



New York times

Simon Jones heads to Vision Expo East in New York to find out more about the new releases from key US frame brands

America is a country that's proud of its manufacturing and proud of its home grown brands. With this mind, *Optician* set aside time at the Vision Expo East exhibition late last month to find out more about what the US frame manufacturers offer practitioners in their own territory.

REM Eyewear used the exhibition to show off its range of brands from the likes of Tumi, Converse and US fashion designer John Varvatos – a brand which looks set for more exposure in the UK in 2013 with the launch of a flagship store on London's Conduit Street.

Varvatos was on hand to talk to practitioners about a slew of new releases at the show and spoke exclusively to *Optician* about the brand's venture into eyewear.

'When you think about eyewear over time gone by, but especially in today's world, it's a huge part of everybody's wardrobes, whether it's for

sunglasses and fashion or ophthalmic function and fashion. My brand was never about big logos. I have always said "god is in the little details", so for me it's about going back to the studio and looking at little finesse touches and bringing back some of the artisan feel that I think has been missing from eyewear,' he says.

On the design process, he explains: 'For me it has actually been really easy because I'm very passionate about the project and working with Nico [REM Eyewear creative director Nico Roseillier] is great. I have tried to think about how glasses used to be made, but kept in mind today's materials and construction and we're also now finding that a lot of the design touches we used for the eyewear are now finding their way into the apparel collections.'

Artisan details like filigree detailing are evident on the new V786 sunglass and V146 ophthalmic frame. The V786 takes the aviator silhouette and turns it into something more low-slung – with an extended teardrop shape





John Varvatos: 'god is in the little details'

and downwardly curved brow bar. The V146 ophthalmic style is more conservative, with a simple wearable rectangular metal eye shape and tapered acetate temples. New sunglass style V785 pays homage to the brand's rock and roll leanings, with a metal guitar head inlaid in the temple at the hinge, which also displays the John Varvatos initials.

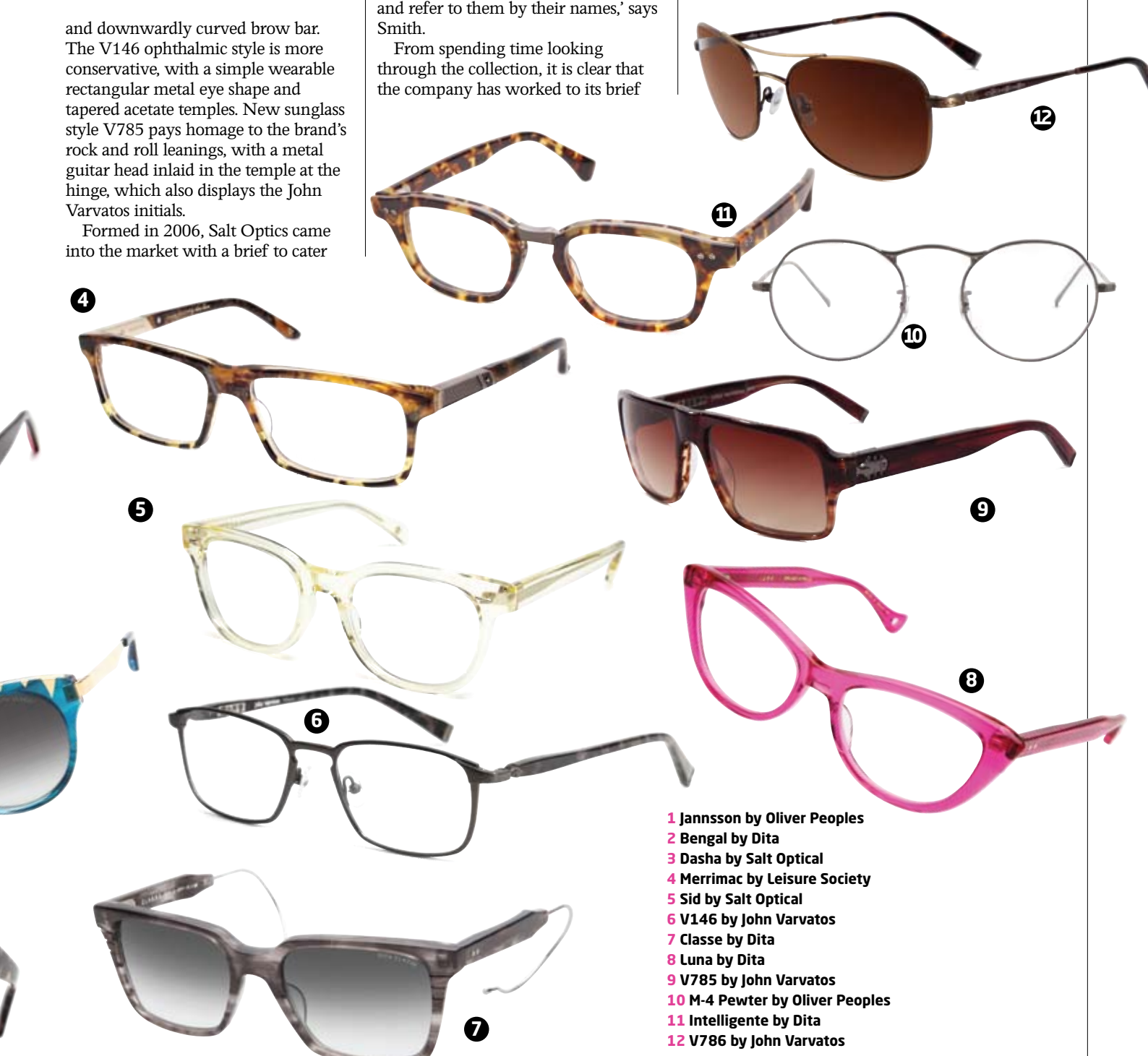
Formed in 2006, Salt Optics came into the market with a brief to cater

for what it says was a gap in the market in which patients struggled to find simple products which were made exceptionally well. Salt Optics' founder Ron Smith says the company has an affinity for the ocean and bodies of water and has an ethos where its customers are put first. The independent company has its roots firmly in optics, with many staff previously working for the behemoths such as Oliver Peoples and Oakley. Its approach to its customers is more personal, though. 'We don't have account numbers; we know our clients and refer to them by their names,' says Smith.

From spending time looking through the collection, it is clear that the company has worked to its brief

of producing simple frames with high production standards. Frames produced in Japan use high-grade Mazzucchelli acetate and feature solid components such as five-barrel hinges. Smith says frames are designed with fit in mind and are 'hand crafted, not produced'.

Styles range from classic panto shapes to wearable, shallow rectangular silhouettes. New models on display at Vision Expo East included the Dasha, Nathan and Sid ophthalmic frames. The upswept brow lines of the women's Dasha model give the



- 1 Jansson by Oliver Peoples
- 2 Bengal by Dita
- 3 Dasha by Salt Optical
- 4 Merrimac by Leisure Society
- 5 Sid by Salt Optical
- 6 V146 by John Varvatos
- 7 Classe by Dita
- 8 Luna by Dita
- 9 V785 by John Varvatos
- 10 M-4 Pewter by Oliver Peoples
- 11 Intelligente by Dita
- 12 V786 by John Varvatos

Featuring frames



- 13 Elins by Oliver Peoples
- 14 Pallina by Leisure Society
- 15 Nathan by Salt Optical
- 16 Alisha by Oliver Peoples
- 17 Foster by Rapp Optical
- 18 Milo by Rapp Optical

cable end tips. The frame also features 1mm recessed milled details on the front to reveal the inner acetate layer. The women's Bengal model has an oversize rounded silhouette and features titanium inserts on the top brow, which are recessed into the front of the frame to mimic tiger's teeth. The style is available in three hues – black, blue and crème/light brown.

rectangular looking frame a feminine appearance, which is bolstered by the subtle, layered acetate with pink internals. Those looking for details will find the bevelled fronts and hinge pins of interest.

The Sid frame sports a modified panto silhouette and a heavy-set acetate profile, while the Nathan style is a subtle metal supra frame with tapered temples that flow into Japanese acetate end tips.

While in New York, *Optician* spent some time searching out some of the city's best optical practices and there was one brand that kept appearing in high-end fashion outlets – Dita. Started as a sunglass brand in 1995 by Jeff Solorio and John Juniper, Dita has carved itself a reputation around the world as a saleable high-end frame manufacturer, but penetration in the UK market has been low – especially

with its optical lines.

Inspired by styles from the 50s to the 80s, Dita's aim was to produce frames that featured high end materials like titanium, 18k gold, white gold and Japanese zyl acetates. Its first ophthalmic collection was released in 2007 and used the same production values as the sun range. 'Simply holding a pair of Dita frames may seduce you for life,' says the manufacturer confidently.

Twelve new frames were unveiled to the US market at Vision Expo East – six sunglass styles and six ophthalmic models. The Classe sunglass was *Optician's* pick of the new sunglass models. A boxier take on the classic Wayfarer shape, which Dita says is inspired by the shapes worn by Malcom X, the frame's stand out feature is the combination of Japanese acetate and stainless steel wraparound

Ophthalmic styles are less animalistic but still major on quality and details.

The unisex Intelligente frame has an obvious retro modified panto silhouette, but look closer and you'll see a full length titanium inlay sandwiched in the frames, which has been diamond etched on the nose bridge section. The cat's eye Luna model features less trickery, but still boasts the same Japanese acetate and rivet ball hinge featuring the Dita logo and custom wire core.

New York heritage

Vision Expo East was the venue for the launch of Oliver Peoples's first eyewear collection back in 1987, a year after founder Larry Leight produced a frame for Andy Warhol. Since then, the brand has moved from strength to the strength and it's fair to say that it is now a staple of fashion-orientated practices the world over.

Its summer collection sees 13 new models in total – nine sunglass styles and four ophthalmic shapes. New unisex ophthalmic frame Jansson is inspired by iconic Oliver Peoples shapes, Ari and Tycoon, but features a deeper lens profile suitable for progressive lenses. After a brief spell shying away from the signature triangular three-pin detailing, the brand has chosen to start deploying the trait once again. 'We figured it was us that made it popular, so why shouldn't we start using it again?' said a spokesperson for Oliver Peoples at the show. Aside from the pins, there are few other details on the frame, which is the brand's modus operandi. Five hues are available – black, cocobolo, amber tortoise, storm and new colour scheme spotted tortoise gradient.



Featuring frames

With a thin panto shape, the unisex Elins frame is equally retro but the M-4 goes even further back in time. One of the first models that Oliver Peoples released at Vision Expo East in 1987, the frame has a rounded wire profile, raised nose bridge and filigree etching on the temples that give it a *Django Unchained* look – especially in its sun guise.

Pick of the new sunglass styles is the Alisha model, which has an oversize cat's eye lens shape mixed with metal and acetate construction. The metal eyewire is subtle, while the acetate brow bars are more substantial. Five colour options are available and polarised lenses can be specified.

American design and master craftsmanship is the ethos behind the Leisure Society brand from Californian firm Baumvision. Frames are made by hand in Japan using what the company says are the finest grades of titanium, acetate, horn and precious metals and the manufacturer's CEO Shane Buam believes the company goes to lengths in the production process that other manufacturers rarely match.

'We worked for close to two years on perfecting numerous new technologies that have been applied to very classical concepts,' says Baum. 'The etching work on many of the frames requires over six hours on a state of the art computer controlled CNC machine, limiting production to only four frames per day.'

'Most companies wouldn't bother with such production, but making something special and ornate is the intention. We believe in heirloom design. Leisure Society wants to create frames that ultimately your grandchildren might fight over when you pass away.'

Three new models have been introduced for summer 2013 – the Du Cap, Merrimac and Pallina ophthalmic



frames. Named after the Hotel Du Cap on the French Riviera, the unisex Du Cap frame has a deep square profile with a dropped keyhole bridge. Acetate temples are embellished with titanium with patterned enamel inserts.

The Merrimac frame builds on the current trend for thin acetates. A thinly bevelled eye wire has a shallow rectangular shape, but is juxtaposed with a heavily-set nose bridge. The Pallina style also sports a rectangular shape, but subtle upswept brows give the frame a feminine look.

The brand is also proud of its two new tortoiseshell hues Desert Tortoise and Mountain Tortoise. The result of a specially developed extrusion process on its acetates, the new colours now have a two-tone effect. Mountain Tortoise has a traditional black and yellow base, but the top half of the colour features a subtle layer of gold flakes. The Desert variant uses a warmer colour palette of brown and

red with the same gold flakes. The new shades can be specified on each of the new models.

Although not a US brand, Canadian manufacturer Rapp Optical provided *Optician* with some of its highlights at the exhibition. The manufacturer, which also has a practice in Ontario, produces frames in a variety of shapes, from the outlandish to subtle, but the inventiveness in the manufacturing, carried out at its Ontario base, really impressed *Optician*. Frames such as the new Milo and Foster styles feature a mix of materials – Mazzucchelli acetate and titanium, in a variety of states. Some of the materials, like the titanium temples, are unfinished, while limited tumbling steps give the acetate sharp, defined corners. Hues also range from subtle to extroverted.

The company only exhibits at Vision Expo East and Silmo, so be sure to view the collections in Paris this autumn. ●



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