

(roadtest)

PENS MADE *by* HAND

from the Penmakers' Guild—Part I

BY MEL STROHMINGER AND HOWARD EDELSTEIN



The Celtic Garden

As society shoots ever forward in the twenty-first century, many people still long for the days of yesteryear, when master craftsmen and artisans made things of beauty with their hands. During the past several years, as a result of having more leisure time and the desire to create handmade objects,

a modern crafts movement has emerged. Today's artisans are learning new techniques and relearning old skills that incorporate modern technology and materials in products that include such things as jewelry, pottery, furniture, textiles—and pens. One such group of craftsmen, pen-turners—so called for their

ability to fashion pen caps and barrels on jewelers' lathes—are creating unique handmade pens one piece at a time. And they have joined together in the Penmakers' Guild to share their art and their story.

The Penmakers' Guild
The Penmakers' Guild was founded in the summer

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The Greek Rose

of 2003. Prior to its establishment, there had been an Internet community of pen turners on Yahoo!, where these likeminded pen buffs exchanged information about materials and techniques. But as the artists matured in their craft, many dropped out. So to bring them back together, the Guild was born to help the craft grow and to establish pen turning in the woodturning community. In addition, the Guild provides a place for the open exchange of ideas and assists in marketing the pen turners' products.

The Guild is governed by a council of five artists—Patricia Lawson, Jay Pickens, Kurt Hertzog, Mike Roux, and Richard

Kleinhanz—and prospective members must submit a masterpiece pen to the council for review and approval. Criteria for acceptance include innovation and quality of craftsmanship. There are currently sixty-nine members in the Guild, including a few pen industry “insiders.”

Their Work

The **Celtic Garden** was crafted by Dan Symonds, who has been designing and crafting pens for the past four years. This example is a floral motif intertwined with a Celtic knot trellis, creating an overall arts and crafts or Art Nouveau effect. It is a beautiful example of micro-woodcarving. Dan crafted the pen from four differ-

ent woods: the white wood is holly, the black wood is ebony, the red wood is blood wood, and the brown wood is mesquite. The fittings are kit-supplied, and the nib is rhodium-plated steel—rigid and smooth. The cap is not meant to post on the end of the barrel. The artist spent over 150 hours on the carving, and it appears to be quite fragile. It stands as a very nice art piece but would probably not be a practical everyday writing instrument. Although Symonds has indicated that the piece is not for sale, he has estimated its value at \$3,800.

Alice Call created the **Greek Rose**. It is produced from homemade poured acrylic, formulated with



genuine ground pink topaz and black acrylic to make up what Ms. Call calls “rhodonite.” The coloration and depth of the material is striking. The pen has a clipless cap, and the pieces at each end are made of black acrylic. This pen employs a standard kit-supplied nib (steel and rigid), section and feed. It represents a nice art piece and comes with a matching black acrylic pen stand upon which the pen can lean.

Crafted by Don Ward, **Montana Prairie Rattle-**

snake comprises real rattlesnake skin in its high-gloss polyester resin finish. The barrel is very short and its end is threaded for posting the cap. All fittings are plated with white metal and the components are from a commercial kit, including the rigid steel nib. This is an unusual pen at a very modest price: \$125.

Janet Smith created **The Rose**, a small white pen crafted from white holly wood, hand painted with a floral design. The metal fittings at the end of the

barrel (threaded to post the cap), the joint thread, the cap band, and the clip are plated in 18-karat rose gold. Given the popularity of Japanese *maki-e* hand-painted pens, this hand-painting is an attractive feature. The gold-plated nib is small but writes smoothly. The Rose is priced at \$225.

Bloodwood, by craftsman Russ Fairfield, is turned from wood of the same name, and although it is large, it is very light and has a clear, high-quality finish. It employs standard kit




components with a very rigid steel nib. The cap is not made to post. Bloodwood is quite reasonably priced at \$115.

The **Marquette** was produced by Glen McCullough, crafted from gray buckeye burl wood with a lacquer finish. It is very light and has some interesting raised ridges created in the turning. The cap is not made to post and, as with most of the pens shown, it's fitted with kit-supplied band, section, feed and a rigid—but smooth—steel nib. The pen is accented by a sterling silver clip. It is quite reasonably priced at \$85.

Ron McIntire created The **Conflict**, turned from

a combination of white holly, black steel wood and blood wood. The name of the pen represents the “conflict” between the colors and the woods in a thematic design. The cap has an interesting inlay swirl of the steel wood and holly. This is a small pen, with standard kit-supplied fittings and a rhodium-plated small steel nib. The cap is not made to post, yet the pen feels quite heavy for its size. This finely crafted pen is pricier, at \$450.

Snakewood was made by Lou Metcalf, and it is a very unusual and interesting original design. The snake wood from which it is crafted has an interesting grain, and the finish on this pen is very well done.

It has an unusual hourglass shape, with the cap and barrel each tapering inward toward the threaded joint where the cap and barrel meet. The pen is fitted with a Bock 14-karat gold nib and a white metal section. The nib is quite small in relation to the size of the pen, and the kit-supplied section is very thin. This combination limits the comfort of writing. The pen is without a clip, and would be best used as a desk accessory, since its flat end allows it to stand on its own. It is a beautiful pen with a reasonable price of \$249. 

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