

RANZCO Museum

The Monocle

Almost forgotten is the wearing of a monocle, which in the late 19th century became the stereotype of the gentleman's apparel derived from the dandies quizzing glass in the 1790s—which was a single lens handheld. The simplest design was the single unframed lens sometimes with a serrated border to aid retention. This evolved into a frame with a gallery of a raised ridge of wire sometimes sprung.

Adopting the wrong facial expression by raising an eyebrow could cause the monocle to fall and this was expressed in comedy where the startled gentleman allows the monocle to fall into a glass of wine!

Morning coat and a monocle marked the stereotypical 1890s capitalist. Monocles were also worn commonly by German military officers in the First and Second World War, and prominent English politicians including Prime Minister Joseph Chamberlain. The monocle was

sometimes worn to mask a deformity. Diplomat Christopher Stewart Biggs afforded a smoked glass monocle to hide a prosthetic eye. Similarly, the great singer Richard Tauber wore a monocle to mask a squint.

Stylish lesbian circles popularised the monocle in the early 20th century wearing one for effect. Una Lady Troubridge and Radclyffe Hall were notable wearers. At the Parisian night club Le Monocle in Montmartre, patrons wore tuxedos, cropped hairstyles and monocles.

The monocle was superseded by advances in lens technology with bifocal and multifocal glasses allowing better optical correction.

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