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A One Woman Powerhouse!

Meet 2024 ABIA Sole Operator of the Year & Eco Salon of the Year, Sara Bowtell from House Of Samara.

By Louise May

Tucked away in the quiet beauty of Allambie Heights on Sydney's Northern Beaches, there's a little clinic doing big things. And at the heart of it all is Sara Bowtell – passionate skin therapist, dedicated nutritionist, environmental advocate, and proud owner of House of Samara.

With over 25 years of industry experience and a deeply cemented belief in holistic care, Sara's work is about so much more than skincare. Her unique blend of science, sustainability, and soul has not only earned her the respect of her clients and community, but also the industry at large – recently taking home both the 2024 ABIA Sole Operator of the Year and the ABIA Eco Salon of the Year.

For Sara, it's not about accolades. It's about impact.

Nine years ago, Sara opened House of Samara with a clear mission: to create a clinic that cares – not only for skin, but for the whole person and the planet too. As a sole operator, she wears every hat in the business – therapist, receptionist, educator, mentor, researcher, writer, and environmentalist – and somehow manages to bring love and energy to every single role.

A typical day might include advanced skin consultations, nutritional guidance, microneedling or LED therapy, and helping a client understand what their skin is trying to tell them. But it doesn't end there. Sara is constantly researching, upskilling, planting vegetables out the front of her clinic, or coordinating local beach clean-ups.

The success of House of Samara is deeply personal. It reflects Sara's values, her resilience, and her drive to leave the world better than she found it. Her clinic has become a trusted sanctuary for teens, professionals, mums, and CEOs alike – all seeking something deeper, something real.



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clinic profile



Real Skin, Real Talk

Sara's expertise lies in treating skin conditions like acne, rosacea, pigmentation and premature ageing – but her point of difference is her whole-body approach. She's a corneotherapist and accredited nutritionist with a Bachelor of Health Science and a recently completed Master of Human Nutrition from Deakin University. Her clients don't just walk away with a facial – they leave with understanding, empowerment, and a plan tailored to their unique needs, lifestyle, and budget. She's passionate about cutting through the overwhelm of the beauty world to help clients make informed choices that work. Every consultation starts with education, with a focus on achievable, sustainable skincare routines. All services are customised and designed to support real, lasting change – inside and out.

A Green Salon, Inside and Out

Sustainability is woven into every part of House of Samara. From solar panels and rainwater tanks to electric vehicles and refillable product programs, Sara is proving that small businesses can make a big difference. She's a proud member of Sustainable Salons, diverting up to 95% of her waste from landfill and transforming it into new resources – like park benches and bollards. Her return rewards program encourages clients to bring back empty product packaging in exchange for loyalty points, with an impressive 82% return rate. Every glove, every pipette, every cotton bud is thoughtfully disposed of and repurposed where possible.



Sara even composts clients' food scraps from their appointments via a Bokashi bin system and offers homegrown herbs and limes from her garden. And yes, clients have absolutely pulled their own carrots from the veggie patch out front.

Her efforts haven't gone unnoticed. From receiving the Northern Beaches Council Outstanding Sustainability Award to features in The Guardian, local councils, and industry publications – House of Samara is a leading example of how the beauty industry can become a force for good. "I don't believe we need to sacrifice results for sustainability," she says. "We can do both. We can use beautiful, effective products while also thinking about the planet. It's about being conscious and doing the best we can."

Community at the Core

At the heart of Sara's business is connection – with her clients, the community, and the land itself. She leads beach clean-ups, participates in Take 3 for the Sea and Clean Up Australia Day, and uses her platform to encourage others to reduce their environmental impact in ways that feel achievable.

Whether she's speaking on sustainability panels, hosting educational events, or mentoring other salon owners, Sara's message is clear: we're all capable of making a difference.

Her clinic has become more than just a place to treat skin – it's a hub for growth, learning, and meaningful change. Clients aren't just treated; they're inspired.

Juggling It All (And Keeping It Real)

Running a business solo is no easy feat – especially while raising teenagers and completing a master's degree. Sara's honesty about the challenges she's faced – from burnout and time constraints to the emotional juggle of motherhood and business – is one of the reasons she's so loved and respected.

During the busiest periods of her study, Sara made the decision to reduce her clinic hours and cap new client bookings, ensuring she could give her full attention to the people already in her care. That decision not only protected her energy, but strengthened client loyalty and increased retention and average spend.

"It was a lesson in slowing down to speed up," she shares. "You can't pour from an empty cup. Learning to say no was hard at first, but it allowed me to show up better – not just for my clients, but for myself." Sara's story is a reminder that balance is possible – even if it takes time, trial and error, and the occasional veggie patch therapy session.



Skin, Science, and Soil

A self-confessed science nerd, Sara's love of learning is ongoing. She regularly updates her in-salon library with books and journals on skin health, gut health, and environmental science. She's a member of multiple professional associations and is planning to attend the International Corneotherapy Symposium in Germany to further her understanding of the skin's innate immune system.

She's also an AUSMAP citizen scientist, trained in microplastic sampling, which she conducts locally and sends off to Macquarie University for analysis. This hands-on work feeds directly into her clinic's education model and environmental practices.

As she says, "Your skin is only as good as what's going on underneath – and what's going on around us. It's all connected."

Looking Ahead

Sara plans to continue building on the strong foundations she's created at House of Samara – sharing her knowledge, supporting other small business owners, and staying focused on practical, achievable sustainability. She's already mentoring others in the industry and encouraging more salon owners to look at how they can run their businesses in a more eco-conscious way.

From thoughtful touches like reusable cups and a book-swap library, to larger initiatives like solar energy, composting, and product returns programs, every part of the clinic has been designed with intention and care.

Winning two ABIA titles in 2024 - Sole Operator of the Year and Eco Salon of the Year, was a proud moment and a recognition of the years of consistent work behind the scenes. But for Sara, the real success lies in the steady impact she's having every day – on her clients, the community, and the environment around her.

House of Samara is a clear example of how one person, with a strong vision and a whole lot of dedication, can create meaningful change.

@sarahouseofsamara