

Founder Jeff Davis (far left) aims to keep Maine's centuries-old rodsmithing traditions alive with his company's handmade flyrods.

# Master CASTS

Maine Fly Company's "small-batch" rods lend a personal touch to the fishing experience.

In a historic mill overlooking the Royal River in Yarmouth, Maine, a young rodsmith wraps the guides on a copper-colored flyrod with pine-green thread. Another half-dozen rods spin on dryers in the finishing room, where Maine Fly Company owner Jeff Davis applies a thin coat of epoxy to a gleaming 3-weight with a burlwood grip. A chalkboard displays the names of the rods the shop has available—the Little River, Dead River, Kennebec, Penobscot, Carrabassett—each inspired by one of the more than 5,000 waterways that course through the state of Maine.

The chalkboard itself is a nod to the state's craft breweries, where ever-changing beer menus spotlight what's on tap. "I've always had a connection with Maine's brewers and the idea that when you walk into a tasting room, they're

only pouring what they've got fresh that day," Davis says. "That's what we're doing with flyrods. We're a small-batch rod company."

Like a good brewer, Maine Fly Company has its staple offerings, such as the Kennebec, which are always available. Others might be as fleeting as a monster rainbow on a fast-moving stream. "The St. John, our bamboo, we only made 10 of each size," Davis says. "We want people to have something that's rare and unique."

Although his father was an avid angler, Davis didn't grow up flyfishing. When his father passed, Davis found that spending time outdoors fishing with his dad's gear was a way to heal. "My cast was horrible," he recalls, "but out on the river, with the water running through my knees, I felt cleansed."

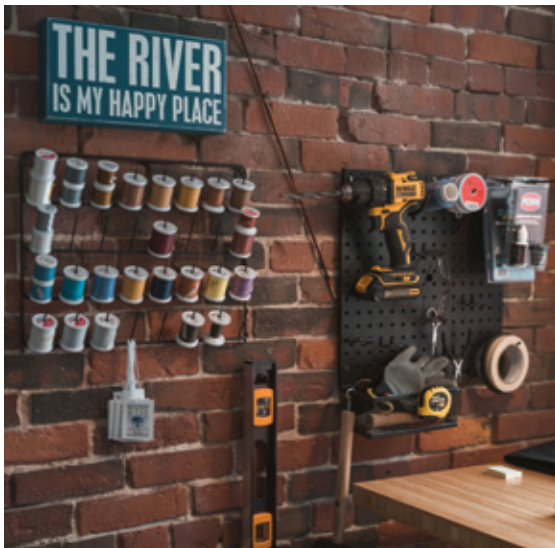


Davis was hooked after just a few trips. He bought a book about flyrods and a simple rod-building kit and retreated to his basement. “It took me days,” he says. “I could barely tie a knot. But when I finished, I felt like I did after a day on the river.”

That first rod led to another, then another. He started researching Maine’s rod-building history, which dates back to the late 19th century, when Hiram Lewis Leonard first popularized the split-cane bamboo rod. The craft flourished throughout New England until the advent of fiberglass in the 1950s. That, coupled with the shortage of high-quality Tonkin bamboo due to the U.S. embargo on trade with China, made it difficult for traditional rodsmiths to compete with the mass manufacture of synthetic rods.

“Maine Fly Company is here to help preserve that heritage,” Davis says. “Once the mass market took over, the art of the rodsmith began to disintegrate. We want to keep that real personal approach to building flyrods alive.”

Davis and his team of six builders hand craft each Maine Fly Company rod using carbon, graphite, or flame-finished bamboo blanks; locally harvested wood reel seats; sustainable cork grips; and bespoke touches such as agate stone stripping guides, richly colored wraps, and nickel-silver trim. The goal, says Davis, is to ensure that the person swinging one of his Roach River 5-weights or other rods can glance downriver and know that they have something different in their hands. “Flyfishing is very personal,” he explains. “At Maine Fly Company, we build rods that are as unique as the anglers who swing them.” —GINA DECAPRIO VERCESI ©



Maine Fly Company’s rods are named after some of the more than 5,000 waterways that run through its home state.

“  
I could barely  
tie a knot.  
But when  
I finished,  
I felt like I  
did after  
a day on  
the river.”

—JEFF DAVIS

