

Putting fashion first

In their entry for the *Optician Awards*, the partners of Eyesite in Beverley, East Yorkshire stated that the practice was in the fashion business rather than optics. This attitude, applied across all facets of the practice, effectively sums up why the judges selected Eyesite from a competitive field of entries.

Carol Parkinson, partner and dispensing optician in charge of buying and marketing, explains that the practice has steadily increased its focus on fashion since its inception in 1985.

'In the beginning it was just me and some locums; we gradually grew and my partner Edward joined us in 1989. Right from the start, we stocked a small amount of Silhouette eyewear and it always tended to sell out very quickly. Towards the end of the 1980s Armani was one of the first designers to really embrace eyewear so we stocked that too and from there increasingly embraced a fashion-oriented ethos.'

Eyesite's current stock of frames and sunglasses is carefully selected by the team during annual visits to Silmo and Mido. Current favourites include Chanel, Dior, Jimmy Choo, Tiffany, Persol, Tag Heuer, Chrome Hearts and Oliver Peoples.

Asked about the practice's most popular brand of eyewear, Parkinson says that it varies season to season but at the moment a particular hit is the Persol Steve McQueen vintage collection.

According to Parkinson the key to selling fashionable frames like these is to provide a suitable shopping experience that matches the prestige of the brands. 'I feel that in our profession that we are so familiar with frames that we can easily forget that the products are actually high fashion items representing luxury brands,' says Parkinson. 'They are products that people aspire to own; you need to make buying a product of that nature an experience and a pleasure for the client.'

There are several components to achieving this, she says, one of which is encouraging staff to treat clients as well as possible.

'Our staff are trained to engage with people and give each customer individual attention. One of the ways they do this is by asking open questions in order to get the client talking and

Eyesite Opticians in Beverley, East Yorkshire, won the award for Fashion Frames Practice of the Year. **Mike Hale** finds out why



Vogue sponsored the Fashion Frames Practice of the Year Award which is collected by Eyesite of Beverley

so they can better assess what sort of frames they might like. We also concentrate very hard on buying and when we stock a brand, we stock it in depth so there is plenty of choice.'

Similar attention to detail is paid to the interior design and décor of the practice, while its online presence (www.eyesiteopticians.co.uk) is suitably stylish, with its own blog that features interviews and articles on eye health as well as celebrity sunglass spotting.

The practice has 15 members of staff, who include three full-time optometrists plus a locum, one dispensing optician and a contact lenses fitter, two trainee dispensing opticians, the optical assistant team and a lab manger.

'Having our own lab means we can offer great lenses to match the frames – the lab helps us target fashion clients and we particularly specialise in Nikon lenses.'

FASHION FRAMES PRACTICE OF THE YEAR

- **Winner** Eyesite Opticians, Beverley, Yorkshire
- **Shortlisted**
 - Chiswick Eyewear, London
 - Eyediology Opticians, Spitalfields, London
 - Specs Direct, High Barnet
 - The 20-20 Optical Store, London



As to the night of the awards itself, Parkinson expresses surprise that the practice triumphed.

'We weren't really expecting to win but we took a full set of staff along and everyone had a fantastic time, especially when the winner was announced. Since then the PR and marketing opportunities from it have been phenomenal.'

'We've had local press and been featured in national magazines, one of which is now interested in me doing a column on fashion eyewear. Most important, the win was great for the staff because it gave them a real sense of achievement. There is a real buzz about it even now.'

Future plans

Asked about her plans for the future, Parkinson indicated a desire to further develop the practice.

'Looking ahead, we are aiming to expand. We have shown growth throughout the recession so there is no reason not to take it forward. I think we have been successful because of our focus on fashion and we've altered our buying during the recession to be a bit more directional. Perhaps people need to be tempted to spend money at this time and you can do that by offering them something special and different,' explains Parkinson. ●