

How to create spots for

Trout carving

Fish carving expert, Tom Dean, shows you how to represent the spots and markings on a trout

Since I began to carve trout full-time for a living, I was continually trying to represent the scales or spots of a fish. How does one do that? There are many different ways to accomplish this, depending on the style and look you want to communicate to the viewer. Since I use exclusively exotic hardwoods for my fish, I had to experiment with different ways to accomplish this and as I do not paint my fish, I had to come up with an idea to represent those spots or markings in a creative and balanced way.

My solution was to drill holes into this beautiful wood that I had just carved and spent many an hour creating. Was it scary to start drilling into this beautiful carving I had just completed? The answer is a resounding yes! They say that one must fail in order to succeed

– I failed many times before getting it right!

The processes of creating spots or markings on a fish are actually quite simple. You have so many spots drilled onto the fish, one's eye cannot focus on any one spot. Sound simple? Let's go through the process from start to finish.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN GOODWIN

Smooth



1

Before I start drilling any holes or spots onto the fish, the fish must be completely sanded to the point where it is a completed carving. In other words, the fish must be where it's at if you were not going to place spots onto it (see **photo 1**).

I like to use sandpaper all the way up to 1,200 finishing grit, using a palm sander and/or my Guinevere sanding tool, and hand sanding; and then use 0000 steel wool to completely finish the sanding (see **photo 2**).



2

Drilling the spots



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I recommend starting at the nose of the fish and working back to the tail section. This way the spots will have the right composition when completed. If you go back and forth from one area to the next, your spots will not come out with a uniform compositional pattern.

I use a 1/4in shank cylinder drill bit placed onto a rotary powered carving tool to create these spots (see **main image**). The amount of

pressure you apply onto the drill bit directly determines the depth of the hole you drill. It's important to have a consistent amount of various sized holes – some holes that are small and some holes that are larger.

Starting at the nose, apply very little pressure to your drill bit to create small holes in and around the nostril and eye section (see **photos 3-4**). As you gradually work your way to the top of the fish, apply slightly larger holes (see **photo 5**). A key to applying these spots is to continually monitor and examine each and every hole you drill, and your progress to the tail section. There will be times in the application of the spots where you will see where to add another hole to make it look uniform – a space between holes if you will.

Some fish will have larger spots on the back with slightly smaller spots on the sides of the fish – a rainbow trout will sometimes have more spots on them than say a German brown trout which has



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larger, colourful spots on the sides of their bodies. Experiment with this process and trust with your eyes. You will know what looks good and what does not. Remember, these are stylised fish carvings.

Photo 6 shows the fish with its spots completely drilled.



5



6

→ Eyes



Don't forget to add the eyes – I use typical fish taxidermy eyes for my carvings. Mark out where the eyes should be positioned (see **photo 7**) and drill holes large enough to take the eyes (see **photo 8**). Position the glass eyes to make sure they fit (see **photo 9**), and secure them later once you have finished sanding the fish – if you fix the taxidermy eyes in prior to sanding, you will not be able to appropriately finish smoothing around the eye socket.



Finishing

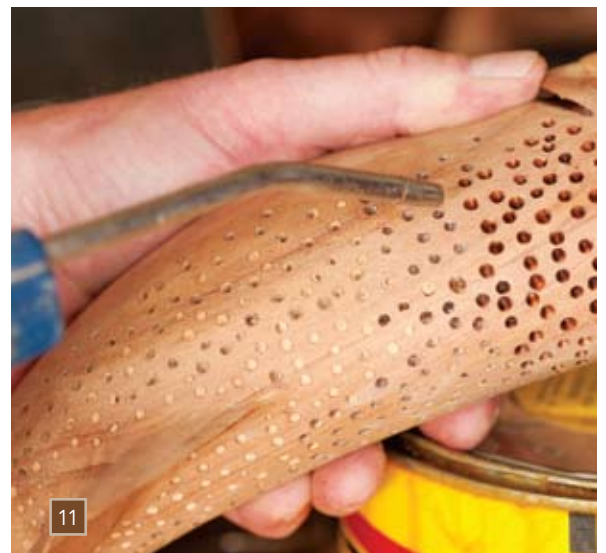
Once you have completed drilling all of your holes/spots upon the body of the fish, it is now time to re-sand those rough holes you've just drilled. My sanding tool of choice for this process is the Guinevere Sanding tool from King Arthur's Tools. This is a remarkable tool for sanding over these rough holes you just drilled. The 2in sanding drum contours perfectly with the body of the fish. I use the 320 grit sanding drum to start with. As I mentioned previously, I will use all the way up to 1,200 grit sandpaper using a palm sander and hand sanding and finish with 0000 steel wool (see **photo 10**).

Before applying your first coat of finish on your fish, it is important to use an air-compressor to blow off all remaining dust (see **photo 11**). I like to use virgin Tung oil, depending on the exotic wood. With every coat of finish you apply to your fish, use



an air-compressor to blow off any remaining finishing oil, and then wipe it dry with a clean cloth. I have learned the hard way that if you do not remove the finishing oil from within the holes you just drilled with an air-compressor, you will have excess oil in these holes.

And there you have your spots for you trout!▶



*If you have any questions about this process or others, contact Tom Dean.
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