

PEN WORLD

when is a pen an experience?

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still no easier to answer the question that has bedeviled men for centuries, but when it comes to their writing instruments, women want color, cases and compartments, the experts say. > > > > >

What do Women Want?

BY JIL MCINTOSH

Pens by Deborah Bedard Designs.
Find a retailer at
deborahbedarddesigns.com.





From top—Jack Georges Milano vertical laptop-compatible wheeler, \$320, Clark & Mayfield Sellwood
top tote, \$119, both available from Paradise Pen,
paradisepen.com; Taccia Snowy Dreams limited edition,
by fountain pens and fifteen rollerballs), ebonite
decorated with three different maki-e techniques
incorporating eggshell and abalone inlays, \$745–895,
taccia.com.



So, women want color, cases and compartments. That's as in color choice in their pens, cases to protect them, and the multitude of compartments they prefer in the bags and portfolios to use along with them.

There are always exceptions on both sides, but generally, men buy chunkier, darker-colored or metallic pens, and then head for the watch department, where the most desirable timepieces have the most complicated dials. Women are more likely to receive their watches as gifts, and have more leeway in how much jewelry they can wear; their pens are often a combination of fashion statement and practical tool.

"Women obviously like the pinks and the reds," says Terry Wiederlight, president of Fountain Pen Hospital in New York City. "They go for the funky ink colors, too, because they want their writing to show up. If they don't want to use a fountain pen, then they'll probably go for a rollerball rather than a ballpoint, because it writes more smoothly."

Women can be just as avid collectors as men. Wiederlight sells a lot of display cases to women, especially fancier wooden ones. And while very few people buy traditional desk sets anymore—"That's a dying breed, but we'd love to bring it back," he says—he does a brisk trade in pen holders that keep one or two writing instruments close at hand on the desk, with women likely to buy animal-themed ones.

It's that essence of practicality that seems to guide women in the pen store, although there's always space for a little whimsy: disappearing nibs are popular with female buyers.

Most pen manufacturers are now more attuned to female buyers, says Deborah Bedard, founder of pen company Deborah Bedard Designs, and are doing more than just downscaling their offerings. "When older pen companies offered 'female' pens in the past, they made really skinny or short pens, and I think they hoped they'd sell a few to women. But they're not comfortable pens to write with," she says.



Deborah Bedard Designs, which caters specifically to women, offers pens primarily in pastels with a few darker shades available. A huge draw is the matching leather cases, because of the way women carry their pens. Men need clips to keep their pens securely in their breast pockets, but since ladies' clothing often doesn't have pockets, women want cases to keep their pens scratch-free and easy to find when they're tucked into a purse.

Women also tend to favor pens they know will stay closed, since they're jostled each time the purse is picked up or put down. "Ours has a screw-on cap and our customers really like that," Bedard says. "They feel the pen is more secure, that it's not going to come apart. I've had a few people say they've had bad experiences with pen caps coming off and ink going everywhere."

Bedard also makes "pen pillows," which, like Wiederlight's pen holders, keep the instrument safe and handy on a desk. "Pens are for writing notes and doing work at the desk," Bedard says. "I've had women say, yes, it sits right by my computer and it never moves. Women tend to make more lists and write more notes than men do. With men, the big expensive pen is to pull out for signatures."

Women also need to make an impression in the workplace, and for that, portfolios and padfolios are very popular, according to Julie Ortega, store manager at Paradise Pen in Las Vegas. But not just any portfolio: it has to have lots of compartments, whether tucked inside or accessible on the outside. "Women want a place to put their iPhone, someplace to put their business cards," Ortega says. "We sell quite a few laptop cases, and women are looking for the pockets. If the computer will fit, plus a wallet,

they don't have to carry a purse as well. They're choosing an extension of their purse."

Leather is the norm for these types of accessories, but the color is anyone's guess. Black and brown are timeless and popular, but many go for brighter shades: Ortega says it's the usefulness of the bag, and whether it has that essential number of pockets, that is the primary consideration.

But don't think women are strictly about practicality: many just love their pens. "Whether people believe it or not, women do buy a lot of writing instruments," Ortega says. "It varies, but women go on aesthetics and the brand name. I have a lot of women clients who collect writing instruments, and just as it is for the men, it's like a candy store here."

JIL MCINTOSH is a freelance writer and pen collector based in Oshawa, Ontario, Canada.



Venlo display pieces are popular with female Fountain Pen Hospital shoppers. The one shown, made of dyed Italian maple burlwood veneers, holds twenty pens and retails for \$550.



Pilot's famous Vanishing Point pen with retractable nib in three widths. Raden finish, as shown, \$380; namiki.com. Monna Lisa pen from Stippen with a retractable 14 karat nib, \$795; retro51.com.