

SMALL-STREAM BIOMECHANICS

FINE-TUNING YOUR **MICRO GAME**

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EARL HARPER / PHOTO

THE BRUTE WAS HOLDING IN A BARELY PERCEPTIBLE LIE AMONG THE COBBLES, FINNING OCCASIONALLY FOR BALANCE. WHILE WELL CAMOUFLAGED FROM ABOVE, HE SHOWED THE UNMISTAKABLE PROFILE OF A MATURE SPECIMEN: MASSIVE SHOULDERS, ENLARGED JAW, DEEP CRIMSON BELLY.

Holding my breath, I checked my backcast and threw at him from a crouch. He smashed the heavily dressed fly before I was even on top of my drift, and immediately tore off downstream with it, vaulting over two small waterfalls before I caught up and brought him to hand.

What sets this scenario apart from a typical storyline is that I was using a 2-weight rod, the water in question was flowing at about 9 cubic feet per second (cfs), and my trophy was a fantastically colored, 12-inch greenback cutthroat trout in Rocky Mountain National Park. To my mind, it doesn't get any better than this. In my education as a fly fisher, I've come to realize that learning to fish very small streams effectively not only carries over to bigger water, but is also a superb discipline unto itself. Structure and flow can be seen in miniature, stalking and presentation can be totally unforgiving, and food forms are not always obvious. The good news is that much of this resource goes ignored by the majority of fly anglers. Understanding the biological mechanics of tiny streams is a key to success, and there are three primary drivers: temperature, turbidity, and wind.

Large trout can thrive in tiny streams, particularly if they connect to a larger river downstream. At some times of the year, there is more food in smaller streams, and this is particularly true in late summer when terrestrials are an important food source.

