

Unveiling the Mystique – My Pen Makers Guild Experience
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From time to time members of the International Association of Penturners discuss the Pen Makers Guild (PMG). For the most part, we discuss who are the members, what are the qualifications and is there economic value in being a member of the Guild. Without trying to answer all of those questions, this article will give you a bit of insight into what it takes to almost make it...and therefore what I think it does take!

The Pen Makers Guild is a relatively new organization. Its purpose, structure and *raison d'être* can be found at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/PenMakersGuild/?yguid=74663167> . In a nutshell, I think the introductory lines of their web page accurately encapsulate the intent in forming such an organization. “*The Pen-Makers' Guild is a place for advanced pen makers to discuss their craft, in an environment not open to total newcomers. This group is a spin-off of the [Penturners yahoo group](#), where many of us got our start and much of our knowledge as shared ideas. The guild was created for those who have graduated to a more advanced level in their pen making.*” Current membership in the Guild is just a few dozen. Their Gallery is viewable at <http://www.turtlewoodworks.com/pmggallery/galindex.htm> .

Having been a member of The IAP for a number of months and having crafted a significant number of pens, I have often thought about applying for membership. Before applying, I have exchanged emails with a fair number of PMG members. In these discussions, I found that there is a reasonably detailed discussion of how to apply for membership which includes expectations of a successful entry. This letter (for lack of a better description) can be found at <http://www.beautifulhandmadepens.com/PenMakers%20Guild%20Masterpiece.htm> .

In February of this year, I decided that I would attempt a “masterpiece” pen. At first I had no thoughts of submitting this pen to the PMG. The first pen was an artistic interpretation of a Greek column, based on the Parthenon. During the creation of this pen, I was further inspired to make it a collection of pens.



Additional pictures can be viewed in my photo album.

Initially, the reaction to the first of these pens was enthusiastic and positive. As the additional pens were posted, the comments and critiques were better than those of any of my previous works. With that in mind, I decided to apply for membership to the PMG.

The first step in the process was contacting the Application Elder, in my case this was Pat Lawson. I asked for guidance on whether or not a collection could be submitted for consideration. I received a positive response and, thus, I continued the process. The Application Elder (Pat) then gave me the appropriate information on where to send the pens to and further advised that postage both ways was my responsibility. Also, I was advised that if I desired insurance on the package I would need to pay for that both ways as well. There are no fees for application!

Prior to sending my pens off, I did what I considered to be a thorough review of my pen. I wanted to feel good that what I was submitting met my standards for what I consider to be my masterpiece. With that having been completed, I carefully packaged the pens and sent them off to Pat.

While I did use USPS Delivery Confirmation, Pat also kept me informed each step of the way, including an email to let me know that the pens had arrived in perfect condition. I was relieved, needless to say. As a bit of a side note, when I sent the pens I did not include refills. (I do not put roller ball refills in pens until they are sold. I quickly sent an email off to Pat explaining my *faux pas*. Pat emailed me back to let me know that she would put refills in the pens for the photographs. She went way above the “call of duty” in that and other instances.

Pat also informed me of what the rest of the process was to be. In a nutshell, she took photos of the pens from multiple angles then shared them with the other Elders. The Elders then discussed the submission and voted on it. At the end of the vote the decision was emailed to me and the pens were returned, packaged at least as well as I had packaged them. The entire process from the time Pat received my pens was less than a week. Considering all of the work and coordination required, I am very impressed with the quick turnaround.

Here is an excerpt from the email I received from Richard Kleinhenz regarding my submission.

The members of the Pen Makers Guild Council have viewed and voted on your masterpiece pen photo. As the council members do not know the identity of the pen maker when voting on the photo, our judgment is based solely on the one pen submitted and is not influenced by any other works of that person which might be known from other sources.

The pen you submitted did not receive the required number of yes votes needed for acceptance into the Guild. However, we invite you to submit another pen to us at any time for consideration. It is sometimes difficult to judge a pen maker's skill level, creativity, etc. from just one pen, so if you feel you have another pen that might give us a better idea of your skills, please send us a photo.

To help clarify what we are looking for, and to improve your chances of acceptance with your next submission, please see the comments below.

Council comments:

... it could have worked out with a yes vote overall, had the pens been technically perfect... the detail photos are taken under extreme magnification, expertly done by Pat in close-up mode. We don't typically put pens under the microscope, looking for the one single flaw to shoot a pen down! Few pens would pass that scrutiny! But, in the large shots, there were indications that prompted us to ask for detail shots.

... you can see the ring at the main barrel fitting next to the section... You can give a light pass with a barrel trimmer to square the end, and I typically then go over the edge with the buffing wheel...

Burn marks just shouldn't be there. Tough to avoid near tall beads - but alas, those are the breaks...

... I have worked out techniques that avoid spilled stone in the area. I'm sure you can work this out... If you want to know what I found works for me, drop me a note...

Technical 'perfection' (or close to it) is not sufficient to gain admission to the guild, but it is a necessary prerequisite.

Here are some additional excerpts from Pat Lawson that are extremely helpful in providing me with insight for my next submission.

... artistic expression/themed pens are just as valid for submission as technologically innovative pens, and that both are given equal consideration. It's really the overall result that we are looking at. There may be some elders who lean a little more in one direction or the other, but even when we have different reactions to a submission, each member is very willing to listen to the arguments, reactions, etc. of all of the other members, and to change their mind and their vote (more than once sometimes) with added input from other members. The final call is made only after everyone has had their full say and each of the 5 of us feel sure about our final vote.

These two Elders were extremely helpful along each step of the way during my submission. Their feedback and critiques were precise and accurate! Their advice on overcoming the deficiencies in my submission will be extremely helpful in preparing my "true" masterpiece for my next submission.

In closing, I have a little advice for those of you considering applying to the Guild. First, read the guidelines for application and make certain that you believe your submission is in line. Second, grade yourself harshly. Make sure your pen is a masterpiece. Make sure your pen is creative and/or innovative. Make sure your pen is technically perfect. After that, do not hesitate to submit. Your work will be evaluated by some consummate professionals who will give you extremely valuable feedback. Your pen making will be better for the experience. And who knows...your pen might get you in on the first try!