

Fashions in Eyeglasses

David Baker recommends a history of frame design for its many anecdotes and insights

Fashions in Eyeglasses is a revised and updated edition of a book first published in 1967. New material includes a discussion of trends in eyewear from the 1970s to the present day, covering the rise of designer sunglasses, sports eyewear, photochromic lenses and contact lenses.

This is not a comprehensive history of frame manufacture, but there is much historical detail on the development of eyewear, supplemented by a broad selection of prints, and several plates of contemporary eyewear accompanying each chapter. The early regulatory work of the Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers is featured, and there are some interesting portraits of influential 18th century opticians such as Scarlett, Ayscough and Martin (a surprising omission is the equally important Cuff).

Primarily the book is a work of social history. The author, who taught theatrical makeup and worked as a makeup consultant, previously produced *Fashions in Makeup* and *Fashions in Hair*. The stated purpose of *Fashions in Eyeglasses* is to provide a practical guide to styles of eyeglasses worn throughout history, for the benefit of costumers, makeup artists, actors and illustrators.

The book is particularly good on analysing the relationship between eyewear fashions and the media, initially in print and latterly via film, television and the growing cult of celebrity.

The modern collaboration between designers and manufacturers is also well delineated. There is a wealth of anecdotes and literary excerpts which is worth dipping into, such as PG Wodehouse's rules for novelists (1930): '(A) Spectacles: These may be worn by (1) good uncles, (2) clergymen, (3) good lawyers, (4) all elderly men who are kind to the heroine; by (5) bad uncles, (6) blackmailers, (7) money-lenders. (B) Pince-nez: these may be worn by good college professors, bank presidents, and musicians. No bad men may wear pince-nez. (C) Monocle: This may be worn by (1) good dukes, (2) all Englishmen. No bad man may wear a monocle. (D) These beastly, tortoise-shell-rimmed things: Never worn in fiction.'

Two minor criticisms. There is no discussion of NHS frames other than a mention of John Lennon wearing the 422CJ as an anti-fashion statement; they are surely an important British cultural phenomenon. Also, the lack of any colour illustrations, although there are copious line drawings, by the author, of 20th century frame designs. Overall, one could not better *Optician's* summary of the original edition: 'A delightful book to browse through or read as a serious summary of history.' ●

● David Baker is an independent optometrist

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1. Chamberlain P *et al.* Fluctuation In Visual Acuity During Soft Toric Contact Lens Wear. *Optom Vis Sci* 2011; 88: E534-538. 2. McIlraith R *et al.* Toric lens orientation and visual acuity in non-standard conditions. *Cont Lens Ant Eye* 2010; 33:23-26. 3. JJVC data on file June 2011; 1•DAY ACUVUE® MOIST® Brand Contact Lenses cover 94% and ACUVUE® OASYS® Brand Contact Lenses cover 97% of spherical and cylindrical prescriptions. ACUVUE®, 1•DAY ACUVUE® MOIST®, ACUVUE® OASYS®, HYDRACLEAR®, LACREON® and SEE WHAT COULD BE® are registered trademarks of Johnson & Johnson Medical Ltd. © Johnson & Johnson Medical Ltd 2012.