

Carving a Brook Trout

Use a combination of hand and power tools to shape this realistic fish

By Charles Weiss

Brook trout are colorful fish that attract and inspire artists and anglers alike. They are distinguished by red spots with blue halos and a scattering of small yellowish-white spots. Brook trout also have dark wavy lines (vermiculations) on the back and dorsal fin, and red lower fins with white leading edges. Males at spawning time often have reddish-orange lower sides with a black bottom edge highlight.

Brook trout are native to northeastern North America from Georgia to the Arctic Circle and have been introduced widely around the world. A giant brook trout with the world record weight of 14½ lbs. was caught from the Nipigon River in Ontario, Canada, in 1915. Today, 5-lb. fish are considered trophy class.

I drew the pattern from photographs of brook trout I've caught, and I focused on accurate proportions and shape. The inspiration for this project was a fish caught and released from a lake in Nova Scotia, Canada. It represents a medium-sized trout with a variety of vibrant colors that remind me of beautiful autumn leaves.

Getting Started

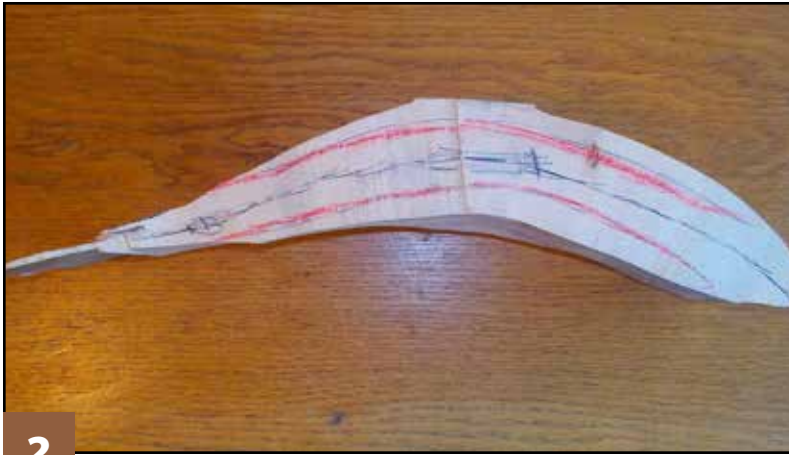
Transfer the top view pattern to the blank. Note the gentle curve that implies the fish is swimming. The widest part of the body is 2" (51mm) thick. Use the curving shape of the pattern to avoid knots. Mark the notch for the tail fin; it is ½" (13mm) deep and ¼" (6mm) wide. Then, draw the side view. Cut the top view, including the notch for the tail (I use a handheld jigsaw).

FISH: CARVING THE TROUT



1

Cut the two tail fin pieces to shape. Glue them together, and then glue them into the notch in the body. Wrap rubber bands around the tail fin to hold it in place while the glue dries.



2 **Cut the side view.** I clamp the body in a vise and use a handheld jigsaw, but you could also use a band saw. Draw a centerline onto the top of the body. Then, draw the two red lines showing where to cut away the sharp corners to create the round body shape on the top and bottom.



3 **Round the body.** Use a coarse rasp. Then, use the same tool to begin shaping the head.



4 **Carve the gill cover lines.** Use a small bit in the rotary power carver. Use the same tool to remove $\frac{1}{8}$ " (3mm) from the bottom jaw so the upper jaw overlaps. The back edge of the gill cover is shaped to be slightly raised above the body.



5 **Drill holes for the pectoral fins.** Use a hand drill with a $\frac{1}{8}$ " (3mm)-diameter bit. Drill holes as close together as possible to create a $\frac{1}{8}$ " (3mm)-deep slot about $\frac{1}{2}$ " (13mm) long. Clean up the slot with a sharp chisel. Use the same process to create a $\frac{1}{8}$ " (3mm)-deep by 2" (51mm)-long slot for the dorsal fin.

FISH: DETAILING THE TROUT



6 **Create the individual fin rays.** Grind them to shape with a rotary power carver.



7 **Shape, round, and sand the body.** Add the head details. Remove $\frac{1}{8}$ " (3mm) of wood from around the eye. Refine the rest of the head gill covers. Then, glue the fins in place.

FISH: PAINTING THE TROUT



8

Seal the carving with white shellac. Then, use a medium-sized hog bristle brush to apply several coats of gesso as a primer. Buff the primer with 500-grit sandpaper to remove any imperfections. Use a gray colored pencil to draw the crosshatched scale pattern on the body. *Note: There are no scales on the sides and top of the head.* Then, seal the scale area with a water-based clear finish.



9

Paint the sides and top of the fish body and the fins. Use a #10 bristle brush to mix equal parts Hooker's green and Naples yellow. Leave the front edges of the fins and the eyes white.



10

Thin iridescent bright gold with water to create a wash. Use the #10 brush to apply the wash across the body, back, and eyes.



11

Mix cadmium red, orange, and yellow. Apply this mixture to the lower fins and upper belly with the medium-sized brush. Thin the mixture heavily with water and apply it to the dorsal, adipose, and tail fins.



12

Thin Hansa yellow to a wash. Use a small round blending brush to apply it along the middle and upper body.



13

Mix raw umber with black. Use a fine brush to paint the edges of the details on the head and the pupils, leaving a slight gold ring around each pupil. Paint a line behind the white front edges of each of the lower fins. Add a lot of wavy lines across the dorsal and tail fins. Use a thinner wash of the same color in a series of blotches over the back and on the lower fins.



14 **Paint a black outline around each eye.** Use a fine brush. Then, paint the inside of the mouth black.



15 **Add dots of cerulean blue along the middle of the body.** Use a fine brush.

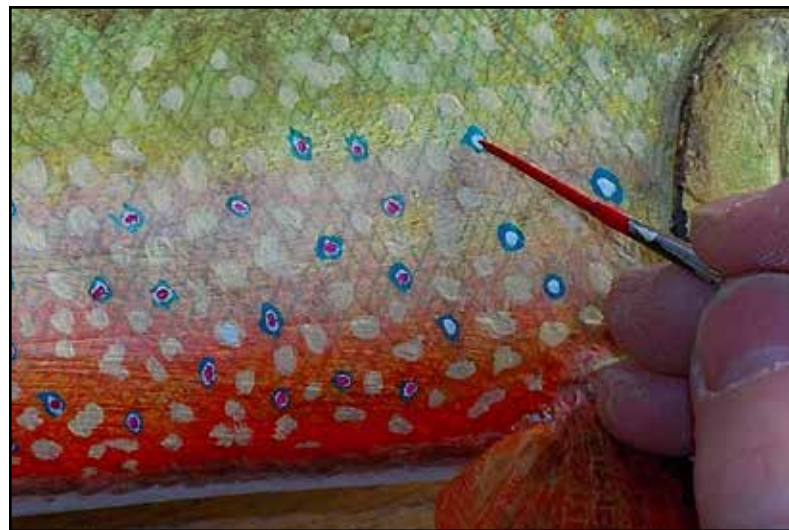


16 **Make a mixture of titanium white, Naples yellow, and yellow ochre.** Use a fine brush to paint scattered small spots along the body.

TIP

APPLYING THE COLOR

I use fast-drying water-based acrylic paint for this carving. The bright and contrasting hues are progressively hand brushed and mixed on a palette and thinned with water. With this colorful fish it's a great opportunity to use your "artistic license."



17 **Add a titanium white center to the blue spots.** Use a fine brush. Then, use cadmium red to add a tiny dot in the center of the white.



18 **Mix yellow ochre, Hooker's green, and raw umber together.** Use a #1 fine brush and the mixture to add wavy marks on the back of the trout. When the paint is dry, seal it with glossy polyurethane and let it dry. Add a hanger to the balance point on the back of the carving to display it on a wall. You could also use a natural driftwood base or create a river or lake scene.

materials & tools

MATERIALS:

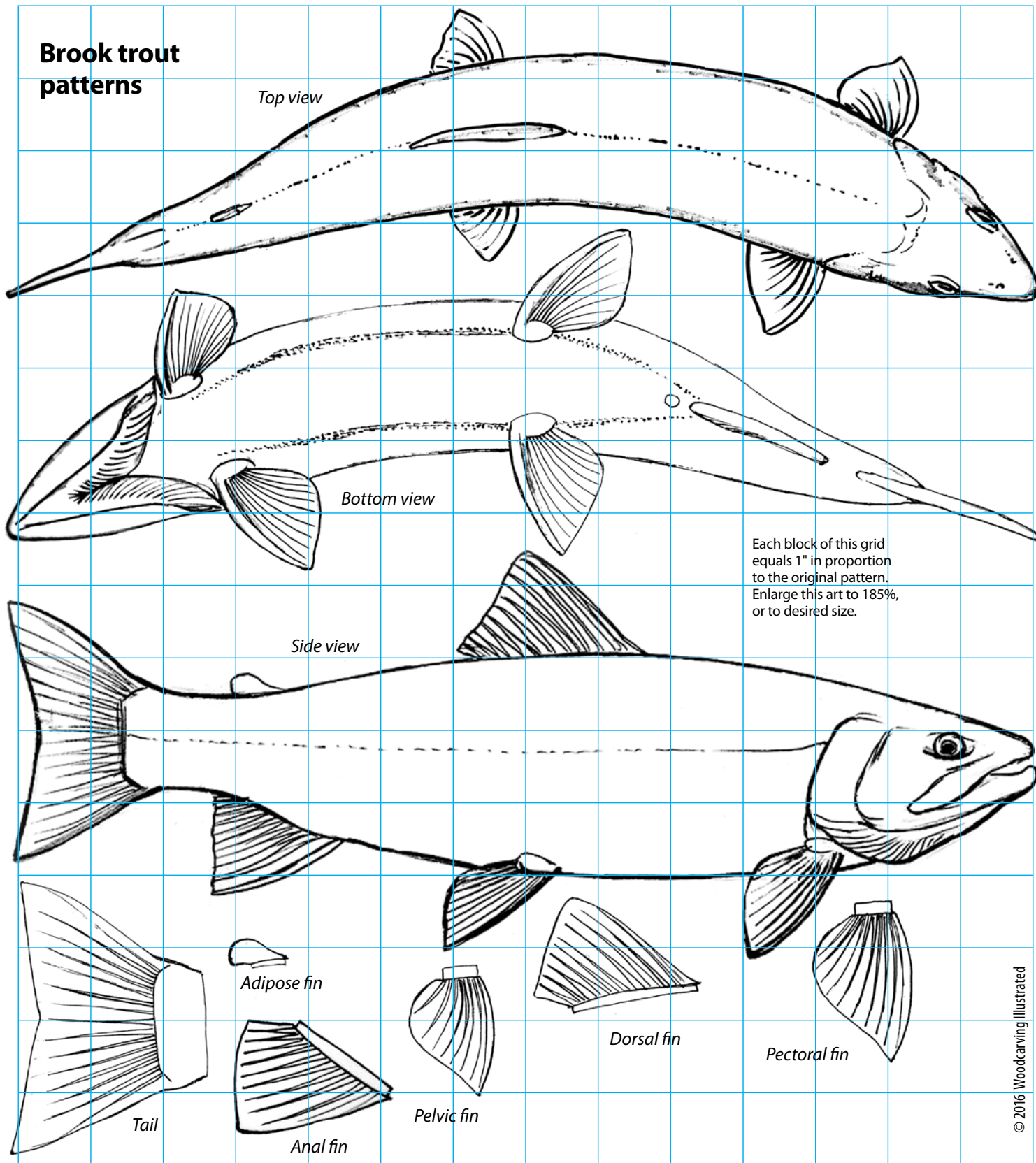
- White pine, 3½" (89mm) square: fish body, 14" (356mm) long
- White pine, ¼" (6mm) thick: tail, 4" x 4" (102mm x 102mm)
- White pine: fins, assorted scraps
- Wood glue
- Rubber bands
- Shellac: white
- Gesso
- Colored pencil: gray
- Finish, water-based: clear
- Acrylic paint: Hooker's green, Naples yellow, iridescent bright gold, cadmium red, orange, yellow, Hansa yellow, raw umber, black, cerulean blue, titanium white, yellow ochre

TOOLS:

- Saw: jig or band
- Hand rasp: coarse
- Hand drill with bits: ⅛" (3mm) dia.
- Rotary tool with assorted bits
- Chisel
- Paintbrushes: medium-sided hog bristle, #10 bristle, small round blending, #1 fine

The author used these products for the project. Substitute your choice of brands, tools, and materials as desired.

Brook trout patterns



Each block of this grid equals 1" in proportion to the original pattern. Enlarge this art to 185%, or to desired size.

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Charles Weiss is a professional artist from Toronto, Ont., Canada. You can learn more about Charles and view more of his artwork at charlesweissart.com.