



Frame of the Year

Optician talks to Feb31st about how its Optician Awards victory is a confidence boost for the company and wooden frame manufacture

When Optician Award presenter Hugh Dennis announced that the wooden Apus frame from fledgling Italian manufacturer Feb31st had won the frame of the year category, there would have been a few members in the audience who would have been asking each other who the company was.

Feb31st was established in 2011 and first came to the attention of *Optician* at Silmo the same year. It seemed like an ambitious move for a new company to work exclusively with wooden frames, but after hearing its substantial experience of working with the material for decades in various disciplines, notably in production of baseball bats for American leagues, the move made perfect sense. An entry in the Frame of the Year category at the Optician Awards was unexpected but entirely understandable.

Modern mix

In less than two years, the company has carved itself a reputation for being a wooden frame manufacturer that mixes modern manufacturing with traditional materials – something that impressed the Optician Awards judges earlier this year. Competition in the category was fierce, with a mix of known brands at accessible price points to exotic options from the likes of Feb31st.

Feb31st director Stefano Sarti Cipriani says the company was waiting with bated breath to receive the call from North Europe sales manager



Chintu Bhatt, who attended the awards night. 'We were all extremely happy to have won.'

'It was a little unexpected, though, because usually other awards are not brave enough to choose a new brand with a totally unique concept, favouring commercial styles and well known brands. We really hoped the UK industry would recognise what we are trying to achieve with Feb31st and were pleased that it did,' adds Sarti Cipriani.

The company's director is in no doubt as to the reason behind the win: 'Quality,' he says confidently. 'The two years of initial research and development and the implementation of state of the art technology plus Italian craftsmanship delivers outstanding quality which we feel is very apparent when you compare Feb31st to other brands.'

He also highlights the brand's customisation options, which allow each layer of wood to be coloured to the patient's choosing as another one of the possible reasons behind the win.

Since the awards night in April, the company has heavily promoted the win throughout the industry and social media sites and received confidence-boosting feedback. 'Even though it was a UK-based award, everyone in the company shouted about it in every country as it was an award for our brand and something to be proud of. And the reaction from the potential customers has been great as it adds an extra level of confidence in our products.'

'It also helps communicate our strategy – to teach and prove to our customers that they can work with wood as they work with acetate or metal. There are no limits that prevent

somebody to sell wood and the award shows that peers in the optical industry agree,' says Sarti Cipriani.

Italian exhibition commitments meant Feb31st could not attend the awards night 'en masse', but were instead represented by Chintu Bhatt. 'Chintu informed us that he had a great evening of food and entertainment... and parading the award around until the early hours of the morning! He said it was a great opportunity to network with opticians from all over the UK. It was a great social and professional evening,' says Sarti Cipriani of the Optician Awards night.

Show launches

The win has not been a signal for the company to relax. Instead, development is at the forefront of its thinking. 'We are preparing great launches for Silmo 2013 and Mido next year, as we have a lot of amazing ideas and possibilities in the pipeline – we just can't share the details yet.'

This year the company has launched eight-base wraparound shapes and a special collection made from Kauri wood, said to be over 48,000 years old.

Away from frame manufacturing, the company has also been working on its website with additions that will allow opticians access to a lot more material to help them promote and sell its frames.

Unusually, the win did pose some problems for the company. 'We had some issues bringing the award back to Italy. We thought it was best that it stayed in hand luggage to keep it safe, but it took us at least 20 minutes to explain to security staff that the big, heavy, sharp-edged lump of metal was not a weapon, but actually an award,' says Sarti Cipriani. ●



OPTICIAN
AWARDS

● Frame of the Year Award

Winner: Apus, Feb31st

Shortlisted: Titanflex, International Eyewear
WML 9902, William Morris
Bench Kids, Brulimar