

Shu-Jen Lin's 20/20 Vision

BY NICKY PESSAROFF

TACCIA celebrates its 20th anniversary with 20 new, distinct urushi and maki-e designs.



She is a whirlwind, Shu-Jen Lin. Just try to follow her movements. One day, she is in her home in Orange County, California. Then she is in Japan, meeting with the principals of Nakabayashi, the corporation that logistically backs her luxury writing instruments brand TACCIA, and the principals of Itoya of America, her long-time distributor. Later you might find her sitting down for an interview at Yoseka Stationery in New York City, and a few days after that, there she is at a pen show, running the TACCIA table, personally displaying the writing capabilities of a TACCIA pen to an eager buyer.

For 20 years, the dynamic force that Lin carries within her has propelled her forward, from fashion designer to pen brand creator to the ambassador for a brand backed by two of Japan's most influential corporations. When she began TACCIA in 2003, there was no roadmap to follow—not for a woman, at least. The peniverse was—and still is, largely—a male-dominated universe. But here was a woman with the gall, the chutzpah if you will, to demand the same respect and dignity afforded to men who run their own pen companies.

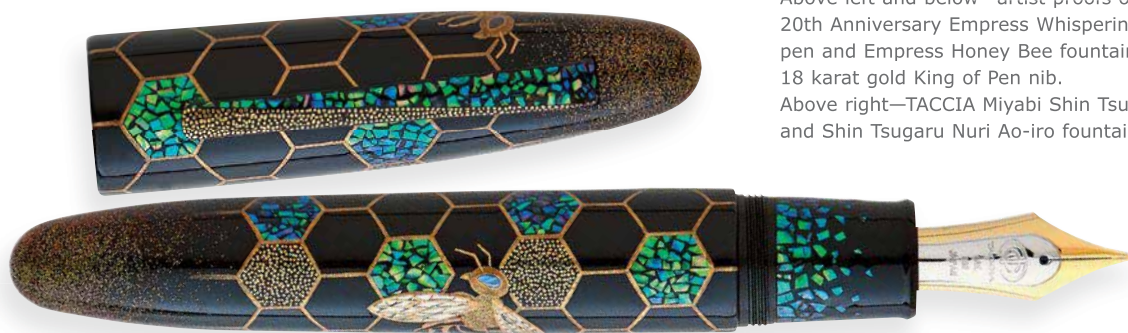
And she got it, and in so doing, she changed the face of pen making.

Lin says, “Looking back at the time when I founded TACCIA in October 2003, my resources were very limited, so I had to use my creativity to make something that would stand out and be noticeable by the pen community and serious collectors.”

Those early pens were remarkable—classic acrylics and modern metallics, urushi and ebonite, even some novelty items like quill-shaped fountain pens.

When TACCIA was acquired by Itoya of America in 2011, it gave Lin access to “a high-quality and recognized Japanese brand that really emphasizes the standards of Japanese quality. This emphasis has been at the center of every decision I make now,” she says. And when TACCIA introduced the Raden Reserve collection in 2015, including the original Raden Reserve Winter Breath, this partnership allowed Lin to introduce those magnificent gold Japanese nibs that are now standard on TACCIA pens.

When one of Japan's largest corporations, Nakabayashi, purchased TACCIA in 2018, it gave Lin the opportunity to “think big,” as in larger pens. That year, Lin says, she introduced the Miyabi model, fitted with a Japanese No. 6 18 karat gold nib; and in 2021, TACCIA introduced the Empress model, fitted with an 18 karat gold King of Pen nib made exclusively for TACCIA.



Above left and below—artist proofs of the new TACCIA 20th Anniversary Empress Whispering Pond fountain pen and Empress Honey Bee fountain pen with bicolor 18 karat gold King of Pen nib.

Above right—TACCIA Miyabi Shin Tsugaru Nuri Ame-iro and Shin Tsugaru Nuri Ao-iro fountain pens.



From left—Empress Chinkin Flight of the Phoenix and Empress Chinkin Wise Owl, shown front and back, display the chinkin maki-e technique, while the latter three Miyabi fountain pens are interpretations of classic ukiyo-e art by artists Hishikawa, Toshusai, and Kitagawa respectively.

Lin says, “These evolutions in TACCIA’s history are definitely what has shaped the brand to its current success.”

The fruits of Lin’s labor and her partnerships are on full display here. For TACCIA’s 20th anniversary celebration in 2023, the brand is proud to present a selection of 20 distinct urushi and maki-e limited edition masterpieces: 20 pens for 20 years.

Before describing these wonders, before you even look closely at the writing instruments on these pages, consider first the ambition of this project. Even the simple tamenuri lacquer technique requires between 12 and 15 layers of urushi, taking roughly three months for the writing instrument to be hand crafted, let alone conceptualized, designed, shaped, inlaid, tested, marketed, and made available to collectors. And we’re talking about 20 distinct designs, each a partnership between Lin and one of her trusted artists.

This collection of 20 writing instruments also marks, in this editor’s opinion, the culmination of a movement. *PW* readers got glimpses of the modern TACCIA over the past three years, awarding TACCIA Pen of the Year RCA wins in 2021 for the Miyabi Maki-e Winter Breath and in 2023 for the Empress Sunset Peacock Maki-e limited edition fountain pens.

Every TACCIA urushi/maki-e fountain pen is an ebonite-bodied cartridge/converter-filler with a 14 or 18 karat gold nib in TACCIA’s standard width options (extra-fine, fine, medium-fine, medium, broad, Zoom, and music) or an 18 karat gold King of Pen nib in medium or broad and with a cap possessing TACCIA’s cushion-seal closure system.

Each design shown here is on either TACCIA’s oversize Miyabi body or its extra-large Empress body. For those confused by the two body types, here’s a handy trick: Miyabi clips are usually solid in color, while Empress clips feature diagonally-designed extensions of the patterns found on the body. Additionally, Empress fountain pens feature a bicolor gold King of Pen nib.

In conceptualizing these pens, Lin relied on her own sense of fashion, color, and design. The collection is also a catalog of maki-e and urushi techniques—raden inlay, chinkin, traditional togidashi and taka maki-e, and more—a living history that connects past with present to make the writing instruments of the future.

Lin reflects, “When I started, I spent time studying urushi art and Japanese culture and design styles. It’s important to cultivate relationships with our expert artists, however they trust my sense of design and respect my ideas, and most of them closely follow my creative directions in making these unique and exclusive fountain pens.”



From left—Empress Wajima #36 in red and blue urushi with horizontal grooves; Empress Aka Brushstrokes and Empress Ao Brushstrokes have tactile vertical blue and green urushi or red-shaded urushi application; Miyabi Bon-Bori Cherry Blossoms and Blue Daisies feature traditional togidashi and taka maki-e. Bottom—Shu-Jen Lin at the 2023 Washington D.C. Fountain Pen SuperShow with the grand prize winner of a TACCIA fountain pen.

And what designs they are. The TACCIA Empress Honey Bee fountain pen features gold powder and abalone shell inlay in a geometric honeycomb pattern, with honeybees along the body featuring delicate mother of pearl wings and bright abalone-inset eyes. The Empress Whispering Pond has an abstract expressionist design featuring a blue urushi backdrop, lotus flowers, and dragonflies along a peaceful pond. While those pens are traditional in design, the Shin Tsugaru Nuri Ame-iro and Aka-iro fountain pens feature an ink drop-style pattern that usually adorns chopsticks and are available in both Empress and Miyabi models.

Empress Chinkin Flight of the Phoenix and Empress Chinkin Wise Owl feature more realistic interpretations of the two bird types using the chinkin chiseling technique. The phoenix seems to fly off the black urushi backdrop, while the lifelike owl perches stock-still on blossoming tree branches.

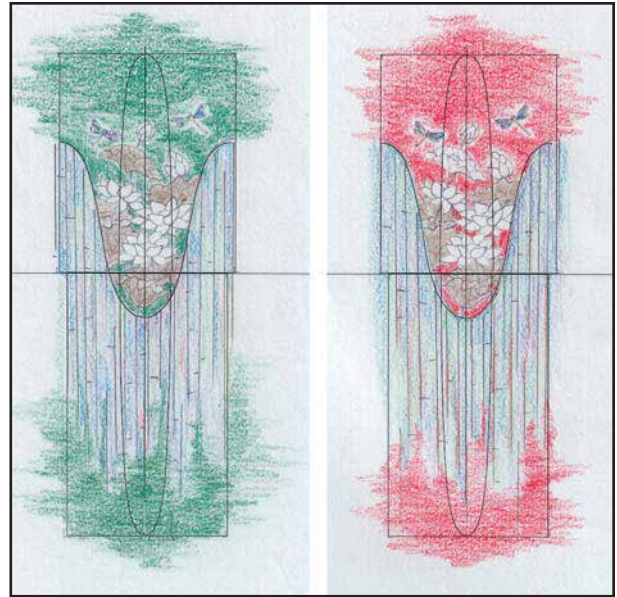
Other Empress models are inspired by Japanese ukiyo-e art, which traditionally depicts everyday life and figures such as lovely geisha and fierce samurai. The influence of legendary ukiyo-e artists such as Hishikawa and Kitagawa are clearly discernible.

Other motifs, such as those on Empress Wajima #36 in blue or red lacquer (an especially difficult and expensive process), Empress Aka Brushstrokes, and Empress Ao Brushstrokes are modernized techniques rooted in urushi lacquer processes that date back to Japan's Edo and Kaga eras. The pens feature contrasting colors and distinct tactility, such as on the Wajima #36.

The Bon-Bori collection includes Miyabi Twilight Shimmer, Aurora Glimmer, and Luna Prairie, which are inspired by natural phenomena and the cosmos. Miyabi Bon-Bori Blue Daisies and Miyabi Bon-Bori Cherry Blossoms highlight a more minimalist, delicate style. The clipless Empress Red Mt. Fuji: Summer, with its red urushi backdrop, Mt. Fuji in gold and eggshell inlay, and golden flying cranes could not be more classical in its design.



Below and right—Miyabi Bon-Bori Luna Prairie captures the cosmos in raden inlay and gold and silver powder; artist's sketch of the forthcoming 20th pen, Empress Lotus Flower.
 Bottom left—Empress Red Mt. Fuji: Summer, a classic Japanese art subject.
 Bottom right—raden inlay is used on the Miyabi Bon-Bori Aurora Glimmer and Miyabi Bon-Bori Twilight Shimmer fountain pens.



The 20 fountain pens in TACCIA's 20th anniversary collection are nothing less than a metaphorical interpretation of TACCIA and Lin's experience over the past 20 years, displaying the culmination of decades of careful research, trusted partnerships, and consumer outreach. And this cannot be stressed enough: TACCIA is also the story of a pioneering woman in a male-dominated industry.

"I started TACCIA for freedom of expression and design as a female owner," Lin says. "Starting TACCIA allowed me to use my background in design and combine that with my passion for creating writing instruments. It is difficult for women to get started in this industry. However, I feel that, over the years, I've been lucky to receive a lot of support from the community and recognition for the efforts I put toward every small detail that is necessary to really create something that is worth being the star of a collection."

When the public hours of a pen show are over, when the last happy customer has left the TACCIA table, I have witnessed that whirlwind of activity, Shu-Jen Lin, as she takes a deep breath, lets her shoulders relax, and looks up, finally, from the endless amount of work she has set for herself.

In that moment, I see her eyes, which never stop dancing, never stop taking in the world around her. In turn, she catches my eye, gives me a smile that is at once warm and ironic, playful and weary. The day is over. We are all fatigued, but Shu-Jen never stops working. I stand across from her at the TACCIA table as she takes up one of her fountain pens and holds it out to me.

"There's something I want to show you," she says, and she puts a fountain pen in my hand, and I am pulled into the whirlwind, ready to go along with whatever journey she takes next.

Contact your authorized TACCIA dealer, and see more of the Bon-Bori collection in this issue's Fall Preview (p. 75).

