

AP Limited Editions offers both classic lacquer art pens and pens that defy categorization.

# Pushing Boundaries and Building Bridges

BY NICKY PESSAROFF

For over 10 years, Anuj and Smita Poddar, the husband-and-wife founders of AP Limited Editions, have produced fine lacquer writing instruments. Calling both Singapore and California home, the Poddars infuse each of their writing instruments with Eastern and Western culture.

The artisans of AP Limited Editions specialize in Russian miniature, urushi lacquer art, and maki-e art—often pushing the boundaries of what said art can be.

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*“Our pens celebrate life, inviting you to experience perfect moments of timelessness that are immortalized in the finest visual expressions.”*  
—Smita Poddar

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The company offers a number of series and body styles for its ebonite writing instruments. The Emperor-sized, clipless, eyedropper-filling Connoisseur line is the company’s most exclusive series, always limited to nine pieces. The Writer series is a mid-sized, converter/piston-filling fountain pen, with or without clip, and also available as a rollerball. (Any AP Limited Editions pen can be ordered as a rollerball pen through the company’s bespoke service.) Editions are limited to nine or 18 writing instruments. Newest to AP Limited Editions is the Apprentice line, which premiered in 2016 as an entry-level line of the company’s Urushi and Sakura Lacquer Art series. All AP Limited Editions pens have 18 karat gold nibs in extra-fine, fine, medium, or broad.

During the span of their 30-year marriage, the Poddars have always worked together. Anuj notes, “It’s actually made us more aware of our strengths and weaknesses and the value of working together as a team. AP Limited Editions is our common objective, and our common goal is to make it a success.”

Far left—Part of the Writer series, The Enchanted Garden is a limited edition of nine pens in multiple maki-e forms by master artist Tamura San. The converter fountain pen has an 18 karat gold nib in extra-fine through broad and italic.

Left—Celebrating the Year of the Dog is a Connoisseur fountain pen honoring the 2018 Chinese New Year. Two adorable dogs grace the barrel while a backdrop of red urushi lacquer on the cap offsets cherry and mandarin blossoms. The eyedropper-filling fountain pen has an 18 karat gold nib in fine, medium, or broad.

Right—This Connoisseur limited edition of nine eyedropper-filling fountain pens with 18 karat gold nibs in fine, medium, or broad is called The Magnificence of the Double Phoenix. The body displays a male and female phoenix and symbolizes the union of yin and yang.



From left—Paragon fountain pen with bicolor 18 karat gold nib, Abstract 4 fountain pen, and the tranquil Cascading Streams fountain pen.

Smita continues, “Working together, we ‘create’ in a unique sense: an individual and combined expression of our personal evolution and the evolution of our company, its employees, and partners.”

Binary structures are everywhere in the work of AP Limited Editions. East meets West, male and female symbolism unite, classic techniques are married to postmodern philosophy.

“We apply Western art techniques to express Eastern forms and Eastern art techniques to express Western culture, creating bold and subtle fusions that are pronouncedly different yet harmonious,” Smita says. “Our creations are both traditional and modern, feminine and masculine, subtle and bold, realistic and abstract.”

Abstract, geometric designs have been a part of AP Limited Editions since 2007, but in the past few years, the company has skewed toward the abstract in a big way. “I was always keen to create fountain pens showing a variety of very different abstract and geometric patterns that depicted forms from a wide spectrum of different cultures,” Anuj notes.

Two designs take that abstraction to its logical extreme. The Paragon Writer-series fountain pen is a maki-e display of geometric principles, with applications of orange, green, and teal as well as shimmering abalone shell. This high-end maki-e pen was composed by renowned artisan Tatsuya Todo. Abstract 4, part of the company’s Writer series, uses hand finishing by master artist Matsuyama San to create fluid panels in shades of olive green, brown, and black along with more glittering abalone—a truly abstract, tidal appearance.

The artisans who create these abstract works tend to be younger, with a strong background in sculpture and deconstruction of form. Anuj notes, “The *Maki-e Shi* [maki-e artisans] are a unique set of individuals who thoroughly enjoy working with new ideas. The more unique the idea, the better the resultant product is.”

That focus is perhaps most pronounced in the Apprentice collection, AP Limited Editions’ line of introductory Urushi and Sakura Lacquer Art series of writing instruments. The simpler artwork allows the company to keep Apprentice price points lower, but the quality of the writing instruments and the hand-made nature of the designs remain the same.

AP Limited Editions is creating a new collector’s base that skews younger and more female with these series—and the Poddars are proud to have expanded their demographic. “Our Apprentice series is dedicated to these new collectors, who want to explore alternatives, understand techniques, and have options in regard to technical aspects,” Smita says. “In response, we now offer rollerball pens in our Apprentice series.”





Left—The Hunt fountain pen is a brilliant example of Kholui-style Russian miniature art. The Mighty Tiger is a chinkin-style fountain pen featuring fine chiseling and gold fill. Above—This close-up shot of the AP Limited Editions Umemi (Plum Blossom) fountain pen displays chinkin's fine etching. Below, right—The Apprentice series Chrysanthemums and Blue Birds fountain pen.



Chrysanthemums and Blue Birds is a fine example of this introductory series in the discipline of sakura lacquer art. An image of the flora and fauna of spring, the cartridge/converter fountain pen has an 18 karat gold nib in extra-fine through broad and is offered in limited numbers.

On the luxury side is AP Limited Editions' bespoke service, encompassing the most rarefied of experiences open to clientele. Anuj says, "Our bespoke service is a direct answer to what I, as a collector, sought for years—the idea of a pen with just what you want depicted and in the manner that you imagined. We are able to realize people's visions with our bespoke service."

Smita—who heads the design team for all AP Limited Editions writing instruments—works on the initial design based on the customer's expressed concept and budget. After a series of discussions on application techniques, style recommendations, and the technicalities of the writing instrument's internal mechanisms, a final design is approved and completed. Each bespoke piece is a singular piece of art, and the process can take anywhere from two to four months, sometimes even longer.

Anuj, for his part, is an avid practitioner of handwriting and constantly quests to create the most technically perfect pen he can.

"A pen takes on the character and writing style of its owner," Anuj says. "Our endeavor is to improve continuously our nibs, feeders, filling systems, and materials. We use the highest-grade ebonite, the best nibs and feeders, and we are working toward a brand-new filling system that will allow for a constant flow and the maximum amount of ink to be housed. Upon request, we also provide our collectors a nib personalization service through a renowned nibmaster."

AP Limited Editions also sets itself apart through its specialty in two of the more obscure schools of lacquering art: the Japanese process of *chinkin* and the Russian miniature Kholui style.

Chinkin involves minute chiseling and carving of a lacquer background that is then filled with gold, silver, and other precious materials. Only a handful of artisans the world over specialize in this rare art technique. Kholui, the most modern of the Russian lacquering art techniques, focuses on fine detail, warm but subtle colors, and an aesthetic focus on landscapes and detailed profiles.

A fine example of the company's work in chinkin is The Mighty Tiger, which has a black urushi background with a snarling, stylized tiger on the barrel. Stalks of bamboo running uninterrupted from the barrel to the cap provide the backdrop. Other than the pop of red on the tiger's tongue, the entire composition is made in simple, elegant gold tones—minimalist maki-e.

Smita notes, "Chinkin can be used very effectively to sculpt three-dimensional, realistic animal and plant life and also very modern, abstract forms. Kholui allows tremendous opportunity for abstract expression and is also great for expressing realistic art, such as in our pens, The Hunt and Lovers in a Landscape."

In all its writing instruments, AP Limited Editions strives for harmony. Indeed, there is an artistic and social philosophy to these creations—a call for multiculturalism and unity.

"Our products honor the traditional stories of a multicultural world and explore new ways of expressing these themes through color, form, technique, and abstract expression," Smita says. "We consciously present our collectors with the whole gamut of experience through contrasting binary systems—East and West, male and female, past and present. Through contrast, we enhance the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual experience of life."

Visit [aplimitededitions.com](http://aplimitededitions.com).

### *Cigars, Watches, and William Wagner Writing Instruments*

The luxury brand William Wagner Geneva specializes in bespoke and limited edition objet d'arts.

"I got to know about AP Limited Editions by reading an article on Anuj [Poddar] in the *Gulf News*, a leading newspaper in the United Arab Emirates," Charaf-Wagner says. He commissioned two pens: one to honor his family's watchmaking heritage (Swiss watchmaker William Wagner is Charaf-Wagner's grandfather) and one for his love of cigars.

The Writer-bodied Horology No. 1 Limited Edition is a converter filler with a sky blue urushi background flecked with silver and an intricate design of watch gears in taka maki-e. Artist Tanbo Hiroshi also used various maki-e techniques to create a three-dimensional illusion. The Connoisseur-bodied, eyedropper-filling Le Cigar No. 1 Limited Edition is its own illusion—on a glimpse, one could mistake this fountain pen for a real cigar. Artist Kotaku Kitahama used shades of platinum and gold lacquer to achieve this pen's marvelous detail.

Both these fountain pens are part of the AP Limited Editions bespoke service and have 18 karat gold nibs in various sizes, and both are limited to 25 pieces. Pens come in a matching presentation box complete with a plaque bearing the edition number and (optionally) the customer's name. Included in the package are two 30 ml bottles of Diamine ink in black and royal blue. The series are carried exclusively at Davidoff Geneva boutique stores in New York, Geneva, and Hong Kong.

[bespokeww.com](http://bespokeww.com)



Left—Cherry Blossoms in Silver features inlaid ornaments and blossoming sakura flowers and has an 18 karat gold nib with the engraved company logo. Right—Horology No. 1 and Le Cigar No. 1.