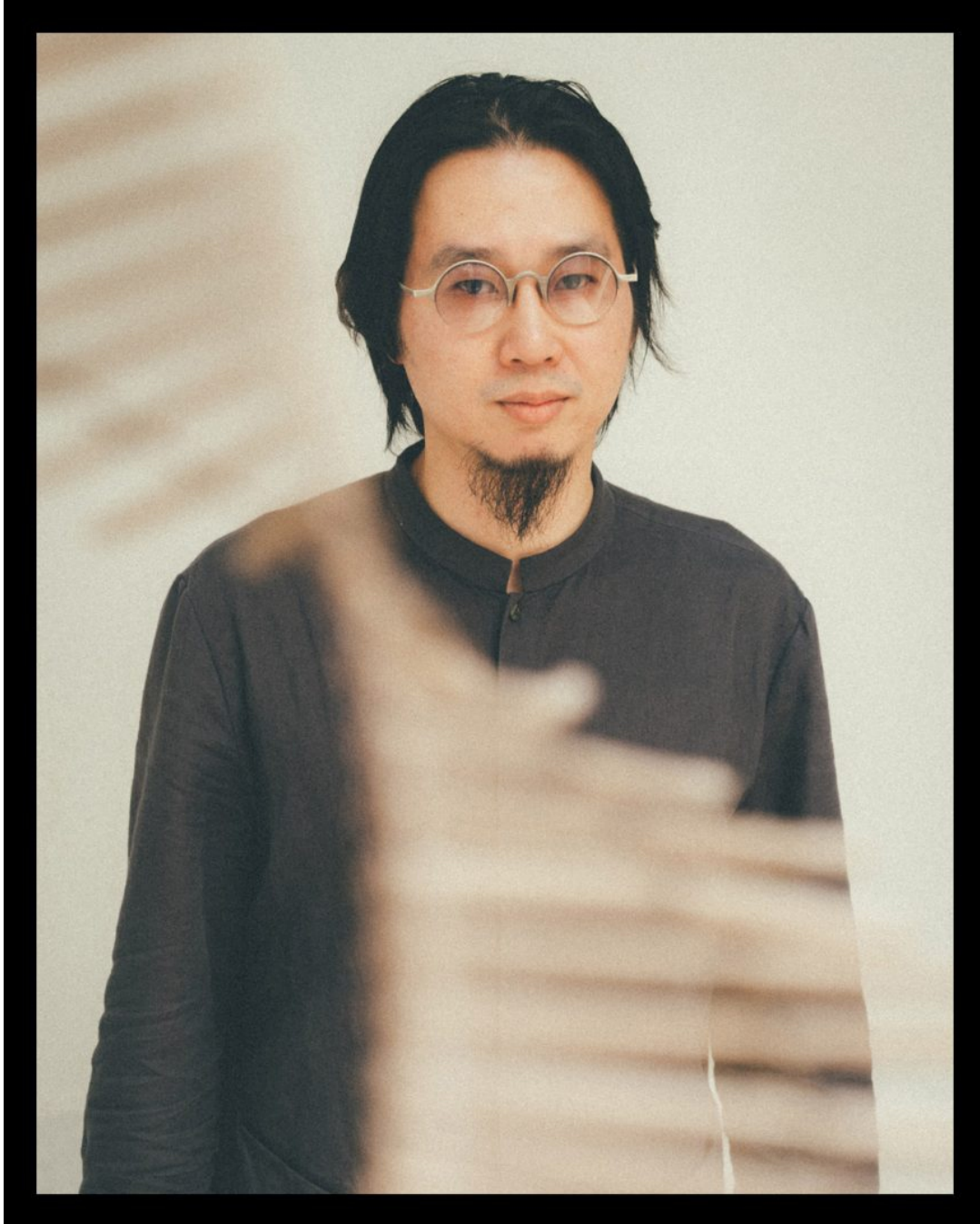


An interview with Ti Kwa of Rigards eyewear

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Rigards is an independent eyewear label that focuses on traditional craftsmanship, original designs and natural materials. As designer TI Kwa puts it I want to make things that will outlive me, heirloom pieces that you can pass on to the next generation We've known Ti long before he started Rigards, so we sat him down for a chat on how things have been going for him and his brand over the past few years.

How have you evolved and grown as a brand?

We started with buffalo horn in our first year in Paris. Back then, we were more fashion focused and the frames were more chunky and more raw in terms of finishing, and we were really into the material then, we wanted to show as much as possible. Horn is 30% lighter than acetate, so you can do a chunky horn frame but it will still be lighter than a pair of Ray Bans, so we were focused on that initially.

As we went on, we wanted to offer something lighter and more refined, because not everybody wants to wear a pair of heavy glasses, so we started pairing horn with beta titanium and aluminium magnesium alloy, both being extremely light-yet-durable. We wanted to cater to as many people as we can, the more fashion focused crowd to something for the older gentleman who wants an everyday pair for the office but doesn't want something boring.

We also make it a point to do stuff we like, we will never do something that is a complete compromise. For example, when we did the Mad Scientist in copper, we wanted to express our skills and show people what we were capable of, something to wake the industry up that says "don't do boring stuff, just have a bit of fun and don't just go through the archives and re-do the vintage stuff".

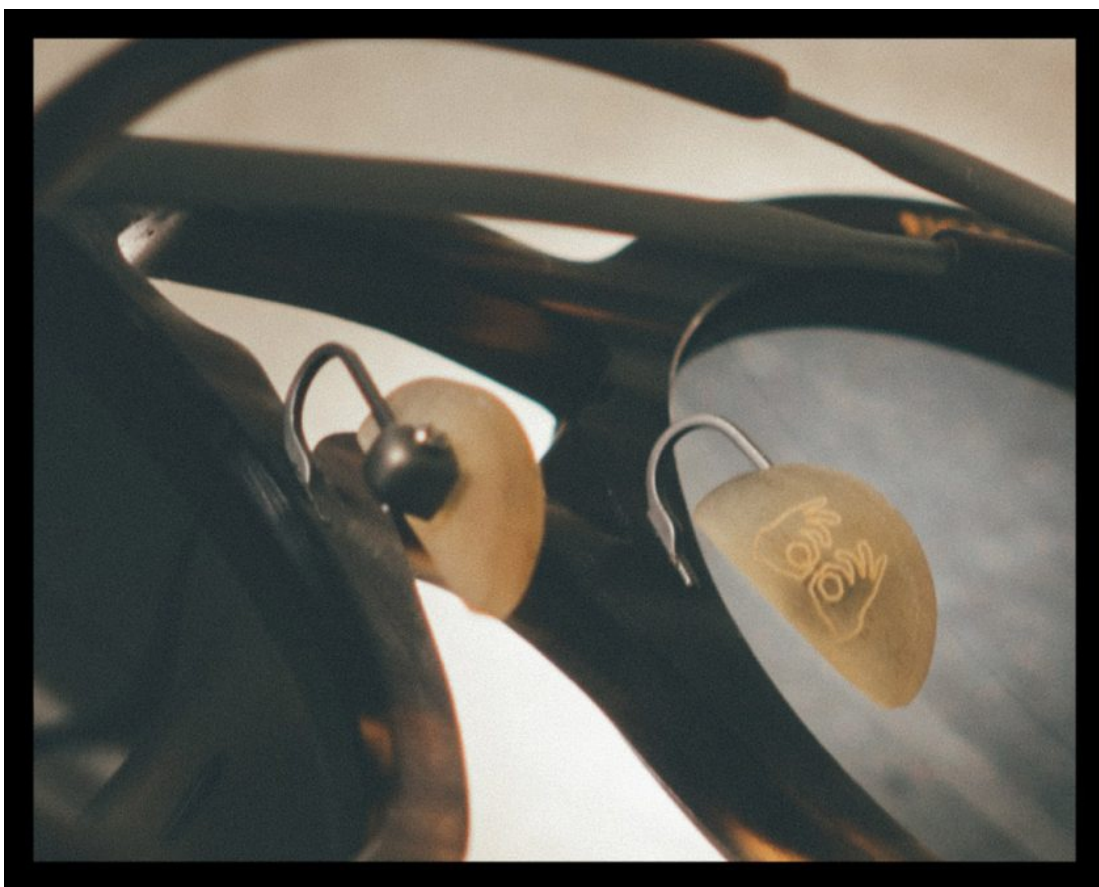


Why put so much focus on craftsmanship?

I want to make something that will last 100 years, heirloom pieces which can be passed on. It is a conscious decision to only work with natural materials, because they are made to last. It is easy to make glasses out of acetate as it is highly automated, but we choose to only work with natural materials even though it is not the most popular choice. 6 years down the road, we are still sticking to this, working on new materials as we go, the latest one being copper.

Working with copper is different from working with aluminium or stainless steel. Copper has its own properties, patina and melting points, you don't solder a pair of sterling silver the way you solder copper, you've got to use a different soldering thread and use a different heat – everything is different. The beauty of copper is that it is all natural, you don't have to colour or do any additional process to it and yet it looks amazing, and it is also lighter than silver.

Every time we embark on a new material, it is a new learning process. I guess this is all part of the fun and adrenalin rush. And when we see it being accepted, it really gives us a good sense of satisfaction.



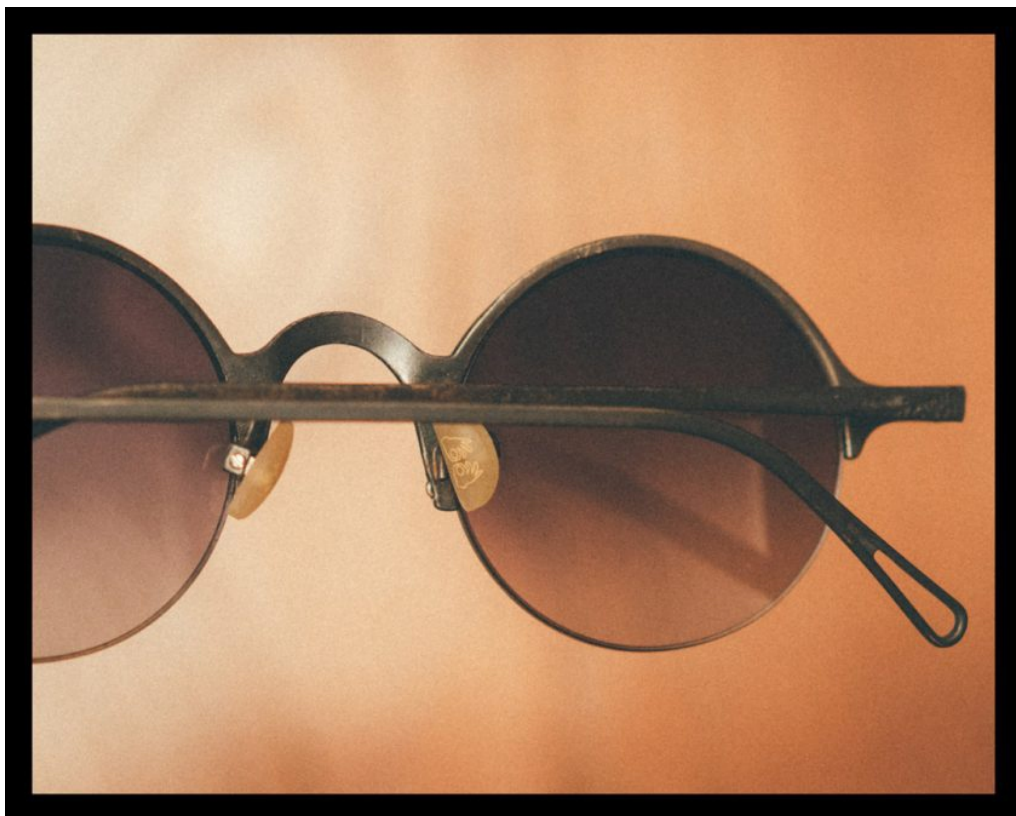
Tell us about the Wooden Visor model

This was one of those things that I wanted to show people. There is a built-in hinge and a steel rod, designed to minimise stress on the wooden frame, that goes all the way inside for support and this is customised specifically for this frame. We got nominated for Silmo, which was a big motivation for us, and it generated a lot of press and business. It was also emotional for me to be nominated over the other big guys, we were close and we will try our best again.



Why work with 925 Sterling Silver?

You don't really see 100% 925 Silver frames as it would be very heavy, so I started experimenting with sterling silver. It was a very expensive experiment, and we kept losing silver when we made them, but we managed to master it after some time. It is completely different from using aluminium as it is much softer and allows hammering and texturing by hand, but we use a special machine to compress it and make it hard enough to use as a pair of glasses.



Any final words?

Today, everybody is talking about going green and having a low carbon footprint, but people are still wearing so much plastic! I'm offering them an option for eyewear made with natural materials that is