



Write on: Omas pens celebrate "Return to the Motherland - The Hong Kong Collection," at Crane & Co.

Fine pens spur passion

SHOPPING CENTERED



DONNA MULCARY

I have two very nice Cross pens and pencil sets, but I rarely take them out of my desk. It's not that I don't like them

- I do. It's just that I'm afraid that if I use them, I'll lose them, because I'm notorious for losing pens.

Come to find out, maybe I lose a lot of pens because I use the really inexpensive kind. Carlyle Smith, manager of Crane & Co. pen and stationery store at the Somerset Collection in Troy, carries a fine fountain pen with him every day. He said he's not afraid to use it or to lend it out briefly when customers ask to borrow a pen. "If you use a fine pen," he said, "you tend to keep track of it and people are more apt to give it back when you loan it out. They're less likely to walk off with it, because they'll notice that it's a nice pen and sometimes they'll even make comments about it."

Cina Gajda-Tweed, manager of the Colorado Pen Co. store at Twelve Oaks mall in Novi, agrees.

"When you value something, you become more aware of it, whether it's a pen or a piece of jewelry," she said. Like fine jewelry, fine pens can range anywhere from about \$100 to thousands of dollars.

In general, the things that set them apart from less expensive pens include: the materials of which they're crafted (gold, silver and glass, for example, as opposed to plastic); the way they fit and feel in the hand (the pen should feel light and balanced); better ink flow technology and the overall look of the pen (some have special, limited edition designs). Fine pens can include ballpoint and roller ball types, as well as fountain, calligraphy and glass dipping pens.

So who buys fine pens? Collectors, mainly?

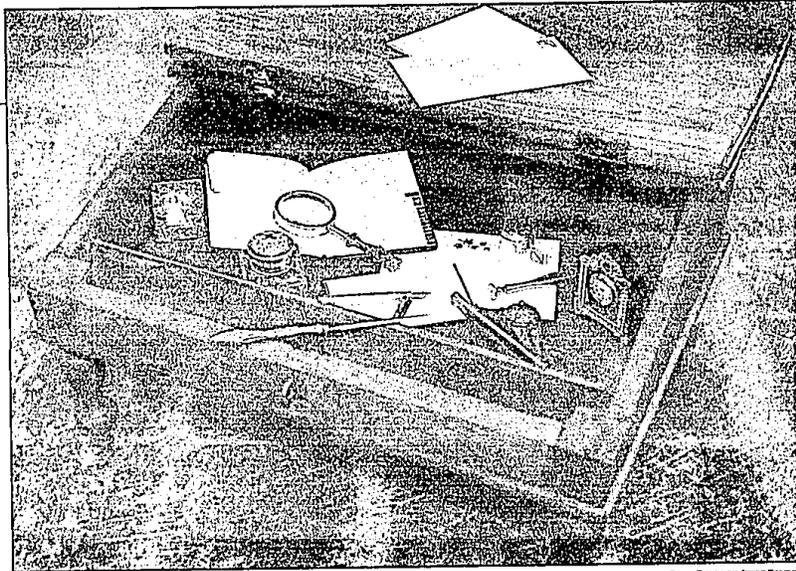
"No, I wouldn't say that," said Darin Asselin, owner of Penn & Paige social stationers in Rochester. "Basically, it's writers. People who just really enjoy writing."

Has the development of faxes, e-mail and other forms of communication hurt the market for fine pens? Not at all; in fact, it may have boosted it, Smith said.

"People may not be writing as much as they used to," he said, "but when they do sit down to write, they want to use the best paper and pen possible."

Montblanc, Waterman, Parker and Cross are the four big names in fine pens, Gajda-Tweed said. The Colorado Pen Co. (which has a store in the Somerset Collection, too), also sells Aurora, Waterford Crystal, Cartier, S.T. Dupont, and Rotring and Lamy pens, plus Fisher Space pens, which can write upside down and in extreme cold and heat (NASA uses them) and an episode of "Seinfeld" was written about one such "astronaut pen". Two of the many brands that Crane & Co. carries include: Sensa pens and Omas, known for its handmade pens fashioned from celluloid and vegetal celluloid (which give the pen casings a vibrant, iridescent look).

Penn and Paige carries pens by Recife, one of the oldest pen houses in France. I don't know if I'm ready for anything that fancy. But maybe I'll start using my Cross pens, after all.



STAFF PHOTO BY JERRY ZOLINSKY

Write in style: Get inspired with an antique writing slope (\$188) filled with elegant accoutrements. Magnifying glass (\$75), sterling silver fountain pen (\$720), inkwell (\$360), letter opener (\$50), sterling pen (\$150), pewter frame (\$30), stamp box (\$40), antique wax sealer (\$80), clock (\$140), pen rest (\$30), address book (\$50), all from Presence II, Birmingham. Stationery from Crane & Co., Somerset Collection.

Duly noted: Writing is an art worth reviving

BY LINDA BACHRACK
EDITOR

Before we e-mail a farewell to the handwritten word, consider its power. Beyond ceremony and respect for tradition, writing by hand makes you think differently from when your fingers are flying across a keyboard. The pace is slowed, the sentiment given renewed consideration.

"There's a tactile element to writing your thoughts on 100 percent cotton paper," says Carlyle Smith, manager of Crane & Co. in the Somerset Collection. "The paper is smooth; it feels good beneath your hands. And it's relaxing to step back from technology for a moment and embrace the art of writing."

Sometimes it's nice to rebel a little against the modern world, continues Smith. "You don't keep a fax for 50 years. But you might cherish a note in your grandmother's hand."

Stop and think for a minute about the mail you receive every day. Most of us rifle through the bills, fliers and advertising promotions, stopping only to read the occasional hand-written note. It's nice to receive a personal letter. And it feels just as good to take the time for yourself to sit down and write to someone. It might be slower than e-mail and more painstaking because there's no delete key. But when you're done, you know you've conveyed your true feelings.

"In every man's writings, the character of the writer must be recorded," wrote Thomas Carlyle. While the casual convenience of a phone call or the impersonal efficiency of electronic dialogue have their place in modern society, the art of letter writing remains a precious skill. It is more than mere communication; it is an asset that should be taught to our computer-savvy children.

In Crane's "The Romance of Paper," it is said that the written word on paper remains our most fundamental means of permanent communication. Our knowledge of the past exists on paper. And the legacy of what we do, think and feel today will live for future generations ... on paper.

Cotton to your paper

For almost 200 years, Crane's has been making social stationery from cotton. In 1801, Crane's papers were made from cotton rags collected from the neighbors along the Housatonic River in Dal-

ton, Mass. In this wooded valley, inside an old stone mill, Zenas Crane produced the handcrafted sheets that set the standard for fine quality paper family-owned business, Crane & Co. supplies the paper for such venerable stationers as Cartier and Tiffany & Co.

Beyond etiquette

The etiquette of note writing is no longer of supreme importance, as it was when Charles Louis Tiffany and John P. Young opened their small "Stationery and Dry Goods" store in 1837. Though Tiffany & Co. emerged as an arbiter of style and good taste, and still adheres to a conviction that correspondence on fine paper be restrained and appropriate, the overriding concern in the '90s is one of revival of the art. Though customers are counseled on proper phrasing at both Tiffany and Crane, the purveyors are flexible and bow to contemporary thought.

"Etiquette should make things comfortable and convenient," says Smith. "Everyone doesn't want what grandma had."

Wedding invitations today often are printed in two languages and embellished with personal symbols and motifs. Invitations can be self-designed on Crane's interactive CD ROM. But the quality of the paper is unchanged - all cotton and all hand-bordered.

Social graces

There are, however, a few traditions that endure. Like escort cards - those tiny gold-bordered cards with hand-folded envelopes. The dinner party host writes the guest's name on the envelope and his dinner partner's name (not the person he comes with) on the card. They can then make their acquaintances before they sit down to dinner. Place cards and calling cards also remain popular.

As Benjamin Franklin said, "Make recollection as durable as possible, by putting it down on paper." When you really want to say something, forgo the convenience of faxes and cell phones. Write your bon mots on elegant deckle-edged sheets.

Build a stationery wardrobe

Excerpts from "The Romance of Paper," by Crane & Co.

There is no "wrong" stationery on which to write your letter. Your words convey the message and your paper is the emissary.

However, in the same way that many wardrobes are built around a "basic black dress" or a dark suit ... for business and professional correspondence your basic stationery is your business letterhead.

Most executives also use the "executive letterhead," with only the name of the individual engraved at the top, for more personal, yet business-related, correspondence. These are always the smaller monarch size (folds three times), and are used for letters of recommendation, notes of thanks or congratulations, charitable work, or combined business-social-personal correspondence.

The complete executive stationery wardrobe will properly include as well:

- Correspondence cards, engraved with a name, or monogram, and used for brief notes.
- Business cards.
- A social calling card, since it's not considered in good form to present a business card on a social occasion. It may have a business phone number in the lower right corner.

The personal stationery wardrobe may include side-folded notes and correspondence cards, as well as top-folded notes, either bordered or plain and engraved with your name or monogram for notes of thanks, appreciation, etc.

Every home should have a house stationery - a larger flat sheet engraved with the household address only. It can be used by all members of the family.

Says Carlyle Smith, "The professionals at Crane will ask you lots of questions regarding your correspondence preferences and habits. Your paper should reflect your personality."

ADDED ATTRACTIONS

News of special events for shoppers is included in this calendar. Send information to: *Malls & Mainstreets*, c/o Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 805 East Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009; or fax (248) 644-1314. Deadline: Wednesday 5 p.m. for publication on Sunday

MONDAY, AUG. 31

COZY WRAPS
Hersh's on The Boardwalk, 6901 Orchard Lake Rd. in West Bloomfield, presents a trunk showing of DUNA sweaters in chenilles, crepes and blends. 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Continues Tuesday.

WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 2

HELP WANTED
Kensington Valley Factory Shops host a Job Fair in the Food Pavilion from 12-4 p.m. and 6-8 p.m. Approximately 160 positions need to be filled. Bring your resume.

FRIDAY, SEPT. 11

ELEGANT ACCESSORIES
Fiber artist Debra Oibrantz Meinke, owner and designer at MoinkoToy, will appear at Bellesima, 301 Main St. in Rochester, from 7-9 p.m. The trunk show features her latest collection of contemporary tassels and pillows that include French techniques in passementerie and velvet gaufrage. Preview her Holiday '98 collection. Event continues on Saturday, from 11 a.m.-5 p.m.

SATURDAY, SEPT. 12

ART IN THE PARK
The 24th annual Common Ground Sanctuary Art in the Park returns to Birmingham's Shain Park today

SATURDAY, SEPT. 19

GARDEN GANDER
Browse the storefronts and the rose gardens at the Detroit Rose Society's annual show at Laurel Park Place in Livonia. View hundreds of prize roses vying for "best of show."

SUNDAY, SEPT. 27

MIRACLE MODE
The Children's Miracle Network Fashion Show takes place at 1 p.m. at the Livonia Marriott Hotel. See the fall fashions from Laurel Park Place shops and enjoy great food from the Marriott. A fashion auction raises funds for children's hospitals. For tickets, call (248) 526-3414.

and tomorrow, Saturday, Sept. 13. Hours are 10 a.m.-6 p.m. on Friday and 10 a.m.-5 p.m. on Saturday. Admission is free.