



**Chris Bennett** visits Devon to find out how Riviera Rimless caters for the most demanding jobs in the glazing business

**B**abbacombe conjures up visions of childhood holidays and the model village for many people, but the sleepy Devon town also houses another small but perfectly formed exhibit.

Riviera Rimless's reputation for quality glazing has stretched far enough for it to boast customers in New York and the Caribbean and *Optician* discovers a lab that applies craft skills to spectacle manufacturing.

The technical skill behind the business is brought by the managing director Rich Woolcott who began his working life as a 16-year-old recruit into the forces. He left at 23 and became a trainee with John H Chapman, at the time bringing optics into Woolworth stores around the country. A stint managing labs for Specsavers along with management roles for Boots Opticians' manufacturing division followed, but Woolcott wanted to take a different direction.

'Within me there was always an inkling that I wanted to work for myself,' he says. This began to be realised when an opportunity with a small local group arose, which coincided with the explosion of rimless frames. 'After five years the market became saturated with the need for rimless glazing,' says Woolcott. 'I found work coming in from all around the country. They were coming for these skills,' he says, holding up his hands. 'I set up Riviera Rimless Glazing in 2003 when rimless was really bubbling.'

### Steady growth

While rimless frames were developed and labs had mastered the art of talking up the technology, not all could deliver on their promises. From a one-man business in a garage in Torquay, Riviera has continued to grow. In the mid-2000s Woolcott took on Neil Jones as sales and marketing director to grow the business and allow him to concentrate on the technical side of the business.

Since then Riviera has gone on to employ 10 people housed in a smart unit in a business park in



Neil Jones (left) and Rich Woolcott: 'What we give is a level of consistency on rimless at its very best'

## Cream of the crop

Babbacombe. The scale of growth has been deliberately steady, says Woolcott. 'It's got to be done in a sensible way, sensible growth so you can look after your customers.'

Riviera is clear about what it does and how it does it, says Jones. 'It's not all about the very technical, complex jobs that no one else can achieve, we get those sort of orders. What we give is a level of consistency on rimless at its very best. It won't depend on who has done it.'

Woolcott says that Riviera aims to offer the very best technical glazing and access to world-leading lenses. That doesn't mean sky-high prices and weird and wonderful jobs all the time, but hand-made spectacles built by skilled craftsmen at a price and on a timescale that you would expect when

products of the very best quality are being manufactured.

'A big part of it is that we don't want to get involved in the surfacing side of it,' says Woolcott. 'We might design products here but we press a button and it goes down the line to the best lens manufacturer in the world.' And Woolcott is confident that he can produce a better complete job than anyone else by combining his technical skills with the knowledge of where to source lenses and tints other labs don't know about. 'We can surpass even what people think is the best lens and then apply the best glazing.'

Jones says that while most of Riviera's customers will specify Hoya or Essilor product, others might simply specify 'the best' MAR

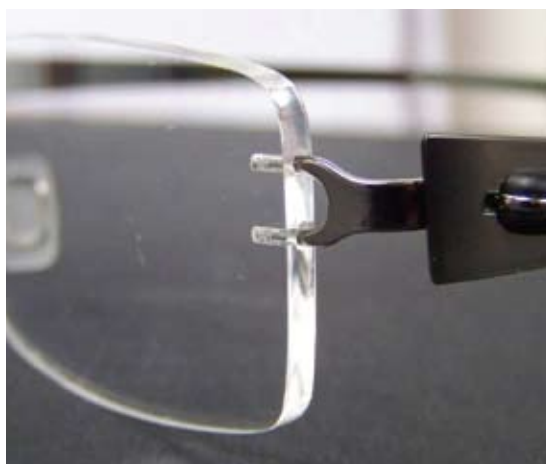


coating. Riviera also prides itself on being an innovator when it comes to materials. It was a pioneer of Trivex and prides itself on understanding its characteristics to get the best results when employing it.

## Curves and mirrors

Jones says the public has become more educated about what is available but getting those products glazed reliably is not always easy. This is where Riviera comes in, he says, dealing with products such as Oakley Jawbones glazed with a prescription, some Ray-Ban products and others such as Tag Heuer's Panorama. 'Any product really,' says Woolcott, 'that's a bit different, a bit special, those with curved lenses, special tints, mirrors. The spin-off is that being so skilled at the difficult work makes more everyday rimless such as Lindberg and Silhouette, or even classy full-rimmed glasses, relatively easy and faster for Riviera to turn around.' Aim for the stars and you can reach the moon, adds Jones.

Woolcott sees Riviera supporting the independent sector by offering consistency and reliability in the kinds of products opticians need to be able to offer customers to differentiate



Each job is always treated on an individual basis

themselves. 'What I am seeing is that good retail opticians are experiencing less footfall but, boy, is the quality up.'

Riviera is proud of the relationship it has with opticians around the country and around the world. Riviera has helped out people who have struggled with rimless or opticians who need to glaze a Cartier frame.

'There are trigger points for a good relationship.' Most of that is still spread by word of mouth. The efforts of frame manufacturers to up their

game have also put pressure on labs but, Woolcott cautions, opticians have to be realistic about timescales.

Jones says in many ways Riviera is like the opticians it supports. 'Practices are becoming more boutiquey, providing something that's really going to attract customers. That's where we see our future lying and we are doing that too but on the manufacturing side.'

'It doesn't matter how big Riviera becomes,' he adds, 'because each job will always be treated on an individual basis. That's the problem with large-scale lens manufacturing, you are trying to mass produce an individual product.'

Riviera feeds back the quality that opticians, and their customers, want, says Woolcott, but it takes time and skill. 'It's a two-way process. They know it isn't going to come out in a couple of days. They want us to sweat blood over it, it's a quality product. They send it to us knowing it's going to be right.' ●

● If you know of a lab that would like to be profiled in the Looking at Labs series please contact Mike Hale on 020 8652 8591 or [mike.hale@rbi.co.uk](mailto:mike.hale@rbi.co.uk)

# FREE NIDEK TECHNOLOGY

Agree to a monthly lens spend with HOYA and benefit from Nidek Technology at no charge



£2,000  
monthly lens spend

**Nidek RT-5100 Auto  
Phoropter Head**



£3,000  
monthly lens spend

**Nidek LE-1000  
Lens Edger**



£4,000  
monthly lens spend

**AFC-210 Fundus  
Camera**

Monthly spend is an example only and is subject to terms & conditions. Other Nidek equipment is also available for the same monthly spend.

**For More Information Contact:**

Email: [zoe@nidek.co.uk](mailto:zoe@nidek.co.uk) or Call: 0845 2303020  
Email: [c.pearson@hoya.co.uk](mailto:c.pearson@hoya.co.uk) or Call: 01978 663168

