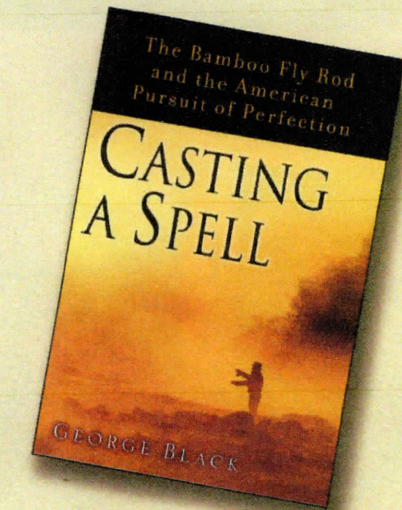


## Casting a Spell: The Bamboo Fly Rod and the American Pursuit of Perfection

*Casting A Spell: The Bamboo Fly Rod and the American Pursuit of Perfection* by George Black. Random House, 2006, 272 pages, \$23.95 hardcover, ISBN 978-1-4000-6396-3.

THE ADVANCE PROMOTION for George Black's second book on a fly-fishing subject sums it up nicely: "Black tells the story of that most totemic of all objects in fly fishing: the bamboo fly rod. This is the story of a prized object, the obsessed artisans who make it, and the anglers who worship it. It's also a story about the pursuit of perfection as bamboo fly-fishing rods are seen as the ultimate object in craft, and



the best rods achieve a kind of physical perfection in the hand. In brilliant prose, Black follows an informal network of gifted craftsmen—each of them pursuing an idiosyncratic, almost fanatical vision of perfection against impossible economic odds."

As Richard Manning, author of *Against the Grain* points out: "This is not just a fishing tale; it is a finely wrought investi-

gation of the major battle of our time: efficiency's assault on beauty."

We have seen how Black crafts his exceptional story telling in his previous *Trout Pool Paradox*: exploring social history, the impact of economic/industrial forces on nature and American social classes, and on individual men and women.

Henry David Thoreau would have loved this book, for Black employs the same cold-eyed social commentary in telling his personal, and often impassioned, story of how a few maverick rodmakers refused to buckle under to the dictates of industrial economics in their fanatical pursuit of hand-making the perfect bamboo fly rod. This book is required reading for fly fishers who wish to understand the cultural root values for our sport.

End note: It is unfortunate that Black did not meet the late Vincent Marinaro. Marinaro spent much of his adult life obsessively hand-crafting his bamboo rod re-creations of the Charles Ritz tapers. As a character, Marinaro would have fit right into the rich cast of idiosyncratic characters Black portrays so well in his book.

