



THE INCOMPLETE ANGLER

What could be missing from this collection of antique fly-fishing equipment?

I AM NOT AN ANGLER. I'VE NEVER CAUGHT a trout. I'm an antique collector. More than 15 years ago, inspired by a photograph I once saw in a magazine from the U.K., I started a small collection of early 19th-century English fly-fishing equipment. The photo showed a little room just big enough to contain a wooden bench with rubber boots underneath, a few blackthorn walking sticks leaning against the wall in the corner, and waxed jackets and dog leashes hanging from a pegboard. The thing that stuck with me most in the picture, though, were three old cane fly fishing rods and a wicker creel hanging from the ceiling. It was perfect. All I could think about was how I could replicate the same simple,

will try the old technique of fly-fishing called dapping, which involves using a 16- to 19-foot-long hardwood rod, such as bamboo. Without the aid of a reel, it relies on the breeze to carry the fly out. With its tip raised high enough, the rod allows the fly to bounce and play just above or touching the surface of the water to attract the fish.

I realize the experiment may explode in my face, but then again, I may finally catch a trout or two of my own.

—By Guy Schum

The Virginia Fly Fishing & Wine Festival takes place April 12-13 on the banks of the South River in Waynesboro. For more information, go to VaFlyFishingFestival.com

rugged beauty in my own home.

I found my first English rod, from the Victorian era, at an antique fishing tackle auction house, Lang's in Waterville, New York, and was hooked. (Lang's, which carries items owned by notables such as Zane Grey, once sold an 1859 Copper Giant Haskell Lure for \$101,200, a record price for any piece of fishing tackle.) Though my collection is small, it is deliberate, and includes mid-century greenheart rods, early dapping

rods, signed standard and multiplying reels, English-made creels, brass-banded bait carriers, period books, nets and fly wallets, a scarce Victorian collapsible fishing seat of turned walnut, and assortments of horse hair, silken, and waxed braided line.

This spring, I intend to take a couple of rods off the wall, find a proper stream or narrow river, and attempt to fly fish like a stuffy old Victorian might have. I

AGE OF DISCOVERY

Stratford Hall hosts first Garden Day.

ITS EVER-FASCINATING history is inducement enough to visit the Northern Neck's Stratford Hall, ancestral home of Robert E. Lee and others from one of Virginia's most famous first families. But this spring, there is a new reason to explore its picturesque 1,900 acres—the first Stratford Hall Garden Day, taking place April 26-27.

Held in conjunction with the Garden Club of Virginia's Historic Garden Week, Stratford Hall Garden Day includes special presentations by gardening expert P. Allen Smith, host of public television's *Garden Home* and *Garden to Table*, and Will Rieley, Charlottesville-based landscape architect for the Garden Club of Virginia. Self-guided tours of the Great House, directors' cabins and East Garden (restored by GCV in 1932) and a boxed lunch are also included.

"In addition to all of the lovely things in the landscape, this was a farm," says Paul Reber, executive director of Stratford Hall, "and we want to expose people to all we have here." Go and see the many discoveries made in ongoing research on the property, including a 375-year old Shellback hickory tree on the east end of the grounds.

Tickets are \$85 per person and available online. StratfordHall.org



WALLFLOWER

Anne Blackwell Thompson's captivating botanicals.

"I DON'T WANT MY pieces to be your grandmother's botanicals," says Richmond-based artist Anne Blackwell Thompson who, for the past four years, has elevated the craft of flower pressing to high art.

"My work is a snapshot of the natural world, a gorgeous blossom or composition of leaves that's frozen in time," Thompson explains. For instance, seaweed, she says, is "fabulously graphic, and it also has an abstract quality ... the finished pieces have an almost ethereal quality about them."

Trained by botanical artist Stuart Thornton at his studio in Turin, Italy, in 2009, Thompson developed a style that makes flora appear to be watercolor abstractions. Her pieces range in price from \$200 to \$1,800, depending on their size and complexity.

Since botanicals are regional, sense of place plays a role in Thompson's art. "I grew up loving the outdoors—whether it was the countryside or the ocean or finding a beautiful slice of nature in the city. I'm a transplanted Texan but



have lived in Virginia for nearly half my life," says the 50-year-old Thompson. "That sense of pride of place is something that's bred in the bone of Virginians, a quality I think Texans share as well."

Thompson has a keen interest in chronicling botany in a historical

context, and this spring plans to trace the plants along certain parts of the John Smith Trail, mapped by the famous sea captain in the 1600s, in order to create a new series of pressed botanicals. BlackwellBotanicals.com

—By Michelle Ross