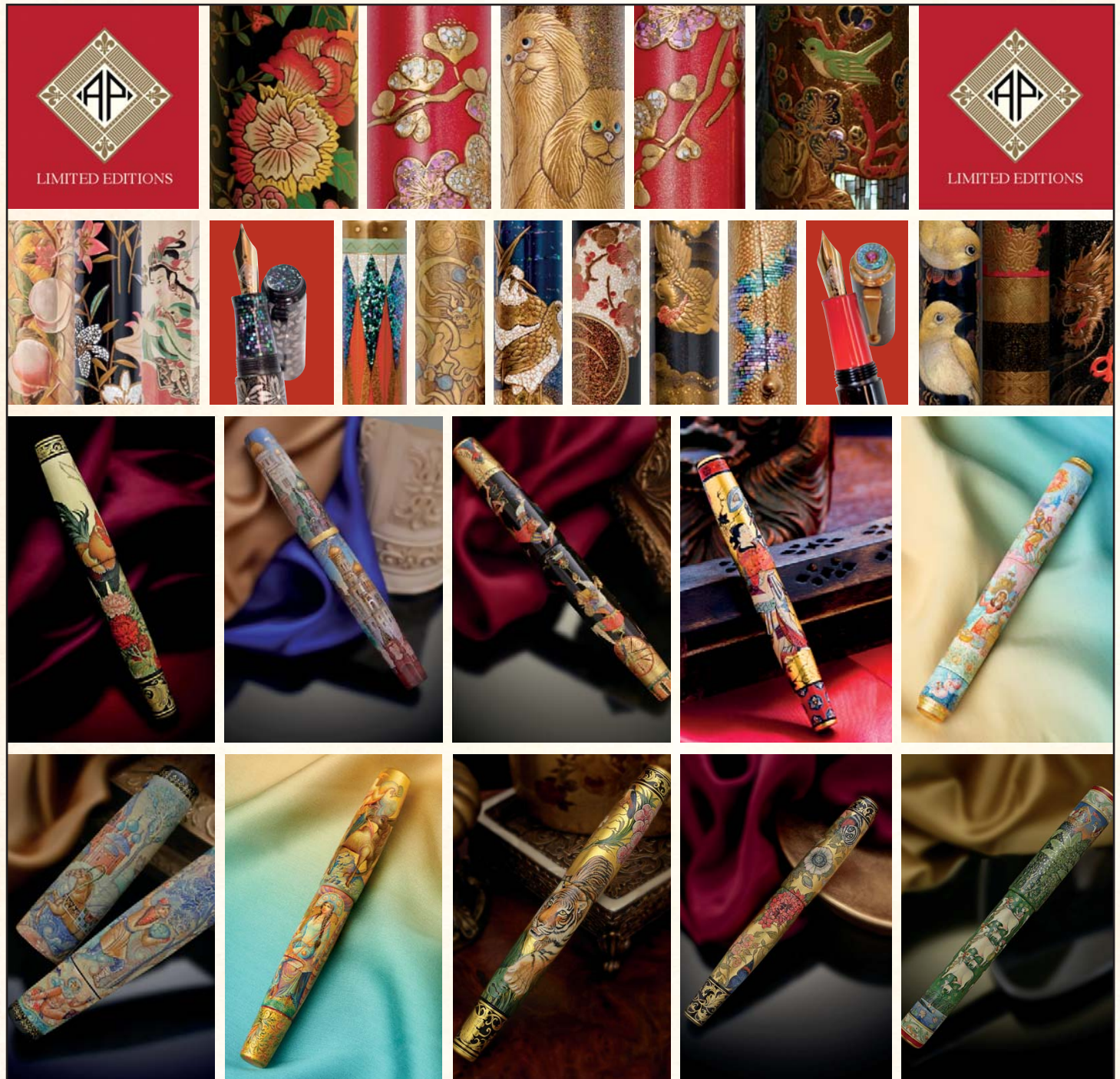


# Superlatives

## Appropriate Here

BY BARRY GABAY

Writing instruments from AP Limited Editions are a blend of influences and techniques, reflecting our multicultural world.



Top two rows—examples of AP Limited Editions urushi and maki-e writing instruments. Bottom two rows—the company's work in Russian lacquer art.







**W**e must reserve the use of adjectives for them to have any meaning or substance. We hear “amazing” countless times—so often, in fact, that it has entirely lost its original meaning of “being overwhelmed by sudden surprise.” Today, the word merely signifies “very good.”

I hesitate to make the claim that follows, but from a long lifetime of usage, I have encountered a fair number of fountain pens. So here goes: the pens offered for the eyes of all and the hands of a fortunate few by AP Limited Editions are among the most beautiful and functional pens in the world. Period.

Approaching an AP Limited Editions pen is entirely different from grabbing a favorite daily writer; but these gallery-quality art pens are meant to be used. Anuj and Smita Poddar, founders and owners of AP, are serious pen users and collectors and want to share both those aspects of writing culture. Why should a luxury model intended for writing sit unused on a shelf?

The fountain pens and rollerballs produced by AP Limited Editions are among the greatest in their category, a realm that merges fine art and utility. These pens are exquisite but are also meant for writing. The fountain pens are eyedropper or cartridge/converter fillers (with new bulk fillers recently released) fitted with 18 karat gold nibs in a wide range of grades from Bock, the famed German nib maker.



Left—The Benevolent *Chenrezig* is a bespoke piece that honors the *Avalokitesvara* Buddha, the patron Buddha of Tibet.  
Top—AP Limited Editions CEO Anuj Poddar.

Right—our cover pen, *The Legendary Double Dragon*, is a new *Connoisseur*-series writing instrument with a greenish-gold backdrop representing the majesty of the cosmos, crafted in the specialized *bokashi nuri* technique of mixing different *urushi* pigments with gold. An elderly golden dragon on the cap and a young blue dragon on the barrel gaze at each other, both composed in *taka maki-e*. Smita Poddar says, “This creation speaks to the cycle of life” and echoes circular cultural legends in which the end leads back to the beginning.





AP pens are created not only as objects of beauty but as fully-functional writing instruments. There are not only images designed for all tastes but also pen shapes suitable for each hand. Some recent design shapes include a tapered bulb, a traditional balance with tapered ends, or straight and flush. Presently, the most popular body style is cylindrical with pedestals or finials. Separating the barrel from the cap seems to form the twin handles of a scroll, revealing truths each time the pen is opened and put to use.

Floral, faunal, and geometric designs characterize some models, including hand-carved shell inlays and gold-dust sprinkles. Others contain extremely intricate paintings from the history and culture of many nations. As one interprets art and then fashions a personal view, the AP pen becomes a canvas—a source for inspiration and understanding for the viewer.

AP's professional philosophy is different from most pen manufacturers, even from those also producing art pens. Anuj Poddar began his passion for writing instruments at age eight, using fountain pens at home and school. Anuj retains his desire to find the “near perfect” pen. He qualifies “near perfect” by saying he continuously aspires to do better.

“We believe in listening to our customers’ ideas and desires. This helps us approach perfection in the eyes of our customers and for ourselves as well,” Anuj says.

Now in its second decade, AP presents two art forms from vastly different cultures—Japanese maki-e and Russian lacquer art—and several specific techniques within each category, an example of AP's willingness to experiment, to merge different designs and art forms in the constant search for elusive perfection. Some of AP's pens incorporate unique techniques of urushi and maki-e that are closely guarded by artists whose expertise and skills have been handed down from one generation to another.

Over the years, Anuj and Smita have received letters from writers who appreciate AP pens but are unable to afford them. Anuj comments, “Given our inherent desire to create an awareness for the importance of handwriting, our effort in recent years is to bring forth collections of affordable yet beautiful writing instruments carefully crafted using heritage art forms. At AP, we believe that emotion can be more fully expressed through a handwritten note.”

An important feature of AP's service allows customers to realize a personal vision through the company's customized bespoke service.

There are custom pen makers who have a conversation at a pen show or online, discussing features the customer would like on an individualized, bespoke pen. With AP, the process is different and considerably more personal. Extensive conversations occur, including discussions of budgetary concerns; designs and sketches are exchanged; images are refined, and a final decision is made. Not only the principals and customer are involved; the artists who will create the actual art on the pen are a part of the exchange. This highly customized service is one appreciated by all who have participated.

Left—the bespoke Immortal Dragon is a Writer-bodied fountain pen with a bamboo-style clip in bright red lacquer. The traditional golden Chinese fire dragon on the barrel is composed in taka maki-e and features flames on the cap, abalone inlay on the cap and barrel crowns, and gold flaking at the barrel and cap ends.  
Right—the Writer series Majestic Mount Fuji and Dragon, limited to nine editions, features a maki-e golden dragon on the barrel looking up at Mount Fuji on the cap.





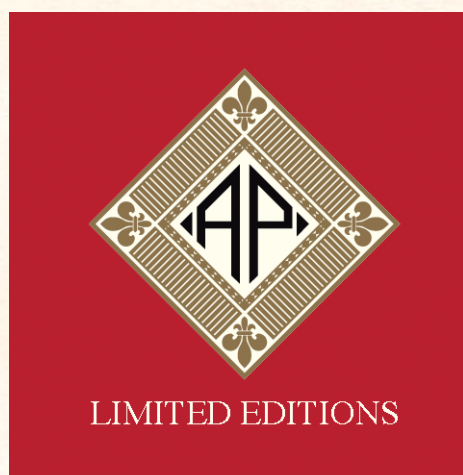
Upon receiving the ideas, the design team, headed by Smita, prepares initial drawings and information on suggested techniques, as well as recommending a certain form of art or craft to be applied on the pen.

Smita explains, "It is after a series of discussions that a final concept is approved, and we then start working on the pen with a 50-percent deposit from the collector. The bespoke pen may take anywhere from two to four months, sometimes much longer, depending of the complexity of the artwork and design."

The bespoke pen is a unique, one-of-a-kind pen that is not repeated. Anuj reveals his personal delight: "We take immense pleasure in the entire process and the sheer glee and wonder we see in the eyes of the collector when receiving a bespoke pen. This is truly gratifying and satisfying for us. The more involved a client gets and the more open they are with what they want, the more beautiful the resultant pen becomes."

Smita clearly conveys her devotion to her pens and those who own them: "Our products honor and celebrate the traditional stories, figures, places, and customs of a multicultural world through different periods of history. Our products also explore real and imagined personal stories and experiences. We hope our fine writing instruments build bridges among cultures and uplift, question, reflect, educate, and spread a greater concept of respect and understanding. We also seek to strengthen the spiritual connection with nature, its fascinating flora and fauna, and the spatial forms that comprise our cosmos."

Below—AP Limited Editions logo and the brand's standard 18 karat gold nib with engraved logo. Right—Writer series Mount Fuji and Crane maki-e fountain pen, limited to nine editions; Great Generals of the Desert, limited to nine writing instruments, is a seamless composition of varied maki-e techniques.







Above—Writer series Giant Pacific Octopus and Goldfish writing instruments (limited to nine editions each) both use taka, togidashi, and raden maki-e techniques to capture visions of the deep. Left to right—examples of abstract maki-e compositions: Writer series No. 7 shows an abstract display of the number “7” in various languages; The Pearl is a Writer series pen with a meticulous display of abalone and mother of pearl; The Skull, part of the Writer series, uses traditional maki-e for a modernist abstraction of human skulls. All limited to nine editions.



The emphasis in the coming months is to create a seamless online experience for customers who will be able to purchase pens online as well as place bespoke orders. There are several types of urushi lacquer art (produced from sap of the urushi tree) that AP Limited Editions makes available through its Urushi and Sakura Lacquer Art collections. The Sakura pen series is dedicated to first-time AP collectors—rollerballs or fountain pens with 18 karat gold nibs that are meant for everyday use and simpler design schemes that allow for lower price points. The Urushi lacquer art series is similarly priced and features urushi lacquer bodies with different textures and finishes.

A visit to the AP website is an education not just in this company's products but also in urushi, maki-e, and Russian miniature art techniques. Because AP pens are each unique and contain such beautiful art, some customers want to see and handle the pens prior to purchase, so Anuj and Smita attend major U.S. pen shows. Because of the new emphasis on online purchases, the company incorporates special considerations regarding customer satisfaction and the free flow and exchange of ideas. The convenience of online shopping and online conversation allows a new generation of AP customers and collectors to see and order pens from the website. Feedback has been positive regarding this renewed online attention.

The opportunity to acquire fine writing instruments online through the AP website has already logged legions of devoted writers and collectors. The Writer fountain and rollerball pens belonging to the Urushi lacquer art and Sakura lacquer art series are available online at affordable prices (starting around \$650). The Writer series includes fountain pens and rollerballs with or without a clip; these pens come with either a converter or piston filler designed and produced by Conid.



This new partnership with Conid Pens of Belgium is a major area of excitement for AP. In recent years, the buzz among fountain pen *cognoscenti* is that Conid makes the most high-tech, patented filling mechanism now on the market. As the manufacturers of their own pens (the famed Conid Bulk Filler), Conid is pleased to partner with AP in creating a unique filling system that will complement the AP aesthetic.

The new filling system for AP Connoisseur and Writer series fountain pens will house more ink than any converter and is based upon the bulk filling system invented by Conid's industrial engineers for Conid-brand pens. This partnership's creation of a brand-new filling system will allow for the maximum amount of ink to be housed in an AP fountain pen, insuring a constant flow of ink to enhance the writing experience. In this partnership, traditional artistry merges with exceptional technical expertise.

So what does the future hold for this remarkable company? AP is developing more geometric and abstract designs for the Middle East, where non-representational art is preferred. The stunning images of Russian miniature art and maki-e will continue on many models. The company recently added Itoya in Tokyo, Japan's largest fine pen retailer, to its portfolio of dealers. Other fine pen shops carrying AP models are found in Singapore, Hong Kong, Switzerland, France, the Netherlands, and Belgium. In the United States, Airline International ([airlineintl.com](http://airlineintl.com)), Dromgoole's Fine Writing Instruments and Stationery ([dromgooles.com](http://dromgooles.com)), and Fountain Pen Hospital ([fountainpenhospital.com](http://fountainpenhospital.com)) represent AP. There are plans for more dealers in new markets.

AP Limited Editions marries traditional art techniques from several cultures and explores their application, experimenting with new themes and creating a unique form of varied images and blended techniques. Some remarkable pens, for example, incorporate both maki-e and Russian lacquer art.

These visual expressions are hand crafted onto writing instruments by skilled artists devoted to keeping heritage art forms alive. The pens celebrate multi-culturalism and reflect a philosophy of unity through both harmony and contrast. In essence, the writing instruments of AP Limited Editions celebrate life, capturing moments of timelessness in a transient world.

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

Barry Gabay is a PW contributing editor.



Left to right—Liberty Enlightening the World combines maki-e on the cap and Russian lacquer art on the barrel; Serendipity captures a lion and his reflection mid-roar in the Palekh school of Russian lacquer art; The Mystic Owls shows a "parliament" of owls on the cap and barrel in Palekh-style Russian miniature art; Shakyamuni Buddha uses Russian lacquer art to display the Buddha and his aura. All limited to nine editions.