

Couture Optique

Barry Franzblau

Barry Franzblau has an eye for optics. Maybe that's why his store, Couture Optique, has been a fixture on Worth Avenue since 1989. Even before then, Franzblau had a reputation for innovation in the industry through his custom embellishing of existing products, adding rhinestones and hand painting frames. The focus shifted, however, when he bought Couture Optique, which sells hand-picked eyewear designs and accessories. "We're not a company that carries a lot of the mainstream brands, we bring in a product from Europe and Japan, some of which doesn't even have US distribution," Franzblau says. "So we're very unique in the sense that some of the eyewear that you see here is not available in other retail stores. The majority of other lines we carry may be available in other stores, but in very select stores."

One example is Chrome Hearts, a premier collection founded by Richard Stark. Stark who is known for gothic inspired collections of leatherwear and intricate detail in sterling silver jewelry. "He does leather pants for Cher and



Madonna," Franzblau says." So the eyewear collection incorporates a lot of those embellishments. It's a very gothic collection, with little accents on the frames including crosses, daggers, etc., in sterling silver, leather or wood treatments."

Franzblau knows star quality; he's been dubbed "optician to the stars" through a Los Angeles-based business founded in 1993. Celebrity Eyeworks is a leading provider of eyewear to film and television celebrities. Today Celebrity Eyeworks continues to provide eyewear to television and feature films under the direction of Michael Hirsch, a former partner of Franzblau.

"To date we've done, well over 600 feature films and television shows, including Academy Award-winning films and Emmy nominated shows," Franzblau says.

Couture Optique's glasses start at about \$175 and can reach into the thousands of dollars. The store also offers made-to-order glasses, like the solid-gold pair a client ordered recently for \$8,000. "The temples were made of solid buffalo horn, across the bridge and on the ends of the frame, they were embellished with diamonds," Franzblau says.

Couture Optique's traditional European interior may seem worlds away from its Celebrity Eyeworks counterpart tucked away in a large Los Angeles prop house, but both businesses serve a high-end clientele. "Sometimes we will drive a pair of glasses to someone's house. Sometimes we'll put a pair of glasses on a plane and do a Delta Dash counter-to-counter in the same day," Franzblau says.

Couture Optique's Robin Beans, a licensed optician who's been with Couture Optique for more than six years, says the store's customers know them. "People come back and want to see us. They trust what we tell them."