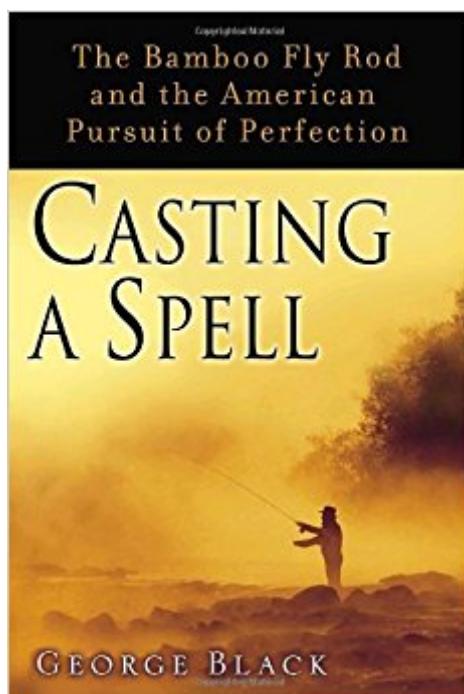


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# Casting A Spell: The Bamboo Fly Rod And The American Pursuit Of Perfection



## Synopsis

Thirty-five million Americans—more in eight—like to go fishing. Fly fishers have always considered themselves the aristocracy of the sport, and a small number of those devotees, a few thousand at most, insist upon using one device in the pursuit of their obsession: a handcrafted split-bamboo fly rod. Meeting this demand for perfection are the inheritors of a splendid art, one that reveres tradition while flouting obvious economic sense and reaches back through time to touch the hands of such figures as Theodore Roosevelt and Henry David Thoreau. In *Casting a Spell*, George Black introduces readers to rapt artisans and the ultimate talismans of their uncompromising fascination: handmade bamboo fly rods. But this narrative is more than a story of obscure objects of desire. It opens a new vista onto a century and a half of modern American cultural history. With bold strokes and deft touches, Black explains how the ingenuity of craftsmen created a singular implement of leisure—and how geopolitics, economics, technology, and outrageous twists of fortune have all come to focus on the exquisitely crafted bamboo rod. We discover that the pastime of fly-fishing intersects with a mind-boggling variety of cultural trends, including conspicuous consumption, environmentalism, industrialization, and even cold war diplomacy. Black takes us around the world, from the hidden trout streams of western Maine to a remote valley in Guangdong Province, China, where grows the singular species of bamboo known as tea stick—the very stuff of a superior fly rod. He introduces us to the men who created the tools and techniques for crafting exceptional rods and those who continue to carry the torch in the pursuit of the sublime. Never far from the surface are such overarching themes as the tension between mass production and individual excellence, and the evolving ways American society has defined, experienced, and expressed its relationship to the land. Fly-fishing may seem a rarefied pursuit, and making fly rods might be a quixotic occupation, but this rich, fascinating narrative exposes the soul of an authentic part of America, and the great significance of little things. George Black's latest expedition into a hidden corner of our culture is an utterly enchanting, illuminating, and enlightening experience.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

**Starred Review.** In the rarified world of bamboo fly rod making, names like Ed Payne and Sam Carlson, and their progeny, acolytes and apprentices, stand like giants, casting long shadows that stretch from the dawn of modern American fly-fishing in the late 19th century to the present-day reality of multimillion dollar "cabins" along the Bitterroot River valley in Montana. In this beautifully crafted, utterly engaging work, Black wraps his own personal journey through the contemporary world of bamboo fly rod making in a sweeping, meticulous telling of the history of American fly-fishing. With admirable dexterity, he manages to make the story a metaphor for a great deal of how American social and commercial culture has evolved over the past 150 years. Black indelibly etches a story of peerless craftsmen laboring toward perfection, sparring all the while with corporate interest, fickle customers and the inevitable diminishing of their own inspiration. A must for any committed angler, this is a worthwhile read for those who have never rolled out of bed before dawn, pulled on a pair of rubber waders and ventured into the ice-cold waters of some trout stream in search of that perfect catch. (Aug.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Black celebrates the bamboo fly rod, finding in this special piece of fishing tackle a metaphor for an offshoot of the American dream: what he calls the "pursuit of perfection" in craftsmanship. The text combines a history of bamboo rod development--from -nineteenth-century craftsmen through such recent rod makers as Hoagy Carmichael Jr. (son of the songwriter)--with a broader narrative in which bamboo craftsmanship becomes part of a larger story involving the cold war, the growth of outdoor retailing companies (Abercrombie and Fitch, Orvis, L. L. Bean), and the movement of the tackle-manufacturing industry from the U.S. to overseas (rod bamboo, it turns out, is only available in China). Some readers may be disappointed to find that there is relatively little actual fishing in these pages, but Black is after, well . . . bigger fish. In the manner of Mark Kurlansky writing about

salt or cod, he finds in the simple bamboo fishing rod a means to express not only the essence of fly-fishing but also the unquenchable spirit of individual craftsmen. John Rowen Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

My review will likely be biased as I own a Sweetgrass rod and have a family connection to an Edwards Quadrate. Black does a great job of presenting a great amount of detail on the life cycle of a few well known rod companies, and rodmakers, many of whom have left our mortal world and more than a few who are still making wonderful rods today. He has pieced together the interrelationships of these masters and the companies for whom they worked while providing insight as to what drives these masters to make excellent fishing rods in the manner in which, and in some cases, using tools which were used more than 100 years ago. This book fills in many holes left by, or topics covered in much less detail than other books on some of the older makers, while connecting their craft to modern makers. I could not provide a higher Recommendation! This book does not go into any detail in identifying particular rods.

The topic has started to catch my eye when I treat myself to a book on . Bamboo rods really have a grasp on my interest in the sport right now. So, I bought this book with the intention of trying to further my awareness of these rods. Well, let me just say that the writing is great. It is unsurpassed within the world of fly fishing literature. However, the author's elitist attitudes did not really provide much of an insight into the world of bamboo rods, other than to recount how one person was able to use his credentials to make connections that others could not make. He met some great people and tells us of these meetings. Then the author engages in an ego boosting yarn about his rare and valuable rods he owns. That is about all that is in the book and why it does not really belong their with Gierach's book. It is up to you but there are other more enjoyable books on the subject.

Read another Black book which led me to this little gem. Anyone interested in fly fishing and particularly bamboo rods should get this and read it slowly and enjoy the multiple vignettes of these craftsmen which turns out are largely Americans. But also includes the history of bamboo and the turn of the century development of leisure sports when we started to fish for fun!

I actually bought this to replace a copy I had passed on to a friend. Wanted to reread it! Stunningly researched and written.

I thought this book was about fly fishing. It's not! It's about rods and reels and how to make them, I think. I took a quick look inside when I bought it a long time ago. It now sits on a bookshelf and I'm thinking about donating it to the library. Not the book's fault. Be sure you know what you're buying. :-)

Incredibly informative and researched! Learned a great deal about the complexities and history of bamboo fly rod making. Love bamboo rods and more fully the time and demands of crafting these superb rods!

What can one say about an obsession? What can one write about an obsessive book about a line of craftsmen who rarely made a profit and were never satisfied with their work? If you fly fish, read this. If not but you are interested in technology and craftsmanship, read this in bits. If you are not any of these, read something else.

"Bamboo" history at its best.

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