



Nearly 6,500 optical professionals descended on the NEC in Birmingham last month for the Optrafair exhibition to see what the best of British and international frame manufacturers had to offer the more reserved tastes of the UK market.

Its largest ever Optrafair presence was the perfect platform for Banbury-based Ridgway Optical to debut its latest lines. Reflecting on the company's activity, managing director David Ridgway said: 'We have experienced steady growth in recent years in difficult trading conditions, but we are releasing lots of new models – many of which are at the show,' he says.

The company says it is reactive to trends, but always keeps in mind what styles sell through to its practice base. Ridgway's philosophy is for its frames to have simple, clean looking front silhouettes paired with an interesting temple design, using either embellishments or patterns. The new models introduced at Optrafair reflect this ethos.

Its in-house Superflex collection has been extended with 24 new styles. Split into three lines – teen, adult and the newly released titanium – the collection has been designed to be a cost-effective range with subtle styling and flexible construction. The new titanium line adds lightweight properties to the mix too.

Ridgway Optical also acts a distributor for some of Canadian manufacturer WestGroupe's brands. The Fysh UK and Evatik collections have been bolstered with additions such as the metal and acetate Fysh UK F3491 and the men's Evatik 9071style – with its retro silhouette and rough acetate finish.

Hand-made in acetate

Brulimar Optical used the show to debut two sunglass collections for its Bench Kids and Lee Cooper Kids ranges. The new collections are said to have been created from both practitioner feedback and the results of consumer research into the children's market.

Practices now have their own exclusive collections separate from the consumer products that are found in department stores and other retail outlets. Frames are now hand-made in acetate as opposed to the previous injection moulding method of construction. When handling the frames, the difference is easy to see.



Fun of the fair

Simon Jones looks at some eyewear highlights from Optrafair



- 1 Islay by Shaun's Shades
- 2 9071 by Evatik
- 3 LCKS5017 by Lee Cooper
- 4 Earlsferry by Shaun's Shades
- 5 F3491 by Fysh UK

The SGBCK107 model from the Bench collection has a fun feminine take on the Wayfarer silhouette with an on-trend selection of crystal coloured front shapes and the SGBCK103 twists the iconic aviator shape into something more low-slung. The LCKS5017 Lee Cooper follows a similar script, but tweaks the aviator style for a slightly older child patient with a larger size and subtle metal Lee Cooper branding.

Brulimar manager director Howard Librae says: 'These sunglasses will place buyers at the head of the game when it comes to children's eyewear. Bench

Kids and Lee Cooper Kids eyewear have always been a phenomenal success and we were pleased to be able to offer our customers exactly what they wanted, based on very specific feedback. By continuing the tradition of offering contemporary adult styles incorporating state-of-the-art materials,



we anticipate huge domestic demand for our kid's sunglass ranges.'

Varg Eyewear may be a new name in the optical industry, but the team behind the brand, Spear Creative, has a long standing pedigree in the design, distribution and production of eyewear.

The Varg brand, making its Optrafair debut, has a distinct international feel. Designed in Britain, but highly influenced by the eyewear designs that emanate from Scandinavia (Varg is the Norwegian word for wolf), frames are manufactured in Japan using Japanese beta titanium and acetate. The range comprises 20 ophthalmic frames and four sunglass styles. Designers admit that the range is male orientated at the moment, but some female shapes are present and more will appear in forthcoming collections.

Sheet metal models such as the

Tuntra will draw comparisons with manufacturers like ic! Berlin and Mykita, but the Japanese production values, subtle touches in design and its own hinge system ensure that the Varg frames can stand alongside aforementioned German brands. The patented screwless hinge design keeps weight down and features a specially designed pin system with its own tool, which catches the pin when dismantling the hinge for glazing. Acetate combination models use the same hinge, but feature acetate in a

- 6 The Ridgway Optical stand
- 7 SGBCK103 by Bench
- 8 SGBCK107 by Bench
- 9 Tuntra by Varg Eyewear
- 10 1026T by Superflex
- 11 Rousseau by CG Claire Goldsmith
- 12 Sessila by Varg Eyewear
- 13 Lightec Solaire by Morel
- 14 2192N by Morel
- 15 2194N by Morel

selection of on-trend hues for front shapes and temples. Attention to detail extends beyond the frames. Spear Creative director Aneurin Smith says the feeling of excitement and anticipation when opening Apple equipment boxes inspired him to create packaging and cases that evoke the same feelings.

Shaun's Shades is another British-based company with international leanings that made its Optrafair debut. Scottish designer Shaun Patterson spent many years in America after



16 DU 01 by OKO

17 Stavanger by Blackfin Eyewear

18 Saint Malo by Blackfin Eyewear

attending Harvard University and set up Shaun's Shades in 2011 to offer high quality sunglass styles. Frames are constructed from Mazzucchelli acetate and are fitted with Carl Zeiss sun lenses.

Look closer and you'll find design touches that have inspired by Patterson's own experiences with low vision. Braille S logos can be found on the inside of the end tip tips and on some models, on the corner of the silhouettes. On the inner lining of the hinge, a subtle 'Sight' engraving ensures the message behind the brand isn't forgotten, as Shaun's Shades isn't just another high-end sunglass brand, it has a philanthropic side too.

For every pair of frames sold, a pair of glasses, a fitting and a sight test is provided. At present, most of the glasses are being supplied to South America, mainly due to Patterson's connections in California.

International travel has been British designer Claire Goldsmith's theme for this year. '2013 was an experimental year where we decided to really throw ourselves into almost every eyewear tradeshow in the optical calendar,' says director Claire Goldsmith.

'We did opti Munich, Silmo New Delhi, Mido Milan, Vision Expo New York and finally Optrafair Birmingham. It was a fun few months and we met some great new accounts as well as got to see and chat to our loyal base of existing customers.'

Developing the Claire Goldsmith brand (the company also reissues Oliver Goldsmith sun styles) has been the primary focus for this year and the introduction of eco-friendly

Mazzucchelli acetate within the new 2013 collection gives the brand an additional edge. The M49 acetate is said to be 100 per cent biodegradable and recyclable but still retains the same structural and aesthetic properties as regular acetate and is also compatible with polycarbonate lenses. One of the new models to use the new M49 acetate is the Rousseau ophthalmic frame, which is a large, feminine interpretation of the panto silhouette, with a dropped bridge and a marbled green hue.

French colour

French manufacturer OKO Eyewear brought its selection of bright hand-made frames to Optrafair for only the second time. 'The 2011 show was all about visibility for us, but it was so successful we had to come again. Colour has gained more acceptance within the UK market and



that puts OKO in an ideal position to capitalise,' says sales agent Jeremy Thomas.

New for Optrafair was the DU 01 frame, which twists the concept of the clip on. The frame sports a simple wearable rectangular metal shape with temples constructed from Mazzucchelli acetate, but the frame's key selling point is a thin clip on layer of acetate (also Mazzucchelli) which, unlike regular clip on systems, masks the front of the frame to transform its appearance. A number of colours are available, as is a polarised sun lens option. As standard, the frame is sold with one coloured clip and tinted lens clip.

Distribution agreements were on the Optrafair agenda for British brand Zuma Eyewear and Italians Marma.

Zuma Eyewear acts as distributor for the Lightec and Nomad brands from French manufacturer Morel. Making its debut at the show was Lightec's first sunglass collection. Continuing with its no screws or welds ethos, models in the six-strong range can weigh as little as 16.5g, with a spring hinge and polarised nylon lenses.

Morel's women's Istanbul collection from the Nomad line is more traditional in appearance, but still features interesting mixed media designs, with layered metal and acetate shapes combined with feminine silhouettes.

Zuma Eyewear brand director Harvey Dhadwar was pleased with how the new collections were received at the show. 'It's what we were hoping for – our tables were really busy and the Lightec and Nomad brands performed well. The event produced some really positive leads and our focus now is to build on them,' he says.

With its mixture of titanium construction, edgy shapes and bright colours, Blackfin Eyewear has caught *Optician's* eye at international trade shows in the past, but is now available on UK shores thanks to a distribution agreement with Marma UK. Two new models, Saint Malo and Stavanger demonstrate the values of the brand – retro looking silhouettes reinterpreted in pure titanium, with stepped edges around either the nose or corners. The titanium temples also feature perforations that facilitate quick and easy adjustment.

More new releases from Optrafair will appear in *Optician's* product news section. ●