

The business of luxury eyewear

eyestyle

Retail Therapy

Kite Eyewear's vision of optical retail

Behind the Brand

Markus T's simple ethos

Objects of Desire

New luxury inventory for stores

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**Less is more:
Minimalism
redefined**




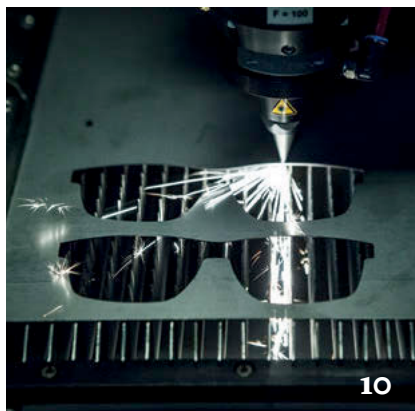
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Foreward



Welcome to Eyestyle: The business of luxury eyewear. In this new supplement resides an edit of the finest

eyewear from around the world and the stories behind those that have created it.

There have been tectonic shifts in the eyewear industry in recent years that have impacted high street optical practice. Those that were once partners are now competitors, fast fashion has made the transition from high street shops to online

optical retail and making a practice stand out in its vicinity area has become a difficult task.

Luxury, independent eyewear can be a marked differentiator for businesses. Quality, design, exclusivity, craftsmanship, loyalty and increased margin are just some of the benefits of adding luxury lines to a practice portfolio. The level of clinical care available to patients is increasing all the time – now's the time to ensure that in-store eyewear collections are at the same level.

Eyestyle is here to inform and inspire fashion-forward practices to extract the very best from their eyewear investments by showcasing the best designers, latest

manufacturing innovations, authentic trends and retail outlets that excel in creating a memorable luxury experience for their clients.

This first issue highlights the diversity of the eyewear industry and the range of products available to stores. The minimalist movement sees the likes of Götti, Lindberg, Andy Wolf and Mykita compete to see who can do more with less, Eyestyle gets groovy with Vinylize in Budapest and talks retail with Kite Eyewear in Shoreditch over a drink at the eye bar.

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The business of luxury eyewear
eyestyle

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Less, but better

Minimalist luxury frames that do more with less



Cyclical fashion, by its nature, comes and goes; but good design is stoic, innovative and minimalist.

As technology progresses, eyewear designers are presented with more opportunities to rethink their approach, creatively paring designs down to the essential elements.

This revitalised thought process has seen minimalism gather pace within the luxury frame sector.

Rimless has been reinvented and 'barely there' frames now boast more manufacturing ingenuity and flair than ever before.



1. Götti Perspective 'DCSo4'
2. Mykita Lessrim 'Yoko'
3. Silhouette Inspire '5506'
4. Andy Wolf White Heat 'Ethen'
5. Lindberg Air Titanium Rim 'Christoffer'
6. ic! berlin 'Bise'
7. Lindberg Spirit Titanium '2301'
8. Markus T Design Neo 'D3317'
9. Götti Perspective 'PSo2'
10. Maybach 'The Regent I P-HB-Z25'

It can be hard to make a rimless frame stand out, but not for Andy Wolf. In its White Heat collection acetate bridges and temples bear the brand's design hallmarks.



With Lessrim, Mykita has reduced the diameter of its stainless-steel rim wire to just 0.5mm. The rim sits flush in the groove of the lens leaving just a shimmering outline.



The rules of engineering say that you cannot turn a wire around itself to a point where the diameter of the inside of the coil is smaller than the diameter of the wire. Someone forgot to tell Lindberg.



Götti's Perspective collection has pushed the technical boundaries of the rimless sector to the limit. The brand developed its own 3D printed mountings parts that protect the lens.



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Luxury eyewear edit

New inventory for fashion-forward stores

Brand: **Hapter**

Model: **MO1L+1**

hapter.it



Details: When you pick up a Hapter frame, it's hard not to be captivated by its design and tactile feel. The one-piece surgical grade stainless steel flexible skeleton has been wrapped in either rubber or textiles – depending on the collection – before in-house surface treatments are applied.

MO1L+1 is a perfect example of the brand's mix of avant-garde silhouettes and vintage inspiration for external surfaces and colours. The thin, oversized round shape is juxtaposed by a large nose bridge section with louvres for air-flow and a cantilevered stainless-steel brow bar that has been left free from fabric to provide contrast. Military fabric was sourced from Lanificio F.lli Cerruti.

Brand: **Veronika Wildgruber**

Model: **Arthur**

eyewear.veronikawildgruber.com

Details: German product designer Veronika Wildgruber avoids the traditional reference points of eyewear design when creating collections for her eponymous brand that won a Silmo d'Or in 2017.

Achieving that accolade was the Arthur style, a three-dimensional frame that explores depth in a way that's unique in eyewear. Two circular eye shapes hang from the top bar, made from two different volumes woven into each other. One passes behind the other as if they were threaded.

The brand gives little away as to how the process is achieved, other than being a system that laminates the acetate before it is fully processed.



Brand: **Alyson Magee**

Model: **AM104**

alysonmagee.paris



Details: Alyson Magee is a true eyewear design icon and the former Face à Face co-founder's eponymous brand has just released new collection, Aurora.

Inspired by a passion for architecture and a love of nature, Alyson Magee has combined warm acetate tones with structural metal construction with negative space. Stark contrast between the acetate and the metal structure creates drama within the frame and highlights its technical elements.

Aviator-inspired AM104 gets its contrast from subtle gold external colouration and the rich Havana Mazzucchelli acetate 'frame within a frame' and fanned temple tips.

Signature of simplicity

Across a series of expansion projects, Markus Temming managed to keep it simple

For nearly 20 years, Markus Temming has based his Markus T design approach on distilling concepts until all that's left are the essential elements. It's apt, then, that a former grain distillery was at the centre of an opportunity to expand and take the company to the next level.

Until last year, Markus T was based in a former farm building in the Isselhorst district of Gutersloh in north west Germany. An old grain distillery building just a few hundred metres away had caught his eye a few years prior to the move, but the then owner of the building wanted to sell the land and the numerous buildings in various states of dilapidation, as a complete package.

Negotiations took place over the next few years, but the owner still wouldn't budge on selling the land and buildings separately. The desire to move into the distillery was so strong, Temming took a huge risk and agreed to purchase the whole 9,000sqm site, just to develop his eyewear company.

To make the project work, Temming had to design and renovate the old buildings to attract tenants, which now include a bank, a hotel, restaurants, commercial lettings and residential housing. This project he carried out virtually by himself – while keeping up his design duties for Markus T.

Eyestyle asks how he found the time – 'I don't know,' he says. 'I just had to do it.'

SIGNATURES

Temming's design signature of simplicity is all over the site, but most importantly, in the new factory. The word 'factory' is used in the loosest sense, because the new facility is unlike any that Eyestyle has seen before. Bare brickwork, futuristic metalwork, glass walls and vaulted roofs give off a feeling of an art installation instead of a glasses factory that produces 55,000 frames per year.

Low slung LED lighting, designed by Temming, illuminates small coves that house heavy duty machinery for different parts of the production process. An industrial laser cutter makes short work of titanium sheets, precise to less than 0.01mm. Opposite, three sandblasting machines prepare the surface of the titanium for colouration – which is completed in small laboratories where tolerances of dye are measured in millilitres and dip recipes are reliant on fractions of seconds.

Markus T only uses two materials, titanium and TMI, but thanks the variations in shapes, collections and colours, offers over 22,000 SKUs. Titanium is used in two ways, both produced in-house. Sheet titanium is used to create the ME Genius, ME Ego, TITAN Terra and Aura and selected models in the sunglass collection.

Wire forms the basis of the Design collection, both the Classic and Neo lines. The material used for the collection begins life in large coils, before being stretched to remove and stabilise tension. A custom developed five-axis bending machine then curves each piece of wire into the required shape. But, this being Markus T, the wire is bent in a different way from most other manufacturers. To achieve perfect symmetry, the bending begins in the middle. Bending from the edge of the frame, the method used by others, slows down production time as the material has to be corrected. The Classic collection is perhaps Markus T at its purest, borne out of Temming's idea of creating a pair of glasses from a single piece of titanium wire.

VISION

Temming started out in optics as an optician. While studying, he met now company general manager, Bernadett Thomas. 'Markus was always the first to finish projects. He would finish them so

quickly, the teachers had to find extra things to do, so they gave him materials and told him to go away and work on whatever he wanted. He came back with a pair of frames,' she says.

Markus was always the first to finish projects. He would finish them so quickly, the teachers had to find extra things to do, so they gave him materials and told him to go away and work on whatever he wanted. He came back with a pair of frames

After masters' qualifications in optics and business, Temming worked for a year fitting contact lenses before moving into retail optics. It was here that he learnt about the shortcomings of eyewear – manufacturing issues, problematic adjustment and poor hinges among others.

In titanium, Temming believed he had a material that could overcome the shortcomings of frames at the time. An old kitchen at his parents' house was the setting for the first Markus T frames in 1998 – made from titanium wire and free of screws. Six months later, the company was in a position where it needed to expand – by offering another material.

'Markus is the sort of person who doesn't believe it when a person says something cannot be done,' says Thomas. That's exactly the barrier that he came up against when looking for

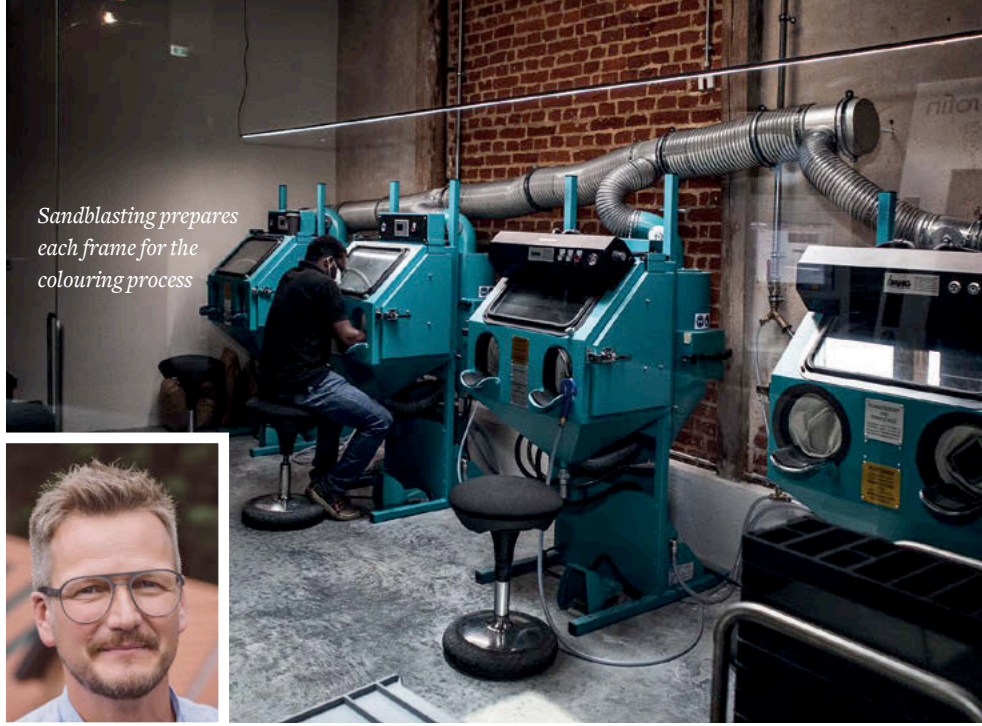
another material. Much of the chemical and plastic industry told Temming his requirements of a plastic that had the properties of titanium could not be met. That was until one got in touch and said it saw the potential in the material and agreed to co-develop it. Markus T would use the new polymer in the eyewear industry and the plastic supplier would develop it for other markets, that include motorcycle racing shoe soles.

The new material was called TMi, which is injection moulded to produce frame fronts and temples. There is the impression within the eyewear industry that injection moulding means cheap and poor finishing, but Markus T goes that extra distance. To begin with, all moulds are produced in house, but more importantly, years of research and development has been put into the moulding process, considering the injection points and material flow to ensure no visible seams or imperfections.

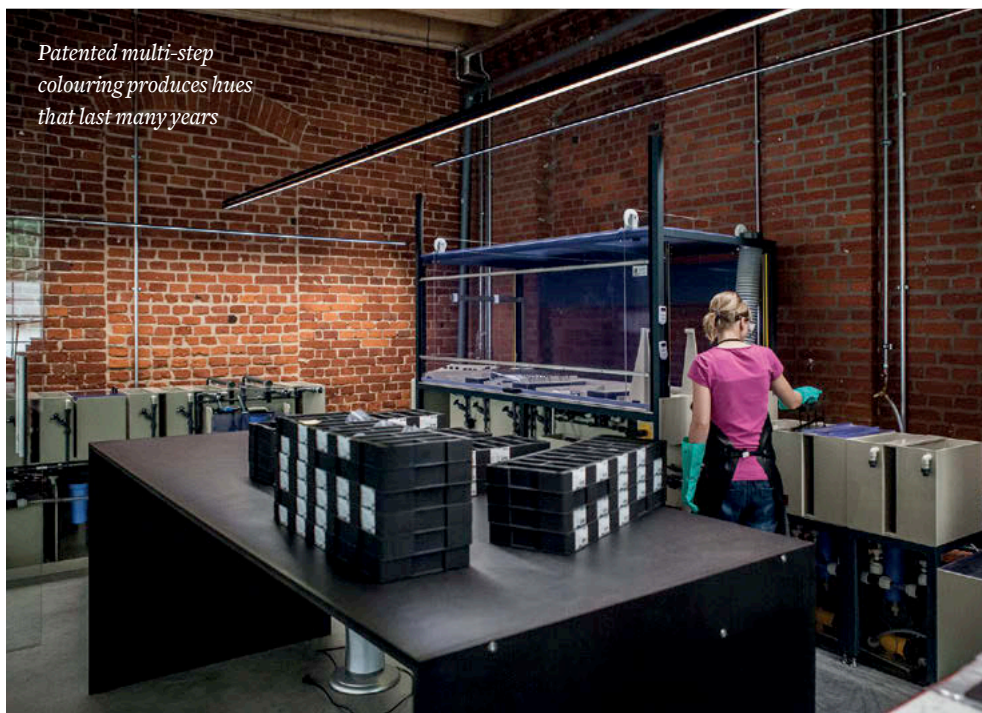
This dedication to the quality of the product is evident in every step of the design and manufacturing process and is just one of the reasons why Markus T confidently offers a worldwide four-year guarantee on its frames.

In the design phase, traditional sketching is replaced with computers and tablets so data can be harvested at a later date if needed. The dummy lens edging is carried out in-house to exacting standards. This part of the process could easily be outsourced to the Far East, but to Temming, the lenses are an integral part of the frame and any intolerance could result in creaking or movement. The assembly area is calm, free of noise and organised so that staff are comfortable at their workstations carrying out adjustments by hand – like nearly every step of the frame’s journey.

In a factory producing over 55,000 frames per year and on a site going through a radical transformation, there’s an air of serenity, led by Temming’s vision for the company. Thomas says this calmness isn’t always so obvious, but with nearly 100 staff this brand manages to be at the forefront of eyewear manufacturing without breaking into a sweat.



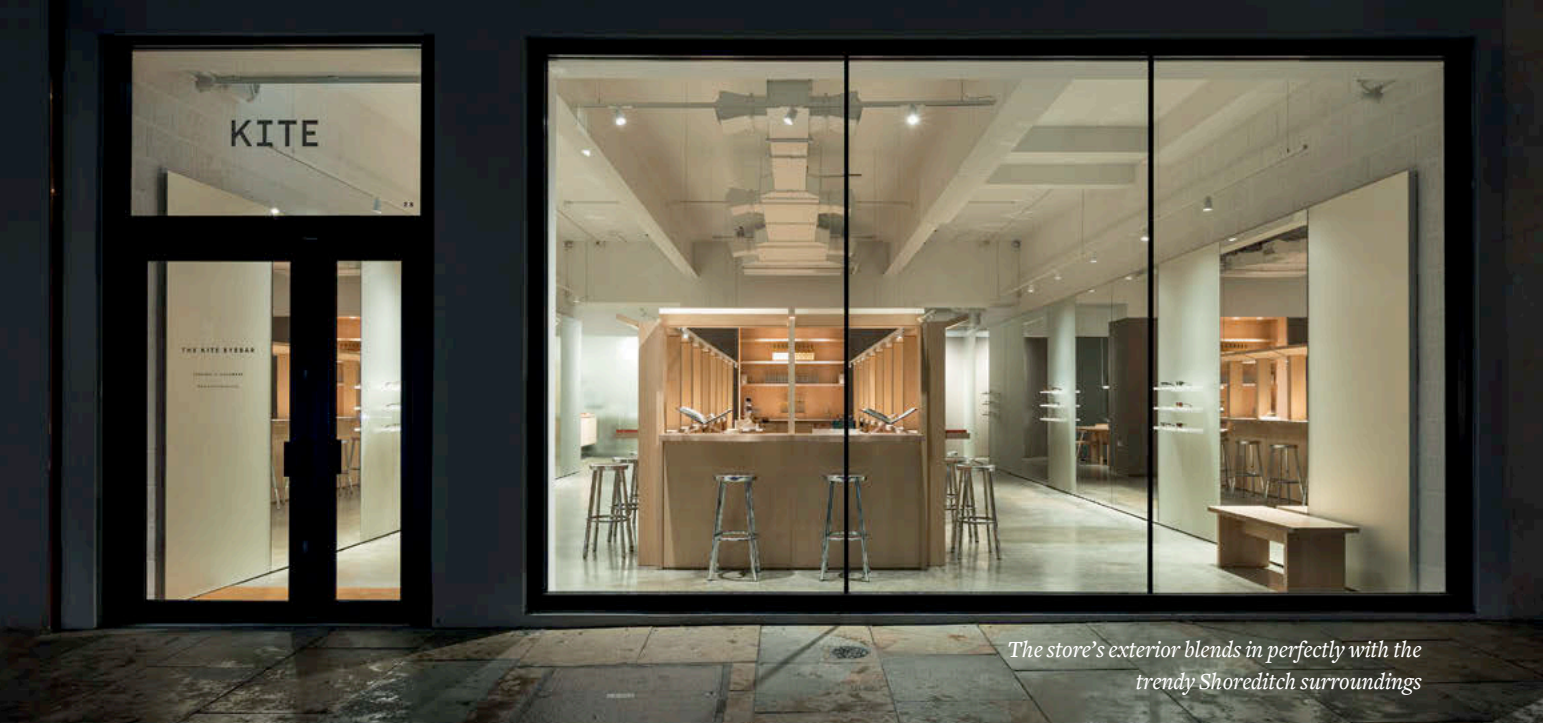
Sandblasting prepares each frame for the colouring process



Patented multi-step colouring produces hues that last many years



Every single part of assembly and adjustment is carried out by hand



The store's exterior blends in perfectly with the trendy Shoreditch surroundings



Very few frames are on display, making styling consultations more personal



Just like a regular bar, Kite's Eyebar makes the customer relaxed

Kite Eyewear

Zoe Cosby talks to the optical retail rulebreakers

Over the past two decades there have been meteoric advances in the production of eyewear. It seems frames can be made from almost anything; wood, stone, marble, old records and even snowboards. Facial scanning and 3D printing has sent shockwaves through the industry – and even the luxury market has been propelled to new levels of extravagance.

But there was one segment that still required improvement, change or perhaps even a revolution – the midmarket consumer. Ray-Ban has long worn the crown of competitive price point king, a position that Asad Hamir wished to challenge. And with his brand new store – Kite Eyewear – he does just that.

Hamir is a tech mad, business innovator, with a serious passion for product. Part of a large family of optometrists, Hamir has worked in optics since he was 16. His partners are long-life friends and British entrepreneurs Adarsh and Amar Radia, brothers who know a thing or two about disrupting the status quo. In 2007 they shook up the Indian restaurant industry when they launched their acclaimed restaurants Dishoom Bombay Cafes, and they hope to have a similar impact with Kite.

THE SPACE

Situated on Redchurch Street in Shoreditch, the store is typically stylish. Designed by British architect Asif Khan MBE, it is 2,000sqft space of bespoke minimalistic design with the industrial textures of wood, glass and metal. Central to the whole space is the Eye Bar – a hub of stylish staff, cool coffees and the setting for style consultations.

But any fears that this is just surface gimmickry are quickly dispelled by two key qualities on display: knowledge and experience. Staff not only know the brand story inside out, but speak confidently about their pricing, materials and – importantly – eye health and lenses. Kite is

passionate about eye care and offers comprehensive, scientifically advanced eye examinations for free to every customer, or £25 without a frame purchase.

It took just eight months from initial idea to the opening of the store in November 2017. 'I enjoy finding problems, and resolving them', says Hamir. The company says it has created the world's first Eye Bar – a completely new retail space that unites design, technology and culture. The aim was to completely reinvent the eyewear shopping experience, shaking up the old image of an opticians and offer a fully-personalised shopping experience that the owners felt no one else was offering. Not only this, it has also challenged the benchmarks of luxury eyewear by producing a collection that is designed in London, handmade in Italy yet with a starting price point of just £125 including Zeiss prescription lenses and Mazzucchelli acetates.

So, what's the catch? For Hamir, there isn't one – his ambition to create 'affordable luxury' has been achieved. Kite has a five-year agreement with Zeiss that enables competitive pricing and it manufactures its own products. The collection isn't radical in design, but that wasn't the aim. It is comprised of simple silhouettes and classic shapes which have contemporary flare and good fit.

First impressions and image are key in any retail scenario but are fundamental in today's culture and Kite has both in abundance. It knows its customer and is catering for it. Simple but clever design such as magnetic walls allows for display shelving to be moved regularly and customer mirrors are simply 'clicked' onto the magnetic booths at the height of the individual. Drinks are complimentary, with a menu crafted by beverage pioneers Bompas and Parr and there are plans over the coming months for the store to play host to exhibitions, workshops and cultural events. The aim

to be more than just an eyewear store is apparent, it wants to be a destination; a place to relax and explore eyewear in an environment that their customers are happy to dwell in.

Hamir's advice to opticians is to 'curate for your customer – choose your brands carefully, each must have strength in not only their collection design but importantly their story, and it's how you and your staff tell that story that's important.'

Staff not only know the brand story inside out, but speak confidently about their pricing, materials and – importantly – eye health and lenses.

CLINICAL CARE

Despite the trendy aesthetic, Kite is first and foremost an optical practice. Each patient receives a state-of-the-art eye exam, with kit featuring hospital grade eye-scanning technology, followed by a one-on-one style consultation with one of the store's resident eyewear experts, who aim to find the perfect frames to suit their style, face shape and personality. Staff receive thorough training on the equipment and collections, whether they are optometrists or not, and this investment was notable.

So, what does the future hold? For Hamir, 'growth is inevitable', but equally he aims to continually challenge the norm and is particularly interested in pushing the boundaries of optics. His passion and ambition are obvious – to shake up the industry as we know it.

Kite Shoreditch is just the start of things to come.

Your flexible friend

The Rolf Spectacles Capri Flexlock features a brand-new hinge design

Up to 11 layers of veneered Bog Oak and Walnut woods are used for Capri's colour 93.

The natural rubber bands used in the hinge are available in three different tension options.

Each Rolf frame is inspired by a classic car and takes up to 82 production steps to make.



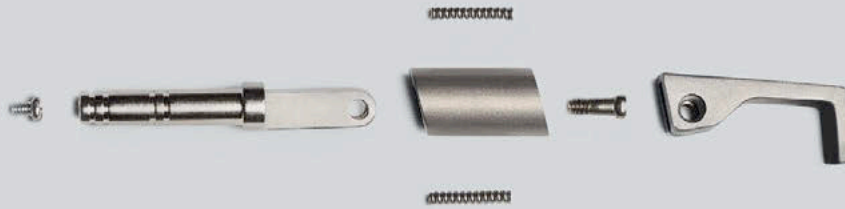
The company uses 24 types of wood, sourced from local suppliers in Tirol, Austria – all fully certified to ensure strict conditions regarding origin of the wood and fair working conditions for the workers.

The intricate machining of the old hinge design is still present, but instead of a wooden pin in a barrel, a natural rubber band is fixed on two hooks – in the front silhouette and the temple internal. The design allows the temples to rotate in any direction without damaging the wooden fibres and has been tested to over 35,000 cycles.

Each layer of wood is selected and treated to create the ergonomically shaped temples.

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Get into the groove

Few eyewear brands have created a buzz in music quite like Vinylize

Sales of vinyl records hit a 25-year high in Britain during 2017 and it's no longer just die-hard collectors and DJs out there 'crate digging.'

For Tipton Eyeworks in downtown Budapest, the passion for records has never waned, but very few of the singles and LPs it receives end up on a turntable. Instead, the records are used as the signature front lamination for the company's Vinylize brand.

Founded by Zachary Tipton in the late 1990s, Tipton Eyeworks was created out of a desire to have a pair of glasses that was genuinely different from everything else on the market. At the time, Tipton says he had very little knowledge of eyewear manufacturing and while in his hometown of Seattle, experimented with a range of different materials such as polycarbonates and acrylics for a pair of rimless frames – 'I didn't know who Mazzucchelli was back then and there was a certain amount of ignorance towards the eyewear manufacturing sector. This probably helped with the company's success, because with my mindset of today and experience of what we have been through, I wouldn't be making glasses using vinyl records,' he jokes.

CREATIVE BACKGROUND

While searching for some new materials in his father's loft, Tipton stumbled across a record collection belonging to his father. 'I had a look at some and thought "I could probably do something with these,"' he says.

Tipton's father was a sculptor, architect and woodworker, presenting multiple opportunities for his son's creative leanings. Tipton junior was working as a furniture maker, so could visualise projects and how finished items might look. He fashioned some prototypes and because of his parentage, moved to Budapest just before the turn of the millennium.

EASTERN-BLOC EYEWEAR

'When I moved out here I came across an old eyewear factory in the south of the country. It was this old, post-communist set up that had recently been privatised, but it was just manufacturing – no design, sales or marketing,' says Tipton. In the early 2000s, the eyewear market was still very young and the market was flooded with cheap Chinese made glasses and pseudo-luxury brands.

Tipton went on to strike a deal with the factory owners – he would design and sell, while the factory would handle all production. This was the first incarnation of Tipton Eyeworks and its Vinylize brand.

Early frames were made solely from vinyl, but the wraparound shapes drew some negative feedback from opticians, on account of the limited adjustability and difficulty inserting lenses. Undeterred, Tipton set about refining the frames with acetate temples and later, acetate fronts behind the laminated vinyl.

The company was soon dealt a blow after the factory went out of business. Its size meant huge volume was needed for it to make money – somewhere in the region of 20,000 frames per month – far beyond the needs of Vinylize back then.

Tipton teamed up with another manufacturer and his brother Zoltan joined the business to help sales. Times were tough then. So tough that the brothers had to forge train tickets to allow them to move up and down the country to visit new clients.

Three years ago, the chance to purchase the old equipment from the former factory partner presented itself. Tipton jumped at the chance to have his own fully complemented production business and leverage the advantages it offered: higher quality control, faster production turnaround and no minimum order quantities.

This has elevated the brand's output and status as one of the most distinctive labels in the luxury eyewear segment.

MAKE YOUR OWN GLASSES

In late 2017, Vinylize opened its Budapest workshop to end users and optician customers to allow them to experience some of what it is like to make a pair of glasses. For stores that have just started to work with the brand, the three-hour workshop is a good way of building up a knowledge base of Vinylize information.

Eyestyles's day begins by picking prepared fronts and temples from the brand's portfolio. Temples are then cut to length, ahead of stamping with gold leaf, polishing and cleaning.

VINYL COUNTDOWN

The upsurge in vinyl's popularity has had a slight impact on the amount of records the company receives. Early frames were made using old Eastern-Bloc records, but over time sourcing has become more diverse.

Flea markets and donations make up some of the stock needed for production, but end of run records and leftovers from pressing plants help massively.

The company has enjoyed an upsurge in music industry collaborations in recent years. Aside from finding their way on to the faces of musical celebrities like Robbie Williams, Elton John and DJ Tiesto, Vinylize been working with bands such as AD/DC to create special edition glasses from limited edition pressings.

Music festivals have also worked with the company to make glasses and presentation cases for their headline acts, including Pink and Major Lazer.

It's the type of organic product placement that many brands can only dream of – and a perfect conversation starter for clients in-store.



Source material ready for use



Starting the polishing process



Eyestyle's finished frame

Jason Kirk

The Kirk & Kirk founder talks retail with Eyestyle

Eyestyle seemingly catches Kirk & Kirk managing director Jason Kirk in a ‘pull no punches’ mood: ‘UK opticians are taking baby steps in independent retail, but they need to take giant strides ... and quickly,’ he insists.

It’s a view that will divide opinion, but Kirk is quick to point out that the motivation behind it is a desire to see British opticians prosper. The Kirk family celebrates 100 years in optics in 2019 and it’s this long history and bond with the sector that drives Kirk on his independent crusade.

Despite his strong take on UK opticians, Kirk says that there have been tangible improvements among British opticians in recent years – but this must improve.

‘In my experience, the biggest difficulty British opticians have is creating the right environments and communicating effectively with their customers,’ he says. Asked to expand on this, Kirk cites in-store presentation as one aspect that opticians let themselves down on. ‘It’s simple things like mixing up brands and products on old looking racks.

‘This only serves to confuse the customer when what they need is a clear message, a story and a point of difference to make them want to visit your store instead of competitors or even the large multiple down the road.’

This also encompasses the look and feel of the interior and exterior of stores.

‘The same optical shopfitters have been getting business for years and years with old ideas. Store windows are also meant to entice customers by sending them a message as to what makes your shop unique,’ says Kirk.

The rise of social media in recent years has given opticians another way of attracting and interacting with customers, but Kirk thinks is another area where the industry is lacking: ‘The emphasis needs to be on educating consumers on the benefits of high quality, independent frames and lenses so that they can make informed decisions.’

AN AGE-OLD PROBLEM

As a seasoned traveller, Kirk has seen the good and bad elements of the industry from a global perspective. He likens the UK market to that of the US roughly 10 years ago: ‘Their market has become polarised. It is impossible to compete in the middle ground without a clear message to the consumer. Opticians either race for the bottom and try in vain to compete on price or they become high-end independents focusing on a few brands and clearly positioning themselves.

‘Opticians don’t welcome change but we need to consider the weight of threat versus opportunity; the massive marketing budget Luxottica put behind Ray-Ban raised public perception of eyewear as a fashion item. It is the role of the independent optician to explain to the public why our goods and services merit spending a little bit more,’ says Kirk.

BRAND AWARENESS

Kirk & Kirk, founded by Kirk and his wife, Karen, launched its first collection in 2015.

At the time, it had three

customers in the UK. Today, it has nearly 40 stockists and has seen impressive year-on-year growth. Kirk says this expansion in the brand’s home territory is a good indicator for how British opticians are embracing change, but that change needs to be all encompassing. ‘The public see beautiful stores and frames when they travel. Surely they must wonder why their choice is so limited on home soil?’

“Independent brands are those that can make their own decisions and hold their destiny in their own hands.”

Independents are a crucial factor for the brand – seeking out stores with a similar view of optics and those that can benefit from stocking Kirk & Kirk product. ‘Independent brands are those that can make their own decisions and hold their destiny in their own hands. We want to work with companies that are the same,’ he says.

A similar take on what constitutes a luxury product is helpful too, because Kirk has experienced many different opinions from opticians on his travels. To Kirk, the word luxury means an object or service that goes beyond ‘simply doing the job’ and is so good that an individual is happy to spend a little more on it as a treat.

By that definition, the company’s colourful range of handmade acrylic ophthalmic frames and sunglasses, some of which feature sterling silver and gold animal pin details, are the epitome of luxury.



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Store fit concepts

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