



Varilux Visionaries Facts Sheet

Bernard Maitenaz

Few, if any, have had a greater influence on modern optics than Bernard Maitenaz. Born in Joinville, near Paris, in the 1920s, Maitenaz began his career in the 1950s with *Societe des Lunetiers*, the French company that would eventually become Essilor. The young mechanical engineer sought to improve the design of bifocals, giving rise to the idea of the progressive lens. In 1959, after seven years conducting research to design an ophthalmic lens with a variable focus, Maitenaz, created Varilux, the world's first progressive lens. His invention innovated lens science to advance and set new standards of performance for vision and vision care for presbyopic patients. Maitenaz eventually went on to serve as chairman and chief executive officer of Essilor from 1980 to 1991 and is today Honorary Chairman of the corporation.

Raymond-Jules Cottet

Raymond-Jules Cottet served as director of *Societe des Lunetiers*. He was instrumental in furthering the development of Varilux by rejuvenating the enterprise that had been set in its ways. He recruited most of the young commercial staff such as Serge Martin, invigorating the company's organization. When the results of the progressive lens were positive enough, Cottet launched the commercialization of Varilux and invested in the creation of several manufacturing machines.

Serge Legendre

Legendre joined *Societe des Lunetiers* in 1953 as a project designer and was recruited to help Bernard Maitenaz with the improvement of the methods of lens surfacing. He worked on the development of the manufacturing machines, called D2-D3, for smoothing and polishing spherical lenses destined for the battants factory. These machines were the first to replace the old machines that had survived both Wars. The machines were rejuvenated and improved to stimulate lens production with entirely new technology and worked better and faster. More than fifty years and several changes later, though technically much evolved, lens machines still function on the principles defined by Maitenaz and Legendre.

Maurice Dufour

With the assistance of Serge Legendre who dictated the values corresponding to each sweep, Maurice Dufour developed the pattern according to the points defined on calculation sheets. The 4,000 points required machining one by one. The milling operations took two days for one

pattern. They shifted and cut for hours and hours as would a digitally-controlled machine today, with the telling difference that the entire operation was executed by hand. Those codes would control the machines that produced Varilux lenses.

Serge Martin

Serge joined the company in 1951. At the end of 1958, at the urgent request of Raymond Jules Cottet, Serge Martin established a plan for the launch of Varilux. The plan included a sales campaign for Varilux that focused on the product's "progressive nature" as its main feature.

Jacques Beasse

Jacques Beasse joined the Varilux team in the 1960s and was entrusted with directing studies on eye movements and the physiology of vision in general. Beasse and his collaborators analyzed movements of the eye and body and sent reports to Maitenaz. His talent with a pencil allowed him to create numerous plates explaining the features of Varilux and the interpretation of images by the brain. These transparencies were used as detailed visual aids to help Maitenaz explain the features and benefits of Varilux for the many conferences he gave on Varilux.

Gerard Cottet

Son of Raymond-Jules Cottet, Gerard Cottet joined *Societe de Lunetiers* in 1960, after cutting his teeth in an investment bank and then in advertising. He eventually went to England to manage the London branch, which employed a dozen people. Cottet was instrumental in developing its commercial network with Nylor frames, and above all helping launch the new star product, Varilux.

Michael Gillet

Gillet joined *Societe de Lunetiers* in 1952 and participated in the first trials of the progressive lenses in concert with opticians. He was put in charge of launching the new product as a technical salesman. His efforts were important as the team worked to build its initial customer base. Gillet worked step-by-step, optician-by-optician and used each success as an example to convince others. He answered opticians' questions and even called them himself, or would be on the road for support when informed by salesmen of their problems.

Pierre Le Fahler

Peirre Le Fahler, surrounded by around ten people, directed the Multi Optics subsidiary in Chicago beginning in 1975. He reinforced his team with a majority of Americans who for the most part were optically trained, such as Mike Daley.

Mike Daley

Mike Daley joined Essilor 1976, as a Varilux sales consultant. Pierre Le Fahler sent Daley to France for an intensive training course in progressive lenses. Upon his return, Daley was one of the original Varilux sales consultants and was sent out on the road to sell Varilux. He was instrumental in furthering Varilux's success in the United States. His theoretical practice allowed him to explain the characteristics of the product in a way that optical professionals understood. In 1997, he was inducted into the National Academy of Opticianry (NAO) Hall of Fame. He is a Fellow with the NAO, and serves on the Advisory Board of the Ophthalmic Dispensing Program.

Olivier Mathieux

A position previously held by Le Fahler Oliver Mathieux was appointed director of the Multi Optics subsidiary 1979. Joining Essilor in 1977 as commercial director for America, he had worked in Paris before being sent to San Francisco. When he took over management of MOC, America optical had just launched an important advertising campaign for the introduction of its progressive lens, Ultravue. The initial Varilux patents were now in public domain and most manufacturers developed their own progressive lens.

Marc Alexandre

Marc Alexandre knew the U.S. to be a difficult market for new products. He knew that the United States had tried to rally the big optical distributors before because the American manufacturers dominated the market. Alexandre contacted optometry schools and met with teachers. He offered them ten pairs of Varilux they could give to their colleagues, friends, students, for them to test the product, compare it to the bifocals and above all discover it. When optical specialists saw the money that Essilor was ready to spend to ensure the credibility of the progressive, they began to take Varilux seriously. At the beginning of the eighties, Alexandre had conceived a Varilux design for airline pilots. The Essilor lab developed a unique progressive lens, with the usual progression in the lower zone and at the top, a narrow area whose power corresponded to the distance of the instruments the pilot read from above eye level in the cockpit. Developed and tested with pilots of the Scandinavian company SAS, Varilux Pilot was launched in 1984 and most presbyopic airline pilots adopted the lens. He then got in touch with NASA astronauts and offered a specific lens for the Space Shuttle. Unfortunately, this cooperation ended with the Challenger disaster in January 1986.