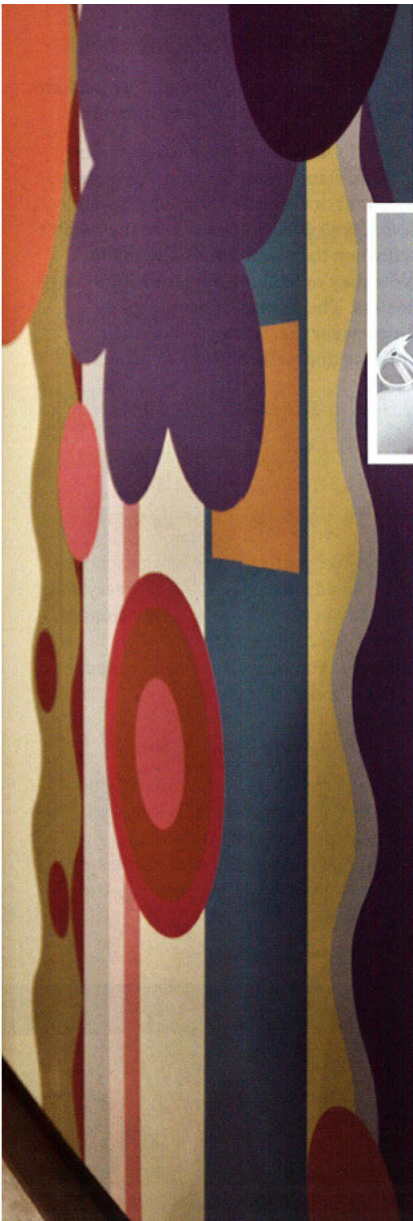


Moss Lipow.

The Man behind the Vision behind a Visual History

WRITER Melanie Kell

There are eyewear designers... and then there are those regarded by their peers as a designer's designer. Moss Lipow, is the latter, a designer who lives and breathes eyewear design. His extraordinary insight into the history of frames and brands are set out in his recently released coffee table compendium: 'Eyewear: A Visual History'. We spoke to this master artisan about what inspired him to step away from designing frames to write about them.



'Eyewear: A Visual History' takes the reader on a journey through the ages of eyewear, along the way venturing into discussions on design, technology and manufacturing, advertising, product placement and more.

Moss Lipow's fascination with eyewear was ignited as a teenager when he realised he needed glasses. Although unenthusiastic at first, he quickly discovered that rather than limiting his style options, the need to wear glasses opened up whole new worlds. As his passion for eyewear developed, he began to trawl eBay, auction houses, garage sales and flea markets in search of frames that excited his senses. Over the years he amassed what is now regarded as a world-class collection that represents 500 years of eyewear design, as he told *mivision*...

Q. Why eyewear?

"I discovered eyewear was the best single fashion item for controlling, or even creating your persona... You could use it to help project anything you want... What else do you wear on your face?"

"As I bought more frames to go with more looks I began to appreciate eyewear as an incredible design object and realised I wanted to create in the medium.

"I tend to be a perfectionist and felt serious design was impossible without serious scholarship so I decided to learn everything. Assembling the collection was an organic out-growth of my passion for the medium and desire to create."

Q. What made you take that interest in design and turn it into a book?

"I soon realised nobody had ever written a serious but accessible reference. So I basically began curating as I collected. I realised most people don't realise how remarkable a medium eyewear was and could be, and I wanted to hopefully elevate their understanding and appreciation of it.

"All in all 10 years from conception to execution – I took a couple years off producing my line to finish it. I'm finally rolling out a new line again this Spring.

"It's nice to focus on design again, but I felt doing the book was always part of the larger goal of knowing my art form so I could be the best designer I could."

Q. What era in eyewear design excites you the most and why?

"I found all the eras fascinating. It was interesting to compare China and Europe from the 16th Century forward and find a plausible reason why, from a similar starting point, the social and aesthetic trajectories of their eyewear diverged.

With the modern era, though, I often learned the history straight from the source; I was lucky enough to be able to

speak to some of the stylists, designers and performers who created the fashion. Personally I like the 1950s through 1970s. Certainly, that's when eyewear began to gain traction with the mass public as something that could enhance their image. It was also the period that saw the greatest explosion of possibilities in what could be done with design."

Q. What style or shape do you believe has had the greatest impact on modern styles and why?

"Probably safety and special purpose glasses of the late 19th/early 20th Century. The Lamb Eye Shield of the 1890s had lenses made of mica stone and was largely intended for cyclists. Its shape had a big influence on motoring glasses, which eventually had an influence on aviator glasses. Early motoring glasses - for reasons of functionality - were also the first widely distributed ones to sport larger lens sizes. All this also set a precedent that contextualized the expanding size of lenses in the 1960s and 1970s and helped make them immediately acceptable to the public."

"Human advancement in working with materials of many types has been reflected in the eyewear"

Q. What innovation do you believe has been most instrumental to the development of modern eyewear?

"Rather than focus on one innovation or another, it's best to think of it as a continuum of progress. A lot of human advancement in working with materials of many types has been reflected in the eyewear of any given period: from improved forging of metal, to drawing of wire, to sophisticated stamping techniques, to the many developments in synthetics and beyond.

"What might get lost as the reader gets drawn into the flashing parade of shapes and colors is how the medium

mifeature

has been an incredible showcase for technological progress.”

“I like the 1950s through 1970s... the period that saw the greatest explosion of possibilities”

Q. What role does extreme eyewear design play in developing fashion trends for frames?

“Extreme eyewear’s not a monolith. A lot of it depends on the individual piece. A lot of the 1950s pieces were basically ornamental combs with lenses. That was the craft tradition of most of the artisans who had the most influence. Little of it had much to do with fashion per se. By the 1960s there were more modernist shapes that were really just exaggerated riffs on stuff people would actually wear.

They were a bit more advanced, but they defined the eyewear fashion of their day. Suitably “detuned” variations sold nicely.

“Things keep moving, though, and the perception of eyewear keeps changing. This is another big factor. In the past most consumers basically didn’t want to draw attention to the fact that they wore glasses. Now that eyewear is generally accepted as a bona fide fashion accessory, people are more inclined to be a bit bold. Witness how many big, heavy frames are being worn now - similar to the Army issue frames American servicemen used to call “birth control” glasses because they made it hard to appeal to women on leave. These are now trendy! In fact the




most fashion forward men and women are wearing even thicker frames than that.

“Also, look at the vintage market: lots of more flamboyant 80s and 90s pieces by Cazal or Gaultier for example were considered dead stock because they didn’t sell when they were originally made. Now they’re fetching a fortune for vintage dealers. The market of people ready for eyewear that makes a statement is growing and will continue to grow.”

Q. As an eyewear designer, how did your research into ‘Eyewear: A Vision History’ inspire your eyewear design?

“It was like post-graduate design school - doing an advanced thesis. Most everything currently in my main line is a celebration of classical 20th Century eyewear tradition. You need to know precedent in order to hopefully surpass it.”

Q. What’s your next project?

“Various things are under discussion. For now, though, my main focus will be expanding my line throughout this year. Feedback on the samples has been great and I’m quite eager to share them.” 

Top Three Frames By Design

With 500 years of eyewear to choose from, we asked Moss Lipow to nominate his top three frames by design...

“I always liked Richardsons – a style of glasses invented around 1800 with four lenses, two of which could swing out from front to sides to either allow different refraction when combined with the main lenses, or when swung out to the sides, to give full coverage and protection from the elements.

“The coolest pair I own have celluloid side panels - not actual lenses - with detachable temples and a spring bridge. When the arms are removed, the spring bridge allows them to be worn as pince nez: the sides are knurled and act like little paddle temples to help hold the piece steady on the face. They were made in India around 1900 to protect railway passengers from flying cinders.

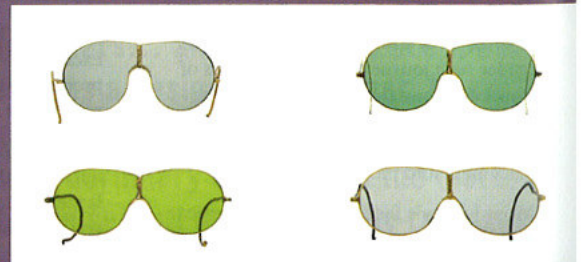
“I like the Auto-Glas of 1911, which took its hinged bridge from the Lamb Eye Shield of 20 years earlier. It was another forerunner to a lot of modern fashion eyewear and still looks futuristic after over 100 years.

“Finally, I’m proud of my own Double M. Lots of the designs I do have been described as “avant garde”. Sometimes, though, the hardest thing to do is reinterpret a classic shape and improve it. It’s the same challenge as good men’s tailoring – doing something essentially classic only with a more flattering cut. The style is a version of the classic Roy Orbison type frame. I worked hard to make the interplay of angles and curves on the front really harmonious. It took a bunch of prototypes to get it right.”

To purchase *Eyewear: A Visual History* visit www.taschen.com



Folding celluloid protective glasses for railway passengers, Lawrence & Mayo, India, c.1900



Folding driving glasses, AutoGlas, United States, c.1911



Double M, designed by Moss Lipow