

FRAGRANCE AND PERSONAL CARE

SK-II reimagines ingredient to turn skincare into art

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"Pitera is Legendary" by Ram Han. Image courtesy of SK-II

By SARAH JONES

Japanese beauty label SK-II is leveraging art to engage consumers around its skincare through immersive bricks-and-mortar experiences.

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The SK-II Artist Series: Power of Pitera project spans a skincare-inspired exhibit and a new artistic themed store concept designed to take beauty engagement beyond selling. Through collaborations with artists in multiple mediums, SK-II is telling the story of its hero ingredient Pitera in inventive, unexpected ways.

"Over the years we have partnered with artists to reimagine our iconic Pitera Essence through limited-edition designs," said Sandeep Seth, CEO of Global SK-II. "We wanted to take this to the next level and push the boundaries. As we like to say in SK-II, if it ain't broken, break it.

"To connect with the consumers of this generation, it is no longer about selling products, but engaging her head, heart and soul and finding new and meaningful ways to do so," he said. "Through our partnership with Carol Lim, Han Ram, Ryan Heffington, *Toiletpaper* and the creative collective of artists, we were able to merge the worlds of beauty and art to completely reimagine our iconic Pitera and engage her with our iconic brand story that was not possible before."

Ingredient interpretations

The story of Pitera's development dates back to SK-II's origins. In the 1970s, the brand was on the hunt for an anti-aging ingredient with no luck, until it stumbled on a secret.

SK-II's scientists noticed that elderly sake brewers had very soft hands, and sought to translate the benefits they were seeing into skincare. Extracted from the fermentation process, Pitera is a clear liquid that is used across the entire SK-II skincare line.

"Pitera's story is serendipitous and powerful," said Chris Ramey, president of **Affluent Insights**, Miami, FL. "Luxury brands don't sell; they simply share their narrative.

"Science need not be staid, particularly if you're marketing a luxury product," he said.

Telling this story in a creative way, SK-II has tapped Opening Ceremony cofounder Carol Lim to partner on an art series around Pitera.

One of the artworks created for the project is a surreal illustration by Ram Han that was inspired by SK-II's discovery in the sake brewery. It shows a woman clutching a bottle of SK-II surrounded by bubbles and a dreamscape that includes a pair of disembodied hands holding rice amid test tubes.

Art magazine *ToiletPaper* took inspiration from the single drop of SK-II that contains Pitera. The images created show women with large-scale drops sitting on their faces, in their hands or functioning as a pillow.



Pitera is "a Miraculous drop" by Toilet Paper. Image courtesy of SK-II

Pitera is often marketed as a path towards "crystal clear skin." Taking this as a starting point, Zhong Lin photographed SK-II brand ambassadors Tangwei and Ayase.

SK-II's "pat pat" application has also been turned into a dance move courtesy of choreographer Ryan Heffington.

Pitera is "Pat Pat" by Ryan Heffington

A group of female artists from around the globe also put their own spin on Pitera through various mediums including painting, illustration, sculpture and photography.

The works from SK-II Artist Series: Power of Pitera will be on display in Shanghai in an exhibit running until Nov. 24.

"We hope our largest artistic undertaking and one of the world's biggest beauty and art crossover programs will create a more meaningful shopping experience for consumers that brings to life the Pitera experience first-hand," Mr. Seth said.

As part of its effort to create an engaging bricks-and-mortar experience, the label will be opening an SK-II Artist Series flagship store in Tokyo this December. This boutique will feature manga-inspired artwork, reflecting the local culture.



SK-II's Art Series flagship store. Image courtesy of SK-II

"This is part of our ongoing global innovation journey to transform beauty retail experiences and create a meaningful connection with consumers, which began with our Future X Smart Stores, which leveraged advanced technology to create a more meaningful shopping experience," Mr. Seth said. "Our new SK-II Artist Series stores bring a whole new dimension to the skincare retail experience, our first art-inspired store design for Matsumoto Kiyoshi, Ikebukuro flagship outlet in Tokyo uses manga-inspired design language, creating a uniquely Japanese skincare retail experience.

"Our goal for bricks-and-mortar stores is to not only make the skincare experience pressure-free but also more meaningful with consumers, connecting with them in unique and engaging ways," he said.

Rethinking retail

Beyond this art project, SK-II is working to reinvent the store experience.

SK-II showcased its Future X Smart Store at CES. The concept, which originally debuted in Tokyo and has since expanded to Shanghai and Singapore, aims to offer consumers a "phygital" experience.

By sitting in a booth, shoppers are able to get an individual skincare consultation through facial recognition-powered diagnostics. Unlike many other skincare analysis solutions, consumers do not need their face to have direct contact with a device to get a reading.

After learning more about their skin type, consumers can head to a Smart Beauty Bar to discover products and make purchases through a digital shopping cart. Rather than tapping screens, the experience tracks shoppers' hand movements to enable them to virtually add items to their basket ([see story](#)).

"Brick-and-mortar provides for experiences, memories and meaning," Mr. Ramey said. "It's how luxury brands are built."

SK-II is also using comedy to educate consumers about its skincare in an entertaining format that aims to break out of the category's usual marketing formula.

The brand's "Bare Skin Chat" sees actress Chlo Grace Moretz act as a skincare guru to talk show host James Corden. Through the series of films, SK-II aims to demystify beauty with the help of the unexpected duo, removing some of the seriousness surrounding skincare ([see story](#)).

As part of the campaign, SK-II tapped recording artist John Legend to perform a song dedicated to Pitera.

"Elevating your brand to art is known as artification," Mr. Ramey said. "In this case, it's elevating the narrative."