

Bavaria in January might not sound awfully appealing, but Munich's opti trade show is well worth braving the cold and snow. The event, now in the fifth year under the ownership of organiser GHM, brings together nearly every facet of the optics industry, attracting over 22,000 delegates in the process.

Unsurprisingly, the show has a very German feel to the way it is run. Everything is very efficient – transport arrangements are exceptional and layouts in the four mammoth halls are well thought-out with virtually no unused floor space. There's talk among exhibitors that GHM wants to make the show bigger soon, a move that would be welcomed, but Dietmar Dohr, CEO and president of GHM, insisted there was an organic long-term plan to develop the show and he was happy with progress.

Adopting technology

While some parts of the optical industry have embraced smartphone apps, exhibitions have been slow on the uptake. This year sees opti's first smartphone app for Apple iOS devices and it really leverages their potential. When you attend an exhibition, there's always that initial time where you don't fully have your bearings and locating stands can sometimes be difficult. Not ideal if you're on a tight schedule.

The opti '12 app is more than just an extension of a show guide, it uses the phone's GPS functionality to put you exactly where you want to be. The huge halls are fully mapped with the exhibitors, so walking past the intended stand three or four times is a thing of the past. Taking this one step further, the app also includes augmented reality functionality, which allows the user to hold the phone in front of their face and the app overlays show information while using the phone's camera.

If you want something more



Ice cold style

opti '12 in Munich kicked off the optical exhibition season in wintry conditions. **Simon Jones** looks at some of the coolest frames on offer



1 Frame designed for *Gadget Show* presenter Jason Bradbury by Tom Davies

2 Red Bull Racing Eyewear optical collection

3 Simon Chim limited edition piece for Carl Zeiss

4 Cleo by Gotti



traditional, the app includes a fully searchable exhibitor list that can be broken down into types of exhibitor. So if you're seeking out fashion frames, the process becomes easier and quicker.

Product launches

The timing of the exhibition provides manufacturers, especially in the frame sector, with something of a quandary. Have designs ready for opti in January or release them, more traditionally, at Mido in March? Many companies opted for the latter, showcasing extensions to existing collections and subtle new models instead of full-on launches of new ranges and styles.

One such manufacturer was Whiteout and Glare, which was using opti '12 to launch colours and styles that it had trialled at Silmo last year – although head of design Fabian Hoffman hinted this could change in future years as the event's popularity grows. 'Munich is fast becoming



my favourite optical show,' he said. 'Because the companies here are all doing different things, we're not really competitors, so there's a really friendly vibe here.'

Swiss manufacturer Gotti has also brought in new features debuted at Silmo to models for 2012. Its Spin & Stow hinge system is making its way into more sunglass models and new reading glasses. The metal fronted Percy and Pepe are two new men's sunglass models, backed up by a glamorous Fame women's style. Gotti development designer Thomas Frischknect said thin, narrow reading glasses were extremely popular in its German-speaking territories and it made perfect sense that the Spin & Stow hinges, which allow frames to fold virtually flat, should be used for the purpose of reading glasses.

In response to customer demand, the company has also released the Cleo acetate unisex frame – although the design is probably more suited to women. While oversized acetate frames have found huge popularity recently, Gotti said there was still demand for the acetate frame look, just with a smaller silhouette.

Inface is another manufacturer for whom the German market is of high importance. Sales manager Thomas Laursen said January was always an important time for the company in terms of frame launches, so the show came at a perfect time.

The Danish company has a strong pedigree in optics and has been trading for over 20 years. Despite this, brand recognition in the UK hasn't always been as high as it could have been, falling behind other well-known Danish brands in terms of exposure. Those who explore a little further will find a company that offers extremely well made products at a very competitive price point. 'We use all of our experience as ECPs to create frames that suit people's needs,' said Laursen.

Among a raft of new ophthalmic acetate frames are the men's IF9256-797 and the IF9245-763 children's frames. Both models feature on-trend shapes and are available in a range of contemporary colourways. The company is also introducing a number of lightweight titanium frames. The IF1125-TI frame has an aviator feel, while the IF1126TI plays it slightly safer with a soft rectangular shape. Distribution in the UK is handled by MAC Eyewear.

Green issues continue to be prominent in optics, with many



5 Simon Chim frames 'wrapped in recycled paper'

6 Percy by Gotti

7 IF1126 titanium by Inface

8 IF9256-797 by Inface

9 IF9245-763 by Inface

companies offering frames made from recycled materials. Japan's Simon Chim has twisted that concept slightly with his ophthalmic frames and sunglasses wrapped in recycled paper – or 'whatever is being thrown away.' Chim's latest paper creation is a limited edition piece for Carl Zeiss to celebrate its 100th anniversary. Sunglasses in the Chim collection use Zeiss lenses as standard, but this particular model uses artwork from Zeiss to wrap the entire frame. For the ophthalmic range, Chim wraps only the temples, but the fronts

don't disappoint, with a wide range of crystal and solid hues available.

Optical formula

After the launch of its sunglass collection at Silmo last year, Red Bull Racing Eyewear used the show to launch its brand new range of optical frames. Plans for the optical collection were already in progress at the time of the launch, but the litmus test was seeing how buyers would react to the sunglasses. Red Bull said feedback was extremely positive and pressed ahead with production of optical models shortly after. The company revealed to *Optician* that its next product launch would be a collection of high-end winter sports goggles.

Like the sunglass collection, there are three lines in the ophthalmic range – Acetate, Stainless Steel and Carbon. Designs in each of the collections are a little more conservative than the sunglass efforts, but there is still a distinct air of sport and clinical motorsport feel. Of particular interest are the Acetate and Carbon collections, which feature similar on-trend silhouettes, but end up with different looks thanks to the stark contrast in the materials used. The Carbon frames are the standout pieces from the new collections, made from a material that is notoriously hard to work with and attain a finish that's acceptable for consumers. Carbon fibre may be commonplace in motorsport, but engineers always favour function over form. Luckily, the Red Bull Formula 1 arm has strict control over the quality of the frames. Distributed by the Michael Pachleitner Group, Red Bull's new optical collection will be available imminently.

Best of British

'Opti is my favourite show,' said Tom Davies on the company's attendance at the show. 'It's where I do most of

my business now.' The manufacturer was celebrating its 10th anniversary and marked the occasion in style with a party and performance from an acoustic band.

To mark the anniversary, the manufacturer has launched a 10-strong collection of designs that Davies considers landmarks in the company's history. Some of the models have already featured in *Optician* (10.02.12), but other notable highlights include snakeskin and horn frames and a limited edition version of the sunglasses worn by Angelina Jolie.

Davies was also showing off one of his latest creations for *Gadget Show* presenter Jason Bradbury. 'I tried to design something which reflected his gadget-obsessed personality,' said Davies.

The Norville Group, exhibiting at opti for the first time, launched the brand new Barbour sunglass collection – after the release of its ophthalmic frames late last year. 'The Barbour brand is well-known and very much understood here in Germany,' said sales director Mark Truss. Much like Barbour's optical collection, there are three collections of sunglasses available. Styles are new takes on classic shapes such as aviators and Wayfarers.

Jai Kudo was focusing very much on German business at the event. 'We are introducing six new sales reps for the German market to develop face to face relationships with practices and increase turnover in the country,' said German head of sales and marketing Francisco Villagrán. As well as showcasing its new Podium collection, the company is also extending the JK London range. Models have been named after places in London and styles have been created with the brief of being easy to wear and on-trend.

Stone and wood

One of the most talked about frames of Silmo 2011 was the stone and wood Dino 41 ophthalmic frame from Austrian manufacturer Rolf. The concept received widespread acclaim and now Rolf is extending the stone finish to new sunglass and women's models. The Aurelia women's ophthalmic frame has a larger silhouette than the Dino and a much softer shape. Also receiving the stone treatment is the Skylark sunglass, which features a very similar silhouette to that of the Aurelia, but with a more masculine top edge of the frame.



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- 10 JK London by Jai Kudo
- 11 Barbour BS003C2 from Norville
- 12 Barbour BS012C1 from Norville
- 13 Aurelia by Rolf
- 14 Skylark by Rolf
- 15 MOD 403 by W-eye



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After the popularity of wooden frames at Silmo last year, many originating from German speaking countries, *Optician* was expecting a slew of new wooden offerings at opti. Surprisingly, new designs were somewhat thin on the ground. W-Eye extended its collection with the release

of the MOD 403 men's one-piece frame and Gold and Wood chose to hold back new designs until Mido.

If you go to opti with the sole intention of seeking out new frames and trends, then you might be slightly disappointed. From talking to exhibitors, it's clear that the show is an important event in their yearly calendars, but in terms of new releases, the mid-winter timing of the exhibition does seem to throttle their desire to release brand new products. However, if you want to keep abreast of more general developments in optics, then opti is a must. ●