

BAMBOO CHOPSTICKS

by Jeff Evans



I have wanted to build bamboo rods for many years. About 12 years ago I started acquiring the tools that I would need but soon became too busy with work to see the project through to completion. In the fall of 2016, while I was still busy with work, I nevertheless found my desire to fish more and build rods rekindled big time. I purchased a small batch of cane and got busy flaming and splitting.

I don't need to tell anyone who has built rods how steep the learning curve is- you've all been there. I muddled through the splitting, straightening, and rough planing process, which was all fun and educational. I spent literally weeks trying to figure out how to make my Garrison style binder work properly, which is to date the most frustrating part of the whole thing. But I think we're friends now.

Having rough planed my rod strips and binding them, I still needed an oven to heat treat the sections. I decided to order an oven from an experienced rodmaker who offers them for sale. But what to do while I was waiting for it to be delivered? I decided to flame and split another culm for a second rod.

After staggering and cutting the strips to length, I was about to trash the little waste pieces when an idea came to mind. I still don't know what sparked it. My youngest son loves to eat Ramen, and he insists on eating it with chopsticks (when in Rome...). However the idea came it proved to be inspiration, because it gave me an opportunity to build skills I'd only read about in books and saw in many of the videos that are available on rodmaking.

With my idea firmly decided on I needed to figure out a "taper". I looked in the kitchen drawer and found a set of plastic chopsticks. I put my micrometer on them in a smaller span of stations (for obvious reasons) and arbitrarily made up a taper. I decided that the plastic ones were a little on the short side so I lengthened mine to 9".

I wanted to be sure that the chopsticks were food safe, so I did an internet search for safe glues and finishes. There was a surprising amount of products that I could have used but I settled on Titebond 3 woodworker's glue since I'd find a use for it in the shop after using so little. For a finish I chose mineral oil, or Butcher's block finish. Shellac is another option if you want shine.

The things I learned are invaluable to me as a budding new maker. First of all it allowed me to familiarize myself with the steel forms in a way that there was no risk of ruining the strips I'd spent hours preparing for my rod. I learned how flexible the forms actually are, since the taper is on a much shorter span and it required me to essentially make a swelled butt strip. To go from .150 down to .070 in 9" really put a bend in those forms.

I learned how to adjust the forms using my depth gauge and standard, something you can read about and think you understand, until you actually try to do it in real life. Again, being able to practice on something where the stakes are not high was really helpful. I have since planed out the 3 sections on a Paul Young Perfectionist taper to final dimension, and it was so nice to start that first strip knowing what to expect.

All together I've made three sets of the chopsticks so far, after which my oven arrived and I have been working on my rod from this point on. But I will no longer toss the little cut-offs when I'm building a rod because I have found a use for them. I gave away two of the three pairs to friends who absolutely love them. They are especially appreciative when they learn about the construction and how each is comprised of 6 individual, tapered strips glued together. My next trick is actually learning to use chopsticks myself, something that has its own learning curve. Maybe I'll tackle that once I finish up this rod.

