

3-D spectacles get a fashion makeover

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3-D movies may be cool, but the glasses you get to watch them with are most certainly not.

The Buddy Holly-like spectacles are not only clunky, but some moviegoers complain that the reusable glasses cause eye strain and question just how thoroughly they have been sanitized.

Now high-end eyewear makers and fashion houses are offering relief - but it will cost you.

Since the release of "Avatar" a year ago, studios have been pushing to squeeze more movies into the three-dimension pipeline - more than 30 films are scheduled to be released in 3-D next year alone. Theater owners, who have profited handsomely from the higher ticket prices 3-D films command, have been scrambling to add enough 3-D screens to handle all the movies.

Eyewear manufacturers like Oakley and fashion houses such as Gucci are jumping onto the stereoscopic bandwagon. They are introducing lines of 3-D glasses starting at \$95 and going up to \$225 - or more than 100 times what most theater-handout models cost to make.

"The way we look at it, it's going to be a lifestyle accessory," said David Johnson, president of Marchon3D. "You've got your smart phone, you've got your [iPad](#) and now you have another piece of equipment. This is a specialty technology device."

Marchon3D, a division of Marchon Eyewear based in Melville, N.Y., has licensed its technology to Calvin Klein and Nautica for 3-D eyewear between \$95 to \$150. But the high-tech glasses, with a patented curved-lens design, are useful not just in theaters: They can be worn outdoors as regular sunglasses.

Apart from being more stylish, these premium glasses vastly improve the 3-D viewing experience, manufacturers claim, because they're lighter, more comfortable and employ advanced optics to filter out reflections and other distractions that can cause eye strain.

Beverly Hills, Calif.-based RealD, the leading supplier of 3-D equipment in U.S. theaters, has "certified" Marchon's glasses and is working with Marchon's parent company, the eyewear insurance giant VSP based in Rancho Cordova, Calif., to develop prescription 3-D glasses. By next year, consumers who are getting prescription lenses could opt for a 3-D version (at an extra cost, of course).

Marchon also plans to offer lower-cost 3-D glasses, in the \$30 to \$40 range, by spring. Australia-based Look3D next month will launch an online store where budget-minded consumers can buy designer 3-D glasses for as little as \$30 (\$15 for kids).

"With more than 30 movies coming out next year in 3-D, moviegoers will spend plenty of time wearing 3-D glasses, and we expect many will want them in a style, color and fit all their own," said RealD Chief Executive Michael Lewis. "Like sunglasses, we'll see a range of options at different price points, from designer 3-D glasses from brands like Calvin Klein to more budget-friendly glasses you can pick up at a local store or the movie theater when you buy popcorn."

Foothill Ranch, Calif.-based Oakley spent more than two years working with Glendale, Calif.-based DreamWorks Animation to develop the

Oakley 3D Gascan glasses, which went on sale for \$120 this month at Sunglass Hut and Oakley stores. Oakley has also introduced a limited edition of 3-D glasses tied to the Disney film "Tron."

"We began with a single goal: to set the standard for optical performance in 3-D," said Oakley Chief Executive Colin Baden. "This is a technological breakthrough."

Oakley's glasses, however, aren't meant to be worn outside. "The technology is not optimized for outdoor use," said Scott Smith, category director for Oakley's 3-D optics.

There are other drawbacks to the new glasses, beyond the high prices.

The Oakley and Marchon glasses, for example, won't work if you take them to an IMAX or Dolby theater; they're designed to work in theaters with RealD systems, which comprise about 80 percent of the available 3-D screens in the U.S. And don't expect theaters to offer a discount if you bring your own glasses, as is common in Europe and Australia.

What's more, your 3-D glasses most likely won't work at home. The models from Oakley and Marchon use a "passive polarization" technology, which is most common in theaters. However, most 3-D television sets require viewers to wear "active polarization" glasses that are battery-operated and use built-in electronics to actively "shutter" the images that reach each eye. (Some TV manufacturers plan to introduce 3-D televisions next year that work with passive glasses.)

Still, the move toward individually owned 3-D eyewear may have other benefits - including for the environment. Though most glasses handed out in theaters are reused at least 10 times and are mostly recycled, at least 300 million pairs of glasses have been used worldwide since the debut of Disney's "Chicken Little" film in 3-D in 2005. That's almost

one pair for every man, woman and child in the U.S.

Look3D, which is working on developing corn-based biodegradable glasses, touts the environmental benefits in its marketing. "We'd like to think that people who buy our glasses will keep them for a long time, which means fewer pairs of disposable glasses going to the landfill," said Rhett Adam, the company's founder.

Avid moviegoers Abel Daryan and Sona Kazaryan, who visit the multiplex twice a week to catch the latest Hollywood fare, like the idea of getting their own glasses. But they're of different minds on just how much they would be prepared to spend for the privilege.

"I'd pay \$20, but \$95? I don't know. That's a little pricey," said Daryan, 26, as he waited outside the AMC CityWalk theater on a recent Wednesday for a 9 p.m. 3-D screening of "Megamind."

But Kazaryan, 22, said: "If it's comfortable ... why not?"

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