

# Santini Italia Slays the Giant

BY NICKY PESSAROFF

With the new No. 8 Giant nib, this artisanal Italian pen company is making its largest mark yet.



From left—Giovanni Santini, seated, with daughter Giulia and wife Katrina; the new Santini Italia Giant fountain pen in faceted Almyra ebonite, gold-plated brass appointments, and bicolor 18 karat gold No. 8 Giant nib with Santini logo engraving.

There are few cities more important to the legacy of fine writing instruments than Turin, Italy, the ancestral home of Italian pen making. What's more, Turin has maintained its dominant place in Italian pen making, the home of both large and artisanal manufacturers. Giovanni Santini is one of Turin's native sons, and his brand, Santini Italia, continues Turin's tradition of completely house-made Italian writing instruments.

First a pen shop owner and restorer, Santini began his career in pen making in 1998 when he acquired the rights to the historical Italian pen brand Ancora, originally founded in 1919 by Giuseppe Zanini. The story of the Ancora brand name is its own saga, but the important thing is this: when Santini changed his company's name to Santini Italia, it liberated him to find his own path in pen making. Twenty-six years on, Santini is still pushing the limits of what he and his company do.

So, what makes Santini Italia such a different artisanal brand?

"Our knowledge," says Santini. "It ranges from the creation of molds for clips and pen turning using the latest-generation machines and tools, but above all, the development of the writing parts."

The last time *PW* featured Santini Italia, in 2017, the pens used house-made cartridge/converter-filling systems and nibs, but there were no plans for a regular-edition piston-filling system or further nib offerings. Much can change in six years.

"In recent years, we have grown significantly, and we have made investments to increase production and quality," Santini says. "We have taken steps to go from an artisan workshop to a full factory that maintains its own production and great attention to craftsmanship."

From the company's structure to the products produced, Santini Italia has metamorphosed in a gigantic way. For one, the majority of Santini Italia pens now feature the company's proprietary piston-filling system. For another, the company also now produces its own ebonite feeds. And finally, Santini Italia has added the 18 karat gold No. 8 Giant nib to its lineup of proprietary Nos. 5 and 6 18 karat gold nibs. This last element is especially notable: Giovanni Santini is now the only Italian artisan to offer such a large, house-made gold nib.



Top left—bicolor 18 karat white gold No. 8 Giant nib, 18 karat rose gold No. 6 nib, and 18 karat yellow gold No. 5 nib, all with ebonite bodies.  
 Top—Nos. 8, 6, and 5 Santini Italia bicolor and yellow gold nibs.  
 Left—Giant Ambra fountain pen with yellow gold plating and bicolor No. 8 Giant nib.  
 Above—Santini Italia white gold nibs.

“I must admit that the thrill of seeing a nib of this size—almost a No. 10—fills us with pride,” Santini says. “And not only that: we are one of very few companies in the world that produces nibs in white and rose gold. Most rose and white gold nibs are plated yellow gold, not the pure metal. We offer a real rose or white gold nib.”

Santini’s proprietary metallurgical process and the Giant’s 18-karat nature give this nib a great amount of flexibility, something for which his customers have clamored: “In fact, the idea to produce our cursive italic flex was a request by one of our customers, and we made it happen.”

Santini Italia nibs are made in a 16-step process before the final iridium bead is welded. Rose gold nibs are strengthened by a copper alloy, and white gold nibs get their color from silver alloy. Santini Italia Nos. 5, 6, and 8 nibs are offered in widths of extra-fine, fine, medium, 1.1 mm stub, cursive italic, architect, left oblique, Chinese calligraphy, and “Flexy” flexible nibs in all gold types. White and yellow gold nibs have the additional option of a “Superflexy” nib, which Santini compares to vintage flexible nibs and is intended for calligraphic writing.

So, from cap crown to nib tip, Santini Italia now produces every aspect of its pens. This allows Santini to keep price points low for such luxurious fountain pens and to change production quickly. For example, in 2017, Santini Italia was pushing its Colors collection, acrylic-bodied fountain pens with wild colors and patterns that harkened to post-World War II pop art and industrial design. In response to changing tastes, today’s Santini Italia fountain pens are more classically styled and minimalist with a strong focus on house-made acrylic and ebonite bodies.

“Ebonite is a historical material, precious because it is hand-made in a much more complex process and is three times more expensive than acrylic. Each ebonite color is unique and unrepeatably, therefore making the object even more precious,” Santini says. “We have perfected our manufacturing process to get the best results. Faceting ebonite pens requires special tools and above all the polishing phase to obtain our brilliant surfaces.”



Above column—Unica fountain pen in orange and blue ebonite with rhodium plating and No. 6 nib; Unica ebonite fountain pens with gold plating in colors of Dim Grey, Ginger, Venetian Red, and Lime.

Right column—Unica Ciccolato fountain pen; comparison of Nonagon Ebonite fountain pen with No. 6 yellow gold nib and Giant fountain pen with No. 8 Giant bicolor nib.

Santini Italia’s expertise with ebonite is on display with the new Unica collection, part of that minimalist movement. Bodies of single color or dual-colored ebonite are matched to rhodium- or gold-plated body rings and cap bands with classical Greek engraving patterns. The proprietary piston-filler, ebonite feed, and No. 6 18 karat gold nib are complemented by a scalloped section for an easy grip. Highly saturated body colors range from gentle lilac to deep denim blue. Color combinations such as orange-and-blue are especially striking, and the MSRP of around \$400 is remarkably reasonable for a completely proprietary creation.

In order to showcase the new No. 8 Giant nib, Santini Italia has created both faceted and round-bodied oversize pen collections, also called Giant. Acrylic versions feature rounded, semi-transparent bodies with rhodium- or gold-plated accents and hand-enameled details. For example, the Santini Italia Giant Boreal features a swirled blue and brown body with hints of red and beveled ends. The cap and section rings have a doubled Greek key engraving pattern with black enamel rings. Like most Giant acrylic fountain pens, Boreal is part of Santini Italia’s regular-edition offerings and has an MSRP of around \$650.

The Giant ebonite fountain pens feature the same elements: a large body with beveled ends, Greek engraving patterns, a rolling clip, enamel details, and the option of either rhodium or gold plating on the brass accents. However, there are some differences. For example, rather than engraved, the Greek engraving patterns are cast, creating a three-dimensional effect. Additionally, Giant ebonite fountain pens are offered in classic rounded bodies as well as faceted bodies with nine edges. Finally, these ebonite pens are limited to 33 editions each.



Top row—Giant faceted fountain pens with gold and rhodium plating in ebonite colors of Rose, Imperia, Umbria, and Venezia; Giant Ambra in faceted and rounded bodies with bicolor 18 karat gold No. 8 Giant nibs and gold plating.  
 Above row—Giant Boreal acrylic fountain pen in faceted and rounded bodies; Giant Imperia ebonite faceted fountain pen with bicolor No. 8 Giant nib and gold plating.

Remarkably, Santini keeps the price points for these ebonite pens quite low: about \$750 for the rounded series and \$800 for the faceted series. The entire suite of Santini Italia nib widths is offered; acrylic-bodied Giant fountain pen nibs are available in white or yellow gold (matched to the accent color). Some ebonite fountain pens feature a bicolor Giant nib. All Giant nibs feature lovely Santini Italia logo engraving.

For those looking for an ebonite-bodied, faceted fountain pen with a more traditional diameter, Santini Italia offers the Nonagon Ebonite series. Generally, the Nonagon collection is similar to the Giant Faceted collection: limited-edition ebonite colors, rhodium- or gold-plated accents including a rolling clip and Greek-patterned engraved body bands, piston-filling system, ebonite feed—however the nibs are No. 6 size, editions are limited to 98 pieces, and price points are around \$500 to \$550.

Despite its growth in recent years, the Santini Italia core staff remains small, and Santini himself oversees all elements of operation. Santini’s wife, Katrina, is a responsive customer service specialist, up to and including in-house repair queries.

Regardless of the model or material, Santini Italia fountain pens are always inspired by Golden Age-era Italian fountain pens, according to Santini: “The Italian fountain pen has been a point of reference in the history of pens, and therefore our goal is to keep this tradition alive. The classic formula for a fine pen is great balance and writing quality, which has always been represented in Italian manufacturing. We like following market trends and changing with the times, but classic Italian design is always present in our DNA.”

Twenty-six years on, Giovanni Santini remains palpably excited about his fine creations and dedicated to providing luxurious Italian writing instruments at reasonable prices. As Santini says, it is “a story that began 26 years ago and has continually been perfected.” As part of Turin’s heritage of fine pen making, Giovanni Santini stands on the shoulders of giants, but he has become quite the giant himself.

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