

Custom Treatment for Luxury Pens

An Interview with Giuseppe Aquila,
Chief Executive Officer, Elmo & Montegrappa S.p.A.

EDITORS' NOTE In nearly twenty years at the helm of Montegrappa, Giuseppe Aquila has been a driving force in legitimising writing instruments as a global luxury category. After leaving college, Aquila spearheaded the brand's international expansion with a renewed commitment to luxury and private bespoke production. His vision of pens as objets d'art won awards and helped foster a thriving collector community. Over recent years, a focus on contemporary customer experience has seen him open more than a dozen mono-brand boutiques and break new ground with an avant-garde approach to materials, design and engineering.



Giuseppe Aquila

COMPANY BRIEF Italy's first pen manufacturer, Montegrappa (montegrappa.com), has been setting standards for prestige writing instruments for more than a century. In the early twentieth century, portable fountain pens were the technological revolution of the day, and the Venetian maker's earliest customers included the young Ernest Hemingway. Today, pens offer refuge from digital technology. For owners ranging from Quincy Jones to Sir Jonathan Ive, Montegrappa pens are a catalyst for creativity and a symbol of personal identity.

Montegrappa's latest launch – Montegrappa Configurator – is the world's first full customization platform for fine pens – objects that have been undergoing a renaissance in recent times. "Create the most interesting pen in the world" is the challenge laid down by Montegrappa Configurator, a newly launched platform that gives users unprecedented opportunities to create fine writing instruments to their exact requirements. Handmade at Montegrappa's custom shop close to Venice, the custom designs take less than two weeks to go from drawing board to desk. The launch of the service represents a major milestone in the 106-year history of the luxury marque.

What was the vision behind Configurator?

It's an idea that comes from the perspective of the user. As discreet accessories, pens can be used to say so much – both literally and figuratively. With Configurator, customers who want the sensation of owning a beautiful pen

get to impose their personality on the object – and not vice versa. So much of what is available in the market tries to neutralise taste: it's antithetical to the notion of a tool designed for personal expression.

What innovations does the platform bring?

Full customization, above all. Users can control settings for eight different parts of the pen, and preview their design from any angle as either a deluxe fountain pen or rollerball. Real-time pricing is displayed

throughout the design process.

We have also introduced a new type of sculpted resin with a striking look and handle we think will appeal to the tech-minded. Alongside these, a range of woods, engraved metals and our complete archive of celluloid colors make it possible to achieve much more than customers know from our production pens – or anybody else's for that matter.



How do you define the target market for Configurator?

Our first order last month came from a Noir fiction writer who wanted a fountain pen in black celluloid. Our customers range from creatives to corporations, or individuals



Montegrappa's Configurator allows pen enthusiasts to create their own custom-designed rollerball or fountain pen

who want a pen to match their watch, car or boat. Many simply see the potential of pens as statement pieces and are intrigued by the possibilities. Diehard pen enthusiasts are also enjoying the chance to make the Extra – our flagship model – exactly the way they've always wanted it.

Does the move to customization represent a pivot by Montegrappa?

It's a pivot in the sense that we want to make the experience of discovering fine pens as delightful as possible to a wider audience. We know how difficult many find it to fathom the pen market, or understand where the value points lie.

But our commitment to production pens and brand loyalists remains unchanged. In fact, we have substantially increased the rate and originality of new releases throughout this year, and have big plans for 2019. Particularly since we released the Q1 limited edition in 2015, the market has taken notice of us as leaders in technical and design innovation. The launch of Configurator is the latest step in that direction.

How did you build Montegrappa Configurator?

We developed the rendering software in collaboration with a technology team from the University of Udine, here in Italy. Behind the scenes, we have made a huge investment in processes and componentry, so as to be ready to respond to any order. In all, the system took about two years to develop, test and refine. It has been a large undertaking for a family company, but we are delighted with the decision we took.

What is your outlook for fine pens in general?

Things have been going well for us, particularly at the upper end of our range. More and more, people are looking for distinctive accessories to break norms and express themselves. They like to know which products and makers are bywords for quality and status.

At a more general level, the distance people are putting between themselves and their digital devices is bringing more attention to pens. We see few people who truly prefer typing and tapping on screens over actual writing. The intimacy and deep functionality of pens are difficult to replicate. ●