

MESMERIZED BY BAMBOO

A BAMBOO ROD IS UNLIKE ANY OTHER
PIECE OF ANGLING EQUIPMENT OR ACCOUTREMENT



GLENN ZINKUS

It begins as an oversized stalk of grass emerging on the precipitous slopes of the Sia River in Southern China. Thickening power fibers grow stronger and higher each day until the stalk of bamboo is harvested, dried, and shipped to a bamboo rod artisan.

A bamboo rod is unlike any other piece of angling equipment or accoutrement; this rod was crafted from a material that was once alive. After harvest, that stock becomes a culm of bamboo that is split, carefully dimensioned, glued and finished to become a fly rod.

I once heard the idea that “each bamboo rod carries the spirit of the builder.” This rings true when casting bamboo. Each rod is unique. A fly caster can sense every bit of line pressure as the rod arches on a backcast. Experienced casters soon realize that a bamboo rod talks to the caster, telling the caster what it wants.

My own introduction into the world of bamboo came through the words of someone who may be the most famous fly fisher - bamboo enthusiast John Gierach. While pouring

through the pages of *Trout Bum*, the stories often included references to John’s penchant for bamboo, that is, when the story was not centered on bamboo.

A bamboo artisan will put more than 40 hours into a finely crafted rod, and often much more time. There are just as many magnificent rods from yesterday’s best shops including the likes of Winston (still active today), Payne, PH Young, Powell and many more, plus the highly regarded masters of the time including Everett Garrison, Lyle Dickerson, and Pinky Gillum. It was Garrison, together with Hoagy Carmichael who first published *A Master’s Guide to Building a Bamboo Fly Rod* in the 1970s, that slowly kicked off the amateur and artisan shop movement that snowballed some decades later into a bamboo rod revival.

Enjoy the photos!

