



Through the keyhole

Once you've made it along the endless Mido travelators, you're greeted with colour and reworked classics. **Rory Brogan** reports from Milan

While the Mido exhibition seems to have travelled further and further from the centre of Milan, manufacturers also appear to have journeyed deeper and deeper into the past for inspiration.

There were cat's eyes styled on the 1950s and many references to 1960s' designs, but there were also a smattering of looks that owe more to the 70s and 80s. One of the more obvious trends was the increased use of keyhole bridges, both subtle and fully formed, along with more adventurous acetate colours including purples and violets, as well as multiple hues of blues and greens.

A case in point was Original and Genuine Oliver Goldsmith which launched seven new styles from the archives, but using colours outside its normal tortoiseshell, black and crystal offerings, for example vibrant reds and blues. 'It is now time for us to have colour in the collection and now we have blues and greys for men. Women also get some colour, otherwise it gets boring,' explains Oliver Goldsmith.

Reissued models include his father's 1950s Chorus cat's eye design, now in bright red, green and blue, Elstree from the 1960s that was modernised for a retro revival of the 80s and Cat, a rounded 80s style. Cat featured the OG logo on the sides for the first time and does so again, in black frames with red and blue hints from behind. Shepperton is a quirky acetate round eye with keyhole bridge, that is designed so that the lenses don't move out of position on cleaning, while the squarish Commander model comes in an option with a crystal front in a yellowish 'desert' shade and camouflage bottle green sides. Haymarket is a larger shape from the mid-70s and Jan is a large women's design from the 70s in a green and crystal option.

'The 60s was all very heavy acetate, the 70s were lighter in weight and the



- 1 Activist Shackleton
- 2 The Edmund sunglass by Activist
- 3 Activist's Livingstone in matt azure



80s were even lighter,' says Goldsmith, who has kept all of the company's 600 original frames in an archive room at home. 'This is history – we're selling heritage, history and a story,' he says.

Ode to colour

Embracing new colours was also a feature at la Eyeworks, with a new array of options including Lusty Red, Chlorine Blue Matt, Rose Milk and Egg Whites. In terms of the frames they go with, there was a particularly retro looking acetate style with a keyhole bridge in Ode, part of the Fiction by la Eyeworks line. Ode comes with a dark browbar and tan or blue undersides and is described by communications director Brent Zerger as blown up in proportion, with a set of modern colours. 'It's a heavy keyhole with a raised browbar and laminated acetate that is cut away.'

This compares with Redcat, a modified keyhole with a straighter bridge, with the Gatz frame, a similar shape in metal.

The la Eyeworks line also introduces the 10-sided polygon or decagon in a number of models. Picnic is an acetate version in Mint Jelly and Blood Orange Pop colours, while the sharper, more precise Jumbo Shrimp is a metal design in BIC blue and patterned gold. Lastly

XO Goodbye, is a finer stainless steel option in more muted colours.

Lovers of round-eye shapes are also catered for with the acetate Sousa. 'We've been talking round for a long time and now it's out there. We're exploring different ideas with it,' adds Zerger.

Taking its name from a British motorbike of the past is BSA, a metal aviator frame in a Liquid Green option.

The company also places considerable effort in the design of its cleaning cloth collection, collaborating with LA-based artists, illustrators and graphic designers. Zerger says they make the cleaning cloth a great experience, which is important, as the frame wearer spends more time looking at the cleaning cloth than the logo of the frames.

Staying with the US and combining the new with the old, as well as working in several keyhole bridges, was Activist Eyewear. It was presenting the new 2.0 version of its Split-Fit temple, described by business director and co-founder Anthony Codispoti as covering an increased surface area thereby providing better grip and comfort – both the temple strips can be adjusted.

On being asked if they would consider using a standard temple design, Codispoti says: 'We have a mix of classic



style and high-tech performance. The Split-Fit temple is part of who we are. There's a ton of great eyewear on the marketplace and it would be crowded unless you're different and take some risks. We love to borrow inspiration from classic eyewear so you'll see a lot of timeless shapes in our collection. But we always look for a way to make it our own – to make it representative of the Activist brand.'

The latest designs are themed around explorers with the chunky acetate Shackleton, Livingstone and Edmund shapes launched at Mido, along with the slightly cat's eye women's model Freya that comes in striking yellow and blue options. 'Edmund is named after Sir Edmund Hillary and is a heavy-browed acetate. Most of the designs before were lighter but the new temple design allows us to make the proportion of the whole frame thicker and show off the acetate more,' says Codispoti.

There is also more of a play with bright colours, with poppy in Edmund, pale olive in Shackleton and matt azure in Livingstone. The collections are in numbered collections of either 347 or 718 (for the hometown Brooklyn area codes), with a much more exclusive offering of special sunglass lenses, limited to 10 pieces worldwide, planned for the summer.

'Another part of the story is the great high quality polarised lenses that come in an array of colours. We're not limited to browns, greens and greys and the super-limited editions come in a lot of really cool colours,' he says.

The total package, from the solid Japanese-made, Brooklyn-designed acetate shapes and polarised lenses to the waxed cotton carrying case, luxury patterned microfibre cloths (which can now be sold as stand-alone boxed product) and recycled outer box, is impressive, if you're willing to give the Split-Fit temples a try.

To date, Codispoti describes the UK as 'the biggest gap in Europe'. 'We're in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France and Italy already and the UK could be a solid market for us.'

One company that is presently increasing its efforts in the UK market is Mido, as managing director Giovanni Lo Faro explains three new sales people have been introduced in a bid to repeat the success of the rest of Europe, where sales were up 60 per cent in 2012.

The company, which is known for being environmentally friendly, now has a One for One programme, where it donates a frame to charity for each frame sold. 'The One for One is a continuation of our environment and



- 4 Keyhole model from Mido**
- 5 Lafont's Madame 610**
- 6 The Shepperton design from Oliver Goldsmith**
- 7 Oliver Goldsmith's Chorus from the 50s in new colourations**

social responsibility effort into our Mido brand, by donating for each frame sold one to people in need, partnering with charity organisations. It means the consumer is involved very directly and that is empowering for them.'

He describes Mido as bringing value to a practice. 'It's a high end Japanese-made product at the price of a mid-level brand, so we compete in the top stores as a more affordable option to the widely known brands.'

There was a continuation of retro-inspired product that had evolved, with thinner rims and larger eye shapes. As well as conservative colours there were layers of colour for added zest, and stronger colours, which he describes as working well, even in the UK market.

Lo Faro explains that almost half of the collection features keyhole bridges

that can be found across its acetate and titanium designs. The acetates feature Italian and Japanese handmade material and he points to more blues and greens. There are four new models in the 500 series, described as Shaved Acetate, with contrasting coloured brows, or alternatives with shaved bridges and temples, for example a reinterpretation of the classic panto. Mido Signature Acetates use textured Italian acetate in five new styles, with the New Black, for example, a tortoise and black gradient.

Finer detailing

Colourful and heavy acetates were also a focus of the Alyson Magee collection, available through Jacques Durand. 'I still work around the side meeting the front with material bursting out of the curl at the hinge and sculptured end tips that have been likened to the fin of a car or a fish,' explains Alyson Magee. 'There are lots of new and exclusive materials. It's quite a feminine collection but I do have unisex models in blacks and more interesting colours of reds, blues and sandwich blocks.'

She adds that the many different shapes include aviators in crystal acetate and models with humour, for example a small round acetate design.

'The sunglasses have the same detailing but with more exaggerated end tips. All frames have small metal plates on the fronts that look like a hinge going through the frame. The new collection is younger and more bold and instead of the metal plate there will be coloured resin in the same hue as the temple tips.'

Colours are bolder and less refined, with more clashing tones, says Magee. 'We have matt black with transparent blue, which is one of the colours that keeps popping up.'

The clever padded cloth case, with no logo on the outside, has a lens cleaner that pulls out. 'It's all about details, with subtle naming on the inside,' she says.

Chunky acetate was very much to the fore with relative newcomer, the Italian firm Res Rei Eyewear. Res Rei meaning 'the thing' in Latin, is a collection with the strapline 'Handmade in Italy with





- 8 Res Rei model Cecilia
- 9 Res Rei model Ottone
- 10 Picnic from la Eyeworks in Mint Jelly
- 11 The keyhole Ode design, Fiction by la Eyeworks



love'. Set up in Treviso in the east of Italy one and a half years ago, this was its second Mido and the company places an emphasis on local production and eco credentials.

Oliviero Zanon, co-founder, and with a background in industrial design, explains that on searching for a name they wanted to use something Italian that wasn't cheesy, that had a nice rhythm and Res Rei placed the focus on making an object.

He describes the frames as strong and iconic designs, some of them featuring floating lenses at the bridge. They stand out through their use of 8mm thick one-piece acetate fronts and 6mm acetate for the sides. 'Frames are conceived to shift the centre of gravity towards the back. It's a matter of balance so that it's more even around your face,' he says.

He describes the design policy as keeping the styles simple and original without too many details. 'Every collection is better than before as we're improving the product and the communication. We're very high end and if you focus on the quality and collection the business will follow.'

The frames, with a collection named after Roman emperors, are hand polished by artisans following tumbling, with the matt finishing requiring an extra sandblasting step.

'The acetate is Mazzucchelli from Italy that is rested for three months so that the chemicals evaporate and it's stiffer. The Ideal spring hinges are tested on a 10,000 cycle for a 10-year life and the sunglass lenses are Divel,' he explains.

New styles at Mido were Ottone in brushed and marbled looking acetate, a women's sunglass with a cut-out bridge in Agrippina and the panto design Romolo. 'It was the first shape of frame invented, the first eyewear and the founder of Rome.'

'We don't really follow the rules – we define our designs by our own point of view, not by looking at what everyone is doing,' says Zanon.

There was certainly no shortage of colour and lively combinations on the Booth and Bruce stand, where the

options on offer were described as a dolly-mixture effect in lots of unisex designs. The collection remains retro influenced and priced so as not to put its core market of students off, with a recommended retail range of £120-150, in spite of its Japanese manufacturing.

'Brighter colours are always one of our things and to experiment,' explains Peter Booth. 'We launched 11 new spring collection designs for Mido and the sizes are coming down and they're much chunkier. We're still quite retro but we've moved away to softer shapes,' he explains, pointing out the continued use of pin detailing.

There are 70s retro square shapes, large 70s-style acetate aviators, including one with a cut out bridge, slightly upswept 50s women's models, a toned down cat's eye and a unisex panto with a keyhole bridge.

'We've used lots of greens. I used to think it was a cold colour but we have lots of options as well as olive. There's even one that's the shade of a first-pressed olive oil,' he adds.

Exclusive acetates were a feature of Lafont, with 85 per cent of those used exclusive and created in its Paris studio. The retro trend continued with keyhole bridges, such as the Melchior design in Lafont Reedition.

Fabrice Aubinais, market manager France, Spain and the UK, highlights the use of new colours of dark red, green and blue, describing

them as colours to help take people out of the financial crisis. 'Vintage is very mature now so we have used new ideas to make new trends and continue with the keyhole bridge.' The Monsieur model fits that bill, with a flatter brow bar, while Merci comes in dark blue and red with a similar bridge.

The acetate used in Maestro looks dark blue, but on closer inspection there are shards of brown and orange inside, while Madame mixes blue and tortoiseshell. Other feminine designs were Melisse, Marion and Magnolia, the latter used on advertising and featuring a cut-away brow with contrast colour.

It wasn't all acetate as acid and laser cut lightweight stainless steel designs were introduced for women in Malice, Mayfair and Madeleine. Aubinais adds that while Lafont mostly sells women's frames worldwide, men's sales are increasing.

With a nod to comfortable eyewear, the company is also using carbon fibre temples with stainless steel fronts, in model Manitoba. 'To my mind, it's the end of very big frames. People are looking for comfortable frames – it's very important, the same as with shoes,' he says. ●

● In the April 19 Mido report, *Optician* will cover more keyholes, some sunglasses, metal offerings and high-tech launches.

