

# apartment number 9

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*May 7th, 2013*

## The write stuff

*Two Southern guys are making their mark with a line of handcrafted wooden pens.*

**Written by Jourdan Crouch Fairchild**

**Photographed by Duncan Wolfe**

This starts out as a common story: Two college friends quit their corporate jobs, become roommates, and to go into business together. What's the kicker? They're making pens. In a storage unit. But by the look of sales, Bart Creasman, 29, and Cass Baltz, 27, are making all the right moves. "We always seem to be behind on orders," says Baltz. "We don't even have our own pens to use right now."

To understand the dynamic of their business, it's best to rewind a few years. The two met on the soccer team at Davidson. They both lived in Charlotte post college; Creasman worked at a financial research company, Baltz, an "ideation" company. When the economy tanked in 2008, Baltz moved back to Raleigh and began working for his father who owned a kitchen remodeling company. But

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Baltz took with him the memory of his former boss who wore a Mont Blanc pen clipped to his shirt every day in lieu of a tie. “I realized that unlike ties, which basically have no use, pens can be used as accessories *and* for writing,” Baltz said. And so Baltz Pens was born.



*From left: Cass Baltz and Bart Creasman*

To learn their craft, the guys watched YouTube videos and asked other pen-making hobbyists for advice. “They all get 85-90 percent of the way there, but you don’t expect them to have perfect pens. We had to figure out that last 10 percent of quality on our own,” Baltz says. When considering their target customers, the duo pictured successful guys in their 30s-40s. “But it was funny who actually bought them,” Creasman says. “We’ve had teachers, engineers, musicians, women looking for a unique gift for their husband.” The designs range in price from \$180-\$280, which sounds pricey until you hear their list of materials: decorative stainless steel clips, exotic woods from Texas to Africa and Asia, and 22-carat gold inlays. Start to finish, each model takes the guys at least two hours to make. “You won’t really see any other handmade wood pen with the same craftsmanship, design, and finish on the market,” says Baltz.

In the near future, the duo hopes to expand their pen selection and branch out into other handcrafted wooden accessories for both men and women. “We’ve already done a lot of the leg work but the development process requires big investors,” Baltz says. For now, the guys are happy to keep crafting pens with a distinguished—and distinct—point of view.



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