

# Emerging eyewear talents

Only since the second half of the 20th century has a career as an eyewear designer been at the forefront of life choices, writes Joan Grady



Handcrafted wood frames by Wood and Cotton

Acclaimed fashion designers date back to the 18th century when Rose Bertin, Marie Antoinette's dress and hat designer became a celebrity in her own right. The shift to frames as a fashion accessory started around 1950, when Grace Kelly, Michael Caine and Audrey Hepburn wore Oliver Goldsmith's revolutionary eyewear designs.

In the late 1970s, Alain Mikli in France and Cari Zalloni in Austria shattered cautionary frame styling by launching innovative, revolutionary shapes in bright colours. From there, the momentum started to crescendo when designers Emmanuelle Khanh, Barbara McReynolds and Gai Gheradi at I.a. eyeworks, and Christian Roth and Eric Domege, all created collections marketed under their own names.

Nowadays, life as an eyewear designer has achieved lofty pinnacles, and training is offered with Master Classes at prestigious schools, including the Royal College of Art (RCA) in London, the Institut Français de la Mode (IFM) in Paris and HEAD, the Geneva University of Art and Design in Switzerland.

## STUDENT OBSERVATIONS

Alyson Magee is the director of the Master Classes in Eyewear at the IFM; a founder of Face à Face Paris she now has a ravishing new collection for Brando Eyewear. "I've been teaching postgraduates for almost five years and work very closely with the students," says Alyson. Most students don't have a background in eyewear, so this is about opening their eyes to a new realm of possibilities in their creative work, in exposing them to a new accessory as a designer."



Eyewear designer, Alyson Magee, conducts Eyewear Master Classes at the IFM in Paris

Speaking about her experiences at the IFM so far, student Jeanne Okretic says: "This was my first contact with eyewear so it was a good surprise. It was my best workshop, and our instructor Alyson Magee is just the greatest. It was really a new world for me when we visited optical shops, and I was very impressed with Lindberg frames and their hinges. It is amazing how far you can go with the hinge. Then we went to an acetate factory, and I was surprised at how many options there are with acetate. When I graduate in July, eyewear is definitely an option for me."

Shubham Jain has already achieved a Masters degree in garment design from the RCA in London. She is now pursuing a

further degree in accessories at the IFM. Originally from India, Shubham has found the accessory world much different than designing garments.

She says: "Accessories are new to me, and I find that it is more precise – especially with eyewear, because everything must fit well. With clothing you can be more flexible, but with eyewear the frame is on your face and it must fit within set dimensions. Lindberg is very technical and Mikli is more avant-garde. I'm thinking seriously that I've had enough of garments, and will make a choice between shoes and eyewear."

Alyson reflects: "I like to think that at the end of the course, students who may never have considered a career in eyewear before can walk out of my classroom knowing it is an option, and pursue eyewear with confidence."

## OPTICIANS AND DESIGNERS

Opticians often discover their inner creative energy is sparked when working with



Swiss designer Christine Haussener



Ringsum frame by Christine Haussener

eyewear. Some start very young. Stefan Flegl, now a German master optician, was 10 years old when he made his first acetate frame. He admits it was a long journey from the first design before creating Wood and Cotton in 2015 with his father Gerhard. The brand specialises in designs in cotton acetate, 'just cotton!', and 'wood else?', wood frames that are carefully handcrafted in Germany.

"We are opticians, not only designers," says Stefan, "therefore perfect comfort in wearing our glasses is enormously important to us. The anatomical elaboration of nose pads and the temples were strongly considered in developing the collection." Wood and Cotton is sold in exclusive optical practices in Germany and Switzerland.

Christine Haussener brings to her eyewear creations a background as an optician and a jewellery designer; she introduced her first collection, Ringsum, in Zurich last autumn. "I like to draw, and I used to make jewellery from old glasses," says the Swiss designer, "and for 15 years, I made jewellery and belt buckles in acetate, the eyewear material." Her love of acetate continues, and her superbly crafted German made collection is proof that small is beautiful: a chic little collection that emphasises lens shape, which Christine calls "the core of the design".



Pure, robust and simple lines with Baars Eyewear



Baars creators Marc-Antoine Rubaud and Guillaume Thuau

**DEBUT SUCCESSES**

Several new start-ups have met with immediate acclaim. Baars is a French brand that began with two friends – an optician from Annecy, Marc-Antoine Rubaud, and a Parisian electronic music artist, Guillaume Thuau. The Baars philosophy is design with simplicity and sobriety in the face of contemporary complexity. Streamlined silhouettes feature a unique, patented magnetic hinge, nominated for a Silmo d'Or, and shapes are pure, with robust and simple lines.

Gyada Lanaro and Nicholas Dimroci launched their Pride collection in October 2015, and have already won a Silmo d'Or award, and the V-Award Silver in Hong Kong. The Italian brand is exceptionally lightweight, with glamorous styling, and laser engravings. Gyada and Nicholas exude a passion for eyewear, and a trio of Italian craftsmanship; the latest technologies and beautiful materials express the innovation and authenticity of the designs.

German efficiency highlights the Powder & Heat Collection: custom-made 3D printed eyewear. Manuel Breit, managing director, brings his unique skills from the aviation world that creatively unites with George Vollmer's sporty, high-quality sunglass and optical designs. Powder & Heat has already

achieved recognition with the German Design Award and the Red Dot Design Award for 2017.

Newcomers to the eyewear scene offer the independent optician a superb opportunity to introduce patients to the latest contemporary frames. Set the pace with a pioneering spirit and bring into your universe young eyewear brands that focus on quality, individualisation, superior production, beautiful designs, colours and materials.



Award winning Silmo d'Or design by Pride Eyewear



Award winning 3D printed eyewear by Powder & Heat



Nicholas Dimroci and Gyada Lanaro of Pride Eyewear (courtesy of Patrick Muller/Die Brillenmesse)