J. John Ruskey's depictions of the Mississippi River are not just maps—they're works of art that come out of years of hands-on experience. Ruskey, who runs Quapaw Canoe Co. in Clarksdale, has just released the latest in a series of colorful, artistic maps of the lower half of the Mississippi and Louisiana to the Gulf of Mexico, including large swaths of the coasts.

Mark Twain's "Life on the Mississippi" at a level of detail that recalls the great Mississippi River artist Walter Anderson and the river from U.S. Geological Survey maps and aerial photos. "It's the Mississippi, and it's what he saw and experienced on the river," he said. "He's one of my all-time favorite artists ever in the history of the world."

Secondly, it's the globetrotter's guide — a bite-sized description of the Mississippi River from St. Louis to the Gulf, accompanied by detailed yet artistic watercolor scenes of the river. "People who I meet inspiration directly from what he saw and experienced in nature." Two years ago Ruskey embarked on a project he called "riverpage" — a mile-by-mile description of the Mississippi River from St. Louis to the Gulf, accompanied by detailed yet artistic watercolor maps break the river into sections from north to south with prices ranging from $10 to $25. (See www.rivergator.org for details.)

Ruskey said he considered writing a conventional guidebook at first. "It's the Mississippi and it would fill many volumes. Mark Twain would have loved it."

Even more detailed is Ruskey's written guide to the Mississippi River at www.mrgator.org. The information—which is freely available to the public—would fill many volumes. Mark Twain would have loved it. "It's the Mississippi, and it would fill many volumes. Mark Twain would have loved it."

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