

Tony Spezio:

Long ago heavy-weight boxing champion Sonny Liston was asked if his most devastating punch was his left hook or his right cross. He answered, "Boffufum." Understanding Tony Spezio's many contributions to fly fishing is much more complex. A consummate gentleman, Tony is modest, kind, and remarkably talented.

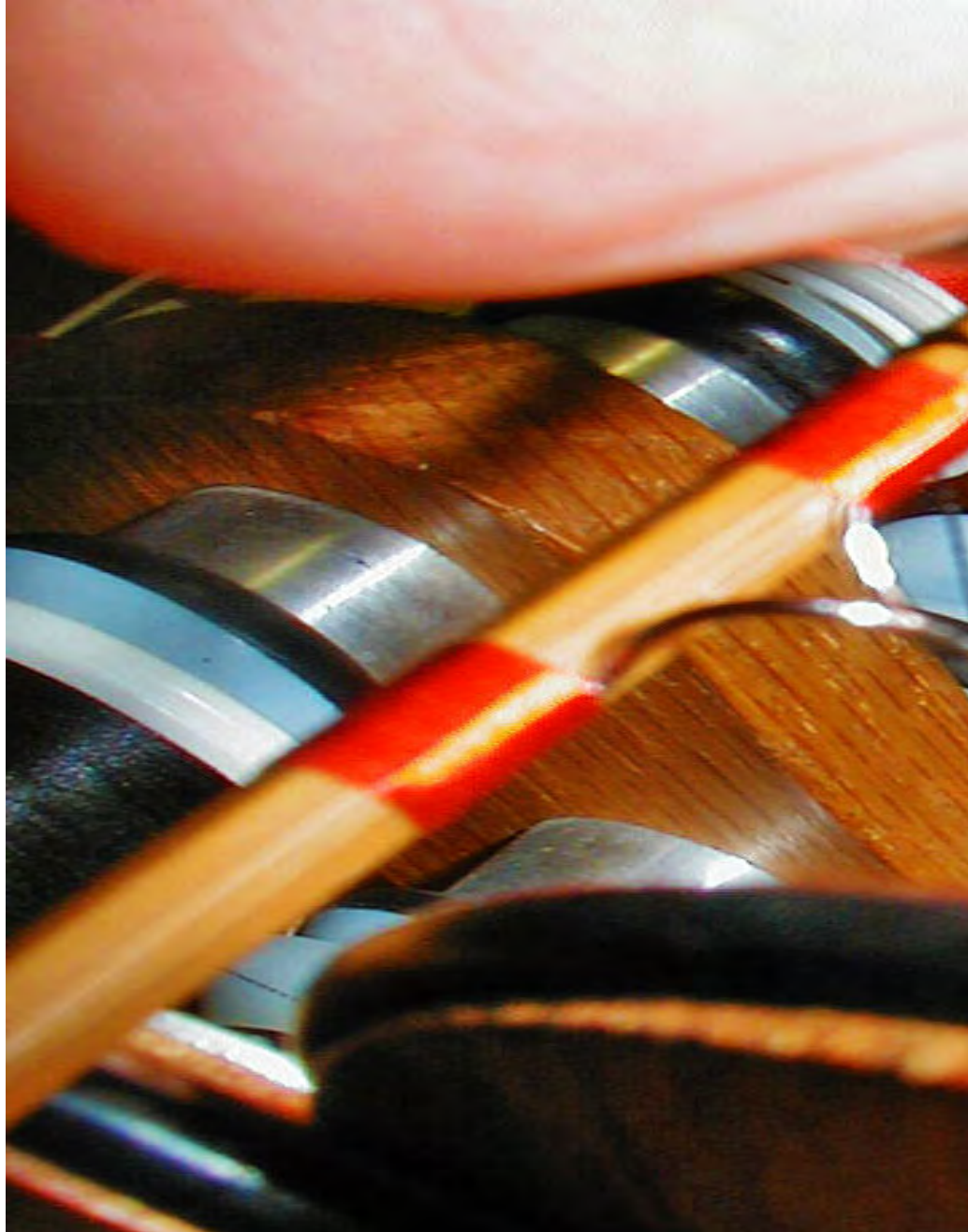
New Jersey born and raised, Tony bought his first bamboo fly rod in bad condition in 1944 for 25 cents and taught himself to re-wrap the rod. A neighbor had him wrap a couple of his rods and gave Tony a copy of iconic Michigan rod-builder and fly tier Paul Young's book on fly tying. He still has both the book and that original rod. Soon he was the envy of his schoolmates as he was charging \$5 a rod to rewind and refinish them.

Despite being "hooked real bad" on all things flyfishing, his love for airplanes took over his life. After a stint in the Air Force, marriage, kids, and a move to Oklahoma to pilot planes and build a folding wing airplane, he realized that he had little time left for fly fishing. Eventually returning to New Jersey, he saw an advertisement in an outdoor magazine about learning to make bamboo fly rods and attended a gathering in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, in 1990. Tony had long been fascinated with how 6-strips of bamboo could fit together so perfectly and result in such a beautiful rod that cast so smoothly.



Featured Rod Builder An Ozark Treasure

The Spezios moved to the banks of Arkansas' fabled White River in 1994 with bamboo culms purchased from a Vermont shop that had bought all of legendary rod builder Jim Payne's equipment and materials. Buoyed by the reminder that he had already built an airplane, one afternoon Tony began to build his first cane rod. Six days later he was casting it. Since that day in 1999, he has caught over 3,000 fish with that rod. Tony remembers, "I was so intimidated that I didn't start for a long time, but that ended after that first rod." Accompanying photos reveal the result of Tony Spezio's rod building skills. His rods are truly works of art prized for their delicate action while maintaining casting power. His favorite rods to build are 7-foot 4wts. and 7½-foot 5 wts. because he likes "the feel of casting and being able to feel what the fish are doing at the end of the line with bamboo."







Since the days of being intimidated to begin building bamboo rods, Spezio now finds encouraging others to become rod builders as most satisfying. "That is what I have been trying to do," he says, "so that other potential makers will not be afraid to try making a bamboo rod." Tony has given many presentations at Bamboo Rod Gatherings and was instrumental in the formation of the Southern Rod Builders Guild.

Tony Spezio's rod building achievements

alone would be enough to qualify him as a major contributor in flyfishing, but it's only the beginning. He is equally well respected for his skills at the fly tying vice, as evidenced by his being honored as Fly Fishing International's Southern Council as "Fly Tier of the Year" in 2007. He is further lauded as one of the world's greatest tiers when he was presented FFI's Buz Buszek Award in 2011. One of his original flies, the "Chili Pepper" has been the subject of many magazine

articles and is regarded by many fly fishers as a "go to" fly.

A long-standing member of the North Arkansas Fly Fishers, a club based in Mountain Home, Arkansas, Tony is also the founder of the "Sowbug Roundup" which has become one of the largest and most successful fly tying shows in the Midwest. It is held annually in early spring (late March, early April) in Mountain Home.

As you would suspect Tony Spezio is as



accomplished with a fly rod in his hand as he is in the aforementioned aspects of the sport. The authors have watched him fight, land, and release a large rainbow trout (easily 17-18 inches) on a tiny 1-weight rod he had built. Many regard Tony's bamboo rods as treasures, as indeed they most certainly are, but the real Ozark treasure in this story is the man himself: Tony Spezio.

