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Custom fly-fishing rods that will delight any angler

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Bill Oyster works from a tiny shop in the mountains of Georgia, in the United States. He is an angler and an artisan, self-taught in both skills, who crafts some 65 custom fly-fishing rods each year (examples in first picture). He's responsible for every detail, right down to meticulously engraving the nickel-silver hardware.

“Custom work makes the rod a very personal thing, and also allows me to push my own abilities in an attempt to realise my customer’s vision,” explains Oyster. Wives, husbands and friends call to commission these special poles, which can be used to fish for everything from trout to heavier steelhead salmon.

Starting with basic information about the client’s fishing style – where the rod will be used, how often, for what kind of fish – Oyster begins the process of engineering a fly rod in the appropriate weight range that is both functional and truly beautiful. Each one starts existence as a raw stalk of bamboo cane that is split, planed down and pieced back together to form a hexagonal shape. From there it is outfitted with a top-of-the-line English Hardy reel, and an exquisite rattan grip. Finally, embellishments are added, often very personal, that take the form of deep-relief and *bulino* (very fine) engravings in the silver details that are specific to the client’s wishes (example in second picture). Oyster, who learned this skill from a gunsmith, takes particular pride in bringing everything from family crests to hunting

scenes to favourite dogs to life.

Each rod requires between 40 and 100 hours of labour, and commissions generally take about six months, depending on the complexity and level of detail. In addition to custom orders, there are also several pre-made models available for sale, but they tend to get snapped up very quickly. The most basic is the Signature Series (\$1,840) – a three-piece, extra tip version available in a range of sizes and weights. At the other end of the tricked-out spectrum is the Epic Series (from \$9,049), featuring everything from a hand-engraved downlocking reel seat to *bulino* game scenes to a handmade and very elegant leather carrying case for the whole package.

So special are these American beauties that heads of state and anglers from around the globe vie for a place on Oyster's waiting list (rods are made on a first-come basis and can cost up to \$15,000). And what sets Bill Oyster's fast fly rods apart is not just aesthetics, but the pleasure of the process as well; he's cited by one and all as a delight to work with from start to finish.