

Optician seeks out some of the most innovative frames on offer at the Silmo exhibition in Paris

Times are hard for British independent practices. Multiples and supermarkets are getting more of the big brand names than ever before, making it harder to compete on price and to make a practice stand out in a cluttered market.

Nearly 35,000 optical professionals descended on Paris earlier this month to view the product offerings of 900 exhibitors at Silmo 2012. Show



New tricks from Paris

organisers say that over half of those were international, but *Optician* could count on two hands the number of British visitors we met at the event. One pair of practitioners we did see were in one of the restaurants on the first day of show, buying frames from a suitcase. A sad sight given what was being displayed in the halls.

Exhibitions such as Silmo showcase some of the best eyewear in the world, and while you will see some of the best frames from the show in the pages of *Optician*, visiting the event is still the best way to seek out products that can set a practice apart.

Optician discovered Danish manufacturer Monoqool at last year's Silmo and its NXT Explorer photochromic frame with corkscrew screw-less hinge has courted much attention in the 10 months it has been worn. Not just passing comments either, but people stopping you in the street to ask about them.

The manufacturer's new 02 line is a slight change of direction from the NXT range. Gone is the ultra-minimalist look, but a highly innovative hinge system remains. 'We wanted a classic look from the front but with accents on the side – a mix

of classical and innovation,' says the company's CEO Allan Petersen.

The surgical steel temples are attached to the front using just a ring of EPDM marine-grade rubber. The ring is inserted into two machined grooves on the temple by hand, and then finished off using a special tool – which is supplied by the manufacturer. The hinge isn't just a decorative item either – but damps the motion of opening and closing the temples.

Front eye shapes are exactly as Petersen says – classic and wearable. Ten styles, all created from Mazzuchelli acetate and created by award-winning Danish designer Flemming Bo Hansen are available and range from rectangular masculine shapes to soft versions of the timeless cat's eye shape. The interchangeable nature of the temples means that over 400 colour combinations of front, temple and O-ring can be created by a practice.

Monoqool also used the show to launch two new temple styles for the NXT collection. Originally fitted with a thin titanium wire, acetate and bladed titanium options are now available.

More than meets the eye

A fresh approach doesn't just have to come in the design of frames – it can come from dedication to an overall package. Luckily for Activist Eyewear, launching in Europe for the first time, it can offer both. Co-founder and creator Mark Craig, who has been designing eyewear for over 10 years, says that creativity has always been his



The 10.01 (left) and Queen Charlotte (right) with Split-Flex temples from Activist Eyewear

Featuring frames



- 1 New NXT temple designs from Monoqool
- 2 Phoenix and Pluto sunglasses by Mykita
- 3 Pelot, Pantura and Basky Mylon ophthalmic frames by Mykita
- 4 Monoqool O2 Series

focus when designing frames.

The manufacturer's Split-Flex temples are the frames' most obvious feature. Designed to spread the pressure away from the temporal bone, the temples are a great mix of form and function. Made in Japan, each colour of each frame is made in runs of 718 or 347 units, in honour of the creators' hometown area codes and is not reproduced when sold out.

The 10.01 frame, available in optical and sunglass versions, features a new hinge-less version of the temples – constructed with a wire core and soft-touch rubber. The frame itself has a co-injected plastic and rubber construction and sports a lighter, svelter version of the Wayfarer silhouette. Seven hues are available and range from bright green to subtle dark red.

The acetate Queen Charlotte model is the company's first dedicated



women's design and has picked up on the trend for softer cat's eye shapes. It is easy to think that a brand that deals in aspects like titanium and split temples would be more masculine-led, but the new frame is delicate and feminine. Split-Fit temples in the acetate range feature surgical steel cores for adjustability and comfort.

The manufacturer's dedication to frame design is matched by its dedication to designing accessories. A microfibre cloth with electrostatic charge might not sound that innovative, but it has been turned into a gentleman's pocket square and comes in frame-matched colours and patterns. Similarly, the design and build of the waxed cotton cases go that extra mile – with a nod to the temple design on the cover and a neoprene gasket which creates a seal. Even the lanyards are made from mountaineering grade nylon and are colour matched to the frames.

If you're looking to work with a manufacturer that goes the extra mile in terms of product development, then Mykita may well just be it. Over the past year, the company has refined its own 3D laser-sintered Mylon material with new finishes and colours for the sunglass collection, but at Silmo, it unveiled its first Mylon ophthalmic

range. Mykita says Mylon is an incredibly light material, but it also offers a great deal of adjustability and comfort.

The collection initially comprises eight styles, which all have modern interpretations of classic shapes. The trend for round silhouettes is represented with the Basky frame, which is modernised not only with the material, but with the addition of square, angular corners. The Pelot frame follows a similar script, but has a classic rounded panto shape. The Pantara model is more in keeping with the sunglass styles and has a modern version of the aviator silhouette and features a cut-away nose bridge. Two new Mylon sunglass styles were also released – the Phoenix and Pluto. Both models can be fitted with corrective lenses. *Optician* tried a few of the frames on and the light weight and comfort were immediately noticeable, especially given that the profiles were by no means minimalist. The brand's metal and acetate ophthalmic frames have plenty of momentum in the UK market, but the new Mylon options offer something completely different.

The second instalment of *Optician's* Silmo coverage will appear in the November 16 edition. ●

