



American Eyewear Makers and ECPs Reflect on a Historic Year

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the product, it was a really easy decision for me to get involved.” Dukes likes to give patients a feel for the culture and history of each frame company that she presents to patients, and has found it special to share her own experience with American-made eyewear, especially State and American Optical. She said, “When I am presenting State Optical or American Optical products, I get to tell the story about actually getting to visit the factory in Chicago and getting to see firsthand how much care goes into making each of these frames. And when it comes to American Optical, we discuss the heritage and history of the frames and having stories with pictures that show John F. Kennedy wearing the Saratoga frame or the astronauts from the Apollo mission wearing the AO Original Pilot.”

This level of personal connection piques patients’ interest, usually. Dukes concluded, “It really makes purchasing these products kind of a prideful purchase for many of my patients, I believe they feel like they’re owning and wearing a piece of history.”

Ruth Domber, co-founder of 10/10 Optics in New York City, told VM that “Some patients care if the frames are made in the USA and some do not. But all patients appreciate knowing that the collections we carry have a relationship with us as independents.” On the practice’s website, each vendor and country of origin is mentioned, and Domber fully believes that “every collection always has a story to tell... we always discuss the frame’s place in the world of optics.”

“We love to tell patients how we’ve set up our retail with more frames Made in the USA. They love it, and encourage us to keep it up. We have a slogan here of ‘Buy Local, See The Difference!’ We believe in supporting local businesses and that extends to Made in the USA eyewear.”

**- Marcus McDowell, optical manager,
East Memphis Optical in Tennessee**

Domber has also seen a real change in American-made eyewear over the past decade. She explained, “Made in the USA’ means

something different now than it did a few years ago. When I’d search for eyewear designs that would complement our curated eyewear collections I was looking for innovative wearable artistic eyewear by independent artists. Customs was not an issue, nor was availability or the value of the dollar. Until the last 10 years there also were not many choices for stylish eyewear made in the USA. All of that has changed. Adding eyewear collections that support our economy, small business owners and designers as well as a simpler supply chain makes ‘Made in the USA’ more attractive and easier than ever.”

“When presenting frames to patients, I like to tell the patient a bit about the company that made each frame regardless of provenance. I believe that as opticians we get to also be educators, especially when it comes to helping our patients be more informed consumers of their eyewear.”

**- Johnna Dukes, owner and optician,
Optique in Spirit Lake, Iowa**

When it comes to fashion and eyewear, it’s true that consumers like to travel the world with their purchases and to tap into the high-fashion experience of Italian-made, or the high-tech expertise of Japanese eyewear—but there’s something special about American made, too. And with the theme for this year’s Met Gala, often considered to be the most important night in fashion, set as “In America: A Lexicon of Fashion,” there’s no question that American-made is about to rocket to the forefront of the fashion and manufacturing conversation.

This year, we’re once again embarking on our annual Made in the USA feature, taking a look at eyewear companies from coast to coast who do their work right here at home. It’s been a tumultuous two years, and just about everything about how we live and work has changed—but these companies have adapted, grown and reimagined the path forward. ■

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