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See the original interview here: [www.thecrazymind.com/2016/05/pen-chemist.html](http://www.thecrazymind.com/2016/05/pen-chemist.html)

<https://youtu.be/vi8I3IEVyZw>

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## Pen Alchemist

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### What is your specialty in pen craftsmanship?

The vast majority of Pen Turners make their pens from either wood or acrylics, whereas a minority of us craft them from metal. The trouble is, bare metal by itself can be a little plain. I specialize in Surface Engineering to enhance the cosmetics of metal. This may be anodizing the pen to give it a splash of colour, or etching a picture or pattern into its body to give it texture and a unique look. I also gold and chrome plate pieces to give a stark contrast to the pen overall.

### **How long have you been teaching other craftsmen how to anodize & etch at home?**

For around 4 years now. As someone who has taught myself these skill sets over the years, I encourage everyone else who is interested to have a go themselves. After all, if I could learn how to do these processes off my own back, then the only thing holding other people back from learning is the will, and where to pick up the knowledge. While I cannot help with the first point, I can certainly provide the information to those which want to learn too. The Internet is a big place as you know, and I appreciate trying to find the information for yourself can be quite daunting and often misleading, and sometimes dangerous. I will gladly share my knowledge with anyone who genuinely wants to learn. It was this which prompted me to make some video tutorials on different processes which are available for free on my YouTube channel and website.



### **What is the size of your YouTube and community forums?**

On YouTube I have just under 1,200 subscribers, and [my videos](#) have been watched 282,989 times. I am a member of the International Association of Pen Turners, or the IAP for short ([www.penturners.org](http://www.penturners.org)). They have 1,529,263 forum posts and 22,152 members so needless to say it's a complete hive of information for anyone wanting to learn, and it's that what makes the site so great. We're a friendly bunch and we will gladly take anyone new under our wings and coach them along the way.

### **How do you create a truly bespoke piece of pen craft?**

The key is originality and interesting focal points which people can relate to. Pens which tell a story or invoke emotions, such as the tribute pen I made for the US Marines, will always be popular. I am known for pushing the boundaries and trying to come up with new techniques which haven't been done before in the pen turning world, and it's these new things which help keep things bespoke. I seldom will make the same design twice as I am not a fan of mass producing. All of the pens I am commissioned to make for customers are custom designed to be relevant to them, and them alone.



**What techniques do you apply for incorporation of the designs?**

Firstly, all of my pens are machined from aluminum on my lathe by hand. I do not use any automated machinery such as CNC. From there, if I am anodizing the pen, I prepare the pen pieces by giving them a good clean in an alkaline surfactant, and anodize the pieces in a sulphuric acid tank for an hour. From there it's rinsed, dyed to colour, and then boiled in distilled water for half an hour.

Etching patterns into pens is a little more complex and the process can vary depending on the result I want to achieve. I either etch them with an Exothermic reaction using a special blend of Ferric Chloride, dissolved copper, and citric acid, or I perform sodium chloride Electrolytic etching which is much cleaner, but slower. Both of these approaches are Isotropic, which means the etchant's will eat away underneath the vinyl mask which was applied to protect the piece. With this in mind the process has to be controlled so not to erode away the image we are trying to achieve.

