

INTRODUCTION TO Iridescent Paints



BY JOHN LUCAS

I was introduced to iridescent paint (also called interference paint) through a video by Tim Yoder called “Cosmic Clouds Platter.” Yoder demonstrates a technique developed by Gary Lowe, using diluted paint with a flow medium, and then a straw to focus his breath and blow the paints around the piece, creating his cosmic clouds effect. Fascinating. I had to try it, I did, and I immediately saw other possibilities to explore.

Basic iridescence

Here’s the short version of the technique. Paint the wood black. Dilute the paints with flow medium (also called flow extender) and apply some of the mixture to the surface of the turning. While the paint is still wet, blow it around to create cloud formations (**see opening image**). As is my inclination, I experimented with the technique and application and discovered some new ways to use the paints.

TECHNIQUES: Introduction to iridescent paints

INSPIRATION

Follow one of the links to see Tim Yoder demonstrate Gary Lowe's cosmic cloud painting technique.

tiny.cc/YoderClouds



I used Jo Sonja iridescent paints, readily available from numerous online sellers, purchasing the small pack of six colors (**Photo 1**). I also purchased a bottle of the Flow Medium (**Photo 2**). After getting the paints, I made a test board for reference, which makes choosing colors easier. You do have to apply iridescent paints over a black background or the colors won't show.

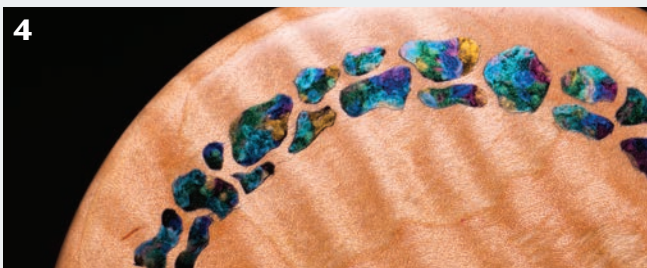
I also did a test to determine how much to dilute the paints (**Photo 3**). Using the paints undiluted and straight out of the bottle results in improper drying and leaves a light or white area. After playing around a lot, I found that estimating the dilution at about 50/50 is good enough—no laboratory equipment needed. Knowing the paints have to be applied over a black background, I wondered how the technique would work over pyrography. I used some wood burning tips to create shapes and experiment with the iridescent paints—it worked spectacularly.

Abalone

With my testing done and a few pieces created using the Gary Lowe's technique, I decided to stretch out and play. Applied correctly, I noted that the colors resembled abalone inlays. My first project was to build a mirror and try out my decorating idea (**Photo 4**). So now I will discuss how I did that and show you how you might use this for other projects.

New ideas emerge

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Iridescent paint applied over pyrography looks remarkably like abalone shell.

Paint supplies



You'll need a modest selection of iridescent paint colors and the flow medium to achieve the correct consistency.



When using a new medium, make sample boards to identify appropriate dilutions and to develop your application technique.

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Cover the area you intend to paint with tape—I use green FrogTape®. Cut out an opening. In these pieces, I used the long point of a skew with the piece on the lathe and cut the circles, taking care to cut only through the tape (**Photo 5**). For the mirror, I cut radial lines through the tape so I was left with little rectangles defining the perimeter of the

circle. On the vessel, I cut and removed the inner circle. I then painted these areas black (**Photo 6**).

With the masking complete, pick a color, dilute it, and start dabbing it on (**Photo 7**). Mix the next color of paint you'd like to apply and dab on more (**Photo 8**). When you're finished applying paint, peel the tape off.

Mask for control



Green FrogTape® is treated to repel paint and create a neat boundary. You can cut out areas to be painted using a craft or utility knife. Apply a black background paint, then iridescent paints in layers, letting each application dry (it happens quickly) before applying the next color.

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If you get some bleed-through, use a craft or utility knife with a new blade or a razor blade and scrape off the excess (**Photo 9**). In diluted form, iridescent paints dry pretty quickly, but you can speed the process with a hair dryer or heat gun. When the paint is completely dry, I apply a coat of finish over everything. It wouldn't hurt to do an advance test of your finishes, but so far all of my finishes have been compatible.

Pyrography

Encouraged by the results I got using my wood burner and paints on a test board, I decided to apply my new-found technique to decorate one of my angels.

I used my small ball-end tip to burn all the areas on the angel that I wanted to decorate. To my delight, the combination of the pyrography texture and iridescent paint took on the appearance of bead work (**Photo 10**). At only 4" (10cm) tall, the decorating task was not too big but resulted in a satisfying visual impact.

Next, I decided to try burning just the high points on a carved platter. To my surprise, the paint carried over onto the non-burned areas, creating a contrast between the burned peaks and the unburned valleys (**Photo 11**).

Now you have an introduction on how to use these paints. There are so many rich ideas I have yet to explore. One thought is to mask-off a basket weave pattern, or a pattern of touching diamonds. I've also seen a technique for applying the colors that involves smearing them with a balloon, which creates a markedly different look than blowing the colors around.

Let your mind go wild and do some experimenting. ■

Retired photographer John Lucas has been working in wood for more than 35 years; he also dabbles in metalworking. John enjoys modifying machines, making tools, and sharing his knowledge through written articles and videos. He has taught classes at John C. Campbell Folk School, Arrowmont, and The Appalachian Center for Craft.

ANGELS

To learn how to turn one of the author's angels with attitude, follow one of the links below.



tiny.cc/AngelsLucas



Clean up



Clean any paint that leaks under the tape with a razor, using the thin, sharp blade like a cabinet scraper.

Experiment!



The author decorated one of his turned angels using a combination of texturing, pyrography, and iridescent paints.



The author burned the peaks on this carved platter rim before applying iridescent paints. The result is intense coloration against the black peaks, and a contrasting faint wash of color in the surrounding valleys.