

Louth leading the way in spectacles

LOUTH and high fashion are not natural bedfellows — but according to one of the world's leading designers the rest of Britain is lagging behind this little corner of the country.

Tom Davies was in the town recently and Tom certainly knows rather a lot about fashion.

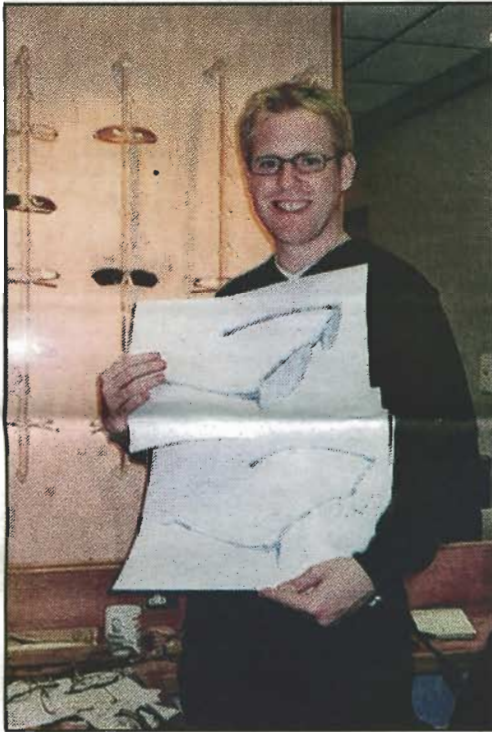
He is the world's only bespoke spectacle maker and designs glasses which are worn by the rich and famous worldwide, including the incredibly wealthy Samsung family from Japan.

He sells at Harrods and Selfridges in London and the young Derbyshire designer is keen that his spectacles should also be available at selected sites round the country at more modest sums.

When he got the chance to show off his range at Stephen Hewitts on Mercer Row recently he was keen to take up the challenge — and certainly getting to Louth proved far more challenging than a day of back-to-back consultations!

And Tom was staggered at the response to his visit — he attracted a bigger following in Louth than he has notched up in cities such as Leeds and in the City of London where money is no object.

He found Ludensians



IMPRESSED WITH TOWN: Spectacle designer Tom Davies. (NA)

were very keen to try out all his latest designs and to invest in top quality, well made spectacles.

Our reporter caught up with Tom after a hectic day in Louth, which he praised to the hilt. He could buy lunch and still get change from a £1 which had obviously made quite an impression.

"Louth is a lovely place and I can't believe the response I have had

here too," he said.

Tom's work is very special. He is the only person in the world who can engineer titanium to such exacting standards — detail is his watchword, he leaves the big flashy design statements to the fashion houses, happy in the knowledge that his intricate engineering carried out by craftsman and engineers in Japan beats his rivals into a cocked hat.

Interestingly the young Derbyshire designer got into designing glasses by accident — and it's a story which all young hopefuls should

read with hope.

Tom came out of university in East Anglia with a degree in theatre and television design. Fearing the lack of jobs in this country he sold his treasured guitar, video and a few other treasures to buy himself a ticket for Hong Kong.

His first night there cost him £50 which left just £150 and no prospects... So he selected skyscrapers in the central district and called at every office to offer his services to television companies.

He was offered four jobs — and one man even rang to ask why he had not attended his interview. Tom had not turned up because he was getting bored with interviews but as his name had been passed on by someone he had visited in the same tower block he decided he had nothing to lose if he went out again.

The entrepreneur offered him a job designing spectacles — something neither of them had the first idea of how to go about. And it was a challenge which fascinated Tom.

"So basically we started from the very bottom and I learnt absolutely everything about the process," he explained. "I would travel to China to the factory and eventually after six months we got ourselves together and we got into production."

He remembers working in China with great affection. A new graduate he still had long hair

— red hair — which the Chinese seldom saw and it even caused one man to fall off his bicycle as he stared at the mad English six footer!

Tom's designs have been gone from strength to strength since he returned to England and set up his own business — and when he was still in his 20s his entrepreneurial spirit was recognised in the Financial Times and he picked up his work with the Sam-sungs via a few lines in Esquire magazine!

His organisation is still lean, he has a massive amount of business start-up money still to pay back as well as a loan from his parents, but Tom has found a real niche market and a job he lives, eats and

breathes with infectious enthusiasm.

Tom will be returning to Louth for his one-to-one consultations, which make choosing a pair of glasses fun rather than a chore. "Most companies concentrate on big cities but towns like Louth show what a mistake this can be," he added.

"A pair of spectacles make such a difference to how a person looks that investing in a pair which is made to fit the individual makes sense," he explained to our reporter.

"A good pair lasts at least five years so that brings the price down! Glasses say something about a person and that is very exciting for a designer."