Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger was installed as Pope Benedict XVI on 24th April 2005 one year ago. He received, as symbols of his Petrine ministry, the Pallium, and the Ring of the Fisherman.
In his installation homily the Pope said this about the Ring of the Fisherman:

The second symbol used in today’s liturgy to express the inauguration of the Petrine Ministry is the presentation of the fisherman’s ring. Peter’s call to be a shepherd, which we heard in the Gospel, comes after the account of a miraculous catch of fish: after a night in which the disciples had let down their nets without success, they see the Risen Lord on the shore. He tells them to let down their nets once more, and the nets become so full that they can hardly pull them in; 153 large fish: and although there were so many, the net was not torn (Jn 21:11). This account, coming at the end of Jesus’ earthly journey with his disciples, corresponds to an account found at the beginning: there too, the disciples had caught nothing the entire night; there too, Jesus had invited Simon once more to put out into the deep. And Simon, who was not yet called Peter, gave the wonderful reply: Master, at your word I will let down the nets. And then came the conferral of his mission: Do not be afraid. Henceforth you will be catching men (Lk 5:1-11).

Gianni Giansanti

Pope Benedict’s distinctive ring is a unique and beautiful example of the art of a master goldsmith. The ring contains 35 grams of gold and the design is full of symbolism. This is how that very special ring was made.

In a narrow, atmospheric little street, tucked beside the Tiber and lined with the shops of a variety of artisans, a master goldsmith called Claudio Franchi has his workshop. Claudio, the vice-president of the Roman Association of Goldsmiths...
designed and made the ring of Pope Benedict XVI.

Claudio Franchi is heir to a family tradition of craftsmen working in precious metals. His family own the last of the old traditional workshops in the city. As well as learning his craft from his father, he has studied the history of art and the history of working with silver and gold. He has also followed a course in the history and conservation of objects made from precious metals.

Claudio studied under Professor Vittorio Casale at the University of Rome, and his studies have given him a historical, artistic and technical knowledge which has inspired him in the creation of the objects he makes in his workshop. He says:

The lectures of Professor Casale on the Sistine Chapel, on the rooms of Raphael, on the colour of the mannerists and on the technical and communicative abilities of the great artists of the Baroque helped me to enter the world and the spirit of
the great masters of art. I began to think of Michelangelo, Raphael, Bernini and Borromini, to name a few, not only as artists, but as craftsmen.

The prestigious commission to make the Ring of the Fisherman came unexpectedly last April. The assignment arrived on the 8th April, the day of the funeral of Pope John Paul II. Claudio Franchi had never before worked for the Vatican, and it was a great surprise. The Monsignor who contacted him had visited an exhibition in the Palazzo Venezia of treasures from the Steppes of Astrakan. Claudio Franchi had been in charge of the catalogue for that exhibition. The Monsignor knew of his professional qualifications but the determining factor was probably his role as the institutional representative of the Roman goldsmiths.

Claudio says:

The first step was to show examples of previous work, then to come up with two designs, one modern and one more classic and traditional. I sent to the Vatican one model in silver and one in wax, and all the sketches I made during the design process with an explanation of the symbols I had incorporated in the two objects. After four days I met the committee and was told that the modern design had been chosen

Franchi was told to begin work immediately on the chosen ring and to have it ready for Wednesday 20th April so the Pope could put it on to check the size and his name could be engraved on it. He worked all afternoon and all night. In the morning he went to the Vatican where he was admitted at the end of the mass the Pope was celebrating with the cardinals in the Sistine Chapel. It was an extremely intense atmosphere. At the end, when the cardinals had processed outside, he was shown into a room where the Pope was seated waiting for him.

It was with great emotion that I found myself in front of him, and when we had measured the ring and settled on the size 24, he said to me This number appeals to me, because it is double the quantity of the Apostles.
Claudio explained the symbolism he had used in the design of the rings to the Pope. He recalls him as timido but kind and gentle. The image on the ring is of St Peter casting his nets. The image is inspired by Baroque painting when papal patronage was strong. In the more modern ring this image is more of an impression. In the traditional ring it is more detailed.

The elliptical shape of the ring recalls Gian Lorenzo Berninis elegant elliptical piazza in front of the basilica and the colonnade. The circle of the ring is made from two stylised fish and on the underside, where the tails meet, the cross of the pallium is carved. The finishing technique chosen was sandblasting, because it allows details to be highlighted and gives a greater pictorial effect to the gold.

The Pope asked me to finish both the rings and I delivered them on the Saturday afternoon before the installation
ceremony. I was told that both were put on the tomb of Peter until the Pope decided which one to choose.

The rings were presented side by side in a golden case. Pope Benedict XVI finally chose the more classic ring as his pontifical seal, but the other will also always remain in the Vatican.
Gianni Giansanti

At the Installation, the Pope was presented with the ring, now alone in its presentation case, by Cardinal Angelo Sodano.
who succeeded Joseph Ratzinger as Dean of the College of Cardinals.

Gianni Giansanti

Claudio Franchi was present to see the Pope put the ring on his finger. It was a great moment for him.

The design and the detail of this Fishermans Ring are exquisite and the components for the prototype, including the sketches and the green wax mould for the image, are carefully preserved in Claudio Franchis archive.
Unlike recent popes, Benedict will wear his ring continually. The Fishermans Ring was previously used as a seal to mark official documents and the pontiffs wore their own Episcopal rings. Pope John Pauls ring was a simple cross shape engraved with an M for Mary. Benedicts Fishermans Ring is a large and heavy ring for such a small hand. Perhaps he removes it with something like relief in private, and someone must remind him not to leave it by the wash basin.