

HORI

What's Out There

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Truly tasteless: floaty pen of O. J. Simpson's white Ford Bronco pursued by the LAPD (above).

TILT

NOTHING SAYS "ISLAND SOUVENIR" LIKE A FLOATY PEN – available in shops from Greenland to the Great Barrier Reef. Maybe you've even spent your last peseta or yen buying one at the airport, then sat mesmerized on the flight home, tipping the pen from side to side and watching as the little ship or plane or fish inside floated back and forth.

Cheap thrills? Absolutely. But what else costs about three dollars, fits in your pocket, and makes you look forward to filling out a customs declaration on the airplane?

"They're kitschy, yet clever and practical," says Nancy Nerenberg, a Los Gatos, California, graphic artist who has designed a number of floaty pens, including one showing the sights of Trinidad & Tobago and another of Utila, one of the Bay Islands of Honduras.

No matter who designs them, virtually all floaty pens are manufactured by Eskesen A/S, located on the Danish isle of Sjælland, about 60 miles from Copenhagen. Eskesen perfected the "floating action pen" almost 50 years ago and, in its unassuming way, has turned a novelty item into a universal icon of all that is fun and frivolous about life and travel.

Nowadays the company produces 100 new designs per week, ranging from corporate classics (like Heinz ketchup pouring over a plate of fries) to the perennially popular "Tip and Strip" pens, featuring nudie cuties who lose their bathing suits.

For collectors, Eskesen's factory is hallowed ground. To accommodate floaty pen pilgrims, the company instituted an Open Day that attracts fans from as far away as Japan; the next one is scheduled for 2002.

Leslie Gilbert Elman



Floaty pens in cyberspace: Since 1995 Diana Andrea has published "Float About," an Internet newsletter for floaty pen collectors and traders. Find it at www.floatabout.com

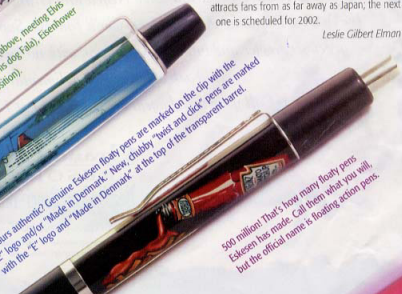


A "Fabulous Floaty Pen" exhibition was held at the Malbo Center for the Book at Boise State University in 1997 – possibly the first academic floaty pen exhibit in history. The show's top-selling souvenirs? Floaty pens, of course.



Partial to presidents? Among the chief executives pictured on floaty pens are Nixon (above), in the Oval Office; FDR (driving past his Hyde Park New York estate, chased by his dog 'Aba', Eisenhower (hitting golf balls), and Clinton (with his notorious intern in a compromising position).

Is yours authentic? Genuine Eskesen floaty pens are marked on the clip with the "E" logo and/or "Made in Denmark." New, chubby "twist and click" pens are marked with the "E" logo and "Made in Denmark" at the top of the transparent barrel.



500 million! That's how many floaty pens Eskesen has made. Call them what you will, but the official name is floating action pens.