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American Eyewear Companies Spread Their Roots and Grow



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GWENDOLYN PLUMMER / SENIOR ASSOCIATE EDITOR

NEW YORK—What it means to be American-made can be different for everyone. In July of 2021, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) introduced a new rule that both clarified and narrowed what it means to be a product “Made in the USA.” Under this new rule, the FTC prohibits companies from labeling their products as “Made in the USA” unless “virtually all” <https://www.ftc.gov/business-guidance/blog/2022/04/ftc-charges-battery-maker-first-case-under-made-usa-labeling-rule>

pieces or ingredients are made and sourced in the U.S. In addition, the final assembly or processing and “substantial transformation” of the item must occur within the U.S. as well.

The rule is strict, and it can be tough to reach every single requirement—in the eyewear industry, for example, many American-made frames are constructed and designed here in the U.S. using globally

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sourced components, like Italian acetate or Japanese titanium.

The takeaway for consumers and eyewear companies alike is where and how American-made frames are constructed: here, in our own backyard, with American personality and heart.

In 2020, the Reshoring Institute (<https://reshoringinstitute.org/made-in-usa-survey>) surveyed nearly 500 Americans and found that 69 percent prefer products with a “Made in the USA” label. Plus, 83 percent of those surveyed said they’d be willing to pay as much as 20 percent more for an item that is American-made.

Alongside the benefits on the consumer front, keeping production in the U.S. creates more jobs and boosts local economies. There's little question, then, that being American-made has its benefits—something the eyewear community has known for a long, long time.

American-made eyewear has its own special space within our industry, one associated with heritage and innovation, combining design and technology that uniquely American way.

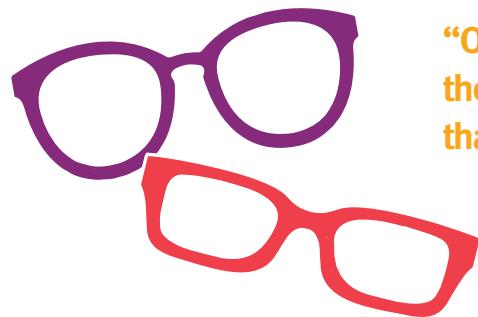
Some brands have been American-made from day one, born with the vision to grow on home soil. Others have seen the U.S. as a perfect place to take their next steps—a land to expand upon, a place to plant more roots. But no matter how these eyewear brands made it here, they’re making an impact—and, in line with the idea of the American Dream, they’re being welcomed with open arms.

It's not just American production that's picking up steam, though—American fashion is having a moment too. Both the 2021 and 2022 Met Galas were themed around American fashion, designers, identity and history; 2021 was titled "In America: A Lexicon of Fashion," while 2022 was "In America: An Anthology of Fashion." An exhibit at

the Metropolitan Museum of Art always accompanies the Gala—open through September 2022 for all to see, this year's exhibit presented the growth and evolution of American fashion, and shone a spotlight on some of the most influential American designers and fashion voices.

Brent Miller, owner of Albright Opticians in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, has seen patient interest in American-made eyewear, too. Miller and his team weren't specifically looking for an American-made collection, but found themselves drawn to North Point Eyewear, Eyenavision's line made in Pittsburgh.

Because the frames are made in the same state as Albright Opticians, Miller hopes to see an increase in patient interest—and a willingness



“Our patients really appreciate the fact that they are made in state in Pittsburgh and that has made it easier to sell.”

- Brent Miller, owner of Albright Opticians in Lancaster, Pennsylvania

to pay the extra cost that comes along with being made in the U.S.

Like many ECPs, Miller has recently hired a company to help overhaul the practice's social media and online presence—part of that will include promoting their American made collections. "Our patients really appreciate the fact that they are made in state in Pittsburgh and that has made it easier to sell," Miller told VM.

Every year, *Vision Monday* takes a look at the landscape of American-made eyewear. From East to West, and everything in between, American-grown and American-planted eyewear companies are thriving, adapting and carving out a unique space for themselves in our big, connected world. ■

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L'Amy America Debuts Home Grown Seven.Five

It was 2021 when L’Amy America signed an exclusive manufacturing agreement with Wayne, New Jersey-based Scene Eyewear. This year, that agreement came to fruition with the announcement of Seven.Five (75), L’Amy America’s American-made eyewear collection.

Designed at L'Amy's headquarters in Connecticut and manufactured of global components in New Jersey, L'Amy America's brand new Seven.Five collection is a luxury, handcrafted American collection. The initial collection, which officially launches at Vision Expo West this month, is made up of 12 models in four colors each. Sales from the collection support the Two Blind Brothers' charitable initiative, too.

The collection's name is a nod to American history, L'Amy's director of lifestyle brands Connie Reiss explained: "The brand name 75 symbolizes the beginning—the start—the impetus of a movement. In 1775 the first, and perhaps most pivotal battle of the Revolutionary War was fought. The year 1775 marked the beginning of America's quest for freedom.

"In a similar spirit, 75 is our start. We are among the first of a small handful of eyewear pioneers to invest in the American eyewear manufacturing movement. 75 not only symbolizes the beginning, but more importantly signifies the early days of the American eyewear revolution."

L’Amy America is a large, global company, with international brands and partners—but the team sees the importance of homegrown production, too. Reiss told VM, “While we are a global company with manufacturing partners all around the world, we do believe in the importance of supplier diversification and that American manufacturing should play a bigger role than it currently does in the global eyewear supply chain.

"Ultimately, we are a consumer solutions provid-



L'Amy America is launching Seven.Five, its American-made collection designed in Connecticut and produced in New Jersey.

“Superior quality, handmade acetates, comfort-sculpted temple design, gorgeously distinctive colorations, and subtle patriotic detail make for a memorable collection.”

- Daniel Shack, VP of business and product development, L'Amy America

er and we create eyewear products and segments that fill consumer needs. The consumer demand for USA crafted products continues to increase. By addressing this consumer need, it becomes yet another key solution-segment for us that sets us apart from the competition.”

L’Amy America CEO and president Stephen Rapoport agreed. “At L’Amy America we are proud of our international heritage, but we are an American company. For decades we have been a global supplier with manufacturing facilities in various countries. Today, more than ever, we believe in the importance of supplier diversification but we believe America should play a more significant role in the manufacturing process.”

Combining global know-how and American handicraft, the 75 collection will be a staple for L’Amy America going forward—a collection that will allow the company to show off its personality and vision. “We combine skill and artistry resulting in a collection in which you can literally feel the craftsmanship—the luxury—and more than anything else, feel the commitment and pride that goes into the careful creation of each and every frame,” explained VP of business and product development Daniel Shack.

"Superior quality, handmade acetates, comfort-sculpted temple design, gorgeously distinctive colorations, and subtle patriotic detail make for a memorable collection." ■

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State and AO, an Icon in Chicago

Europa Eyewear and the city of Chicago are almost synonymous these days, and anyone who knows Europa can't imagine it calling another city home. The company's Chicago factory opened in 2014, and today it's where the Europa team produces State and American Optical, two of its most iconic and timeless collections.

AO, of course, is deeply intertwined with American history—it's the birthplace of the iconic Saratoga style worn by JFK, and has over 150 years under its belt. State, too, is inextricable from its home city of Chicago. Designed by creative director Nico Roseillier, the collection is meticulously crafted by a team of just 75 in Chicago.

CEO Scott Shapiro told VM, “When we built our American factory in 2014, we felt like the strategy fit our company values and direction perfectly. We were dedicated to keeping our brands and our mindset independent, while at the same time offering our customers something that was different, and something that meant something to them deeply. Having the opportunity to craft the product we’re selling ‘with our own hands’ has completely changed the way we view our offerings and even our place in the world.”

Shapiro and the Europa team find customer feedback to American-made eyewear to be “overwhelmingly positive. They want to offer American-made options to their patients, and more importantly, they want opportunities to discuss the quality and craftsmanship that go into the products they sell.” Having a small team based in the U.S. means ECPs and their customers can build personal connections with the people who make their eyewear—making each purchase that much more special.”

Although supply chain issues hit domestic manufacturing hard, Shapiro also found that COVID reignited interest in and passion for domestic



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- Scott Shapiro, CEO of Europa Eyewear/
State Optical



Scott Shapiro, CEO of Europa Eyewear/State Optical, said State's American-made adventure is just beginning. The company calls Chicago home.

production. Europa is continuing to grow alongside this interest and passion, and American Optical in particular has a bright future, with an expanded sunglasses collection and the launch of ophthalmics planned for 2023. ■

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The McGee Group Grows in Georgia

Producing acetate frames at home in Marietta, Georgia was a natural decision for The McGee Group—a company whose 20-year vision plan included the simple phrase “we need to make our stuff.”

"We needed to complete our story," Matthew McGee, executive vice president of The McGee Group told VM. "The McGee Group is proud to be an American company that works with American brands that does its design work in America, and the next logical step was to start making our eyewear here as well." Right now, the Group produces its acetate frames in Marietta, but plans to expand offerings in the next year. McGee explained, "We're excited to begin producing several of our most well-known and popular frames at our facility in Georgia as we move into 2023."

Like everyone else, The McGee Group's Georgia team have faced issues brought about by COVID.



Making more products at home in Marietta, Georgia has resulted in interest and excitement from The McGee Group's customers.

the supply chain and the economy, but, McGee said, the situation “forced us to rethink the need to gain better control of our supply chain. Part of that meant investing in the capabilities to do

our own manufacturing, giving us control over the totality of the process from design to production to distribution.”

Making more products at home has also resulted in interest and excitement from customers, McGee said. "There's a lot of excitement around the certainty of the product, as they know that our team will be responsible for every step of the process." Plus, there's the pride in knowing that The McGee Group's team is helping their local community, too. "There's also a good bit of pride, as we strive to create American products and create new jobs for people in our home community as we grow our manufacturing efforts," McGee said.

With a solid foundation already, The McGee Group's homegrown collection is headed into a new year with direction and excitement, bringing more production to the U.S. to complete the Group's story. ■

Hilco's American-Made Safety Eyewear

Hilco Vision introduced OnGuard, its American-made industrial safety eyewear in 2019. The entire collection of safety frames are designed, developed, tested and manufactured in the U.S., and made of domestically sourced material from material and manufacturing partners that span the country.

Debbie Fitzgibbons, director of marketing communications at Hilco Vision, told VM, "The OnGuard team thrives on filling the gaps in the marketplace, no matter how challenging, and we wanted to work on something that hadn't been done before that had benefits on a greater scale. It took 3 years and countless hours from a dedicated group of people to make it successful, but the experience empowered us to see what else is possible—not



Hilco Vision's OnGuard safety eyewear collection is designed, developed, tested, and manufactured in the USA.

just in USA made safety eyewear, but in looking at our overall business with fresh perspective."

Fitzgibbons said that Hilco's Made in USA frames consistently rank among Hilco customers' top-selling styles, and that the demand continues to exceed expectations. The team has had to face new challenges over the past few years, pivoting to

work around increasing demand and supply chain issues, but the adaptation is, overall, “making us a stronger organization,” said Fitzgibbons.

Now, the team is working hard on the second generation of its USA collection, with plans to offer a broader range of fit options, new styles and exciting design elements. ■

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modo, made in Brooklyn

Industry City is a large campus located on the Gowanus Bay waterfront in Brooklyn, New York, where design studios and manufacturing facilities thrive alongside shops, restaurants and gorgeous views. It's also the New York City enclave that Modo Eyewear calls home to its M Factory, its factory dedicated to the production of Modo's Made in Brooklyn collection.

Modo opened its factory in 2016, a move that was both an opportunity and a challenge at the time. Brian Dombrowski, Modo's director of ECP sales and marketing, explained, "There has been an appetite from U.S. consumers over the past decade for American made products, not just in eyewear but [in] everyday items like apparel and accessories to higher end purchases like cars and bikes. Modo's owner and global CEO Alessandro Lanaro and Rebecca Geifer, CEO of Modo Americas saw the opportunity and challenge and we are proud to be among the leaders in the industry for American made eyewear."

Although the past few years have presented challenges related to COVID, supply chain issues and rising inflation, Dombrowski told *VM* that Modo's nimble and responsive leadership has led the company through these rougher waters. Now, Modo is focusing on expanding its Brooklyn Made collection with new shapes and colors, while also making positive changes to production. He explained, "Our factory has also improved their processes and become more efficient so we remain excited to offer amazing products with the highest quality that Modo is known for." ■



Brian Dombrowski, Modo's director of ECP sales and marketing, has seen a growing appetite for American-made eyewear from U.S. consumers.



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- Brian Dombrowski, director of ECP sales and marketing, Modo

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North Point Eyewear's Pittsburgh Roots

Having a factory based in the U.S. means the



**Crafted in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania,
Eyenavision's North Point offers stylish
American-made frames.**

- Caitlin Northup, director of products
and marketing, Evenavision

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Tema Offers Italian-Born, American-Made Eyewear

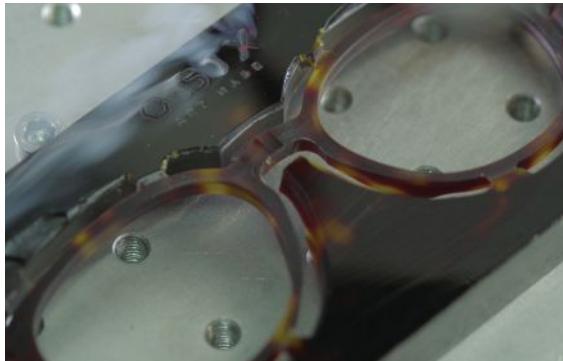
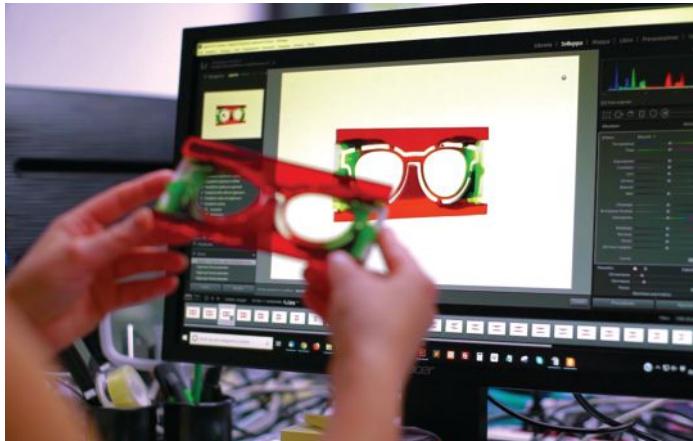
Italian-born and American-made, Thema Eyewear opened its Miami, Florida factory in 2017 to “bring the quality and tradition of Italian eyewear to the United States,” Giulia Valmassoi, CEO North America, Thema, told VM. The company’s three most popular brands are iGreen Hi-Tech, which focuses on biobased acetate frames, O-Six Eyewear and Giorgio Valmassoi 1971, its classic and contemporary collection that uses luxury materials.

Overall, Thema focuses on creating eyewear that is both eco-friendly, made to order and entirely customizable—all achieved in its Miami factory.

Valmassoi explained, "The importance of having our collection Made in USA was inspired by the opportunities we were fortunate [in] having when coming to the States. Having our factory in the U.S. has provided our workers, who have migrated from countries all [around] the world, an opportunity to use their skills and techniques in eyewear manufacturing and in turn creating a stronger community and economy.

Since most of our designs are made-to-order, our goal was to utilize the same manufacturing techniques used in Italy to make customizable frames for our U.S. customers within three to five business days from the order. Producing our frames in the U.S. doesn't just add the value of American made eyewear, but also gives us the ability to maintain the high quality of our products."

While the increasing prices of raw materials and wages have caused Thema to raise some prices themselves, Valmassoi has found that customers are happy to pay in a little more for Thema, especially considering the direct relationship between the Thema factory and the ECP. Thema welcomes customers for factory tours regularly whenever it is safe to do so, and Valmassoi said a majority of Thema's customers are small businesses who "have shifted their optical store inventory selection



to only purchase Made in USA products and support independent brands.”

The relationship between factory and ECP is more important than ever—and Thema understands how to bridge that gap in a uniquely impressive way. Getting a custom-made pair of frames into the customer's hands within a week is no small feat, but Thema does exactly that every single day. "Customers are excited when they hear only three to five business days for a custom frame to be produced and their patients receive the frame within seven days of placing their order," said Valmassoi. "With our frames being produced in small batches, we can uphold a higher quality of standard for all our

products and guarantee 100 percent customer satisfaction.”

Thema always aims to be at the forefront of eyewear innovation, especially when it comes to the areas of sustainability and customization. Eyewear that is made in the U.S. fits into these areas perfectly, said Valmassoi. "What we have seen lately in sales trends and customer demands, is an interest in eco friendly product offerings, interactive digital services, made-to-order designs, and Made in USA products."

As Thema continues to reach for what's next, being American-made remains at the heart of its growth. ■

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- Giulia Valmassoi, CEO
North America, Thema

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Art-Craft Optical Serves Up New Suns

For over 100 years, Art-Craft Optical has called Rochester, New York its home. The company, which has been manufacturing workforce and combat frames since 1918, is currently helmed by the third generation of the Eagle family, and shows no signs of slowing down.

Art-Craft has been supplying all branches of the U.S. and NATO-aligned military with frames for decades, with a 0 percent defect rate—and this year, they're bringing that same level of precision and durability to the consumer, too. Three years ago, the Eagle family began looking into design and then tooling for a commercial sun product line—one that they knew, without a doubt, would be made in the U.S.

Charlie and Christopher Eagle, owners of Art-Craft Optical, explained, "We spent time in Germany, Japan and Italy working to learn new techniques for tooling and manufacturing processes that include automated soldering machinery and the latest equipment innovations. We also beefed up our engineering department and brought back former production engineers from Art-Craft and Bausch + Lomb, as well as seasoned industry consultants from lifestyle and fashion categories for guidance in design, product development and marketing."

The result is The Art-Craft Classic Collection, a complete sunglass collection that celebrates three of Art-Craft's most enduring designs: The Aviator, The Sabre and The Clubman. The collection combines the authentic and historical heritage of Art-Craft's frames with the modern finishes and high-tech lenses that the optical marketplace demands, creating a truly special offering with a rich backstory—all made in Rochester.

Charlie and Christopher told VM, "Our desire was to bring our 100+ years of high-precision manufacturing skills, honed by our Department of Defense work, back to the commercial market. We



Art-Craft Optical has been making frames in Rochester, New York for over 100 years, supplying to all branches of the U.S. military. Now, the company is working on a new sunglasses collection that combines their military precision and technology with timeless fashion.



also felt, as did many of the former Bausch + Lomb folks we've been consulting with, that Rochester, once the optical frame manufacturing center of the U.S. could once again be realized... We dug through 100 years of our history and begin to reimagine products we've made over the past century, taking inspiration from our military and aviator DNA, for releasing this new sun collection steeped in our rich history of eyewear manufacturing.

"We are excited to be once again on the commercial side of the business and we are looking forward to what the next century has in store for Art-Craft Optical." ■

- Charlie and Christopher Eagle

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Randolph Eyewear in Massachusetts, the White House and Around the World

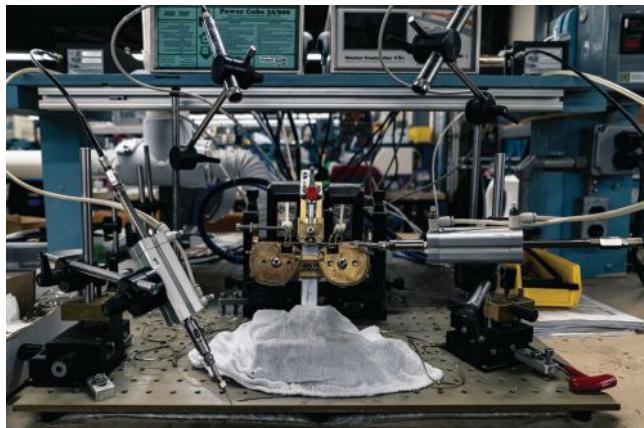
Randolph Eyewear handcrafts all its frames in its namesake town of Randolph, Massachusetts and has done exactly that since 1973, when former Royal Air Force navigator Jan Waszkiewicz and machinist Stanley Zaleski immigrated to the U.S. and opened up their own factory. Nestled just outside of bustling Boston, the Randolph factory still uses machines that Randolph engineers designed and built back in the '70s.

For the Randolph team, being American-made isn't just something confined to a special collection—"it's a core value and our authentic heritage," Amy Bean, brand communications and marketing manager at Randolph told VM. "Each pair of sunglasses that leaves our factory was designed and built within the same four walls by hardworking, local craftsmen and women."

Randolph had a huge moment in the spotlight in 2021, when the White House chose its iconic Concorde frame to be presented as a gift from President Biden to other world leaders in Geneva, Switzerland. The frames were a perfect choice for the President, whose fondness for aviators has been well-documented over the years.

But, of course, it wasn't just the design that made the frames a perfect gift—it's their American craftsmanship too. Randolph frames are made using jewelry-quality finishes like 23k gold, 23k white gold, and 22k rose gold. It takes nearly six weeks to make a single frame, with each frame constructed in 200 detailed steps.

COVID, a rapidly changing economy and blistering supply chain issues have hit Randolph, too, but these challenges haven't knocked the team down. Bean explained, "Certainly, supply chain for raw materials has made it difficult to create our frames within our ideal timeline, however, we're all learning and adapting to make the best out



Randolph considers "Made in USA" to be its core value and heritage. All frames are made in Randolph, Massachusetts using machines designed and built by Randolph engineers.



of the circumstances. Our teams have never been busier and we're hopeful for continual growth... Jan Waskiewicz, one of the Randolph founders, once said 'Respect where you come from. Reinvent where you're going.' And that's just what we're going to do." ■

“Each pair of sunglasses that leaves our factory was designed and built within the same four walls by hardworking, local craftsmen and women.”

- Amy Bean, brand communications and marketing manager, Randolph

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ClearVision's Spectaculars, Handcrafted and American-Made

ClearVision's Spectaculars is handcrafted in New Jersey, just one state away from the company's Long Island, New York headquarters. The goal with Spectaculars is to combine "time-honored manufacturing techniques with modern production processes and hand-finished details," resulting in eye-wear that is "truly new American vintage," David Friedfeld, president of ClearVision Optical told *VM*.

The collection showcases iconic and classic American frame styles from the '30s through to the '70s—and the Spectaculars team produces these frames in the same vintage colorways and finishing details, too.

"Spectaculars USA is supporting optical independence and building a nationwide network of leading vision care providers offering American-made eyewear," said Friedfeld. "The core aesthetic of the Spectaculars collection has its roots in genuine American eyewear dating back to the '30s. The most iconic and classic American styles are reproduced using the same colors and finishing details as were used in the past...Spectaculars continues to stay true to time-tested production techniques, honoring the original method of American manufacturing and hand-finishing." ■



**Spectaculars, from ClearVision,
is a love letter to vintage, iconic
American styles—all made in
New Jersey.**

“The core aesthetic of the Spectaculars collection has its roots in genuine American eyewear dating back to the ‘30s. The most iconic and classic American styles are reproduced using the same colors and finishing details as were used in the past..Spectaculars continues to stay true to time-tested production techniques, honoring the original method of American manufacturing and hand-finishing.”

- David Friedfeld, president, ClearVision Optical