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ONCE UPON A TIME...

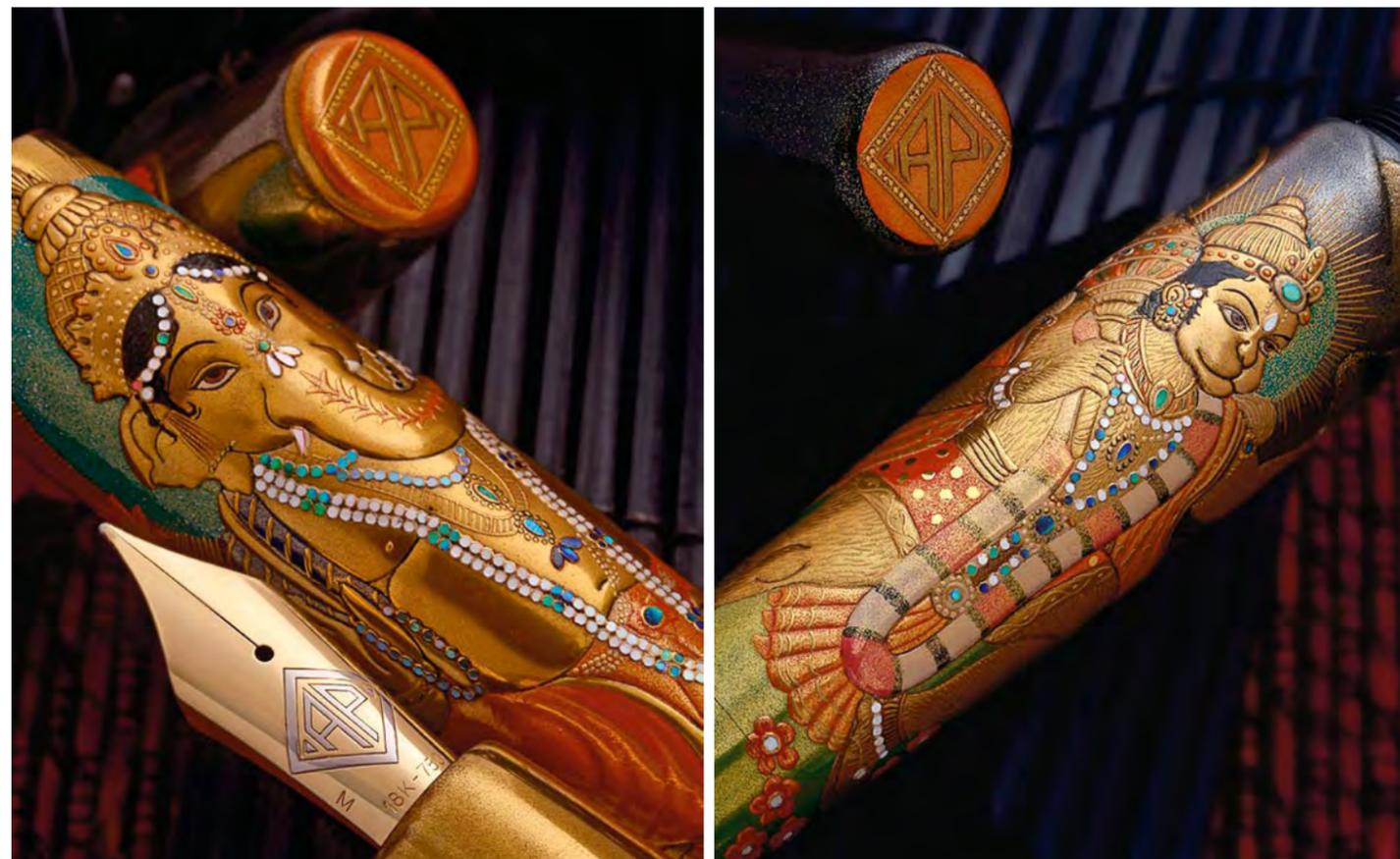
AP Limited Editions stand apart from the rest of the herd. PENcraft talks to Anuj Poddar, the man behind the mystique.

BY DAVID KHOO

Novices to the world of pen-collecting are likely to be familiar with the usual suspects of big brand names. However, as one matures and develops in the hobby, the urge to push the boundaries start to manifest itself in a willingness to explore and experiment with less conventional brands. After all, the 'same-old-same-old' can get 'hum-drum' over time and keeping the fires of a hobby



The Poddars'; Anuj and Smita



alive means not getting stuck in a rut.

Moreover, serious pen aficionados who have already built up a comprehensive collection need to latch onto a collectible that is special and exclusive to truly set themselves apart from the rest. Even better if they have something precious to serve as an heirloom for the next generation, which is where 'AP Limited Editions' come in as it has attained a sort of 'cult' status amongst the global pen-collecting fraternity.

The initials 'AP' (for Anuj Poddar) seem innocuous enough to the uninitiated, but the cognoscenti will appreciate the exclusive and very limited edition pieces to issue forth from the manufacturer. Judging by the levels of aesthetic intricacy and craftsmanship that characterise any one of the

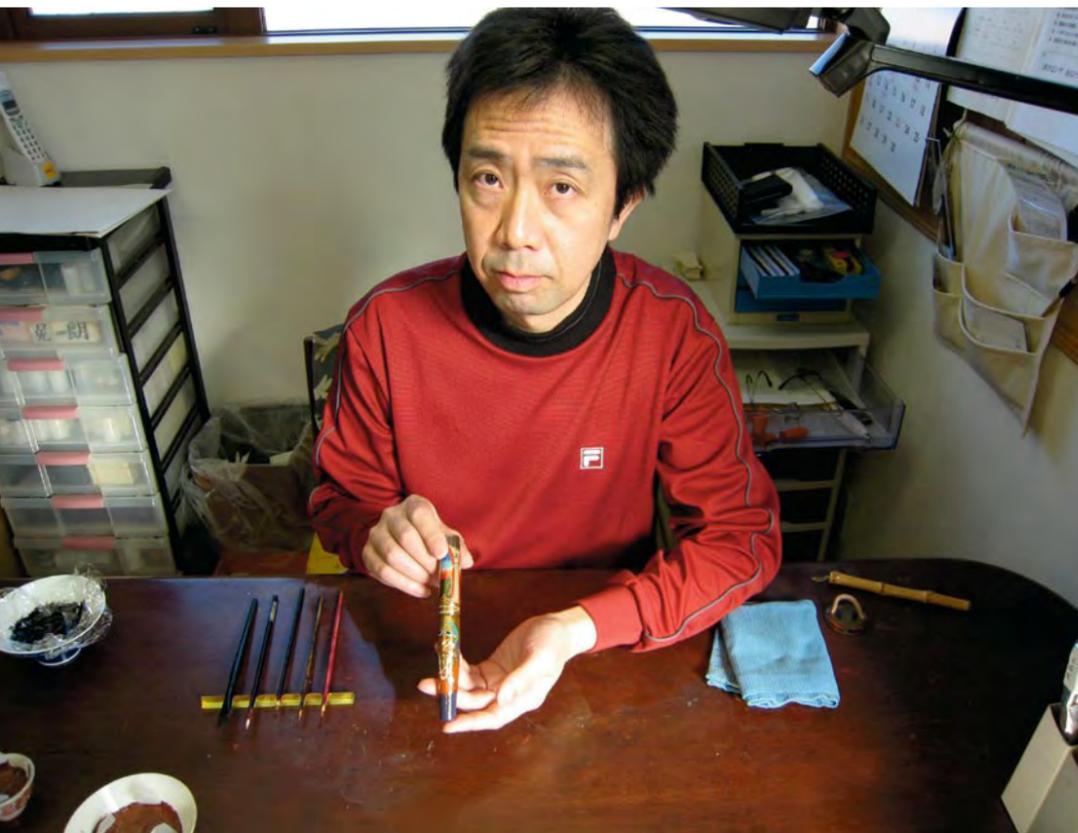
'AP Limited Editions' writing instruments, it's clear that a great deal of passion is involved in the painstaking creation of each pen.

The passion for pens gripped Mr. Poddar from a tender age of nine, where he grew to appreciate the art of fine penmanship as he was growing up in India and subsequently, England, where his teenage years were spent immersing himself in the world of fountain pens by reading, using, learning, as well as visiting the vintage/collectible hubs and shops in London, which included Battersea, Covent Garden, Burlington Arcade and Harrods.

Saving prudently helped him grow his pen collection, making sure only to buy the most "intriguing pieces", but

“My pens are designed with no specific gender in mind and the ‘AP Limited Editions’ lines have been acquired by both men and women from different countries.”

~ Anuj Poddar



Maki-e artist, Kogaku-san, created the ‘Ganesha’ and ‘Hanuman’ pens. He is working on a new pen for ‘AP Limited Editions’

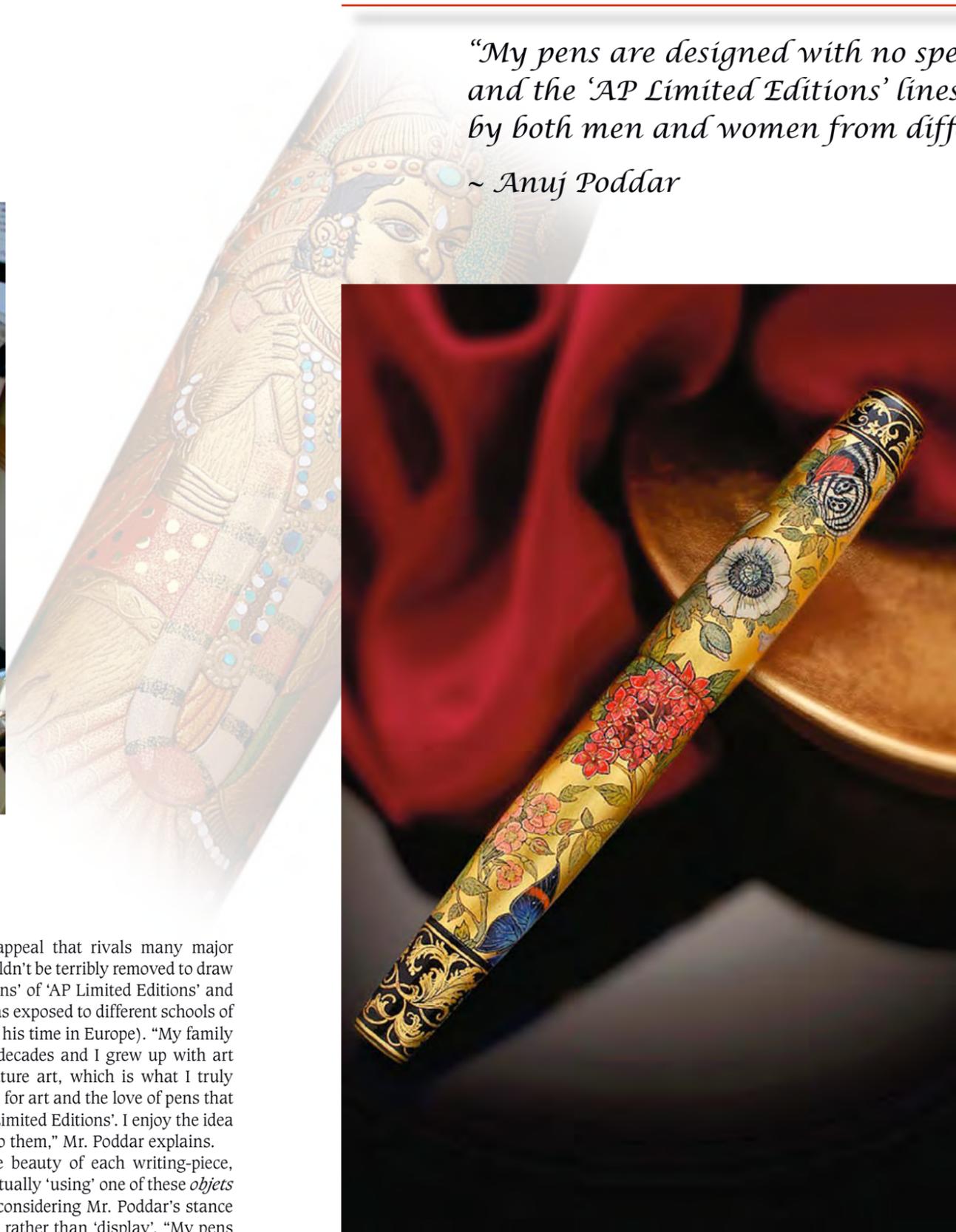
most importantly, his pens were never destined to be ‘safe-queens’. “My pens were not just a part of a collection to view – I thoroughly enjoyed putting the fine nibs to paper,” he reminisces.

Even as a youngling, Mr. Poddar already had the big dreams that characterise so many successful passion-driven entrepreneurs, “I used to dream of how I would launch a line of pens that would be everything I desired to own.” Re-locating to the United States gave him the opportunity to become a part of and interact with the collector fraternity there, which enabled him to enhance the scope of his pen knowledge. This would serve as the source of his inspiration to kick-start his brand, ‘AP Limited Editions’.

Even the most cursory examination of an ‘AP’ pen-piece

reveals a depth of artistic appeal that rivals many major manufacturers. In fact, it wouldn’t be terribly removed to draw a parallel between the ‘art pens’ of ‘AP Limited Editions’ and miniature art pieces (Anuj was exposed to different schools of Russian miniature art during his time in Europe). “My family have been art collectors for decades and I grew up with art around me, especially miniature art, which is what I truly appreciate. It was the passion for art and the love of pens that really got me started on ‘AP Limited Editions’. I enjoy the idea of pens with an art element to them,” Mr. Poddar explains.

Considering the exquisite beauty of each writing-piece, one ponders the efficacy of actually ‘using’ one of these *objets d’art*, a conundrum of sorts considering Mr. Poddar’s stance as a strong advocate of ‘use’, rather than ‘display’. “My pens



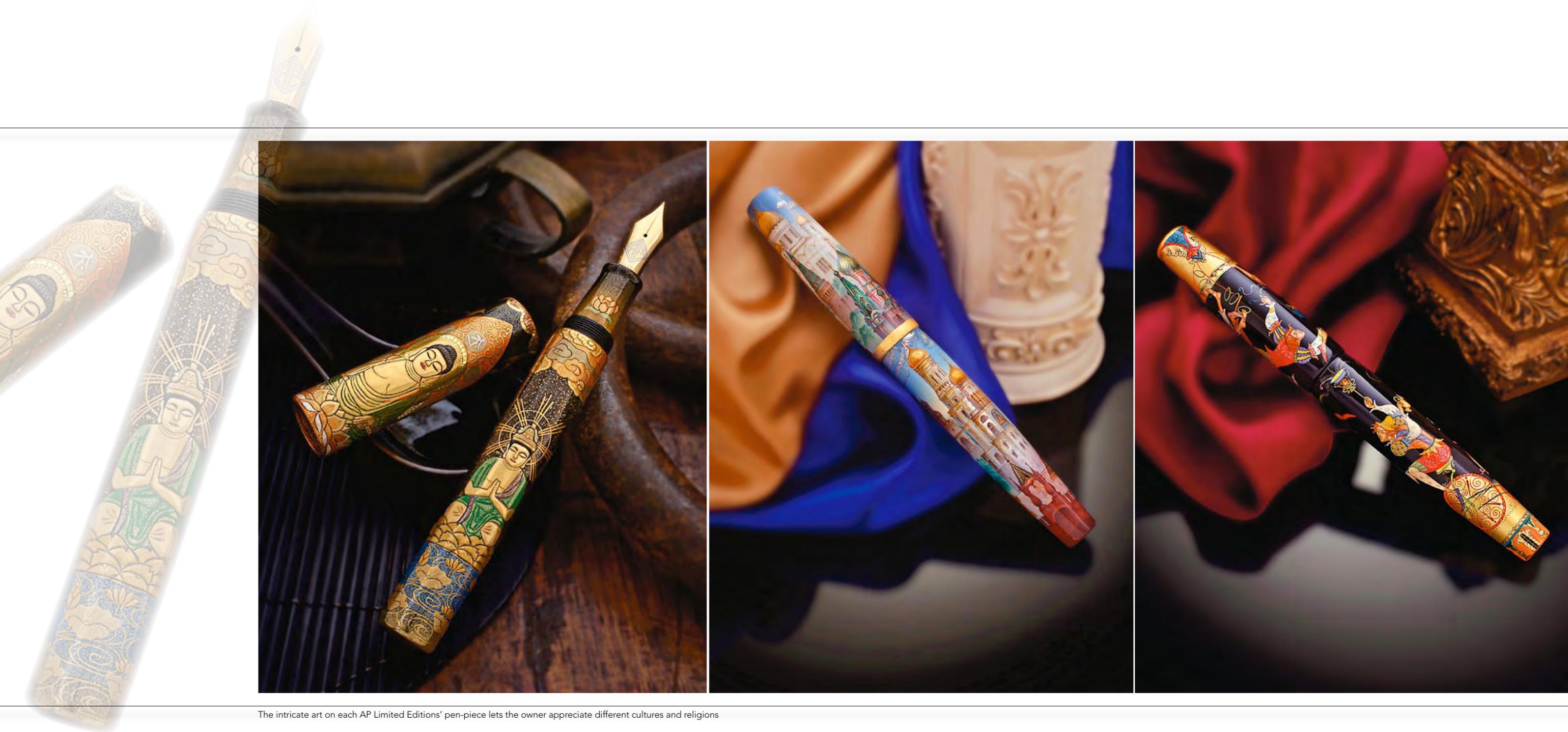
are designed for collectors who appreciate art. The pens are absolutely for collecting; they are works of art that will appreciate in value and become part of a person’s estate,” he iterates. But he adds, “They may be used as well. I use my own pens all the time.”

Despite the predominantly male base of pen collectors, recent years have shown a surge in female enthusiasts. However, Anuj is quick to point out AP Limited Edition pens are designed to have a universal appeal. “My pens are designed with no specific gender in mind and the ‘AP Limited Editions’ lines have been acquired by both men and women from different countries,” Mr. Poddar emphasises. But he attributes different aspects of his pens that appeal to the ladies. “Writing with fountain pens may not be appealing to some women but they all love the art, the detailed work and they can appreciate the aesthetic value of the product.”

The complexity and detail of the artwork on these writing pieces boggles belief as they straddle history, fantasy and whimsy that transcends the many cultures and borders he’s encountered and crossed in his travels. Mr. Poddar gives us a glimpse into this creative process that sees him spinning stories via the artwork on the pens from ‘AP Limited Editions’.

He elaborates, “I find inspiration for themes from memories of books read, stories heard and ancient art forms. The selection process is quite diverse in nature. I believe that every form of art tells a story and I seek to capture all that is beautiful and inspiring in that story. I travel across the globe to find ancient techniques of art that can be rendered on a pen. I like to marry the art form to the story. This is an experimental process since the story and the art form may come from two completely diverse cultures.”

Living in so many different countries and experiencing the different cultures have provided him with invaluable exposure to different influences. For instance, the ‘Ganesha’ and ‘Hanuman’ are inspired by his childhood memories in India. His travels in East Asia gave us the ‘Buddha’ series,



The intricate art on each AP Limited Editions' pen-piece lets the owner appreciate different cultures and religions

while the 'Circus' was inspired from childhood memories of travelling Russian circus groups. Mr. Poddar hints that a future collection will reflect the American themes of his chosen country of residence.

For the moment at least, collectors of his limited pieces have no cause to worry that Mr. Poddar will ever 'sell-out' or compromise on his ideals for the purposes of turning a fast-buck. As far as Anuj is concerned, "I have no plans of

entering into any collaboration or joint venture with a big name. 'AP Limited Editions' is a result of love passion and creativity; I would not want that to ever be compromised. This is a business that is very personal to me and I wish to keep it that way. But that's not to say I do not wish for it to grow. I do hope to see AP Limited Editions become a big name on its own one day. I am in no rush though; the future is unknown but exciting and the opportunities, endless."

However, like all great works of art, Mr. Poddar wants his pens to be 'accessible', but he is adamant that it is the collector/connoisseur he is interested in and not the 'dabbler'. He is currently working on a slightly less expensive range of pens but rules out mass production to make his job easier. "The whole idea is to create limited editions with the use of unique forms of art from all over the world, each design being unique and original in all aspects. Mass production

would defeat the whole purpose."

Bearing in mind the length of time from initial conception to end-result of a pen line (up to a year), Mr. Poddar's aversion to mass production really shows his commitment to his principles. It is this meticulous attention to detail that truly sets a work of art apart from everything else.

"Every pen tells a story," Anuj says.

I'm glad we get to hear his... PC