

VOGUE

APR

beauty close contact

Used in fashion sittings, music videos, and films for years, custom color contacts are now going mainstream.

Wendy Schmid reports on the latest beauty “accessory.”

These made Brad Pitt look deranged in *12 Monkeys*,” says optometrist Mitchell Cassel, holding a tiny vial containing two painstakingly hand-painted contact lenses up to the light. “This pair transformed Jack Nicholson in *Wolf*. Oh, and you’ll see these on David Bowie in his new rock video ‘Little Wonder.’”

Cassel is the film industry’s best-kept secret—a special-effects eye man and the president of Custom Color Contacts. Working out of his Rockefeller Center office, Studio Optix, Cassel helps a bevy of high-profile stars “get into character.” But he transforms mere mortals as well. With recent surveys showing that 80 percent of women would like to change or enhance their eye color, requests from the general public have doubled Cassel’s business in the last year.

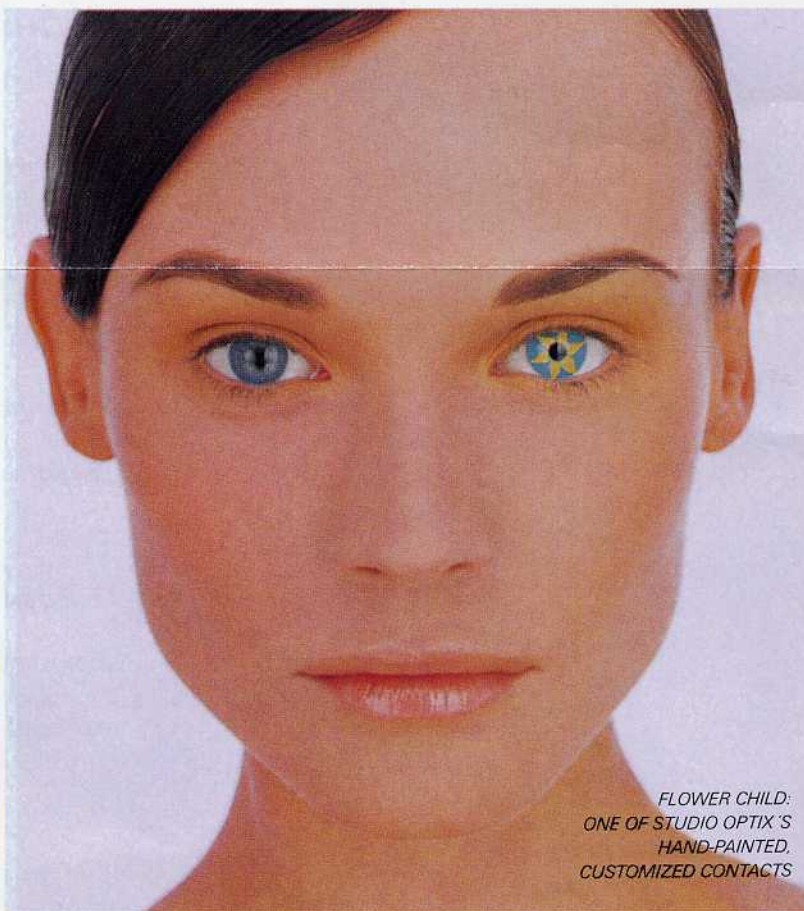
“Special movie effects and seeing a star’s eye color change from role to role have made people more aware of the look-altering possibilities of contacts,” says Cassel. “It’s not unlike coloring your hair.” It’s certainly as pricey as a regular highlights habit: Cassel’s hand-painted lenses can cost between \$450 and \$1,250 a pair. And though most will last a year or more, depending on use they’re not for everyday wear.

“A lot of people want something extreme for special occasions; others want a more detailed iris than standard color contacts can provide,” says Cassel. If, however, you’re not

ready to shell out the kind of money Steven Tyler did for the mirrored lenses he wore in Aerosmith’s “Eat the Rich” video, don’t despair. Companies like Wesley-Jessen and Bausch & Lomb offer two-week disposable colored lenses at easy-to-swallow prices. Disposable soft lenses have made colored contacts safe as a daily cosmetic device. Since the life cycle of the lens is shorter, there’s less chance of irritants building up and leading to eye infections like conjunctivitis.

Wesley-Jessen’s FreshLook Colors (available in four shades) are opaque enough to turn your brown eyes blue, while the company’s new Color Enhancers merely brighten and lighten eyes

that naturally fall on the paler end of the spectrum. Both are sold in “six-packs” for about \$75. Bausch & Lomb’s NaturalTint enhancement lenses cost about \$30 a pair and come in such jewelery hues as Aquamarine, Crystal Blue, Jade Green, and Sable Brown. Word of warning: The less unusual the color, the more realistic your result. Few humans (forgive us, Liz) actually *have* violet eyes. An eye exam and fitting is required for first-time users to check for astigmatism (irregularly shaped corneas) and other potential problems. Most eye-care professionals have a range of colored lenses on hand to help you find the right new hue—or hues. After all, the grass is always greener . . . or, perhaps, bluer. □



FLOWER CHILD:
ONE OF STUDIO OPTIX'S
HAND-PAINTED,
CUSTOMIZED CONTACTS