

MEN'S WEAR

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NADER ZADI IN HIS NEW YORK SHOWROOM

THE VISION THING

With old-fashioned handiwork, Nader Zadi turns vintage glasses into a hot fashion statement

It's a sultry summer morning, but eyewear designer Nader Zadi is tucked away in the cool darkness of his showroom on New York's Upper East Side.

Pristine in a crisp blue shirt and matching blazer, Zadi stands over an antique wooden writing desk, opening a leather briefcase filled with his most prized vintage eyeglass frames. He pulls out an intricate, gold, hexagonal frame that he found at an antique jewelry store in New Orleans more than a decade ago.

"This is what propelled me into this business," says the 37-year-old founder and president of Customeyes, a vintage and bespoke eyewear company. "They were so gorgeous, I had an immediate connection to them and knew I had to have them."

The ornate, Civil War-era rims became the first in Zadi's stunning collection of late 19th and early 20th century frames. The jewelry-like piece also inspired the designer to view glasses as luxury accessories.

"A beautiful pair of glasses that are balanced with a man's features ties a look together," says Zadi, pulling open a heavy wooden drawer where he stores original lenses and hardware. "Men may have a great watch or an elegant pair of cufflinks, but their choices for quality accessories are limited."

Since forming Customeyes 12 years ago, Zadi has helped to broaden the high-end accessory selection for men, providing prominent New Yorkers with a rare selection of vintage sunglasses and eyeglass frames—some more than 200 years old—which he reshapes and custom-designs to suit the unique look and lifestyle of each client. His assortment of roughly 1,000 one-of-a-kind white- and yellow-gold frames—purchased from old optical stores and antique shops across the U.S. and abroad—are displayed like miniature objets d'art in wooden armoires throughout his studio. With an emphasis on frames from 1900 to the 1940s, Zadi's glasses—available in rimless, semi-rimless and full-frame styles in—are functional antiques as well as eye-catching accessories.

Part Old World artisan and part style-savvy dandy, the former model is also an expert on eyewear fashion.

"Oval and teardrop shapes look great with formal attire, and sunglasses—in basic colors, like browns or grays—look fantastic with a suit," Zadi says. Want to make a statement? Simple. "Do bicolor lenses in fun shades like mint green or sky blue."



It is this sort of optical pampering that draws Zadi's discerning clientele to his appointment-only showroom. A mix of celebrities, executives, artists and architects pay \$750 to \$5,000 for his unique investment pieces. "My clients view this as a well-kept secret, a hidden shopping mecca of sorts, which they want to remain exclusive," says Zadi.

Insistent that the cut of a custom-designed frame makes as much of an impact as the cut of a bespoke suit, the designer—who grew up in London, Israel and Los Angeles—likenes a visit to his showroom to a one-on-one meeting with a custom tailor. "I have a client try on many different bridges and frames," says Zadi. "Once I see what looks best on their face, I go about creating a shape with the hardware they select."

Fusing classic design with modern touches, Zadi then begins a painstaking process that can take more than a month to complete. He begins by drawing and designing different lens styles before cutting and then grinding the lens in an old-fashioned edger machine. Zadi then spends hours reshaping the metal frames by hand and meticulously assembling the screws to achieve symmetry and balance.

The end result? A one-of-a-kind luxury accessory. "They walk out of here knowing that their glasses were built for them," explains Zadi. "It makes people feel good and shifts their whole persona—the way they carry themselves."

Those who want the look without the hefty price tag need not worry. Zadi's latest venture is to develop, design and manufacture two new lines of vintage-inspired eyewear—a ready-made and a bespoke collection—for select retailers. Taking cues from his antique redesigns, the new lines will incorporate a modern touch and cost slightly less than those he custom-designs for his showroom clientele. It's a plan that has been in the works for more than two years, and one that will no doubt leave many men seeing the world through rose-colored glasses. —GILLIAN KOENIG

UP IN FRAMES: SIX POINTERS FROM EYEWEAR EXPERT NADER ZADI

CONTRAST SHAPES

"If you have a square face, go with oval or round frames to soften your features. If you have an oval or round face, go with angular shapes to create more definition."

GET MADE IN THE SHADE

"Pale complexions look good in warm colors, such as rose and copper. Darker complexions look stunning in white or yellow gold. All metallic frames suit black skin."

DON'T BLOCK YOUR EYEBROWS

"The top of the frame should be just under, or intersecting, the brow line. Otherwise the glasses will cover too many of your features and look too big on you."

AVOID GOING WIDE OR TIGHT

"If there's a gap between the temple pieces and the side of your head, the glasses are too wide. But if the arms are digging into the side of your head, the frame is too narrow."

PLASTIC = CASUAL

"Plastic frames are a bit more fun, especially multi-colored styles. I equate them with jeans. Rimless and semi-rimless frames are more conservative and go best with slacks."

BIGGER ISN'T BETTER

"Stay away from oversized aviators. They detract from your features, especially when they touch the cheek and cover your face. You want to wear the glasses, not the other way around."