



Mixed messages in a material world

Materials, production methods and finishes took centre stage at this year's Silmo trade fair. **Simon Jones** looks at some of the highlights

Trends at shows such as Silmo aren't always easy to spot. Certain manufacturers go to great lengths to tell opticians and frame buyers what will be popular this forthcoming season, while others quietly go about their business showing the fruits of their labour.

This year's event was different. Nearly every manufacturer *Optician* saw over the course of the four days has experimented with some form of combination of finishes or materials.

Depending on who *Optician* talked to, the reasons for this sudden surge in mixed finishes and materials differ. Some say that it's the result of experimentation or the result of

colour blocking trends filtering down from the catwalk runways around the world. It's undoubtedly correct, but others, such as Robert Viner from Savile Row Eyewear, believe that the answer is simpler. 'We (the frame industry) can't really reinvent the wheel, so we have to look at different ways to be creative,' he says.

The brand, which manufactures its frames at Algha Works in London, has a long standing reputation as being one of only a handful of companies to work with rolled gold. It also has the reputation of producing classically styled, tailored frames to famous names such as Eric Clapton and Daniel Radcliffe – for his round Harry Potter glasses. The new six-strong acetate line

keeps Saville Row's subtle, classical aesthetic very much at the forefront of its thinking. Shapes are subtle, with inspiration taken from NHS silhouettes and acetate has been sourced from Algha's basement, so colours are genuinely retro.

The Hampshire style has a rectangular silhouette but avoids being too angular by using a contoured nose bridge design and smoothed corners. The Norfolk style has an on-trend retro round shape which, thanks to the period acetates used in the collection, looks like something from the 1960s. The rolled gold temples used in the range are available in three styles to cover most fitment types.

Austrian manufacturer Woodone



Clockwise from top left:
Oldman, Baron and
Tallulah by Ørgreen



Morden from the PQ Eyewear
by Ron Arad Springs collection



The Norfolk (top) and The Hampshire by Savile Row

first came to the attention of *Optician* at Opti Munich in 2011. There it showed a selection of expertly crafted wooden frames for the first time on a small stand with wood shavings on the floor – not much else. A small wooden house played host to Woodone at this year's Silmo and is testament to how quickly the brand has expanded in the past 18 months. CEO Klaus Tavella says the company has opened 1,200 accounts since Opti in 2011 and sold in excess of 10,000 frames, to customers including Brad Pitt. He puts the success down to having a good product at a great price, but adds that re-order data has helped them hone down collections to what sells through with practices.

The company's star of the show was its new 'Bling' finish – which is made up of smashed stones from the nearby Dolomite Mountains. The finish, which is applied to the fronts of the frames and a section of the temples, gives a glitter-like effect and rough texture. The new finish has been added to nine styles in the collection and six new models have been added to its overall collection.

The manufacturer has also launched a reproduction service for practices, where it recreates chosen silhouettes in the same wood from south Tirol used for its regular models. The manufacturer says it charges an initial set-up fee but after that, each frame is charged at the normal wholesale

price. Tavella believes the service will be extremely attractive to opticians who are looking to create their own collections.

Italian newcomer

ResRei is another eyewear brand in its infancy but looking to make waves. The company, just over two years old, was created out of co-founder Oliviero Zanon's desire to make a truly Italian product. 'The famous Italian eyewear producers manufacture most parts in China then assemble products in Italy,' says Vanon. With this in mind, ResRei sources most of its parts from within 50km of its Fiscale base.

Zanon's background is in product design and he has worked on projects



Featuring frames

such as mobile phones, but says he never really had a relationship with the products he designed as he would never really see where or how they were manufactured. 'I wanted to do something more human,' he adds.

The same accusation can't be levelled at ResRei's eyewear. Early collections mixed classic Italian acetates with architectural metal shapes, but the new Writers and Emperors range is more traditional but hasn't skimped on product innovation. The front eye shapes of frames in the Writers collection have been rounded by CNC, which Zanon says gives an entirely different feel to tumbling. Mixed finishes also feature heavily in the collection with mixtures of matt and gloss.

Aesthetic mixture

Belgian manufacturer Theo has been a long-standing *Optician* favourite as a result of its left field designs and the quirky inspirations. Although some of its frames may not find favour with the more conservative British patient, its asymmetrical titanium Eye-witness collection is more reserved but still has the Theo aesthetic it is famous for. New styles TV (men's) and TX (women's) tap into the trend for mixed materials though the addition of buffalo horn pieces clipped on to the brows of the fronts.

In a similar vein, CG Claire Goldsmith unveiled its very first metal and acetate models. The Reiss style has been constructed from stainless



TV (top) and TX from Theo Eye-witness



steel layered acetate and sports a boxy interpretation of the iconic aviator silhouette. Metal lugs meet acetate wrapped temples. A new range of mixed finishes have also been added to existing

models – including the Lomax ophthalmic frame, which the brand said has proved popular since it was released last year and has now been updated with a matt and gloss mix finish.

There are few eyewear manufacturers that can say they have a staff member whose role is to work solely on colour development, but Danish manufacturer Ørgreen has tasked Sahra Lysell with just that. Her job is to develop new colours across the collections; taking in factors such as how certain colour processes react with different materials and gauging what shades work best with different skin tones.

The first fruits of her labour are seen on the Oldman and Baron ophthalmic frames and the Tallulah sunglass. The new models are three of 14 styles (seven ophthalmic frames and seven sunglass models) released at Silmo and many tap into the trend for mixed finishes and mixed materials. The Tallulah and Oldman models are constructed from titanium but have been styled to give the look of an acetate frame. On the Oldman style, this is shown with stepped detailing around the nose bridge of the panto-inspired frame. The Tallulah sunglass



Woodone's wooden house and Alanya with Bling finish made up of smashed stones from the Dolomites

Featuring frames

sports an oversize round feminine silhouette and is available with matt finish on the fronts and a golden gloss finish on the temples. The large Baron ophthalmic frame takes a simpler approach to its colour options, with matt finishes inside and out but in contrasting hues which gives the frame a subtle hint of individuality.

Material world

The production of eyewear using 3D printing has been gathering momentum in the eyewear industry for a number of years now, but at Silmo the use of the technology became even more apparent. Mykita, Monoqool and Ron Arad's PQ Eyewear project were just three of the brands using the technology, each in different ways and in different styles.

In some quarters, 3D printing has been touted as the future of eyewear, but how are designers using the technology at present?

Danish manufacturer Monoqool unveiled its first 3D selective laser sintering project at the event, the IQ Series.

The manufacturer has a reputation for innovation, with its corkscrew hinges and NXT frames, so the addition of 3D printed frames made perfect sense says CEO Allan



Clockwise from above:
Leopardi, Guiliana and Petrarca
by ResRei

Peterson: 'We decided to give it a try because it allows greater flexibility from a technology perspective. It's also great because it allows us to keep production in Denmark instead of Japan – which itself is an achievement as most eyewear today is coming cheaply out of Asia. We also have greater control over the quality and can drastically reduce lead times.' Peterson believes that when the collection is production ready towards the end of the year, lead time could be as low as two weeks from order to delivery. Impressive considering the additional manufacturing steps that

Monoqool deploys.

When you first pick up an IQ Series frame, the fact that it has been 3D printed isn't immediately obvious. Some 3D printed frames suffer from rough textures and edges, but the IQ series is smooth and the edges of the frame have been tumbled perfectly. The colouring and finishing are also a step up from traditional 3D printed designs and Peterson says colour pigment has a depth of 1mm – so scratches won't show the original colour of the material.

Hinge benefits

The greater scope for innovation that 3D printing offers is evident in the hinge design, which Peterson says wouldn't be possible with regular material. A thin curved piece of stainless steel inserts into the lug at right angles and clips into place without screws.

Eye shapes in the collection range from large sports-inspired styles to retro silhouettes and the initial colour palette is subtle. Monoqool has enlisted Charles Zooens, former Minima designer, to create the collection's silhouettes and *Optician* asked Peterson if he was worried about consumers making their own frames on 3D printers. 'Not really no, we're a long way off that. Even small 3D printing businesses don't have the optical experience of tumbling and colouring. We had to search long and hard for a producer here in Denmark.'

PQ Eyewear's first foray into 3D printed eyewear came at Mido in 2012 with its Angel sunglasses. Now its Springs range of ophthalmic frames and sunglasses has pushed things forward. *Optician* has featured PQ and Arad's slightly left field A-Frame line in the past, but the new Springs range plays it slightly safer and offers a slightly more optician-friendly





IQ series by Monoqool and hinge detail (below)



of the flexibility of the material. What once would have been leather side shields are now clip on nylon parts that slide over the temples when shut. It also shows the manufacturer's confidence in the material, as plastic sliding over plastic is going to wear at a faster rate. In addition, the temples have been designed with extra flexibility for use with a helmet. For the two new models, the manufacturer has specified mineral glass lenses, which reveal the Mykita logo when breathed on.

Flexibility of titanium

The flexibility of 3D printing is demonstrated by the range of materials that can be used when producing items. Belgian designer Hoet has pushed the 3D printing envelope with the release of the Hoet Couture project,



Hoet Couture hinge detail (above) and Femme frame (right)



which has seen the designer produce frames printed from titanium – a process which uses titanium powder sintered by laser.

The brand has a reputation for modern designs and the two initial styles (Homme and Femme) are no different. Both share basic rectangular silhouettes, with the women's model sporting subtle upswept brows, but the level of detailing on display is one rarely seen and shows off the potential of the production method. The fronts feature a hollow honeycomb structure seamlessly mated to thin outer edges. The hinge design closes like a finger but takes on a robot-like appearance. Hinges are damped with an alloy plate within the titanium.



Lomax and Reiss by CG Claire Goldsmith

As well as some of the production benefits of 3D printing, Hoet also believes that there are a number of environmental benefits too. 'This technology produces eyeglasses without creating any waste, while using a very low amount of energy. In addition, there is no need for the production of stock. Apart from the show models, the only frames produced are the ones actually sold – no unsold stock. A win-win situation for us and opticians,' says a spokesperson for Hoet.

Further Silmo coverage will appear next month in *Optician* and will feature British brands Rock Optika and FAN Optics, along with left field creations from Theo Eyewear, Factory 900 and new Australian brand Nicola. ●

product. Eye shapes are classical and easy to wear, but the innovation synonymous with Ron Arad designs is still present. The one-piece frames feature a hinge design based on an exoskeleton and bend to close. The design is ingenious, but one that needs an expert manufacturer. Luckily PQ has utilised the services of a Surrey-based company that produces parts for the medical industry and the McLaren

Formula 1 team.

Out of all those showing 3D printed frames, Mykita probably has the most experience of working with 3D printing in a consumer-ready form. Its patented Mylon material has evolved considerably over the past three years – in terms of its feel, colouring and the range of shapes available.

The mountaineering inspired Anselme and Sylvain sunglasses show