

Stationery Objects

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Introduction

While high tech digital devices like notebook computers and tablets are essentially ubiquitous today, it's not hard to find those who are still devoted to the most analog of technologies – writing by hand on paper. While some members of the Greatest Generation or the Baby Boom never set their pens aside in favor of keyboards, younger people who grew up with computer graphical user interfaces are discovering the joys of putting words directly onto the page.



There's something special about sending a handwritten note to a friend or loved one – it seems somehow more personal than sending an email or even a word-processed note by mail.

A Passion for Tools

Some people seem to really enjoy the quest for the perfect pen or pencil, while others seem driven to accumulate a wide assortment of the same – perhaps to always have the right tool for every occasion. Regardless of customer motivations, manufacturers have responded by offering an incredible variety of writing instruments. Quality products exist at many price levels, so finding something you like need not require cashing in a brokerage account (though if you do, you could get something very nice indeed!)

Pens

The word pen actually covers a lot of ground. Traditionalists enjoy the fountain pen experience, but ballpoint, rollerball, gel and even felt tip pen models have their fans. At the luxury end of the scale, Montblanc, Caran d'Ashe, Dunhill, Namiki and Waterman battle it with boutique manufacturers for the carriage trade. These pens typically feature a sleek design made with high-quality materials, though you're undoubtedly paying a premium for brand cache. The other end of the price spectrum engenders lively discussion – so much so that certain pen models generate a consistent buzz on various discussion forums. Some examples mentioned as providing good value include:

- **Uni-Ball Signo 207:** a gel pen with smooth flowing pigment-based ink specially formulated to prevent check washing fraud.
- **Pilot G2:** another popular gel pen can actually be modified to use Montblanc rollerball refills. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=eoHDhLY4rxs for instructions.
- **Zebra F-Z01:** more notable for its sturdy stainless-steel construction and its silky-smooth click action than its ink, this pen has a no-nonsense industrial feel. In contrast, Zebra's **Sarasa Retractable Gel Ink Pen's** plastic construction is reflective of its budget price, but its ink reportedly flows very smoothly.
- **Pilot Hi Tec C:** a gel pen not typically available in the United States market, the Hi Tec C is offered in an unusually large array of colors.



From left to right – Uni-Ball Signo 207, Pilot G2 Limited Edition and Zebra F-701.



A few Hi-Tec C pens.

Interestingly, some entrepreneurs have noted a cult following

in certain pens (the Pilot Hi Tec C, most commonly) and have begun creating housings for their internal parts. To get in on the action, visit Kickstarter (kickstarter.com) and search for “Hi Tec C.”

Pencils

For writers prone to making mistakes, pencils fit the bill perfectly. At the upper reaches of the market, most luxury pen makers offer matching pencils. If you’re looking for something a bit more affordable, there are certainly options available. They come in three general formats:

- **Mechanical Pencils:** Typically using a click-to-advance mechanism which holds thin 0.5 mm or 0.7 mm lead, mechanical pencils are easy to find at your local office supply store and never need sharpening. Options abound:
 - **Pentel Sharp Kerry:** Its unusual removable cap gives it a stylish look not always found in lower-end models.
 - **Zebra M-701:** The sibling of the popular F-701 pen – this model has the same sturdy stainless-steel construction.
 - **Uniball Kuru Toga:** A clever tip design rotates periodically so that the lead will not wear down to a wedge shape.
- **Lead Holders:** These pencils use a simple claw-like mechanism to keep a grip on the thick lead (usually 3.2mm). Pressing the button on the back of the pencil allows the lead to freely shift position in the barrel. Unless you prefer a blunt writing tip, you’ll want to keep a **lead pointer** handy for sharpening. For more information on lead holder pencils, see leadholder.com.
- **Wooden Pencils:** For some writers, the smell and hand-feel of traditional wooden pencils cannot be beat. Pencil collectors lament the discontinuation of classic models like the **Eberhard Faber Blackwing 602**, and breathlessly seek out new-old-stock boxes of them, as evidenced by blackwingpages.wordpress.com.



The thick lead used in this Lamy Scribble lead holder is sharpened with a lead pointer. The blue model above is manufactured by KUM.

Fortunately, a new facsimile of the venerable pencil called the **Palomino Blackwing 602** has received positive notice and even caught the attention of the New Yorker (newyorker.com/online/blogs/newsdesk/2011/09/back-in-blackwing.html). The **Papermate Mirado Black Warrior** is mentioned on pencil sites as another high-quality choice. For other quality, modern-day wooden pencils, check out brandnamepencils.com and penciltalk.org.

Online Pen and Pencil Resources

- **Luxury Pens Blog** – affiliated with Montgomery Pens in New York City (luxurypensblog.com)
- **The Luxury Pen Review** (luxurypenreview.com)
- **Office Supply Geek** (officesupplygeek.com)
- **The Pen Addict** (penaddict.com)
- **Pen Hero** (penhero.com), including a great set of pen-related bookmarks at penhero.com/PenBookmarks_PenInformation.htm
- **The Fountain Pen Network** (fountainpennetwork.com)
- **Dave's Mechanical Pencils** (davesmechanicalpencils.blogspot.com)
- **Penciltalk** (penciltalk.org)
- **Pencil Revolution** (pencilrevolution.com)
- **Palmpsest** (writinginstruments.blogspot.com)
- **The Wooden Pencil** (thewoodenpencil.com)
- **Leadholder: The Drafting Pencil Museum** (leadholder.com)
- **Brand Name Pencils:** (brandnamepencils.com)

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