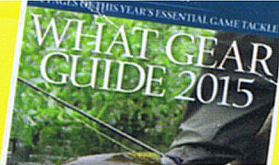


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MEET MISTER CdC

Fly-tyer, designer, philosopher, and a hint of Eric Cantona thrown in: we met CdC revivalist **Marc Petitjean** at the recent British Fly Fair

HE MIGHT be the flyfishing industry's most famous sole trader, yet Marc Petitjean doesn't look like your typical angler.

No rustic, weather-beaten son of the land, he; if you were to meet him on the street, you could picture him running an art gallery, perhaps, or lecturing in Modern History at the Sorbonne, in his native France.

So I'm not surprised to learn that if fishing has always been his life, it has only been his career for the latter part of it. >>



Marc worked both days at last month's British Fly Fair International, in front of an appreciative audience.

The master at work: Petitjean has transferred his love of design from watch cases to a full range of fly-tying tools.

"I worked in a company that made boxes for watches," he told me as we chatted ahead of opening time at this year's British Fly Fair International. "By the time you rise to be number four in a company of 200 people, it gets more and more complicated to make everyone happy. Then I was diagnosed with an ulcer and that decided me: I told myself that from now on, I would be number one in a one-man company. That was 25 years ago. I've never looked back..."

In truth, there was another major impetus behind the decision to make flyfishing his career. He was about to transform a dormant tying material into an angling game-changer.

Hard as it is to imagine now, CdC feathers were incorporated in Swiss fly patterns in the 1920s yet somehow remained off the global radar for the next 60 years, until Marjan Fratnik came along. If the Slovenian's F-Fly design meant that CdC was back, Petitjean devised a tweak that made it hot property worldwide. Pressed by a friend to find a

different way to use CdC so as to make a dry fly that could be easily seen, Marc took what was previously a hackle or wing material and fashioned the body from it.

New era

"Using the full feather to create a body was much better than just making a dubbing out of the fibres because they are very dense and perfectly conical so it's a very good way to have your hook floating," he explained.

"Now, I have no problem getting the hook floating, so I can get rid of the classical hackle. That's very important because I can now do the wing the way I want it, with the amount of material and the shape I want. I have no restriction, so naturally, the fly is more effective."

With a dread of inadvertent plagiarism which endures to this day, he ran his idea past a number of angling journalists, to make sure it hadn't already been tried. Of all the rave reviews he received the most decisive

"I see the open mouth of a huge tarpon, my fly moving from inside it to outside, just as the mouth closes..."

arrived last, from Danish angling legend Preben Torp Jacobsen.

"I got a nice letter, in which he said, 'Thank you, Marc, for sending those very nice flies to me, but I have to tell you that they will never get wet, because I have put the box in my tying room, where I look at them every day. Maybe one sunny day, when there is no wind, I will take the box to one of my favourite rivers, open it facing the water, and show the fish what they missed...'"

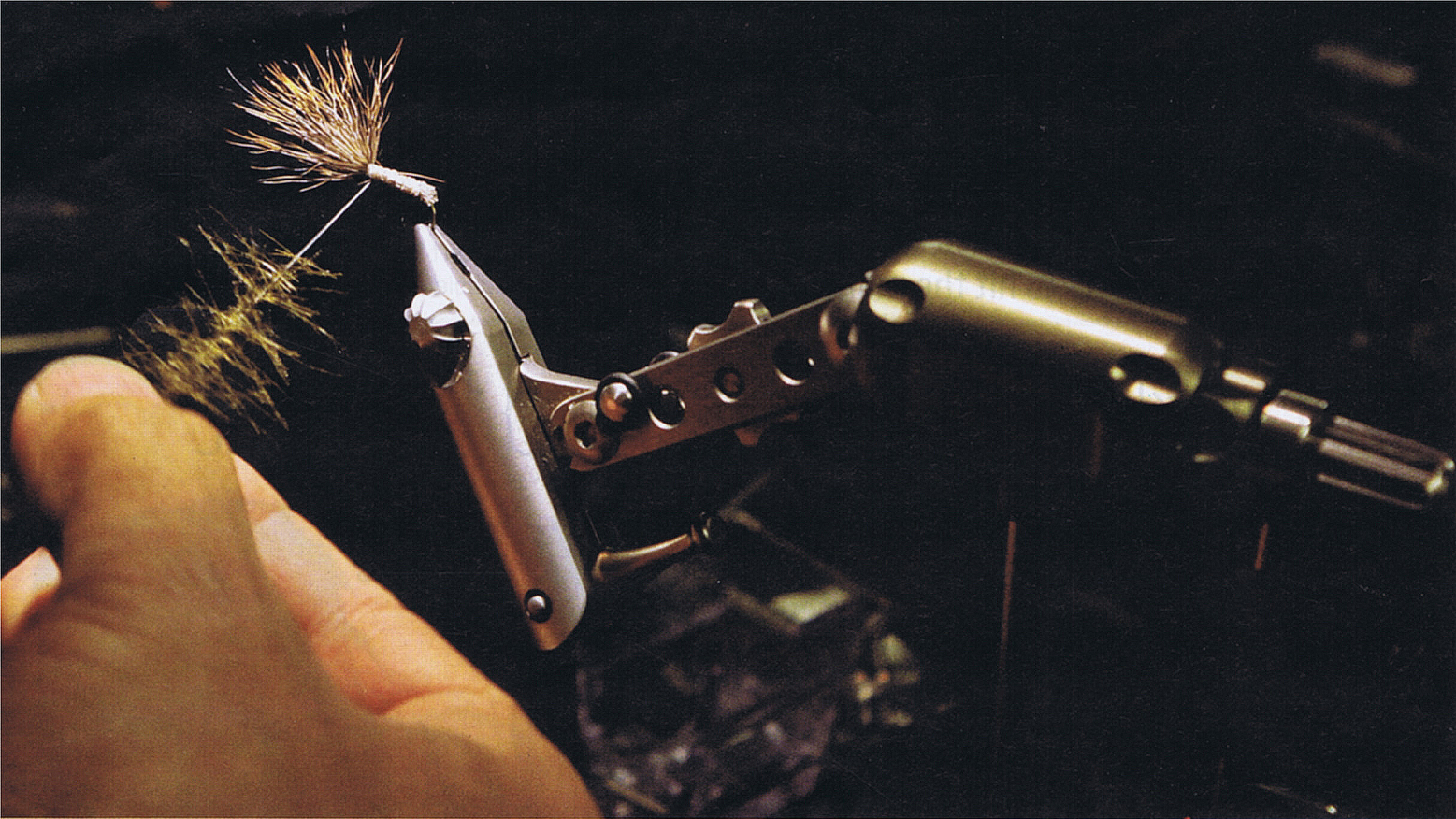
Marc Petitjean had designed his last watch box. From then on, his creativity (he is a self-taught designer, having originally studied agriculture) would be applied to flyfishing, not only flies but also rods, clothing and tying tools. Some 600,000 flies, 500 trade shows worldwide and 18 international awards later, the warm welcome he receives from a number of visitors at the Fly Fair is testimony to the cachet 'Mr CdC' enjoys among the sport's nuts-and-bolts fraternity.

Anglophile

For all his devotion to his work, however, he never forgets what it's all for.

We've all met those hi-fi enthusiasts so obsessed with listening for the sound that they forget to enjoy the music, but Marc Petitjean is not of their ilk. Quite the Anglophile where fishing is concerned ("You have a very important sensibility about fly-tying and flyfishing here in England") he talks reverently about the inspiration of Izaak Walton - "this guy is responsible for my work today" - as if the man died only last year and his pleasure, he insists, is simply





Another of Marc's creations, Magic Tool clips ease the task of making bodies and hackles.



"To catch fish – any species, anywhere." It is fishing rather than the fishing trade, indeed, which has bestowed his main regret. A visitor to Cuba several times, he has had tarpon to 60lb but just the most heartbreaking of near-misses where the species' 120lb-plus leviathans are concerned...

The great escape

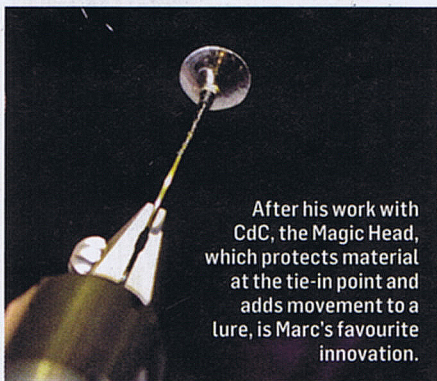
"You have to keep an eye on the guy steering the boat behind you when you are about to re-cast, so you don't hit him with the fly," he explained. "I had turned to do that and when I turned back, having started to load the rod, I see the open mouth of a huge tarpon, with my fly moving from inside it to outside, just as the mouth closed.

"For the last six years, I dream about that, many nights..."

Now based in Fribourg, Switzerland, within an hour's drive of 11 good waters, Marc emphatically bucks one trend among commercial tyers; his retail fly collection is the same as it was 20 years ago.

"I don't want any more. The fewer flies you have when fishing, the better you fish, so I focus on being confident in the fly I'm using," he explains.

Not that he pooh-poohs those whose flybox collection could fill a suitcase.



After his work with CdC, the Magic Head, which protects material at the tie-in point and adds movement to a lure, is Marc's favourite innovation.

"Fly choice is a mental process everyone goes through, you start with one box and may later have 10 boxes but as you get older, you think, 'I'm fishing a familiar place: I'll take two boxes,' out of which you might use three flies. Getting older, you are more accurate in knowing what you need. I would not blame anyone for having many flies, for you cannot get away from this process. We call it *cursus* in France, a course, a progression..."

A refreshing change from the hard-nosed businessman stereotype, the only time he frowns is when I ask him to name his favourite fishing venue or favourite type of fishing. If you remember footballer Eric Cantona's enigmatic "seagulls follow the trawler" interview after hoofing a fan 20 years ago, you should know that it wasn't just Eric being awkward. Vivid metaphor is clearly a Gallic thing...

"I do not like your question about favourites," says his compatriot, briefly shaking his head. "After all, when you enjoy a meal, is it the meat you enjoy, is it the vegetables, is it the sauce? Or is it the whole thing?"

Thankfully, Marc Petitjean refrains from kicking me in the chest. Although it would have made a great picture. ←

ADVICE FOR NEW FLY-TYERS

- "It's not natural to be a fly-tyer, so be prepared to invest time and effort in developing your skill."
- "Tie at least four of any pattern. The first will have all the right components but won't be what you're looking for. The second one will be much better but still not exactly what you want. The third will be what you want but if you stop there, it's not printed in your memory. So make a fourth!"
- "Vague imitation or exact copy? Somewhere in between. Tying is about contradictions – a fly should be light yet we use a heavy hook; it should be strong, yet insects are delicate; it should be 'sexy' to the fish yet not take too long to make. All those things pull in opposite directions, so you have to compromise to make a good fly."



■ Our thanks to FlyTek Fly Fishing (tel: 01772 684003) for their help in arranging this interview.