



Craftsmen of the Great Outdoors

In their backyard studios and workshops, these entrepreneurs create beautiful gear for the wild—and future generations.

LUXURY AIN'T WHAT IT USED TO BE. NOWADAYS A FEW multinational corporations dominate the luxury-goods industry. Cheap knockoffs of their mass-produced clothing, purses, and perfumes sell on street corners across the nation. All too often "luxury" means global brand awareness, fast growth, and a derivative sense of style. Now the good news: American craftsmanship is thriving, and some of the most luxurious, lasting goods on the market come from independent businesses that employ—and often are owned by—talented artisans. In the following pages we present three small firms whose handcrafted outdoor gear will take you and your great-grandchildren through the wilderness in style.

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Oyster Bamboo's Fly Rods

BY SCOTT BOWEN

THE SMOOTH PERFECTION of Bill Oyster's bamboo fly rods betrays nothing of the Wyoming native's chaotic path to his calling. Oyster, 37, studied art and engineering in college before dropping out to concentrate on professional bicycle racing. While training for the 1996 Olympic trials, he crashed and broke most of the bones in his torso. After recovering, he joined his in-laws' construction business in Gainesville, Ga. "My wife



SOUTHERN FLIES Bill Oyster tests his fishing rods on the Soque River in Clarkesville, Ga.

crafting his own rods. A year later the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* published an article about Oyster's products, spurring so many requests that he decided to jump in full-time.

Bamboo's suppleness allows anglers fishing in small creeks and rivers to make more accurate short casts. Today there is a two-year waiting list for an Oyster rod. Each one



got used to having me around," he says.

But Oyster had always loved fly-fishing. During his downtime as a cyclist, he worked as a fishing guide and gave fly-fishing lessons to balance the mental intensity of bike racing. Oyster began researching bamboo rods in 1998 and was so attracted to the material that he decided to start

requires nearly 100 hours of labor: Oyster cuts six triangular bamboo strips, tapering the ends to less than the width of a toothpick. The pieces are glued together and then flame-tempered and dipped in varnish. The rods, used by President Jimmy Carter and other devoted anglers, run from \$3,700 to \$5,000. oysterbamboo.com