

Absolutely, Positively Luscious

AP Limited Editions

BY JOHN CHANDLER



Goldfish; Rabbits in a Summer Garden

Some fountain pens are pieces of fine art. Some fountain pens are excellent writing instruments. AP Limited Editions seeks to create a fountain pen that is both.

Anuj Poddar's long-held reverence for art and pen collecting began in his childhood in India and continued through his teenage years in England and his immigration to the United States. In establishing AP Limited Editions, Poddar benefited from the years he spent researching art forms that could be applied to pens and the technology required to create high quality writing instruments.

Initially turning out fine maki-e pieces with the aid of Danitrio principal Bernard Lyn, Poddar launched his brand at the Los Angeles International Pen Show in 2006 with the aid of retailer Eddie Kallman of Airline International, who handled the sales. "We sold 16 pens in one day at \$18,000 each," Poddar marvels. "That gave me the platform to launch this business."

Poddar also sought out the best artists in the Russian schools of Fedoskino and Palekh miniature art to adorn pens with thematic scenes of nature, religion, legend, and history. Nearly all of AP Limited Editions' output falls into the categories of maki-e and Russian miniature art.

The creative process begins with Poddar and his team of three others, one of whom is his wife. Before each year begins, they always have a production plan in place, which includes the artistic themes they are interested in exploring and how many pieces to produce, but they are small enough to change their minds and deviate from the plan.

They must also determine whether each project will be rendered in maki-e or in Russian miniature painting. The decision is often based on the theme's compatibility with the medium and also the artists' enthusiasm for a given theme—Poddar has scrapped ideas that the artists couldn't get excited about, knowing that they will do their best work





From top, three pens offered in limited editions of nine pieces each—Writers Series Le Cirque, paying tribute to the historical circus of Russia; The Lovable Giant Panda; and The Celebrations at the Private Garden of Emperor Qianlong.

on subjects they take pleasure in. One project everyone was clearly excited about is the Tree of Life, shown with this article and also on our cover. Poddar calls it the most exciting project he has ever worked on. Crafted by master maker Shi Kosetsu San, the Tree of Life traces the journey of the ordinary soul to enlightenment.

Many times decisions on themes are guided by or even determined by the demographic group for which a particular pen is intended. For example, Poddar creates pens for the Indian chain store William Penn (see *PW*, October 2014), but the retailer is interested only in Indian themes. Middle Easterners tend not to like faces of people depicted on pens, he says. Poddar has found that themes dealing with nature and wildlife are universally popular, as are depictions of myth and legend. Recent pens

from AD Limited Editions depict goldfish, Bengal tigers, giant pandas, and fluffy rabbits.

Despite all the variables, one constant in AP Limited Editions pieces is that they all have a story to tell through exquisite artwork.

The brand's collections come in two categories, the luxury Connoisseur Series and the recently added Writers Series, which offers luxury pens at a more affordable price point—mostly from \$1,800 to \$6,500 but with some priced as low as \$900. This allows many customers access to AP Limited Editions that was previously unavailable. A wider range of nib widths and styles, with customization by U.S. nib specialist John Mottishaw at no additional charge to the customer, is available in the Writers Series, including extra-fine, fine, medium, broad, stub and fine italic.



Simple and elegant Writers Series Red Lamont, available in nine each of rollerball and fountain pen

At the other end of the price spectrum, a bespoke pen service has recently been introduced allowing customers to define what they want on one-of-a-kind, individualized projects. One early client was the Sultan of Oman; a current client is a Chinese customer who wants a pen that depicts his Buddhist garden.

“I want people to be able to sit down with me and discuss what they want. We can really do almost anything,” says Poddar.

Poddar attributes much of AP Limited Editions’ success to personal contact with dealers, artists, and customers. On the road for as much as six months of the year, Poddar visits each of his dealers at least twice a year, as well as all the artists engaged by the brand, and the feedback he receives is critical to developing future pieces.

In the next year, while wildlife themes will continue in the Writers Series, mosaic patterns and designs will be directed towards the tastes of consumers in the Middle East, an area where Poddar would

like to develop an even greater presence after being featured by the English-language Middle Eastern paper *Gulf News*. AP Limited Editions will also be introducing a line of inks later this year, which brings us back to writing.

Poddar is passionate about producing writing instruments that work perfectly. While acknowledging that the high price point of most AP Limited Editions pens means that most of his pieces are purchased by collectors who will never ink them, he says, “I am selling pens, not just art. If I’m selling a beautiful pen that doesn’t write well, I might as well be selling pictures or plaques hanging on the wall.”

After nine years producing beautiful art pens, Anuj Poddar is still a collector at heart. During the course of our discussion he noticed my pen, a Franklin-Christoph, and asked to examine it. He takes a great interest in what others in the pen business are doing and appreciates quality in pieces other than his own. After expressing his approval of my Model 29, he showed me the pen he likes



Poddar’s travel pen—a customized Platinum.

The Almighty Shiva pen depicts one of the most enigmatic deities of the Hindu pantheon borne upon the back of the Divine Nandi. The edition is limited to nine pieces.



Writers Series maki-e Prayer Wheel pen, inspired by the Tibetan prayer wheel used by Buddhists. The inlays are abalone, mother-of-pearl, and coral.



AP Limited Editions display at the renowned Singapore retailer Aesthetic Bay

to carry when traveling, a simple black Platinum that one of his maki-e artists embellished into a beautiful one-of-a-kind jewel. “I love Japanese nibs,” he says.

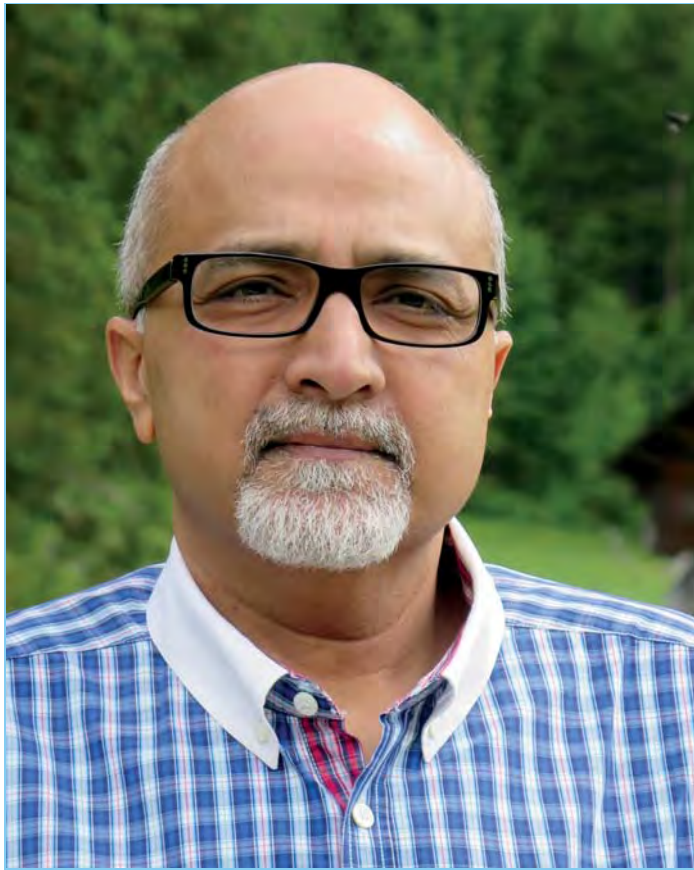
He doesn’t share the view of some that the pen market is dwindling—but he acknowledges it has shrunk in some areas and grown in others.

“I think the most important thing is to have staying power,” he says. “Consistency. In this business you must be customer focused, knowing what the customer wants—that’s why it is so important that I communicate with my dealers, to know what the customers are saying, what they like, what they don’t.”

Examining many of his beautifully crafted pieces on the small table in front of me, I was overwhelmed with the exquisite detail and quality of craftsmanship so readily apparent. I simply didn’t possess the superlatives necessary to adequately express myself.

I was reduced to “Wow!”

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The Tree of Life

Many cultures across the world understand the symbol of the Tree of Life. The Buddhist version of this symbol is represented on the new Tree of Life pen from AP Limited Editions, the company's most intricate maki-e project to date with nine pieces available.

Says Poddar, "The hidden meaning of life and evolution of the soul is intricately woven into the roots, trunk, and branches of a tree as it stretches outwards to the Great Void, while rooting itself inwards, deep inside the soul of Mother Earth. The art on the pen traces the journey of an ordinary soul on the path to discovering and achieving the divine state of the Great Buddha. Buddhism believes in the enormous potential vested in human life.

"The Tree of Life is the enlightened state of the Buddha—the One who has crossed all the inner and outer realms of existence."

