

RETRO-SPECTIVE



Glasses evoking the charm of yesteryear while giving a cool nod to modernity are now in focus, says **Nick Scott**

Men who wear glasses are so much more gentle, sweet and helpless," says Marilyn Monroe's flighty band player Sugar Kane in *Some Like it Hot*. This might have been the case in the late 1950s when the film was released, or even in the late 1920s of its setting, but here in 2018, spectacles resembling the eyewear worn in those and other past decades give off not so much an air of unthreatening vulnerability as one of cool poise. It's something not lost on either high-end opticians or major menswear brands, whose newfound affection for a retrospective approach to eyewear is proving a hit with stylish men.

Maison Bonnet – the family-owned bespoke glasses maker based in Paris, which opens a London flagship **this month** – continues to produce the frames it once made for Le Corbusier (pictured top), Jacques Chirac and Yves Saint Laurent. "Today people are revisiting those styles [all price on request] and playing with their visual references," says Franck Bonnet, the fourth generation of his family to helm the company. "The

From top: Maison Bonnet glasses originally designed for architect and designer Le Corbusier, left, price on request. Rolf wood Topolino frames, €795

small round glasses of the '30s, the thick newsroom-style black frames of the '50s, the extraordinary designs of the '70s, or the exuberance of the '80s: our bespoke approach allows us to reinterpret and

Clockwise from near right: Cubitts Broadfield frames, £125. Gregory Peck in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Tom Davies 1983 Collection glasses, from £295. Zanzan Rizzi glasses, from £230. Ray-Ban aviator opticals, from £124



adapt these influences according to each client's desires, personality and facial features."

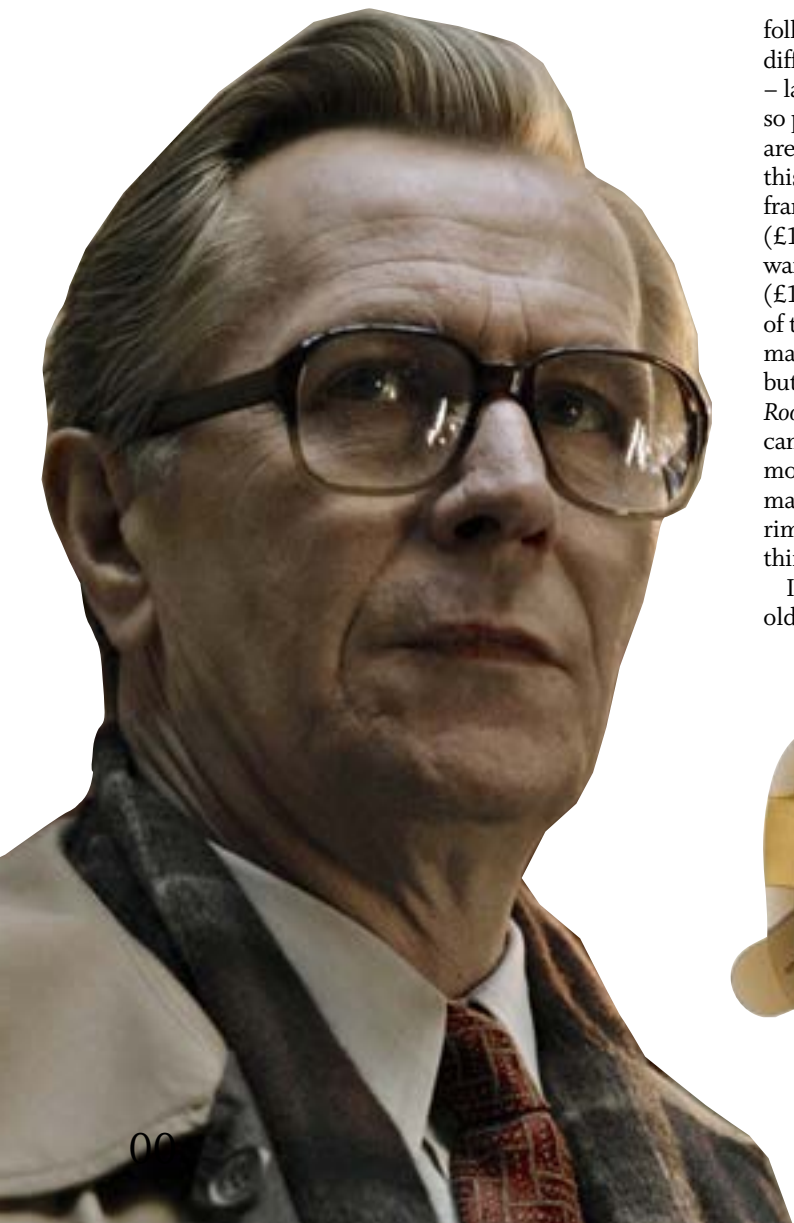
At EB Meyrowitz, the London-based luxury opticals brand founded in 1875, it's a similar story. "We've always attracted clients because of our traditional craftsmanship, design and materials," says director Jamie Davison-Lungley. "But lately we've also seen a growing interest in styles from the first half of the 20th century." The company is now recreating a number of archive pieces dating back to the early '30s and '40s – including the delicately elegant Blenheim and the George models, which come in acetate (£995) or horn substitutes (£2,500).

Younger, hipster brands are also in on the act. Take Austrian label Rolf, which handmakes wood, stone and horn frames in the Tyrolean alps, including the Lennon-esque Topolino (€795, pictured on previous page). "Wooden frames and new 'disruptive' business models

are being driven by newcomers to the market from entrepreneurial, tech or digital backgrounds, who have seen the potential in the glasses business," says Gordon Ritchie, managing director at Kirk Originals. And with hipster entrepreneurs there often comes a vintage vibe.

Kirk Originals rose to prominence with the unofficial ambassadorial aid of Mick Jagger, Oasis, The Smiths and Paul Weller, and is now regaining its cult status – in part through glasses that evoke the charm, attitude or cool of yesteryear with an appealing nod to modernity, such as the Brigham in olive green, the Margate in smokey grey (£225) and the chunky Harris in polished tortoiseshell (£425, both pictured overleaf). All will pay dividends to a man looking to channel Michael Caine as the first action hero to wear glasses – Harry Palmer in *The Ipcress File*.

For Tom Broughton, who founded Cubitts in 2012, the sheer elegance of postwar frames is a classic case of form



following function. "In the late 1940s, the NHS tested different shapes and found universal appeal in the Panto – later worn by Gregory Peck in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and so popular now," he says. "They have a round shape but are slightly peaked, with a wider top than bottom because this suited natural eye movements better than the round frames that preceded them." Cubitts' own Broadfield (£125, pictured top) features the Panto lens, while those wanting to step up the retro could try the Guilford (£125), whose traditional 'W' bridge rests on the crest of the nose rather than the sides. They might give a more mature wearer a touch of the Swiss-chalet watchmaker, but they nail retro hipster (think Daniel Day Lewis in *A Room with a View* – about as tastefully antiquated as one can get without going full pince-nez). Another Cubitts model (£425) offering weapons-grade retro is from its made-to-measure Gold collection; it features a windsor rim and curl ends that hook behind and under the ears – think Cillian Murphy in *Peaky Blinders*.

Indeed, popular culture is the inevitable gust in old-school frames' sails. Tom Davies' new 1983

Collection (from £295, example pictured above) fashioned from cotton acetate also draws on a movie reference. "About five years ago I rewatched *Brewster's Millions* on a flight to Chicago and was so inspired by the frames worn by Lonette McKee's character that I spent most of the flight designing the initial collection," he says.

And it's not just films that provide inspiration. Italian handmade sunglasses specialist Zanzan designed its first opticals for 2018 and has three backward-glancing models in its collection. The D-frame acetate Rizzi (from £230, pictured above centre) is inspired by Gigi Rizzi, who spent the summer of '68 as playboy beau to Brigitte Bardot; the Arango (£275) is a cross between the Panto shape and classic aviators and takes its inspiration from John Lautner's architectural masterpiece Arango House, in Acapulco; while The Libero (£275) recreates the quadrilateral specs sensibilities of Marcello Mastroianni and is named after the "free" position in Italian football because of its versatility. It also adopts what the company calls "a contemporary approach to



From far left: Gary Oldman in *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*. Gucci GG03185 glasses, £300

Clockwise from near right:
Kirk Originals Harris
frames, £425. **Michael**
Caine in *The Ipcress File*.
Kirk Originals Margate
frames, £225



European vintage” – or to put it another way, lighter modern alloys with a vintage effect.

Ray-Ban is another sunglasses brand with an eye on retro-inspired designs. For the first time in its 80-year history it is offering its traditional aviators with clear prescription lenses (from £124, pictured on previous page). “In the past year there’s been a lot of interest in aviator shapes with a ’70s feel,” says Cubitts’ Broughton. Paul Smith’s brushed-silver Davison glasses (from £215) and Gucci’s GG0242S (£335) borrow from the same gene pool. And the Italian giant’s GG0318S (£300, pictured on previous page) goes further and takes Gary



Oldman’s distinctly 1970s bins in *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* up a flamboyant notch.

Happily, Paul Smith and Gucci are not the only major menswear brands focusing on retro eyewear. Dolce & Gabbana’s Jazz design (£260) features a keyhole bridge, common on heavier, thicker (more old-school) glasses as it distributes weight more evenly. They come in light Havana, striped brown and striped blue and brown, but the pair in black offer the clearest nod to the era.

Ermenegildo Zegna also uses a keyhole bridge on its thick-framed glasses (£165) reminiscent of Woody Allen’s trademark specs, but embellished by an elegant woven-leather effect on the temples and hinges. Another pair of round specs (£210) in slim metal with the brand’s iconic chevron pattern on the hinges and temples have more than a touch of Harrison Ford as Indiana Jones about them.

From Woody to Indy: it’s quite the retro spectrum. And with so many options now available, it seems it really is a feast for the eyes. ♦

THE GOOD OLD GAZE

Cubitts, 37 Marshall St, London W1 (020-7129 8128; cubitts.co.uk).



Dolce & Gabbana, 6-8 Old Bond St, London W1 (020-7659 9000; dolcegabbana.com). **EB Meyrowitz Optician**, 6 The Royal Arcade, 28 Old Bond St, London W1 (020-7493 5778; ebmeyrowitz.co.uk).

Ermenegildo Zegna, 37-38 New Bond St, London W1 (020-7518 2700; zegna.com). **The Eye Place**, 5 Charlotte Pl, London W1 (020-7583 1936; the-eye-place.co.uk). **Gucci**, 34 Old Bond St, London W1 (020-7629 2716; gucci.com). **Kirk Originals**, kirkoriginals.com.

Liberty, Regent St, London W1 (020-7734 1234; libertylondon.com). **Maison Bonnet**, 7 Stafford St, London W1 (maisonbonnet.com).

Paul Smith, 9 Albemarle St, London W1 (020-7493 4565; paulsmith.com). **Ray-Ban**, 15 James St, London WC2 (020-7420 9330; ray-ban.com). **Rolf**, rolf-spectacles.com and see The Eye Place. **Tom Davies**, 25 Royal Exchange, London EC3 (020-3711 0012; tdtomdavies.com). **Zanzan**, zanzan.co.uk and see Liberty.