

# Marbling Techniques *By Randy Parpart*

I don't see any limitations to marble. I have done butt wraps; bait casting reels, a spinning reel, guide wraps, grooves in cork foregrips, the area under double foot guides, and graphite reel seats. I've put waterslide decals on top of marble and also inlaid feathers on it. The possibilities go on and on here.

On the craft end of it, marbling is in its infancy. I've done the bases of swing-arm lamps, ink pens, and electrical light switch and plug-in covers (with plans to do more objects soon).

To begin doing this, I'd recommend buying some different colors of pigments from your local hardware store. You could also try some TAP plastics' pigments from [TAP Premium Pigments](#). I have used some of them; the blue, green, and the purple are very 'flat' with little brilliance. The red is very bright and shiny, though.



To buy pigments locally, buy some empty bottles with yorker caps or some way of putting one drop at a time so you can count the number of drops that you use each time so that you can duplicate the mixture. Note: Not all stores that sell house paint will sell the pigments to you; smaller towns with these mom and pop style stores are the best places to get this stuff. Maybe use a toothpick to drip it off from or buy some dropper bottles.

In paint pigments at the old local hardware store, I was able to get a green, 2 reds, purple, blue, black, white, & 2 yellows (now these are pigments, not paint). I'd recommend getting some Testor's model paint (enamel) in white, black, silver, & gold. I got these at Wal-Mart. I believe that's about all that you'll need to get started for pigments. For tools, some toothpicks and 2-part high build rod finish are all that's necessary. Pour off nearly all of the solvent in the Testor's paints. The color will be more brilliant or lustrous, then. There will always be a bit of solvent left in the Testor's, though, so always stir thoroughly before using. Also see [Testors website](#).

About the rod finish: I'd recommend using high build type of 2-part rod finish, preferably one that sets up more quickly (finishes such as LS Supreme High Build & Aftcote require a bit of sitting because the pot life is longer). You'll need to experiment with the finish you choose. If it isn't working well, it could be that a different brand of finish will help you out (it could also be the pigment or that you're putting an incorrect amount of pigment in).

Both of the following are GREAT epoxie



for general rod building.



Fast setting (top two) vs. slow setting epoxy rod finishes. Marbling requires fast setting epoxies for consistency.

Marbling sticks pretty well to properly prepared surfaces but 2-part rod finish isn't an adhesive. It just has some adhesive qualities to it. Maybe read Ralph O'Quinn's articles in the "LIBRARY" on these blank preparation subjects. This fantastic article can be viewed here: [Surface Preparation](#)

You need the primary or base coat with the pigment added to not be "runny" before you start to add the secondary color or colors. Or mix the base color first, put it on the rod, rotate it and allow a bit of time so it is set up a bit more before starting to add colors. Not stiff, but getting towards that spectrum. Start with a scrap blank and practice first would be my recommendation. If the finish is too runny, when you marble or swirl, the two contrasting colors will combine to form a lighter color of the darkest color (blue and white become light blue, red and white become pink). This doesn't look very good...

Let's just say that we're going to do a blue and white marble with some gold accents and start with that.

I mask off the blank at the top of where I want my butt wrap to end but I make sure and use a burnishing tool so that the tape is on real good (so the finish doesn't work under it). Scotch tape works best for this in my opinion (IMO) and INK PENS are a wonderful thing to practice on!! If the epoxy does work itself under the Scotch tape, just let it harden and remove it carefully with your fingernail later. Sometimes what I like to do is start with about 1/8" or 1/4" of white just above the winding check to offset or contrast the blue marble.

I use 4" X 4" heavy paper cards very similar to a cereal box in stiffness (cardboard would work fine here, too) to mix all of this on. I mix up plenty of finish so that I don't run out. It will come with more experience just how

much to mix up. Even now, I always mix more than I think I'll need and save some finish without pigments in it for the times where a mistake is made and more of one color, or another, different color, is needed.

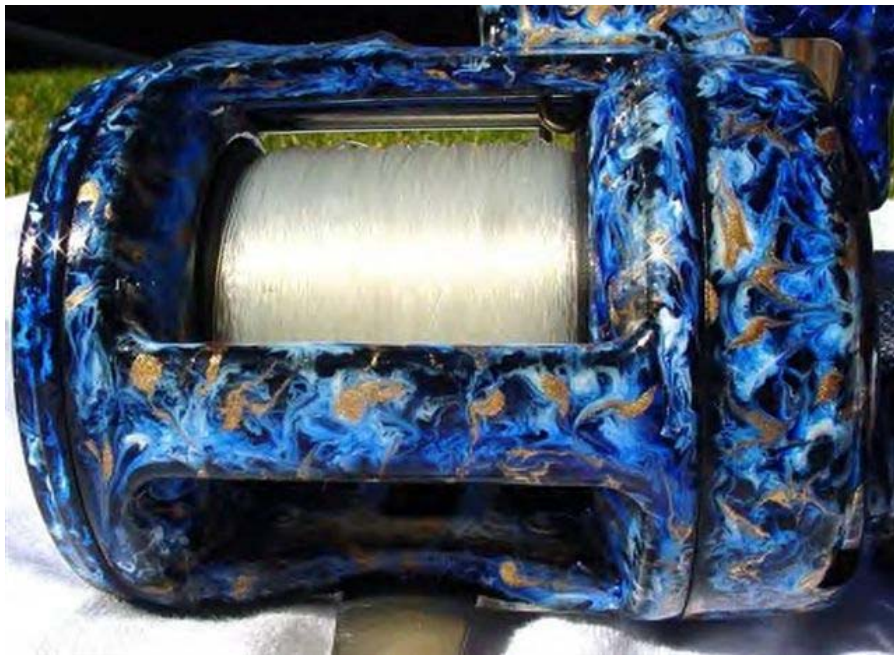
I mix this high build finish up all at once and then pour it onto the cards in puddles. The base coat will need more finish, so I make that puddle largest. Tin foil likes to tear too much for me and the heavy paper card is stiffer and I can hold the side of the card near the rod with one hand while I'm using out of it with my other hand and the toothpick or dental pick. Make the other puddles large enough to handle the amount of marbling that you plan to do on top of the base coat.

Now, I mix some drops of blue into the largest puddle of finish for the base color coat. I started with one drop at a time and mixed it up good. As experience was gained, I learned quickly how many drops of each pigment were needed for this to come out right. But at first, I always did one drop at a time until this experience was gained. **Note:** If I want to start with a lighter shade of blue, I'll mix in a few drops of white with the blue, also. This mixing should be done off to the side, not in the finish, so mistakes don't ruin the finish. Then the correct shade can be added to the puddle of epoxy finish one drop at a time.

If it looks thin or if there are swirl lines in it after mixing, I add another drop until the mixture appears smooth and creamy or the swirl marks disappear after it's thoroughly mixed. This is how I know I've mixed the correct amount into the epoxy rod finish. I then do the same with the white and the gold. I think most people having any trouble with this are putting too much pigment (or paint??) in. You just want it so the color is the same throughout the mixture (no areas left with the clear finish look to it or swirls of finish). **Note:** Some colors, especially Testor's white, need to be mixed in very quickly after putting a drop or so onto the rod finish. It can start to dry on top of the finish and will turn out "flaky".

I can place the rod in a slower turning winding or drying machine while marbling is done (mine is a 2 RPM motor), in a faster RPM one (but foot-operated so that it can be stopped and started), or I can just turn it by hand and put it in a dryer/rotator later. I've done it all of these ways. I use my rod drying motor now, but it is a very slow 2 RPM motor out of an old humidifier.

I sometimes start by applying the 1/8" to 1/4" of white above the winding check to get a nice contrast with the winding check and cork or EVA grip (and also the blue marble job). Toothpicks work great for this. Maybe have several toothpicks laid out at this point. Next, I just use my finger and put the blue on the rest of the area.



Brushes or spatulas can be used; don't use the brush with a stroking motion, use it above the rod and let the finish flow onto the rod.

**NOTE:** Some people are sensitive to things in rod finish, so I suggest using a latex or vinyl glove to be on the safe side. The thicker I put it on, the darker blue the color will be after marbling in the white. A thinner coat will get it to a lighter shade of blue marble easier.

How much white I add to the blue with a toothpick is a judgment call; again, experience and experimentation are real important. I can add just a bit and match a royal blue color on

the guides or add more of the white and match lighter shades of blue guide wraps. I add this in a swirling motion with a dental pick. When using a toothpick, I have to be more careful how much white is brought to the blue base coat. Too much can be brought up very easily with the relatively blunt end of a toothpick. The sharper end of the dental pick makes this job a bit easier for me, but then I always like the easiest way to do things!! Usually, it's also the best way...

I really want to stress this, so again, the sharper the object or instrument used, the smaller an amount of a color will be brought up to the rod. I use different dental picks that have thin ends and blunt ends to varying degrees.

Back to the white being marbled in: The white I've swirled in can also be drug with the dental pick in different directions or blue can be drug through it. Experiment with these things; I often combine these techniques in every marble that I do. I do this a lot when marbling small reel parts and in nooks and crannies of reels. How long the blue was mixed up (how "stiff" the blue mixture is) will determine how much the two colors mix and blend. The brand of finish used and the brand of pigment affects this a lot, also.

If it's real stiff, the white will stand out and not mix in as well and contrast. Each effect is equally beautiful; there really isn't a wrong way to do this, just so the base coat isn't TOO stiff. It won't self-level if it's too stiff and set up. Just keep dipping into the white and adding to different areas and swirling it for the marble effect (sometimes, a bit later, I just add some pure white here and there just to get a good contrast-this is done after the finish is getting stiff so the white doesn't flow into it for that contrast in color again. I have also found that the hardware store white (titanium) pigment will do this even when the finish is fairly fresh-it just stays right where it's put-no blending occurs at all). But it needs to be put on top of finish that is still flow able enough that it still self-levels. Anyhow, I add the white a bit at a time and swirl it around with the toothpick (or just lay it on top of the blue- without swirling it very much- in patterns for the stark contrast).

If I want to lighten the blue color up or create more blending than has occurred, I add some heat while it's turning and this will get the job done for me. I do this with a Bic-style lighter and keep the flame moving to the SIDE of the rod, never underneath of it!! If I want to keep it the darker blue with just the marbled effect, I don't add heat. I don't do this very much, but when you practice your first few marbles, add some heat (to varying amounts) and notice the effect it gives. Pretty awesome!! But if you keep adding heat or use too much heat, the colors tend to run together, so experiment with the heat, also.

Now is the time to experiment and get to know the different effects-before you're on an important rod with sweat beads breaking out on your forehead because you're nervous about it. LOL!!

Next, I'll add the gold and just "drag" the edges here and there into the swirled area. Also, I might drag some of the blue/white mixture into the gold area. I haven't had much luck swirling (marbling) the gold in until lately. The thinnest of the dental picks seems to do a better job, now. I also like to add it on top for an accent. You could pop up some of my pictures on fishingphotos.org's website; [my gallery is here](#) . I do have ones with this exact color posted.

If you want to see any of these and can't figure out how, email me, I'll help [putter@dia.net](mailto:putter@dia.net) . You'll want to practice this, especially on the gold, but it's easy and beautiful.

When you've done one or two, you'll be ready to do a rod. With the gold, mix it up later than the other colors. The finish that you put it onto should be getting a bit stiffer than when first mixed up and the gold's mixture should be fairly fresh. The gold should be mixed and added just until the mixture is smooth and creamy on the top; no more, no less. The gold tends to sink into the marble and disappears frequently when I use it if the mixtures are fairly fresh and not setting up to some degree.

After the rod has been spinning for a while and my finish has started to set up, I remove the Scotch tape brand masking tape slowly & carefully and the edge of the marble will round itself off to blend in with the blank. After it has dried, always put a second coat of finish over the top-this doesn't have to be high build, but that's what I



use. High build will protect it from everything, even fading to a degree; it's better than a regular or lite build finish because it can be put on in a thicker layer.

You can also experiment with something wider than a toothpick for different results. I'm sure we'll all come up with new ideas that create interesting adaptations to this. If you do, I'd love to hear back. Marbling is very, very beautiful on custom fishing rods and in the area of the crafts, also. This is all about sharing information, so pass it on!!

Also, in response to some past posts on [rodbuilding.org](http://rodbuilding.org)'s website, the only way that the marble finish could get rubbery is with way too much pigment with too much solvent (paint) in it IMO (or when using acrylic pigments and paints). Again, paint can be used if careful with the amount, but pigments are brighter IMO.

Randy 'Putter' Parpart