

## Quality Trumps All at The Eye Bar

**By Rachel Bozek** Optician Stacey Plank opened The Eye Bar in 2009 after getting her start in the industry working with Sama Eyewear's Sheila Vance. The vast majority of the St. Louis, MO, boutique's inventory is made by independent designers, and Plank, who runs the business with her husband, Jared, prides herself in the quality of the shop's offerings.

**SUNGLASSES:** When you first opened The Eye Bar, how was your focus on luxury eyewear determined?

**STACEY PLANK:** When I worked for Sama Eyewear, I loved everything that Sheila Vance created. It was the first time I realized that if there's a true designer behind eyewear, then you get that same flavor that you see in clothes. Diane Von Furstenberg has her signature look, so does Tom Ford, so do Marchesa dresses—they all have that flavor from the designer. When you start seeing that in eyewear, you start to see their personalities come out. Sheila's eyewear was so beautiful and I loved working for her. The next phase for me was to do something on my own. We wanted to carry pieces from designers that we knew, who loved what they made.

**SG:** How would you define luxury eyewear?

**SP:** To me, quality is what defines luxury. It's certainly not price. Everybody has a different budget and I think in our store we're pretty good at covering that. It's quality. It's the craftsmanship that goes into something, how well it's made, and if it can stand the test of time—just like a great handbag or a good coat.

**SG:** When it comes to suns, do the trends in Hollywood influence your inventory choices?

**SP:** Occasionally. Most people are confident in who they are, and they don't necessarily have to be Jay Z or Nelly, but if something's really hot, and a celebrity is wearing it, people are going to reach out for

that. When people shop for luxury, they wonder, "Why would a person who has the money to buy anything in the world buy this brand?" And that's what draws someone to that same brand. Because if celebrities can afford multi-million dollar homes, why would they spend \$400 on a sunglass? Because it's made so well.

**SG:** Have you seen a particular sunglass style that really grabbed the public's attention after a celebrity wore it?

**SP:** The frame that Jay Z wore, which is Oliver People's Daddy B, was huge, and it had its own calling. It became so popular that they recreated the frame in a smaller size, because Jay Z is a big guy. That's what I also like about these designers: they really work for who their clients are. This style didn't fit everybody, so they created a small one so other people could get that same look.

**SG:** What's your approach when customers want luxury sunwear but don't really know where to begin?

**SP:** Sunglasses are the best thing



that anyone can do to prevent eye damage. When somebody comes in and they don't really know what they want, we talk about what they're using them for. It's really about knowing what their lifestyle is and how they want to present themselves to the world.

**SG:** How do you address customers' resistance to the cost of some luxury sunwear?

**SP:** People should just give them a chance! A lot of times people say, "Oh, I can't afford to buy something like this. What if I lose them?" Well, how many people have an expensive smartphone? We don't lose those. When you invest money into something you care about, you'll make sure you always know where it is. I tell people to not pass by that opportunity because this one thing is going to last a really long time if they take care of it.

