

Some thoughts about bamboo fishing & rodmaking

Text & Photos by Marcelo Calviello

Always, when I'm working in my shop my computer is connected to the Internet in the Rodmakers list and Bamboo Forums. Time to time when I'm waiting on the oven process or dipping rod sections in varnish I take a look at new things, new thinking, tools and bamboo philosophy. I mean the different ways that different people feel about cane rods and rodmaking. Also, I make my posts trying to help find answers. Some of the conclusions I make are full of passion. Passion for the work, for the fishing, for new experience, for our great rods...



I feel that we are the owners of a very special touch. We can feel things in a different way. We appreciate the forms, the making process, the finish, and we can imagine that rod casting and fishing. I write sometimes that fishing a good bamboo rod is an accumulation of many kinds of sensations. Just for me, it's not important to take a fish when I'm casting a good cane rod. I can do it for weeks just for the pleasure of the casting feeling. Also when we are walking trying to find a rising fish or special spots, we can't stop looking at our rod. We always find new things that make that perfect communion between the man and his tools. That cane that is now really a part of our body takes perhaps many hours into the rod maker's process. Many hours full of passion and love of our craft have come before.

Any rod I start to make is a new timeline in my rod maker history. Because of my hand planing process I'm really in contact with that piece of grass. I can feel it's behavior and make a true sense of what taper it will work better with. Also the flaming process can show us what kind of character that will in turn become its personality in the long building process. So we are really making something dead into a full of life 'Bamboo Fishing Rod'. I will emphasize this because "fishing" is the real thing that will turn that rod into life again.

In two recent post to Clarks Classic Forum I said that rodmaking is a "Magic Art" and that "We are helping to make a new Bamboo age".

The "Magic Art"

Sure it is, love and passion for our rods is always surrounding our shop and turns this Craft into an Art. You know that I'm one of the first in our community to push for new techniques and investigation. Always I point my search to new tapers, materials and action. I also love digital dial indicators, calipers and micrometers, wrapping machines, binders, drying cabinets, block planes, etc. But there is a thin area where I think we can lose the "magic". Our job is just a sum of magic moments, mystery, test, frustration and happiness.

I for my part will always try to

(Continued on page 14)

"So we are really making something dead into a full of life 'Bamboo Fishing Rod'."

(Continued from page 13)

keep these glorious moments because they are part of the game. When I have a culm I inspect it looking for power fibers, sounds, the node distribution, marks, etc. I decide how to flame it and then what taper is appropriate for it. It's like looking how to make better improvements to help that transformation from dead to alive, and really feeling my expectations. I do all my rods by hand planing and this puts me in real contact with the new "to be born" rod.

I also love the other magic moments, when we confirm or not, testing the blank aptitude and know if the work was done or not. I'm not trying to say that we are some kind of "Harry Potter", but we are the owners of part of the mystery.

I think I was born to do this, and I'm sure many of you feel the same. For that reason

I think that our hands can feel a good piece of wood, a culm, we can make strips, flame, and straighten nodes, plane to thin dimensions, glue and dress our cane. I think that many new machines will attempt to make the magic, and we cannot let this happen. If any of you feel the same, help to protect this art, improve it and not just make it "simple". I think that many good moments are still to come for bamboo.

So if we feel that we are the owners of the magic secrets and honor all the teachings of our predecessors, we have to fight to let the art continue

like an art, the art of making magic fishing bamboo rods

" A man that work with his hands is a worker, a man that work with his hands and his thoughts is a craftsman, but a man that work with his hands, his thoughts and his heart is an artist".

Never will my "art" turn into a "repetitive craft". I never will make one more of my rods if I feel like that sometime. If you do not consider yourself a

"gifted individual," it may be difficult to keep yourself out of the box. Come on man! You can do it! For example, today one of my rods is going to Japan, really a very difficult and new market for one of my rods.

"Passion".

What a great word. Perhaps this turns my work into "art"? I love my work. All my life I

waited for these years to come. As a bamboo fly fisherman, as a bamboo rod collector, I read all the books that I could find and tested all the rods that I could for about 35 years.

I used to work with art for most of my life, as an owner of an advertising company, and then because of the "passion" I became a rod maker for my own pleasure. Then the difficult economic situation in Argentina turned the hobbyist rod maker into a full-time shop. I had to make all my shop tools by hand and I promised myself not ever forget that passion I use to make my own rods,

(Continued on page 15)




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(Continued from page 14)

when I made the decision to sell my rods to other fishermen. "Passion." What a wonderful word! This turn problems into solutions, little boxes into really big ones, and sometimes you can make something new too, but the most important is the feeling that you are doing what you love, the art of making magic bamboo fishing rods.

Everyone can learn to speak and write, but only a few can do poetry; everyone can learn to run, but only a few can run the 100 meters in less than 10 seconds. Somebody will say, "the secret is in the planing form." Yes, and the selection of the culm, the splitting, the flaming process, the straightening method, the design of the appropriate taper, the oven treatment, the gluing, the varnish, the wraps and the making of all your rod components.



I think if rodmaking is so easy, what are the classes for? Four days, 4 months, four years or a century? Do you really think that you can learn rodmaking in 4 days? Or are classes for getting information about all the steps you have to sort in the making process?

The beauty of the music we can play depends not on the material of our instrument. It depends on how open our minds are to understanding and feeling all the sounds we are playing.

1. I don't use Tonkin. I make my rods with a new kind of cane that grows in my country. Just for breaking the rules and because it really works like Tonkin.

2. I make all my ferrules with bamboo, just for the pleasure of doing it, and getting away from the rules, and because I get a really new action and a great power transference.
3. I make all my components, just because I love that my rods own that personal touch.
4. I make all my own tapers, because of my ferrule design, and not to offend any of the old masters. That way I can feel that my rods are really my creation.
5. Sorry, I don't spin my own silk, just because Pearsalls does it better.

The owners of the passion feel like this, and many fishermen around the world will fish and enjoy the results of our making, building or that magic that we feel and name art; the "magic" art of making bamboo fishing rods.

Well, you and others, as passionate about bamboo like me, must forgive me for my Latin soul. I couldn't imagine myself thinking in "strictly speaking" terms. As I've said many times, I was a bamboo rod collector for many years. Many excellent cane rods from the most famous rod makers passed through my hands along my life. My beginnings with fly-fishing were with bamboo rods, and I feel something very special for them.

Then when I made the decision to make my own, something in my heart said that I have to do something different. Just take all the knowledge received during my life as a fisherman and collector. Put all my efforts and continue with the "magic" craft, that years later would become an art for me. (I feel like this and it doesn't mean that everyone as a rule has to think the same).

Like I cannot consider fly-fishing as a

(Continued on page 16)

(Continued from page 15)

sport, I couldn't think of a rod as a tool (again, my "no strictly speaking"). For me fly-fishing is a way of life and a good cane rod, that perhaps will be with me for the rest of my life, is much more important than a simple tool.

As you are probably thinking, without this passion and creativity perhaps never would I have finished my first rod. But you know, the great rivers were there; the great fish waiting, the passion and also because I tie my own flies, I thought, "just do it". Imagine that, in Argentina...

Well it's ok for those of you who don't think the same about little

boxes, rules, creativity, passion, work, craft and art. One of the things that fill me with passion is trying to go on with the learning from the masters. Those great gentlemen were masters in working with all the things that involved their creations. This is what I'm trying to do. Just break the rules, always staying in the background that they leave we can find many new things to make, design, change or test (materials, actions, tools, etc). They are there, only we have to do our part.

I find the magic in every step of rodmaking, because we are taking a dead piece of grass, with our passion, into a full of life bamboo fishing rod.

Sometimes in my life, because of the kind of fish I was fishing for (ie: peacock bass in Amazon rivers) I had to use graphite rods. Oh man, that was so mechanical, every cast the same as the previous one. Please God, I want little rivers and a little bamboo rod, fish will be welcome but certainly they aren't a necessity to have a great time.

How many times during winter time do we find ourselves opening our rod tubes just to take a look to our rods,

how they are, feeling its action, touching his grip, looking at them like idiots? This also is the "magic" I'm trying to explain. But feelings are just that, and are a personal touch that we came with.



We can help with the Bamboo new age

A few days ago when I dropped off a letter to Mr. Bob Maulucci and Mr. Todd Talsma some new thinking emerged, and I want to share it with the friends of the list. Every day I spend some time in forums reading about our passion, Bamboo rods and Bamboo rod making. Every time I get something to increase my knowledge, and I must say thanks for that. I have said many times that in my country it's very difficult to share or exchange information, tips, tools, etc. I'm a full time rod maker and I live off my work. Lately I've been reading discussions about antique and new,

(Continued on page 17)

"I find the magic in every step of rodmaking"

(Continued from page 16)

late rod makers and live ones, hobby rod makers and full time ones, swelled butts vs. not swelled, hand planed vs. machines, etc., etc.

Here in the last part of the world I'm thinking: Hey guys we are making Bamboo come alive!!!

BUT, I think that now is our time. We learned a lot from the late gentlemen that began our passion. That time when rivers were full of wild trout never will come again. We can do nothing to take the 2003 year to the 30th, 40th or 50th. But perhaps we can take the post and do our work. Perhaps we have to leave those gentlemen to rest in peace and do our work. I think that those who can do it can get their names into the bamboo history, because of the results of ones own work, own designs, and own improvements. I think that many can make it. With a little of madness, some tests and errors... some new, NEW, N E W thinking can put our names in the books.

In my personal life, Mr. Garrison is Mr. Garrison; a Payne rod is only, and thank God, a lovely Payne Rod. From my adolescence I always preferred an original Ford than a Porsche copy. Those original antique rods, why do I call a Garrison an antique? Because in the last 30 years many, many changes were made in every point you want to talk about. Only the passions still live and all the original rods sometimes aren't compatible with today's fishing. But we, the rod maker can support the passion continuity by making bamboo rods to be fished. It's difficult I know, with the big market of graphite rods, titanium with the "you break and we give a new one" "lifetime

warranty"...

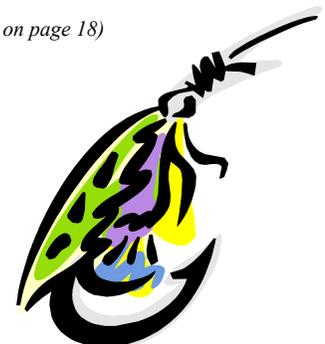
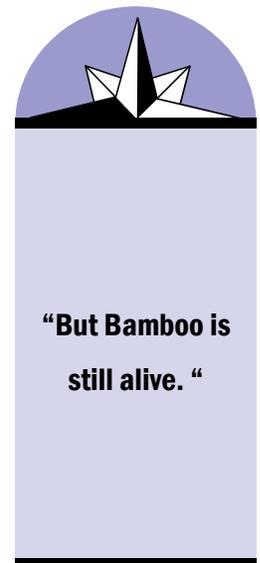
Bamboo lovers had to spend 60% of the price in marketing, telling the market that the rods are good and making many fishermen believe this. But bamboo is still alive. We can make it. We can make a new Bamboo age. A lot of people are leaning towards natural products. Perhaps we can help by showing that bamboo rods are not just for professional fisherman, princesses, etc. We have to design new tapers, new actions, using new materials, and new bamboo. We have to test everything to help our dreams come true.

Those great gentlemen that began with this art made a great work, great pieces of history and this will point to us the way that now we have to follow. I'll respect those gentlemen in the same way I respect my grandfather and my father. But one day God decided that my grandfather had to go. Then I took the past and with all my learning I began my own life. The same will happen when my father has to go. That doesn't mean that I have to live the same lives they did.

I love antique fishing rods, but I'm a rod maker and I feel that I have to do my work. I don't like to take credit from Mr. Garrison, Mr. Payne. Mr. Gillum, Mr. Edwards, Mr. Leonard, Mr. Howell... I feel as an artist, sure I can learn from the styles of the masters, but never try to copy any piece of work.

I don't know if you can under-

(Continued on page 18)



(Continued from page 17)

stand what I'm trying to say. This, please without trying to take out the value of anybody, is only a call to the rod maker's community to make the best effort to continue our masters' traditions.

Just a wish,

Best regards from Argentina
Marcelo F. Calviello



Power Fibers

