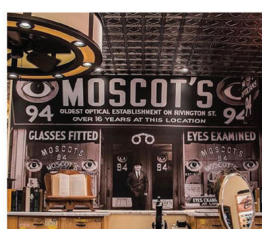




COVER TOPIC

# Indies Rule

Unique Points of View From Successful Independents



NEW YORK—Sometimes bigger isn't always better. Just ask the dozens of independent optical retailers *Vision Monday* has been profiling since we launched our newest e-newsletter, *The Independent Eye*, last year. Over and over, retailers and eyecare professionals take pride in the power of their independence, which allows them the freedom to go above and beyond by developing and nurturing their own home-

grown brands.

More than anything, these retailers and optometric practices feel the need to set themselves apart from the rest of the “retail pack”—and they find ingenious and creative ways to make this happen. Whether it be through community involvement, building relationships with patients or finding that high-quality luxury niche, these indies are each successful in their own right.

Some use social media while others stake their fortunes on solid reputations and years of service. But however they get there, the bottom line is these small businesses get to call their own shots, which often results in a winning formula. In this exclusive *VM* feature, we've selected a few examples of retailers who are taking their businesses to the next level. We hope you enjoy their stories. ■

—Mary Kane

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# Inspirations

From new office designs to new collections, what's motivating independents?

## Taking Inspiration from Pantone's Color of the Year

NEW YORK—Earlier this month, The Pantone Color Institute announced their 2020 color of the year: Classic Blue. Pantone describes the color as “a timeless and enduring blue hue elegant in its simplicity.” According to Pantone, it makes the perfect choice for 2020's Color of the Year because, “Instilling calm, confidence, and connection, this enduring blue hue highlights our desire for a dependable and stable foundation on which to build as we cross the threshold into a new era. Suggestive of the sky at dusk, the reassuring qualities of the thought-provoking Pantone 19-4052 Classic Blue highlight our desire for stability.”

Across the design world—from fashion to interior design and everything in between—designers are looking to Classic Blue for inspiration, and frame companies and independent ECPs are no exception. Here's a look at how a handful of independents are taking 2020's Color of the Year onboard. ■



Al Roker's electric blue Dom Vetro frames went viral earlier this year, ahead of Pantone's announcement. Image via Al Roker on Instagram.



Valley Optical Eyewear in Hillside, New Jersey, featured these classic blue MCM frames on their Instagram. Image via Valley Optical Eyewear on Instagram.

## Independent Brand I.a.Eyeworks Goes International for 40th Anniversary

LOS ANGELES—This year, independent eyewear brand I.a.Eyeworks is celebrating its 40th anniversary. A staple of the independent eyewear scene for over a generation now, I.a.Eyeworks has spread far beyond its Californian roots. To celebrate 40 years, the brand is leading an international window display campaign, which kicked off on Sept. 9, 2019. The campaign art appeared on the facades of more than 80 optical retailers in seven countries, and features a custom graphic design, printed on transparent vinyl. The graphic depicts two signboards which say “Raise Your Glasses!” and “Uncensored Visions Since 1979,” floating above the I.a.Eyeworks logo, which has been modified to add a decorative “40.” L.A.-based artist Nina Palomba designed the placard artwork, and graphic designer Mike Fink created the logo.

Window messaging has been a staple for I.a.Eyeworks since the beginning—in fact, their namesake stores have never featured eyewear displays in their windows, just window messaging. The brand's first ever windows read “Changing the Face. Facing the Change.” Brent Zerger, director of communications at I.a.Eyeworks said, “We call it ‘the original Twitter feed.’ We have always regarded our window slogans as an opportunity to share who we are versus what we offer for sale.”

Here's a look at some stores both in the U.S. and international that are sharing I.a.Eyeworks' 40th anniversary graphics. ■

Le Petit Salon des Créateurs



Le Petit Salon des Créateurs—Grenoble, France



I.a.Eyeworks Melrose—Los Angeles, Calif.



Eye Look Optical—Portsmouth, N.H.

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## Biz Tactics

Tips for unpacking and implementing your business tool box.

### SmallBizDaily Specializes in Tips for Keeping Small Businesses in the Game

NEW YORK—SmallBizDaily is an excellent resource for independents who are looking for “ideas, insights, information and inspiration for entrepreneurs,” according to the company’s tagline. Information on sales and marketing, technology, startups, management, money and other retail trends for small businesses are available via [SmallBizDaily.com](http://SmallBizDaily.com). Co-founders Rieva Lesonsky and Maria Valdez Haubrich, formerly of *Entrepreneur Magazine*, combine their decades of experience reading and writing about entrepreneurship enabling the duo to share their unique take on the world of small business. Here are a few examples of features that can help independents run a profitable and efficient business with an eye toward growth.

### 4 Ways Artificial Intelligence Will Impact Sales

As we enter a new decade, businesses are increasingly turning to artificial intelligence (AI) to improve operations, specifically in sales. According to Gartner, 37 percent of organizations have implemented some form of AI. It is quickly moving from a foreign concept to a must-have for businesses wanting to remain competitive. According to a 2019 survey by Dresner Advisory Services, marketing and sales prioritize AI more than any other department. There is enormous potential for AI to continue to grow in sales. We have already begun to see it drive more empowerment for sales, but it is only beginning. 2020 is going to be a massive year for companies looking to start their journey with AI in sales. Businesses that make AI part of their selling process will gain incredible advantages over their competition.



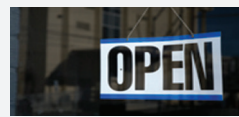
### 3 Tips for Making Your Business Look Inviting

Many people spend just as much time at work as they do in their homes. Therefore, your office space should be inviting and comfortable. This also applies to clients, volunteers, and other visitors who may frequent your office building. The more inviting your business looks, the more business you will attract, whether you regularly entertain clients or just need to accommodate employees. Making your business inviting encourages employees and clients to feel comfortable there, which will increase their trust in you and your services. For helpful tips to make your business look inviting go to [smallbizdaily.com/3-tips-making-business-look-inviting/](http://smallbizdaily.com/3-tips-making-business-look-inviting/) for design strategies.



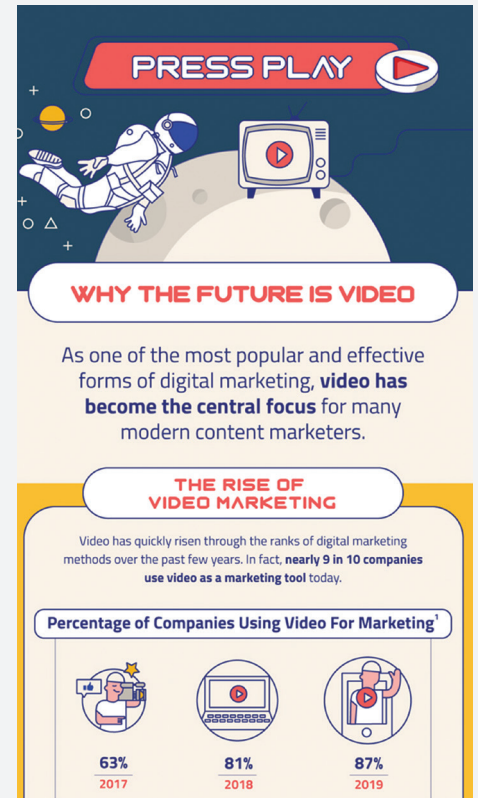
### How Much Does It Cost to Start a Business?

So, you’re an aspiring entrepreneur with a killer business idea and plenty of hustle. You know you’ve got the skills and the ambition to succeed. You might even have found the right business partner. All you need is some start-up cash. But ... how much? How much will it really cost to start your business and keep it running while you build your revenue stream? You can consult surveys and census data to get an idea of the “average” cost to start a small business, but your start-up doesn’t have to be average. You need a budget for your business. Here’s how to make one: [smallbizdaily.com/how-much-does-cost-start-business/](http://smallbizdaily.com/how-much-does-cost-start-business/)



### Press Play: Why The Future Is Video

NEW YORK—The digital experts at Omnicore, an award-winning health care digital marketing agency, has pulled together some compelling info and statistics about the growing influence of video to



promote businesses of all sizes and types as it is increasingly connecting with today’s customers. Omnicore posts, “Video has quickly become one of the most popular types of content on the internet. And it’s not hard to understand why. Video excites and engages people like few other types of content, whether they’re consuming entertainment, news, sports or branded messaging.

“Video has the power to bring people together, to engage and teach them, to create cultural conversations. That’s why savvy digital marketers know video is a crucial component of a broad content strategy. Blog posts, social media and white papers are all well and good, but if the current trends hold up, the future of marketing, and maybe the internet itself, will be video.

“Today’s marketer is already catching on to the need for video, and with this infographic, we’ll explore why those who haven’t embraced video should want to do so soon or risk being left behind.” ■

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# Indie-GRAM

Getting social about the business of eyewear and eyecare.

## InSight Opticians in Washington D.C.



Last October, Oprah stopped by InSight Opticians in Washington, D.C. According to *O Magazine*, Oprah first discovered InSight through a recommendation from her makeup artist Derrick Rutledge, and has been visiting opticians Yolanda James and Tony Byers for years now. On this visit, she struggled to pick between two Götti pairs (we've all been there!), and shared her dilemma on Instagram.

## Smart Eye Care Center in Maine



The team at Smart Eye Care Center in Maine created vision boards together to celebrate 2020. Image via Smart Eye Care Center on Instagram. ■

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## 47 Years Later, Gleek + Howard Is Still the Attraction

MONTCLAIR, N.J.—In 1969, William (Bill) Berk was one of about 400,000 people at Woodstock. Like the rest of the crowd at the legendary music festival, Bill was witness to a historic event—one that would change his life forever. For Bill, that historic moment came when his friend, Albert Gleek the 3rd, who was with him at Woodstock, mentioned the fact that his father was thinking of selling his optical store, Gleek + Howard, in Montclair, New Jersey. Bill was interested—and in 1972, Bill, a Vietnam veteran who began working in the optical industry as soon as he returned home from service, purchased the store from Albert Gleek and John Howard. He kept the original name, but has made the independent business entirely his own since then.

Bill still owns the optical shop today, working alongside Justin Elmini, who joined Gleek + Howard about 15 years ago, and who Bill calls his “optical son.” For the two of them, being an independent business means having the freedom to be different—and that’s vital.

“We have had a singular vision since day one: ‘Be the attraction,’” Elmini told *Vision Monday*. “What we mean is simple: why just be another brand-centric store selling the same frames, the same lenses, and the same service as everyone else? We want to sell our quality, expertise and service. We give our clients the very best of everything we can give them.”

Gleek + Howard has been a permanent fixture in Montclair for nearly five decades now, meaning Bill and Justin have seen the landscape drastically change for independents. In particular, said Elmini, “the last five years especially have been a very odd time in this industry.” With the rise of quick, inexpensive access to eyewear, customers’ demands have been changing. For Gleek + Howard, though, two things remain consistent: quality and exclusivity.

“Sure, eyewear is a fashion statement, but it’s also a medical device,” Elmini explained. “We are experts in our field with decades of experience. It’s up to us as independent opticians to educate our consumers, explain to them, and show them the difference. Exclusivity is something that all independents should have; set yourselves apart, be the attraction.”

When it comes to exclusivity, Gleek + Howard makes it a point to keep stock that makes them the attraction. “We carry frame and lens lines that not everyone can get and I think that’s important,” Elmini said. That stock includes brands like TAVAT, Mr. Leight, Mykita, Oliver Goldsmith, Barton Perreira, Res Rei, Eyevan, Theo Eyewear, Bevel, Moscot, Face A Face, Alain Mikli and more, with lenses from Shamir, Seiko and Hoya. The optical shop keeps a full list of available brands and lenses online.

Like many independents, the team at Gleek + Howard have made community involvement a priority over the past few decades. Elmini says they have “watched this town grow and change into what it is today,” and, with that, has come many iterations of community involvement. Things like sponsoring town-wide events such as sidewalk sales, ladies nights out, and the Montclair Film Festival are standard fare for Gleek + Howard, as well as other unique



The Gleek + Howard storefront decorated to celebrate the store's 47th anniversary.



Bill Berk outside Gleek + Howard in 1972.



Bill Berk and Justin Elmini in 2019.

events like fashion shows. “We are one of the older businesses in town, so we try and stay involved in any way we can,” Elmini said.

Even though times are changing, Elmini is confident that Gleek + Howard knows how to change with them. “We’ve been here a long time,” he told *VM*. “We know our client base and we know what they want and need. We pay attention, we ask questions, we talk to them. We don’t just try and sell a pair of glasses. All of these things separate us from the pack. Almost 50 years of independent thinking with no doctor and accepting no insurance—we must be doing something right.”

Last weekend, Gleek + Howard celebrated their 47th anniversary. “I wish I could say we are having a huge party,” Elmini said, of the anniversary. “But the truth of the matter is, we are just going out with our spouses for some margaritas and good Mexican food. We will save the huge party for our 50th.”

## EYESPOT Chestnut Hill Makes Independence the Height of Luxury

CHESTNUT HILL, Mass.—For independent optical boutique EYESPOT, it’s all about luxury. Founded in 2010 by ophthalmologist Jorge Arroyo, EYESPOT calls Chestnut Hill—one of Massachusetts’ most expensive zip codes—its home, and the practice operates on the goal of providing its community with “the highest level of medical and aesthetic attention,” said Melaine Cabral, LDO, managing optician. “Luxury eyewear is essential to the EYESPOT brand,” Cabral told *Vision Monday*. In store, EYESPOT offers “the most fashion-forward eyewear from around the world,” which includes frames from companies such as Krewe, Oliver Goldsmith, Lafont, Lindberg and more. These top of the line frames come hand in hand with what the practice calls “concierge-level service.”

Luxury is the backbone of EYESPOT Chestnut Hill, but it’s independence that allows luxury to take center stage at the practice. Cabral explained, “being independent means that we are able to provide products and services

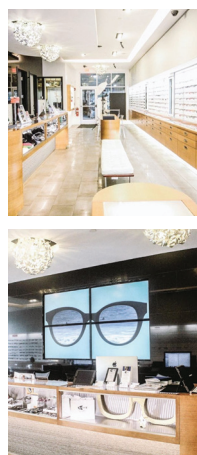
tailored to our patients' individual needs. As such, we have very loyal customers who know that we do our best to avoid the corporate and commercial biases involved in retail."

For EYESPOT, those tailored services include standard exams for glasses and contact lenses, bespoke frame adjustments, frame consultations, lens customization, a club membership and a longstanding Give A Pair Get A Pair program in partnership with the Birat Eye Hospital in Nepal.

"EYESPOT's founding ophthalmologist, in collaboration with his resident from Nepal, initiated a program to fund eye exams at the Birat Eye Hospital," Cabral said. Then, the two traveled to Nepal and set up a Give A Pair Get A Pair program for children in need. "Both at home and abroad, the mission of EYESPOT is to make eyecare and eyewear accessible to all those who need them."



EYESPOT managing optician Melanie Cabral, LDO, helps a customer find the perfect frames. Photo Courtesy of EYESPOT.



The interior of EYESPOT Chestnut Hill. Photos courtesy of EYESPOT.

Closer to home, the team at EYESPOT strives to connect with their local community in and around Boston. The practice partners with The Street, an open-air shopping center in Chestnut Hill, to get involved with children's events such as the annual Bfit Halloween Candy Drive for Boston Children's Hospital, and they consistently donate used glasses to New Eyes for the Needy in New Jersey. In the past, the practice has also donated to anti-domestic violence initiatives as well.

In addition, the team at EYESPOT Chestnut Hill makes it a point to keep their social media presences active and engaging. "Aside from customer care, we also feel that social media provides the perfect platform for spreading awareness about our brand and philanthropic endeavors," Cabral said. On Instagram, Twitter and Facebook they share celebrity eyewear looks, reminders to donate used glasses for those in need, and other in-store offers and events. Like an extension of their shop, EYESPOT's social media is a place to connect, to share and to enjoy beautiful frames.

Inside and outside the practice, independence and luxury are all about connections for EYESPOT—connections with their customers, their local community and their global community shape this independent practice into what it is today.

## Independence Means Freedom and Quality for Upstate New York's Frameology Optical

SYRACUSE, N.Y.—When Stacy Daniel, LDO, opened Frameology Optical in December 2013, she knew she was doing something different. Located in Syracuse, a city with a population of just under 145,000 in upstate New York, opening up an independent optical office that focuses on handmade, artisan, European frames is "something people think doesn't happen in Syracuse," Daniel told *Vision Monday*. But five years later, Frameology is thriving. The staff is headed up by Daniel, who is a licensed contact lens fitter with a degree in optical dispensing from Erie Community College and a BBA in finance, as well as 25 years of work experience in private practice and the corporate world.

Along with her staff, which includes Amanda Twohig, licensed optician, and Gina Wright, optical assistant, Daniel focuses on bringing handcrafted, European frames to Syracuse. It's a passion project for Daniel, who combined two of her loves—frames and retail—to create Frameology.



The interior of Frameology Optical.



Stacy Daniel, owner, LDO, at Frameology Optical.



Frameology Optical in Syracuse, New York.

For Daniel, the decision to open an independent practice was twofold. Firstly, she told *VM*, being independent "gives you this freedom of selling the products that you want to. I think that's number one, that's why most of us go into this." And the second reason? "Frame quality. I wanted that unique, different thing," Daniel said.

Frameology stocks high quality, handmade, and sometimes hard to find brands like Theo, Mykita, Bevel, Vuarnet, and Sabine Be. A full list is avail-

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able on their website, but there is one common thread among all the frame brands you can find on the shelves at Frameology: the highest quality standards. And it is those standards, Daniel said, that have changed her work life for the better. “The number one thing is quality,” said Daniel. “The quality of my work life changed because of the quality of the frames. When you sell quality frames your time isn’t taken up by repairs and adjustments—I can now focus on what to sell, and I enjoy what I do. The style and quality are equal, for what I want to offer.”

High quality often comes with a high price tag, something Daniel was aware of when starting her journey in a small city. Syracuse has a much smaller population than other major cities in upstate New York, so Daniel knew her risk was high. She said, “We’re a small city, a blue collar city—Syracuse didn’t have this, but I knew they were succeeding in Rochester and Buffalo.”

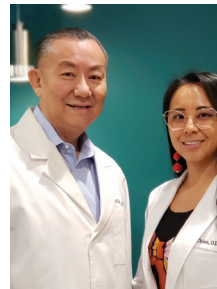
To make sure Frameology can succeed in a smaller market, Frameology keeps an active and well-curated social media presence, and Daniel herself does her best to collaborate with and get involved with other local small businesses. In January, she invited six other women-owned businesses in Syracuse to come into the Frameology store and hold pop-up shops. It was, Daniel said, “a huge success.”

For Frameology, it’s all about freedom and quality, and for Daniel, succeeding in small businesses is all about confidence. “There are a few rules if you ever want to start your own business. Have your business plan, know the market you want to reach—and most importantly, don’t ever feel you need somebody or something to succeed. You only need you. I don’t think you need doctors or insurance companies. You only need you,” Daniel said.

## Indie Father-Daughter Duo Are a San Diego Staple

SAN DIEGO, Calif.—Independent optometry is part of the Chinn family’s DNA. Thirty years ago, Stephen Chinn, OD, opened his very first independent private practice in San Diego, after graduating from U.C. Berkeley School of Optometry in 1972. Throughout his career, Dr. Chinn has had up to three private practices at once—but these days he focuses his attention on one in particular. Today, he and his daughter, Jennifer Chinn, OD, who graduated from the University of Missouri St. Louis College of Optometry in 2015, practice together at Dr. Chinn’s Vision Care, in San Diego’s North Park neighborhood. Their independent practice is a member of the Vision Source network.

For Dr. Stephen Chinn, independent practice has always been the path to follow. Dr. Jennifer Chinn (who goes by Dr. Jenn) explained, “He felt there were three main motivators that were pushing him to be independent: he wanted to be able to provide more individualized and specialized eyecare to his patients, he wanted to spend more time getting to know his patients and building strong relationships with them, and finally, he wanted to use



Stephen Chinn, OD, and Jennifer Chinn, OD, are the father-daughter duo behind San Diego’s Dr. Chinn Vision Care.



Dr. Chinn’s Vision Care is located in San Diego’s North Park neighborhood.



Dr. Jenn and the staff at Dr. Chinn’s Vision Care use Instagram to connect with their patients and their community. Image via Dr. Chinn’s Vision Care on Instagram.

his training and knowledge so that he could practice full scope Optometry.”

And the Drs. Chinn have done all of the above. Dr. Jenn told *VM*, “we approach the business having our patients in mind,” and credits independent practice with giving them the freedom and ability to do that. She explained, “As independent practitioners, we have the freedom to choose how we will service our patients, what type of equipment you’ll purchase, what products you will offer to your patients, and how to run your business.” For them, this means choosing to put themselves in their patients’ shoes, and choosing to “provide them the best eyecare experience.”

Being a long-term independent also means building meaningful relationships with both your patients and your community. This is something that Drs. Chinn take seriously—both online and in person. Alongside attending community meetings, getting to know other local business owners, and shopping at the local farmers’ market, both Dr. Chinn and Dr. Jenn volunteer vision screens and eye exams for underserved populations in San Diego, and Dr. Jenn speaks at local health fairs, Lions Clubs and Rotary Clubs around San Diego about the importance of eye health and vision. Dr. Chinn offers exams in Chinese and Vietnamese as well as English, and Dr. Jenn offers exams in Spanish, too.

In addition, Dr. Jenn has expanded her community to include an online one as well. On Instagram as both Dr. Chinn’s Vision Care and herself Dr. ChinnChinn, Dr. Jenn shares snippets of her life as an OD and beyond—from peeks behind the scenes in the practice to special moments with patients to more personal, touching posts about confidence, growth and transparency. Dr. Jenn’s online presence, which has led to features in *Women In Optometry* and a print edition of *Vision Monday* allows her to connect with patients on another level, showing who she is beyond just their doctor, and allows them to feel comfortable enough to open up to her.

For Drs. Stephen and Jennifer Chinn, it all comes down to family and independence, both of which give them the drive and freedom to create a practice that they are proud of. “Being a true 2nd generation family owned practice means everything to us,” Dr. Jenn concluded. “We put our hearts into this practice and treat all of our staff and our patients as if they are part of our family.

That goes hand in hand with our desire to provide individualized care and have the freedom to schedule our patients accordingly. We spend our time with our patients and care for their eyes as if they are our own.”

## Expanding to New Horizons With Indie Moscot

NEW YORK—New York is Moscot’s DNA. The brand was founded in 1915 at 94 Rivington Street, in New York’s Lower East Side, by Hyman Moscot, who had been selling eyeglasses from a pushcart on nearby Orchard Street for nearly 20 years. In that time, the brand has established four locations in their native New York. But they didn’t stop there; New York is just the beginning for Moscot. Today, the brand, which is led by fourth-generation Harvey Moscot, OD, CEO, and fifth-generation Zack Moscot, chief design officer, also has locations in Tokyo, Seoul, Rome, Paris, London, and, their only U.S.-based location outside of New York: Moscot Melrose, which opened in Los Angeles in October 2019. The father-son duo oversee the retail expansion together, and with three more 2019 openings—two in London and one in Milan—the Moscot family shows no sign of slowing down any time soon.

Moscot Melrose, the most recent expansion of the Moscot independent brand, is an 1,800 square foot space on Melrose Avenue in Los Angeles, California. The new shop will showcase the full breadth of the Moscot eyewear collection as well as distinct Moscot touches, such as vintage furniture and artifacts from the family archives. Featuring tin in ceilings made in New York, Moscot Melrose is a continuation of the brand’s New York City identity. In addition, Moscot Melrose will feature The Hall of Moscot Moments, an experiential space that showcases the brand’s legacy and roots, as well as a speakeasy room in the rear of the store.

Zack Moscot said, “As a family-owned, 5-Generational, independent eyewear brand, my father and I were drawn to this specific stretch of Melrose Avenue because of its unique mix of establishments spanning from acclaimed comedy clubs, vintage shops, and interesting retail concepts. The Melrose Trading Post, the famous open-air market, is just three blocks from Moscot Melrose and reminds me of our family’s humble beginnings when my great-great-grandfather, Hyman Moscot, sold ready-made glasses off a pushcart in the early 1900s when Orchard Street was full of pushcart vendors selling knick-knacks, housewares and food. You won’t be able to miss our iconic yellow building emblazoned with the iconic Moscot eyes while driving down Melrose.”

CEO Harvey Moscot, OD, added, “Moscot has always had close ties to the creative arts and the film, TV, and music industry. Many of my former patients and longtime customers of Moscot started their careers while living in the Lower East Side and eventually moved out West. We’re thrilled to open our first U.S. shop outside of New York City in West Hollywood and



Zack Moscot and Harvey Moscot, OD, outside Moscot Melrose.



Moscot’s most recent opening, Moscot Melrose, is the company’s first U.S.-based shop outside of New York.



The interior of all Moscot stores takes cues from the brand’s New York City heritage.

to have found a home on the eclectic Melrose Avenue.”

All of Moscot’s spaces offer unique touches in this way. Most independents cite freedom to go above and beyond as their biggest motivation in approaching independent practice—and the Moscots, although they may be bigger than most, are no different. Today, the Moscot family refers to their brand as “a global community built on neighborhood values.”

On their website, they write, “While now recognized as a global fashion brand, Moscot remains, at heart, a neighborhood optical shop.” Dr. Harvey Moscot oversees Moscot Eyecare, the medical eye health division of the company, himself. With a team of ODs, Moscot Eyecare sees patients seven days a week at the New York City shops.

At home in New York, Moscot keeps things unique with Moscot Music, a program that started in 2004, with Dr. Harvey Moscot, who began playing his guitar to pass some time and entertain on a rainy Saturday. From this casual jam session an institution was born: now, musicians as big as HelloGoodbye have stopped by various Moscot locations to perform. Moscot makes the most of these “Moscot Moments,” as they call them, even dedicating a section of their website to the special moments that make Moscot more than just your neighborhood optical shop.

There is also the Moscot Mobileyes Foundation, created by Dr. Harvey Moscot to “eliminate the barriers to quality medical eyecare by bringing medical treatment directly to those most in need,” the company said. Anyone can donate their glasses at any Moscot location in New York—in 2017, Moscot was able to provide over 2,000 pairs for New York residents.

Moscot’s own line of frames is central to their business as well—something being independent gives them the freedom to explore. From their famous Lemtosh frame to their various clip-on offerings, Moscot keeps a cohesive brand aesthetic across their frames, accessories, social media presence, and in-store design—building an independent, home-grown brand that is recognizable around the world. ■