



Natural sense

Optician's Frame of the Year Award went to an eco-friendly horn eyewear range that is custom made for the end user

The winner of the *Optician* Frame of the Year Award is no stranger to recognition for his designs, but it was an extra step in the provision of luxury eyewear that led to the judges opting for TD Tom Davies Natural Horn.

There's nothing new about making frames in horn – there are a number of manufacturers that have been doing that for some considerable time, but the idea of selling horn plates to opticians, from which the eyewear is then manufactured is a simple, yet effective concept. It means the end user gets to choose the very material their frame is manufactured from and, as an additional attraction, matching cufflinks are made out of the left-overs.

Tom Davies explains that the collection came out of a request from one of his personal Couture customers. It took him two years to learn how to make a horn frame, longer than it took to build and launch his Bespoke collection but he says the results are worth it. His very first horn frame took six attempts to perfect but he describes it as 'looking amazing' and 'one of the best "product" moments in his life'.

Buffalo is best

Davies adds that the raw material is particularly important and that he settled on Indian horn because it is the best material. 'In India cows are a religious animal and are treated very well. In addition, good horn needs to come from a mature animal, which has had a good life, with a good diet. It is a farmed product and quite eco-friendly from that point of view, and we found that the Indian water buffalo was far better – and more expensive – than the rest of the world.'

Among the many challenges in making a frame from horn are in the lamination and frame setting. 'I had to invent machines to grind the horn plates and I had to go through a dozen glues.' The glue used is made from buffalo hooves and is the same



Tom Davies takes home the Frame of the Year Award for his buffalo horn frames

as that used in A&E to mend wounds instead of stitches. 'It's very strong, and handling this is in itself a major challenge,' he says.

The company cuts the horns in half, soaks them for two months in water and then presses them for one month. As horn wants to curl back to its previous shape, after much trial and error the company also invented a technique to set the frames.

Speaking about one of the difficulties of working with horn, he explains: 'One of the biggest problems with making made to measure frames in horn is that each piece of horn is different. So, you might buy a frame for a customer which they love, change the size and modify the shape, and it comes back, fits well, but the colour and material are completely different.

We get round this by giving the optician the horn material to select from.'

Combination plates

The stockist can draw on the pre-sold horn plate from supplied stencils, or by eye, and the front is then milled from the plate. Davies recommends a set of 12 sheets, with most of the accounts stocking 20-30 over time. Equally, they can start small and work their way up. There are 16 colours, many of which are the result of laminating a combination of different coloured plates, in natural shades of browns, creams and black.

There is training for stockists on handling the material and fitting the frames, which are made to the same standards as his Bespoke and Couture frames. The base curve, pantoscopic angles, nose fitting templates and detailed customer measurements are also applied to the horn frames.

Davies admits to being surprised by the reaction in the UK, where he has four accounts and more waiting in the wings. 'I haven't even given a sales kit to my UK reps yet.'

As Felix-Andre Gonnier of Gregory & Seeley [Opticians] Group explains in the Awards entry: 'I was lucky enough to go to Tom's workshop and design our own collection. This is something completely new for me and was a fascinating experience. To create your own collection using Tom's Designer Service and actually select the raw materials is enthralling for an optician. Then to be able to have this control on such a premium product really helps me justify my price point. The ability to show my customer the horn plates and then use the Bespoke design tools of Tom Davies means we can offer beautiful hand-made horn frames uniquely tailored for that person. It's fantastic!'

The second collection of TD Tom Davies Natural Horn will be launched later this month at the Silmo show in Paris and Davies expects his worldwide distribution to increase from the current 54. ●