

## Book Review: Eyewear: A Visual History by Moss Lipow

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Designer [Moss Lipow](#) spent two decades curating a collection of vintage eyewear. In *Eyewear: A Visual History*, tony publishing house Taschen has devoted a typically handsome doorstopper of a book to showcase Lipow's collection, along with a concise history of the frames that correct, protect, and decorate our eyes.

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Sunglasses seem the most modern of fashion statements, but early versions were developed thousands of years ago. Ancient Eskimos cut a narrow aperture into a piece of bone to shield their eyes from the sun's powerful glare. The Chinese fashioned lenses from a quartz called tea stone. But eyeglasses as we know them came to being at the dawn of the Renaissance. Author/designer Lipow can't be certain if

it's the chicken or the egg in this equation, but suggests that the development of corrective eyewear paved the way for enlightenment. We tend to lose the ability to focus on what's close to our eyes when we turn 45. Eyeglasses extended the careers of the monks who meticulously copied scholarly manuscripts, and the consequences reverberated.

*Eyewear's* chapter sections are subheaded with clever titles like "One Word: Plastics," about the revolution in manufacturing, and "Descent into Geekdom," which notes that the high cost of early frames relegated them to the upper classes at first. By the mid-17th century, when glasses were sold by itinerant peddlers who are the ancestors of today's rest area glass huts, four-eyes were no longer a symbol of class but became a stigma.

The design of eyewear developed due to changes in manufacturing as much as fashions, and as much as we take glasses for granted today it's a revelation to see how they have changed -- or not -- over time. The hourglass shape of Richardson-style frames from late 19th century Europe look stylish and modern today. The design of post-war sunglasses evolved from the kind of intricate ornamental combs that were the mark of mid-19th century elegance, but would make exquisite retro statements today.

Lipow's collection of frames are handsomely presented, many of them true to scale. Icons of eyewear style through the ages are also generously represented, from medieval monks to fin-de-siècle monocles, from [Jackie Onassis](#) to [Kim Jong-il](#), from [John Lennon](#) to Devo. And in Taschen's typical attention to detail, the multi-lingual text for this handsome tome is set in elegant, eye-pleasing Didot.