

DESIGN

PENS OF DISTINCTION

Flowing ink is only the beginning. The new collection of writing instruments from Porsche Design is being produced by Pelikan, and that means a signature made in Germany.

By Helge Kalb Photos by Jürgen Schwöpe

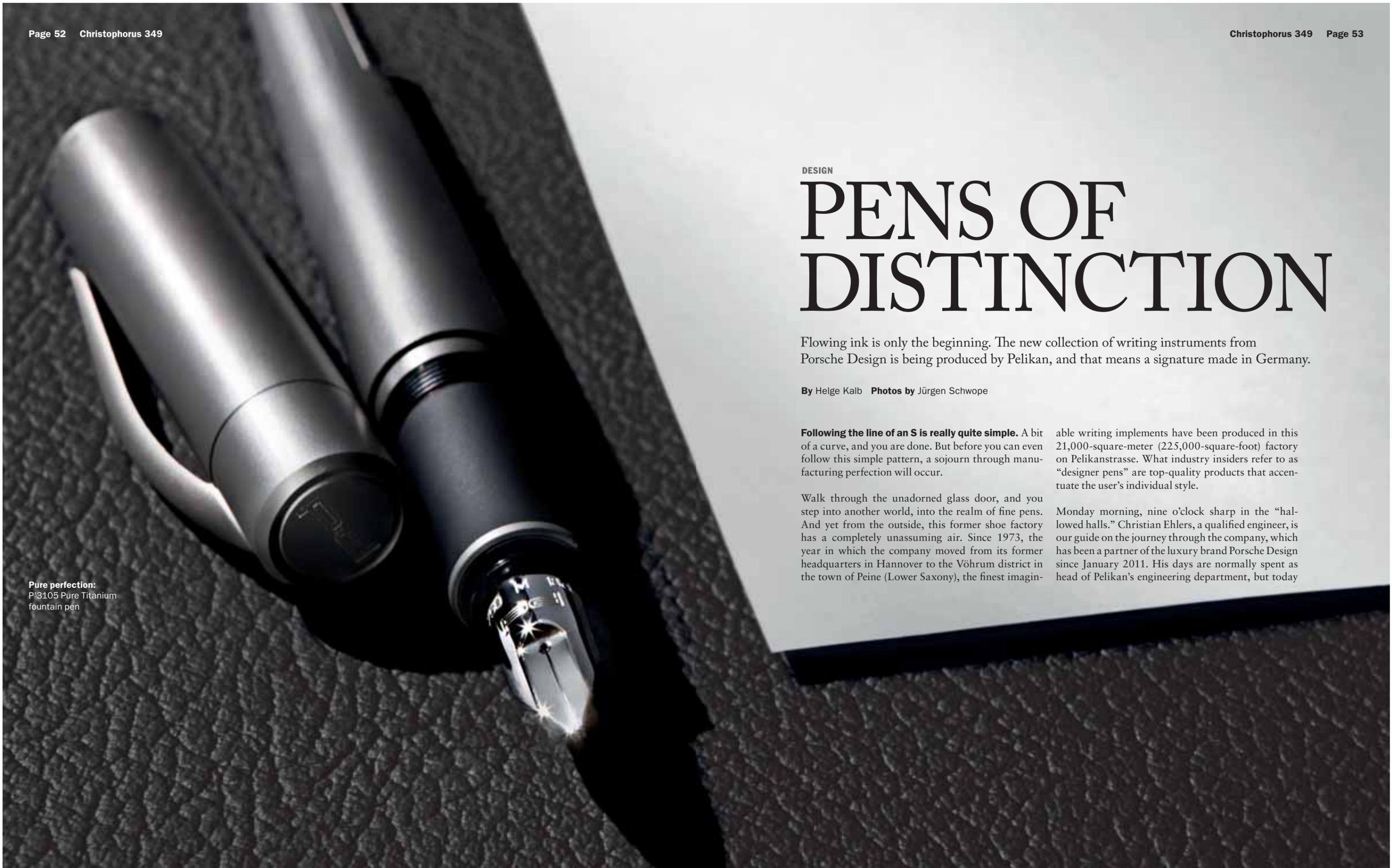
Following the line of an S is really quite simple. A bit of a curve, and you are done. But before you can even follow this simple pattern, a sojourn through manufacturing perfection will occur.

Walk through the unadorned glass door, and you step into another world, into the realm of fine pens. And yet from the outside, this former shoe factory has a completely unassuming air. Since 1973, the year in which the company moved from its former headquarters in Hannover to the Vöhrum district in the town of Peine (Lower Saxony), the finest imagin-

able writing implements have been produced in this 21,000-square-meter (225,000-square-foot) factory on Pelikanstrasse. What industry insiders refer to as “designer pens” are top-quality products that accentuate the user’s individual style.

Monday morning, nine o’clock sharp in the “hallowed halls.” Christian Ehlers, a qualified engineer, is our guide on the journey through the company, which has been a partner of the luxury brand Porsche Design since January 2011. His days are normally spent as head of Pelikan’s engineering department, but today

Pure perfection:
P’3105 Pure Titanium
fountain pen



To the point:
P'3105 Pure Titanium
fountain pen and
P'3125 Slim Line
ballpoint pen



he accompanies us on an introduction to the fine art of writing. Together, we maneuver our way around twelve production modules and past 300 employees who uphold the high quality of this traditional brand and ensure the good name of the company with the pelican logo. At the conclusion of our two-hour factory tour, we can see the result in blue on white: the Porsche pen has driven a symbolic S-curve.

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Perfectly flowing ink demands first-class materials. In contrast to the traditional “Stresemann stripe” design, plastic is not part of the picture for the new high-tech collection. Instead, the world-renowned brand is committed to the exclusive processing of perfectly engineered precious metals. “We’re like a fine watchmaker who starts with valuable German craftsmanship,” Ehlers adds.

Pelikan of course produces quite a few writing instruments, and does so around the clock, six days a week. In great quantity, to be sure, but more important, in great quality. Each year, the company—since 1996 a subsidiary of Pelikan International Corporation Berhad, based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia—manufactures 300 million individual items for customers around the world. That figure includes 160 million ink cartridges and three million writing implements, including two million fountain pens for children.

However, producing the 250,000 premium writing instruments is far more elaborate. A longer development time is called for, as are higher-quality raw materials, finer additions, more complex production steps, and more sophisticated processing. Constant quality control is a must.

Ehlers gives an enthusiastic tour through the production areas: “Production Module 1 focuses strictly on the premium segment. Five production islands are used for carrying out the 30 individual operations used to produce mechanical pencils, ballpoint pens, rollerball pens, and fountain pens.” Before we are allowed to observe the industrious, dexterous professionals at work, the engineer gives a few details of the events leading up to this partnership: “Cooperation between Porsche Design and Pelikan was agreed on in late 2009, development took place last year, and now the first seven joint product series are available.”

The “magnificent seven” include three newcomers: the Pure Black fountain pen, commemorating the legendary black Chronograph I, Porsche Design’s very first product; the limited edition Pure Titanium fountain pen; and the Slim Line series (a fountain pen, ballpoint pen, and mechanical pencil), in a style reminiscent of the famous Classic Line. The remaining four collections are further developments of products originally drawn up by Faber-Castell. Ehlers explains, “Porsche Design specifies the design, and we try to implement that with our know-how as well as propose our own ideas.” That is to ensure the new license agreement will be yet another success story “Made in Germany.”

THE COLLECTION

The current focus of the cooperation between Pelikan and Porsche Design is on seven product lines. The P’3105 Pure series comprises the Pure Black fountain pen in a matt black finish, which—together with the matt black paperweight—forms an exclusive set, as well as the Pure Titanium fountain pen, limited to 200 pens worldwide. The P’3110 TecFlex series includes a fountain pen, a rollerball pen, a ballpoint pen, and a mechanical pencil. This series features a woven stainless steel texture. The simple, sporty design of the P’3120 Aluminum series is available in two versions: as a twist ballpoint pen and as a twist mechanical pencil. The

new P’3125 Slim Line series comprises a fountain pen, ballpoint pen, and twist mechanical pencil. Its fascination emanates from both its concealed clip and the delicate design. The P’3130 Mikado series is available in ballpoint pen and twist mechanical pencil versions, each with 17 stainless steel rods elegantly wound around the shaft and the inner mechanism. The P’3140 Shake Pen ballpoint presents a fascinating, innovative, and unique mechanism: a short, rapid movement of the wrist causes the filler to extend and retract. The black calf leather case from the P’3190 accessories series rounds out the product range.

A closer look:
Fine craftsmanship
at Pelikan



Photo: Andreas Teichmann

It is a complicated road to completion when it comes to crafting Porsche Design writing implements. The new writing instruments are made of high-quality stainless steel, titanium, and brass components. Some of these instruments undergo a sophisticated coating process to avoid annoying fingerprints on the material. Pelikan then refines the base components that have been supplied, adding the final touches to the manufacturing process with a subtle treatment of the surface, so that once assembly is complete, these masterpieces of the art of writing fit well in the hand. The recipe for this process is kept under lock and key.

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The heart of every fountain pen is, of course, the nib. The nib is critical—and so is the gold. This precious metal with its magical allure is supplied as 14-carat and 18-carat gold—in one-kilo pieces worth over €30,000 (\$42,000)—from which the exclusive nibs are later stamped out.

Step by step, the process continues. A stamping press is used to imprint the nibs, after which they are folded.

The next step is to weld a tiny, extremely hard iridium reinforcement to the tip of the nib. The tipping is then slit to permit the ink to flow easily from the regulator onto the paper. In the last stages, the tipping is first polished; the completed, one-gram nib masterpiece then spends 24 hours in a polishing tumbler with one thousand porcelain particles that give the copper ball on the tip a glossy polish. The extra touch for the Porsche Design premium market: the 14- or 18-carat gold piece is given a fine rhodium coating beforehand. This silver-plating technique makes the showpiece truly luminous.

From start to finish, it takes four weeks to manufacture a fountain pen, including an entire week for the nib alone. Then—just as for a sports-car chassis—the new writing instrument is taken for a test-drive on paper to ensure it corners well. Over a 24-hour period, machines guide the nib in a circle and in the shape of a figure eight, at a constant writing speed of 20 centimeters (7.9 inches) per second. How is that for a racetrack? Ehlers: “We go to the limit—and then beyond.” If the nibs survive this absolute hardness test, they are then tested by hand, with great sensitivity. This is to ensure that they last a lifetime after being fused with the regulator by means of an ultra-heat treatment. The use of pressure compensation guarantees that everything will continue to flow as it should. The large-capacity filler in the ballpoint pen can easily write a distance of 13 kilometers (8.1 miles). Now, that is a long-distance classic. ●



THE MANUFACTURER

With over 170 years of company history, Pelikan today is a strong international group with a product range focusing on writing implements, writing materials for school children, hobby and painting supplies, and top-quality office and printer supplies. Pelikan’s European and German headquarters are based in Hannover (responsible for sales and marketing). Its PBS production company (paper and office supplies, and writing instruments) is located in Peine, and can be visited at any time. Since 1996, Pelikan Holding’s main office has been based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. This is the residence of company head Hooi Keat Loo and the parent company, Pelikan International Corporation Berhad, which at the same time is the largest single stockholder. The group (with

1,500 employees worldwide, 500 of them in Germany) has annual sales of €250 million, including over €200 million in Hannover. The company was established in 1838; Günther Wagner introduced the company’s pelican logo in 1871. In 1878, Pelikan was registered as a trademark. The first fountain pen came on the market in 1929. The year 1960 marked the debut of the Pelikano fountain pen for children. In 1978 the company became a corporation. The Pelikan brand is registered in 175 countries, with a brand awareness level of 95 percent. In 2010, the Eurovision Song Contest winner Lena used a Pelikan rollerball pen to sign her name in Hannover’s *Goldenes Buch* (the city’s visitor book). And Pelikan takes pride that no toxic substances are used in production.