



- 1 Visitors prepare to enter Hall 6
- 2 MA Wood 204

Delegates from around the world descended on a baking hot Paris for the 2011 Silmo exhibition to see what eyewear designers and manufacturers have in store for new spring and summer collections. The British contingent did a fantastic job of making sure the country is still viewed as a major player in the worldwide optical industry, but how would the rest of the world respond?

Optics is still reeling from the effects of the financial crisis of recent years



Paris feels the heat

It was more than just the weather in Paris that was hot for the Silmo World Optical Fair. **Simon Jones** looks at some vibrant styles from the worldwide manufacturers

and it has been something of a hot topic at recent Silmo events. One area that has taken something of a hit when cost cutting is in effect is innovation and there was an undercurrent of dissatisfaction with the new styles on offer – especially given the high levels of expectation prior to the show. Although the worldwide economy has shown signs of improvement over the past year, uncertainty has once again come to the fore, and purse strings for R&D budgets remain tight.

Scottish frame designer Andy Sweet believes that at this year's show boundary pushing has been put to one side while safe retro trends continue to

dominate. 'This may be symptomatic of the times we're living in, with companies investing in tried and tested shapes rather than taking the riskier option of new shapes and directions,' says Sweet.

While it's hard to single out anything truly groundbreaking, it's not all doom and gloom. Innovation is out there, it's just taking a more subtle form. Colour schemes are starting to become more vibrant on the popular retro styles, which is potentially a good way of getting wearers into something new, but in a shape they can trust. Finishes are becoming more daring, with the aforementioned colours getting frosted



and matt finishes.

One manufacturer offering such matt and frost finishes is Germany-based Whiteout and Glare. The company shares OEM production facilities with Tom Davies in China, and the frames have an immediate feel of quality to them, with beefy hinges and heavy-duty acetate. Frame collections are named after American places and the new Hamptons



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3 Feb 31st Ara sunglass
4 Ørgreen Vincent 167
5 Mykita Mylon Nova
6 Mykita Phoebe and Devandra frames

collection is the company's latest frame offering. Hamptons is a collection of 12 frames inspired by looks of 1950s America, with up-to-date colours such as vanilla. Rudi Studiger, executive director, was using the show to trial new colours such as carrot with a matt finish – but has received mixed reactions. However, other matt colours, such as the tortoiseshell, have been very well received, says Studiger

Innovation

There is always an exception to a rule, and bucking nearly every trend were the designs from architect and designer Ron Arad. *Optician* carried the pre-Silmo story on the exciting collection last month, which will be produced in association with PQ Eyewear, so we were looking forward to seeing the designs in the flesh and trying some on for size.

Sadly, there were no Arad frames on display – just a beautifully finished stand. PQ Eyewear says it was using the event to assess the suitability of the potential retailers and to discuss the intricate production process that would come with frames this left field. Although Arad is new to the world of optics, he's acutely aware of the nuances of the industry. 'Opticians are the gatekeepers and there is a certain order we have to do things,' he says on his and PQ Eyewear's objectives for the show.

Arad was also on hand to answer questions on his new collection and

where the inspiration came from. 'You see glasses all your life and they all look the same,' says the designer somewhat disparagingly. 'People like glasses to say something about them', he says on a more upbeat note. So what does Arad think a pair of his own glasses would say about the wearer? 'I think it would say they are a person of exquisite taste, with great personalities and displaying great generosity. They would be good in bed, very brave, knowledgeable and exceptionally cultured,' says Arad modestly. Expect to see patients queuing up for these when they are launched in spring 2012.

Standing out

While financial uncertainty may have curtailed creativity and design, there are other ways that practice owners can allow themselves to stand out. Creating an identity for a practice may seem like a difficult thing to do, but Frischkorn Mittelman is aiming to make things a little easier with its custom collections.

The company, co-founded by ex-Mikli designer Marian Mittelman produces a range of frames and sunglasses that can be customised according to the practice's needs and wants. Mittelman believes 'the optician's strongest brand is their own', and by developing an in-house brand, practices can appeal to patients in an entirely new way. The range comprises 40 styles, which were launched into the UK market in early 2011. Heavy retro acetates make up the majority of the range, but new for Silmo were six titanium frames – the first time it had worked with the metal. The company is switched on to the fact that brands need to be strong, so practices are limited by area to avoid a slew of local brands popping up. The designer

also applies the personalisation to marketing materials. Posters and POS material is tailored according to the chosen brand name.

Green issues are becoming more important to people and as a company, being able to display green credentials is becoming a major selling point. Opticians wanting to pass on green messages will undoubtedly be interested in the ECO range from Modo. The collection is made from 95 per cent recycled materials – a figure which has been certified by UL Environment. Launched three years ago in the US, the collections are still very new to the UK. Modo UK sales manager, Sean Collins, says the styles are perfect for current retro trends for shapes and encompass the new trends for frosted and translucent colours.

Modo also announced it is launching 7 for All Mankind's eyewear collections into the UK market. The upmarket denim brand is synonymous with quality in its denim and the new optical frames are right on trend. Those familiar with the designer's jeans will know that they command a high retail price. Thankfully for opticians, the frames don't have the same retail price; in fact, Collins says the price point is going to be attractive to practices. Colours and shapes are in keeping with current trends; the shapes range from men's retro styles to feminine pantos and standout colours are matt Havanas and frosted whites.

Superdry has also made the transition from clothing to eyewear, and the new collection is being launched in the UK by Inspec. Sam Craig, head of product at Inspec, says the collection 'has a 1950s Americano feel', which should sit perfectly with



Silmo round-up

current trends in optics. The collection is primarily made of up acetate frames, but frames such as the unisex Depp collection feature hand finished bamboo temples. The women's Daisy frame mixes a strong black front with textured ivory temples.

Materialistic in nature

Despite the strong trend for heavy looking acetate frames, designer Andy Sweet says opticians he talked to were seeking out metal frames. Sweet says this is probably a response to the slew of retro acetate frames and opticians have reacted accordingly based on the need to stand out from the crowd.

If the trend for ultra-cool metal frames gains more momentum, then ic! Berlin will be in a perfect position to capitalise on it. The Berlin-based manufacturer has forged itself a reputation for minimal looking frames, and the designs have found favour with men across the globe. Well aware of this, the company has set about designing a frame collection that is aimed solely at women, but that still has the clinical ic! Berlin look and feel. The new Tres Chic range features more feminine shapes but with a distinctly ic! Berlin feel – which means screw-less hinges, light weight, and a minimal feel.

The collection is made up of 10 styles and each frame comes with a miniature version of the frame on a chain – something that should appeal to women who like to accessorise down to the very last detail.

The company also debuted the Metallic Prescription collection. More in keeping with traditional ic! Berlin styles, the new collection is, in the main, for women, but there are men's frames available too. At first glance, Metallic Prescription looks similar to other collections, but look closer and you will start to notice subtle details on temples such as floral engravings and flashes of bright colours on the signature hinges.

Another way to stand out from the acetate crowd is to develop your own material – like Mykita has done with its recent creation, Mylon. The German manufacturer says the material 'offers unlimited design options, light weight and individual adaptability'. The polyamide based material has been given a patented 3D surface finish by Mykita and the manufacturer claims it is the first time it has been used for the production of eyewear. The finish has a porous feel and look, but not to the point where the wearer would feel the textures or any discomfort.



7 Frischkorn Mittleman Titanium Collection

8 Ron Arad 9 Red Bull RBR 131

**10 Factory 900 Stained Glass sunglasses
11 Lindberg Precious Horn**

inspiration from oversized trends.

As well as developing in-house materials, Mykita is also releasing a number of optical collections, with new shapes and colours. Designed around the current trend for oversized eyewear, the stainless steel Devandra and Phoebe frames are remarkably restrained when compared to the Mylon efforts. Mykita says the colour schemes have been kept simple so the oversized shapes can speak for themselves.

Carbon fibre formula

Although Red Bull Eyewear cannot lay claim to developing carbon fibre, it can call upon the youngest ever two-time Formula 1 World Champion, Sebastian Vettel, to endorse its brand new range of high-end carbon fibre sunglasses. The new range, launched at the exhibition, has been developed in association with the Michael Pachleitner Group and is made up of three collections: High End, NXT Sport and Merchandise, with three distinct price points.

The carbon fibre frames tip the scales at just 14 grams, and come in recognisable aviator shapes that should entice buyers. The designs had a sporty feel, with lots of straight lines and subtle curvature. At present, Red Bull Eyewear doesn't have a UK distributor,

German frame designer, Kathrin Schuster, who creates frames for the likes of ic! Berlin, sings the praises of the new material. 'The 3D printed plastic brings a new perspective to eyewear in terms of the design possibilities and scope for customisation,' she says.

'Mykita is not just an eyewear company, it is much more a creative space for new ideas, constant experimentations and great visions – they really think outside of the box.'

The frames getting the Mylon treatment at the Silmo show were the Nova, Icco and Crison models. The yellow Nova sunglass is the most striking of the three, and is a massive nod to the late 1980s and early 1990s – which according to many, is the next period of time set for revival in fashion and music. The Icco and Crison Mylon frames are more subtle, taking



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Great Danes

The reputation of Danish eyewear brands was done no harm at the exhibition. The country continues to produce high quality eyewear with clean, innovative designs and high specification materials.

Possibly the most familiar name to come out of the country is Lindberg, which welcomed optical professionals to its sizeable stand to view new collections. There was something of a buzz around the stand following the company's Silmo d'Or win, especially as it was the only Scandinavian company to be nominated. The award for Innovation was given for its Precious Horn frames, which blend natural horn and titanium temples.

The manufacturer also released a number of new optical and sun collections. The rimless Spirit collection has a strong following in the UK, according to the company, and the range has been updated with new temple designs and lens shapes. The strength of the line has always been about the customisability of the frames and the new additions will see that grow even further.

Never one to ignore trends, Lindberg has updated its Acetanium fashion

frames to include frames with a 1950s feel.

In 2010, Monoqool gave the Danish eyewear industry something of a shake up. Instead of employing designers from the optical industry, it commissioned designers with no optical industry experience to design glasses from the ground up. The resulting frames won design awards around the world, but for the new collections released at Silmo, the company wanted some more traditional shapes. It enlisted the help of Andy Sweet to design four new optical shapes and at the same released a new sunglass style.

Monoqool's photochromic NXT frames caused something of a stir thanks to the Helix corkscrew style screw-less hinge and svelte weight of just 10 grams. The new Jupiter sunglass takes the minimalist theme even further, with a weight of only 5 grams. The one-piece sunglass is available in blue and grey tints and turns clear when not exposed to UV rays.

Ørgreen continues to produce classic designs in both metal and acetate, with a look it describes as 'retro futuristic'. The Titanium collection features frames with a look which has



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but is expecting this to change soon. *Optician* will carry the news just soon as it is announced.

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References: 1. Korb D, Blackie C, Meadows D, Christensen M, Tudor M. Evaluation of extended tear stability by two emulsion based artificial tears. Presented at the Tear Film and Ocular Surface Society meeting; September 2010; Florence, Italy. 2. Data on file. Alcon Research Ltd.



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Date of preparation: April 2011



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been inspired by 1950s America. The half-rimless Beatrix women's model has a vintage shape which has been brought up-to-date with the use of a clean looking titanium frame. It's a similar theme with the Mr White men's frame – which sports a full frame design with heavy temples.

The company's Acetate collection also pays homage to 1950s America. The line plays with contrast in colours and thickness to give what the company claims is a new spin on retro styling. The Twister frame is listed as a unisex frame, but Ørgreen says it has a feminine feel in certain colour schemes. The Vincent frame has an edgier feel, with graduated colours and translucent flecks.

Can't see the wood for the trees

Wooden frames are nothing new, but the number of manufacturers offering the material, either in complete frames or with wooden detailing, is growing significantly. Testament to its current popularity, wood featured twice in the Silmo d'Or awards nominees. Gold and Wood scooped the award for optical frame for subtle B23.2 frame, while MA just missed out on an award for its one-piece Wood 204 frame.

Cult star in this sector is Rolf Spectacles. The Austrian company



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won a Silmo d'Or award for its organic efforts in 2010 and hasn't rested on its laurels over the course of the past year. One of the most talked about frames at the show was the Dino 41, a wooden frame finished in stone. Pictures were released prior to the exhibition and the *Optician* team were keen to have a closer look. We weren't disappointed with the results and were especially impressed with the darker stone finish. The Dino 40 is a work of art, and the stone finish gives a cooling sensation when wearing them. The darker colour means you have to look hard for the tone textures, but the effort is well worth it. Like fine art, however, the frames come with a substantial price tag.

Italian company, Feb 31st, will be hoping that the trend for wooden frames grows faster than the trees it uses. Silmo was the debut show for the Italian start-up company, which displayed a range of designs in wood – the only material it offers. It may seem brave to set up a company with

no optical background and specialise in wood, but Feb 31st has a strong background in timber, which it believes will stand it in good stead. The frames look well produced and the styles are on trend, with oversized round shapes and bold colours.

The future

It would be foolhardy to ring the death knell on the retro trend just yet, but you get the feeling from some of the exhibitors at the show that there are a growing number of opticians and patients who are looking for something different.

There are also a number of manufacturers out there who are willing to offer something new, but retro hasn't run its course just yet. Art Deco is beginning to come to the fore, and the look will give wearers the chance to enjoy a little bit of opulence in difficult financial times.

Manufacturers are doing more with less, and customers are seeing the results in brighter colours and finishes, so patients shouldn't have to settle for blacks and tortoiseshells any more.

Forward-thinking trend seekers can look to Mykita, PQ Eyewear and Kirk Originals for futurism and left-field frames. In the meantime, the new wave of retro styles should be hitting optical practices in the very near future. ●