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FIRST WRAPS

Form Follows Function



Faruk Ekich spent hundreds of hours handcrafting what might be the world's most beautiful and functional fly-tying vise.
by David Klausmeyer

PERHAPS YOU HAVEN'T HEARD of Faruk Ekich. He lives in Canada, and makes only infrequent forays into the United States to show off his latest fly-tying inventions. But when Faruk does show up, it's always a treat to see what he has created.

A few years ago, Faruk introduced the Ekich Ultimate Bobbin. I immediately recognized the ingenuity and care that went into the design of this spring-loaded tool. The Ultimate Bobbin is designed to automatically maintain proper thread tension while you tie.

While the Ultimate Bobbin is a purely functional tool, Faruk's new Dama Seal Vise is as much a work of art as it is a high-quality fly-tying tool. We'll get to the functional parts of the vise in a moment, but for now, I want you to understand that the vise jaws are entirely handmade out of Damascus steel. We live in an age when it is claimed that many products are handmade, but in reality that often means they are *assembled* by hand. When Faruk says "handmade," however, he really means it.

"I start with a raw bar of Damascus steel, and cut out all the parts using a saw," Faruk explained. "I then shape and smooth everything using files and finishing stones."

Examine the photos of the jaws and swept neck, and you'll agree that Faruk's vise is beautiful to behold. While I thought

The sweeping neck and jaws of the Dama Seal Vise are made using simple hand tools out of Damascus steel. The Dama Seal Vise is surely a functional work of art.

the curved neck was for artistic effect, Faruk explained that the shape is purely functional. (In fact, I think Faruk was a bit puzzled by my reaction to many of the features on his vise. Whenever I thought he designed a part for the sheer artistic beauty of the curved lines, he would reply that each shape had a practical purpose.)

"That's where I rest the palm of my left hand," he said about the curved neck. "I can easily apply pressure to the neck to turn the jaws to see other parts of the fly."

Faruk also pointed to the cleverly designed jaws. Study the close-up photo of the jaws. Even with this large salmon fly, Faruk can conceal the hook point and barb to prevent fraying the thread or other materials, yet the tip of the jaws are fine enough to accommodate the smallest dry fly hooks. And the low center of gravity of the jaws' mass minimizes the tendency of the jaws to drift while tying. This last design feature sounds strange, but I, too, have tied on rotary vises that tended to turn under mere thread tension. Faruk's design eliminates this problem.

During our interview, Faruk talked for a long time about the nuances of thread, and how to use his bobbin with his vise. His years of experience as a mechanical engineer were obvious, and I almost gave

up thinking that there was anything artistic about his vise or if he even had an artistic bone in his body. At last I asked about the screw that opens and closes the vise jaws. "What's with all the shapes," I asked. "What do I do with these?"

"Those represent the shapes of the wings of the three major insects: the mayfly, the stonefly, and the caddisfly. Don't you see them?"

Caught you, Mr. Ekich! No one could create such a beautifully sculpted object as your vise without having some sense of artistic flair.

I Could Go On, But . . .

We talked for close to two hours, and I've had Faruk's vise in my office for close to a month. (This is one tool that I will have to return to the owner; it will be back in Faruk's hands before you read this article.) There is still much to tell, but space is short.

I could, for instance, tell you about the special tempering of the completed jaws. Or I could tell you about how Faruk makes the head of the vise using nickel silver. But I suppose the question you most want answered is, how much does this vise cost?

"I don't have a clue what to charge for something like this," Faruk said. "I haven't even thought about that."

"Well," I asked, "how long did it take you to make this vise?"

"There again, I don't know. I didn't keep track of the hours. It might have taken hundreds of hours. It took a very long time. Most of it was completely made by hand. You don't keep track of how long it takes to make something like this. You do it because you love the work, and you love the materials."

I don't know if Faruk and I ever came to terms over what his vise represents: Is it a work of art, is it a purely utilitarian tool, or is it something in between? I suppose I have no choice but to bow to his wishes and acknowledge that first and foremost, the Dama Seal Vise is a fly-tying tool, and that form follows function.

To learn more about the Ekich Ultimate Bobbin, the Dama Seal Vise, and much more, go to Faruk's Web site, www.automaticbobbin.com.

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