

WWDACCESSORIES

A Golden Era for Eyewear



Ray-Ban gold aviators.

By Lauren Benet Stephenson

THANKS TO A HEAVY CELEBRITY SHOWING AND THE lure of limited edition luxury, gold-lensed sunglasses are shining brightly.

The trend of 24-karat gold-lensed sunglasses seems to have stemmed largely from a plethora of paparazzi shots of Brad Pitt, Angelina Jolie and Halle Berry wearing them.

Badgley Mischka Perry sunglasses by Sama Eyewear were spotted on Jolie this fall as she traipsed through Italy. Next, Rihanna sported the same frames in her "So Hard" video. This spring, Sarah Jessica Parker towered over the fashionable populace in billboards for "Sex and the City 2" wearing Mykita & Bernhard Wilhelm's Franz limited edition gold aviators.

Lindsay Champine, a manager at Urban Optiques, an up-scale eyewear provider, said the style's popularity in recent months is directly related to this celebrity placement.

"Sarah Jessica Parker from "Sex and the City 2" wore them in the opening scenes, so that has a lot to do with it," Champine said.

Sama Eyewear, which produces its own signature collection in conjunction with Badgley Mischka and Loree Rodkin Eye Couture sunglasses, fancies itself the forefather of gold-lens eyewear. The brand unveiled a limited edition series, Sahara Heart of Gold for Sama Eyewear, with 24-karat gold lenses with micro-plating, which covers the lenses with a light, 24-karat coating, in May 2009. A Sama spokesman explained the impetus behind incorporating gold is the importance of limited edition luxury styles.

Mykita introduced its limited edition gold aviators, which retail for \$525, in January of last year during Berlin Fashion Week. Co-owner Philipp Haffmans said, "Once the first images from the set of 'Sex and the City 2' were released...we started getting inundated with e-mails and calls and immediately had a long waiting list for the product...sales have been fantastic since then." Sama eyewear retails from \$550 to \$1,100; with the exception of the Sahara Heart of Gold collection, which is priced at \$1,500, of which all proceeds go to the Betty Ford Center.

David Yurman launched its 24-karat Waverly gold aviator frames at Vision Expo East in March, retailing for \$375 in select David Yurman boutiques. Michael Kors will introduce a limited edition of the Michael Kors aviator in 22-karat gold in November, selling for \$395 nationwide in Michael Kors boutiques.

Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen's apparel line, Elizabeth and James, launched its first eyewear collection last month and introduced a limited edition line that featured 24-karat gold lenses and retails for \$425 at select doors. Jill Collage, president of Dualstar Entertainment, the parent company

of Elizabeth and James, said the inspiration behind the eyewear was, "To create eyewear for an aspirational customer and to create something very special for our loyal customer."

Ray-Ban has featured gold-hued lenses in its aviator frames, such as the Ultra Gold sunglasses that retail for \$290, since its inception, but "sales of gold-lens sunglasses have increased with the current trend," said Kristen McCabe, vice president of Sun and Luxury Products for parent Luxottica. The company also produces eyewear for Chanel, which has its own gold-lensed aviators that retail for \$485.

Though it may seem paradoxical to embrace a metal like gold as it continues to skyrocket in price, McCabe said, "Because of its cost, gold lenses are usually associated with limited editions," which increases demand.

Last week, the precious metal was selling for more than \$1,200 an ounce compared with an average of \$928.64 in May 2009 and \$421.87 in May 2005.

When asked why she believed gold-frame sunglasses remained popular in a generally staples-only economy, Urban Optiques' Champine said: "They always say that in hard times women are known to keep the home front pretty and will spend extra money for lipstick and perfume. I think the same can be said here of these feel-good items."

The eyewear sector has proven its mettle during the prolonged recession. New licenses and collaborations have been plentiful, and since 2009 a parade of designers and brands have extended into the category, including Diane von Furstenberg, Stella McCartney, John Galiano, Tory Burch, Alexander Wang, Hogan, Tod's, Josie Natori, William Rast, Jimmy Choo and Dsquared2.

Von Furstenberg said of the eyewear at her launch, "Sunglasses are all about two things — glamour and protection — it's more than an accessory, it's a necessity."

Some celebrities delved into the action as well, like Mary J. Blige (who launched her own eyewear line); Madonna, who collaborated with Dolce & Gabbana; Rachel Bilson for Sunglass Hut, and Róisín Murphy with Linda Farrow Vintage.

Eyewear has proven profitable for the publicly traded firms, as well. Marcolin SpA reported profits up 44.3 percent in the first quarter to 6 million euros, or \$8.2 million, in the first quarter ended March 31. At the same time, Luxottica reported a 20.8 percent rise in net profits in the first quarter to 95.1 million euros, or \$131.2 million, compared with the same period last year, with sales rising 6 percent to 1.39 billion euros, or \$1.92 billion. During the same period, Safilo, which produces eyewear for such brands as Dior, Gucci and Yves Saint Laurent, reported net profits fell 0.3 percent to 1.7 million euros, or \$2.3 million.



From top: Michael Kors aviators in 22-karat gold; Chanel gold frames from the Denim Collection; Elizabeth and James limited edition Fairfax sunglasses.



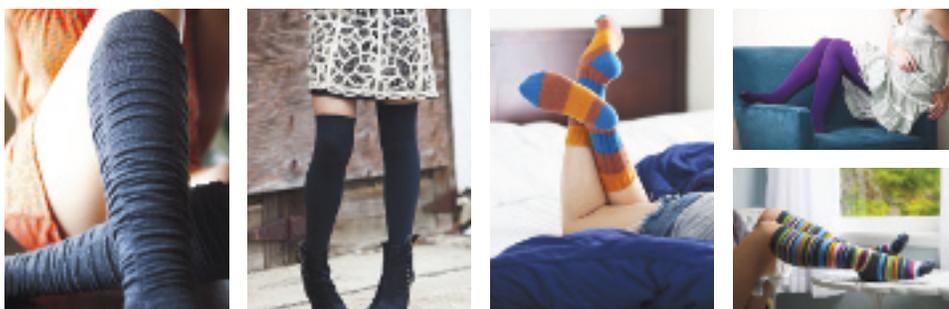
Angelina Jolie in Badgley Mischka gold aviators.



Sarah Jessica Parker on the set of "Sex and the City 2," wearing Mykita & Bernhard Wilhelm's Franz limited edition gold aviators.



David Yurman gold aviators.



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