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## Oliver Goldsmith: Spectacle-maker to the stars

22 March 2012 | J. Philip Rathgen

*With the gentle rays of sunshine heralding the onset of spring, what better time to buy a new pair of sunglasses? The famous Oliver Goldsmith brand was one of the first to be regularly featured in fashion magazines, and can be seen on the faces of the rich and famous from Acapulco to Zermatt.*

P. Oliver Goldsmith began making spectacles at his Poland Street, London premises in 1926. Using his second name 'Oliver' (his first was actually Philip), the former optical salesman was one of the pioneers of making frames from an early plastic known as Erinoid, an imitation tortoiseshell or horn material popular in the closely associated button industry.

It was the original Oliver Goldsmith's son, Charles Meyer Goldsmith, who recognised eyewear for its potential in the fashion business and pioneered the use of ornamental frames (sometimes with jewels or metal inserts) in the 1950s. On P. Oliver Goldsmith's death in 1947, Charles adopted the 'Oliver Goldsmith' name himself, developing the business to such a level that its products were sold in Harrods and Harvey Nichols, and were regularly featured in *Vogue*, *Tatler* and *Harper's Bazaar*.



During this period, Oliver Goldsmith-designed sunglasses were the choice of celebrities such as Audrey Hepburn and Peter Sellers. Michael Caine's famous heavy black frames were also Oliver Goldsmith creations, and John Lennon once commissioned the company to design a special wire-framed pair, known by the Beatle as his 'Olivers'.



In the 1980s, the Oliver Goldsmith company was run by brothers Andrew and Raymond Goldsmith, the youngest scions of the dynasty. Despite a falling-out between the pair in 1989, when each went his own way (Oliver Goldsmith Eyewear and Oliver Goldsmith Sunglasses being the result), the company is still active in all markets.



After Raymond's death in 1997, Claire Goldsmith took over the sunglasses side of the business and her frames can be seen worn by modern-day celebrities such as Robbie Williams, Jude Law and Gwyneth Paltrow.

The Oliver Goldsmith shop in London's Notting Hill sells modern frames, holds the archive of over 500 pairs of vintage 'OG' frames and serves as the location for the company's famous bespoke service, where hand-made spectacles can be ordered made-to-measure.

Photos: Oliver Goldsmith

Video: Victoria & Albert Museum

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