

The “Wow” Factor



An Interview with Peter Wayne Yenawine, Crystal Signatures

EDITORS' NOTE A former master designer at Steuben – with concepts executed by the likes of Baccarat, Lenox, Orrefors, Rosenthal, Swarovski, and Val St. Lambert to his further credit – Peter Yenawine has fulfilled requests from U.S. presidents, Hollywood celebrities, business leaders, other VIPs, and the Smithsonian Institution.



Peter Wayne Yenawine

COMPANY BRIEF Based in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, Crystal Signatures (www.crystalsignatures.com) designs and manufactures high quality, custom-designed awards and gifts for a variety of occasions. After a client submits a proposal and budget, the firm conceptualizes, designs, and produces a sketch for review and fine-tuning. Once it is approved, Crystal Signatures generally delivers the finished product within two weeks. Founded in 1996, the company has created custom pieces for corporate clients including Cigna, Coca-Cola, Federal Express, General Motors, IBM, and Rolls-Royce. Additional commissions have included the ESPY Award, the NHL All-Star Game Most Valuable Player Award, and the U.S. Figure Skating Award.

To what do you attribute the strength of the Crystal Signatures brand?

The key to our success and to our uniqueness is the fact that when a client presents a piece we've created, it reflects the inspiration of the client – it's not just about us. Our approach has always been that we want the piece to reflect the client or the occasion. The fact that we do this with a piece of Crystal Signatures work only adds to the occasion.

How much of an impact have you seen on the business in the wake of the economic crisis?

Everyone has felt the economic impact. Of course, we're not immune. However, because we design based on a client's budget, we are able to really maximize the dollars being spent. While other companies can only sell what's in their catalogues, we have the ability to create unique pieces within specific budget and time constraints. This has worked tremendously well, and we have found that in truly difficult times, our business has actually increased. Although other company benefits may have been reduced, at the end of the year, the CEO or President still

wants to communicate to employees how valuable they are, and that is a niche our company really fits well.

How broad is the market for you? Does it include those looking for everything from that entry level gift all the way to high-end, or does it focus more on the high-end niche?

The high-end drives it, with the lower end being filled with “me-too” companies, making it a much more saturated marketplace. But again, because we can design to a budget and

have resources all over the world, we can also work in this lower-end niche quite nicely. In the higher end marketplace, clients aren't including as many employees or clients in their gifting or reward programs as they might during better times. Instead, they'll do something more substantial for fewer people, and that's where we thrive, because our value is immense compared to some of the other players that are out there.

Has there been an evolution of the designs you are able to offer today?

Just as we invented our manufacturing process and patented it, I've always been driven by my fascination with process and materials. So that is an ongoing and constant part of my career and my life that drives some of the innovation. But the primary inspiration comes from our clients, because we truly have a blank piece of paper when we start talking to them. We listen to what they're trying to accomplish. We don't expect them to know what they want, but we do expect them to know what they're trying to achieve. That's when we can use our creativity. Using that approach, every item or program is truly unique and is created just for the client.

Your pieces maintain that handcrafted feel, but how much of an impact does technology play, either in the initial stages of design or in production?

Our facility is unique in the world and allows us to essentially prepare the blank with state-of-the-art equipment. We have arguably the finest handcraftsmen in the world as well. So each piece is created by hand for the recipient. Our one guarantee is “Wow!” which is the reaction when someone is presented with one of our pieces. When someone gets the box, it's much heavier than they think it ought to be, so the first thing out of their mouth is “Wow!” As they open it up and realize what's inside, that “Wow!” just

gets louder. As our corporate motto states, “when the occasion requires the unforgettable.”

Has technology made almost any design possible today, and has that allowed you to create pieces that many would think are not possible with crystal?

I go back to my early days in glass as a big fan and student of Frederick Carter, who started Steuben Glass. He believed anything could be made out of glass, and I've certainly carried that belief into what I do. Having spent 35 years working with most of the major crystalleries around the world, with which I still have very close relationships, if we need something custom-made that, for instance, needs color casing and has to be hand-blown, we have specialty manufacturers who will work exclusively with us to create those unique items. That's not to say that they can't be of larger volume, but they remain unique to the client. So there are no limits that we can foresee.

Is colored crystal just a current trend, or is that something you foresee continuing?

We only use it when conceptually it makes sense to use it. People have asked me how I can stand to work just with crystal. It's because, with crystal, I can use the entire color spectrum if I design correctly and use the optics to maximize the prismatic dynamics of crystal. We now use color thematically in very selective ways, but I try to maintain what I refer to as the magic of crystal. Every time you look at a piece of crystal, every millimeter of movement you have, there is a kinetic energy – you see something different. Lighting is always changing, so crystal is kept alive rather than being a static memento of some sort. It's something the viewer can interact with.

Did you always possess an entrepreneurial spirit and desire to create your own company or build your own brand?

Probably the last thing I wanted to do was have my own company. However, having worked with the finest crystalleries around the world, I could not find anyone who wanted to match my energy and my creativity, so I had to do it myself. The desire to be the best and to have no limits was what forced me to pull out my entrepreneurial side and now, I can't imagine having worked any other way. Every single day, I learn something brand new. So if I sound like I enjoy what I do, that's exactly right. ●

The World Golf Association Points Leader Award, presented to Tiger Woods in 2008 (left); Equi-Librium Champions Trophies (right)