

close look - tennessee

“Bamboo: One Man



Marc Payne

's Labor of Love"

“I didn't start fly fishing till later in life,” says Marc Payne, master bamboo rod builder of Knoxville, Tennessee. “My best friend had tried for ages to get me to go to the Clinch River with him, but it just seemed too complicated. Finally, I gave in and had an epiphany. Now I don't own anything but fly gear now.”

From a seemingly harmless introduction to fly fishing, Payne went “hook, line and sinker for the high church of angledom. As these tragic stories so often go, he fell in love with the magic of bamboo fly rods after having used one of his friend's cane rods for a day. But to buy one of quality in those days was 100% out of his price range. Motivated by economic reality, he set out on his own by watching a ton of how-to videos and reading anything he could get my hands on. Shortly thereafter he “just dove in.”

Knoxville, TN

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“I don’t know that I had any “mentors”, but I certainly did have guys such as Harry Boyd and R.L. Nunley that I hounded the heck out of for advice,” says Payne. “They were fellow members of a bamboo rod building forum I frequented. Whenever I found myself in a bind, I would ask for advice. I discovered that the rod building cottage industry is a pretty small fraternity where help is freely available.”

While bamboo is the rod building material closest to Payne’s heart, he is flexible when it comes to creating custom rods for his customers. He will build whatever the customer wants. Graphite and glass rods are not a problem, but for sheer beauty and functionality, he prefers to build cane rods.

“Cane is just amazing stuff and until you catch a fish with a cane rod, you will never

know just how organic the sport can be,” explains Payne. “It’s an odd thing, but there is an energy transference that occurs with cane that you cannot experience with any other material. Glass rods come close, but it isn’t quite the same.”

When asked what makes a good “mountain” rod, Payne stated “Whatever feels good to you is a good mountain rod. I have had guys tell me that a certain rod is



perfect for fishing the mountains only to try it and it just be a train wreck. What type action best suits your casting style? What is your preference in line weight? Now, I would not recommend taking an 8wt spey rod to a blue line brookie stream, but hey, who am I to judge. If you catch more fish that way, then that is a good mountain rod for you.”

Asked how do tailwater river fly rods differ, Payne stated “It doesn’t. As

I said, whatever helps you get the most out of your experience is what you need to use. Personally, I use an eight and a half or nine foot five weight on tailwaters just to help with distance. However, I have also used a six foot three weight as well. Now, granted, I could not exert my will on the fish quite as easily, but it was still fun, and if the mood hits me, I will do it again.”

When asked how tough is it find quality

blanks and components, and what are the telltale signs of cheap cane,” Payne noted, “For me, the number one sign of cheap cane does not come from the cane, but the rod builder. All cane used to make bamboo fly rods, from an old Winston to some beat up wall hanger, came from the exact same place in China. Tonkin cane is the ticket. Now, sure, some will have nicks or blemishes, but they all come from one region.




featured rod builder

The stuff won't grow with any success anywhere else in the world. So if the material all comes from one place, it has to be the craftsmanship (or lack thereof). Glue marks, uneven binding. Anytime I see that, I know that the builder has not taken into consideration the respect of the buyer."

When asked what are the most popular actions requested by buyers of his rods," Payne said "Okay, here is where I will no doubt sound like a prude. I will not under any circumstances build a fast action fly rod. I think we have a generation of anglers that think if you can't double haul across two time zones you ain't fishing. Guys who will bypass a fish lurking twenty feet in front of them just to make a hero cast. Medium to slow. Those are my actions."

"First let me say that if a person wants a bamboo rod, but is scared away by the price, then get in touch with me. Rod building for me is a hobby, and I do not price my work to get rich. To know that I have helped some working class angler get a work of fishable art in their hands is a big deal to me. Same with graphite and glass rods."



"If you have something in mind and want to discuss it, there are two ways to reach me. My email address is marcpaynemp@gmail.com and my phone number is 865-742-0297. You get to pick the length, line weight, color of the wraps, personalized inscription, etc. It is going to be your rod after all. My job is to get you something you will be proud to use on a stream, and proud to show your friends," says Payne.