



TIM ABBOTT—CUSTOM BAMBOO ROD MASTER

by Alex Zidock Jr.

photos by the author

During my experience as an outdoor writer for more than six decades, I have encountered few one-percenters. That is the one percent of people who rank at the top of their craft—the best of the best. The innovators, trendsetters and developers of ideas and techniques others emulate. Tim Abbott, Bucks County, is such a craftsman.

In his early years as a Boy Scout, Abbott did a lot of spin fishing to earn a fishing merit badge. Then, in his teens, his interest turned to cars. Eventually, he designed and built a race car and at one time held a track record at Watkins Glen in his class. He even raced at Daytona. During this time, he was involved in the theatre.

“I designed and built stage sets for Broadway and off-Broadway movie sets. I also did the lighting and staging for rock concerts. If you went to a major rock concert anywhere in the country in the 1970s, I probably designed and built the stage and set the lighting,” said Abbott. He still gets calls from non-sporting entities to design, re-design or mend projects that are broken.

So, why extreme fly fishing rods and accessories?

“I saw a photograph with fly fishing in it, and it appealed to me. I said, I want to try this,” said Abbott.

“About 25 years ago, I met Art Weiler at a fishing show (see *Pennsylvania Angler & Boater* September/October 2021, pages

36 and 37). Art was a schoolteacher, and he is a consummate teacher. He’d take two or three students one or two nights a week at his home, and he would take us through the basics and each ended up with a completed rod. We have a friendship that lasts until now,” said Abbott.

“I then went on my own and started to explore my way of building a bamboo fishing rod. I came up with many processes that are better than what was traditionally done during the age of the classics,” said Abbott. Some of his developments have now become industry standards.

“There was a good tradition among early bamboo rod makers, and they kept every process pretty tight. Some of the steps were secret to their employees. For instance, they cut the bamboo in a locked room, and the average employee was not allowed in,” said Abbott.

“But, back then, rods were derived empirically. Builders knew how to cast, they knew how to play fish and that’s how they developed the fly rod classics. To this day, there’s always a debate, because I also design empirically. Most rod builders embrace computer design, and there are so many flaws with computer programs that I have no interest in them. You’re going by what somebody else thinks is good and the limitations of other mathematical programs. Not by feel,” said Abbott.

A custom fly rod crafted by Abbott begins at \$4,000.00 and goes as high as \$7,500.00 or even more. He says you won’t find an Abbott rod on eBay for resale, but possibly as part of an estate sale, because they are bought, used and kept.

“If you are a good caster, a good rod does what you want it to do; a great rod does it without thought. It becomes part of



All of Tim Abbott's custom fly rods sport this silver butt cap.



Every component of Abbott's fly rods is in his shop, including the aluminum tube rod holder with a genuine leather bumper pad on each end.

you. The people who buy my rods want something they just think, and the fly goes there. It's not a conscious effort to cast anymore. You just wave your hand, and the magic happens," said Abbott.

"I make mostly six-sided trout rods for the most part. Right now on the bench, I have a 12-foot, three-piece, two-handed salmon rod. But, if somebody comes with a specific need, I like the challenge," said Abbott.

Abbott makes everything from tip to butt except the bamboo and thread. "When I started, some commercial line guides were very good, and now, I'm not happy with them. It takes a lot of work to make them usable, and I can make one from scratch and make it better in less time than I can modify a commercial guide to an acceptable level. And, as far as I know, I'm the only person that every guide on a rod is a different size," said Abbott.

If Abbott discovers a new way to alter or change a particular rod-building component, he has no problem developing and building a machine to produce the item. One such device is his steam node pressing machine that compresses the nodes on the bamboo as opposed to shaving them. He has sold more than 125 of the machines to rod builders worldwide.

A custom fly rod from Abbott can take 6 months or up to 2 years to build. He also remanufactures reels and makes custom reel feet.

"As I get older, I like the smaller projects and the detailed work. That's really what my future focus is, primarily custom bamboo fly rods and reels," said Abbott. ☐



Abbott calls it a wrap packer that he invented and has sold to other rod makers. The small guide squares the thread wrap to the blank and aligns it to the adjacent thread.

More information

timabbott@verizon.net