



# Goodbye to geeks

In part one of *Optician's* coverage of the first optical exhibition of 2014, **Rory Brogan** takes a look at some of the lightweight frame styles on show at opti Munich

If you were to draw any conclusions from the frame launches at the recent opti in Munich, one is that the geek look of heavy acetate frames and the proliferation of keyhole bridges is on the wane.

Having been the main focus in recent years, such vintage, nerdy styles have been toned down, with thinner acetates and combinations. At the same time, there was no shortage of lightweight launches in titanium, aluminium and surgical steel, sometimes combined with acetate inserts.

One company particularly focused on weight, or rather lack of it, was nine eyewear, set up in 2009 by former long-term Bada distributor Jens William Sorensen of Aarhus in Denmark. The name nine comes from full-rim frames made in Japan of nine grams of pure titanium. There are three collections, the first being 'nine' a classical line with

0.8mm titanium wire and a standard groove to take any lenses, the second, 'nine EDGE', offers laser-cut 0.7mm sheet titanium for younger looking styles and the most recent, 'nine 3rd', where a transparent polyamide front, sometimes in bright colours, is used.

'I love Japanese craftsmanship,' says Sorensen, who points to the nine eyewear code of conduct on the frames. 'Consumers are now more aware of what they buy and why some people can make product at a certain price. There's a reason why some companies do things cheaply, but we have guidelines and don't cut corners. What you are getting from us is good product from good producers in Japan. How they do the colouring is perfect.'

He says his drive is for quality, attention to detail and to create clean, minimalist product with simplicity.

Sorensen attends the international fashion events in Berlin and Madrid for colour inspiration and blue has been much in evidence of late, for example cobalt blue. There are currently four shades of blue in use and the company is also known for its white frames, with one practice in Denmark using 30 white designs in a winter window display.

Explaining the latest nine 3rd collection, he says: 'We needed to have a product that looked like acetate but not as heavy. I like the feel and touch of acetate but it doesn't go with our label, so we came up with a nylon polymer.'

This collection uses titanium temples that curve around the front, but when folded they reveal rivet detailing on the nylon front. The frames incorporate a monobloc hinge and use an adjustable nose pad system (three different nose pad arms fit all frames) that offers comfort for sport.





He explains that nine is looking for steady rather than spectacular growth. 'When we set out we didn't want a big business and wanted to have fun, but as they say "You can't be half married".' On whether it would ever veer from its 9gm mission statement, Sorensen says: 'This is our red line, it's what we follow and you should stick to your idea. For example many companies do shiny colours but we're all about matt.'

## Aluminium architecture

Another Aarhus-based firm at opti was Kilsgaard, which has chosen aluminium rather than the more famed titanium material and has worked with architectural design company Bonnelycke from the outset. All the frames feature sculpted aluminium fronts some with acetate temples and others with titanium, giving a chunky look without the heaviness and using adjustable nose pads.

Founder Jacob Kilsgaard explains that he came up with the idea working with a good friend at Bonnelycke and it took two years to finish the first collection, having stumbled across aluminium by chance. 'We're known as the company that made aluminium work,' he says.

UK representative Sarah Moustafa, who believes there is a move away from the chunkiest of acetates, points out the lively use of colour: 'Everything comes in 10 to 12 colours per model which makes it easy for the dispenser to find something that really suits. There are unisex colours including turquoise in a big guy's frame and three shades of blue and grey with two of green. They're very hard wearing and easy to fit.'

The acetate sides are aimed at those wanting a heavier feel, she says, while the thinner titanium sides aim to meet the demand for a fine temple.

Kilsgaard's Jakob Roebstorff explains that influence for the latest designs was American movies from the 60s and describes the new styles as smaller. Retro shapes are being given a new life, for example a round eye.

'You get a clean urban look coming out of these aluminium frames. We use bright colours but they're in matt so that you get away with wearing them, for example the green. They're produced in Italy and come back to Denmark to be anodised, so we maintain the quality,' adds Kilsgaard.

The use of aluminium was not confined to Kilsgaard, as Face à Face showed off its first frames using the material in Alium 1 and the larger Alium 2. Company founder Nadine Roth says: 'It's a real technical challenge to get right but it allows us to make thicker metal frames. Alium 1 and 2 are a technical product with flex hinges.'

They are also colourful, with five different shades of blue on offer including a striking Alium 1 electric blue model with yellow inner sides, a darker blue with orange acetate and an orange and red version. Alium 2 offers up a dark blue front with plaid-detail acetate sides.

For women, the smaller metal Vicky 1-3 frames gave a frame within a frame look, with a cut out ridge around the inner front filled with contrasting colour. This comes in some subtle options as well as the more obvious, for example brown with a turquoise contrast. 'They're still not very big, but there's demand for it,' adds Roth.

Paris-based Oko Eyewear made use of extra-light surgical steel in the ZD31 frame that has zigzag chemically cut sides in duo tones, with colour options including grey with blue inside and deep red and brown. Sales and

marketing manager Ana Sedes explains that the supra frames are flexible and do not deform thanks to a memory material. The design was inspired by chain lighting to give an industrial feel, with the openwork steel giving more fluidity and lightness.

Flying the flag for 'Made In Italy' product was Blackfin, whose president and CEO Nicola Del Din explains the company's 43-year history of titanium production in the mountainous Agordo region through Pramaor, a company set up by his mother in 1971. He describes the company as using the 'neomadeinitaly' term to reflect the pride in where they produce and its aim to look ahead. 'We're not working with a printing machine. Real Made in Italy still exists,' he says.

Because of the minimalist titanium design they are often mistaken for a Swedish or Danish company, but he is proud of Blackfin's roots. 'We use pure Japanese titanium and there is a lot of passion. Aside from Silhouette we're the most experienced in titanium production and we produce all the frames you see here. It can be difficult to manufacture and sell as they are different modalities but we match the two. It's a big goal and a huge advantage as we can deliver in 24 hours.' With sales up 39 per cent in 2013 and 70 per cent of product exported, it seems the approach is working.

Del Din adds that the latest additions to the Blackfin Zero Edge frames, shown at opti, reinterpreted the latest design trends and fashion for hi-tech eyewear. The slim-line models combine lightness with vibrant, high-impact two-tone colours. Traditional shades of black, grey, and dark brown are teamed with bolder tones of navy blue, sky blue, electric blue, red, green, fuchsia and purple that also come in fluorescent versions.

- 1 nine 3rd in white
- 2 Kilsgaard in aubergine
- 3 Kilsgaard blues
- 4 Oko ZD31
- 5 Lindberg now





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There were three new beta-titanium models, two for men in the square-shaped BF700 Mackay and BF701 Galway, along with the slightly cat's eye top rim of BF702 Bantry. The models all weigh in at 4.1gm, have the Atom Zero shock-absorbing hinge and the patented Swordfish Mini temple tips. These, explains Del Din can be shortened by hand in three simple moves. 'Opticians can say to their patients "I can give you a full rim frame that weighs less than a rimless",' he adds. 'We use 100 per cent beta titanium fronts and sides and the frames are made in 53 big steps or 150-200 real steps. We've got huge experience in soldering.'

Practices can also buy into personalised high-tech Blackfin dispensing kits, combining aluminium and foam, which can be used in window displays and to present the finished product to the customer. Both the frames and the kits can be personalised and there's the option for the customer to buy a presentation box.

On whether or not Blackfin would look to introduce acetate via combination frames, he is clear about the future. 'There are a few other companies that are good at producing acetate and carbon fibre, but we want to be the best for titanium. It's better to do a few things very well and not confuse the customer,' he says.

Working across a number of materials and also launching lightweight eyewear at the show was Mykita. There were six new frame shapes that were smaller for the season, with copper brown a feature in optical and sunglass, as well as matt finishes.

The panto Mercer and Greene sunglasses, named after streets in New York's Soho, have traditional shapes and glass-bead blasted surface in contrast with gold-laminated lenses. In its Damir Doma collaboration, aviator sunglasses DD1.2 and DD1.3 combined delicate stainless steel with acetate inserts in an aviator shape. Colour combinations include Champagne/Misty Green and Off-White/Chocolate Chip.

There were round eye shapes in stainless steel with a double bridge in

- 6 Blackfin 701
- 7 Blackfin 702
- 8 Hapter marries cloth and steel
- 9 Mykita Mylon Anselme and Sylvain



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the Philomene and Philo models that combine glossy gold with silky matt colour finishes including blue and opal.

New in Mylon is the panto frame Luxon, described as one of the lightest models in the line, with fine temples and front and a resurrection of the flashy panto look popularised in 1980s New York. There were also lightweight Mylon sunglasses in the double-bridged Anselme and Sylvain. These use side clips for performance and wind protection, an alternative to the leather sections of alpine goggles from the 1950s and PR manager Lisa Thamm describes them as fusing design and high-tech material. Colour combinations include blue/orange and grey/purple.

Taking its inspiration from the find of a pair of glacier military goggles from the Second World War in the Dolomites in 2009, was Hapter, a start-up firm exhibiting in the opti box area. It has a toned down aesthetic, fusing surgical stainless steel to high-end textiles from Cerruti Woollen Mills – cotton fabrics from the military archives of the 1920s and 1940s.

The high-quality product uses Zeiss lenses in the sunglasses and stainless steel is treated to maintain a natural curve to the temples.

For co-founder Eric Balzan it was a busy first showing at opti, who describes the manufacturing of the hingeless, screwless and solder-free frames and sunglasses as strong and reliable. 'They're very delicate in look but strong in structure, as the material

is fused at 200 degrees,' he says of the Italian-made designs that weigh 12gm.

New for the show were a grey-green material colour and another in aubergine, as well as a slightly panto style and an oval shape. The end tips have cut-outs for lightness and he describes the military feel as 'not fashion more functional conservative'.

A company well established with lightweight product is Lindberg, which used opti to display more sizes and colours for existing product ranges, widening the scope of frame sizes. The Acetanium range has been extended with new colours and sizes, while Air Rim Titanium has new models for younger children and adults with wider faces. Lindberg says finesse has been used to make the larger and smaller frame sizes look just as good.

There was a preview of Strip 9700, a model with an acetate inner rim, giving warmth and colour in a lightweight alternative to an acetate frame.

Also new was the temple tip of the ultralight Lindberg now range, with snap-mounted hypoallergenic silicone covering three sides of the slender titanium side. This, says the company, gives an uninterrupted swoop of the delicate line of the titanium plate and is only visible edge-on along the temple. Director Peter Warrer says the latest look has taken off and is evidence of a move back to minimalism. ●

● Part two of the opti coverage will look at acetate introductions.