

THOMPSON TIMELINE

AN EARLY START

Leaving Sheffield aged 14 in the 1930s, Leonard Thompson arrived in London to find work in a glazing factory. He learnt his trade by chipping glass by hand and grinding lenses to shape using a stone wheel and shaping metal frames. Before he left to fight in WW2, optics being considered a reserved occupation, he stayed in the factory and fitted lenses for gas masks. After the war he continued working in the glazing factory while taking an evening degree in optometry. His first practice was in Stoneleigh South West London, before moving to East Sussex and setting up in Hove.

ROCK'N ROLLING INTO OPTOMETRY

A wayward teenager with more interest in rock and rolling, Alan; Leonard's son, reluctantly ended up working as an optometrist. After enjoying himself a little too much he received his dispensing degree which is based on the technology of lenses and frames, from Optometry College. Father and son worked together for decades and managed two practices: Church Street Hove and another in Steyning. Due to their colourful style and amusing demeanour, they built an extremely loyal following. Even today, clients still return five decades later.

A CHILD OF THE 1970S

Alan was to modernise the business. As a child of the 1960-1970s he was all about the latest and wildest brands. And with loud suits and long hair, he brought a taste of counter-culture to the British opticians. The shop underwent a radical fit with floor length glass windows and bespoke interior fittings. A glazing lab was developed downstairs, and in the evenings Leonard would glaze the prescription lenses.

A FAMILY AFFAIR

Gwendolyn, Leonard's wife helped manage the practices and was an integral to his development as an optician. Supporting him as he worked in the factory and studied optometry in the evenings. Belinda and Alan met when she started working on reception in the Hove practice, falling in love they started their own family, sons Max and Nico. History repeated itself as they worked together in the optician for years to come.

THE SURREY STORY

When brother Graham an ophthalmic surgeon, mentioned a village called Cobham, Surrey needed a quality optician, the family relocated to Surrey. In 1992, they moved to a cosy bungalow where Nico and his brother ran wild. Two miles down the road, the local water board was repurposed into Ellis & Thompson Opticians and became the most luxurious shop the quiet English village had ever had seen. Creating a large lab in the '90s that glazed thousands if not millions of prescription glasses and sunglasses, Alan stocked every and all types of lenses. With vast glass windows and a lavish bespoke shop fit of rich walnut and the deep purple (a N.T.E signature) carpets, the shop turned into a salon of sorts holding luxury eyewear.

THE NEXT GENERATION

When Alan recruited young vagabond Stuart Cox, he found an employee who would become a great friend. Cox worked with the family for 25 years, until his tragic passing in 2018. A 'joker of the first order,' it was Cox who taught Nico how to glaze. 'Working' in the lab during summer holidays, Nico began learning the craft while still at school. And encouraged by Stuart, he continued mischief making and sunglasses shaping until university.

N.T.E EYEWEAR

N.T.E was subconsciously born out of years of working in the lab and being surrounded by mountains of old and new stock. Ellis & Thompson was an extremely vibrant and successful optician, so there was a glut of eyewear everywhere. There was a storage room in the flat above, which was full with boxes and boxes of 'dead' stock – old frames from previous collections stuffed with iconic designer pieces. Many spectacles, especially the wacky designs, were never sold and were waiting for a new life. This was how the N.T.E vintage collection was born. Nico would make all sorts of tinted lenses and glaze them into the old spectacles to make funky sunglasses, building and building the collection until it was vast. While unfortunately he sold many cherished pieces at university for a bargain-rate of £30, Nico built a solid reputation.

Today, N.T.E eyewear is the culmination of three generations and decades of experience working in eyewear. Unlike most contemporary brands, it is not just based on aesthetics but learnt knowledge. Heritage is everything to N.T.E which is why our collections are based around an appreciation of classic and timeless designs. Nico plans to continue building the family firm for another five decades with his own contribution. Creating a beautifully made product to inspire the same appreciation of eyewear in those that wear them.