

CREATING A SPECTACLE, John-Henry Exclusive Eyewear, Jackie Cleobury for SA Interior Design (1994)

In his pursuit of a uniquely South African aesthetic, Raymond Smith has created an unusual but sophisticated backdrop for the marketing of exclusive eyewear.

Described by the owner as a “frame boutique”, John-Henry is primarily a fitting- and showroom (although an adjacent testing room has recently been added). The design and installation of display units and storage space to accommodate up to 250 frames was, therefore, the most vital practical requirement. Individual showcases for special frames, two workstations and a mini-dispensary table were also necessary.

As this is the first in a proposed chain of similar stores, the establishment of a graphic identity and directional theme was the essential design consideration. In response, designer Raymond Smith opted to instill “a South African aesthetic” which he interprets as a combination of African, Cape Dutch and Victorian styles. “I concentrated on establishing relationships between elements from each of these styles in order to create a fresh composition,” he explains.

The approach is clearly reflected in the shopfitting and furniture, where the use of strong curves is inspired by the shape of clay pots and nouveau tile effects is influenced by European architect Antoni Gaudi. The inventively-designed display units are fashioned after a stylized gazelle, resembling the head, horns and shoulders of the animal.

Not only does Smith display a uniquely fresh approach in terms of style and form, but also in the use of materials. Not afraid to combine naturals and synthetics, he utilises laminates, sisal, steel, fibreboard and linoleum together, applying various treatments and finishes to create compositions rich in texture and visual appeal. Equally eclectic is the original artwork by South African artist Lien Botha. Entitled ‘Passage Of Wing’, the series explores South Africa 's cross-cultural heritage using the medium of photo construction.

The 60m² space took three months to complete and although Smith worked according to a strict budget, he was given ample aesthetic freedom. He confirms that the greatest challenge presented by this interior was the achievement of an exclusive look using relatively low cost materials. While successfully accomplishing this, Smith has also challenged orthodox perceptions of art and design, fostering the notion that the two are, in fact, mutually inclusive.