

# The Heroine's Journey

BY SUZANNE C. LEE

In a magical realm called Scriptorium Pen Company, U.S. artisan pen maker Renée Meeks crafts literarily-inspired writing instruments.



From left—new special edition Scriptorium Kelmscott fountain pens in German Red Ripple ebonite and silver hammered wrap-around clips and body bands; Renée Meeks of Scriptorium Pen Company at her lathe in Jackson, Mississippi; new special edition Kelmscott Dragonfly fountain pens with silver dragonfly wrap-around clips.



In the summer of 2012, Renée Meeks metaphorically closed the last chapter of a well-loved book and began to write another chapter of her life. After 25 years of teaching high school Senior English and British Literature, Meeks retired. What she anticipated was a quieter life, more time for reading and puttering around her garden in Jackson, Mississippi.

One day, she was notified by her brother that she would soon receive a package. Meeks was intrigued. When the box arrived, she discovered a mini wood lathe and all the tools needed to produce pens. Reminding his sister that she had always wanted to make pens, he told Meeks that it was time to start. Like a magic helper, her brother initiated the journey.

Meeks prepared: she devoured every article and video on pen making she found. She knew that she did not want to make kit pens—she wanted the freedom to create entirely. Through the International Association of Penmakers, Meeks met the man who would become her mentor, another former English teacher-turned-artisan pen maker named Robert Holm. When Meeks tried to buy one of Holm's fabulous pens, he told her she could make one just like it and offered to teach her everything, from the ground up. Having a guide was invaluable.

It became apparent Meeks needed more than the mini-lathe, and she purchased a larger one that offered variable speed. Eventually, and with the patient instruction of Holm, Meeks began to post photographs of her creations on Fountain Pen Network. The response was tremendous—forum members wanted her pens. In November of 2012, Meeks sold her first pen. A deluge of customers followed.

Meeks was still seeking inspiration; she began to create her own models. Meeks' pens, the Balladeer and the Scribe, were unveiled to great success. About a year after she had begun her journey, in early fall 2013, nib master and online pen retailer Pendleton Brown asked if he could carry her work in his store. Of course, Meeks was elated. Brown requested that she come up with a name for her company and a website to which he could refer customers.



Above and top right—this Kelmscott Dragonfly has a hand-tuned stainless steel nib by nib master Mark Bacas and a custom acrylic by Bob Dupras. Right—Kelmscott in German Red Ripple ebonite with custom Rickshaw Bagworks pen sleeves.

Meeks says, “I reveled in the choosing of a company name. I wanted it to reflect my love of writing, of medieval calligraphy, and of the images of illuminated manuscripts—dedicated monks working away in a monastery scriptorium. I found exactly what I was looking for with the Scriptorium Pen Company. I then created a website and a logo, and I was off and running. It was like a runaway train. My work queue got longer and longer.”

Designing roll-stops and clips is one of Meeks’ favorite steps in her artistic process. She wanted a traditional and classic look for the clips but insisted they also be substantive (unlike typical pen kit clips).

Determined to make her own designs, as unique as magic wands, Meeks decided she didn’t want to use ordinary clips and roll-stops. Instead, she consulted with silversmith Mike Redburn, who is able to cast silver, bronze, and brass clips, using her sketches as a map.

Every journey will lead to challenges, monsters to be defeated or tamed. When, in 2016, Meeks upgraded to an enormous 1,000-pound metal lathe, she and her brother labored to wrestle the massive Grizzly lathe into the shop, properly level it and finish its assembly. Yet another helper revealed himself at that point: the kind Shawn Newton of Newton Pens, who was happy to help her learn the rhythm of the metal lathe.

Meeks notes that Newton is both a great person and a wizard of a pen maker: “His help was instrumental in getting me up and running with the big lathe.”

Two years later, in 2018, the huge Grizzly had burned two motors. Meeks invested in a Precision Matthews 1236 lathe. She and her brother once again took on the monumental task of wrestling a daunting beast indoors to complete its construction.

Another landmark of Meeks’ professional career came in 2019, when she began to have the renowned nib master Mark Bacas tune and smooth all her nibs. Meeks had been doing this work herself but was proud to hand the job over to someone so widely admired. Her gratitude for Bacas is evident; he offers custom nib grinds for any customer who desires it. In addition, Meeks offers specialty stacked nibs from Monty Winnfield and flexible stainless steel nibs from Kirk Speer of Pen Realm for her cartridge/converter/eyedropper-filling fountain pens.



Top row—Idyll fountain pen in Dupras Ocean Cenote with Mike Redburn-designed silver koi roll-stop; Idyll in Bob Dupras Kingfisher acrylic with kingfisher roll-stop; custom-designed fountain pen based on vintage Montblanc 139s in Bob Dupras Midnight Flame acrylic.  
Above row—Novelist in vintage Parker Brown Crush celluloid and black ebonite with brass cap bands, gold-plated Exclamation clip, and 14 karat gold medium nib; Literati dip pen in Nikko red ebonite with matching pen rest.

The true enchantment lies always in creation. One of Meeks' favorite parts of making pens is devising color combinations and styles for blank makers to construct.

"I've worked mostly with Jonathon Brooks [Carolina Pen Company] and Bob Dupras in this. It takes a lot of time and work, emailing pictures, calling back and forth, and making prototypes to get the new blank just right," she explains.

Which of Meeks' own remarkable, precise instruments does she prefer to use, herself? Her favorite models are the Balladeer, which was created to be comfortable in her own hand, and the Idyll, which she explains is similar in certain respects to the Nakaya Piccolo but much longer.

Many of Meeks' pens feature a barrel that widens a bit as it goes from the front threads toward the back end of the barrel—she discovered that this particular style, which is seen on many Conway Stewart and Montblanc pens, fit into the web of her thumb and forefinger far better than a straight barrel and avoided slippage. She notes that it also works well for hands that might be suffering from arthritis, since its chunky shape makes it much easier to grip. (The first incarnation of the pen was sold, but the second she has used daily since 2013.)

Our heroine has come far, but she is not done traveling. Even now, she dazzles with new writing instruments, each capable of transporting the writer to a place where fairy tales are the fabric of reality, where myths are precipitated. Meeks is now unveiling special edition projects.

Meeks wanted a model that would easily lend itself to special clips and band work. In pursuit of such elegance, Meeks created a base pen design with clean, sleek lines, like vintage Waterman ebonite pens of the 1920s and 1930s.



From top, clockwise—Sonneteer in Illuminated Amber Tortoise; Novelist in Old Growth Amboyna Burl with Sapwood; Wordsmith in Primary Manipulation 4 with brass accents; Zephyr in custom Japanese Autumn Colors acrylic with Open Book roll-stop.

“I love choosing a name for pen models,” Meeks says. “I finally settled on ‘Kelmscott’ for this one. Most of my pens have names with literary links, and this is no different. In 1891, William Morris created the Kelmscott Press, a specialty press devoted to bringing back the illuminated manuscript styles from the medieval period. Morris was the founder of the arts and crafts movement, with which pen making ties in perfectly.”

Two different styles of clip are available for the Kelmscott’s introduction, both in silver. One looks more

like a traditional accommodation clip but with a hammered texture and a matching band for the barrel. It features a body of German Red Ripple ebonite, another nod to vintage styles. Rickshaw Bagworks created a custom pen sleeve for this version, which features a vintage pattern of willow tree leaves and branches designed by Morris.

The other special edition Kelmscott pen is more whimsical, using a dragonfly motif. It features a functional clip that resembles a dragonfly, wings wrapped around the cap. Meeks and her silversmith Mike Redburn have worked on the new designs since the winter of 2021, going through multiple prototypes and iterations.

Meeks was intent upon capturing the delicate blue-green of the dragonfly. She notes that she wanted to fully recreate the delightful, stunning creatures she encounters in her garden. The material used in the pen is a dazzling custom creation of Bob Dupras. The two artisans spent hours emailing, phoning, and texting one another in pursuit of the perfect design.

Meeks says, “I’ve always loved doing hand crafts and loved to watch other artisans at work. Plus, being able to put to use something that I’ve made myself is a fantastic feeling. From my early teens, I’ve been fascinated with letterforms, methods of writing, and how books and manuscripts have been produced over the ages, including the tools used to create them.”

Our heroine has undertaken a long, arduous journey. With the assistance of helpers and wizards, Meeks has confronted riddles and produced magic. What she is able to create and offer to the world is pure enchantment. And while her adventures continue, she’s certainly made her mark. Renée Meeks has arrived.

*All Scriptorium pens are custom and made to order; current wait time is seven to nine months. Visit [scriptoriumpens.com](http://scriptoriumpens.com).*

