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Choosing Cool Shades

There is something about two [sunglasses](#) that makes them possibly one of the most archetypal 'must-have' items of all time. Not only are they immensely practical, offering protection against the risks of the sun, they're a terrifically versatile accessory, available in a massive range of styles, colors and prices to suit each pocket. Given their worldwide acclaim, sunglass producing has changed into an extremely profitable, but highly competitive industry and while some manufacturers rise and decline in the public affections, there's one company that remains forever linked with the eyeglasses that protect our eyes from the rays of the sun: Ray-Ban

Although US President, Benjamin Franklin, is often credited with inventing glasses (he was the one that developed the 1st bifocal lens in the 1780's), the first reading glasses were developed in Italy, as early as 1260. Folks continued to be intrigued by all things optical throughout the centuries that followed, then, in the mid-eighteenth century, UK scientist James Ayscough started to research coloured glass, and the chance that such technology may be used to boost vision diminished eyesight. As successful as he was, it was not until 1929 that the assumption that glasses could filter solar beams was given any heavy consideration. At that time, U.S. Optical company, Foster Grant, began developing the concept further, until eventually, later that very same year, the 1st ever pair of sun shades were sold from a Woolworth's store on the Atlantic Town boardwalk.

Recognizing that the advanced technology could be useful to their pilots, the U.S. Army Air Corps asked another prominent American corporation, Bausch & Lomb, to develop eyeglasses that would protect the eyes from the risks of the conspicuous sun, when flying.

It was U.S. Eyeglass company, Ray-Ban, who actually ran with the idea. In 1936, utilizing the newly available polarized lenses, and a wide frame that offered maximum protection from the glare of an instrument panel, Ray-Ban started to produce a lens that banned the sun's beams. Some three years on, this model of sunglass so popular with pilots, became freely available to the North American public. Ray-Ban 'aviators' were born.

As Americans came of age, so too did their eyewear. Across the war years Ray-Ban continued its working cooperation with the Air Force, creating Gradient mirror lenses that managed to be both highly practical and fashionable at the same time. There had been something about that American flyer in his tough brown leather flight jacket, whose shades hid his eyes. Ray-Ban had just made sunglasses sexy.

Ubiquitous in the 1950's, shades became more than only eye protection. Worn by A-list stars in Vegas and Hollywood -stars whose each move was scrutinised and emulated all over the country- sunglasses became a fashion accessory, and Ray-Ban was quick to house the rising trend for new designs and colourful frames, which they promoted to ladies in particular.

Keeping abreast of futuristic technology, the company developed shatterproof lenses in the 1960's and the idolization of sun shades continued to rise when style icon Jackie Kennedy was sometimes seen with her trademark, oversized frames. On the cinema screen, shades were becoming an essential part of any actor's costume, with picture stars like Peter Fonda and Audrey Hepburn, playing stylish, sunglass-wearing, characters who were able to hide their eyes from the onlookers and remain credible.

Ray-Ban continued to develop new styles and designs in the 1970's and 1980's: their 'Wings' model was a forerunner to the modern, half-frame, lens of today. In the age of American TV cop shows, like Starsky & Hutch, and Chips, the mirrored lenses once so popular in the 1940's, began to reappear. Ray-Ban was retro.

Stylish and modern, cool and retro, Ray-Ban stays at the advance guard of sunglass producing to this day, not to be sneezed at when one considers the competition out there. Undoubtedly, the company will continue to have staying power in the sector, because throughout the decades it has developed with the nation to give folk exactly what they desire for their eyes: the trusty protection of a hi-tech pair of sun shades, and the serious 'cool' of a damn attractive pair of shades.

Kay Bornham has been devoted to writing about fashion and sunglasses for more than 10 years. For more information on [carrera sunglasses](#) and [bvlgari sunglasses](#) please visit our web site.

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