

# RxART

## VANITY FAIR

### Ducati and Men's Grooming Brand Atwater Collaborate on a Mission-Driven Soap

February 1, 2023  
By Laura Regensdorf



Chris Salgado, as you might expect from a men's grooming guru, wears his ink on his sleeves. "I have an anchor over here," he says, lifting his right bicep, Popeye-style, into the Zoom window. That was his first tattoo, dating back some 15 years—not long after Salgado signed on as president of Kiehl's USA. (He left the company in October 2017, staying on as brand ambassador into the following fall.) "I just try to remember to be anchored in everything that I do in life, because you can get battered around," he explains. The left arm is a more complex work in progress, incorporating eagles and a Bengal tiger. "It's kind of like my Atwater mascot," Salgado says of the big-cat muse for his five-month-old skin care startup.

Tattoos, trademark beard: check, check. But that paints only a partial picture of the beauty industry veteran. Behind him, a wall of framed art showcases his eclectic eye at home in Stone Ridge, New York, a two-hour drive north of his former corporate job. A red Supreme x Vitra Pantone chair makes a curvy set piece, while a blush pink sequined Chanel vest, layered over a white T-shirt, catches the light in the foreground. This is the guy who memorably parked a Ducati Panigale inside his office at Kiehl's—a high-energy talisman—though these days he's more likely to hop on his 2023 Super Sport for winding mountain drives. "For some reason it makes sense: Chanel, Supreme, the skateboards, the crazy yard," says the Atwater founder, laughing about his gardening obsession. "I love how things naturally come together."

The latest addition to the grooming brand's lineup similarly reflects such cross-pollination. Today, Atwater debuts its first collaboration: a limited-edition custom bar soap with Ducati, which supports the nonprofit organization RxART. "It was a 30-minute call that turned into two hours," Salgado says of the initial brainstorm with Jason Chinnock, CEO of Ducati North America. The two instantly became "fast friends," as Chinnock puts it, describing a shared "passion of bringing joy and health to people's lives through our areas of expertise." Of course they also spoke in shorthand about bikes. "My father was a big motorcycle enthusiast," Salgado says

of his boyhood introduction. (The skin care brand is named for his father's hometown of Atwater, California.) "He got my mom on bikes, then he got me on bikes. We had them all: Suzuki, Yamaha, BMW—you name it, we had the bike."

When it came to dreaming up a product with Ducati, Salgado had plenty of road-tested essentials to look to, including the windbreaker trio he layers under his helmet: Heavy Armor facial moisturizer, Eye Armor, and Lip Armor. But instead he leaned toward the universal. "If you're a motorcyclist and you're a guy, you need to get clean," the founder says, familiar with the caked dust that accompanies, say, a ride through Joshua Tree. (That's where Salgado shot the original Atwater brand imagery, taking a Ducati Street Fighter through the desert to Salton Sea.) The line's Clean Impact body-cleansing bar provided the formula's starting point. "The technology in Clean Impact is great because it has three things: It's an exfoliator, it's a hydrator, and it has an organic ingredient that kills bacterial cells," Salgado says. For the Ducati edition, he added in charcoal powder—a natural detoxifier that imparts a chrome-gray cast—and a hit of citrus. The special-edition black packaging suits the Italian brand, while the soap's name is called out in red: AXD1, as if the debut Atwater x Ducati collaboration were a model name for a bike.

Salgado, who for years led the Kiehl's-sponsored LifeRide motorcycle event to raise funds for amfAR, was equally keen on giving back with Atwater. The choice of RxART was an easy one, with Salgado a longtime supporter and board member. "RxART's mission is to create beauty, humor, and comfort in pediatric hospitals," says founder and former gallerist Diane Brown, whose organization is behind the exuberant, museum-level commissions seen inside treatment centers, including a jewel-tone mural by Nicolas Party (Children's Hospital Los Angeles), zany pool-themed rooms by Derrick Adams (NYC Health + Hospitals/Harlem), and a CT scanner festooned with Jeff Koons' monkeys (Advocate Children's Hospital in Oak Lawn, Illinois). "Our projects are only visible to children who are hospitalized, their parents, and staff," says Brown,

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The packaging for the limited-edition soap takes a cue from Ducati's design codes. Photo by SEAN DVR.

grateful for the exposure—right on the front of each bar soap. “The more people that learn about RxART, the more we can do.”

And RxART has grand plans ahead, with a multipart installation underway at SUNY Upstate's Nappi Wellness Institute, in Syracuse. Atwater will donate up to \$10,000 from the AXD1 soap sales to underwrite a project by Tomokazu Matsuyama; other artists involved include Julia Chiang and Ann Craven, whose painting of a pansy Salgado snapped up at a past RxART gala. (This year's event is next week in New York.) In a way, the mission of RxART—to reframe a challenging period through creative, uplifting means—is dear to Salgado too. When I ask about the brand's origin story, the mood turns emotional: He lost his motorcycle-loving dad around Thanksgiving this past year. “He knew all about this project—he was super proud,” says Salgado, who started out as a Chanel makeup artist and now logs time in his three-car garage. “I love being in there and tinkering and doing all the things that he did. I have more tools than anyone could ever need,” he laughs. Knitting his father into the brand story means that it will always be a family business, in a way. “I sit and hand-write notes to everybody. I look at your orders and add in samples, like, ‘Oh, I see you got these three things, but I'm adding in these too.’” High-touch is important, for beauty and for bikes. “It's like you're a shopkeeper,” Salgado says. “A shopkeeper in Chanel.”