

Easy on the Eyes



Krewe du Optic's French Quarter flagship is a nod to the brand's southern roots.

BY KATIE JAMES

New Orleans does not only serve as the origin of Krewe du Optic—it's the eyewear company's livelihood. The buzzy two-and-a-half-year-old label (which takes its name from groups that organize dance-infused Mardi Gras parades) draws together the city's historic architecture, vibrant culture, and, of course, the eclectic people. "We truly believe that people are our brand, not the other way around," says founder, creative director, and NOLA native Stirling Barrett. "That's why we don't have any logos, and we're not out there marketing ourselves."

Instead, the Louisiana destination serves as the homegrown brand's logo, with each style being informed by (and made in) the Big Easy. Vintage-inspired sunglasses take on the vitality of the metropolis in the form of electric-hued mirrored lenses and gold-plated details. One angular frame called the JLP is named after a French-American pirate notorious for his smuggling operation in the region, and the St. Louis derives its brushed metal bridge from the iconic 19th-century cast-iron balconies of the French Quarter.

So when opportunity arose to open Krewe's first flagship this past August, the Quarter was a natural home. Barrett debuted the 900-square-foot space on Royal Street on the 10th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. "It was more emotional than I expected," he

said. "But to open something new and design it as a place for conversation showed, I think, how far we've come in 10 years."

The idea of conversation is central to Barrett's concept store, which he imagined with the help of designer and fellow local Benjamin Bullins. Customers coming in off of the gallery-riddled street are greeted by a verdant succulent wall (Barrett has an affinity for plants), before moving into the minimalist display area, called the Sun Room, where delicately handcrafted frames are artfully set on linear shelving. Hints of the building's historical past, like an original 19th-century wall, live harmoniously among new, more modern elements.

In the back of the space, an espresso bar serves up Illy coffee, matcha, and artisan teas in partnership with Merchant, NOLA's premier java joint. A narrow outdoor courtyard and intimate seating area invite customers to hang out; the latter features low-slung benches that were built from original growth of 1800s Louisiana Cypress.

"You don't buy sunglasses everyday, but the space is designed for people to have conversations and be part of the creative fabric of New Orleans," Barrett says. "And then if you need a pair of shades one day, we're here too."

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