



# SCUDDLEBUTT



## Bar Flies

### Relaunching the Livingston collection

ONE ONLY HAS TO LOOK AT THE RECENT INFLUX OF FLYFISHING LOGO-themed microbrew bottles to notice the connection between art, drinking, and angling. Though it's hard to pinpoint the origin of this relationship or how long it has existed, the search for the nexus of this holy trinity leads inevitably to Livingston, Montana, and The Murray Bar's wall of fame, known simply as the Bar Flies.

Before you can understand the Bar Flies, you have to understand Livingston. With a population hovering around 7,000, the town, which sits on the banks of the Yellowstone River, probably has more writers and flyfishermen per capita than any other town in America. It also supports over a dozen art galleries, an equal number of bars, and six fly shops.

In 1995, accomplished fisherman and angling artist Michael Simon accepted a position in Bozeman and moved to Livingston. But when Simon got to Montana he found out that the gig he had been promised no longer existed. With no day job, he quickly fell in with the town's other artists like writers Doug Peacock and Tim Cahill, and his neighbor, actress Margo Kidder, and started frequenting The Murray Bar.

"Without a job, the Murray became my office," Simon remembers. And as his bar tab started to rise the bar's owner, Dan Kaul, decided to give Simon some work as a means of putting his talents to good use and making sure he got paid.

"It was like one of those Depression-era 'make-work' projects," Simon says. "Dan had this idea that I would take pictures of the regulars, and then get them to tie their favorite fly to be mounted with their picture and signature."

While putting up shots of patrons may seem like a quaint idea, the regulars at the Murray were more than just familiar faces to the locals. In terms of artists, some of the first Bar Flies were author Jim Harrison, painter Russell Chatham, and of course Kidder. Simon, who worked for legendary tyer Hank Roberts during the '70s, tied Kidder's fly using hair from her two dogs.

The outfitters on the wall—including the Yellowstone Angler's George Anderson and John Bailey of Dan Bailey's Fly Shop—were

just as famous in flyfishing circles and cemented the bar's reputation as an angler's hangout. But it was when the Federation of Fly Fishers conclave came to town that Simon landed his white whales: tyer extraordinaire Jack Gartside, casting guru Lefty Kreh, and renowned fishing writer Ernie Schwiebert.

"I tracked Ernie down in the Livingston Bar & Grill and then lured him over to the Murray to take his picture," Simon says.

After three years, there were more than 100 Bar Flies, with the country's best flyfishermen making up a high percentage of that number. But around that same time, with work in Montana still hard to find, Simon moved to Virginia, the state for which he created bass and brook trout license plates.

With Simon gone, it seemed like the Bar Flies would also disappear. When ownership of the bar changed hands, some regulars took their pictures off the wall before the rest were removed to be stored in crates in the bar's basement. And over the years, as the bar's deed changed hands again, that's where the Bar Flies remained.

Then about a year ago, the new owner, Brian Menges, and the bar's manager, Cole Murphy, decided to dust off the Bar Flies. They instilled the help of locals Tony Valeriano of Western Drifters and Eric Adams of Montana Fly Fishing Guides to sort through the remaining pictures and choose 46 of the "fishiest" Bar Flies to surround a shot of Simon up on the wall. While Margo Kidder and her dog-hair salmon fly are gone, you can still catch a glimpse of the visage and handiwork of Gartside, Kreh, and Chatham.

The Murray's new owner has also bought the building next door and may expand not only the bar but also the Bar Flies using the new crop of guides, fisherman, artists, and drinkers—or any combination thereof.

Time will tell whether the new Bar Flies will have the same cachet as the old. But the bar's website says the criteria is "you drink like a fish at the Murray or you live a life of fishing and have a few at the Murray!" So it is at least safe to say that it won't take long for the wall to fill up again. —Stephen Camelio