



# Painting a Muskellunge

by Dan Rinehart



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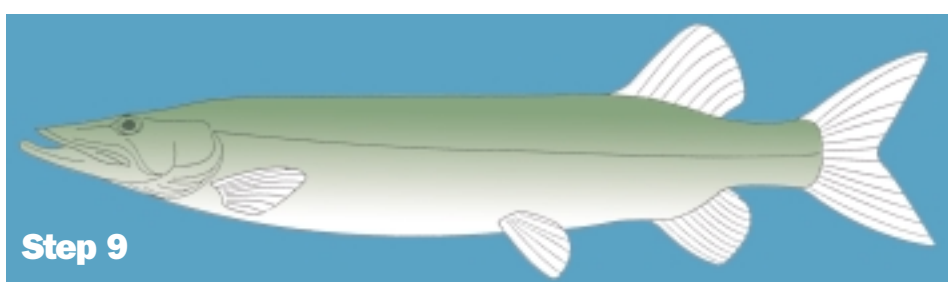
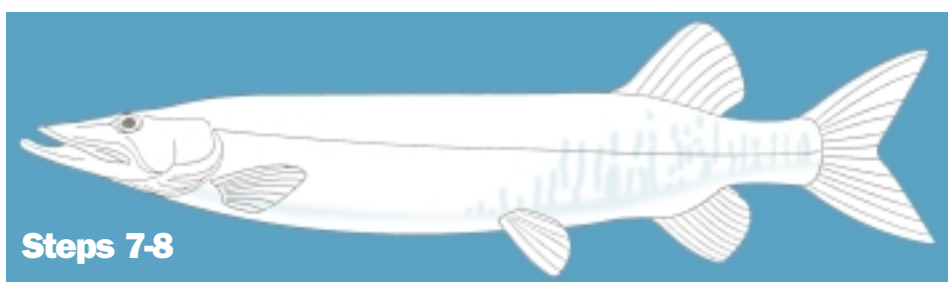
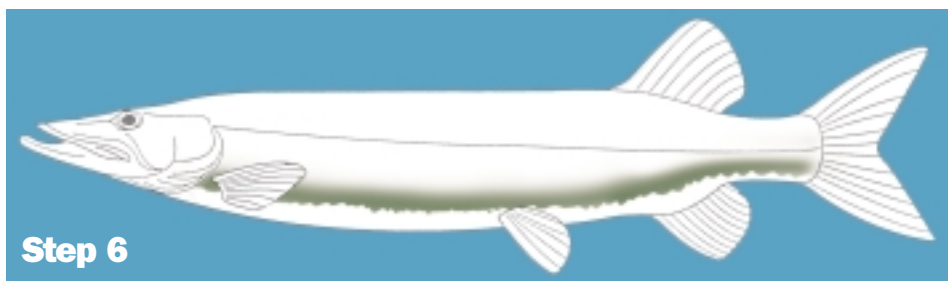
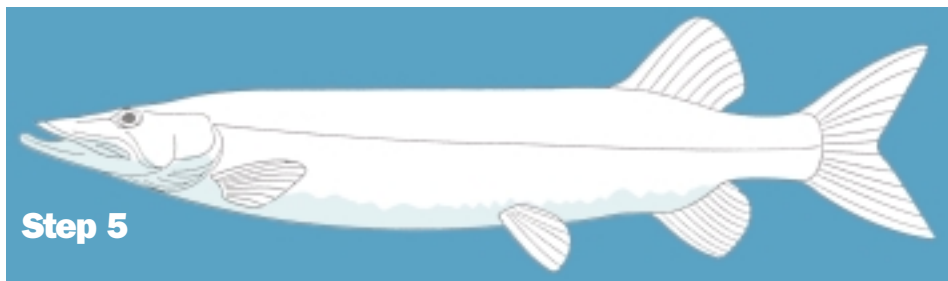
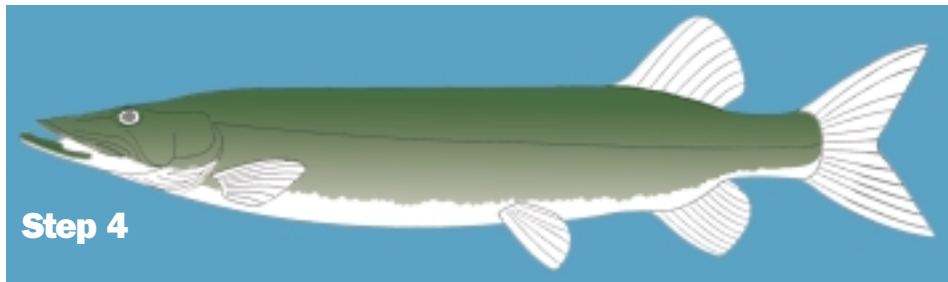
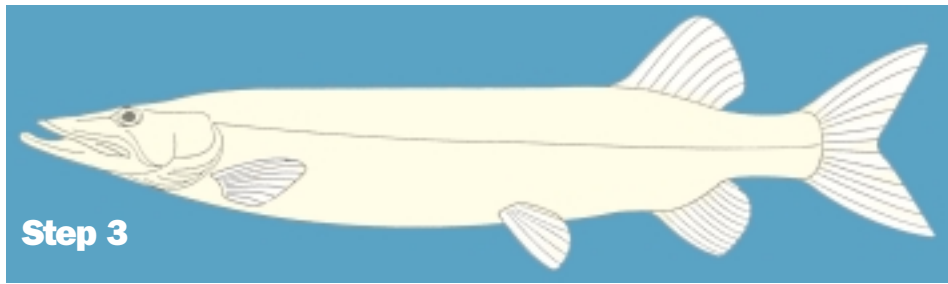
MUSKIE REFERENCE

**T**HE FOLLOWING IS A COLOR schedule I use to begin painting a muskie. I say “begin” because a painting schedule should only be used as a starting point. Fish colorations can vary from fish to fish. This muskie painting schedule, however, represents how I paint the coloration of an average natural muskie. This is *not* a paint schedule for a tiger muskie and should not be confused with a hybrid muskie. I will be using Lifetone paints throughout this article. Pick up an airbrush, set the air pressure at 35 PSI and get painting!

**Step 1: Pencil Repairing.** Muskies have an epidermal skin layer covering the surface of their scales. This layer is often broken and separated from the scales during the skinning and scraping procedures, causing damaged area to dry much lighter than the undamaged skin around it. The epidermal damage is extremely visible and must be touched up to match the natural color tones surrounding the damage. This blending is simply done by using a regular pencil to darken the epidermal damage, matching it with the darker surrounding skin tone. The pencil shading tends to be a little rough. To

soften the pencil shading, rub a fingertip back and forth over the penciled area. The result will be a soft look that matches the darker tone along the side.

**Step 2: Rich Brown and Jet Black.** All the lighter epoxie'd areas, such as around the eyes, must now be shaded to match the tone of the fish before the overall painting can begin. I start the shading by using Rich Brown to initiate the darkening. Next, fade a little Jet Black over the same areas that the Rich Brown was applied. All epoxie'd areas should now match the surrounding darker skin tones. Obviously, lighter



areas, such as the belly, naturally match the lighter tone of the epoxy and shading is not necessary.

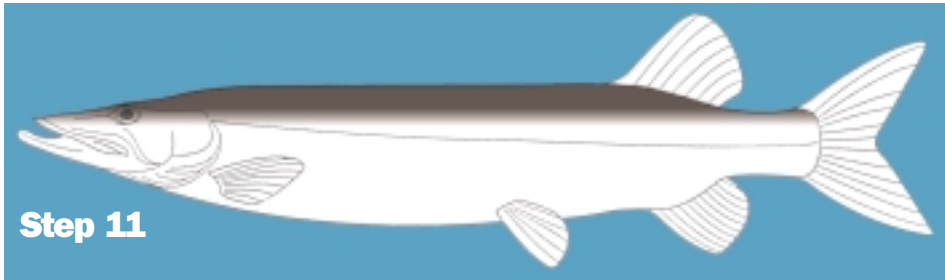
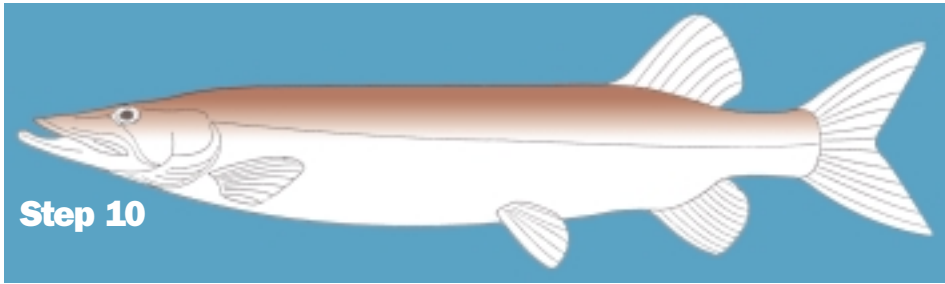
**Step 3: Golden Sparkle.** Everyone has his or her own theory on fish painting and coloration-layering. I believe that all fish have some sort of metallic base-toning. Some fish are silver metallic while others are golden sparkle. A natural muskie has a golden base tone so I apply a medium coat of Golden Sparkle to the entire side of the fish body and head. Golden Sparkle should be applied evenly throughout the sides to a medium coverage. Apply enough Golden Sparkle to create a shimmer without eliminating the natural scale textures and bar patterning. A light coat of Golden Sparkle should be applied to all fins to create a slight shimmer.

**Step 4: Transparent Medium Green.** Once the shimmer of the Golden Sparkle has been applied, a transparent color is applied along the sides to achieve a natural fish coloration. Muskies vary in coloration, however, most muskies I paint include a Transparent Medium Green color along the sides. Apply an even coat of Transparent Medium Green to the body and head in the same manner as the Golden Sparkle was applied in the previous step. The only difference is that I stop the coat a half-inch above the side-belly transition. The green of the sides and the white of the belly *do not* smoothly blend together. Instead, a muskie has a very defined edge between the green side and white belly.

**Step 5: Pure White.** Apply an even coat of Pure White over the belly, gullet, inner mouth, maxillary slot and lower brachial rays. Similar to the Transparent Green in the previous step, the Pure White should end a half-inch below the belly/side juncture. Again, we want the belly transition of a muskie to be sharp. Bring the green of the sides together with the white of the belly and side bars.

**Step 6: Transparent Medium Green.** Adjust the airbrush to a low spray and color the unpainted edge along the belly. *Do not* overspray onto the white belly. The Transparent Medium Green that you apply along the belly transition should match the tone of the sides (not darker, not lighter).

**Step 7: Pure White Belly.** In the previous step I brought the green down to the belly juncture. Now I will complete the belly transition by bringing the white of the belly up to the green edges of the sides. Again, adjust your airbrush to a low spray and paint the Belly White up to the green edge. The belly juncture is now complete. Now the bar pattern of a muskie must be re-created.



**Step 8: Pure White Belly.** The side bars of a muskie will vary as to size, quantity, and intensity of bars along the side. Some muskies will not have any bars along their sides, while others will have bars along the entire sides. A native muskie has pure white, not silver, bars. It is a hybrid tiger muskie that has silver bars, *not* a native muskie (do not get them confused). The pure white bars are always most intense along the belly and decrease in intensity as they continue toward the top of the back. Locate the bars of the fish (you should be able to see them along the sides). Adjust the airbrush to a fine spray and bring the white of the belly up through each individual bar. The white of each bar will be most intense at the belly and progressively decrease as the bar extends up toward the back. Continue using pure white to enhance all bars until complete.

**Step 9: Transparent Medium Green.** Once the pure white bars are re-created, you will probably notice that they seem a little harsh and separate from the greenish side. To blend the white side bars with the green, I apply an even coat of Transparent Medium Green over the *entire* side of the fish. The Transparent Medium Green is applied similar to where the Golden Sparkle was applied back in Step 3 (full head and body). A slight bit of green over-spray is also desirable along the belly transition (it will slightly soften this area as well).

**Step 10: Rich Brown.** Begin to shade and darken along the back with Rich Brown. Fade Rich Brown an eighth along the back (full head to tail) and down the sides of the fish. This will darken the back and begin to fade the bars that extend up the back.

**Step 11: Jet Black.** Fade Jet Black along

the back, a sixteenth down the side, but not as far down as the Rich Brown. This will finish the darkening of the back as well as the overall coloration of the sides.

**Step 12: Gill Red.** Paint all fins and gills with a heavy coat of Gill Red. This will re-create the reddish fins of a muskie, however, the red will be a little too intense on the fins.

**Step 13: Transparent Medium Green.** Soften and darken the reddish fins with Transparent Medium Green and apply an even coat over *all* the fins. Apply the green until you see the red darken a bit and take on a richer red tone.

**Step 14: Jet Black.** Use Jet Black to darken the lead edges of the pectoral, ventral, and anal fins. Also darken the top and bottom edges of the caudal fin.

**Step 15: Golden Sparkle.** Create an overall golden shimmer. Apply a light coat of Golden Sparkle over the *entire* fish (head, body, fins). This coat is designed to create a slight overall shimmer so be light!

*DAN RINEHART is a taxidermist and instructor from Janesville, Wisconsin, and is currently offering weekend mini-courses in fish and deer taxidermy in his personal taxidermy studio. Dan also performs wholesale fish taxidermy for taxidermists throughout the United States. If you would like information about the weekend mini-courses or wholesale fish taxidermy, Dan can be contacted at Rinehart Taxidermy, 410 South Randall Avenue, Janesville, WI 53545, telephone (608) 754-9804.*