

**W**hile mid-tier brands around the world have struggled in the recession, high-end luxury brands have tended to perform well and defy the economic downturn. Some of this can be attributed to growth in emerging markets like Asia, but around the world, there are still plenty of consumers that are still looking for high-end items. As eyewear is often seen as a perfect entry point into the luxury product sector, now could be a good time to bolster the luxury lines stocked in practice.

The Vision Expo West exhibition at the Sands Expo and Convention Center is an excellent place for opticians to do business in the luxury sector. On the show floors, high-end eyewear has its own Galleria area while more luxury brands exhibited in plush suites at the Venetian hotel. For those looking to mix business with pleasure, there aren't many better venues in the world.

In the dog-eat-dog world of high-end brands, Sama Eyewear is the luxury manufacturer with a conscience. The company, founded by veteran eyewear designer Sheila Vance, has a 'fashion with a cause' ethos and was created not only to showcase luxury eyewear to the world, but to generate funds for the Sam Vance Foundation – a not-for-profit organisation whose mission is to prevent drug use among teens and young adults, and to help recovery among young addicts. The Foundation was set up by Vance after her son, Sam, lost his life to a heroin overdose.



# Luxury in Las Vegas

Sama Eyewear followed and a portion of its annual profits goes to the Foundation.

The brand eschews popular Italian acetate manufacturers and instead looks to Japan for its materials to maximise its luxury credentials. Its plastic frame lines are constructed from Japanese Zyl and metal models are made from 100 per cent pure titanium – something that the company says it was the first to bring into the optical frame industry. Decorative elements include Swarovski crystals, jewellery grade sterling silver and genuine diamonds. Attention to

The opulence of Las Vegas provided the perfect setting for *Optician* to view some of the best new luxury frames that could be worth taking a gamble on in practice

detail is what the company feels it is known for and it isn't difficult to see why. New ophthalmic style Saif has a titanium supra design with a modified Clubmaster silhouette. From the front, the frame has an almost unremarkable feel, but it's the Zyl temples that really bring the frame to life. Within the acetate resides a laser-cut beta titanium dagger, which runs almost from the

lug down to the end tips and features intricate detailing throughout. Perhaps more impressive than the high levels of detail on the dagger itself is the svelte nature of the temples. You would be forgiven for thinking that an inlaid titanium dagger core would add to the width of the temples, but they are wafer thin and a testament to Sama's dedication to innovation. A similar

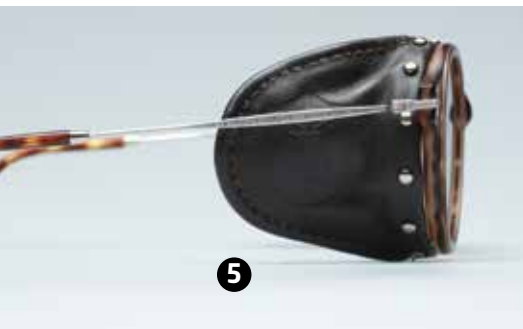


2

- 1 The Muse II by Maybach
- 2 V7735 by Hoffman
- 3 Jill by Sama Eyewear
- 4 Alessandra by Sama Eyewear
- 5 Matsuda M1013
- 6 Saif by Sama Eyewear
- 7 The Artist VIII by Maybach
- 8 The Sovereign V by Maybach
- 9 Matsuda M3033



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approach is applied to the Alessandra women's sunglass, with its decorative inner temple core, while the Jill women's ophthalmic frame has a more traditional shape and construction.

Shauns Shades is another eyewear company with philanthropic sensibilities. Scottish designer Shaun Patterson spent many years in America after attending Harvard University and set up Shauns Shades in 2011 to offer high quality sunglass styles. For every frame sold, a pair of glasses, a fitting and a sight test is provided in a deprived area. At present, most of the glasses are being supplied to South America, mainly due to Patterson's connections in California.

The company made its British debut at Optrafair earlier this year, where it showed its first sunglass line – which featured high quality frames made

using materials such as Mazzucchelli acetate and Carl Zeiss sun lenses.

At Vision Expo West, the company debuted its first ophthalmic frame collection. 'Launching an Rx collection was always the plan, but being a start up company we thought a sunglass range would initially bring us more exposure. The new Rx line uses the same production standards and design touches as the sunglass collection, which should really appeal to opticians,' says Patterson.

These design touches are inspired by Patterson's own experiences with low vision. Braille S logos can be found on the inside of the end tip tips and on some models, on the corner of the silhouettes. On the inner lining of the hinge, a subtle 'Sight' engraving ensures the message behind the brand isn't forgotten.

New models Cara and Nairn are very much in keeping with the look of the sunglass range. The acetate and metal Nairn style has a feminine Clubmaster look while the acetate Cara frame has a simple rectangular shape and on-trend mottled acetate.

### Back to life

The luxury roots of Japanese brand, Matsuda, can be traced back to the 1960s. Founded in 1967 by Mitsuhiro Matsuda (also the founder of Japanese fashion week) in Tokyo, the brand quickly became one of the most celebrated Japanese fashion houses. In the early 1980s it made the move into eyewear, with a luxury offering akin to its fashion lines and brand went head to head with the likes of Oliver Peoples. By the turn of the millennium, however, the brand was

## Featuring frames



difficult to find and licence agreements lapsed when Matsuda became ill.

In 2010, James Kigsen, CEO of PM Eyewear, set about on a mission to revive the brand. After working for Cartier, Kigsen knew the luxury product sector and in 2011, set about the painstaking process of restarting Matsuda – exactly how it was in the 1980s. ‘One of the workers we recruited was an apprentice at the Matsuda factory in the early days, so he has come back to make sure the brand is still using the same highly skilled artisans and materials that were used in the early days,’ says Kigsen.

Eyewear across the Matsuda collection treads a fine line between modern and vintage elements. This means combinations of modern, angular takes on retro silhouettes with period touches such as coined edges and leather sides shields.

A perfect exponent of this style is the M1013 sunglass. The frame has a rounded eye shape in celluloid acetate, mated to titanium temples with filigree detailing. The foldable leather side shields are the frame’s highlight feature – giving a feeling of vintage mountaineering expeditions. The women’s M3033 frame is slightly more reserved, with a subtle cat’s eye shape with layered titanium and filigree on the temples, fronts and nose bridge. Acetate models such as the M1010 are more traditional in appearance and construction, although its simple wearable shape is updated thanks to clever bevelling.

Matsuda also received a massive PR boost earlier this thanks to a tie-in for the *Iron Man* movie franchise. A number of frames found their way on to the face of billionaire-come-superhero Tony Stark, played by Robert Downey Jr. ‘Robert was a massive fan of the Matsuda brand in the 80s so a mutual contact put us together as our eyewear seemed like a perfect match for Tony Stark,’ says

**10 Claire by Selima Optique**

**11 Zoe by Selima Optique**

**12 Cara by Shauns Shades**

**13 Nairn by Shauns Shades**

Kigsen. Also adorning the faces of actors on the big screen are the sunglass styles from Selima Optique. Its Money 2 sunglass was worn by actor Ryan Gosling in the art house film *Drive* and the Chad sunglass was used in *Crazy, Stupid, Love*.

The brand was created by optometrist and DO Selima Salaun in 1997 after leaving an Alain Mikli practice in New York. Salaun set up her own boutique practice and quickly established a bespoke frame service. The bespoke designs go on to form the basis of the ready-to-wear collections and brand has an air of simple luxury that emanates through the designs and the construction. Salaun’s eyewear has also allowed her to forge a reputation for herself in and among New York’s fashion elite and she is a regular consultant for fashion events.

‘Selima’s frames have simple, clean and elegant designs,’ says head of sales David Michel of Selima Optique eyewear. Frames are handmade using a high grade of Mazzucchelli acetate and colours range from subtle mottled black and red combination hues to bright green – demonstrated by the Zoe sunglass and Claire 3 ophthalmic frame.

### Handmade in Germany

Maybach is one of the most recognisable luxury brands in the world, so it’s only fitting that *Optician* visited the brand in its suite at the exhibition. Manufactured by IVKO in Germany, Maybach eyewear exudes the same levels of luxury that its vehicles are famed for. The manufacturer uses wood, leather, buffalo horn, diamonds and even solid

gold in its quest to produce some of the most luxurious handmade eyewear available.

New ophthalmic models debuted at Vision Expo West included the Sovereign V, Muse II and the Artist VIII. The men’s Sovereign model has a large rectangular silhouette constructed from buffalo horn and features subtle bevelling around the nose bridge. A number of finishes are available, including natural horn shades and a sleek matt black hue. The Artist VIII rimless frame provides subtle luxury and has been updated with a new sculpted wood and carbon fibre temple design with new aluminium inlay and a redesigned lug which bears the Maybach motif inside and out. Carbon fibre temples are also available, which feature platinum inlays.

Also manufactured by IVKO is Hoffman Eyewear. Famed for its buffalo horn frames, the manufacturer has started to experiment with combinations of horn and materials such as wood. New for this season however, is the V7735 frame with a combination of horn and a thin layer of stone. Although the use of stone has been tried recently, the mix of horn and stone is something entirely new to *Optician*. The first thing you notice about the stone layer is how thin and smooth it is. The manufacturer really has gone to painstaking lengths to make an innovative yet lightweight frame, as some stone-clad eyewear can be heavy and cumbersome. If you’re thinking that a stone-covered horn frame will be a difficult to glaze, you can rest easy. The rim-lock design, which extends across the entire V-Series range, allows the frame to split at the lug, making the glazing process a lot easier than a regular horn frame and goes to some way to easing fears of chipped or broken horn.

Further coverage from Vision Expo West will appear in a future issue of *Optician*. ●