

# BEYOND BASIC BLACK

One company takes up the challenge of providing pen lovers with exactly the inks they want.

IN 2002, PARKER INTRODUCED its gel ink ballpoint refill in black and blue, followed by red, purple, green, turquoise and light blue a few months later. The more adventurous colors were discontinued, however, as Parker returned to the basics. While this has not made color-conscious consumers happy, it's hardly fair to blame Parker.

The problem is that, while most good pen shops stock multi-hued selections of refills, the majority of big box office suppliers (as in Staples, Office Depot and OfficeMax) and general merchandise marts (as in Wal), where most people shop, don't. As big as their boxes may be, these retailers simply can't afford to devote sufficient space to displaying more than a relatively small

sampling of common black or blue refills, and some have even begun limiting themselves solely to black. Profitability depends on mass sales, and it's usually the most basic common-denominator refills that can be counted on to sell en masse in the mainstream marketplace.

Which brings us to Yair Greenberg's enterprising efforts to develop, manufacture and distribute the kinds of pen refills that people really want but are unable to buy—mainly because they don't yet exist. As president of Yafa—the California-based manufacturer of its own inexpensive Yafa and mid-range Monteverde pens and distributor of Delta's upscale instruments, among others—Greenberg possesses a wide-

angle perspective and has his finger on the pulse of hand-writers everywhere. If it works, his approach to developing and marketing refills promises to increase pen users' awareness of—and access to—the kind of ink products that capture their fancy and answer their needs.

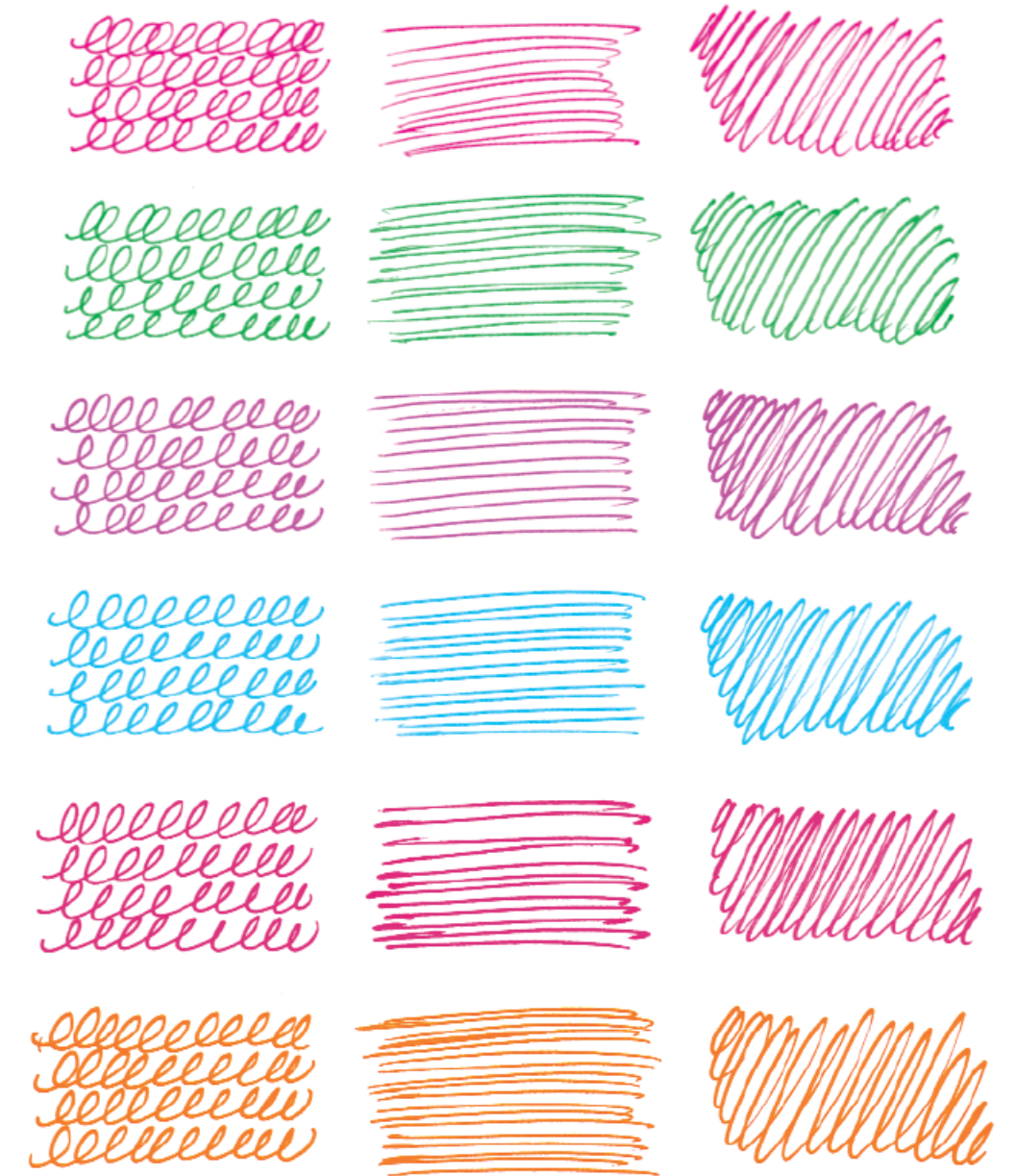
For instance, in Monteverde's Artista line, rollers and fineliners come with refills in six different colors, while the fountain pen is accompanied by ink cartridges in a variety of shades. And these aren't run-of-the-mill colors but bright green, orange, turquoise blue, brick red, pink and purple. What's significant is that the refills adopt a universal roller/fineliner format, and the cartridges are standard European format,

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Monteverde permanent ink fineliners in six colors.

from top—pink, green, violet, turquoise, brick red, orange.



Author Barry Robinson tested a few of the items that are farthest along in the production pipeline, among them:

- **Monteverde low-viscosity Parker-format ballpoint refills**—smoother and less pasty than typical ballpoint ink; available in black, blue and blue-black in medium and super-broad points with additional colors and fine points coming soon.
- **Monteverde fineliner refill**—promises to do for the fibertip pen what the maker's Mega Ink-Ball did for the rollerball; premiered in six colors.
- **Monteverde brush refill**—possibly the most intriguing of the batch, it looks like a medium-point fibertip but acts like a brush; available in permanent black for use in standard rollerball holders.
- **Yafa gel ink Montblanc-format rollerball refill**—black or blue in fine point with more colors to come.

—Barry Robinson

which means that they will fit many pens.

This is true, too, of Monteverde's breakthrough fineliner refill in fine and extra-fine with permanent black ink. Pens with this type of ink are frequently used for signing what may become historic documents but have until now been available only as disposable pens—the kind that are indispensable to ball-signing major leaguers and authors on book tours. Monteverde's permanent ink refills will fit into any pen that accommodates a standard rollerball refill, such as a Schmidt refill. To demonstrate the permanence of his refill, Greenberg wrote my initials on the water bottle I was carrying when we met last summer. Despite repeated washings, my initials are still on the bottle.

Although 90 percent or more of ballpoint pens made today accommodate Parker-format gel or Schmidt-format wet-ink refills, there are still millions of ballpoints and rollerballs being manufactured—many by major penmakers—that accept only refills unique to their brand. Montblanc, for instance, boldly reinvented the fineliner, but has not

yet seen fit to make a gel or wet-ink refill available for its ballpoints. By the time this is published, Yafa's Montblanc-format gel ballpoint refill will be available in black, blue and blue-black with medium and fine points (not only is the type of refill a first, but the use of blue-black ink is quite rare in refills of any kind). I tested this refill, which is everything I've always wanted a Montblanc ballpoint to be.

Think of any major penmaker with a non-universal refill—chances are that Greenberg is already thinking about developing a new refill to fit its pens.

In the end, what will most likely determine the success of Greenberg's entrepreneurial experiment is the depth of the inroads he is able to make into the mass market. Like any business entity, he'll need to be able to stay in the game long enough to reach the critical breakpoint and make a profit. While living on specialty shop sales alone may be possible and even profitable, a business can boom if it can expand beyond those limits. So stay tuned.

*For more, telephone 800.YAFA.PEN or visit [yafa.com](http://yafa.com).*

Written by Barry Robinson; photography by Carole Wilmot. Robinson is a Washington, DC, writer and media maven whose desk and shelves runneth over with pens that he would love to use regularly if only there were gel or wet-ink refills available for them.



Monteverde rollerball refills in six colors