

# Apprentice to Journeyman to Master

BY NICKY PESSAROFF

Since the turn of the century, Penlux's Kevin Hsu has been mastering his craft.



Left—Penlux Masterpiece Grande Marble Wave with high-density PMMA resin body of swirled red, black, and white with gold-plated appointments and gold-plated stainless steel nib.  
Right—the new Penlux Elite fountain pen with proprietary Mustard PMMA resin and gold-plated appointments.

The word “masterpiece” is thrown around a lot these days to denote any work that approaches excellence in artistic or manufacturing prowess. Arguably, the word has lost much of its potency due to its overuse. As we look at the work of Kevin Hsu and his writing instruments brand Penlux, let us consider the historical definition of “masterpiece.”

During the days of apprenticeship guild systems, an aspiring craftsman presented an exceptional piece of work to a panel of guild masters. If the work was considered good enough, it was given the title of “masterpiece” and the apprentice or journeyman was denoted as a master of their craft. This is the path that most resembles Hsu’s life trajectory.

Hsu was born in Taiwan and attended college at the University of Oregon. After graduating, he met Bernard Lyn of Danitrio. He recalls, “Bernard took me to most of the U.S. trade shows and then sent me back to Taiwan to meet with all of the Danitrio suppliers so I could learn how to make a complete pen. He gave me knowledge of both the U.S. business system and the components of a writing instrument. They became essential nutrients for my own business.”

For a time, Hsu returned to his family’s business in Taiwan—the manufacture of tennis rackets using carbon fiber materials. But the “pen bug” had bit: Hsu designed his own carbon fiber fountain pen and presented it at PaperWorld in Frankfurt, Germany, the largest pen and stationery trade show in the world.

Some major writing instruments companies took notice of Hsu, and in 1999 he began an ODM (“Original Design Manufacturer”) business, supplying to various pen companies. A further casual “apprenticeship” with Taccia’s Shu-Jen Lin and a burgeoning friendship with Itoya of America founder Shun Takemura strengthened Hsu’s knowledge of pen making and his ties to the global pen market.

After all the apprenticeship and experience in designing writing instruments for other companies, in 2015 Hsu launched his own—Penlux—with the goal of offering fine writing instruments of the utmost quality at the fairest price possible. His connections to U.S. distributors and shops through his ODM business, along with the sheer quality of Penlux pens, helped Hsu’s brand take off meteorically.

Most of the components of a Penlux fountain pen are made at the Penlux facilities in Taiwan, and the rest of the components are sourced through Hsu’s longstanding contacts, which allows him to produce high-quality fountain pens with very affordable prices—a major part of Hsu’s strategy.

