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UPFRONT

Inside the Frame

A 20/20 EXCLUSIVE WITH WESTGROUPE'S VICE PRESIDENT OF PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR **BEVERLY SULITEANU**
BY JILLIAN URCELAY



JU: You have been designing for WestGroupe's brands for almost two decades. How have you seen eyewear and the industry change over this time?

BS: When we first launched KLiK denmark and Fysh in the early 2000s, they caught retailers' attention because the design and detailing were so different from many of the brands that were in the marketplace. While colorful and interesting eyewear was readily available in high-end optical boutiques, this was not the case for the average ECP. I look around the industry today and the continued growth of our brands, and I am excited to see that "fun" eyewear is no longer a niche product. A significant number of consumers are looking for eyewear that reflects their individual style and are more interested in the design and detailing than they are in the label. Today, independent companies are driving the fashion direction of optical frames at all price points, and ECPs are recognizing this and starting to devote more board space to companies that offer unique and fun eyewear brands.

Which of your brands do you most enjoy working on and why?

That is such a difficult question to answer because each brand really has its own personality, and I enjoy working on them for different reasons. Of all our brands, Fysh is the most inspired by the world of fashion so it is a lot of

fun researching the fashion trends, playing with pattern and color, and pushing the design envelope while still ensuring strong sell through for the ECP. The aesthetic of KLiK denmark, with its clean, structured design, is probably the closest to my own taste so the designs resonate with me more than any other brand. I also love playing with proportions, which is imperative when designing for the narrow-fit consumer. I enjoy the challenge of taking an oversized shape and figuring out how to make it smaller without losing its essence. KLiK is also the first brand that I created—from developing the concept and designs, to sourcing the factories and organizing the launch, so it will always have a special meaning for me. Evatik is all about technology. Researching new materials, components and manufacturing processes is fun and fascinating. Many times, we apply learnings from Evatik across our other collections. I also get personal satisfaction knowing we have played a part in introducing color in eyewear to men. For Superflex, which is our affordable lifestyle collection, my biggest pleasure is knowing that regardless of a consumer's budget, they can purchase quality, stylish eyewear that they love and feel good wearing.

Where does your inspiration stem from when designing for your men's versus women's collections?

Our biggest inspiration regardless of the gender of the collection is fashion. As eyewear is viewed more and more as a fashion accessory, it is important that glasses are a natural extension of the

consumer's sense of style. We want our eyewear to seamlessly fit into their overall look. Interior design, industrial design and nature also inspire our designs.

What trends do you see making big waves in eyewear this year?

Sustainability and eco-friendly materials are undoubtedly a major trend in our industry. As the world grapples with the effects and impact of climate change, it is imperative that we continue, on all levels, to reduce the carbon footprint of our industry.

We can all agree that 2020 was a tough year. What have you learned about yourself and your company during this time?

These very difficult times reinforced that we truly are a WestGroupe family. Everyone, regardless of their position, sacrificed to help keep our company viable and strong. Managers and employees went above and beyond to keep our business running when we were shut down, and many worked from home to ensure that when we did reopen, we would hit the ground running. The outpouring of support that Michael and I received was overwhelming, even when we had to make heartbreaking decisions. Our sales team was there to support customers, even when they were furloughed, and once states began to re-open, they have not stopped being there for their customers. The Suliteanu family is immensely proud of and grateful for our entire WestGroupe family. ■