay, the noise has kind of died down and here we are; it's just us. Let's get to work.'"



A hero ingredient for **The Outset**'s range is Hyaluroset, a botanical alternative to hyaluronic acid that doubles down on moisture. It taps the skin-healing benefits of the Indian plant Cassia angustifolia. (In addition to the five products now available, the lip treatment is next to arrive.) COURTESY OF THE OUTSET.

If a phrase like *the outset* signals a clean slate, that philosophy also extends to its vision for an overhauled skin-care landscape, with considered ingredients and come-one-come-all approachability. (The protective night cream is the biggest ticket item, at \$54.) At the heart of the range is an elemental three-step routine: a micellar gel for gentle cleansing, a firming serum, and a squalane-boosted moisturizer. Filling out the lineup are two targeted treatments: a lotion-like application for lips (launching soon), and an eye cream for smoothing fine lines. (It's a sleeper hit with Johansson's husband, *SNL* star and **Staten Island Ferry co-owner Colin Jost.**)

For Johansson, whose onscreen work has expanded into a production company, it seems natural that her previous beauty ambassador roles would inspire her to create something of her own. The idea of building community was central; sustainability, too. "Making something that was a necessity without contributing to a problem was a pillar of importance for me," she says, echoing the brand's warm, pragmatic approach. Here, she revisits her Y2K piercings, hints at The Outset's next steps, and talks about the lingering scrutiny around motherhood.

Vanity Fair: In the late 1990s, when you appeared with Robert Redford in *The Horse Whisperer*, he described your level of maturity as “13 going on 30.” Did that ahead-of-the-curve awareness extend to skin care?

Scarlett Johansson: It's so funny that you brought that up. Right around the time when I made *The Horse Whisperer*, I was starting to get teenage, like, hormonal acne. And I remember—this really shows you how careful you have to be around what you say to young people—the makeup artist at the time was like, "Whoa, what is that? Like Mount Vesuvius." He was describing my acne and it made me feel terrible. I did have problem skin for a really long time, well into my 20s. Even before that, starting to wear makeup when I was like eight, nine years old for film, my mom always reminded me to take care of my skin. [No matter the] amount of beauty or lighting or whatever, at the end of the day, coming home and washing your makeup off and seeing your skin, you're just kind of there with yourself. I've been hyper-aware of how that has affected my own self-confidence.

A black and white photograph of actress Scarlett Johansson. She is wearing a light-colored, long-sleeved dress and a wide-brimmed hat. She is standing outdoors, looking down at something in her hands. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a horse and some foliage.

Johansson in 1998's *The Horse Whisperer*. © BUENA VISTA PICTURES/EVERETT COLLECTION.

Coming of age in the '90s, did you experiment with beauty in ways that felt emblematic of the era? Or did you have to play it safe aesthetically because you had auditions?

I was lucky because I would leave to go do a film for a few months, and then the rest of my time I actually had a very normal childhood growing up in the city. I'd hang out with my friends, go out all around. It was felt in some ways easier then—maybe because there were no camera phones and social media, and we could just disappear into the city life. I got my nose pierced and my eyebrow pierced; I liked blue lipstick. I tweezed all my friend's eyebrows off. I still get chided by them for that. They're like, "My eyebrows never grew back after eighth grade when you plucked them all out." I'm like, "Girl, you loved it then."

Now it's all coming back, which is so crazy, just to see the whole [obsession with] Y2K makeup and hair and fashion. But I think you're supposed to do all that stuff—you're a teenager and it's just an important part of your self-discovery and self expression. I was lucky I didn't have a crazy stage mom who didn't let me play in that space.

Which women onscreen were you inspired by early on—for their performances or their sense of self in real life?

I watched a lot of movies from the golden age of Hollywood and was an enormous Judy Garland fan. She was so beautiful and vulnerable, and was such an incredible actor to watch on film. Her performances all felt so emotionally pure and available. And I loved **Winona Ryder**

growing up. I think she similarly had that kind of openness and vulnerability. And, of course, her style was so great off-screen too. She was beautiful in *Edward Scissorhands*—that's one of my favorite films—but she was also just such a teenager in it. She's finding her independence; she's kind of still a girl, but she's becoming a young woman. It's just such a great character.

You've worked with beauty brands in the past. What compelled you to create The Outset?

I worked as an ambassador for brands for a very long time, and [eventually]—because this is a project I've been working on for over five years—I just felt like I didn't want to represent other people's beauty standards. I'd outgrown that as a person, and I had the confidence to start something that felt true to me. But I didn't know how to begin; it's such a completely different industry than what I do in entertainment. I started this deep dive, trying to understand if what I was looking for was also what the consumer was looking for, so it didn't just feel like I was making something for myself. I knew I didn't want to license my name. I knew I wanted to start something on my own that was from a seedling. And I knew I wanted to build some kind of community around the brand. It wasn't until I met my cofounding partner, Kate, that everything started to crystallize.

What feelings does the phrase **celebrity beauty** bring up for you?

It's not something you can run away from, you know? The fact is, I have a thriving career in film. I've worked for 30 years in that industry, and it's something I'm really proud of. I would like this brand, of course, to stand on its own because the products are great, and if I can maybe shine the light on them in a way that's helpful, fantastic. But I also hope that we can build a community that stands outside of just my own name recognition. I don't need to boost my own ego and have my name and face all over the place, even with The Outset.

In an abstract way, what moments in your life have been a kind of reset—an “outset” type of feeling?

There have been a lot of outset moments for me, both in my professional career and in my personal life. Obviously having children is the biggest life-changing thing. I have two children, [and] after having my daughter [**Rose**, now six], it took me a long time to have that kind of new-beginning feeling. I was so in it in that primary, preoccupied phase, where you're still connected to your baby. And then I went into work pretty quickly after that. I always felt like I was trying to keep up and create some sort of work-life balance, which I think is probably a lie.

It wasn't until my daughter was more independent of me, probably around two, where I rediscovered myself. I was like, "What is most important to me in my life?" I felt like the work

that I was doing and the choices that I was making personally should be intentional in a certain kind of way, where I didn't want to feel like life was happening *to* me. I knew more what I *didn't* want in my life and in my career.

And there, of course, have been other times. When I was in my mid-20s, there was a period of time where I really felt like I was kind of pigeonholed and I could move laterally with my work, but I wasn't really being asked to stretch myself. I realized that I had to create my own opportunities to do that. At the time I had committed to doing an Arthur Miller play, called *A View From the Bridge*, on Broadway, and it was a huge step for me outside of my comfort zone. I was able to push myself into all kinds of places emotionally as an actor, and learn from my fellow actors and the experiences night after night. I realized in that moment, every piece I commit to has to feel meaningful and not just like I'm working because I'm afraid I'm never going to work again.

As someone who values privacy, how do you see yourself handling being a face of The Outset in terms of social media and appearances?

Starting a brand, it's a really expensive thing to do; you're asking people to commit a lot of upfront money to be able to fulfill all your needs as a company. And that question is always there: "Well, you don't have social media—how do you plan on promoting this?" Obviously it's a really important tool for people just to discover the brand story, and so I did have a lot of pressure to start my own social media channel...or accounts? I'm so out of the loop. People would say to me, "Most celebrities, they don't even manage their own accounts. They just look like they're authentic, but it's very strategic. There are ways of managing it, the way you would manage any other part of your public life."

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And I just don't do that with any other part of my life; every other part of my life I'm involved in and transparent about, so I just felt like, I can't be inauthentic with this. I am really excited to create content for The Outset and be involved in our brand in that way. I'm curious about interacting with the consumer and being a part of those conversations. But I don't need to share pictures of my breakfast in order to do that. I feel like I can be accessible in a way that comes from a genuine place.

What are the MVP products in your household for you, your husband, your kids?

Other than **WaterWipes**, which I feel like I go through cases of, what are the MVP products for us? In The Outset line, my husband, he loves the fine **line cream**, which is so funny. I'm like, "Oh, you really use an eye cream." I use the **lip cream** constantly. It's like a lotion, but that product was really born out of my own desire to find something that didn't require me to use six different lip products. I just want one that works. Other than that, honestly it's, like, **A+D Ointment**. Can I say A+D Ointment? [laughs]

What do you want to create in the future? I feel like the brand has so much wiggle room in terms of it being cross-category.

Yeah. I would love to apply our ethos to these kinds of hero products. I could see it in color [cosmetics]. I could see it in fragrance. I could see it in women's hair [care]. Even in, who knows, apparel or homeware. But we are focused on getting this part right. I'm so interested to see how the consumer reacts to what we created, because we want them to feel a part of the process of how we expand.

In your back catalog of work, is there a beauty transformation that stands out to you—a pink wig in *Lost in Translation*, or an insane superhero body moment?

That was a humongous moment for me because I was, I don't know, 23 or 24 when I was cast in *Iron Man 2*. I had never stepped foot in a gym, and I had five weeks to prepare myself for these huge stunt sequences. Back then when we were doing it, over a decade ago, it was before we kind of figured out how to be most efficient in the process of shooting stunt work—what could be handed off to other stunt people and what the actor would practically need to know. So I was doing these huge choreographed sequences and I had no previous experience with any of that stuff. It was just a massive lifestyle change immediately upon getting cast.

I was living in L.A. at the time, and I went to this massive, huge, muscle meathead gym. I didn't know how to use any of the equipment. I mean, I was so intimidated. Luckily I had a really great trainer, this guy, **Bobby Strom**, who was training my husband at the time, **Ryan Reynolds**. And he took me under his wing and was so positive, and really made me understand what functional training was. And I could never go back the other way. Fitness is such an important part of my mental wellness. Other than that, I've had to bleach my eyebrows several times for different movies I've done. It's always fun to live with in your everyday life! **You've talked about how women's bodies are so scrutinized in the public eye, and pregnancy is another time that people have all sorts of opinions about women's bodies. In this postpartum phase with your second kid, how has that experience been for you this time around?**

I think because I'm hyper-aware of what you're touching on, I've been so protective of both pregnancies, not wanting to feel scrutinized in the public eye. I wanted to be able to have my own feelings about my changing body without other people also telling me how they saw me, whether it was positive or negative. I realized when I was pregnant with my son [**Cosmo**, born last August], it's funny how much stuff people put on you when you're pregnant—their hopes or their judgment or their desire, a lot of that is put on pregnant women. I would have a lot of people saying things to me immediately, like, "How great, oh my God, that's wonderful." And while I was definitely excited to be pregnant in some ways, I also had a lot of not-great feelings about it, and that would be scrutinized by—I'm talking about, like, women that were close to me. You expect it from men, but from women, it's like, "Come on, girl, you've been through it."

One friend, when I told her that I was pregnant—she knew I was trying to get pregnant—she was just like, "Oh shit. Great, but not great." And I was like, "You're a true friend." [laughs] I feel like a lot of things have moved forward in the past five years in terms of women's empowerment, but that thing remains sort of in the Dark Ages. So much judgment it's crazy.

You've got this brand, you've also got this new baby. How do you see yourself balancing the entertainment part of your life?

How am I feeling about it all? There's a lot on my plate. I'm pretty good at delegating. I'm used to having a lot of balls in the air, and I think I'm finally okay with letting other people help me keep the balls up. I haven't always been that way. I'm getting to a place in my life where I'm okay with letting other people in, with asking for help—because I have projects that I want to work on as an actor, and they're very consuming. It's like, once I go into production, I don't

have that much space for other stuff. I'm working probably about 15, 16 hours a day. Other than having a little bit of time here and there to maybe answer emails or take a call, that work involves a lot of brain space.

I want to take the summer off [from acting] to just focus on this project. It needs a lot of attention. And I'll focus on my family, which needs a lot of attention. I have a film-TV production company, so we have 12 projects that we're doing and we're extremely spread thin. So that's plenty for me—for right now.

This interview has been edited and condensed.



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Laura Regensdorf

BEAUTY DIRECTOR

Laura Regensdorf is the beauty director at *Vanity Fair*, with an eye to the wellness boom, emerging brands, and personalities across stage and screen. Previously an editor at *Vogue* and *Elle Decor*, she also writes about music, art, and dance. Laura lives in Brooklyn. You can follow her on [Instagram](#)

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