

Optical Prism

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One family, three O's
Could eyecare be genetic?

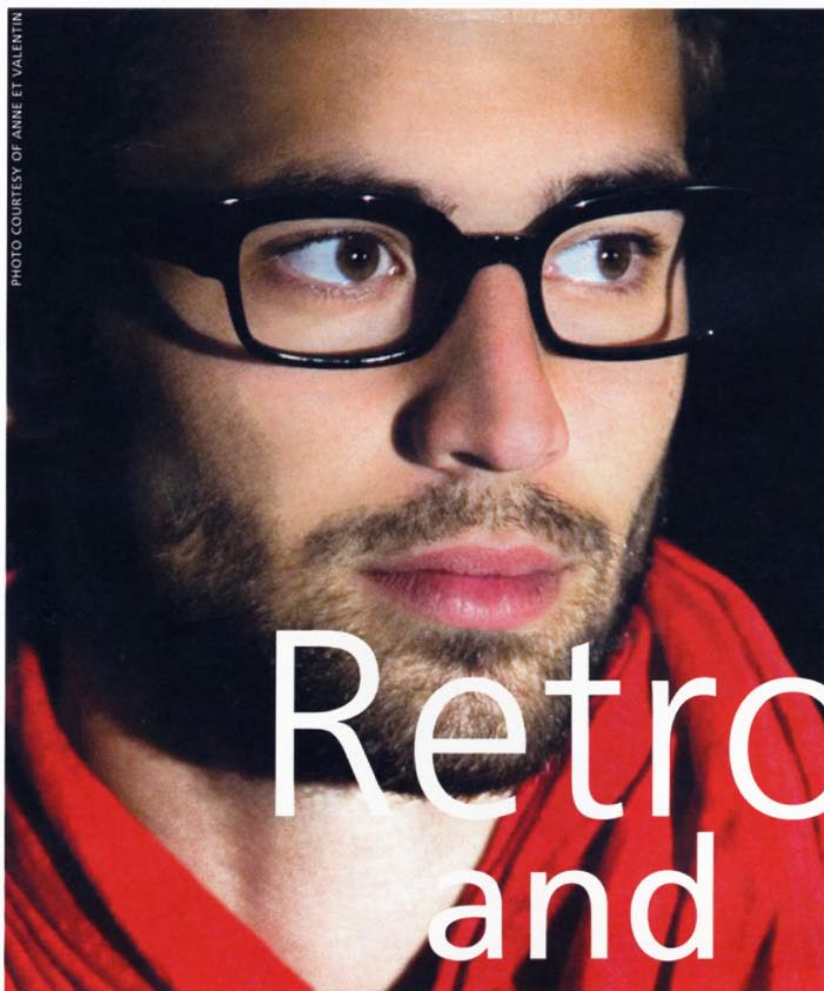
Hot accessories for the new year

Retro and beyond

Yesterday's big thing is back,
what next?

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Retro
and
beyond

by Craig Saunders

The retro trend continues, with some superb

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Evatik 9010 and 9004.
At left: Anne et Valentin
Reaction.

Honestly, this whole retro thing is starting to get a bit old. Big aviators, P3s and Oxfords had a cool factor back when it was just Corey Doctorow, Brad Pitt or Harry Potter wearing them. But today they're everywhere, making up the bulk of most eyewear collections.

That's not to say they're not good frames. They generally are. Lots of designers are making well-crafted retro frames, each a unique iteration on the trend. The frames have hardware, textured zyls and colours that Buddy Holly would never have expected. But isn't there something more in eyewear?

Thankfully, yes, there is. Particularly in metals, there are contemporary frames that use classic eye shapes with wildly bent and folded metal, unusual temple patterns, laser transfers and all sorts of fun stuff. Most aren't outrageous, but

neither are they stock retro. There's also rimless, which seems to have finally begun to find its own fashion voice and is poised for a comeback.

But first, since it's so wildly popular right now, let's check out the world of modern retro frames.

The new retro

It's no surprise that retro frames are a big deal this season. They've been growing in prominence for years. At first, fashion-forward designers were sneaking in an Oxford here, a Wayfarer shape there. Now the trend has gone fully mainstream and dominates many, if not most, collections.

The surprise, however, is where the retro frames are coming from. There are some fairly mainstream companies, obviously including Luxottica, making them, but most are from the designers who normally deliver something new, exciting and trendsetting. This year, however, the retro trend is dominating collections

from L.A. Eyeworks, Face à Face, Anne et Valentin and many others.

The influence clearly exists in more mainstream collections, too. It's evident in the Gant Stephano frame from Viva, for instance. Or check out the Marchon's new Ck frame with a USB key in the temple.

Evatik, a new collection from Wescan Optical in Montreal, is an excellent example of a mainstream retro collection. Model 9010 is an updated classic. In dark green, the textured acetate is just visible, and a simple pair of horizontal metal bars on each temple give it a touch of class. Evatik is a bit of an urban, technology-oriented brand, says Beverly Suliteanu, who is in charge of putting together Wescan's frame collections. These are often retro-inspired frames, but they're updated with adornments or interesting textures. For example, model 9004 has a subtle, sparkly tweed finish with a metal 'T' logo.

interpretations, but what does the future hold?

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Variations on retro. From left: Classic round Ringo from Anne et Valentin; big, rounded suns from Face à Face; the Warhol-inspired Factory Seven from Anne et Valentin; RM240, Robert Marc's take on the trend.

Robert Marc, the New York designer known for classically stylish frames, makes no bones about being part of the retro chic trend. His new men's frames channel Don Draper, the cunningly debonaire lead character on *Mad Men*. While the shapes harken back to the curious 1960s, the frames aren't old fashioned. First, there's Marc's flair for colour. The outer layers of zyl tend to be dark for men—black, tortoise, deep olive or “mud” (oddly, at least three collections this season are using a colour they call “mud”)—but the insides have a nifty houndstooth pattern. Women's frames likewise tend to be dark on the outside, but adding Bordeaux and this year's hottest colour, plum, to the mix, with brighter insides of cobalt, lime, orchid.

The French are taking a bit of a playful approach to the retro theme. Face à Face, for instance, has brought vibrant colour to the table, creating frames in bright reds and blues. The economy may have most designers sticking to neutrals—at least on the more visible parts of the frames—but not Face à Face. Lafont is likewise picking up on retro. They still have lacey cat-eyes and fun frames, but classical shapes like the P3 are definitely there, noticeably in the Lafont Reedition collection. Interestingly, designer Thomas Lafont attributes the trend largely to the Americans.

“Classical frames are a bigger part of American culture,” he says. “It's the New York man.” He adds that tastes in Europe are a bit more

trendy now. Maybe the retro thing is getting ready to pass?

Another French company, Anne et Valentin, has decidedly retro frames, such as Reaction for men or the round Ringo for women. But the collection also includes a modern cat-eye and an eye-catching square plastic frame. Their newest frames, the Factory series, were loosely inspired by Andy Warhol. These frames have a rough-cut top to the eyewire to give a feel that reflects Warhol's industrial approach to creating their art.

Trends in art often reflect trends in society. As we move from one generation to the next, our concepts in art and design tend to change as well. But if that's the case, then why are all our frames based on stuff from 40 years ago?

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Conservative fronts with crazy temples. From left: nature patterns on Guess 1584ST and 1585ST; bent metal on Kliik 405 in red and 404 in black and gold; Mykita frame Dries in topaz; intricate eagle pattern on Ashley from Claudia Alan.

It's partly just where fashion is right now. But retro chic and hipster garb aren't new anymore. Another part of the explanation is the economy. Retro frames are based on popular, classic shapes. In dark colours, they're a safe bet, at least until the public starts clamouring for small metal frames again. Many designers admit that they are, to some extent, in a bit of a holding pattern until the world economy perks up and tastes in eyewear become playful again. Nothing kills whimsy like an empty wallet.

We also have a large market of Baby Boomers and their kids who have varying degrees of nostalgia for their bygone era. Jackie Onassis and Andy Warhol are great symbols of that era, and ones that have become timelessly fashionable. In Canada, the 1960s and 70s saw a new generation of artists redefine what art means here. Joyce Wieland created her playfully patriotic masterpieces while Michael Snow experimented with shape and form.

South of the border, new ideas in abstraction challenged the art world.

And a new generation of eyewear designers was emerging. It's a generation that gave us Gai Gherardi and Barbara McReynolds, whose creations at L.A. Eyeworks, sometimes with eyelash-like attachments to the eyewire, have kept mainstream designers on their toes for the last couple decades.

Sadly, this is not the season of playful eyewear. But maybe, as our world is changing around us, eyewear, like art, is on the verge of discovering new concepts in shape, colour and pattern to challenge us once again.

The new contemporary

While retro still dominates the scene, there are some breaths of fresh air. The most noticeable difference this year is the amount of bending and laser cutting in metal frames. Surprisingly, this trend seems to be coming through most loudly in Canadian collections.

Toronto designer Stephen Kapoor went wild with bending and cutting in his new Eyenigma collection. His fronts are fairly ordinary, although coloured brightly, but the bending and cutting make his temples three-dimensional. Some are crenellated, others have complicated, see-through astral patterns.

Wescan Optical has picked up on this trend in its Kliik collection. Model 404 has metal temples that are bent from the top and bottom, almost into a tube. However, the sides don't quite meet, leaving a crisp line down the temple. Model 405 likewise has a folded split temple. It picks up on another of this season's trends—metallic finishes—and looks smart (especially for a mid-priced frame) in rich purple. For women, purple is a huge colour this season. Variations on rich, deep purples exist in almost every collection, seeming to displace the British Racing Green we saw just six months ago.

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Nifty cutouts also seem to adorn almost every temple in Vancouver designer Traff Green's Reflections collection. Likewise, there are some subtler cuts on a few frames from Britain's Booth & Bruce, a company that is also playing heavily into the retro trend. And there's no denying the appeal of the laser-cut temples on the brand new Claudia Alan frames from Vancouverite Carla D'Angelo, who has been working with West Coast artist Corrine Hunt to create some truly Canadian looks.

Mykita's frames this season actually fit the retro trend (model Steve is named after Steve McQueen), but because they're experimenting with ultra-thin metal and making frames that redefine the term "lightweight," they have a very contemporary look. Also, they've made a bold step. They've started colouring their frames. They've also started making acetate frames, this year in translucent colours such as red, sand-blasted crystal (clear crystal doesn't sell well, but this

season is seeing crystal used in very innovative ways) and, yes, purple.

In terms of colour, there's lots to tell. Dark tones remain popular for men, with a bit of colour creeping in. Women's frames are undeniably getting more colourful. Purple, as mentioned before, is big, as are various shades of blue. Not so much acid colours, but some are bright. Matte and metallic finishes are popular, as are acetates with a bit of a sparkle to them—usually coming from deep within the acetate and if they're very sparkly, it'll be on the inside of the temple. For colour, it's always fun to take a look at Pucci, which is using 70s colours this year, including peach and rust.

Another trend is to use laser transfer or other methods to put patterns onto frames.

"Animal print is really important to the Guess brand. This year we decided to go a bit higher end with the transfer on the temple and the Guess logo in rhinestones," says Guess brand manager Jennifer

Orentas. Leopard and zebra prints are showing up on her frames and in other collections this season.

"Moving forward, snake print will be one of the most important patterns," she says.

Indeed, a wide variety of natural patterns are showing up, from bamboo prints to florals, even frames with feathers in the acetate.

Frameless future?

There have been rumours afoot that rimless eyewear is on the way up in popularity. Beyond any shadow of a doubt, Silhouette believes this and is ready to back that belief.

Last year, Silhouette announced that it was turning its back on full-rim eyewear in order to devote itself exclusively to rimless. This year, the company has developed three lifestyle categories of frames. The frames all have noticeable temples, which is where the fashion element comes in, allowing wearers to express themselves without creating a barrier in front of the face.

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Clockwise from left: she wears Zenlight, one of Silhouette's "Essential" frames; purple Mystero, a Silhouette "Extravagant" frame; pure luxury—a diamond-studded gold rimless frame Gold & Wood.

The most basic of the three categories is the Essential collection. These are simple, elegant frames that don't shout. They're for everyday wear, and are suitable for the office. Then there's the Extravagant collection, which is louder and hipper with wider temples and stronger colour. These are the glasses for going out. Finally, there's the Luxury collection, which has more classically shaped temples with metal buckle hinges or decorative bits of leather. Great for a black-tie occasion.

Silhouette is backing up their new fashion trio with a fashion consultant program, which is being piloted in the United States this year. They've put together a book on colours and fashion, and have trained aestheticians who can come into an optical store for a pre-booked event. The shop makes appointments with key customers, who come in to have their colours done, discuss face shapes and go through a frame selection regimen with a special consultant, and can even have their eye makeup done. A scaled-down kit will be available to Silhouette's accounts.

Rimless is a busy category these days. In addition to its dominant players—Silhouette and Lindberg—there's also Teka, with a variety of classic wood temples, sportier models and thin metals.

On the luxury side, Gold & Wood lives up to its name in this year's collection. The showcase piece is a rimless 18 carat gold frame set with 48 diamonds on the bridge and hinges.

Bling's down, not out

One thing that's abundantly clear is that bling is all but gone from frames. Logos are much smaller and more subtle in almost every collection.

But bling lovers, don't despair. There's one place you'll find plenty of it. The tattoo art trend is still going strong, and that means wild Ed Hardy frames from Revolution Eyewear.

The ophthalmic frames are something to behold, with metal skulls and rhinestones aplenty. But to really make your eyes pop, check out the sunglasses. They're simply blingtastic.

While retro still dominates the scene, don't despair. A lot of it is elegant, well-made and a pleasure to wear. The trend will eventually come to an end, but there's still a fair bit of life in it.

For those who aren't into the chunky retro frames, there are plenty of colourful options in classical shapes, often with interesting temples. Intricate cutouts and folds are all the rage on metal frames, which will provide fun contrast to the big retro boys. For those who don't like either, there's a new wave of rimless coming.

And, although the economy has put a damper on adornment (along with a move toward 80s fashions and minimalism), and although Ed Hardy may have taken bling to its logical extreme, we can rest assured that more ostentatious frames will also make a comeback, eventually.

While design isn't all about new shapes, take time to enjoy good craftsmanship. And keep your eyes peeled for the next new thing. It's right around the corner, waiting for you to find it. ●