

Declaration of Independents

The Pen-Makers' Guild



Of all the penmaking developments in recent years, one of the most marked has to be the proliferation of independent makers. Producing pens on a large scale has historically been—and still is—fraught with risks; but now, with the Internet making the world smaller and smaller every day, it's not so hard to find materials, parts and, perhaps most importantly, information. All of this adds up to less risk, and more people hanging out their shingles as penmakers.

Sharing information was one of the primary goals behind the formation of the Pen-Makers' Guild, a group established in July 2003; and many of the new independent penmakers are members.

Richard Kleinhenz, who was a major force behind the formation of the group, says the guild emerged from a still-active chat group established some five years ago, whose members possess a broad range of skills. Some of the chat group members saw a need for a group specifically dedicated to the needs of more advanced pen makers. The guild was established to fill that role, though many of its members, including Kleinhenz, remain active in the original group and in the International Association of Penturners. Kleinhenz says that the goals of the guild are to "advance the state of the art, get handcrafted pens established as a recognized art form in the woodturning community as well as in the pen marketplace, and take our products out of the craft show-only circuit." Though Kleinhenz specifically mentioned woodturning, guild members work with a variety of other materials as well, including metal, acrylic, antler, corncob, snakeskin—the list goes on and on.

To join the Pen-Makers' Guild, a prospective member must submit an example of his or her work that demonstrates creativity and artistry. Pens made from kits are admissible (Kleinhenz comments that the quality of pen kits has recently risen dramatically, which he attributes



pens by Joe Feeney



pens by Kevin Bergen



pen at center by Mark Gisi
examples at left and right by Brian Gisi



pens by Randy Pearson



pens by Jay Pickens



pens by Greg Wilson



pens by Sean Couch

partly to the pressure pen makers have exerted on kit manufacturers), although the finished pen must be something more than the kit assembled as is—it must bear the artistic signature of the prospective member. And, of course, it must also function well as a writing instrument. A five-member council votes on admission.

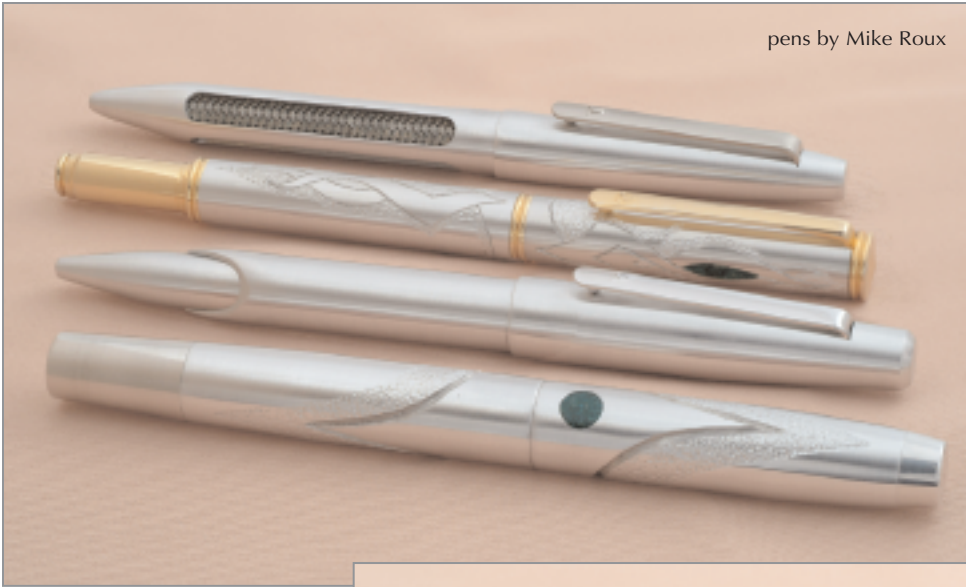
The guild's 61 members come from diverse backgrounds, but what they all seem to have in common are a love for pens and a desire to work with their hands.

Patricia Lawson elaborates, "The main reason I make pens is because I truly enjoy working with my hands and heart to create attractive, artistic and useful objects out of some of the most beautiful and unique materials in the world. If I never sold another pen, I would continue making them for the great satisfaction and enjoyment that this art gives me." Lawson, who serves on the guild's council along with Kleinhenz, Kurt Hertzog, Jay Pickens and Mike Roux, is a retired marriage and family therapist and has been making pens for over seven years.

Some guild members, like Kevin Bergen, have found

that the skills they acquired in their primary professions transfer readily to penmaking. Bergen, a retired dentist who has been making pens for just over four years, points out that in dentistry, form and function are essential to patient comfort and satisfaction. He says the years he spent meeting exacting standards in dentistry led directly to his ability to meet those requirements in penmaking.

pens by Mike Roux



pens by Tom McMillan



pens by Pat Lawson



A father-son duo, Mark and Brian Gisi—both of them guild members—have been making pens for about four years. Mark, a pen collector since age six, signed up for a class at a local woodworking supply store. It sounded interesting to Brian, so he joined his father. After making a number of basic wooden pens, they started to add design details. Says Mark, “I showed some of my early stripe designs to Brian, and about three weeks later, Brian showed me a pen that he designed and made that was well beyond anything I had considered. That changed my approach to making pens. Each pen became a challenge to combine colors and come up with a unique look for that writing instrument. I would say that my pens are unique in the use of angles, stripes, and combinations of materials. Brian is different in his approach, in that he comes up with a theme for each pen and designs and builds accordingly. My son and I work independently when we make an individual pen; however, we talk about potential designs and approaches at least twice a week.”

Bruce Boone began producing pens as an outgrowth of a business he started in his basement in 1993, with a CNC (Computer Numeric Control) machine. He began by making titanium bicycle parts and other metal products; he is now making titanium wedding rings and, of course, pens. “I’m interested in getting into high-end titanium pens and seem to have a niche in making some with clean lines,” says Boone. He mixes metals with wood or precious metal inlays and says he enjoys the creative outlet the pens provide. And, unlike wedding rings, pens don’t have to be individually sized!

What is possibly the greatest benefit to membership in the guild? Patricia Lawson says it best: “Being a guild



pens by David Hamby



pens by Simon Bosworth

member is like having mentors available 24/7 to inspire you, encourage you to try new things, and help you troubleshoot when things go wrong. It’s always satisfying to help new pen-makers, but when you are beyond the basics and wanting some support to take your own penmaking to a higher level, the Pen-Makers’ Guild offers a place to learn and share with advanced artists. Knowing that I’ve got the support of the guild members whenever I need it makes it easier for me to move out of my comfort zone and reach a little higher.” «

For more information on the Pen-Makers’ Guild, visit <groups.yahoo.com/group/penmakersguild>. Visit the photo gallery at <turtlewoodworks.com/pmgallery/galindex.htm>.



pens by Glenn McCullough



pens by Jim Lambert



pens by Barry Gross

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