

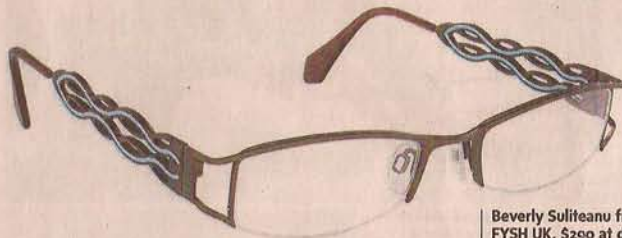
## GLASS ACTS

## WHAT A SPECTACLE

Canadian eyewear designs are giving those from Europe and Asia some serious competition, **Craig Saunders** writes. Welcome to the newest hall of frames



Edmonton-based Mike Christensen's M-Theory collection, \$220 to \$300 at dealers across Canada ([www.venuseyedesign.com](http://www.venuseyedesign.com)).



Beverly Suliteanu frames for FYSH UK, \$290 at dealers across Canada ([www.fyshuk.com](http://www.fyshuk.com)).



A design from Suliteanu's Evatik line, from \$270 at dealers across Canada ([www.evatik.com](http://www.evatik.com)).



Eyenigma frames by Toronto's Stephen Kapoor, \$350 to \$425 at dealers across Canada ([www.eyenigma.com](http://www.eyenigma.com)).



Mehran Baghaie's carved-maple frames, from \$650 through [www.spec-eyeworks.com](http://www.spec-eyeworks.com).

If you wanted great eyeglasses 20 years ago, you turned to designers from France or Italy. Today, though, you can also look to Canada, where a crop of new designers is turning out frames from funky to artful.

If one pair screams "Canada," it's the one by Vancouver designer Mehran Baghaie, owner of Spectacle Eyeworks ([www.spec-eyeworks.com](http://www.spec-eyeworks.com)). His latest creation features chunky arms carved from maple in a pattern reminiscent of Stanley Park totem poles. The glasses sit right on the nose of the trend toward eighties-era geek chic.

In today's luxury-eyewear market, metal and plastic are giving way to natural materials such as wood, leather and horn, which Baghaie combines with his interest in aboriginal culture.

"I have always wanted to incorporate Haida art into frames," he says. "Some of my frames also include tiki art, which is Pacific. If you look at

native art, whether it's from Fiji or the West Coast, you see similarities in the carvings."

The designer describes his patterns as a "mashup" of favourite influences. One of the carvings, for instance, includes a tiny skateboarder.

Baghaie, who migrated as a teenager from Iran to Vancouver, where he trained as an optician, first rose to fame in the 1990s when he made frames that tapped into the tribal tattoo trend. Those frames won him acclaim at major design shows in Paris and Tokyo, making him among the most decorated of Canada's dozen or so eyeglass designers.

One of the newest to the field is fellow Vancouverite Claudia D'Angelo, whose firm is called Claudia Alan ([www.claudiaalan.com](http://www.claudiaalan.com)). Her first collection, called aya, is being released this fall and features animal patterns by Corrine Hunt, an artist of Kwakiutl and Tlingit heritage.

With the Winter Olympics

just around the corner, both Baghaie and Alan are betting that Canadians will be a strong sell.

But stylish Canadian glasses don't only come from the West Coast. Beverly Suliteanu, a Montrealer, has created what might be among the country's most commercially successful collections. And they largely reflect European trends, such as the minimalism that defines her work for Kliik Denmark.

Another quality that distinguishes many of Suliteanu's collections is her use of bold colour, which may account for some of her own healthy sales of late.

In a recession, says Leatrice Eisemann, a fashion colour forecaster with the Pantone Color Institute, people tend to buy big-ticket fashion items such as suits in neutral colours but will go for colour in accessories.

Suliteanu's company, Wescan Optical ([www.wescan.ca](http://www.wescan.ca)), is likely doing well, she says, because women in particular are much more comfortable with brightly coloured glasses than they used to be. By contrast, men tend to be more conservative, although they too are experimenting with bolder and more intricate finishes. Tortoiseshell prints, for instance, now have more colours at play in them, while plain black frames are often streaked with grey to create horn-, wood- or feather-like patterns. Many of these intricate neutrals appear in Suliteanu's new Evatik collection.

If colour is your thing, however, you can't do much better than Edmonton's Venus Eyewear ([www.venuseyedesign.com](http://www.venuseyedesign.com)), where designer Mike Christensen has pulled out all the stops for his new M-Theory collection. Featuring flat metal fronts with arms made of custom zyl, a form of cellulose acetate, his richly textured offerings come in a candy store's worth of hues.

While Christensen has been

pushing the boundaries of colour since 2002, Toronto designer Stephen Kapoor brought out his first collection last spring. His Eyenigma frames, featuring wide metal temples that are cut and bent into wild, three-dimensional shapes, sell in some of the country's top optical boutiques (visit [www.eyenigma.com](http://www.eyenigma.com)).

As the diversity of offerings suggests, Canadian eyewear designs don't have a clear identity as of yet: We haven't rallied around the minimalism of the Danes or the severe angles of some Japanese frames or the piles of rhinestones on many Italian designs. Even so, they are more than holding their own on the world stage, standing up to competition from countries with a stronger and longer design tradition.

As Baghaie might characterize it, Canada's eyewear is a bit of a mashup - and unapologetic about it.

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