



## CLASSIC COOL

Oyster's bamboo fly-fishing rods come in fresh- and saltwater styles — and can cost more than \$20,000.

*By Kim Kavin*

**B**ILL OYSTER THOUGHT his life was going to be about bicycles. Fly-fishing was a hobby he pursued when he wasn't training for the 1996 Olympic trials. Then there was a crash, a lot of pain and an unwelcome abundance of free time. He hunkered down in his basement

and read books about carving bamboo fly-fishing rods, which he thought were gorgeous. The first one took him six months. It was hideous and left him bloodied, but his skills improved.

"Since rod number 2 came out, I've never *not* had a waiting list," he says. "I was as surprised as everyone else."

Today, Oyster's shop in Blue Ridge, Georgia, turns out 35 to 50 rods a year. Basic models start just below \$2,400, and his intricate custom rods — including hand-engraved metalwork — fetch more than \$20,000. They are owned by die-hard fishermen, serious collectors and former U.S. presidents alike.

BAMBOO FLY-FISHING RODS ARE LIKE WOODEN BOATS. THEY'RE TRADITIONAL, CLASSIC AND BEAUTIFUL.

—BILL OYSTER

## FLY-FISHING, YACHT STYLE

*Think fly-fishing is just for guys wearing waders in a stream? Wrong! "We have clients going for tuna, and they're way offshore in these boats, and they're only fly-fishing," he says. "They'll get the tuna crashing on the surface where you're in range of the flyrod, and they cast and catch them." On the West Coast, he says, the target is roosterfish: "They might be 20 miles offshore fly-fishing for them."*

"I can make you a bamboo fly rod in about 30 hours," he says. "We have rods that we spend 500 and 600 hours of work on because it is more intricately made, finer detail work, a higher aesthetic."

He carves fresh- and saltwater models, with the latter designed to stand up to stronger winds, pounding waves and the corrosive nature of salt. The saltwater rods also have a fighting attachment. Exposed metal is covered with varnished silk thread. Aluminum is used instead of nickel-silver to prevent corrosion.

All of Oyster's rods can also include sculpted metalwork and inlays in yellow, green and rose gold. Rod action and feel can be customized too, or Oyster can make recommendations based on his years of fly-fishing experience worldwide.

Some of his favorite spots include Florida and the Bahamas, where many of his clients fish for tarpon, bonefish and permit from flats boats — and for mahimahi and other big catch from sport-fishing yachts.

"This is where saltwater fly-fishing was born, in the Florida Keys," he says. "Of course at that time, bamboo was the only selection. It was before graphite or fiberglass and all the modern things. A lot of people don't think of bamboo because of all the modern materials available, but saltwater fly-fishing was invented on bamboo rods." ♣

Take the next step: [oysterbamboo.com](http://oysterbamboo.com)



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1. Each handcrafted rod is unique. 2. Students come from around the world for Oyster's six-day classes. Each student leaves with a finished rod. 3. Yes, that is the presidential seal. Jimmy Carter ordered several rods. 4. Metalwork can be intricate. 5. Oyster teaches with an eye toward keeping the craft alive after he's gone.