



Love Story

BY NICKY PESSAROFF

AP Limited Editions celebrates its 10th anniversary with pens in honor of its deep U.S. connection.

You can't talk about AP Limited Editions without talking about Anuj and Smita Poddar, the husband-and-wife team that built a small pen company into an acclaimed luxury brand focused on fine art and fountain pens. Smita Poddar says, "I knew my husband since our teens. He had bold ideas and dreams of building a brand that expressed his passion for everything he loved—travel, art, antiques, pens, and pen-related ephemera. He had a keen eye for quality and precision. I knew that he would one day create something that expressed his passion and interest. He just had to.

"So on our wedding anniversary, ten years ago, February 19, 2006, he took his hobby to the next level and AP Limited Editions was launched with two limited edition writing instruments, with 18 pens in each edition, to show at the Los Angeles International Pen Show in Manhattan Beach. The response was astounding, and both editions sold out."

Since then, AP Limited Editions has shown remarkable growth, both financially and artistically, consistently offering limited edition maki-e and Russian miniature pen models that wow pen lovers.

"Passion and enthusiasm are the key drivers bringing AP to its milestone of 10 years," Anuj Poddar says. "The company has grown slowly by improving the product from a technical standpoint, listening to customer feedback, exploring new techniques in the art form, and experimenting with new ideas. It is the ability to adapt to what the customer desires that has brought us this far."

Anuj grew up surrounded by his mother's art collection: Indian miniatures, Chinese brush paintings, Japanese woodblocks, Western Renaissance pieces. Smita, for her part, studied art history and design along with business management. When they immigrated to the United States, Anuj discovered the meticulous art of maki-e through the American pen community.

Born in both the West and the East, with headquarters in Los Angeles and Singapore and a staff of artists from Russia and Japan, AP Limited Editions is a global company, but the Poddars credit the United States for a great deal of their current success.

“Our time in the States has been a very special experience for us,” Anuj says. “We are eternally grateful to this great nation that gave us the opportunity to launch our brand and make it successful. We feel a sense of pride in being American, and it inspired us to honor the United States with a very special collection.”

The Great American Bald Eagle collection pays homage to that most prominent American symbol, the bald eagle. At the same time, the two pens serve as beautiful examples of the two major art forms the company is known for and the two major divisions of its collections: One version in a combination of maki-e techniques is a part of the Connoisseur series, and the other, hand-painted in the Palekh style of Russian miniature painting, is part of the more affordable Writers series. Pre-orders will be accepted beginning in February 2016 with delivery in the spring.

The maki-e version shows the eagle against a mountain backdrop done in taka and togadashi maki-e. Above the scene is a raden sky replete with 50 stars. The pen is eye-dropper-filled and comes with a solid 18 karat gold nib in a choice of fine, medium, or broad. A limited edition of nine pieces, the pen is priced at \$9,500 each throughout 2016, after which the price will increase to \$12,000.

The smaller hand-painted pen displays a similarly perched bald eagle with a fiery sunset in the background. The converter-filling pen comes with a solid 18 karat gold nib in a choice of extra-fine, fine, medium, broad, and italic. The pen is priced at \$4,900 throughout 2016 but will increase to \$6,500 after the anniversary year.

The Great American Bald Eagle collection features the brand’s current barrel shape—simple, clipless, streamlined, and tapering softly at either end. To complete the American motif, the threaded cap covers a section striped in red and white.

Along with the Great American Bald Eagle collection, the company also offers two new ink colors, Old Glory Red and Old Glory Blue, homages to the colors of the



This page and opposite—the Great American Bald Eagle Limited Edition from AP Limited Editions. The pen comes with the combination inkwell/pen holder shown above at no additional charge throughout 2016.

Recent pens from AP Limited Editions inspired by the Mughal period of Indian history—Nature’s Bounty, a maki-e pen depicting an enameled scabbard from the early 18th century (note the guilloché effect in the background); The Hunt, with Russian miniature painting in the Palekh school, pays homage to a sport that was important to the princes of the Mughal court.



American flag. Made in collaboration with a European company, these inks are exclusive to AP Limited Editions. Old Glory Red further honors the United States with a rose fragrance, the national flower. (The Poddars say we should expect more colors of AP Limited Editions ink as 2016 rolls on.) A handmade crystal inkwell complements the lot; it is included in the American Bald Eagle set and is also available for sale individually.

The launch of the Great American Bald Eagle collection resonates strongly with the Poddars on a number of levels. For one, the launch time coincides with their 28th wedding anniversary. Their marriage began in the United Kingdom; from there, the Poddars spent time on the island of Malta, settled in the United States, and now divide their time between the States and Singapore.

The Poddars actually credit their business with strengthening their bond. Smita Poddar explains, “Many businesses are undertaken as a means to make money, but when a hobby and passion translate into a career, and the appreciation of that passion is valued by both partners, it is a little easier to balance a personal and professional life.” Anuj puts it more succinctly: “Working together for us is a pleasure. We work well as a team.”

That team mentality applies to the business as a whole. Each pen is conceived and planned long before ever reaching production.

“We have a team of creative people that includes five designers, one of whom is very skilled at technical drawing, and one copywriter,” Anuj says. “This team is responsible for storyboarding a design from paper to digital formats. Smita heads the team

in conceptualizing the theme and story for our pens, sometimes 18 to 24 months before we even bring the pen to market.

“Smita and I together select the artist to whom we entrust the work. The decision to give a particular theme to a specific artist is a very important one. All of our artists are different in their styles and talents, so it is very critical for us to pair the right theme with the right artist.”

That management style has created some truly stunning works of art over the past ten years. The Poddars’ list of personal favorites includes *Pen World Readers’ Choice Award* winner *The Blade of Magnificence* (2013 Best Maki-e), the new Great American Bald Eagle, the Royal Bengal Tiger, and the Tree of Life, to name a few. The list encompasses the brand’s creativity and growth—from a pen

company that went from a couple of maki-e pens at the L.A. Pen Show 10 years ago to an established fine writing instrument brand.

The brand continues to grow. AP Limited Editions now offers a wide selection of nibs—extra-extra-fine, extra-fine, fine, medium, broad, and italic—along with a nib customization service for collectors. A new bespoke service allows collectors to personally design a one-of-a-kind pen in partnership with the company’s design team. A new innovative filling system is also in the works.

In all, the future looks bright for both AP Limited Editions and for the Poddars. The strength of their personal relationship directly informs their business, and vice versa. They see every reason to imagine growth for both in the future. Smita Poddar explains it best:

“Our pens are our shared dreams and visions. They speak to our stories of individual experience, the books we read, the places we travel, the forms of nature that enchant us, the art forms that inspire us.”

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A few of their favorite pens—Smita and Anuj Poddar are particularly fond of the Blade of Magnificence, the Bengal Tiger, and the Tree of Life, among others.