



## featured rod builder

Life can take some unexpected twists and turns and leave us in a place with which we are neither familiar, nor certain. While we may not have seen ourselves being in a certain place at a certain time of our lives, often fate draws us there because it is where we are meant to be. This is the case with William Oyster who early in his adult life found himself on a career path he never imagined was in the cards he was dealt. However, it was exactly the right hand for him.

William "Bill" Oyster grew up in northwest Wyoming with his family, but by his teen years had moved down south to Georgia where he lived until he graduated high school. Studying a wide range of subjects from engineering and philosophy to education and studio art, Oyster attended

and eventually quit school after receiving a professional license. This resulted in his traveling of the country, competing in as many as sixty races in one calendar year. During the traveling, Oyster latched on to fly fishing which would become a passion for years to come. "As a student at UGA," Oyster explains, "my friends and I would take trips to the north Georgia mountains to camp and fish the remote streams. I guess that was about 22 years ago now. I have been obsessed with fly fishing since that first cast." Oyster was experiencing life in such a unique way, but it was brought to an abrupt end when he suffered a serious injury. "At that point I took up rod making," Oyster explains, "I am now one of very few people who actually credits 'custom bamboo fly rod maker' as their family's one and only source of income."



GA Tech, the University of Florida, and the University of Georgia. Despite five full years of schooling, Oyster says he never managed to settle into one subject or course of study long enough to acquire a degree, but found he had a passion for cycling which he had taken up in his freshman year. College, although a great option for such a dedicated person, took a back burner to the passion that became cycling. Eventually becoming a top ranked cyclist in the SEC, Oyster competed in the Olympic Trials

After an accident, Oyster found himself with an excessive amount of time and energy that he poured it all into his fly fishing hobby. "For the next two years I fished as often as I could," Oyster said, "all across the country, in the freshwater and salt. I worked as a guide, fly casting instructor, fly tying instructor, anything that would allow me to stay involved in my passion. When I wasn't fishing, I worked as a residential general contractor, which I despised, and only did just enough of it to get me to the



## featured rod builder

next fishing trip.” At 27 and having done almost everything associated with fly fishing, Oyster took interest in what he describes as the “beauty and character” of the classic bamboo fly rod. Having never even fished with a bamboo fly rod, the writings of John Gierach (described by Oyster as Mark Twain if he was a living fly fisher and devoted bamboo aficionado) inspired him to pursue the purchase of one. “The rods however where expensive,” Oyster tells *Southern Trout*, “and my taste surpassed my income. When I told my wife Shannen just how much getting a custom rod would set us back, she told me to just make my own. I immediately set out to do just that.” The lack of information on the internet left Oyster searching through sources outside of the computer which more often than not led him to dead ends. “One

guy had made a quarter of a rod before giving up.” Oyster explains, “He sent me to a ‘real pro’ who had almost reached the halfway point before calling it quits. The guys who did know, as it turns out, weren’t talking. I decided that no matter what, I wouldn’t be a ‘half-rod wonder.” Oyster then began his quest to understand the building of a bamboo rod and build one himself. Researching the process through books and putting the research to physical use, Oyster managed to cobble together what he describes as “the worst looking rod you’ve ever seen.” “But,” Oyster points out proudly, “it was a complete rod. My second one came out better, and the third one wasn’t too shabby. Before long, my wife was encouraging me to pursue my passion on a professional level. That encouragement and



## featured rod builder



support has helped me stick to it through ups and downs as the business developed to what it is today.”

Oyster’s appreciation for handmade things prompted his interest in traditional fly rods which are a large part of his business. Oyster takes tremendous pride in the fact that he hand engraves his own hardware, a skill that is rare and unique to his shop. “This allows me great latitude in so far as cosmetic design is concerned. These rods have certainly become our trademark. Functionality however, hasn’t been forgotten, it’s just harder to see. We’ve developed our own system for extreme hollow building, integrated bamboo ferrules, etc.” In reference to the material used in building process, Oyster explains that

modern rod materials make for fantastic tools, however, no matter how light, fast, or advanced they are, the fact remains that they are only tools. They don’t ooze with the character that traditional rods do. “An old graphite rod is just an old rod.” Says Oyster, “Old cane rods grow with richness the more soiled the grip becomes, the more dinged the varnish, and the deeper the tip’s stress set from the memories of big fish brought to hand.”

Oyster teaches the making of split bamboo fly rods. “It’s the one thing no one would teach me,” Oyster says, “and ironically I have now taught more students the craft of rod making than anyone else—ever.” Oyster currently instructs sixteen, week-long classes of six students a year where each



## featured rod builder

student will build from scratch a custom rod of their choosing. Oyster takes them from their experience level, be it professional or beginner, to the completion of a 100% built rod ready to fish. "I would never name another angler's home water in print," Oyster says when asked about the waters that he enjoys fishing, "so I'll not mention some of the more fantastic southern streams I'm so passionate about. I would, however, be happy to name my own--the Toccoa river right here in Blue Ridge. I actually moved here specifically to be near this small tail water river and the twelve month a year trout fishing it provides. This is still the place you'd be most likely to bump into me when I'm not in the workshop."

The advice Oyster gives to someone considering buying a custom fly rod is to do your homework. "Just because they are made of bamboo doesn't mean they're all the same." Oyster assures, "The vast majority of guys selling rods are hobby

makers who are supplementing their habit. This is a wonderful trend that perpetuates interest in these rods and helps to ensure their future. Most of these rods are priced appropriately; some are not. Just like getting your car worked on, or a new roof put on your house, a professional outfit is more likely to give you professional service and a professional end result." Oyster, a self-made professional, gives credit where credit is due which for Oyster means the appreciation of his wife, Shannen. "I love my wife, she is awesome. I'd be lost without her. She is the reason I get up each morning." William "Bill" Oyster can be reached by phone at 706-374-4239 or through his website at [www.oysterbamboo.com](http://www.oysterbamboo.com). Bill can also be found in person at the Oyster Bamboo showroom at 494 East Main St. Blue Ridge, GA which is open to the public seven days a week.

**BEE CLIFF CABINS**

(423) 542-6033

**BEECLIFFCABINS.COM**

**Exclusive access to trophy Rainbow and Brown Trout on the Watauga River!**

Room for the whole crew or you!  
7 cabins and 1 lodge  
Handicap accessible cabin available

**Free Wi-Fi!**  
Email for more info!  
Beecliffcabins @charter.net

141 Steel Bridge Road, Elizabethton, TN 37643

**Unicoi OUTFITTERS**

**North Georgia's Trophy Trout Specialist for over 15 years!**

ORVIS ENDORSED FLY-FISHING OUTFITTER

*The Liars Club*  
If you fish, you lie!

**Helen, Georgia**  
**706-878-3083**  
[www.unicoioutfitters.com](http://www.unicoioutfitters.com)

*Bed & Breakfast*  
**The Speckled Trout**

**Alaskans host an elegant Adventure B&B** in historic Waynesboro; luxurious guest rooms with vintage four-poster beds... delicious, gourmet full course breakfasts... beautiful gardens. Relax, your gear is welcome!

*"Can I come back tomorrow?" Lefty Kreh*

The Speckled Trout is the **VIP Home for the Virginia Fly Fishing Festival** and host home of Shenandoah Valley Trout Unlimited.

Outstanding warmth and hospitality ... *"Beyond our highest expectations!"*

[thespeckledtroutbb.com](http://thespeckledtroutbb.com) (540)-946-4899

**THE SMOKY MOUNTAIN ANGLER**

2011 **TROUTFEST SPONSOR**

Professional Fishing Guides  
Complete Selection of Flyfishing Equipment  
Spinning Gear and Equipment Rental  
TWRA License Agent

466 Brookside Village Way (In Winery Square) Gatlinburg, TN 37738 (865) 436-8746 info@smokymountainangler.com

A Gatlinburg Tradition since 1988

**Tennessee Traditional Flies**

**Specializing in traditional flies used in the Appalachians, Ozarks and Tennessee Tail Waters**

[www.tennesseetraditionalflies.com](http://www.tennesseetraditionalflies.com)  
[shop.tennesseetraditionalflies.com](http://shop.tennesseetraditionalflies.com)

Traditional Flies  
Custom Flies  
Tying Materials  
Tying Tools  
Fly Fishing Accessories

**Made In the USA**