



“Italianness”

An Interview with Giuseppe Aquila,
Chief Executive Officer, ELMO & MONTEGRAPPA S.p.A.

EDITORS' NOTE A native of Naples, Italy, Giuseppe Aquila entered one of his family's businesses, the Lalex Pen Company, in 1988. While completing his college studies at the University of Naples, he oversaw export activities for the other family business, Montegrappa. In 1992, he became CEO of Montegrappa. In 2000, Aquila sold Montegrappa to Richemont and became International Marketing and Commercial Manager for the new division. In 2002, he and his father, Gianfranco, established the Aquila Group and, in 2004, acquired Tibaldi, which is Italy's oldest pen brand.



Giuseppe Aquila

COMPANY BRIEF Montegrappa (www.montegrappa.com), the first Italian pen manufacturer, has been producing quality writing instruments with an Italian flair since 1912. Among the many soldiers who used Montegrappa pens (then known as Elmo) to write letters home during World War I were renowned American writers Ernest Hemingway and John Dos Passos. Montegrappa was acquired in 2000 by Richemont and was been reacquired by the Aquila family in June 2009, which along with Tibaldi, now operate under ELMO & MONTEGRAPPA S.p.A.

Would you provide an overview of the history and tradition of the Montegrappa brand?

The company has been manufacturing superlative pens in the same historic building on the bank of the River Brenta since its founding nearly one century ago.

The region's historical importance is a key element of the company's persona, an ever-present reminder that it is the first Italian pen manufacturer. “Italianness” is nestled at the heart of the Montegrappa tradition and guides the company's philosophy, attitude, and aesthetic.

Montegrappa was a by-product of the region's social history. Originally known as ELMO, Montegrappa benefitted from a pool of local talent, a workforce able to produce finely crafted objects with style and panache, and with a drive to create the best pens to which a writer might aspire.

In the 1930s, Montegrappa blossomed, enjoying a golden era now appreciated for the elegance of the manufactured goods of the day. The fountain pen replaced dipping pens and Montegrappa's products catered to the tastes and needs of the public with sober yet graceful designs.

Montegrappa was among the first pen manufacturers to use celluloid and galalith, elevating it to the material of choice for superior pens. The company's skilled craftsmen were able to perfect the manufacturing process with original and precise technical solutions, which served as the platforms for the artistry of the pens' designers. Through the ensuing decades, Montegrappa would produce numerous models, now highly collectible.

Montegrappa pens have played their part in history. Famed leaders including Benito Mussolini used Montegrappa pens; Boris Yeltsin gave his Montegrappa Dragon pen to Vladimir Putin on the second day of January 2000, and with this pen, Yeltsin symbolically handed over power to Putin; and Russia's President Dmitry Medvedev signs all official documents with the Montegrappa Extra 1930.

In 2010, France's President, Nicolas Sarkozy, join the distinguished gathering of proud owners of Montegrappa pens. Other users include Silvio Berlusconi, His Holiness John Paul II, Al Pacino, Stirling Moss, and Paulo Coelho, among others.

Notable among the friends of Montegrappa are the great Formula One racing driver Jean Alesi and actor, writer, and director Sylvester Stallone who are both shareholders and board members.

Montegrappa was acquired by the Richemont Group in November 2000. Once the Aquila family reacquired Montegrappa in 2009, it marked a heightened appreciation for the Montegrappa legacy, with renewed enthusiasm resulting in a plethora of desirable new pens for enthusiasts to savor.

Would you highlight the collections for Montegrappa and some of the new product that you will be introducing?

To consolidate its position as the premier manufacturer of luxury pens, Montegrappa has produced a continuous flow of limited editions with special models to commemorate specific events, locales, and individuals. Among them is the recently established series of pens that create elegant tributes to the notable individuals of Montegrappa's first century, the “Icons” pens.

Muhammad Ali and Bruce Lee were, respectively, the first and second “Icons” with Frank Sinatra to be honored with a pen in the “Icons” family September 2011. Muhammad Ali's pens inspired yet another special edition, marking the 35th Anniversary of his legendary

bout with Joe Frazier, “The Thrilla in Manila”, while Bruce Lee's pen served a second purpose: Lee's birth in the Year of the Dragon inspired Montegrappa to revise and reintroduce its coveted Dragon pen from a decade earlier.

Montegrappa, however, also has an eye on the future, exemplified by its new lifestyle range under the NeroUno banner. NeroUno is Montegrappa's response to the manner in which elegance has evolved in the 21st Century.

The collection began with pens designed with an eye to the company's peerless reputation for classic writing instruments. The clean lines of the post-Bauhaus era were married to the signature Montegrappa touches of a faceted barrel and a pocket clip with roller. Pens were followed by the minimalist range of cuff links, allowing NeroUno to exist as a collection of accents to a way of living. It is a distillation of bella figura, a purely Italian attitude about presenting one's self appropriately, gracefully, and without pretence, but rich with panache.

A third element in the NeroUno collection was launched in Spring 2011 at Baselworld: a range of wristwatches. The wristwatch has become for men an indication of taste and self-awareness in the manner of distaff accessories such as shoes or bags. Time-telling is almost secondary; how you tell the time is of primary concern.

To create a watch to complement NeroUno pens and cuff links, Montegrappa turned to Switzerland. The resultant effort between Montegrappa and its Swiss watchmakers is a line of timepieces that respects the brand's core elements while acknowledging the definition of a modern watch.

What are your key priorities for Montegrappa as you look to the future?

At the turn of its first century, Montegrappa is evolving from a pen company into a world-class luxury brand. While our focus remains on writing instruments, we have developed an outstanding range of accessories such as wristwatches and cuff links and are under way to launch exciting new products such as a fragrance, leather goods, premium stationery, travel accessories, desk accessories, and eyewear. These products will require an appropriate retail environment and, in addition to our select network of authorized dealers, we are planning the opening of a number of Montegrappa boutiques around the world including Doha, Moscow, Dubai, and Baku. ●

Teatro La Fenice Solid Gold Fountain Pen (upper left); Thrilla in Manila Silver Ali Fountain Pen (upper right)