

The Discerning Doodler

Astrophysicist and TV star Neil deGrasse Tyson loves the feel of a fancy pen



GROWING UP in the Bronx, I'd doodle when I got bored in class. But whereas the other kids were filling their notebooks with dragons and planes, I was polishing my calligraphy. I had noticed that the *New York Times* banner shared letters with my own name—the “N” in “Neil,” the “T” in “Tyson”—so I would laboriously copy out that Gothic lettering and practice my penmanship.

I quickly discovered, however, how hard it is to form Gothic letters with the cheap plastic ballpoint pens we had to work with back then. It felt freeing when I started to experiment with inexpensive calligraphic pens. With them, I could add a little flourish to a word if I decided the tone of the statement deserved it.

When I started studying astrophysics in graduate school in 1988, I received my first fountain pen, a Mont Blanc, as a gift. That was the first time I could combine calligraphic lines with something I felt proud to display in my pocket, and I still use that pen for book signings today.

These days I like to write by candlelight. When I dip one of my quill pens into an inkwell, I feel like I'm communing through time, sharing the thoughts of others who came before me—medieval monks, maybe. As I sit and write in the relative dark, in the same manner in which they wrote, I gain a better understanding of what it meant to solve the problems of their day. —As told to Michele Shapiro

Neil deGrasse Tyson, 58, hosts the National Geographic Channel show StarTalk.



1
Knights Templars
I have a soft spot for knights and their quests, and this Visconti pen features a Templar cross like those often found on battle standards.

2
Copernicus
Inspired by the heliocentric model of the known universe, this Visconti design has the name “Copernicus” etched on a gold band.

3
A.D. 2000 Zodiac
Representations of constellations in the night sky decorate this Namiki pen celebrating the dawn of the third millennium.

4
Stars & Moons
Festooned with heavenly bodies, this pen is ideal for pressing down hard when you have to make “carbon” copies of signed documents.

GROOMER: STACY BENEKE/ZENOBLIA AGENCY