

# Optical Product of the Year

Winning an *Optician Award* is not easy but winning the Optical Product of the Year Award is a major achievement. **Chris Bennett** reports on this year's winner



**T**he Vision by Conran frame concept won Inspects the highly contested Optical Product of the Year Award 2007 in April.

Producing a frame more than the sum of its metal and plastic parts is something frame companies have long struggled with. Increasingly, they seek refuge in brands, but Inspects has taken the idea of frame retailing a step further.

Vision by Conran is not only a classically styled range of frames but also a new concept for owning and purchasing eyewear. The collection itself is a Conran co-designed range focusing on classic lines in a mixture of materials. Pieces range from an all-metal model taking design cues from the angle-poise lamp to library-chic acetates featuring rich colours and over-sized eye shapes. As ever, Inspects has scoured the world for the most up-to-date materials, the lightest and most discrete hinges and placed them in a classic design concept. But Vision by Conran doesn't end there.

Differentiating eyewear is becoming increasingly difficult, says Sam Craig, Inspects' product manager. If the selling point of the eyewear is fashion that problem becomes even worse. What Inspects has achieved, he says, is to use brand values to build an additional story into each of its collections. With Caterpillar the focus is on safety but with Vision by Conran the focus is on classic design, fit for purpose products, longevity, lifestyle and quality. And this isn't confined to the eyewear.

### Book box concept

One of the key innovations in Vision by Conran has been the book box. This contains a trademark-blue Conran lining, prescription record, humidore case and cloth. The idea is to bring eyewear out of the drawer and on to the bookshelf alongside the lifestyle reading matter of the owner. This black box is the story of the wearer's eyewear, it preserves a record of the correction and houses the product and its care systems proudly and visibly.

'The book box has been fantastic,'



**Sam Craig (left) and Paul Lovett pick up their trophy on Awards night**

says Craig, 'We can use it as point of sale and it sends out the right messages about the product.' Feedback from practices indicates the collection has been fantastically well received by patients, while practices have appreciated innovative thinking on the point of sale material.

Craig said Inspects intended to send a clear message to the optical community. 'We wanted to talk about the fact that we weren't just doing fashion retailing any more. We felt we were bringing something totally different into the market,' he says. It has been compared to the Philippe Starck approach, he says. 'We want to make eyewear part of people's lives. The driver for the entry was to let people know that the product was out there.'

'It is a fantastically iconic piece of design. Even if you remove all of the packaging it would still sell as well. It is not one of those brands that will date, it's classic.'

While all of this makes for an



excellent product it also made for a simplistic award entry. Inspects used its promotional materials and its launch material plus a sample of the product in its entry. 'The entry was very minimal, if a proposition is strong enough it speaks for itself. Look at it and love it,' he concludes.

But, he says, he knew they were up against some stiff competition. 'We just didn't think we were in the running for it. We were up against some very technical products and it was difficult to see how we were going to fend off companies like Johnson & Johnson and Essilor,' he recalls.

### Day of celebration

But Inspects did just that, much to the jubilation of Craig and national sales manager Paul Lovett. And the *Optician Award* meant the dinner was a cause for even more celebrations, as earlier that day Inspects had also been announced as a winner of the prestigious Queen's Awards. 'The Optrafair weekend was a triple whammy for us: The Queen's Award, The *Optician Award* and an award from the Optrafair organisers,' Craig says. Winning the Queen's Award meant that some of the Inspects team travelled to London to take part in that presentation ceremony, so it was not until the team was reunited that the celebrations began in earnest.

Craig has nothing but praise for the *Optician Awards* night and says he was pleasantly surprised by the diversity of the audience attending the black tie dinner. 'We were sat on a table with a lot of industry people and it was a good opportunity to meet people with a different perspective on optics,' he says.

Since the Awards night the win has been publicised and the trophy now takes pride of place in the reception area of the firm's Farleigh House headquarters.

'We are extremely proud of the award. It is from opticians in the UK and it has helped us with Conran. It is a great story for us to tell and we have put it up on our website. Our reps use the cuttings from the Awards night, once you can talk and get people interested that's half the job,' he says. ●