

Sculpting on the fly

A bit big for catching fish, but an amazing artisans creation for any fly fishing and art enthusiast

Pam Kershaw introduces us to Tyrone Jaspers way of tying flies.

When angler Tyrone Jaspers and his father saw their huge straw bale workshop in Mansfield burn to the ground in 2007, the pair knew they were losing a valuable collection of artisans' wood and metal working tools, along with precious aged hardwood timber that had been destined to become prized pieces of furniture.

But this event became one where more than just a single phoenix rose from the ashes.

On both sides of Tyrone's family are generations of artisans: a glassblower on his mother's side, a grandfather who was a monumental mason, and his father William a blacksmith who had turned to creating very distinctive furniture and paintings.

Tyrone himself had been an accomplished artist when young and subsequently built a successful career in Victoria as a craftsman, designing and building sustainable homes and other structures, and adding cabinetry, fine stone work and sculptural features.

Now, back to the fire.

When the pair trawled through the ashes, Tyrone found large pieces of the wire mesh which had been part of the shed's ceiling.

He created a sphere of the tangled wire, and walked one his favourite fishing rivers near Mansfield to find rocks which he enclosed in the mesh.

The phoenix rises – and wins

The work, 'Phoenix', was entered in the Medium to Rare Sculpture Exhibition in Mansfield, sold for \$600 before the exhibition opened and won first prize.

Spurred on by the response to this work, Tyrone asked his father to help him build his metal crafting skills.

"Dad had been a blacksmith, and I wanted him to teach me, to pass on his skills with the forge and anvil," Tyrone says.

Working with a 1926 forge from Pennsylvania and an old English anvil which weighed 100 cwt (a tonne), Tyrone learned to forge steel and work

with other metals.

Which is where his love of fishing and sculpture intersected.

He began creating distinctive sculptural flies, forging the large hooks from steel, building the body, hackle, rib and tail from fencing wire, barbed wire and stainless steel cable, and the plinth from Howqua River stone.

First fly catches an Honourable Mention

He entered 2 fly sculptures in the Victorian Fly Fishing Association Art Show in 2008. Both sold within 10 minutes, and another 10 would have sold if he'd had them. The sculpture was awarded an Honourable Mention, and Tyrone realised there was a market for his flies amongst passionate anglers.

He has since created a limited edition series of three flies he uses on the Howqua River with just five flies in each series.

Flies popular on the Delatite and Jamieson Rivers near Mansfield will follow, as will flies of the Goulburn



Tyrone has been able to integrate his love for fishing into his work producing pieces of art.

"I've worked out how to 'tie' any pattern,"

River, Tasmania and New Zealand, where Tyrone has also fished.

Saltwater flies and hoppers will be a further series, but Tyrone will also make flies of any pattern to order.

"I've worked out how to 'tie' any pattern," he says. "It's really only limited by the imagination, but dry flies are best as they have more body to them."

Much of his inspiration comes, naturally enough, while he's fishing his favourite rivers around Mansfield.

"I generally fish alone, and nothing else exists for me. And even though I've fished a stretch of water 40 or 50 times, that doesn't change how special it is. I might spook a wallaby having a drink,

or a wombat suddenly dashes off. It's never the same, even if I've gone back to the same stretch because a particular fish is there," he says.

A spin fisherman in the 1980s and a fly fisherman for 12 years, Tyrone walks up the river fishing and observing the sculptural shapes in nature which have inspired many other works. Some are ephemeral, such as the rock pool he once filled with dandelion heads.

Others, such as the sculpture made with sticks on the river, might last a week before being washed away.

Landscape sculpture: a transient form

"This is a transient form of art, using what's on site and natural, and reassembling it in a different way. It's landscape sculpture, where the environment is modified just a little bit."

Some pieces become more permanent collectors' items, including

the whimsical one metre long sculpture of a 'bone' fish. Its head was made from a granite beach stone on King Island, its backbone from old recycled copper wire that was wrapped around cable then frayed to create spines.

This was the kind of holistic commission Tyrone really enjoys, as he was renovating the client's King Island home at the time and built the stone fireplace on which the fish is mounted.

Another concept was a large oval-shaped granite boulder, which became the head of a fish with a fly hooked in its bottom jaw.

Tyrone often spends a day with his father in the huge shed which replaced the hay bale building, creating his flies while his father creates one-off pieces of furniture. At 4pm, he downs tools and goes fishing.

"I get out twice a week when I'm in Mansfield, and I'm told (by partner Hailey Cavill), that I get a bit cranky if I don't fish for a month"

Generally a catch and release angler, he's far more likely to come home these days with ideas for another sculpture than fish in his bag.



Inspiration has to come from somewhere so it's important to research as much as possible.



Tyrone Jaspers' limited edition flies are available at a special price exclusively for Pro-Angler readers. Flies normally retail at \$1100 plus GST, but can be purchased for \$880 Inc GST by Pro-Angler readers. They'd make a superb Christmas presents. Order by emailing tjaspers@bigpond.com.au, or calling Tyrone on 0404 039 027.