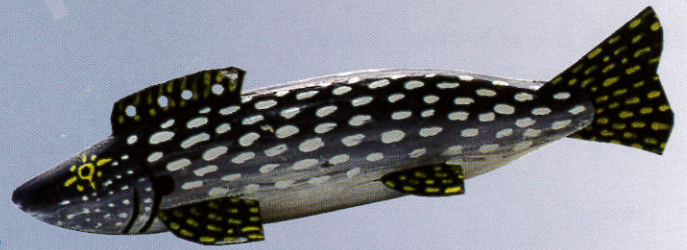


# Starry-eyed



# SWIMMERS



## The spear fishing decoys of Rudy Zweig

by Patty Hardin

People living during the Depression years found out on a daily basis that many times there wasn't enough money for items they needed or wanted. The most enterprising learned to make several of the things they couldn't afford. Rudy Zweig was no different.

Like so many of the old time carvers, Zweig began carving out of necessity. He and his brother fashioned their own bass plugs during the Depression because they lacked the resources to buy their own lures. They also carved spearing decoys, filling their tackle boxes with their homemade creations. Some were sold to local fishermen who admired their work.

In the 1950s Zweig sold his decoys through local bars and hardware store for

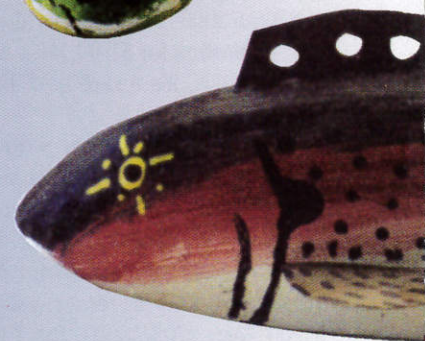
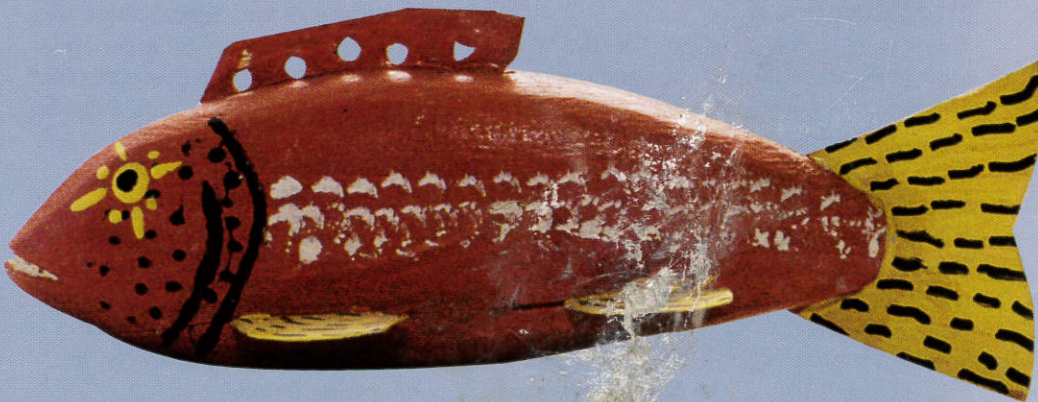
as little as \$8.00 a dozen. His prices have increased since then, but they're still very affordable, whether used under the ice or put on a shelf.

Considered one of the deans of contemporary Minnesota fish carvers, Rudy Zweig was born in Douglas County, Minnesota in 1917 and has lived in state his entire life. He now lives in Alexandria, where he had worked for the Alexandria Light & Power Company until his retirement nearly 20 years ago.

Without the constraints work placed on his free time, Zweig devoted many of his retirement hours to carving decoys and attending decoys shows, an interest developed only in these last 20 years. And the amount of time devoted to a carving project was limited only by the number of

hours he wished to spend.

Zweig's early decoys were carved solely to spear fish. But it was only natural that





after practicing the craft for so many years, that an interest in carving shows caught his attention. Bruce Dixon, a local collector, organized many of the early decoy shows, and at the urging of Rod Osvold and John Jensen, two fellow fish carvers, Zweig got involved.

Zweig had already exhibited his carvings at local fairs, but for the last ten years he's competed at shows. And a boxful of ribbons is a testament to his efforts. He enjoys the opportunity to showcase his work - and he agrees the shows provide an opportunity to sell a few or swap fish with others - but it's really the camaraderie between fellow carvers and collectors he cherishes the most.

In addition to the ribbons his decoys have been awarded, Zweig has accumulated honors for his long-time contributions to the fish decoy world. At John Jensen's "The Gathering: 2000," a decoy and collectibles show in Perham, Minnesota, Zweig received a Living Legend Award, recognizing him for his many years producing spear fishing decoys. It caught Rudy by surprise, but he says the award means a lot to him. Through the efforts of fellow collectors, one of Zweig's frog decoys was chosen for exhibit at the Smithsonian Institution.

Many people who pursue carving interests have favorite parts of the process. What Zweig enjoys most is capturing the

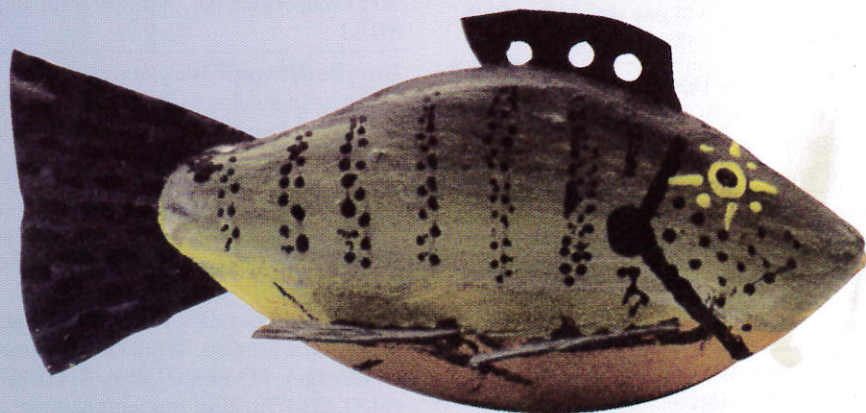
shape and coloration of each species he produces. Placing the back fin, cut out of tin, is his least favorite task. This is where the line tie-in is secured and the decoy is balanced.

Fish decoys can be made of several different materials, from wood to horn or bone. Many carvers use basswood to fashion their decoys, but Zweig prefers white pine - one-inch for his small fish and two-inch for the larger ones.

During his lifetime Zweig estimates he has made over 2000 decoys; he now produces about 50 a year. He still carves functional decoys for spear fisherman, as well as decorative ones to sit on a shelf. Rudy makes sure his working decoys perform properly, testing them in a minnow tank at the fish house or off a dock in summer.

He makes a variety of species, including sunfish, bass, perch, crappies, pickerel, bullheads and frogs. And nearly all of them sport those trademark starry eyes, a distinctive feature that identifies his work. Asked how it developed, he replies that that's how he started making them and just stayed with it over the years.

Zweig no longer spears due to a heart condition and no longer drives a car, depending on others to take him where he wants to go. While this represents a certain loss of freedom, Rudy Zweig gives it a different spin. It simply affords him more time to create those starry-eyed swimmers



*Nearly all of Rudy Zweig's spearing decoys sport those trademark starry eyes, a distinctive feature that identifies his work.*

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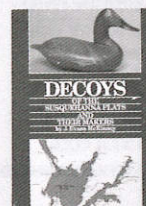
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