



Then there are the personal requests, such as the pens made for the Shah of Iran featuring floating images of his family. French president Charles de Gaulle and Chicago mayor Richard Daley also commissioned floaty pens for their personal use. In fact, Eskesen will produce pens for anyone who orders a minimum of 500 units. Floaty pens have become popular as souvenirs for weddings, bar mitzvahs, family reunions and other events.

#### Classic collectibles

Collectors buy, sell and trade all varieties of floaty pens on the Internet, in person and by mail. Among them, Dutch collector Miranda Wittebol has gained legendary status for amassing more than 7,000 Eskesen floaty pens. French floaty pen enthusiast Mahfoud Zanat, whose collection numbers more than 2,000, commissioned a floaty pen featuring a photograph of company founder Peder Eskesen in honor of the floaty pen's 50th anniversary.

Dozens of floaty pen websites for collectors and traders exist on the Internet. Diana Andra, who has operated the Float About website ([www.floatabout.com](http://www.floatabout.com)) since 1996, sends her bi-monthly e-mail newsletter to approximately 1,000 collectors worldwide. In addition to news from Eskesen and trading information for collectors, the newsletter includes floaty pen "sightings" in the media. Most recently, floaty pens were featured in a U.S. magazine advertisement for Acura automobiles. A floaty pen also turned up as the murder weapon on a recent episode of the TV series, *CSI*.

"Floaty pens are moving mementos of our travels and our times," Andra says. "Unlike postcards, shot glasses or other souvenirs, they are individual and unique—and they're func-



tional." It hardly matters that floaty pens do not bear a designer imprimatur; they still bear the hallmarks of Scandinavian design—inventiveness, style and functionality. Inexpensive and ubiquitous they may be, but floating-action pens also are remarkable examples of engineering and artistry.

The scenes contained inside the clear plastic pen barrels are hand-drawn by Eskesen artists, some of whom have been with the company for 40-odd years, or by floaty pen specialists such as American artists Nancy Nerenberg and Jack Keely.

### Floaters have depicted everything from Coke bottles to pilgrims from *The Canterbury Tales*

Keely, an illustrator who studied at the Rhode Island School of Design, estimates that he has created more than 80 floaty pen designs. Among them are promotional designs for the films *The Deep End* and *The Business of Strangers*. Nerenberg has designed souvenir pens for Trinidad and Tobago and Utila, one of the Bay Islands of Honduras, among others. Each piece of artwork is drawn in an elongated fashion to compensate for the visual distortion that occurs when it is placed inside the round plastic, oil-filled pen barrel.

The designs, which generally include a stationary foreground picture, a "floater" (such as a moving motor vehicle), and a scenic background, are reduced onto 35mm celluloid film and overlaid with color approximately 11 times. (The most intensely colored pens are those created for sale at Disney stores and attractions. They may be colored with as many as 20 overlays.) Then the back of each design is painted white to make it opaque. The strips of painted film are then cut and shunted into the plastic barrels, which are taken into the injection room to be filled with non-toxic mineral oil and sealed. All of the work is done by hand and on machinery that was

**Over the years** Eskesen has expanded its floaty repertoire to include toothbrushes and school supplies.

**A diver descends** towards a wrecked vessel in the pen above.

