

Made in USA

American Eyewear Companies Celebrate Milestones and Look to the Future



Image Credit: Getty Images/ teddyandmia

GWENDOLYN PLUMMER / SENIOR ASSOCIATE EDITOR

NEW YORK—If there's one constant in a post-2020 world, it's change. The economy, labor market, retail landscape and overall world we live in has been in constant flux since March 2020, teaching us all how to be adaptive and inventive in everything we do. For many consumers, products labeled as "Made in the USA" have long been preferable—from giving back to the local

economy to lowering your carbon footprint, there are plenty of reasons that Americans want to buy homegrown products. That has not changed—though inflation has put a slight damper on what Americans are willing to spend.

A 2022 poll <https://www.retailbrew.com/stories/2022/07/28/consumers-will-pay-more-for-american-made-products-but-inflation-takes-a-toll-poll> from Retail Brew and The Harris Poll found that 72 percent of respondents said that even with

the challenge of inflation they seek out American-made products "very often or somewhat often," and 48 percent said they were willing to pay about 10 percent to 20 percent more for a product made here in the U.S. There is a slight generational divide, though: just 9 percent of Boomers strongly agreed with the statement that American-made products are too expensive, while 13 percent of Gen X, 23 percent of Millennials and 16 percent of Gen Z agreed.

Continued on page 50



Over 100 Years of Art-Craft Optical Eyewear

Art-Craft Optical has been a staple of the American eyewear landscape for over 100 years. Established in Rochester, New York, in 1918, the company is currently led by the third generation of the Eagle family, carrying on a long legacy of American eyewear production.

Art-Craft has been supplying all branches of the U.S. and NATO-aligned military with frames for decades, and they will soon offer that same level of performance and precision to consumers. The company began looking into designing and creating an American-made sun line about four years ago, with plans to launch in January 2024. Inspired by vintage Art-Craft frames and lenses from the 1940s, the designs will be available for a “sneak peek” at Vision Expo West this year.

The Art-Craft Optical team has noticed more and more players entering the market over the past few years, underscoring the strength and importance of the Made in USA message, as well as the consumer demand. Once the new American-made sun collection is available, Art-Craft plans to underscore its long American heritage with shelf talkers and logo plaques for retailers that tell the brand’s story.

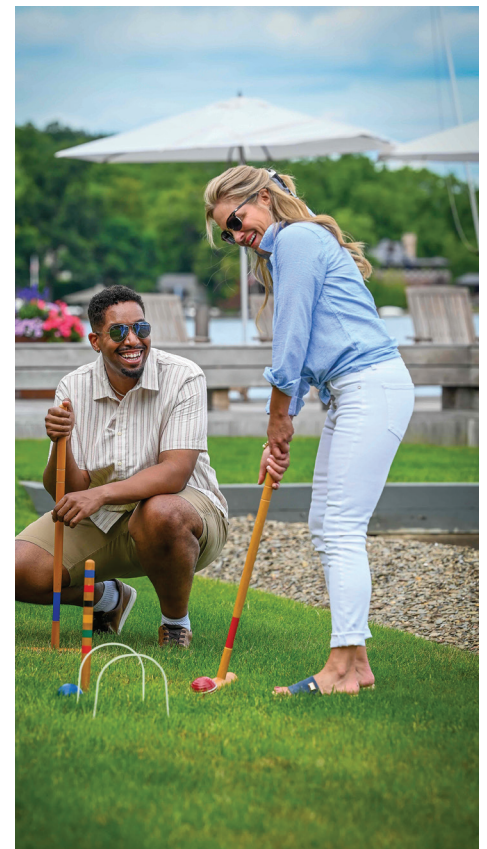
Discussing the collection last year, Art-Craft Optical’s owners Charlie and Christopher Eagle told *Vision Monday*, “Our desire was to bring our 100+ years of high-precision manufacturing skills, honed by our Department of Defense work, back to the commercial market. We also felt, as did many of the former Bausch + Lomb folks we’ve been consulting with, that Rochester, once the optical frame manufacturing center of the U.S. could once again be realized... We are excited to be once again on the commercial side of the business and we are looking forward to what the next century has in store for Art-Craft Optical.” ■



Art-Craft Optical's upcoming sun collection will bring the brand's iconic 100-year history to the consumer.

“Our desire was to bring our 100+ years of high-precision manufacturing skills, honed by our Department of Defense work, back to the commercial market.”

**— Charlie and Christopher Eagle,
owners, Art-Craft Optical**



More →



Hilco Vision's American-Made Safety Eyewear

Hilco Vision's OnGuard American-made industrial safety eyewear launched in 2019. The entire collection is designed, developed, tested and manufactured in the U.S., made of domestically sourced materials from material and manufacturing partners that span the country. Last year, Debbie Fitzgibbons, director of marketing communications at Hilco Vision, told *VM* that the OnGuard collection consistently ranks among Hilco customers' top-selling styles, and that demand continues to exceed expectations.

Fitzgibbons said, "The OnGuard team thrives on filling the gaps in the marketplace, no matter how challenging, and we wanted to work on something that hadn't been done before that had benefits on a greater scale. It took 3 years and countless hours from a dedicated group of people to make it successful, but the experience empowered us to see what else is possible—not just in USA-made safety eyewear, but in looking at our overall business with fresh perspective."

As the OnGuard collection continues to go from strength to strength, the Hilco team is working on developing the next generation of its American-made collection, offering new styles and design elements. ■

"The OnGuard team thrives on filling the gaps in the marketplace, no matter how challenging, and we wanted to work on something that hadn't been done before that had benefits on a greater scale."

— Debbie Fitzgibbons, director of marketing communications, Hilco Vision



Hilco Vision's American-made OnGuard collection continues to exceed expectations.

American Eyewear Companies Celebrate Milestones and Look to the Future

Continued from page 46

Notably, the survey found that respondents said they would be most likely to buy a product labeled "Made in America," more so than "Manufactured in America," "American-made," or "Product of the U.S." Seventy-five percent of respondents said it's either very or somewhat important for brands to make their products in the U.S., while 74 percent said it's very or somewhat important for brands to be based in the U.S.

In 2021, of course, the FTC <https://www.ftc.gov/business-guidance/blog/2022/04/ftc-charges-battery-maker-first-case-under-made-usa-labeling-rule> introduced a new rule clarifying what it means to be "Made in the USA," prohibiting companies from using that verbiage unless "virtually all" pieces or ingredients are made and sourced in the U.S. Final assembly of the product must occur within the U.S. as well. It's become clearer and clearer what "Made in

the USA" really means—and the fact that consumers search out American-made products remains clear too.

Each year, *Vision Monday* takes a look at the state of American-made eyewear. From coast to coast, American eyewear companies are growing, thriving and creating a new landscape for themselves—showcasing part of what it means to be born in the USA. ■

More →

Made in USA



L’Amy America Welcomes Seven.Five, its First American-Made Collection

In 2022, L’Amy America debuted Seven.Five, its first American-made collection. The collection is designed in Connecticut at L’Amy’s headquarters, and then manufactured out of global components in New Jersey, as part of an exclusive manufacturing agreement with Wayne, New Jersey-based Scene Eyewear. L’Amy’s director of lifestyle brands Connie Reiss explained to *VM* upon the launch last year, “The brand name 75 symbolizes the beginning—the start—the impetus of a movement. In 1775 the first, and perhaps most pivotal battle of the Revolutionary War was fought.

“The year 1775 marked the beginning of America’s quest for freedom. In a similar spirit, 75 is our start... 75 not only symbolizes the beginning, but more importantly signifies the early days of the American eyewear revolution.”

The current collection is still on the smaller side and has been on the market for less than 8 months. Reiss said, “We’ve cautiously approached the market with a selective distribution model and are finding that accounts are very passionate about American products, so expectations for growth are very high.”

L’Amy America sees Seven.Five as a key focus of its business, one that gives it a competitive edge. Reiss said, “We are a consumer solutions driven company and research shows that consumers value and desire USA products. We aim to satisfy that consumer need. It is a point of competitive differentiation.”

L’Amy has found that consumers are indeed asking about American-made eyewear, and the response from accounts and end consumers has been “overwhelmingly positive,” and “mostly centered on the high quality of the product—from materials to luxurious detail,” said Reiss.

The American-made story is an undeniable competitive edge, and when paired with top tier manufacturing the Seven.Five collection becomes unmissable. To further this story, L’Amy offers small displays, counter cards and large format graphics



L’Amy America’s Seven.Five has seen overwhelmingly positive responses from ECPs and accounts.



“The year 1775 marked the beginning of America’s quest for freedom. In a similar spirit, 75 is our start... 75 not only symbolizes the beginning, but more importantly signifies the early days of the American eyewear revolution.”

— Connie Reiss, director of lifestyle brands, L’Amy

like window banners and posters so ECPs can call out that the collection is made in the U.S.

As the Seven.Five collection grows and reaches its first year in the market, Reiss said L’Amy is looking to increase the value, offering the same quality and detail without changing prices. From a trend standpoint, the collection is leaning into earth

tones, textured surfaces and shapes with angular effects.

Reiss said, “We will continue with our neo-classic/mod traditional design approach, utilizing gorgeously rich colored acetates with hand-sculpted effects, for both men and women.” ■

More →



The McGee Group and Ducks Unlimited Keep On Growing

For The McGee Group, American manufacturing just made sense. Executive vice president Matt McGee tells *VM*, “The McGee Group has long been proud to be an American-owned company that generates designs for the American consumer. Growing our manufacturing capabilities enable us to complete the American story.”

The Group currently has a number of Manufactured in the USA Ducks Unlimited styles, which The Group has released to a limited number of accounts. McGee says that feedback has been positive—especially considering Ducks Unlimited’s dedication to local conservation as well. It all connects in a larger story: that manufacturing is good for the local economy, yes, but also helps a business lower its carbon footprint and keeps businesses involved in their local communities. He says, “ECP customers that have participated in the program are very excited about the Manufactured in USA collection. Of course, the Ducks Unlimited organization is focused on conservation in the U.S., so having products made here reinforces every element of their brand story by shortening the length of the supply chain, which reduces our carbon footprint connected to the product journey.”

Of course, Manufactured in the USA can mean constant adaptation to a changing market and supply chain, but McGee finds it all worth it. He says, “we find ourselves pivoting and making those adjustments when necessary. Having greater control over the full process, from design to production to distribution, is beneficial for us and gives us greater flexibility when we have to adapt.”

And growth is on the horizon. At first, all of The McGee Group’s Manufactured in the USA collections were acetate, but that has gone so well that the Group is planning to expand into new design elements, special production techniques and testing new materials. The next Manufactured in the USA collection is slated for October of this year.



The McGee Group’s Ducks Unlimited offers a number of Manufactured in the USA styles, which have seen positive feedback from many sectors.

McGee says, “Over time, we’ll be adding new brands to our American-made collections, so this is an area we plan to invest in and grow in the coming years. We will be adding more brands that will showcase our factory’s capability and increase our competitive advantage... As we grow and expand, this will give us better visibility throughout the entire process—from design to distribution—and bring expanded capability to our business.” ■

“The McGee Group has long been proud to be an American-owned company that generates designs for the American consumer. Growing our manufacturing capabilities enable us to complete the American story.”

— Matt McGee, executive vice president,
The McGee Group

More →

Made in USA



Modo and Lowercase: Building a Classic Collection in Brooklyn

Modo Eyewear's Made in Brooklyn collection, which offers a combination of classic shapes and trendy colorways, is a result of customer demand. Rebecca Giefer, CEO Americas, told *VM*, "While innovation is at the core of Modo's DNA, we also listen to our customers and there is a demand for U.S.-made product. It took an enormous risk and investment to open our own production domestically but we are proud to say that over the last 7 years, Modo's Brooklyn-based factory is among the current leaders in American-made eyewear."

This year, Modo expanded its American-made offerings with its acquisition of Lowercase, another Brooklyn-based brand that both diversifies Modo's offerings and ties in perfectly with the brand DNA. As Giefer explained, "First, we love the Lowercase brand. The luxury brand positioning of Lowercase allows us to connect with a different segment of the market. Second, we appreciate the manufacturing details of the Lowercase products... We are committed to maintaining the brand identity that the founder, Gerard, started with both component and material stories.

"Third, a top priority for us is to expand the current Lowercase sales team to include representation in many regions across North America. We appreciate the customers that have stood by us throughout the last 5 months of transition, and we're committed to expanding our service both in the field and being supportive with Modo's client relations team at our head office."

Lowercase's production had been based in the Army Terminal in Brooklyn, but moved to Modo's factory in Industry City, also in Brooklyn, in April of this year. Giefer said, "After many months of integrating techniques and equipment, we are finally picking up momentum on increasing inventory levels for both the carryover styles and newness. We are excited to launch a FW23 collection debuting at The Loft, Vision Expo West and Silmo."

With this expansion, Modo has even further

This year, Modo expanded its American-made offerings with its acquisition of Brooklyn-based brand Lowercase.



Rebecca Giefer, CEO, Modo Americas.

solidified its commitment to American-made eyewear—something Giefer said is undoubtedly a net positive. She said, "Having a Made in the USA collection has had an overall positive effect as the end customers and patients are seeking out American-made products and we have a great offering for our retail partners to carry.

"Producing eyewear in the U.S. will always present challenges, but we credit our factory team for continuing to fine-tune each production, find ef-

iciencies and handoffs between automation and handmade processes."

With its American-made collections, Modo offers an assortment of "Brooklyn Made" plaques, counter cards and displays that serve to reinforce where the frames are made. Alongside a variety of custom POP, this can make all the difference. Giefer said, "Often it is an added bonus or story, like being made in Brooklyn, that is the difference between the sale of our frame vs. one produced overseas." ■

More →



Modo's Brooklyn Made collection is made in Industry City, Brooklyn.



"While innovation is at the core of Modo's DNA, we also listen to our customers and there is a demand for U.S.-made product."

— Rebecca Giefer, CEO, Modo Americas



North Point Eyewear Takes a Hands-On Approach

Manufactured in Pittsburgh, Eyenavigation's North Point Eyewear is a line fully dedicated to the independent ECP. Each frame is designed using 3D CAD software with global components, including acetate from Italy and hinges and core wires from Germany. The collection was born to be American-made.

Joe Zewe, CEO, told *VM*, "Eyenavigation was founded with a focus on innovation and being hands-on with respect to our products. As a Made in USA frame line, North Point Eyewear is an essential extension of that mentality. Our frame manufacturing operation is now at the core of our business."

As a central tenant of the business, the Eyenavigation team is with North Point every step of the way. Zewe said, "It is important to be involved in the products you sell. We found it difficult to be passionate about frames made in an overseas factory. We feel a connection to North Point because we are with the product from design, through prototyping, and finally production."

Smaller production runs also allow North Point to introduce new frame designs and sizing in "record time," Zewe explained—furthering the brand's commitment to its partners and customers.

While the varying economy always plays a factor in business operations, Zewe said that customer satisfaction is strong—and growing. "Made in America is becoming an entirely new category of eyewear. As more consumers see the lines, it has created more demand. More and more patients are prioritizing American-made products.

"We have found that our customers and their patients have responded only positively regarding North Point Eyewear. ECP feedback tells us that patients are becoming repeat customers, and word-of-mouth sales are driving profits."

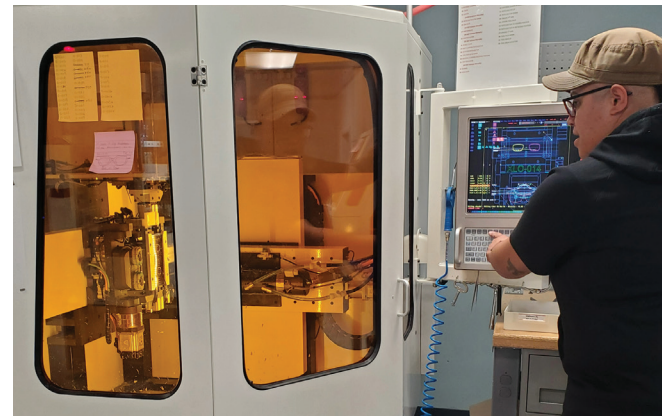
POP materials help spread that American-made story, too. Eyenavigation works closely with ECPs to co-brand and create custom marketing that works with their specific markets. These include custom displays that are handmade and locally sourced,



Joe Zewe, CEO, North Point Eyewear.

"We feel a connection to North Point because we are with the product from design, through prototyping and finally production."

— Joe Zewe, CEO, North Point Eyewear



North Point Eyewear is manufactured in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania with global components.



"Made in America is becoming an entirely new category of eyewear. As more consumers see the lines, it has created more demand. More and more patients are prioritizing American-made products," said Zewe.

posters, window clings and social media campaigns.

Zewe explained, "We're all in this together, so we make it a point to stress the support we provide during the onboarding of our product lines... We love to highlight and celebrate our accounts in whatever way we can."

Zewe said that North Point has "moved beyond the startup stage," and that he and his team are now focused on bringing increasingly complex designs to North Point, distinguishing it from competi-

tors. This fall, North Point will release its Heritage Collection, inspired by Pittsburgh's industrial roots and architecture. In 2024, a lighter, high-tech collection will follow, inspired by Pittsburgh's robotics and tech boom.

The company also works behind the scenes with ECPs to produce private label collections—all things made possible because of North Point's local, hands-on production. Zewe concluded, "We love working directly with our customers to design, prototype and grow." ■

More →

Made in USA



Randolph Marks 50 Years as an American-Made Eyewear Company

This year, Randolph Eyewear celebrated its 50th anniversary, marking five decades as a company dedicated to American-made eyewear. In 1973, former Royal Air Force navigator Jan Waszkiewicz and machinist Stanley Zaleski founded Randolph, after immigrating to the U.S. Today, the bustling business is located in Randolph, Massachusetts, just outside of Boston, and still uses machines that the Randolph engineers designed and built in the '70s. Being American-made is the core tenant of everything Randolph does—and everything the brand is celebrating this year.

To mark this special anniversary, the Randolph team created a Limited Edition collection featuring the brand's most iconic styles: Aviator, Concorde, P3, Sportsman and Aviator II. The collection was paired with the launch of a Collector's Box which included a special cognac sunglasses case, travel journal, golden pins that commemorated the brand's 5-decade heritage and a cleaning cloth, all packaged in a unique bamboo box.

Moving forward into the second half of its first century, the Randolph team remains committed to staying true to the brand's heritage and consumers, creating new styles and colorways that feel both timeless and exciting.

As part of these celebrations, and to showcase the Limited Edition Anniversary Collection, Randolph also opened its first-ever retail location this year, with a pop-up store at The Current in Boston Seaport alongside Seaport Common. The pop-up location commemorated this special anniversary, while also signaling Randolph's strong future.

All this work highlights what makes Randolph special: its American heritage and commitment to carrying on its founders' legacy. As Peter Waszkiewicz, president and CEO (3rd generation) and Sunni Fleming, chief brand officer, told *VM*, "Accounts and consumers are proud to wear our sunglasses because of their Made-in-America quality, craftsmanship, premium materials and iconic styles. It's our key differentiator that we're committed to continue



Randolph Eyewear celebrates 50 years in 2023. The brand's current engineers still use some machines that Randolph's original engineers designed and built in the '70s.



All Randolph eyewear is created in Randolph, Massachusetts, outside of Boston.

the operation of our family-owned and operated company in Randolph, Massachusetts."

But for Randolph, the American-made story goes beyond just product. The company also created a documentary this year. It tells the Randolph story in an authentic way, centering on the voices of those who lived it and followed along from the beginning.

Waszkiewicz and Fleming said, "Experiencing

"Accounts and consumers are proud to wear our sunglasses because of their Made-in-America quality, craftsmanship, premium materials and iconic styles."

— Jan Waszkiewicz and Stanley Zaleski, founders, Randolph Eyewear



A special 50th anniversary collection reimagines some of Randolph's most iconic frames.

challenges is a part of being engineers, manufacturers, designers and craftsmen and it's how we overcome those challenges that make us stronger. We're passionate about continuing our founder's legacy in creating quality, Made in USA eyewear... Our Made in USA products are the root of our business and we're committed to keeping it that way." ■

More →



State and American Optical Go Beyond American-Made

This year, American Optical is introducing the AO RX Collection—the brand’s first optical frame collection in decades, according to State Optical Co. executive Scott Shapiro. He explained to *VM*, “Since we acquired AO Eyewear in 2019, we’ve only produced and sold sunglasses under the brand. At Vision Expo West we’ll be launching the first optical styles with AO branding that haven’t been available in decades... we’ve been working on this launch for over a year to incorporate many of the unique AO details veteran ECPs will remember. We can’t wait to share it with our optical partners.”

With State and American Optical, Shapiro has shown a true commitment to American-made eyewear. From the brands’ Illinois factory to all over the world, there is a distinctly American flair to each and every frame—and much of that is thanks to a dedicated and personal work ethic.

Shapiro said, “Manufacturing our own eyewear connects us directly to the most important (but often overlooked) aspect of our business, the expert craftsmanship of quality eyewear. You can’t help but look at a product differently when you’re making it yourself. You sign your name on that frame with every cut, every brush of the polishing wheel. It also gives everyone in our company, and all our customers, an extra sense of pride to be associated with a company that’s willing to take chances and reinvest in American manufacturing.”

Shapiro believes that being American-made is an important factor—but not the only thing that sells eyewear. He said, “While many consumers want to buy products made in USA, and many retailers want to carry them, the association with American manufacturing alone is not enough to move the needle. ‘American-made’ is an incredibly valuable element to add to a brand story, but it can’t be the whole brand story.

“Your eyewear brand still must be able to stand out and connect to patients and consumers on its own, otherwise it will get lost.” With State and



With State and American Optical, Scott Shapiro has shown a true commitment to American-made eyewear. From the brands’ Illinois factory to all over the world, there is a distinctly American flair to each and every frame.



American Optical is launching AO RX at Vision Expo West this year.

State Eyewear continues to combine the American-made story with top-of-the-line craftsmanship.

“Manufacturing our own eyewear connects us directly to the most important (but often overlooked) aspect of our business, the expert craftsmanship of quality eyewear.”

— Scott Shapiro, State Optical Co.

American Optical’s dedicated and talented craftspeople handmaking each and every frame in Illinois, both brands are able to stand out from the crowd—for being made in the U.S., yes, but also for their top of the line work.

This also extends to the brands’ relationships with ECPs and accounts, who work closely with State and American Optical to tell the stories that make these frames so special. Said Shapiro, “Most of our accounts have been very proud to carry our American collections, but they’ve learned that their dispensers have to be willing and able to tell the brand story in order to make it successful among some of the biggest brands in fashion.

“As is true with so many aspects of our business, our brands are incredibly reliant on our relationship

with the ECPs who are selling them. When they’re passionate about the brand, and passionate about how and where it’s made, we all can be very successful.” It is these personal relationships that truly build a community around eyewear.

Even when it comes to POP and marketing, Shapiro hopes State and American Optical can tell their American-made story, but also grow beyond that. “We’re trying to answer the question, why else does it matter to patients? What else is there for patients to connect to? Finding ways to express quality American craftsmanship through things like counter cards and displays helps opticians tell the story of a collection to connect the dots for patients,” Shapiro concluded. ■

More →

Made in USA



Thema's Miami Factory Is a Hub for Innovation and Customization

Thema Eyewear's Miami factory has long been a place of innovation, customization and sustainable mindset. As explained by Giulia Valmassoi, CEO of Thema North America, "Having a Made in USA collection is integral to our company's ethos. It symbolizes our dedication to supporting local artisans, fostering job creation, and upholding rigorous quality standards."

It also allows Thema to build a personal relationship with its customers and optometry/opticianry students in the area, inviting them to Miami to see how their frames are made. Valmassoi said, "Since we opened the factory in Miami, we have welcomed hundreds of customers for a tour of our factory while also taking the opportunity to host enriching educational sessions for individuals pursuing a career as opticians, in collaboration with Miami Dade College."

For Thema, being American-made has always been something to be proud of—and a competitive advantage. Despite changes in the economic and retail landscape over the past few years, Valmassoi said, "our commitment to American-made collections has been a consistent advantage. It allows us to maintain greater control over the production process, ensuring both quality and ethical practices."

This works for Thema, and it works for their customers, as well. "Our Made in USA approach has resonated positively with customers who appreciate the authenticity and attention to detail inherent in domestically crafted eyewear. Feedback from our accounts has been overwhelmingly positive."

"Our customers are enthusiastic about our American-made eyewear, and their satisfaction soars upon discovering our transparent pricing and vast custom options. Combining customization and domestic production isn't just a perk—it genuinely propels ROI and boosts sales," Valmassoi said.

To underscore this, Thema provides accounts with merchandising support and POP materials that highlight the fact that Thema frames are American-made. Part of the brand's packaging is also made



Valmassoi believes, "Our commitment to American-made collections has been a consistent advantage. It allows us to maintain greater control over the production process, ensuring both quality and ethical practices."

in the U.S., including their countertop displays. As customers continue to prioritize American-made collections and as customer taste continues to evolve, Thema continues to innovate. The brand is introducing a new 3D configurator, as well as new and diverse designs in its most popular collection. Valmassoi concluded, "We firmly believe that the

authenticity and craftsmanship of American-made eyewear resonate with consumers seeking products with a compelling story. In addition, being able to produce our products locally provides us with a significant advantage, allowing us to swiftly release new models that align seamlessly with the latest trends." ■

Thema offers factory tours to students at Miami Dade College, bolstering its relationship with the local community.



Thema's frames are made in its Miami factory, something that CEO Giulia Valmassoi said, "genuinely propels ROI and boosts sales."

"Our Made in USA approach has resonated positively with customers who appreciate the authenticity and attention to detail inherent in domestically crafted eyewear."

— Giulia Valmassoi, CEO,
Thema North America Optical Co.

@VisionMonday

Facebook.com/VisionMonday

VISIONMONDAY.COM