



ANGUS WOULD BE PROUD.

Maiden in Montana

Rocking Big Sky Country BY STEPHEN CAMELIO

I GOT MY FIRST FLY ROD around the age of 14. A couple years later, I went to my first concert: Iron Maiden and Anthrax at the New Haven Coliseum in Connecticut. Both were life-changing moments. The former became an obsession, leading to countless days on the water, a job at a fly shop, and eventually a move across the country to live and fish in Montana. The latter was the first of hundreds of shows, the impetus to co-host a heavy metal radio program in college, and the reason I own more CDs than I know what to do with.

Despite my long-held passions for both fishing and music, the two worlds always felt mutually exclusive until I recently walked into East Rosebud Fly & Tackle in Billings, Montana. There on the rack before me were the shop's logo t-shirts, each one a playful yet chilling angling homage to an Iron Maiden record cover featuring the band's legendary ghoulish mascot, Eddie.

The t-shirts are the brainchild of Richard Romersa, who opened East Rosebud in March 2009 after a couple decades of flyfishing around his hometown of Billings. A diehard heavy metal fan, Romersa likes to say that he sold his soul to AC/DC's Angus Young when he was 13 years old. "Going back to 1980, I'm a *Back in Black* generation guy," he says. "I've loved it ever since. It's who I am and that's why I incorporated it into my shop's personality." (East Rosebud's website proclaims: "For Those About to Fish, We Salute You.")

Since he opened, Romersa, with the help of a local artist, has put out a new Eddie shirt every year, riffing Maiden classics like "Killers," "Number of the Beast," and "The Trooper." Most recently, he created his shop's logo (which he's turned into a t-shirt as well): Angus Young doing his famous "spasm" move while holding a huge trout. "As a lifetime AC/DC fan, to be able to put the image into a flyfishing vein

and get the reactions I get," Romersa says. "I've pretty much peaked professionally."

But rather than just being a personal indulgence for Romersa, these shirts and logo define what his shop is (and isn't) and who he wants (or doesn't) as his customers. "The crusty fly shop, where you walk in and nobody greets you, nobody talks to you, and everybody thinks they are high and mighty, has been done," he says. "I'm not looking for that demographic."

Instead, Romersa believes his shop—characterized by its slogan "NO SNOBS"—fills a void for a lot of people who have been ignored by the same type of fly shop guys that used to overlook Romersa when he frequented shops as a beginning angler. "That's why these shirts are symbolic," Romersa says. "Because, until recently, AC/DC never got any respect from anyone other than their fan base."

Fittingly, East Rosebud and Romersa are developing a following all their own. One local angler was so taken with an Eddie design from one of the t-shirts that he decided to have the full-sized image tattooed on his forearm.

Another young customer told Romersa that the Angus t-shirt was going to be the perfect gift for his impossible-to-buy-for father. "The kid held up the shirt and told me, 'My dad's gonna shit himself when he sees this.'"

And while it's great to make people feel good, Romersa also knows that marketing his store and merchandise to people who appreciate being recognized makes good financial sense. "Fly shops are like tree houses," Romersa says. "And when people pick their club, that's where they spend their money."

So far, his business model appears to be working, considering that two other local fly shops have shuttered their doors since East Rosebud opened.

"I work very hard to make my fly shop successful," Romersa says. "But I'm still just a 14-year-old headbanger having fun." 🐟