

AIMING FOR THE TOP

JEFF BOSCHERT IS A bottomless well of energy and ideas; Joyce Tang is goal-oriented, methodical and analytical but sensitive at the same time. Together, the husband and wife, who make their home near San Francisco, are following a mutual dream of becoming designers and makers of extraordinary sculptural pens that are to ordinary pens what René Lalique's work is to plate glass and what a Van Cleef & Arpels masterpiece is to department store costume jewelry.

For them, penmaking is less about nuts and bolts and more about fine art and compelling design. So, their first pen had to be unexpected, stunning and precious. And so it is. The Jules series of pens is eliciting accolades everywhere it is shown. The incredible and well-executed pieces are created in the form of squid—the ancient biological shapes wrestled from sterling silver, gold and

platinum, and its eyes indicated by gemstones: Burmese rubies, Ceylon sapphires and faceted white diamonds.

When Boschert and Tang decided to name their new brand after one of the most powerful of all mythical creatures, the dragon, they might have also decided to make their first pen in the form of a dragon. In fact, they considered it, but the appeal of the squid pen project was too powerful to resist. They hit upon the name Jules—a reference to author Jules Verne and his underwater adventure *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* as well as a pun on the word jewels. Add to this the fact that squid produce ink and that their skeletal structure is called the pen, and there was no point in discussing any other theme. Looking back, the two cannot imagine any other outcome: their first pen had to be the Jules.

Getting started present-

ed many challenges. First of all, neither Boschert nor Tang had any training or experience in jewelry making, metalworking, gemsetting or penmaking.

Boschert had developed a career as an inventor and entrepreneur in the aquarium industry, and Tang had trained as a physician at Stanford. Realizing that the first order of business was to develop the needed skills, they enrolled in jewelry-making classes. Within two years, they were confident enough in their newfound abilities to set up a home studio. This was no small feat either. It required a six-figure investment in furnishings, equipment and raw materials and a good deal of space. But the studio was a necessity if penmaking was to become the couple's full-time occupation, which it now has.

To bring the Jules into being required eighteen months and many renderings of various species of

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Let others inhabit the lower strata of the market—the couple behind Dragon, a new high-end jewelry pen brand, aims to stand, fully evolved, at the top.

squid, culminating in the final design. The precious metal cap takes the bulbous form of the squid's body and accounts for more than half the weight of the pen. A tapered barrel of deep blue Italian resin is overlaid by the precious metal tentacles of the squid. The two halves of the pen come together as if the jeweled sea creature is devouring the pen, an amusing illusion that is highlighted in digital animation on the newly launched Dragon website. The German-made, 18 karat gold nib, offered in five widths from extra-fine to stub, is engraved by Tang with a hand-embellished nautilus shell.

As incredible as Jules is in terms of design, workmanship and price—the humblest of its three variations sells for \$3,750—the couple considers it to be a threshold piece. Tang explains, "In the life cycle of the company, you want to start out with something accessible and build up."

Boschert adds, "Jules is the most basic product we will make. We have the capabilities to do things that haven't been done before, and our work will be more jewelry-oriented in the future."

If there is any doubt that the current market for pens could support these ambitions, Boschert and Tang do not share in it. They see pens like Jules as hybrids of writing instruments and art objects and believe that there will always be a market for both extraordinary pens and extraordinary art objects. "We're forging our own niche," says Tang. "We're trying to produce the finest quality possible, and



The Jules series is Dragon's first offering. It is produced in five combinations of precious metals and gemstones: sterling silver with ruby; sterling silver with sapphire; 18 karat gold with ruby; 18 karat gold with sapphire; and platinum with diamond. The limited edition number is discreetly engraved inside the cap. There will be 176 in silver (88 with each gemstone), 28 in gold and only one in platinum. Prices for silver and gold versions are set at \$3,750 and \$18,000 respectively. The price of the platinum pen is expected to be around \$50,000.



Why the name Dragon? For Tang, who is Chinese, this was a natural choice. The Eastern dragon carries with it connotations of power, timelessness, beneficence and good fortune; it is a sort of one-word signifier of everything the couple wants for their nascent company.

below, left—Boschert and Tang in their home studio with their dog Yum Yum and the tools of their newfound trade. The two are preparing to exhibit their work at this year's Washington DC Fountain Pen Supershow in August.



we're making art."

Inspired by artists as diverse as René Lalique, known for his Art Nouveau jewelry and early twentieth-century art glass, and Christos, whose works involve wrapping natural features in millions of yards of fabric, Boschert and Tang are constantly searching for interesting new projects to attempt. "Art causes people to experience something new, to see things in a different way," Tang says, describing one of their design goals. Boschert says, "We are always asking ourselves what can possibly be that doesn't exist right now."

According to the couple, they are in no danger of running out of answers. "I am most passionate about finding inspiration," says Boschert. "When we find inspiration, we find energy—we'll stay up all night discussing a new idea." By responding to inspiration as it comes to them, they have developed a long list of ideas—about 50 that they are serious about, 20 of which will be fast-tracked. One of these is the dragon-themed pen that they might have launched their brand with had it not been for Jules. And, fittingly, it will be their flagship product. The dragon pen will showcase both the ancient art of hand-chasing and up-to-the-minute technology in

the form of hardened 24 karat gold. The price will depend on the exact materials and processes of the final design, but is projected to be significantly higher than that of the Jules.

Other projects on the couple's drawing board include a Nouveau-inspired piece designed by Tang and something using Boschert's favorite gemstone, the Paraíba tourmaline. They imagine their work showcased in pen retailers worldwide, and in ten years, they would like to have developed a reputation for doing some of the best contemporary work in the decorative arts. If the determination and ability they have shown so far in pursuing their dreams can be taken as an indicator, Boschert and Tang must certainly be on the path to success.

Entering the world of penmaking at a remarkably high level, Boschert and Tang can only envision attaining higher levels. More than a business strategy, the tendency to aim higher seems to be organic, an aspect of their personalities. "I am passionate about learning new things," says Tang. "And there will always be more to learn." So, it follows, there should always be something interesting coming from Dragon.

For more information, telephone 925.937.5105 or visit dragon-pens.com.

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