Luxottica and Intel Take the Fashion/Tech Hookup to a Whole New Level

By Vanessa Friedman

On Wednesday, Luxottica, the Italian eyewear behemoth, and Intel, the American technology giant, announced a partnership for the research and development of tech-infused glasses that both signals a new stage in the wearables revolution and shows the brands staking their claims as the most tech-forward fashion company and the most fashion-aware tech company.

“The growth of wearable technology is creating a new playing field for innovation,” Brian Krzanich, the Intel chief executive, said in the announcement. “Through our collaboration with Luxottica Group, we will unite our respective ecosystems. We expect the combination of our expertise to help drive a much faster pace of innovation and push the envelope.”

“We bring to them the art of the possible, and they can help us figure out how to make people want it, very intimately,” he said.

The Luxottica chief executive Massimo Vian said, “This marks a new way to see glasses.” No pun intended. The agreement, which has been in discussion for two years, is open-ended. It will involve the creation of a special research and development group of Intel and Luxottica specialists, largely based in California, that will develop technologies for eyewear that can be applied to different brands, as appropriate. Luxottica holds the eyewear license for, among others, Burberry, Bulgari, Chanel, Coach, Armani, Miu Miu, Polo Ralph Lauren and Dolce & Gabbana.

As each new technology is developed, a contract will be negotiated that details each company’s respective ownership and investment.

It sounds a bit confusing, but Mr. Vian insisted not. “We’ve never had as flexible and open a contract with anyone before,” he said. “We have a magic chemistry.”

The partnership is the second such foray for Luxottica, after its announcement this year of an agreement to manufacture more fashion-forward frames for Google Glass via their brands Oakley and Ray-Ban. The Intel deal does not mean that Luxottica is breaking up with Google, Mr. Vian said, as it is a different kind of relationship.

“Google Glass is a specific product we are working on,” he said. “With Intel, we are researching new possibilities that can be applied or offered to many brands.”

Luxottica represents the fifth fashion partnership this year for Intel, which has also had liaisons with the fashion brand Opening Ceremony (which designed its MICA smart bracelet), the Council of Fashion Designers of America (marrying designers with technology), Barneys (selling MICA) and Fossil (working on accessories).

Together, Mr. Krzanich said, “We’re going to build some products and see where they can go.”

“We’re working on batteries that can be almost any shape you want,” he said. “Very small footprint silicon with low-power usages and high computing possibilities.”

And he sees a lot of options: “When I think of wearables, I think of appendages. You have the wrist, the torso, the eyes and ears. We are thinking about wearables in each of those spaces.”

In other words, both brands are clearly committed to the idea that consumer desire will make wearables the next big thing.

Mr. Vian said the first Luxottica/Intel baby — sorry, product — should reach the market next year.