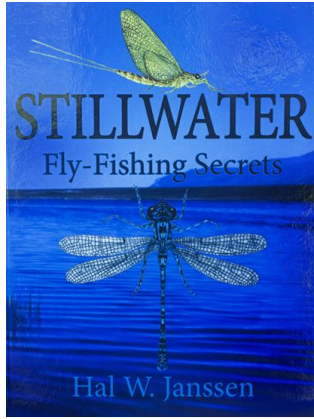


*Stillwater Fly-Fishing Secrets*, by Hal W. Janssen, Hal Janssen Company, Forest Ranch, California, 2011, 278 pages, foreword by Russell Chatham, illustrations by the author, hardbound, ISBN 978-0-98871660-0-5



Allow me to digress. In the early 1980's, I frequented a fly shop in Connecticut; it's long since gone. One day I spied a new book by John Merwin, entitled *Stillwater Trout*. It lay in the display cabinet like a lost soul for over a year; no one was interested. Eventually I scooped it up, and took it home. I never regretted that purchase. Merwin was a fine writer, and his book opened my eyes to a new fly-fishing frontier.

Since then, I've seen precious little written on the subject of Stillwater. Yes, Brian Chan from Kamloops comes to mind; he is one important exception. Yet in our country, fly-fishing for trout in lakes, ponds, and reservoirs remains largely a secret world, entered and understood by only few. Compare that to the UK, where Stillwater fly-fishing is a long revered, long written about sport. The flies, the leaders, boat handling, and drifts are constantly evolving. It just seems odd that on this side of the pond, we show so little interest. Forgive the pun.

As a result, a new book on Stillwater is welcome news, I feel, especially one penned by an author with Janssen's credentials. Many of you will recognize his name. Hal Janssen is a writer, an artist, a fly angler of long standing, as well as a tackle innovator. He is also a member of the Federation of Fly-Fishing Hall of Fame. More recently, he was inducted into the California Outdoor Hall of Fame.

A foreword by Russell Chatham kicks things off. I enjoy Chatham's writing, so I eagerly read his contribution. He praises the author and this book, while also extending a prickly overview of fly-fishing. Clearly, Chatham is not pleased with our sport's present state. It's an acerbic assessment that might have made a mainstream book publisher balk. Thankfully, Janssen gave him an opportunity to speak. I found Chatham's candor refreshing.

After Chatham fires the opening shot, Janssen jumps in with an introduction. We learn that we are about to benefit from knowledge gained in over half a century of Stillwater fishing. You have to love that. But Hal warns us that Stillwater isn't easy, and will test even the best stream fly anglers.

"Stillwater is not an underwater world where running water masks vision and sound. Stillwater will test any angler's skill and patience, but the opportunity to expand your knowledge and present your fly to larger than average trout without the distraction and aggravation of crowds of anglers is worth the effort."

Next, we get four chapters on Stillwater strategy. This is essential reading, particularly for those fly anglers approaching Stillwater for the first time. Streamside strategy revolves around reading currents. On a lake or pond, that strategy vanishes. Making matters worse, trout in a lake tend to move around with the wind and the seasons. Trout in a stream, on the other hand, often stay in the same pools they held in yesterday, last week, and last year. You pretty much know where they are. Frankly, these are the same types of problems freshwater anglers encounter when taking on the salt. It can be disconcerting; you have to rethink things if you're going to be successful.

Janssen understands the issues and shows us how to approach open water. He begins with various bottom contours, and how to fish them. Then he offers information about specific Stillwater habitats including - spring areas, sand areas, swamp areas, weedy areas, types of vegetation and their associated forage base. All of this is very helpful, and brings us to chapter 4 - *Aquatic Insects and Fundamental techniques*. There are some real gems here, including the effects of the sun's path on trout behavior, correct rod control, line control, hook sets, and how to properly rig your line, and leader to fish various types of flies. Janssen finishes the chapter with illustrations depicting the kinds of rises forms we will encounter on a lake.

With a solid foundation behind us, Chapter 5 focuses on fly tying. The author insists that tying for Stillwater is different than tying for streams. Why? Janssen points out Stillwater insects have evolved in special shapes, sizes, and movements that are not like their stream-born cousins. Moreover, he feels trout in moving water have little time to study a fly, whereas Stillwater trout have all the time in the world. The author goes on to say that picking the right hook is essential to success. And Janssen has strong opinions on the type of point, the size of the barb, and the shape of the bend. For fly tying materials, he likes natural furs and feathers, with a special love for rabbit fur, duck flank feathers, marabou, and ostrich. He warns us, however, that to get the right colors we must dye these

materials. To that end, the chapter closes with recommended dye colors, and instructions on how to best employ them.

It seemed a bit odd to me, that he doesn't mention any synthetics. This is our first hint that Janssen is something of a purist. Nothing wrong with that, every sport has them. I'm not one of them, however. I prefer to employ the tools of my time, wherever useful. To each their own.

The chapters 6 through 14 are devoted to what Stillwater trout eat. The bulk of these pages cover aquatic macro invertebrates of all flavors. Mayfly nymphs, caddis pupae, chironomids, damsel nymphs, dragonfly nymphs, scuds, and shrimp are covered in detail. There is a chapter on leeches too; Janssen finds leech imitation an exciting fly to fish. And we get additional chapters on forage fish, and terrestrials. As you might hope, each of these nine chapters ends with proven fly patterns, along with their tying instructions.

After the in-depth look at trout food and flies, Janssen delves into equipment. His opinion on fly rods is surprising. Yes, here too he is a bit of purist. Then again, many of us are at times. Janssen warns us that fly line selection is a crucial part of the game; we must fish at the proper depth to be successful. To that end, he walks us carefully through a selection of floating, intermediate, and sinking lines. Following that, he offers 10 pages on Stillwater leaders. It's a very detailed examination, with illustrated leader recipes, for both floating lines and sinking lines.

After a chapter on knots, we come to a final chapter covering watercraft with special emphasis on prams, and float tubes. Janssen does a nice job discussing these crafts and their application. Plenty of good advice here. Still, in my opinion this chapter has some omissions. The author does not discuss canoes, kayaks, or pontoon boats - all of which are useful. He also advises against electric motors, asking us to row instead. No one loves rowing more than me, but not all anglers have the skill or the strength to cover even a small pond. Hence, an electric motor can make beaucoup sense. And nowadays we have lightweight, highly efficient, ones that use lithium batteries. Not cheap, but just what the doctor ordered.

Overall, this book is not a quick or easy read. The information is dense, and Jansen's writing style demands you take your time. None of that, however, affects the value; this is a very informative, and much needed work. One that opens a door on portion of our sport that richly deserves more attention. Truth is, it may well be best book available on the subject. So if you're thinking of investigating this fly-fishing frontier, this book is for you.

Ed Mitchell

PS I purchased the book directly from the author. Reach him at <http://haljanssen.net>