

# Santini Italia:

BY LAURA CHANDLER

## Writing a New Chapter



Giovanni Santini, at home with his wife, Katrina, and daughter, Giulia. His Giotto Tower writing instrument is hand enamelled with sterling silver overlay and covered in over 220 minute decorative motifs.

**W**e control our surroundings in so many ways that we sometimes forget it's a two-way street: our environment shapes us, too. Take Giovanni Santini as an example. The fact that he was born 55 years ago in Turin, Italy, explains a great deal about his career in pens, for this area is the historic seat of Italian pen making. Turin is the home of Aurora (see p. 68) and not far from the home of Ancora, two of Italy's oldest brands, both founded in 1919. Settimo Torino (a town seven miles outside Turin—hence its name—but now more like a suburb) was once home to scores of fountain pen manufacturers.

So it was the most natural thing in the world that Santini would gravitate to pens. He attended an arts college, shaping models and creating drawings and also studying architecture and art history. After college, he tried several jobs before opening a stationery shop, and that's when he truly fell in love with pens. He soon began selling and repairing fountain pens, and a Waterman salesman led him to the next step of his career: he told Santini about a well-known pen shop in Turin that was for sale. "That was my dream by then," says Santini. "I didn't wait a moment and bought it!"

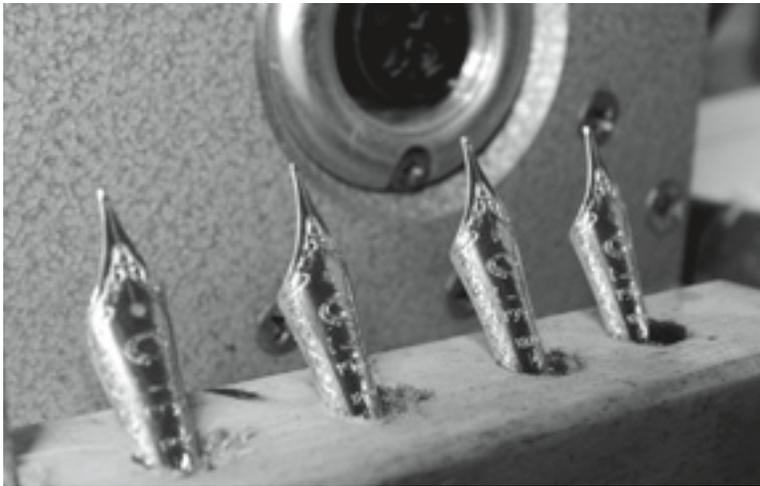
The shop, which had been established in the 1950s, came with a stock of vintage spare parts and materials, including ebonite, celluloid, lever-fill mechanisms, nibs, and tools, many of them handmade by the previous owner. Santini built his skills in pen repair, began collecting mostly Italian pens, and attended pen shows in the United States.

Ancora had stopped producing pens in 1975, and Santini saw an opportunity not only to create his own pens but also to bring back an important part of Italy's fountain pen history. He bought the dormant brand in 1998, and the first pen he produced there was the Unica. "A pen made by me! The dream came true!" Santini marvels.

"Ancora was my baby," he continues, and Santini applied himself to learning the entire production process. A few years ago, a Russian company purchased the Ancora brand for the express purpose of creating pens for the Russian market. Santini initially oversaw production for the new owners and in fact still works with them on occasion.

But Santini needed a new avenue for his own pen making, and that is when Santini Italia was born in Confienza, roughly halfway between Turin and Milan. Santini thinks of it as simply a continuation of his work: "The story of Ancora and the story of Santini Italia are the same thing: my work with different names." That is why the Santini Italia logo carries the founding date of 1998, the year Santini purchased Ancora.





In the tradition of Turin pen making, Santini controls all aspects of production, including nibmaking.

Santini takes pride in the fact that his pens are made at his own facility, including the nibs. “I think it is important when you buy a pen that its heart is Italian, too!” he says. “Will you buy an Italian car if you are aware that the most important part, the engine, is from a foreign producer?”

All Santini Italia fountain pens are cartridge/converter filling, although Santini created a special “depression-filling” mechanism for Ancora, which works similarly to Parker’s Vacumatic. For the time being, Santini plans to stick with the cartridge/converter filler because he thinks today’s customers prefer its simplicity, but he allows that perhaps in the future, the company might make a short limited edition with the Ancora-style mechanism. A proprietary feed is in the planning stages.

Against tough competition from major, well-established brands, how did Santini carve out his place in the pen market?

First, the prices are very reasonable. A large pen with a big 18 karat gold nib carries an SRP of only \$230, and limited editions like the Giotto Tower and the Taj Mahal—made of solid silver with 18 karat gold nib—retail for only \$650.

“Nowadays pens are too expensive!” Santini explains. “If we want a future for pens, we have to attract more young people, and how can we attract them if a simple pen with a gold nib costs almost the same as a high-end mobile phone? We have to be a reasonable choice for potential buyers. They are our future!”

Besides reasonable pricing, Santini Italia offers a wide variety of colors and patterns, which are created using a proprietary process. For fear of being copied, Santini declines to give specifics except to say that the color process comes from another field of manufacturing, that it is a manual process, and that it allows him to change colors and patterns easily and at very little cost. It also produces color that varies a bit from pen to pen, so that no two pieces are exactly alike. Customers can also request special colors.



Color is so important to Santini Italia that one of its most important lines is called the Color collection. In creating it, the company was aiming for a pen with an unusual pattern but that had “all the features of a classy pen,” says Santini, meaning a large pen with a large, 18 karat gold nib.

Slightly above the Color collection is the Scottish collection with a solid silver cap. The Classica collection has a solid silver cap and hand-enameled decor.



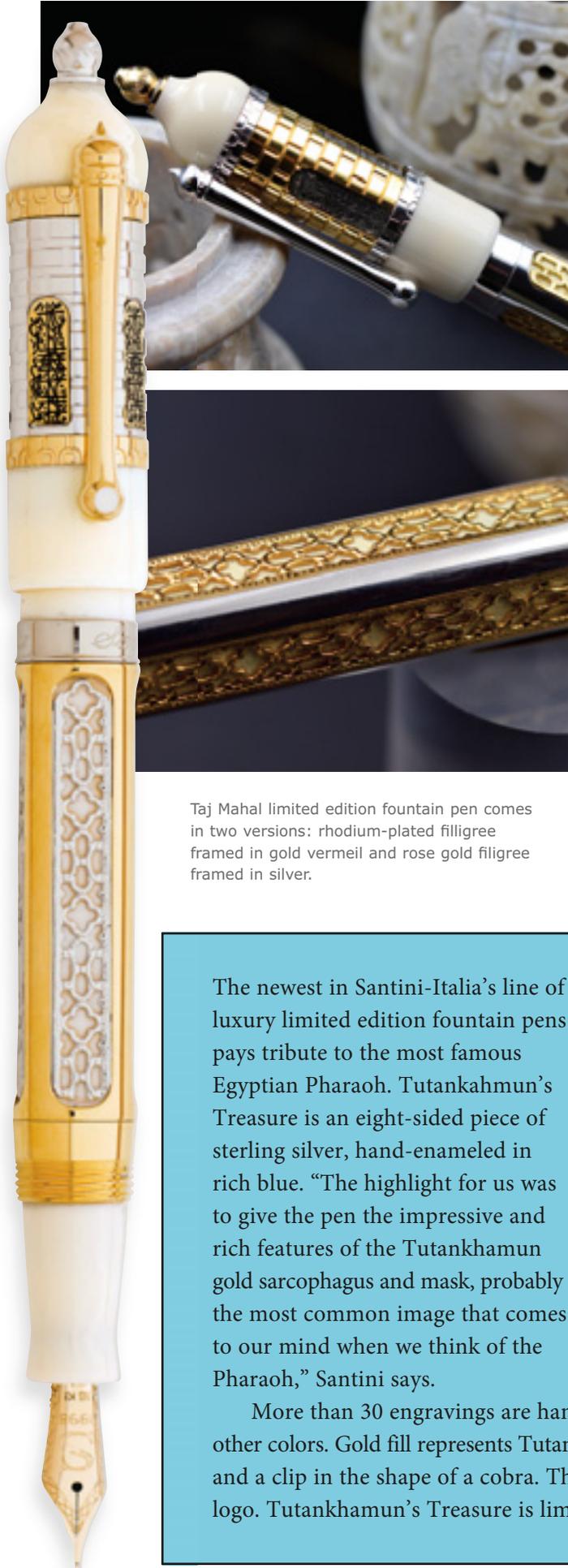
A manual coloring process allows Santini to make affordable pens in varied barrel designs for his Colors collection. Both fountain pen and rollerball versions are available. Fountain pen has an 18 karat gold nib in sizes from extra-fine through broad.

The Giotto Tower limited edition of 88 pieces evokes Florence's 14th-century Giotto Tower with its square shape. "We made small plates of engraved bronze that are decorated completely by hand, repeating exactly the same decoration of the Giotto Tower—a piece of Italian history in your hand," says Santini.

The Taj Mahal is equally time-intensive because of the degree of hand work that goes into it. On the cap, which is shaped like the mosque of the Taj Mahal, is an Arabian prayer engraved on four sides; the top is hand enameled. "The body is machined from a solid silver rod and then into that, a silver filigree strip is hand cut and hand adapted. Four layers of lacquer fill in the filigree," says Santini.

All that work is done by a staff of only eight people working at full efficiency. In this way, Giovanni Santini and his staff are writing a new chapter in Italian fountain pen history: with a fond glance back at their beginnings and respect for the roots from which they sprang, but also with a clear and steady gaze toward the future.

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Taj Mahal limited edition fountain pen comes in two versions: rhodium-plated filligree framed in gold vermeil and rose gold filigree framed in silver.



The newest in Santini-Italia's line of luxury limited edition fountain pens pays tribute to the most famous Egyptian Pharaoh. Tutankhamun's Treasure is an eight-sided piece of sterling silver, hand-enameled in rich blue. "The highlight for us was to give the pen the impressive and rich features of the Tutankhamun gold sarcophagus and mask, probably the most common image that comes to our mind when we think of the Pharaoh," Santini says.

More than 30 engravings are hand-filled with blue enamel. A further 80 cavities are filled with three other colors. Gold fill represents Tutankhamun's gold mask, and the cap features hieroglyphic cartouches and a clip in the shape of a cobra. The nib is a large 18 karat gold beauty engraved with the Santini Italia logo. Tutankhamun's Treasure is limited to 88 fountain pens and 88 rollerballs.

