



This Serum Smells Like Hot Dog Water — & Derms Can't Get Enough

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To buy into much of what the skin-care industry is selling, to a certain extent, you have to believe in magic. Mystical miracle soups, ancient ancestral secrets passed down for generations and generations, tall tales of monks and priests and Egyptian queens: These kinds of farfetched backstories, whether based in truth or not at all (difficult to confirm, either way), are what best-selling products are made of.

But there are no Ayurvedic principles or family recipes behind SkinCeuticals' cult-favorite antioxidant serum, C E Ferulic. What the 12-ingredient formula does have is science — cold, hard, honest science. And that has been more than enough to earn C E Ferulic its

unparalleled fanbase, and its longtime status as quite possibly the single most-loved product of board-certified dermatologists and beauty editors and average skin-care shoppers everywhere

Not everyone is surprised that this objectively unsexy product — which makes exactly zero mention of miracles, comes in straightforward, clinical packaging, and smells like either pennies or hot-dog water, depending on who you ask — has earned such an intense cult following.

Dermatologist **William Kwan**, MD, for one, said he saw it coming from the get go. "It has scientifically proven effectiveness that I knew would catch on," he says of first encountering the formula upon its release over a decade ago.

And catch on it did. C E Ferulic launched officially in 2005, the result of 40 years of academic research conducted by leading dermatologist and professor Sheldon Pinnell, MD, who became the founding scientist and chief medical advisor behind SkinCeuticals. Dr. Pinnell was a true innovator in the field, and his specific research into vitamin C is why, for all the imitations the product has spawned, none have succeeded in recreating the formula. The combination — of 15% pure vitamin C (L-ascorbic acid), 1% vitamin E (alpha tocopherol), and 0.5% ferulic acid — was *his* discovery, which is why he was able to patent it.

"The patent is around the three parameters Dr. Pinnell proved to be the gold standard for an effective antioxidant," says Christina Fair, the brand's general manager. "One, the combination of these ingredients is more effective than vitamin C alone; two, vitamin C has to be pure, with a concentration between 10-15% for best results; and three, the formula has to be at a pH lower than 3.5 for optimal delivery."

Because vitamin C is water-soluble, and vitamin E is oil-soluble, combining the two, *and* maximizing their efficacy, is not necessarily easy. Dr. Pinnell's background in investigative research made him uniquely equipped to develop and perfect this type of formula; prior to helping advance the cosmeceutical industry with his innovations in topical antioxidants, he specialized in skin biology and the pathogenesis of skin diseases, including cancer. With Dr. Pinnell at the helm, SkinCeuticals became one of the very first companies to do real scientific research to prove that antioxidants can help protect the skin from UV rays.

"Today, SkinCeuticals remains rooted in science, and C E Ferulic continues to be the gold standard in topical antioxidant care in the physician community," says Fair. Ask a dermatologist — any dermatologist, no matter their specialty or even their brand affiliation — which products

they not only recommend to their patients, but also use on their own board-certified faces. It is not an exaggeration to say that, nine times out of ten, they will tell you that they use C E Ferulic every morning. "It's one of the most potent and stable antioxidants available," says Elizabeth Tanzi, MD.

The formula is also an essential for Laurel Naversen Geraghty, MD, a former beauty editor-turned-licensed dermatologist. "C E Ferulic is one of the very few over-the-counter products that is backed by research published in peer-reviewed medical journals," she says. "I believe it has a positive effect for guarding against free radical damage that we naturally accumulate during the day (from sun, pollution, and our skin's natural metabolism), which is why I don't mind paying over \$100 for this serum. It's key that it comes with an opaque dropper bottle, since light and heat can easily break down vitamin C."

In a market where beautiful packaging and an aromatherapeutic blend of essential oils is enough for a "natural" serum handmade in someone's kitchen to generate major buzz, C E Ferulic earns no points on the trend front. But that's just fine — and it's a testament to the power of this product, that people repurchase again and again despite the peculiar smell (Fair says she likes to call it "the smell of efficacy") and the steep price tag (\$166 for 1 fl oz).

"Simply put, it works," says Fair. "Not only do you get advanced environmental protection by neutralizing damaging free radicals caused by UVA/UVB and ozone pollution, but you also see visible aging benefits and improvement in overall skin brightness. Customers see and *feel* C E Ferulic transform their skin." No bullshit, no frills, no floral extracts: What's given C E Ferulic its staying power in an oversaturated skin-care universe is that it offers nothing but real, tangible results. And the faint yet familiar scent of hot dogs — which, as any of the serum's devoted fans will tell you, you'll eventually come to love.

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