

PEN WORLD

rooted in the past,
looking to the future:
Deco Crest
by Conklin

a new day dawns
Alpha
by Aurora

on the move
Curtis
Australia

Ink!



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Curtis Australia's Glenn and Heather Curtis get around. They have to. The rest of the world is far away for those who live Down Under, and finding markets outside Australia is essential for the survival of luxury goods manufacturers such as the Curtises. The Curtises have worked hard to make theirs a truly international brand, and they have succeeded: their pens, born of third-generation jeweler Glenn Curtis's desire to extend his skills to new kinds of products, have been available in the U.S. since 2006, followed by Europe, India and the Far East. India and Singapore are particularly strong markets now, where there is a several-months-long waiting list for certain Curtis Australia pieces. As the company has grown, so has public recogni-

tion: the company won *PW's* 2010 Readers' Choice Award in the Metal Mastery category for its Race to the North Pole pen and was named by the *Robb Report* as a "Best of the Best" honoree in 2009.

Glenn Curtis has been making pens for less than ten years and has the unique perspective of a relative newcomer. He has tried working with a U.S. distributor but now prefers a slightly different kind of arrangement in which the company retains more day-to-day control. The Curtises have arranged with Mark Shell to be their on-the-ground representative in the U.S.; his role is to facilitate sales by meeting with the major accounts. His background is in the watch and jewelry industry, and this was a strategic choice because Glenn Curtis's vision

for the company involves increased concentration on gift, jewelry and watch stores. Traditional pen retailers will continue to be important for the company, but these other stores offer an enormous opportunity simply because they far outnumber pen shops, Curtis points out. Also, while Curtis is firmly a member of the "form follows function" camp, he believes some pen retailers sell *only* on performance, forgetting that the choice of pen can be quite an emotional one—one that makes a statement about the owner and is linked with the way the owner sees himself. Curtis compares it to a car purchase: "You buy it for other reasons than getting from point A to point B. You don't look at a car just as utilitarian. People will buy a certain car because it's a nice thing to



Glenn and Heather Curtis; Dreamwriter pens at right.



On the Move Curtis Australia

BY LAURA CHANDLER



George Washington fountain pen (\$845); detail on the back is shown in inset. Available also as a rollerball, \$645.

own and they'll enjoy it. *We* have to put more emotion in *our* product," he sums up.

Over the past twelve months, Curtis Australia has been hard at work creating pens in keeping with its vision of itself as a luxury company, but its brand of luxury comes in a wide variety of styles and price ranges. For instance, the Komo and Dreamwriter collections are everyday writers, albeit elegant ones.

Just launched in April, the Komo Diamond collection boasts a fountain pen with hooded nib similar to those on the iconic Parker 51, a capped rollerball and twist ballpoint. Each pen's clip is hand-set with a genuine diamond, and the pens are available in three glossy lacquer finishes: red, blue and black. At \$185–225, this is Curtis Australia's most affordable collection.

"We were very fussy about this pen. A lot of research went into it," says Curtis. First, he asked retailers all over the world what their most popular pen colors were. Once the colors were selected, Curtis did some mockups and brought them to retailers for feedback, among them Chris Sullivan of Fahrney's. "He was pretty brutal," says Curtis, "as I wanted him to be. He told me that the fountain pen would need to be something really special to stand out. *And* that it would need to be usable by anyone. Then we realized that if it was to be usable by anyone, we would have to protect the nib—to make it visible but still protected—and that's what made us think of mak-

ing a hooded nib." As with all Curtis Australia pens, the Komo was subjected to hand testing at every point of the process to ensure balance and comfort, as well as superior writing qualities.

The Dreamwriter combines fun and practicality. It is a bit sleeker than Curtis Australia's usual profile and comes in seven colorful resins or black with handcrafted sterling silver trim and decoration. Equipped with a spring clip and thread-on cap, the Dream Writer is available as a fountain pen with two-tone 14 karat gold nib (\$695) or as a rollerball (\$495). These pens were created to offer perfect balance, hence the name Dream Writer.

The latest pen in the brand's Presidential Series, a pen honoring George Washington, was released on February 22, Washington's birthday, and will be available only through December 14, the anniversary of Washington's death. At that time, the pen's mold will be broken just as the mold of the Lincoln pen was broken previously, as a dramatic way of emphasizing that no more pens will be made. The Washington pen is made of red resin with a wide solid sterling silver band on the barrel that, in true Curtis Australia style, incorporates an astonishing amount of detail. A portrait of Washington framed by the cartouche from his personal library, the Washington Memorial, Mount Vernon and a likeness of Washington's favorite horse, Nelson, appear on the band along with a depiction of General



Morning Mist necklet and fountain pen, made of gold and hand-set Silvermist diamonds.



William Howe's dog, Washington had found the dog when it wandered across enemy lines and returned it to the British general in a selfless act that won Howe's admiration. The pen is available as a fountain pen or rollerball (\$645–845). Curtis Australia will complete the Presidential Series with individual pens in honor of Thomas Jefferson and Theodore Roosevelt, after which a final pen will incorporate all four of the presidents whose faces are sculpted on Mount Rushmore.

The new Morning Mist collection, which includes a pen and various pieces of jewelry, showcases the jeweler's skill. Meant to evoke the morning sun sparkling on a lake among golden reeds, the collection is made of solid gold and "Silvermist" diamonds, which have a silver-gray color and come primarily from mining company Rio Tinto's Argyle Diamond Mine in Western Australia. Much of the work on pieces such as these is done by hand—the setting, hinging and polishing. Curtis says, in fact, that there are over 20,000 hand actions just to set the necklet pictured on the facing page. *PW* readers will recall that Curtis Australia has worked with Rio Tinto before, notably to produce the Colours of Australia pen encrusted with champagne diamonds, which was a nominee in the Most Glamorous category in this year's Readers' Choice Awards.

Clearly, Curtis Australia has not been standing still. It has outgrown its original headquarters, so the company

is literally on the move again—this time to a larger facility designed and built specifically for its needs. The new facility is four to five times larger than the old one, with larger and better spaces for the company's jewelers and pen craftspeople, much greater space devoted to manufacturing, and special areas designed for clients to see jewelry and pens being made. There are also areas devoted to client consultation, where visitors can confer with Curtis Australia about bespoke pieces. The new facility, which Curtis Australia will have occupied by the time this issue goes to press, will accommodate the entire pen and jewelry making process, from concept to manufacturing to shipping. The company now has more than twenty employees, and several months ago, Glenn and Heather's twenty-three-year-old daughter Megan began an internship there. For the next three and a half years, she will remain active in the family business where her opinions and youthful perspective have always been valued.

The new headquarters is located in the same small town (Bairnsdale, pop. 11,000) that the previous facility was—a charming place for Curtis Australia to make its home. And having a terrific home base is especially important to a company that's forever on the go.

Visit curtisaustralia.com.



above—Komo collection of fountain pen with hooded nib, rollerball and ballpoint, \$185–225.
below—Curtis Australia's roomy new digs a few weeks before move-in.

