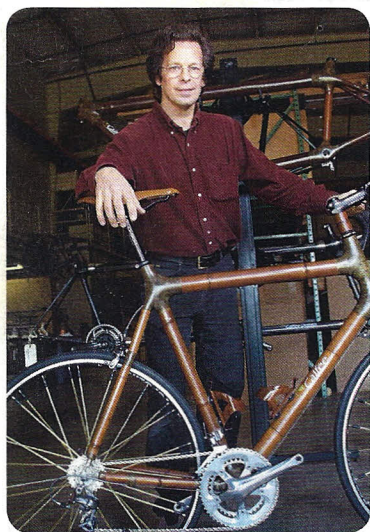


# Bamboosero

## Calfee's mission in Africa connects foreigners with local craftsmen



Craig Calfee has devoted an enormous amount of time, energy and money to create a sustainable micro-business for others in Africa. His vision? Africans building bicycle frames from native materials.

Since 1995, Calfee has been making high-end bikes out of bamboo in his facility near Santa Cruz, California. But these bikes sell for upwards of \$3,000, and Calfee yearns to see this technology used in the third world. This desire was inspired by the New England native's travels prior to starting his pioneering carbon bike business in 1987.

Following three years of art education in sculpture at Pratt Institute, Calfee hopped sailboats from Europe to Kenya and continued west across the width of Africa via trucks to Cameroon and via freighter to Brazil. These experiences in equatorial areas abundant in both bamboo and poverty led to a realization: bamboo grows in many places that have a tremendous need for the kind of affordability that bicycles can provide.

Calfee has been going to Ghana for a number of years, training groups of builders in the construction of heavy-duty bamboo bikes. Using inexpensive component packages from China and India, and reinforcing the rear wheels for carrying heavy loads by inserting bamboo strut spokes in between the steel spokes, these "bambooseros" have built a number of high-quality, practical bikes out of local frame materials and without electricity.

To expand on this model, Calfee created Bamboosero, Inc. to train builders licensed to use the Bamboosero name and to have their own Web page on bamboosero.com, thus preventing bamboo knockoffs by others not building to the same standards. Bamboosero directly connects people of means with small,

third world bicycle businesses. Foreign consumers can select a craftsman in Africa from the Web site to build them a bike, and Bamboosero offers a central clearinghouse for the builder to obtain materials like epoxy, bottom bracket shells, rear dropouts, cardboard boxes and components, as well as logistical support with international shipping.

Because of the unique shape of each bamboo tube and the fact that each joint is hand-wrapped, economies of scale to mass-produce these bicycles do not apply. This ensures that the businesses will remain in the hands of individual entrepreneurs working in their local communities and employing local labor and materials.

The multinational law firm Sonnenschein, Nath and Rosenthal, LLC has taken Bamboosero on as a pro bono client, offering services ranging from corporate formation to trademark and license agreements. Cyclists for Cultural Exchange and a number of individual donors have assisted with startup grants, but Calfee estimates that another \$80,000 needs to be raised to make the venture viable. Until bamboo becomes better understood to the point that Africans spend their hard-earned money to buy these bicycles, external markets need to be established to sustain the builders while they increase their efficiency. Calfee is sending a Bamboosero frame to EFB testing laboratories in Germany in hopes of certifying the material's quality. Already, foreign individuals and tour groups have been buying them, as have safari companies within Africa.

To find out more, visit [calfeedesign.com](http://calfeedesign.com).

— LENNARD ZINN

**VeloNews**  
The Journal of Competitive Cycling

February 2009

[www.Bamboosero.com](http://www.Bamboosero.com)