



## Book of the Magic Wand

To fly-fish, you need a rod and a reel and a tiny little hook covered in fur. And yes, you're going to need to learn to cast. But, at the heart of it, fly-fishing's really all about anticipation, surprise, joy and loss.

Words JAZZ KUSCHKE  
Photography and Captions CRAIG KOLESKY

'HE WAS A MAN WITH A WAND IN A RIVER and whatever happened, we had to guess from what the man and the wand and the river did.' To radically paraphrase Norman Maclean in *A River Runs Through It*, watching someone else cast a fly rod is the ultimate guessing game: what fly has he on, where are the fish, does he even know, how well is he going to present the fly, how will the fish react.

And, once you've seen him shoot out a cast, drift the fly and retrieve it without success, the speculations become ever more detailed – perhaps there's too much drag in his drift, how long is the leader, what tippet is he using...

Would I have caught that fish had the rod been in my hand?

That's it then, you aren't making assumptions, really. You're judging. You'd rather be on the water yourself, in touch with these primitive emotions.

### ANTICIPATION

The business of 'what ifs' and imaginings begin long before you get anywhere near the water – at your car as you rig up your rod, knot the leader and tippet, tie on the fly. If you tie your own flies, it starts even earlier – over the vice as your thread-and-feather creations take shape.

It's not to be confused with patience though, this anticipation. Find a fly-fisherman who claims patience and you'd be talking to a liar. If he did truly possess the virtue, he'd chuck a bait and sit idle on the bank waiting for a fish to come to him. Fly-fishing, by definition, is a thing of action – from stalking the quarry, to the graceful roll of the line through the air and the drift and retrieval of the fly – it's an expectancy and the prediction that something's going to happen.

### THE CAST

What really puts the 'fly' into fly-fishing is the fact that artificial flies are too light to be cast out to where the fish are with conventional tackle, therefore the need for a line that 'flies'. Also, it explains the need for skill and grace under pressure – known as fly-casting. Remember, the best fly-fisherman is the one who spends the least time casting



THE CATCH

As much as fishermen may tell you 'it was just nice being out there,' catching a fish is the ultimate goal. Here, Al Saville fights a beautiful brown trout in a private stillwater at Fizantakraal Trout Lodge

PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAY

THE GEAR

Prized, collected, tuned, compared, used – your tackle has to be matched to the water you're fishing, the fish you're targeting, the flies you're casting and the skill you possess. At the end of the day though, the fish can't read the rod manufacturer's name, or deduce who tied the fly. Or can they?



THE STALK

River lore is far harder to learn than fly-casting. Few are born with it and some never learn. Ryan Weaver, a guide at Fizantakraal, hunts a private stream deep in the Du Toit's Kloof Mountains. If there's one fish in a pool, he'll raise it





**SURPRISE**

And yet, when it does, you're always startled. Even if you knew (and sometimes you do) that that trout was going to take your fly. But it's the chance that something absolutely astounding might just happen that lures most back to the water. Such as finding a fish in a river run you've always thought devoid, or fooling a fish on a fly you've designed and then tied yourself. Or, like Saville, landing a trophy-sized rainbow hen on a small river rod, from an unlikely lie on a stillwater he's never fished. 'That was insane! Such a hard hit, like hooking onto a log.' Enough said.

**LOSS**

Ah, and they do get away. A lot. Having a trout you've sighted, stalked without spooking and then cast a dry fly at, rise to your offering only to refuse it. It's like being told you've been upgraded to business class at the check-in point, enjoying all the lounge comforts until you board and then being ushered back to economy. Fighting a wild-bred fish on a remote mountain stream for hour-long minutes only to lose it in the shallows is worse.

**JOY**

River lore, educated guess, stream craft, gamble, pure skill or blind luck – your appreciation level of the fish in your hand may differ, depending on which one it was that time. But the raw joy of having caught a fish with a rod and a reel and a tiny little hook covered in fur is euphoria every time. And as you release that fish, you realise you'll be waving the wand for the rest of your life. Always trying to recreate that magic. □

**THE LIFESTYLE**

Mountains, bush and rivers. Part of the allure of fly-fishing (and especially river-trout fishing) is that by definition, it takes place in fairly remote places.

Yet these areas are often not so far from city limits as photos suggest. This pristine mountain stream is less than 90 minutes from Cape Town

**THE FLY**

In fly-fishing evolution, the fisherman who catches a fish on a fly he tied himself is the most advanced of the species





**THE PREPARATION**

There's always a favourite pattern in the fly box. You might've tied it yourself, had great success with it before or simply been told it works. It's the go-to default and often on tough outings, as on this chilly day, you can try 10 different patterns and come full circle back to it. Just for one last cast



POST-PRODUCTION: CLONE

**THE RELEASE**

Watching a trophy catch swim away after release is almost as rewarding as landing it. But it's the strict catch-and-release policies of many trout fishing venues that have led to the prospering of the species

Fizantakraal is an exclusive trout lodge deep in the dramatic Du Toits Kloof mountains. The lodge overlooks four picturesque trout dams stocked with beautifully conditioned rainbow and brown trout. Two pristine wild trout streams run through the farm, each offering private and exclusive access to some of the best dry fly-fishing in the Western Cape. The lodge sleeps 6-8 people and is ideal for corporate getaways. For rates, bookings and guiding enquiries, call 021 783 0652, email [info@liquidhorizon.co.za](mailto:info@liquidhorizon.co.za) or visit [www.fizantakraaltroutlodge.co.za](http://www.fizantakraaltroutlodge.co.za).

With thanks to Nikon, Lexar, Al Saville and Fizantakraal Trout Lodge for the great fishing.