

**H**E pens poetry inspired by love and external beauty and always, it's done with his favourite Caran d'Ache pen, Ivanhoe, of which the design itself makes it a beloved companion. But it's not his poems that the suddenly bashful Philippe de Korodi wants to promote ("They're never to be published because they're so bad I wouldn't impose them on other people...").

Instead the CEO of Caran d'Ache, Swiss manufacturer of fine arts products and writing instruments, is here to launch the brand and to announce its very first Limited Edition, Perles de Caran d'Ache, a collection for women and of which there are only 30 pieces made. The pen is priced at RM288,000, available at the Caran d'Ache boutique in The Pavilion, Kuala Lumpur.

"The brand's essentially geared towards men in the past but now we've identified women and their specific tastes as a key growth opportunity for the future," says Korodi in his Swiss accented drawl.

Perles de Caran d'Ache, adds the genial Gemini, is a great example of what can be achieved when the world of fine writing speaks the same language as the world of fine jewellery.

"We're playing with the rare conch pearl, the rose pearl of the Caribbean. This edition targets successful career women with taste, and who want the emotion of having a pen that nobody else

Korodi, 45, is also excited to be dazzling Malaysians with two exquisitely bejewelled writing instruments, the RM1m La Modernista Diamonds and Gotica Jewel, both one of its kind in the world.

As much as I am enthralled by the collection of some of the finest fountain pens I'd ever seen, I couldn't resist asking the charming Korodi why in this age of high technology, anyone would want to hang on to such an 'out-dated' invention.

"When Gutenberg invented the printing press in the 40s, people said the pen was not going to be of use anymore. Then, when typewriters were invented, they said the pen was going to disappear and when the electronic world came, again they said the pen would be obsolete. But look around... people are still carrying pens."

Pointing to a man engrossed in his laptop seated not far from us, Korodi adds: "People have their digital assistant, their mobile phone and maybe even a third electronic device. But they also need their pen. You may be writing less but qualitatively, you still need a pen to sign a contract or to write a poem to your loved ones. You preserve the pen for very special things."

Caran d'Ache isn't in the volume business, continues the father of two. "We're in the quality business. Even if half the 6.5 billion inhabitants of this planet were to stop writing with a pen, we'd still cater to the other half who wants higher end, high quality products."

Korodi, who received his first Caran d'Ache pen from his

# Power of the pen

Despite this era of high technology, Philippe Korodi, CEO of Caran d'Ache, tells INTAN MAIZURA AHMAD KAMAL that nothing can replace the emotion value of a pen

Modernista diamond - voted the most expensive fountain pen in the world by Guinness Book of records

The Gotica Jewel is one of its kind in the world

Korodi and the million dollar pen

Caran d'Ache designer Nicolas Muller showing the stages of creating such fine pens

parents at 18, is confident that the future of the high value pen market will not suffer despite the current economic climate. "The beautiful pen is becoming a piece of jewellery, an accessory with social value that you can be proud of, like how nobody buys expensive watches today just to tell the time."

The company has so far, been concentrating on the European market. But now they've set their sights on South-East Asia. Why? Because of the emergence of an affluent class of people here, answers Korodi simply.

"Also, it's not just about the money. People here have the taste and appreciation for beautiful items. There are places in the world where this is also true but

unfortunately it's often one or the other and not in this ideal combination."

Like a great piece of art, a Caran d'Ache pen is also a fabulous investment, adds Korodi, who's passionate about politics and history, particularly the Roman era.

For consumers, it's something they can hand down from generation to generation.

Also, we offer a lifetime guarantee which makes people confident about investing quite large amounts in our pens. But at the end of the day, it's really about the pleasure and the emotions."

Caran d'Ache, the only pen manufacturer in Switzerland, was founded in 1924, as a producer of coloured pencils for artists, teachers and school children,

albeit of different quality.

"Its origin has always been creativity," says Korodi with a smile.

His own childhood was spent in the French-speaking part of Switzerland, near Geneva Lake. "We used to say that we don't sell pencils - instead, we're freeing the creativity of our consumers."

And we hold true to that promise, through our fine art products as well as our high-end luxury items."

Before he took over as CEO of Caran d'Ache in May this year, Korodi was with a Geneva-based heritage company which manufactured premium confectionery.

Growing up, he aspired to become a lawyer and did study

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