

## FrameTech

# Spectacle *Antiquity*

The art of recrafting antique frames

BY TIMOTHY HERRICK

**W**hat's old is new again for optician Nader Zadi and his ultra-exclusive Manhattan Opticianry, Customeyes. That saying clearly describes Zadi's expertise and art. The man literally fashions old spectacles into enviable new eyewear.

Customeyes only dispenses vintage frames. For Zadi, vintage does not mean a manufacturer's retro line, but authentic antique frames. A choice few are from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, although most are early-to-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century vintage. Zadi doesn't just refurbish. He redesigns. This entails reshaping eyewires and fastidiously creating innovative lens shapes for drilled mounts.

The eyewear is then painstakingly tailored to each wearer. "I work by appointment only," says Zadi. The niche is lucrative. Prices for the customer are \$1,000 to \$3,000. Clients include business and entertainment executives, artists and antique fanatics. Zadi does no advertising. "My clientele is completely word of mouth."

The appeal is crafted on personal attention, the quality of the frames and the exclusivity. "My clientele wants to look good in their glasses, but they also want something unique, something individual, something nobody else will be wearing."

### PRIVATE STUDIO

Customeyes does not have a store front. Zadi's lab and fitting studio is located in an apartment in Manhattan's upper east side. The fitting area displays some striking redesigns—such as round frames with buffalo horn inserts—in glass cases. Most frames and original lens shapes, however, are kept in wooden drawers. Clients coming to the studio receive Zadi's undivided attention. Optical artifacts such as a

pince-nez and an antique microscope, accentuate the decidedly old-fashioned ambiance.

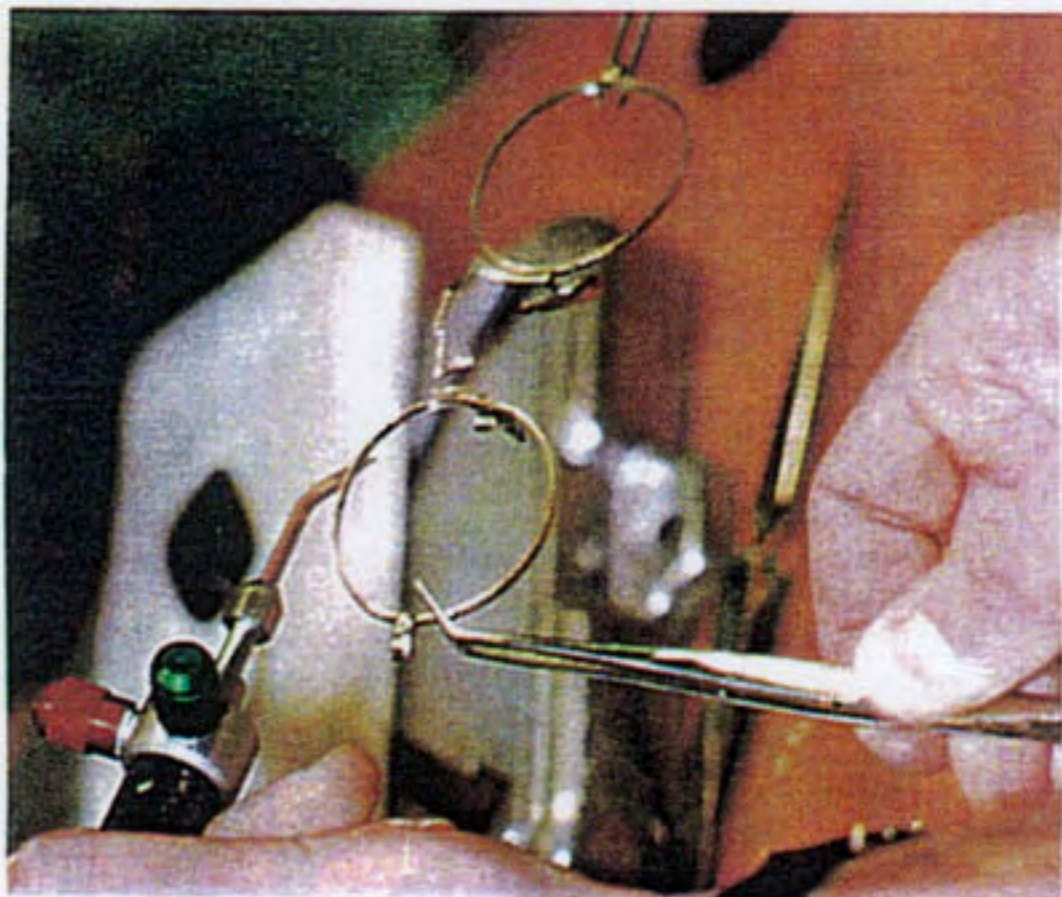
About a third of the space is devoted to the "lab" area featuring a long wooden table for the meticulous bench work. Hand tools, including tiny buffers, files and a jeweler's soldering iron, hang neatly on the front edge of the table. There's also a jeweler's vice, a magnifier and spotlight for detail work, a full complement of screwdrivers and pliers, a Dremel Drill and small drill press. A small sub-stand holds a handstone and AIT Mach 5 pattern edger. There's no stand-alone buffer. All polishing is performed with hand-held jeweler's tools. "I want to control the edge polish and I get better control by hand," he says.

There's also no pattern maker. Each lens shape is literally created by hand. It may be the only case where high-tech edging equipment isn't warranted. "Patternless edgers can't trace the shapes I want," says Zadi. "And a pattern maker can't cut them."

Producing the lens shapes Zadi wants—modified ovals and rectangles, star and diamond configurations, as well as shapes resembling abstractions of strawberries or clouds—is a methodical process. The edging starts with sketches cut into patterns for each imagined form. After modifying with a hand-file the lens is cut on a pre-Reagan era edger. Sometimes, the lens is shaped entirely by handstone.

Since most of the lenses are A-R coated and the lens of choice is a 1.60 or 1.66 high-index plastic, fabrication is slow and deliberate. "You have to be careful, because the lenses are expensive. But I get lost in crafting each lens and lose track of time. Sometimes I look at my watch and it's

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