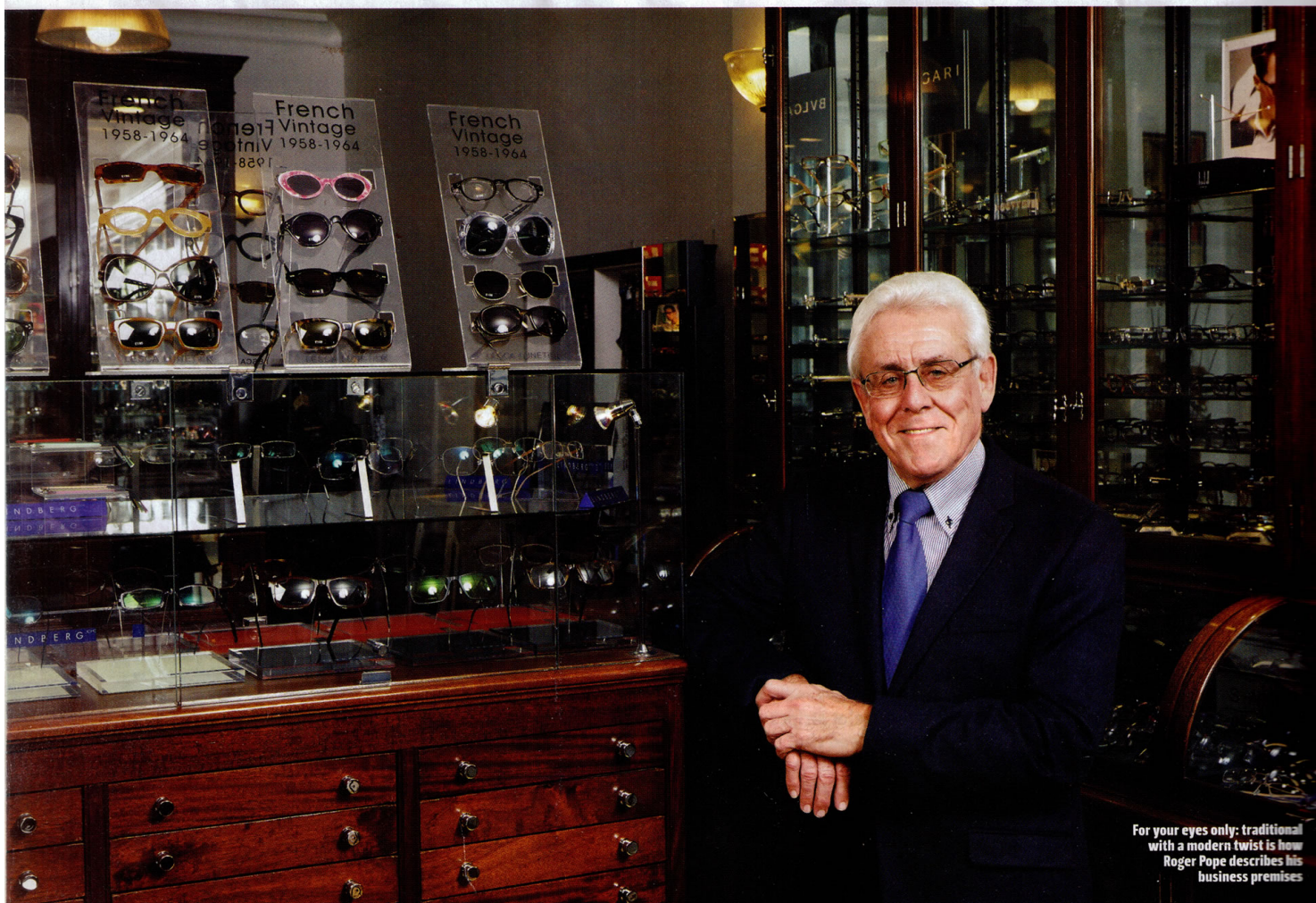


Roger Pope

We have our eyes opened by the Queen's optician at his dispensing practice in Marylebone, central London



For your eyes only: traditional with a modern twist is how Roger Pope describes his business premises

Interview **Richard Dunnnett** Photograph **James Winspear**

Many independent businesses close as a result of large chains entering their market, but for me it proved the perfect opportunity to launch on my own. I'd built a career at a dispensing optician that specialised in making up spectacles from prescriptions issued by Harley Street ophthalmologists. But by the late-1980s the store, along with many others locally, was taken over.

The loss of such businesses concerned Harley Street, which feared chains couldn't offer the bespoke services that patients with major optical problems needed. Consultants suggested that I open a traditionally run dispensing clinic and they were right – 25 years later the business turns over £2m.

The industry has evolved and so too has our business. Fewer ophthalmologists refract, leaving the testing to us. Investment was required in new equipment and our New Cavendish Street premises. We are traditional

with a modern twist. Our shop is furnished with Edwardian display units sourced from a former medical instrument manufacturer and a mix of commissioned and reclaimed furniture. With five qualified dispensing opticians, we put a high value on our knowledge of measuring and fitting frames.

"My first visit to the palace with frames for the Queen to try was nerve-wracking but I'm more relaxed now"

Lenses are bespoke to the customer's needs – from shooting to cycling – and our basement laboratory manufactures spectacles to order.

Customers include the rich and famous but discretion is key. Such is our reputation some have travelled from China to buy £11,000 Lindberg diamond-encrusted gold frames and

from Brazil to purchase Hoffmann frames made of sustainable [shed] buffalo horn.

I don't know how we caught the eye of Buckingham Palace but, I believe, when the need for specialised lenses came up, our name was mentioned. My first visit to the palace with frames for the Queen to try was somewhat nerve-wracking, but this job requires a steady hand and I've become more relaxed. Having fitted the Queen's spectacles for five years, it was a proud day in 2006 when we were issued with the royal warrant.

Our second store in Dulwich village, south London, opened in 1996, when my business partner Stephen Hopkinson bought a 50 per cent share. Further expansion is a possibility but it would depend on us finding a talented person with the right philosophy. For now we have plenty of technological advances in our sights to keep us busy.

www.rogerpope.co.uk