

Making Morgan Rods

I found your article on Tom Morgan ("A Life in Rod-Making") quite misleading. Tom has been confined to a wheel chair and physically unable to build cane fly rods for many years now. All of Tom's rods are being built from start to finish by Bill Blackburn, a talented cane-rod builder from Bozeman, Montana. Your article makes no mention of Bill's contribution and leaves the reader with the impression that they are buying a rod built by Tom Morgan. This in no way diminishes Tom's contribution to the craft but I think it's high time that Bill gets the recognition he so richly deserves and people understand that when they buy a "Tom Morgan Rod" they are not getting a rod built by Tom Morgan.

Vince Zywiec
Sent via e-mail

Tom Morgan responds:

What Mr. Zywiec says about my physical condition is certainly true. I am disabled from MS and can't physically do any rod work myself although I still have an eagle

eye. Bill Blackburn is a very skilled and talented rod-maker and does a terrific job of building his portion of our rods deserving great credit for his work. I always acknowledge Bill's contribution to our bamboo rods, which has been substantial, and mention on our Web site that our bamboo rods are a collaboration of his, Gerri's (my wife) and my efforts.

However, just because I'm disabled doesn't mean that my contribution to our bamboo rods isn't significant. I think that it's fair to explain some of my contributions to our wonderful rods. I am very much involved in the bamboo-sorting process. The rod tapers are entirely based on my designs even though other anglers cast them and contributed their input. I physically look at every single strip of bamboo that goes into a rod for its integrity and blemishes. I worked with Bill on the use of the Hand Mill in the beginning whereas now he does the cutting by himself. I supervise gluing and ferruling. Bill and I work together on aligning and straightening the rods after they are ferruled. Gerri corks the rods and turns the grips. Bill dips the rods and Bucky Ballou writes on them. Gerri wraps the rods and she and I work together on aligning the guides. Gerri does all of the wrap coating. She and I work together gluing on the tiptops and the reel seats. Gerri does all of the wood work on the reel seats and fits the metal fittings. In addition, the reel-seat designs are mine based on the design of the rod-tube cap and collar that was mostly Gerri's idea.

Perhaps my most important contributions are my years of experience in the rod business knowing what makes a great rod not only from the casting aspect but also from the integrity of the rod and its components. And, most important, having the uncompromising mindset that unless a rod is as perfect as we can make it, it won't go out of our shop. 🦅

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