

# FINE CUSTOM KNIVES

BY JOE MANGIAFICO | Review by Brian Clark



It's not often that I get to geek out on knives with a dedicated angler, or talk fly fishing with a serious knife nerd. Meeting the young knifemaker Joe Mangiafico was special, and he's found a clever way to merge fishing with knives in a way that may appeal to many wingshooters as well.

Joe grew up in Atlanta and started fishing young. His knifemaking journey got rolling with some DIY blades made in his dorm room while getting a fisheries management degree in Vermont, which he promptly put to work as a fisheries biologist in Idaho, Montana, and Colorado before making the tough call to shift his professional focus to knifemaking. He made a cross-country jump there as well, following well-known knifemaker Lucas Burnley from Massachusetts out to Bend, Oregon, later to wind up settling down back in Cape Cod where he's now both a full-time knifemaker AND a full-time fishing guide (in the season, that is – mostly for stripers and false albacore).

With such august knifemakers as Chris Reeve, Tim Reeve, Sam Densmore, and Lucas Burnley counted among his inspirations and mentors, Joe was well-placed to develop fresh designs made to exacting standards, always chasing the goal of making unique custom knives with the precision and consistency of premium production models. He came up with a way to make G10 knife handles resemble fish flanks, as shown here. These days he prioritizes custom fixed blade knives with fish-flank scales (handles) in sizes that happen to be perfect for both anglers and bird hunters, although he also turns out a few custom folding knives when he has time.

His custom fixed blade designs start around US\$250, and custom folders start around US\$700. Among hardcore knife nerds, those prices may raise eyebrows for being extremely reasonable; for the general public, they might seem eye watering. If you're in the former category, prepare to raise your brows even further: many of Joe's blades are made from Magnacut, arguably the world's premier space-age super-steel designed specifically for knives, and also from Nitro-V. Both are stainless steels which inhibit corrosion and can safely be used in saltwater (although you should still always rinse them with fresh water after exposure to the salt). His scales are made from G10, titanium, and other non-ferrous metals for accents. Artisan knives aren't cheap, but they provide the owner with an incomparable blend of aesthetic pleasure and pragmatic utility.

Reach out to Joe directly via his website or Instagram if you're interested in having a custom blade made to your specifications, but there's also an option for more budget-conscious folks who want a fishy blade but aren't fussy about the steel: Böker, a well-respected German knife company, has licensed a number of Joe's designs through their Böker Plus program. These production models are manufactured overseas with less costly materials than the customs (VG-10 for the blades, still a great stainless steel) and can be purchased from the Böker website (see below). The fixed blade Brook model (similar to the knife on the left) retails for just US\$169, and more designs are forthcoming.

**Instagram:** [@joe\\_mangiafico](https://www.instagram.com/joe_mangiafico)

**Website:** [www.mangiaficoknives.com](http://www.mangiaficoknives.com)

**Böker Plus:** [www.bokerusa.com/the-brook-02bo031](http://www.bokerusa.com/the-brook-02bo031)

*Top photos by Joe Mangiafico; left photo by Nick Cisko; below by Brian Clark*



Although it's less overtly fishy, Böker Plus also stocks one of Joe's folding knife designs, the Canoe model. It feels like Joe lifted this design right out of my own blueprints for the perfect folder: it's a blue stonewashed titanium frame lock with bronze accents and a sebenza-ish drop-point 2.68" blade made from S35VN. Thanks to bearings, it fires smoothly with ambidextrous thumb studs. It's a small, elegant, non-tactical, fidget-friendly knife with top-quality materials and clean tolerances. Compared to other knives in its class, this is a stunning piece at a reasonable price.

**MSRP:** US\$220 | **Website:** [www.bokerusa.com/canoe-01bo494](http://www.bokerusa.com/canoe-01bo494)