



## Meet Our New GH Seal Star!

# Honest

A childhood marked by illness pushed actress **Jessica Alba** to create The Honest Company, a trailblazing business to help families stay safer – and now, with four GH Seals under its belt, Jessica and her team are working harder than ever to deliver on that promise

If you'd been a fly on the wall at The Honest Company's L.A. offices one day in September, you would have witnessed nothing short of an eruption of joy. "We were in a conference room and someone yelled, 'We got the Seal!'" says Jessica Alba, 36, founder of the L.A.-based business, which focuses on safe baby, home and personal care products in stylish packaging. "There were high-fives and people hugging, we were so proud."

Jessica and the Honest team had been waiting to find out whether four items from her newly relaunched and reformulated line of cleaning products – the multi-surface cleaner, the laundry detergent, the dish soap and the hand soap – would meet the stringent GH Seal standards and make it through the lengthy testing process.

"We were confident in our formulations, since we'd put them through our own rigorous testing for safety and efficacy, but still, you're always nervous – it was sort of like waiting for a baby," says Jessica, who happens to be waiting for baby number three, a boy, due this winter (she and husband Cash Warren have two girls, ages 9 and 6). "Earning the Good Housekeeping Seal means you can trust that it's been vetted by the best of the best," says Jessica. "It's validation that [the products] really deliver."

### Early Inspiration

Jessica's drive to start her business arose partly from her own health woes. "I was really sick as a kid," she says. "I had severe asthma and allergies, and I spent a lot of time in the hospital. My airways would start to close up if I had an attack – it was really scary." To control her asthma, Jessica was on steroids for much of her childhood. "But as a teen, I learned to take control of my health. I'd notice that every time I used certain cleaning products or hairspray, I'd get a headache or itchy eyes or a rash or I'd wheeze, so I'd stop using it, which made my life so much better. When I had my first child at 26, I wanted this new little person to live a healthy life too. I had a really lonely childhood, and I didn't have a lot of friends. I didn't want that for my kids." (Neither of Jessica's daughters has asthma, though both have allergies.)

But when Jessica researched which products she could trust as a new parent, she encountered a bewildering array of ingredients with unproven or potentially harmful effects. "I wondered, *What are phthalates and endocrine disruptors? And what are they going to do to my child over time?* Because it's not necessarily just one exposure – it's a cumulative impact that can affect brain development and how your body matures." →



## **mogul mom**

Jessica's goal is to make doing the right thing for your family easy — and attractive. "Our diapers are so beautiful, it makes those 10 changes a day not so terrible," she laughs.



## Soap Smarts

The GH Institute's resident chemical engineer Birnur Aral, Ph.D., and Carolyn Forté, head of the GH Cleaning Lab, demystify the chemistry of cleaning!

### How Soap Works

All cleaners must have chemicals to be effective. Surfactants are the main active ingredients for removing oil and grime. Each surfactant molecule has one component that loves water (or is hydrophilic, in science-speak) and another that repels it (or is hydrophobic) but likes oil. When you mix soap with water, the surfactant molecules penetrate and loosen soil, and friction from rubbing or scrubbing lifts away dirt.

### Function of Foam

Surfactant molecules are also the main source of foam. However satisfying it may feel to see lots of suds, foam is not necessarily an indicator of efficacy.

### Find Your Perfect Soap

Some surfactants can irritate skin because they can strip the body of its natural oils. If you or your family members have sensitive skin, do some research to find out which products, like ones from The Honest Company, contain mild surfactants or low quantities of them (just don't expect a sink

She also discovered that some products marketed specifically for babies weren't even gentle enough for her own skin. "When I was pregnant with my oldest child, I washed her layette and I had an allergic reaction," she says.

Jessica began trying various green brands. "Some didn't work well; some had packaging to make them look natural when they really weren't," she says. Her solution: to create her own dream product line of safe, affordable and effective family-care products. "I wanted Honest to be a brand that put human health and safety first and actually worked," she says.

She built a team of entrepreneurs in the eco-responsible sphere (including Honest cofounder Christopher Gavigan, author of *Healthy Child Healthy World*) and went to work raising funds. Honest launched in 2012 with 17 products; today, the company has more than 100 products, employs nearly 400 people and reportedly has a market value just under \$1 billion. "We are the little engine that could," says Jessica. With a reported \$300 million in annual sales from Honest's

**"I'm a science nerd," says Jessica. "I want to learn."**

subscription-based online store and products in big-box chains like Target and Whole Foods, Honest is a true success story.

"I'm competitive," says Jessica. "Being in acting, you [learn to] persevere. 'You don't think a woman of color can be a leading lady? Let me show you.'" Jessica, whose father is Mexican, proved doubters wrong on that count when she starred in the TV series *Dark Angel*, where she kicked serious booty as a genetically enhanced heroine fighting government agents—a role that snagged her a Golden Globe nomination. She also played superhero astronaut Susan Storm in *Fantastic Four* and

starred in lighthearted rom-coms such as *Valentine's Day*. "The constant rejection in acting prepares you for just about anything, but certainly for business," she says. "When people tell me something can't be done, I see a challenge. Just because it hasn't been done doesn't mean it can't be. I just have to figure it out."

### Overcoming Obstacles

Jessica's grit prepared her well for one unexpected challenge of launching a business: legal action by people claiming that some of her products were ineffective or mislabeled. "Because Jessica is who she is, she brings visibility to our products, but at the same time, if there's a hiccup, she's also got a bigger target on her back," says Don Frey, Honest's chief innovation officer, a chemical engineer with 30-plus years of experience in the personal care industry.

But while lawsuits make headlines, they aren't a litmus test for quality. "There are attorneys out there who make a living off of consumer class-action suits, so it's fairly common to be sued," says David Biderman, a partner in the California offices of law firm Perkins Coie, which specializes in food and consumer packaged-goods class-action defense (neither he nor his firm has represented Honest or its direct competitors).

And Honest has many supporters. "We need more companies like Honest," says Amy Ziff, founder of Made Safe, a nonprofit that certifies products that have met strict scientific screening criteria for toxins that may affect human health, aquatic life and the ecosystem. "Honest invites consumers who have been buying conventional products—like the ones they grew up with—into the green space. But it's not an easy place to be, and you take hits from all sides."

"[Dealing with the lawsuits] was stressful, but it was a lesson, and it just made us want to better convey our messaging," says Jessica. "We are always looking for ways to be innovative, to learn and take it to the next level."

Ultimately, a company with "honest" in its name has set the bar high for transparency, which is one reason the founders have pursued trusted endorsements—including the GH Seal. "When a product earns the GH Seal, we ensure, through rigorous evaluation, that it performs as promised," says Rachel Rothman, a mechanical engineer and the technical director of the Good Housekeeping Institute,

Fashion Director: Kristen Saladino. Hair: Chad Wood using Honest Beauty at The Wall Group. Makeup: Daniel Martin for Honest Beauty. Manicure: Ashlie Johnson for Chanel Le Vernis at The Wall Group.

## environmental impact

"I tried to create a homey experience in the office," says Jessica. "It's a cozy space where you can be creative."

GET THE LOOK | EARRINGS, \$75, SAKI.NCHLOE.COM. BLAZER, \$198, LELAMOSS.COM. REBECCA TAYLOR FOR 100% BLOOMINGDALE'S DRESS, \$450, BLOOMINGDALES.COM. MULES, \$TK, TKTK.COM.

# Honest's Quest for the Seal



## Honest HQ

The company reformulated its products in its own labs before GH investigated them.



## It's a Go!

After the products passed muster, Jessica and *GH* Editor in Chief Jane Francisco celebrated Honest's four Seals.



## Team Spirit

All smiles with the GH chemists, analysts and engineers who vetted the products in our own labs.

## Jessica's success secret

"Nothing is easy," says Jessica. "If it's easy, you should worry. You have to fail a few times to find out what the best path forward is. It's part of learning."

the 118-year-old consumer-product testing lab that evaluates everything from skincare creams and smart-home technologies to kitchen gear and toilet paper.

The Seal approval process delved into the formulas' supply chain, including raw-materials sourcing and manufacturing processes, to ensure that it was aligned with the ingredient-related claims. Institute scientists also tested the products for efficacy in the GH Lab using panelists and various protocols.

"When I found out all the testing GH does for the Seal, I was like, *Oh, my God!*" says Frey. "It was very positive for us to have that outside lens. It's like having an auditor to make sure we have all the bases covered." Agrees Ziff, "[That third-party safety check] is a powerful thing, especially since so many terms, like 'nontoxic' and 'green,' aren't regulated. And moms, who typically control most

household spending, want something safe."

Getting the Seal resonated on a personal level for Kevin Ewell, Honest's director of research and development. "I have a baby in the NICU — she's doing great now, but she was premature," he says. "My wife and I couldn't hold her for a month. When they gave us her laundry for the first time, we were so excited to do *something* for her — and I knew what was in Honest detergent. I said to my wife, 'Trust me — I know this is safe.'"

Honest has also earned the USDA's Bio Preferred certification for many of its products that have satisfied set government standards for meeting a minimum amount of plant-derived ingredients. In addition, some of the company's products have earned the EPA's Safer Choice label, indicating that chemicals have been reviewed for toxicity to human health, aquatic life and the planet as well as for performance->



### THE HONEST COMPANY MULTI-SURFACE CLEANER

Tackle any mess with this powerful formula, which scoured through our Cleaning Lab tests, leaving virtually every surface we tried it on streak-free and shiny.



### THE HONEST COMPANY GEL HAND SOAP

Keep a bottle by every sink. Lab testers liked that this soap, available in four scent variants, was gentle and left hands feeling clean and soft.



## mother of invention

"I wasn't taken seriously at first," says Jessica (above, with husband Cash and daughters Honor, left, and Haven), who felt dismissed by people who regarded her as "just" a mom. She proved them wrong!

## Champion of Change

Jessica's commitment to safety and health extends to our nation's capital. She's lobbied twice to strengthen the Toxic Substances Control Act; the amendment was signed into law in 2016, but critics, including Jessica, say it doesn't go far enough. "There are only 11 [cosmetics] chemicals banned in the U.S., but in Europe, over 1,300 are banned," Jessica says. "If Europe has tested chemicals and shown they aren't safe, why are we selling products with them here?"

She has high praise for California's Cleaning Product Right to Know Act of 2017, which says cleaning products sold in the state must list ingredients — particularly known hazardous ones — on their labels by 2021. Advocates see the law as a key protection, as there are few to no federal regulations on what ingredients companies may keep proprietary. "We're hoping it'll become a national standard," she says.

## Family First

As for Jessica's personal evolution, a return to full-time acting isn't on the agenda: "I did a role in Ted Melfi's movie *El Camino Christmas*, but unless I was in control, [going back] would feel weird. If I could develop a film or a series for Netflix, that would be cool. I still have my *Dark Angel* fans, and Hollywood is finally allowing women to star more in action franchises, which is a passion of mine."

# “Becoming a mom made me more true to who I am.”

As is the case for many moms, it's tricky for Jessica to balance motherhood with work, but she sees the two roles as interconnected. "I feared I would lose my sense of self in becoming a mom, but it's actually made me more true to who I am," she says. "It's good for my girls to see that I have an opinion... hopefully some of what I'm doing will rub off on them. It's hard, because they're growing up with more privilege than I had."

Jessica's father was in the military, and the family moved several times. "My mother was always working several jobs. Now she works with Honest as an educator, visiting retailers to explain why we use some ingredients and not others. If I can't be there talking to people, my mom can."

For mothers thinking of launching a business, Jessica offers this: "The Internet is a blessing because it allows you to try things out. You can put things on Etsy to see if there's a marketplace for you, or on Instagram to create a social following [she has over 11 million Instagram followers]. If you have a point of view and a story to tell, there's probably a community out there that wants to be part of what you're doing. It's not easy, but you have to try if you have it in your heart."

Jessica's heart is, of course, with her family first. At the end of the day, she's like any other mom, diving into the controlled chaos of bedtime. She's always looking for teachable moments, imparting the values she tries to embody. "Recently, I told my oldest, who doesn't want to hurt anyone's feelings, 'It's OK to win a race, it doesn't mean you're bragging. Don't hold yourself back.'" In other words, grow up to be just like her mom. ♦



**THE HONEST COMPANY DISH SOAP**  
In our evaluations, this successfully cleaned greasy dishes and cookware, and testers found it gentle on skin. The formula is made with essential oils for light fragrance.



**THE HONEST COMPANY LAUNDRY DETERGENT**  
Our pros love that this cleans in hot, warm or cold water and works in both high-efficiency and traditional washing machines. Pour it right on stains for easy pretreating too!

