

PHOTOGRAPHS: ROB DENSON
May on Blagdon
— prime time for
buzzer-feeding trout.

TROUT ON THE THREADLESS BUZZER

Inspired by a Romanian sculptor — to say nothing of Kite, Shipman, Barden and White — *Rob Denson* reveals a family of Buzzers destined to take the stillwater trout fishing world by storm >



I WONDER HOW many of you, on March 16, raised a glass and celebrated what would have been the 135th birthday of the sculptor and “pioneer of modernism”, Constantin Brancusi? Well I did, and so did Google, who dedicated its logo to the Romanian-born genius for a few days! Even if the auspicious occasion, and the works of the great man have hitherto managed to pass you by, his legacy is all around us.

Modern art is to everyday design what Formula 1 is to the car industry. The innovations and big ideas eventually filter down to the masses, to be publicly consumed in some form or other. The process is a relatively quick one in the automotive industry, the innovations hitting the streets seemingly overnight. Public acceptance of, and appetite for, changes in popular culture, style and design tend to happen a little less speedily – 20-50 years or so is the norm – sometimes longer, seldom sooner – before seeds sown by the likes of Picasso, Rothko, Warhol and Brancusi



The colour combinations of these Buzzers are endless and the tying could not be simpler.

Like most people who earn an honest living, I'd never heard of Brancusi until the mid '80s, when I decided it was a good idea to waste – sorry, dedicate – three years of my life to “studying” fine art. I spent a good chunk of those years hacking away at lumps of stone trying to emulate the works

the spirit and essence of his subjects. He managed it too – often, and with apparent consummate ease – producing works of breathtaking simplicity and an almost spiritual beauty. Whether we should try to concern ourselves with a similar endeavour in our fly-tying is

“My Brancusi Buzzer doesn't begin to touch on the man's genius, but it was a

come to fruition and shape our everyday lives. Design-school graduates in black polo-necks and Joe 90 glasses usually take the credit for what is in reality a long, organic process. So next time you're relaxing in your less-is-more sitting-room, fondling the seductive lines of your iPod, sitting on your ever-so-minimal modern sofa set on a clean wooden floor, spare a thought for the people who really made it all happen.

of the great man, and a good many more years trying to become solvent again! But that's another story. I've nothing much to show for those years, other than a portfolio gathering dust in the loft, a couple of sculptures and oil paintings forced on various relatives. Something less tangible but completely priceless did stay with me, though – a love and appreciation of the Romanian master. Oh, and a Buzzer named after him. While my Brancusi Buzzer doesn't even begin to touch on the man's genius, it was a starting point for a series of super-slim Buzzers, pared down to the bare bones.

“There are idiots who define my work as abstract; yet what they call abstract is what is most realistic. What is real is not the appearance or the outer form, but the idea, the essence of things.” – Brancusi.

Brancusi concerned himself primarily with trying to achieve purity of form and encapsulating

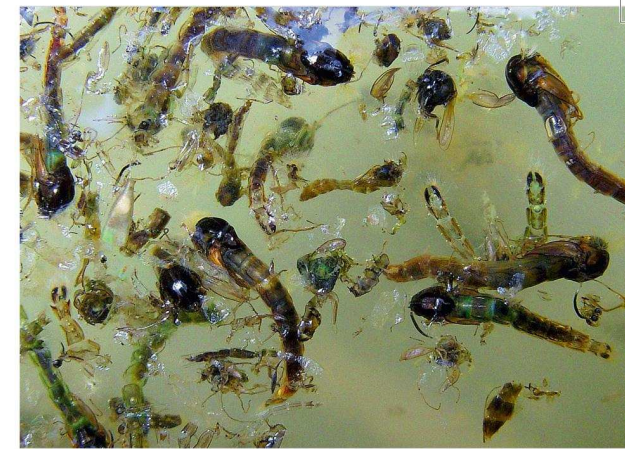
debatable. There is, though, often much wisdom, not to mention pleasure, in deconstructing and paring down a natural to the simplest of forms on the hook.

To be fair, however, the influences that led directly to the Brancusi Buzzer were probably a little closer to home than some obscure sculptor. The late '80s and early '90s saw competition anglers such as Dave Shipman (Shipman's Buzzer) Bob Barden (Barden Pupa) and John White (Superglue Buzzer) busily getting down to the essence of things, too. Having recently downed lump-hammer and chisel in favour of a few feathers and a vice, I was busy learning how to get some of these materials to stay on the hook. Fresh out of art college, the minimalistic, “anorexic” approach of Barden and Co really struck a chord with me and seemed to make perfect sense as well as perfect trout fodder. I was quick to copy these patterns, and the thrill of deceiving some big Carsington

browns with a few wisps of fluffy stuff clumsily lashed to my hook will stay with me forever.

Nowadays, unsurprisingly, a peep into anyone's fly-box will reveal a plethora of skinny, “anorexic” patterns. There will always be a time and a place for a good mouthful, but when the fish want things natural, and on the quiet side, less is indeed more.

There is a limit, though – or is there? When the late Oliver Kite, who fished with and learned much from Frank Sawyer, duly deconstructed his mentor's patterns, the end result was a bare hook. It caught plenty of trout, and although Sawyer probably loved the fact that trout could be fooled by a bare hook, and no doubt understood why, legend has it that he was quick to point out to Kite that no dressing on the hook meant no fly, and was therefore not cricket, not to mention contravening club rules. There is, however, something of the essence of the nymph in a bare hook. The unmistakable profile of ascending pupae is no doubt indelibly stamped on the brain of the trout from an early age. Is it any

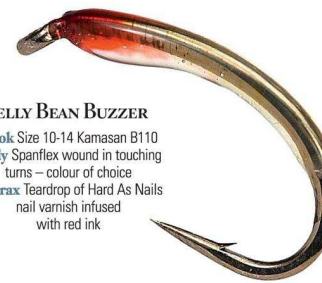


A slim profile is essential if you wish to closely copy the profile of natural buzzers.

Around this time, my fishing pal and sounding-board, Alex Ferguson, had shown me a trick for imitating the buzzer thorax area and the pre-eclosion surge of blood, involving raffia, red ink and varnish. Alex had achieved a stunning effect with his process, albeit a touch too detailed and bulky for my minimalistic purposes. A little trial and error produced a similar effect under the thorax zone of the 387. A teardrop of varnish was added to a spot of red marker-pen dabbed on to the underside of the hook. A lovely bi-product of the

pleasing when the Spanflex is tied on without the use of thread. A simple overlap of stretched Spanflex, akin to “casting off” thread in the usual way, starts things off, and then the properties of the Spanflex, wanting to contract back on itself, hold everything nicely in place. A coat or two of Sally Hansen Hard As Nails varnish seals the deal and makes the fly incredibly robust. This method added other dimensions in terms of colour, translucence and transmitted light. A tempting colour coating had been added, and The Jelly

starting point for a series of super-slim Buzzers, pared down to the bare bones”



JELLY BEAN BUZZER

Hook Size 10-14 Kamasan B110
Body Spanflex wound in touching turns – colour of choice
Thorax Teardrop of Hard As Nails nail varnish infused with red ink

wonder, then, that these sparse artificials, or even a bare hook, fool fish after fish?

For me, too, the bare hook is indeed not cricket, which is why when in 2008 I came across the black nickel version of the Hyabusa 387 – a hook that in its own right simply screamed “black buzzer!” – I was duty-bound to add a little something to the profile to keep it “sporting”.

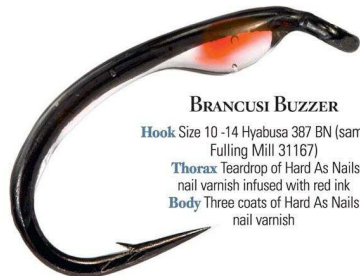
“teardrop” was the way in which light bounces around inside the bulge, illuminating the ink beautifully, and in a very natural-looking manner.

Dragging excess varnish away from the teardrop with a dubbing needle, and along the curve of the shank, seemed a very intuitive next step. This softened the curves created by the teardrop, and seemed to harmonise nicely with the hook profile. The Brancusi Buzzer was born!

Initial trials on Stocks Reservoir were encouraging, and the trout were soon snapping at the Brancusi in a very positive and convincing manner. The subtle suggestion of a bare hook and a smear of varnish is all well and good, but there are times when matching the colour of the predominant buzzers can reap rewards. Spanflex, when wound tightly in touching turns, loses any sign of segmentation and forms a smooth coating of colour. This effect is even more aesthetically

Bean was born! Both the Brancusi and the Jelly Bean performed admirably on local waters when the fish were tuned in and susceptible to simple suggestion. But what about when the fish wanted a closer look? There's not an awful lot to imitate or suggest on a buzzer pupa, and the whole point of the Brancusi and the Jelly Bean was to try to encapsulate the spirit and essence of the buzzer with minimal effort and material. It was a useful exercise, though: to prove something to myself, albeit something that had been proved by the likes of Sawyer, Kite, and others many years ago. Still, I felt there was a trick or two left in the Spanflex-ink-varnish locker, so maybe it was time to try to get just a wee bit more imitative.

Adding breathers was a non-starter for me. I have added breathers in many forms and different materials to many patterns over the years. There's no doubt they look pretty, but as a



BRANCUSI BUZZER

Hook Size 10-14 Hyabusa 387 BN (same as Fulling Mill 31167)
Thorax Teardrop of Hard As Nails nail varnish infused with red ink
Body Three coats of Hard As Nails nail varnish

TROUT ON THE THREADLESS BUZZER *continued*

trigger, or key feature, the jury is out. You may think differently. So, pretty much the only key feature left to try to incorporate was the segmentation. Opening the turns of the Spanflex, thus adding distinguishable buzzer “stripes” and segmentation, was the next step. The fly in general felt a little unresolved, though, in terms of the slightly more imitative direction in which I was heading. The teardrop when added directly to the ribbed Spanflex was all a bit “spots and stripes” – not quite right. I needed some kind of device to bring the two disparate main elements together.

After a little experimentation, I settled on wing-buds, in the form of a short length of Spanflex to unify the two features. Perhaps even less of a trigger than



This trout took an olive Spanthrax Buzzer.

“The Brancusi and the Jelly Bean encapsulate the spirit and essence of the buzzer”



The black Spanthrax Buzzer gets its colouring from the Hyabusa 387 BN (same as Fulling Mill 31167) hook and its segmentation from a white (almost transparent) Spanflex rib.



SPANTHRAX BUZZER

Hook Size 8-14
Hyabusa 387
Body Spanflex ribbed in open turns – colour of choice
Wing buds Spanflex – colour of choice
Thorax Spanflex (as body) with teardrop of Hard As Nails varnish infused with red ink



breathers, the wing-buds did at least do a good job of resolving the transition from abdomen to thorax, linking the two elements very nicely, and, as it happened acting as a good foundation for the teardrop. The Spanthrax Buzzer was born!

The first outing with the Spanthrax was on Stocks reservoir again. A slow drift on to Gull Island in the midst of a huge buzzer hatch produced several arm-wrenching takes to the black version (clear Spanflex over black 387) fished on the tail of a straight-through set-up, and an olive version on the middle or top dropper. The confidence of those takes convinced me to pursue the idea, and I quickly came up with several more colour variations. Bringing a bronze hook and a few more shades of Spanflex to the party, the permutations are virtually limitless.

My personal favourites include the original black, olive, and grey to imitate the common colours of the natural. I've made use of some of the less natural Spanflex shades as well, to make the Buzzer stand out from the crowd – not always a bad thing when the trout are faced with thousands upon thousands of naturals to choose from. My favourites for this kind of tactic are chartreuse/orange buds (good in a hatch of olive or apple-green

buzzers), and the yellow-olive over black with chartreuse wing-buds (good in just about any hatch I've tried). UV varnish in place of the Sally Hansen is another interesting variation, and has done well, too. All three styles, and most colours, do their fair share of damage among both wild browns and stocked rainbows. The outstanding colours from the feedback received have been no different from my own findings – black, olive, grey and yellow-olive over black being best.

The Brancusi, Jelly Bean, and Spanthrax series have been my go-to quick-sink Buzzers for two or three years now, working well for covering the depths, and also fished high in the water on a washing line when the fish are seriously tuned into buzzers, and it's an obvious match-the-hatch situation. I've had success with all three of this series on Stocks, Carsington, Rutland and Chew. Feedback from friends and customers the length and breadth of Britain has been most encouraging.

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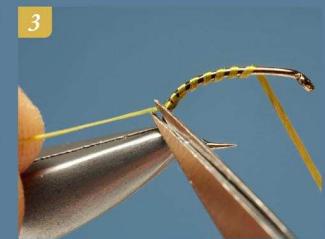
How to tie the olive Spanthrax Buzzer



1 Take a 6-8 inch length of olive Spanflex, stretch it to its limit and catch it in – as you would when adding thread to a hook – with a locking turn.



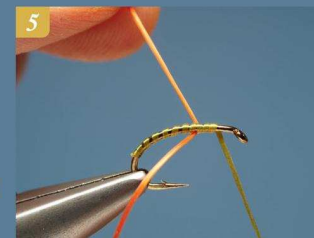
2 With the initial turn locked tight wind the Spanflex in open turns to a point at which the thorax and wing buds will start.



3 Keeping tension on the working end trim the waste while stretching it to double its natural state. Do not trim too close (about 1 mm is ideal) otherwise the waste end will “retreat” under the locking turn and unravel.



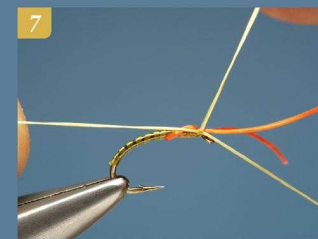
4 Fold a 2 inch length of orange Spanflex (for the wing buds) around the olive Spanflex.



5 Slide the orange Spanflex up to the hook, trapping it between the olive Spanflex and the hook. Figure-of-eight the olive Spanflex around the orange once, to lock it in position, then wind up to the eye in touching turns.



6 Pull the two ends of the orange Spanflex forward to form the wing buds. Lock them in place with one tight turn of the olive Spanflex.



7 Make a one-turn whip finish (by hand) with the olive Spanflex, keeping it under maximum tension. Adjust the orange wing buds for the correct position.



8 Pull the waste ends of the orange Spanflex away from the eye, stretching them to about twice their natural state, then trim them about 1 mm from the eye. Repeat this process with the waste olive Spanflex.



9 Turn the hook upside down in the vice and add a spot of permanent red marker pen to the rear of the wingbuds.



10 Add a drop of thick Hard As Nails nail varnish to the underside of the thorax and agitate the spot of ink slightly with the point of the dubbing needle so that it bleeds into the varnish.



11 Return the hook to an upright position and leave to dry for 12 hours.



12 Brush on another two or three coats of varnish (at six-hourly intervals), covering the thorax and the body. Allow around three days to cure before fishing.