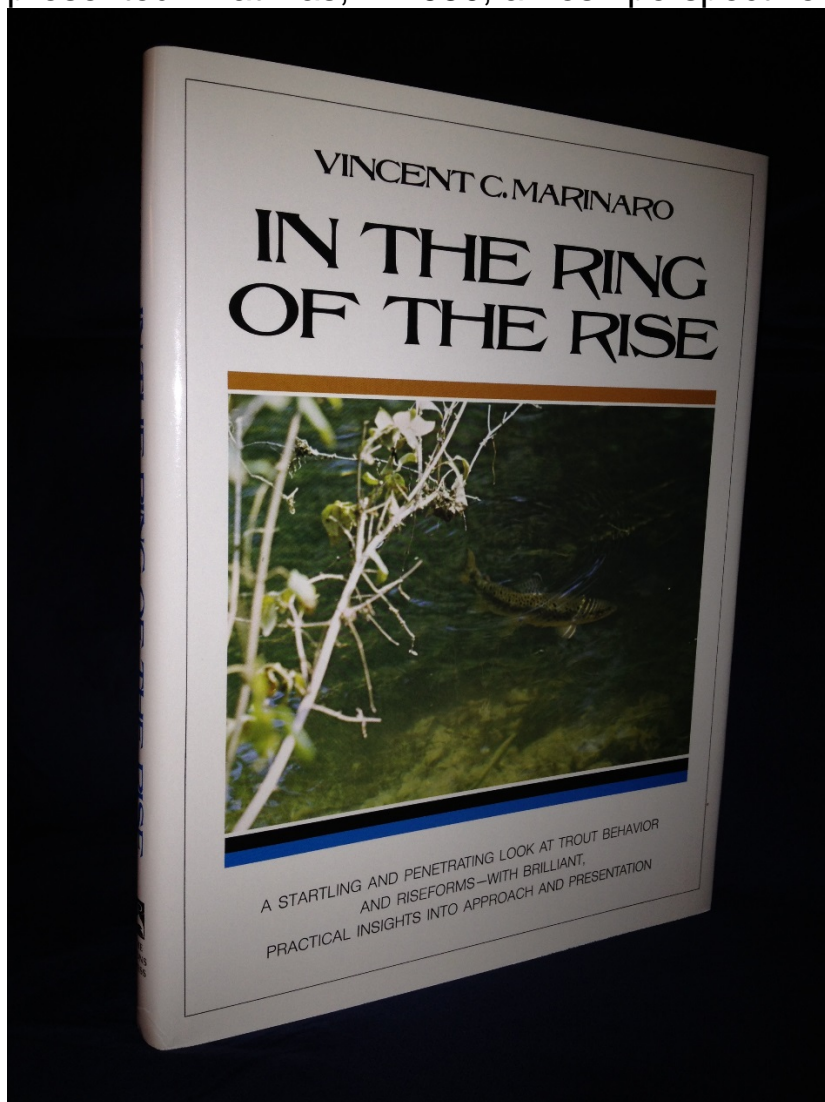


Looking at the Classics: “In the Ring of the Rise” by Vince Marinaro

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[This is one in a series of articles describing classic fly-fishing books and their authors, with “classic” meaning works that have been widely recognized as seminal to the sport for decades. Very little here is intended as a review, as these works have stood the test of time. Rather, they are showcases of the writers and their work, with a selectively detailed overview of the content. Hopefully this will be of interest to anyone who ever wondered, like I did, why these works are so highly regarded. Ideally, these articles will lead some to enjoy these historical works themselves. Thanks to Larry Hice for his review and comments. Please send any of your comments to buddyrandolph@comcast.net. –Buddy]

Having recently finished Vince Marinaro’s first book, “A Modern Dry-fly Code,” I felt motivated to read what I believe is his only other published work: “In the Ring of the Rise” (New York: The Lyons Press, 1976, hardback). In the “Code” the author presented what was, in 1950, a fresh perspective on dry-fly fishing. Twenty-six years



later he again drew upon his experiences with fishing a local spring creek to analyze trout rise forms in remarkable detail, and always with an eye toward how a more detailed understanding of this behavior could lead to catching more and bigger fish.

Immediately Vince gets right to the point with photographs he took from a natural blind and descriptions of three types of rise forms. During the “Simple Rise,” apparently seen during heavy hatches when fish are very confident in what they’re eating, a trout leaves his “observation post,” drifts upwards and backwards with the current to intercept a floating target, takes the fly and returns. In the “Compound Rise,” exhibiting less confidence, the fish begins the same but then drifts under the fly for some distance and inspects it at

length before taking it, or not. The “Complex Rise” involves the most hesitation: beginning as a “Compound Rise,” the fish slows after inspection and allows the fly to begin drifting away downstream – possibly to allow the fly to become more visible from

a different angle. Once flies reached a certain distance away in this final stage Vince observed a decision point: fish either turned back or took the fly. Saying this another way, once a Compound-rising fish committed to taking a fly from the decision point, the author never observed a subsequent refusal.

So what does this mean for fishing? For the author it largely boiled down to two main points. First, long and drag-free drifts can be vital to catching wary trout; to accomplish this, serious anglers must master the “puddle cast.” Second, he saw that Complex and Compound rise forms lead the fish farther away from its “observation post” than do Simple rises, easily leading us to underestimate how far to cast upstream from rises and to inadvertently cast behind rising fish. This was probably the most helpful point in the book for me, as I’m quite sure I’ve cast behind rising fish exactly for this reason.

Vince also addresses how rise forms change for different foods, including the “Sipping Rise,” and a feeding move he calls “The Swivel.” He expands greatly a topic he covered in the “Code,” what trout see and how, with photographs taken through a water tank built with a sloping glass wall, tying these last points to specific fly designs and how they should best be presented.

This book then moves through a variety of distinct subjects: rod design (he was a bamboo rod builder with strong opinions); designing and testing original flies (the “Game of Nods” involves watching one fish react to different patterns); fishing a hatch of tiny mayflies (*Caenis*), and tying and fishing grasshoppers and midges. The author concludes with an excellent and detailed description of spring creeks (to him, a misnomer) versus freestone streams and then finally provides a full chapter devoted to, not one of his home waters in Pennsylvania as we might expect, but rather to the Au Sable River in Michigan.

Frankly, I found the material here very engaging but much less coherent than the “Code.” I think I solved that puzzle when I noticed a block of text on the copyright page acknowledging that six of the ten chapters had originally been published as magazine articles from 1967 to 1976. This probably explains the “shotgun start” in the first chapter and of course the wide-ranging and disjoint topics in many of the other chapters. So it seems that this book is really more of an anthology, and I believe it would have been better to identify it as such in the title. This arrangement takes nothing away from the usefulness of the material but noting it up front would have better prepared the reader for these relatively independent chapters, many of which (after the first three) relate only tangentially to the title.

This author’s writing is very good, as in the “Code,” and either of a couple of stories about hooking and fighting mammoth trout in tight water is worth the price of admission. Apparently it was not unusual to feed your fly rod under a bridge or fence while fighting a fish, and once he threw his rod downstream to a... well, you get the idea without me adding any spoilers, except to say that such rod tricks weren’t enough

to land them all. Each chapter was compelling even while I was wondering how it fit with the others, or with the title, but perhaps that says more about the editor or publisher than the author. "In the Ring of the Rise," best seen as a collection of short essays on fly fishing, is both an interesting look at trout fishing almost forty years ago and also a useful source of information for trout fishers today.