



# Color Matters

Troy A. Buzalsky

**W**e all know that, in reality, size does matter. When fishing gin-clear water you might try a small bait and a stealth approach in an attempt to not spook the elusive prey you're targeting. On the flip-

side, when water is high and colored, you might dig deep into the tackle box and dress out a jumbo Spin-N-Glo with an oversized glob of eggs in an attempt to trigger a strike. So, yes indeed, size does matter!

There is also considerable research surrounding sound, vibration, and hydro-sonic frequencies, all of which play into a bait or lure's effectiveness. Again, based on the water's condition, running a plug with a rattle may be a benefit, or problematic, depending on the situation.

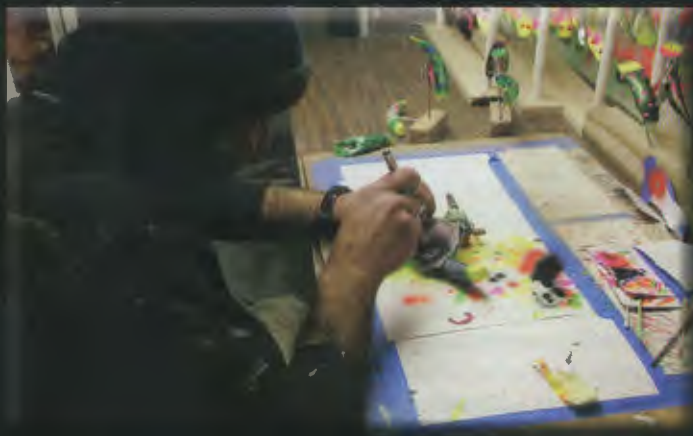
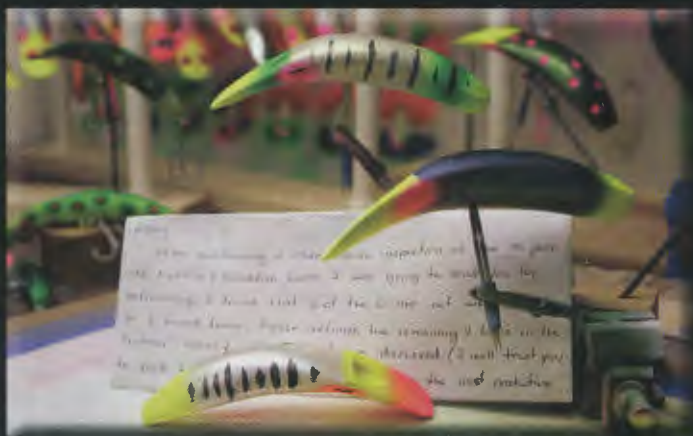
But take a walk down any tackle shop and it will become painfully obvious that color is a huge variable in the tackle industry, and believe it or not, bait and lure

color are oftentimes the most important single element in successful fishing. Most fishermen use a particular color because it has worked for them in the past, or because they saw the boat next to them hook-up so they change

out their offering to match their neighbor's selection. That's a pretty good reason, but it doesn't mean that color is the best color for the given circumstances. There could be better colors staring you in the face, but you don't try them because they haven't been proven to you, and let's face it, confidence also matters.

Retired Gulf War Veteran Larry LaRue is taking the art and craft of color management to an entirely new level when it comes to not only lure selection, but also creating custom-colored lures.

*"I use my fishing hobby and my custom-lure making as a way to find internal peace," shares LaRue, who suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).*





*Larry painted his new sled a vivid candy purple and airbrushed (no stickers or vinyl here) Wile E. Coyote and the Road Runner.*

suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Larry's military career started 24 years ago, spending the first 18 years with the U.S. Marines in Special Operations. Once retired from the Marines, Larry re-enlisted with the U.S. Army, where his last assignment found him face-to-face with enemy Iraqi troops. Larry served for a year and a half in Iraq as a heavy-truck master mechanic, up until his retirement September 19, 2004.

"We followed the first troops in, and kept the equipment running," Larry remembers days of endless battles; moving the front line forward, taking on enemy gunfire, losing friends in battle, and capturing prisoners. Larry's proud of his military service, but now focuses all his energy on being a better fisherman.

When Larry retired from the military he literally drove to Steven's

***"As Larry's spinner-building skills were perfected, he still felt there was more to learn, and more to apply when building spinners, so he started studying paint schemes and painting his own blades."***

Marine and ordered his brand-new Alumaweld Stryker, unpainted. Larry then designed one of the most custom paint jobs an aluminum sled has ever been finished in, painting it a vivid candy purple and airbrushed (no

stickers or vinyl here) with Wile E. Coyotes and the Road Runner. If you have ever seen Larry's boat, you would remember it.

Having a stand-out boat that draws a look or two is nice, Larry admits, but what trips-his-trigger is educating himself on lure color, and how to make ordinary spinners and plugs, extraordinary.

"I started building spinners a few years back," Larry explains. "I would be fishing with friends and they would be fanatical about which color spinner we were using. A rainbow blade, a pink tip, hammered copper...there was always a theory on the boat, and we caught fish, so we were doing something right."

As Larry's spinner-building skills were perfected, he still felt there was more to learn, and more to apply when building spinners, so he started studying paint schemes and painting his own blades.

"I bought an airbrush and just started experimenting," shares Larry.

Before long, Larry was designing and painting mind-blowing blades, using special paints and finishes that were truly one-of-a-kind. "I started using iridescent and neon paints, painting my own patterns, and trying to create special finishes and effects," he says.

Larry became so obsessed with his spinner-building hobby he named his Beagle "Spinner."

As Larry's interest in lure making

escalated, he enrolled at Clackamas Community College and took a series of classes on airbrushing, art painting, and pin stripping, hoping to apply this new-found education to better lure design, which would translate to better fishing. After painting thousands of spinner blades and wobblers, Larry turned his attention to plugs. Kwikfish, Tadpolls, Hotshots, Flatfish, Fatfish, and Storms—you name it, Larry has redesigned and repainted it.

Larry has also started purchasing unpainted chrome and gold plugs, using the metallic finish to play into his final effect.

"I like to use iridescent, glow-in-the-dark, neon, pearls, and candy paints in my designs," explains Larry. "My first designs were, in reality, just experimenting. The more I learned, the more I wanted my designs to catch fish, so I became a student of color management, learning how colors affected catching fish."

Larry started by reading *The Scientific Angler* by Paul C. Johnson, *The Master Angler: Using Color Technology to Catch More Fish* by Phil Rabideau, and *What Fish See: Understanding Optics and Color Shifts for Designing Lures and Flies* by Colin J. Kageyama. Larry even recently spent some quality one-on-one time with author Phil Rabideau, picking his brain for as much information as he was willing to share about lure design and color use.

"Knowing the temperature of the water is the most important factor in color selection, and every lure color combination has a narrow band where it is effective," Larry explains.

"A lure's brightness, contrast, color, and shade, linked to water temperature,

***Retired Gulf War Veteran Larry LaRue is taking an entirely new level when it comes to not only***



are the key to getting a fish to strike. Add other influences such as water color and turbidity, depth, and sunlight and you can see why it's called 'color management'.

"I learned a great deal from Mr. Rabideau, but one of the easiest and most useful tips he shared was to 'tone it down' (the color of the plug) as the water temperature goes up."

Larry explains that there are three categories of water: cold, cool, and warm. When water temperatures go above 55 degrees most people are still using their go-to spinners and plugs, when according to his research, less vivid colors are a better choice.

While examining some of Larry's handiwork, which he proudly calls his "Looney Lures," I picked up a K-16 Kwikfish he had just redesigned and repainted for a friend and had him explain the color selection and theory. The plug had a chartreuse and green head, a gold pearl main body complete with black camouflaged sides, a green and chartreuse tail, pink gill plates, and prism eyes. Larry explained that although the plug looked vivid in color, in reality, it was fairly tame, Larry referred to it as being "toned down." Larry recommended this plug as an ideal late-morning plug for water temperatures between 53 and 55 degrees, in shallow, direct light conditions, with either green or turbid water.

Next I picked the flashiest plug I could find. It was also a K16 Kwikfish with its entire body painted neon chartreuse. The body was then covered with green, dark blue and red dots, and a large set of black-and-white eyes. Larry explains that this plug would be considered a bright plug,

the art and craft of color management to an collection, but also creating custom-colored lures.



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## Guide Tip of the Month

### Trolling Plugs for Spring Chinook

When it comes to fishing for spring chinook one thing is clear, top guides use Wigglers to catch more fish. Long-time northwest Pro Guides like Steve Leonard and Bill Swann share some top tips that can help you catch more chromers this season.

*...When it comes to fishing the Mag Wiggler, Swanny is specific. "I run wigglers 'flat lined' 50-65' behind the boat. I run a braided line with approximately 54" of 17-pound fluorocarbon leader...*

Both Steve Leonard and Bill Swann use Mag Wigglers when fishing Drano, Wind and Mid-Columbia rivers for spring chinook and they have opinions on what colors to use and when. "I use Mag wigglers to catch springers that are suspended around 15-18' deep," says Swanny. For deeper water rig with a diver or dropper lead. His favorite colors are: Fire Tiger, Fluorescent Orange, Rocket Red, Chrome/Chartreuse bill and all Copper. Steve's favorites are similar: Red, Fluorescent Orange, Blue Pirate, Green Pirate, Gold and Chrome/Chartreuse. "When I am fishing Drano Lake my #1 producer is the Fire Tiger," says Swanny "...over at the mouth of the Wind River my #1 color is Fluorescent Orange. On especially busy days on the water or cloudy days I like to use all Copper, it gives the fish something different to look at." Steve Leonard says, "I use a darker color to start with in the morning or in overcast skies then switch to a brighter color as the day progresses or lighting changes."

#### TOP SPRINGER COLORS

Fluorescent Red.....	Color 05
Fluorescent Orange.....	Color 18
Silver Chartreuse bill.....	Color 21
Fire Tiger.....	Color 74
Copper.....	Color 79

When it comes to fishing the Mag Wiggler Swanny is specific. "I run wigglers, 'flat lined' 50-65' behind the boat. I run a braided line with approximately 54" of 17-pound fluorocarbon leader. Combine this with a moderate soft plug rod and keep your drag fairly loose for the best hook-ups. Add some weight to the system to get down fast in crowded waters." Swanny aims to keep his trolling speed at 1.2-2.4 mph (ground speed) with 1.8 being optimal.

Wigglers fish great out of the box, but can be fine-tuned. Check the regulations on waters you fish to see if you need to change the plug from treble to single hooks. "One thing that helps produce more results is to smear your plug with scent that covers human scent," says Swanny.

For more tips and the latest colors visit [www.bsfishtailes.com](http://www.bsfishtailes.com)

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Larry will tell you himself, his hobbies of lure des

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and would be ideal for cold shallow water less than 53 degrees in blue, green, or turbid water. Larry also suggested silvers in these low-temperature environments.

Finally I grabbed a dark-colored K-15 Kwikfish with a dark purple head. The mid section was translucent red over chrome with black scales, and a black tail, dusted with silver glitter.

"That's a deep, warm-water (above 55 degrees) plug that would work well in low-light conditions," Larry offers.

Next on the agenda was actually watching Larry paint a few plugs. Obviously well practiced, Larry took little time assembling his equipment, which included getting his airbrush assembled, mixing his paints, and locking up the subject plugs in their alligator-clip holders.

Larry then pulled out his hand-made stencils and painted pink circles on both sides of the plug's head. Once dry, he pulled out another stencil, which would turn the pink circles into gill plates. Looking around Larry's bench, he had several stencils, including camouflage patterns, scale patterns, gill plates, circles, eyes, stripes...you name it.

As I continued to inspect Larry's hand-crafted art, he continued to share his thoughts and ideas. Telling me he can hardly wait for springer season to get here so he can actually test his prototypes, using what he learned from his reading and visits, hoping to up his catch rate from last year.

Larry has designed his own little space for his lure creations, transforming a small attic storage area into his art gallery. The room is fully adorned with lures hanging from the walls and rafters, books lining the shelves, and an entire corner of the workbench dedicated to all the paints and special finishes he uses. There are also prepped plugs, blank plugs, and a host of spinner blades, either waiting to be worked on, or somewhere in their mid-stream production.



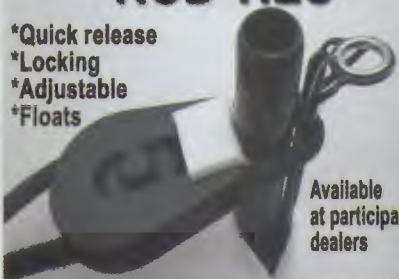
and fishing have given him some calm in his life.

The space is small, you could even call it cozy, but most importantly to Larry, it gives him a place to ply his newly learned skills and abilities, in a therapeutic setting; complete with his loyal companion Spinner at his feet! The war did cruel things to Larry's psyche, but Larry will tell you first-hand, his hobbies of lure design and fishing have given him some calm in his life.

Remember Happy Gilmore's famous saying, "Go to your happy place," well, I can assure you that both metaphorically and in reality Larry's happy place is either on the river, or in his fishing studio!

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