

Insect Inlays

Terry Henson



The bug inlays are tough, but it can be done neatly.

First of all, the bug. Get a bug that is fairly fresh and use alcohol to preserve the fly or bug for the inlay. For me, I like to get the bug the day I do the inlay. That way, the bug is pliable and easy to work with and maintains its true color.

As for the material, buffalo horn and wood works best. It is really hard to see where the bug starts and starts in buffalo horn and wood. Ivory works, but light colored materials are harder to work with because they show imperfections.

For me, I like to rough out a handle and get it close to the shape and size I want it. I will have a wood or buffalo horn ring on the rod, usually 1 inch wide to 2 inches wide for bigger bugs like stonefly nymphs.

Using a dremel with a sanding barrel, I level out a spot on the rod in the horn or wood where I want to do the inlay. Sand this area smooth and flat.

Take the fly out of the alcohol and place him in the level spot (allow fly to dry). Take a straight piece of wood and stand it on edge. Span the level spot of the rod on the handle for the inlay and make sure there is ample room for epoxy above the fly.

Tack the fly down and pose him with permagloss or similar epoxy product. Once the fly is in position, take molding clay and make a mold around the area to prevent epoxy from running out of the area.

Once the area is molded, then pour a small amount of epoxy (Is supreme is my favorite for this) and watch it closely for any bubbles. Dig out bubbles with a needle that usually appear from under the bug and flame it a time or two to get out all the bubbles. Once this dries, repeat it again until it is done. Once the epoxy is up level or above the handle, then allow it to dry for a minimum of one week, perhaps two weeks.

Using a belt sander, shape the epoxy to match the handle shape and smooth it out to 1500 grit, feathering the epoxy to the surrounding materials.

Now you can do one of two things. Put a thin coat of bubble free epoxy over the area and let it dry for a week for a beautiful finish. OR, you could allow the epoxy to cure for 3 months and buff it to a satin finish. Both work well. In the photos on the web, the streamer with the red throat in the buffalo horn was buffed. The stonefly was coated to finish the inlay. Both work well and look good.

Hope this helps....

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A few pointers.

Allow the specimen to dry for an hour before you place in the epoxy.

Go slowly, a few bubbles will ruin the project.

Fresh specimens maintain their color and look really nice.

Good luck

Terry