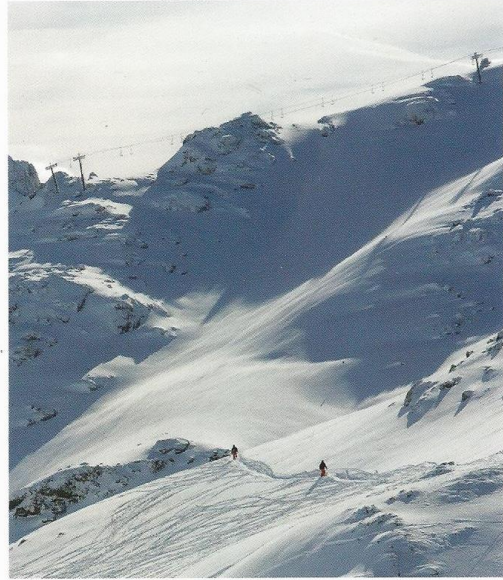
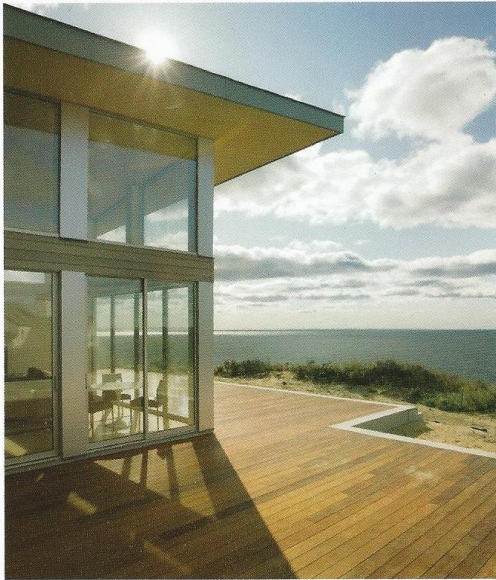


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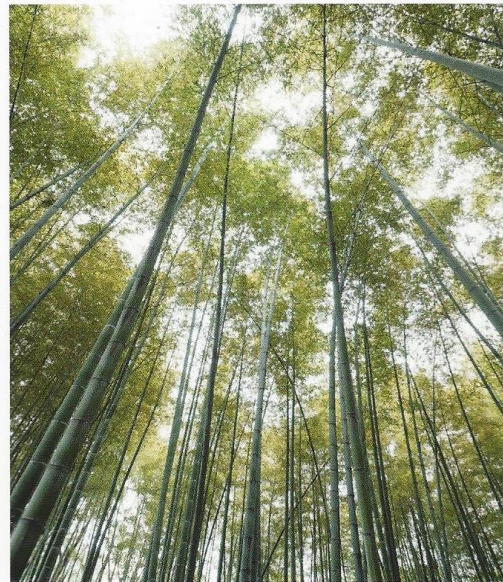
spring 2014

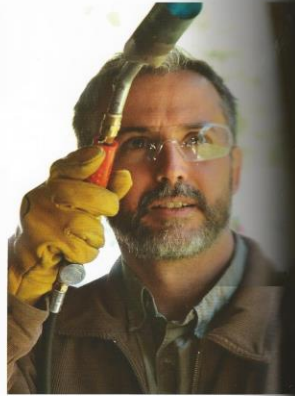


TOP 5 SKI DESTINATIONS

TAKE FLIGHT: PRIVATE AVIATION

SPRING FASHION

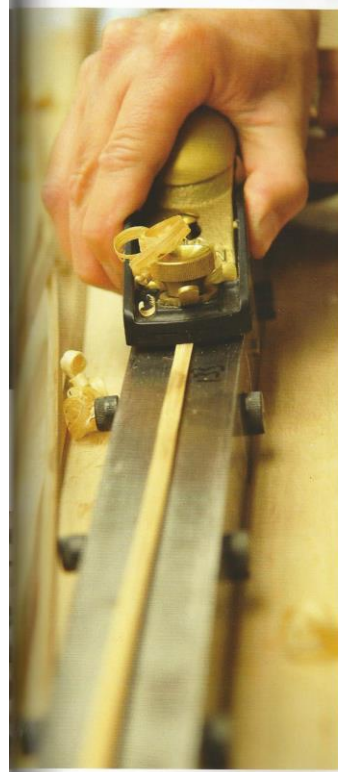




Bamboo Roots

Today's bamboo fly rod makers connect anglers to the history of their sport

By Zach Matthews



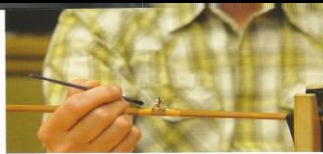
Fly fishing is known as "the quiet sport," said to be good for the soul. It is also a last bastion—one of the few outdoor pastimes which maintains a clear path back to its own traditions today. After all, golf abandoned the hickory shaft decades ago. No one plays tennis with wooden rackets anymore. But in fly fishing, you can still be connected to the legacy and tradition of the sport through the exquisite hand-craftsmanship of the bamboo fly rod.

Bamboo, or "cane" fly rods are not and have never been made by machines. They are each the product of hours of skilled labor by a master craftsman. Like snowflakes, no two are exactly alike. Supple, whippy, perfect for protecting the soft silky tippet that connects the angler to the fly—and thus to the fish—bamboo fly rods begin as grass. The best fly rod bamboo grows on the Gulf of Tonkin in Vietnam, where the winds blow hard and make the key material, the "power fibers", strong.

Men like Georgia's Bill Oyster have studied the history of the masters; they are experts on the designs, or "tapers", developed by famous bamboo craftsmen in the 1920s and 30s heyday of the material. Using mostly un-powered tools, like a hand plane, the bamboo fly rod maker first selects and cuts his cured bamboo cane into strips. The traditional cane rod is hexagonal, and each individual facet of the rod must be carved into a taper to give the fly rod its shape and thus its "action". At the tip end of today's lightest rods, the individual strips may be as thin as one-sixteenth of an inch across. And the tapers themselves are works of mastery; each subtly different to impart a different feel to the final form.

Strong, powerful tapers make good wind rods, stout enough for saltwater use on the cerulean bonefish flats of the Bahamas, where crack guides bank directions from the poling platforms of their bonefish skills: "Two o'clock, crossing at five feet. Three tails; see them! Lead them by twelve feet." Meanwhile, supple, buggy-whip tapers are perfect for small mountain streams, allowing the crouching angler to snake a cast in between the blooming flame azalea and reach a brook trout's secluded lie, where he sips passing mayflies, oblivious to the fisherman's presence.

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Oyster Fine Bamboo Fly Rods

Once the bamboo is tapered, it must be glued, cured, and finished, eventually forming a "blank." The cane rod maker then transforms his blank into a fly rod using time-honored materials and techniques: whipping brightly-colored silk thread, which wets out like stained glass, around the blank to hold on to the nickel silver fly line guides. Exotic hardwood reel seat spacers are glued snug against the rarest, premium cork grips—cork selected from the first cuts, before the wine growers can snatch it all up.

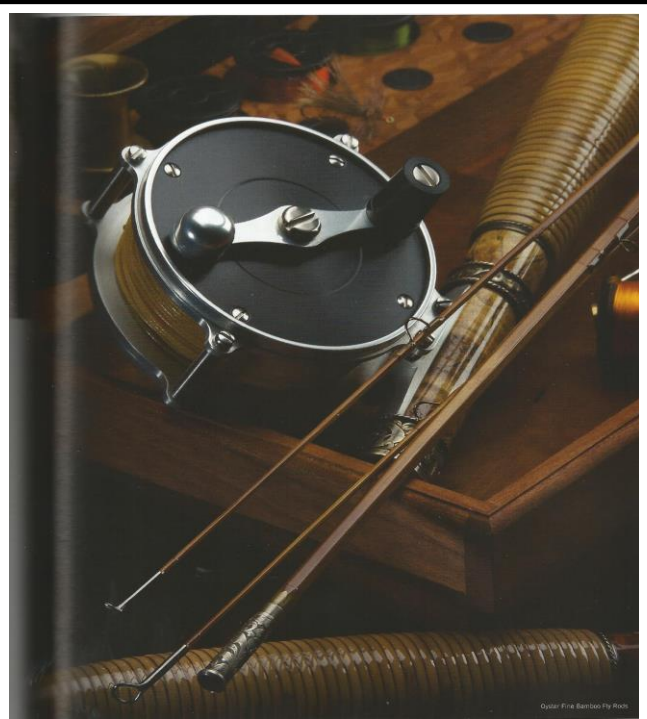
Nothing this fine comes cheap, of course. A master bamboo craftsman's rods generally start at four figures and move up from there. As with any art form, the canvas is vast, limited only by the artist's imagination. Leaders in the field—men like Bernard Ramanauskas, who with his label Eden Cane has pioneered methods of removing the natural fibrous "nodes" from the cane, thereby making rods like fine musical instruments, command premium prices. In fact, Ramanauskas's rods are so coveted in Japan, he says, "I've had to set some back for the American and European markets. I want my rods to be fished, not just to disappear into an enthusiast's collection."

Georgia's Bill Oyster has meanwhile mastered the arts not only of cane rod construction, but also of engraving. After

training with fine gun engravers, he set out to make his mark on the nickel silver buttplates and slide rings which give bamboo rods their heritage look. His engraving work (pictured) is astounding, and as a result the waiting list to buy one of Oyster's rods is lengthening by the week. Fortunately, there's another way to own an Oyster: you can sit at the feet of the master himself.

"I opened my school in 2012 and recently completed new facilities," Oyster says, in the picturesque North Georgia mountain town of Blue Ridge, the tradition of bamboo creation lives on. His six-day class, offered several times a year in his own rod shop, will train a small group of anglers in the start-to-finish process of bamboo rod construction, for around the price of a new rod. The first half of 2014 is already full, but some spaces remain available for the fall sessions.

There are few accomplishments as satisfying as fooling a rising trout with a fly you tied yourself, on a rod you built yourself. But even if time doesn't allow the pursuit of that extreme, the heritage of fly fishing—the commitment, hours of dedication, and careful study of a worthy adversary—cannot be better expressed than with a fine bamboo fly rod. They truly are like musical instruments, and in the hands of the appreciative, they sing the history of the sport.



Oyster Fine Bamboo Fly Rods