



WELCOME  
TO THE  
SEATH VALLEY RAILROAD  
*The Heritage Route*

The image shows a miniature garden railroad setup. A yellow rectangular sign with a red border stands on two red posts. The sign reads 'WELCOME TO THE SEATH VALLEY RAILROAD' in a serif font, with 'The Heritage Route' in a cursive script inside a black-bordered box. To the left of the sign, a wooden ladder leans against it. Two miniature figures of men in blue overalls and white shirts stand on a bed of dark gravel. One figure is holding a small blue bucket. To the right, a black steam locomotive with a silver smokestack and a white bell is visible. The background is filled with various plants, including purple flowers and large green leaves. The foreground shows a gravel bed and a small section of railroad track.

# 3 Signs for your Garden Railroad





Workers admire the new billboard they've put up. Use signs such as this to promote your favorite magazine or organization.



# Billboards for garden railroads

*Add interest, send messages*

by Mike Garforth | Barrow-in-Furness, England    Photos by the author

Here is an easy project that can enhance your garden empire and also deliver a multitude of simple messages. I use two or three billboards, placed at strategic points around the railway, to

welcome visitors and publicize my favorite model club or magazine. Indeed, if my wife Lynda and I are hosting an open garden in support of a charity or special event, then a miniature billboard with a



A sign advertising the G Scale Society adds interest to a scene.



This small sign welcomes visitors to the host's railway.

sign supporting the relevant charity (or whatever) can be a real eye catcher, particularly if it is incorporated into a small diorama or scene.

You can also use a billboard to spring a surprise on people. Make unique “Happy Birthday” signs for family members, or even a “Nice to See You” sign for visitors you know are coming. With regard to publicity for your favorite club or magazine, make sure you include at least a web-site address or contact telephone number; you would be surprised how many visitors to our garden railroad I have seen writing down such information.

I lead a simple life and do not have access to a scanner or color printer. Thus, my signs are produced from my PC’s basic word-processor package, backed up by scissors, glue, and an old photocopier. If you have more sophisticated equipment, you will be able to produce more exotic signs.

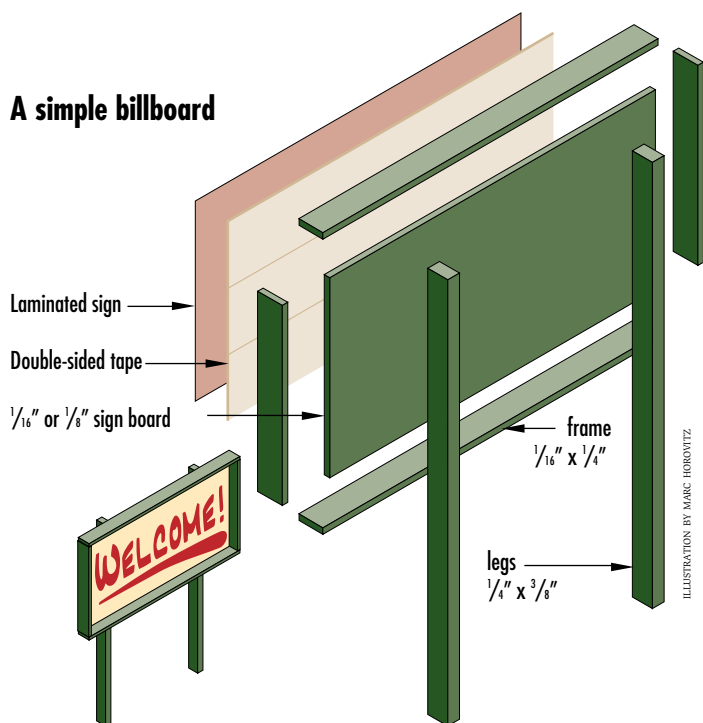
I have not given any dimensions for the billboard or its frame, as much depends on the actual size of the sign you may wish to display. I simply use the old adage that if it looks right, then it is right!

Once I have produced the sign, I pass it through a laminator. This ensures it can withstand both dirty fingerprints and the odd rain shower without suffering any ill effects. After trimming the sign to the required size, I secure it to a suitable piece of plywood or plastic with double-sided tape. This technique ensures that I build the billboard around the sign rather than having to make a sign to fit the billboard. You may prefer to work the other way round—it’s much the same.

All that remains is to fit a frame of wood or plastic around the mounted sign, secure a couple of legs to the back of the sign, and that’s it. You can, of course, construct a more elaborate frame than the simple board on two legs that I use, if you wish.

When you’re finished, go out to the garden to “plant” your sign in a strategic location and see if your messages have any effect. I am sure they will. **II**

## A simple billboard



## Laminate it yourself!

by Rene Schweitzer

Alex Gillam, a GR forum member, posted a note about weatherproofing outdoor signs. He mentioned a product he used to laminate his sign without using heat or machines. I was intrigued, and set out to find some over lunch one day. I found and purchased a package of Scotch brand self-laminating sheets at a discount store (#LS854SS-10). (Other brands, such as Avery and GBC, are available at office-supply stores.)

Using the product is a snap. Measure and cut two identical pieces—one for each side of the sign—to size. For straighter cuts, a small paper trimmer is handy, but not necessary. Peel off the backing of one sheet and lay it down, sticky side up. Apply the back of the sign to the sheet. Adhere the second sheet to the top of the sign (sticky side down), creating a sign “sandwich.” Press firmly to completely seal the sign and remove air bubbles. Trim edges if necessary.

If the glossy sheet bothers you, a quick spray of Testor’s Dullcote should help dull it. You now have a sign ready for installation on your railway.



Measure and cut the sheet to size. I used a small Fiskars paper trimmer, but you could also use scissors.



Peel off the backing and apply to the back of the sign. Adhere the second piece to the face of the sign. Press firmly to remove air bubbles.



The laminated sign, trimmed and ready for the outdoors.

PHOTOS BY JIM FORBES





# “Painted” signs for wooden buildings



A little creativity and an ink-jet printer are all you need

by Rod Eaton | Champlin, Minnesota  
Photos by Paul Veronikas

**M**y Hitchcock Railway is set in the mountainous West of the early 1900s. The lineside structures and buildings in the towns the railroad serves are made mostly of wood. They show their age and the effects of the harsh climate. I wanted to create signage appropriate for this look. I knew I could make the artwork on my home computer, but I needed a technique for “painting” these signs directly onto wooden surfaces.

While browsing in a computer-supply store, I found a pack of printer paper designed for creating iron-on transfers.

This material is used for making your own printed T-shirts and other fabric-craft uses. The paper is specifically designed for inexpensive ink-jet printers. If it can transfer an image onto fabric, I reasoned, it should also work on wood.

The other tool you’ll need is a software program that not only allows you to design sign graphics but to print them mirror reversed. This is necessary, since the paper is placed image down when you make the transfer. I already had an application, called Print Artist, that would do that. Print Artist is just one of a group of

The General Store’s sign was made using the process outlined here. Having been applied over aged wood, the sign takes on an aged appearance, too.

inexpensive and easy-to-use programs designed to create greeting cards, signs, banners, and similar items. When you select “Print” from the menu, one of the choices is “mirror reverse.”

I create and save the art for each sign as a separate file. To make sure the size and overall look are right for its intended location, I’ll print out the sign on regular paper, cut it out, and check it against the



model building. Since the heat-transfer paper costs about two dollars per sheet, I wait until I have several signs ready, then assemble them on one page (copy and paste) for final printing. You can fit a lot of large-scale signs on one sheet of paper!

### Printing the signs

The instructions that come with the heat-transfer paper give some suggestions for adjusting your printer to produce the best results. Generally, you'll reduce the amount of ink applied to prevent the image from smearing during the transfer process. I reduce the dpi (dots per inch) to around 300, increase "Brightness" about 10%, and reduce "Saturation" by 15%. You may need to experiment some to find the best settings for your printer.

When you print your sign onto the transfer paper, the ink is held in a carrier. When heat is applied in the transfer process, this carrier separates from the paper and adheres to the new surface, taking the image with it. As with a traditional decal, you'll see the edge of the carrier after the transfer has been done. To disguise it, create signs with edges—a box around the type, a fancy graphic border, or even just a colored background. Cut the sign out right along this edge. Or, if you're making a separate sign that you'll attach to a structure, begin slightly oversized and trim the sign after the image has been transferred.

### Transferring the sign

You can transfer your sign directly onto a finished model building or you can make a separate wooden sign and attach it to a structure after the transfer. The latter is a safer approach—if you have a problem, you won't end up trying to sand a poor transfer off the front of a finished model (I'm speaking from experience here). In either case, the wood surface must be fairly flat so the transfer paper will be in contact with the entire area.

Transferring the art requires only a hot iron. Cut the sign from the transfer paper, position it, and use a bit of masking tape on the opposing corners to hold it in place. Apply the iron (hottest setting, no steam) for a couple of minutes, making sure you cover the entire sign area. Do not iron over the tape. Let the work cool for a minute or two, then remove the backing paper. The art should stay on the wood.

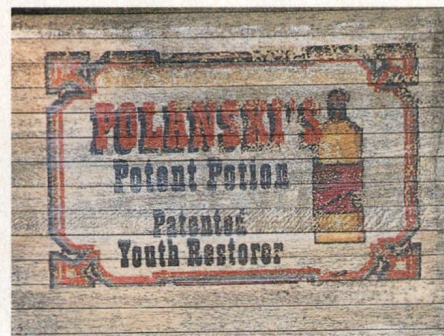
Next, cover the area with a piece of



As it comes off the printer, the artwork for transferring is reversed. This is for the General Store (not full size).



Art for this sign was applied to separate pieces of wood, which were then applied to the building.



Small parts of this sign didn't transfer well, adding to its weathered appearance.



ABOVE: A simple, rustic sign using an outlined type face adds character to the mine building.

LEFT: The water tower at Disney on the author's railroad. The small sign was painted white before the lettering was transferred.

freezer paper and apply the iron for another minute or two. Remove the freezer paper, replace it with a clean piece, and iron yet again. This removes excess ink and sets the image into the wood. Finally, give the completed sign a light spray or two of clear matte finish.

Although so far I've created all of my signs from scratch using the graphic capabilities of the software, you could also import photos or magazine art using a scanner. This would be a great way to make an exact replica of a real sign.

That's all there is to it. The transferred art looks like it was painted directly onto the wood. The image is waterproof, but, like the real thing, will fade in time outdoors. If the wood surface has been weathered prior to transferring, the finished sign takes on an aged look, too. Occasionally, a bit of the image may not transfer cleanly, but this only adds to the old and weathered look. Of course, you can age the sign further by sanding lightly, distressing the wood, or adding a light weathering wash of India ink in alcohol. It's up to you. **11**





# Sign painting for your

*Careful work produces outstanding results*



by Richard Schmitt | Brandon, Florida  
Photos by the author

A particular part of large-scale railroading that I enjoy is building dioramas. My start in the hobby may sound familiar. I began with an LGB starter set around the base of the Christmas tree. When Bachmann introduced its 1:20.3-scale Shay, I had to have one. It was then I decided to build and run scale trains. The level of detail on the Shay was great, but I wanted more. I read several articles on detailing and weathering locomotives, then I weathered and detailed my Shay, transforming it into a well-used logging locomotive.





The sign, which fills the wall, adds color and interest to the scene and suggests human habitation.



The author hand-cut this stencil from bond paper. The middles of the letters have been set aside and will be carefully placed on the side of the structure before spraying.



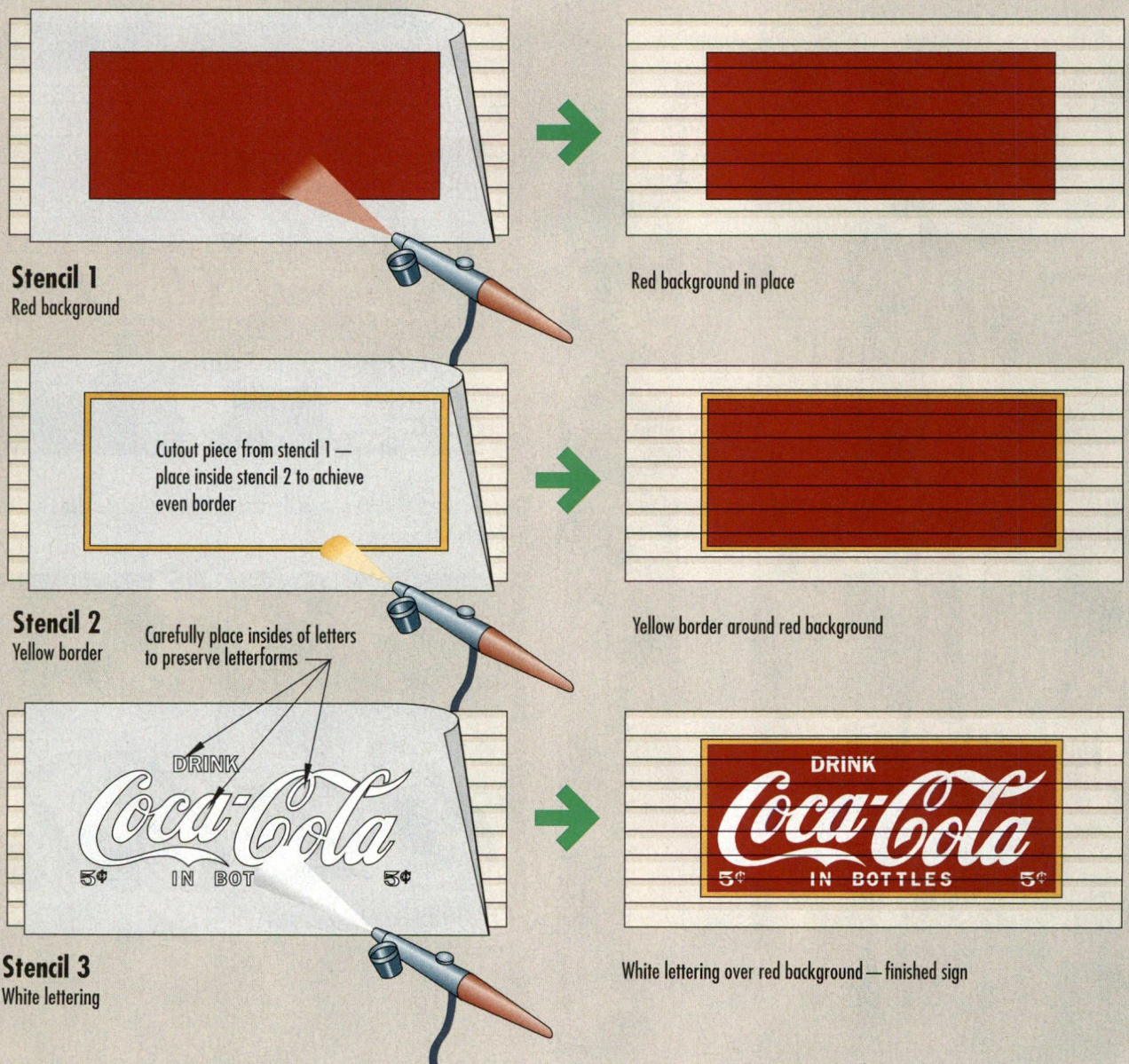
In this closeup shot you can see that the edges of the painted letters are not absolutely sharp. However, the eye does not pick up on this when the diorama is viewed as a whole.

# buildings

A local hobby shop hosted a train show that had categories for non-operating entries. Being new to the hobby, I asked how I should display my model. The reply was, "Set a piece of track on the table with the locomotive on it." I knew there had to be a better way. This led me to building my first diorama. My entry won First Place and Best of Show for non-operating super detailing.

For another train show, I scratchbuilt a 1930, rural gas-station diorama. Instead of today's billboards, many signs during that period were actually painted directly onto the sides and roofs





of buildings. I chose to paint an advertisement for Coca-Cola on the side of the building. I wanted the look of a hand-painted sign to bring the building into character for the era. Although the building I constructed was for an indoor diorama display, the hand-painted lettering technique applies to exterior applications as well.

I am sure there are many ways to accomplish the look of a hand-painted sign, but this article is about the method I chose. As you know, the sign for the product I chose has been around for many years, so I wanted to make sure that the lettering for the logo was correct for the 1930s. After checking books and various sites on the Internet, I found the lettering style for that era. I printed out several sized copies of different sizes from the Internet sites to fit the side of the building. Once I had a sign of the right size, I could begin.

Here's how to reproduce a sign like mine on the side of the building. First, paint the building siding white. Then make a rectangular stencil out of a piece of heavy bond paper. The size of the cutout will be the background for the logo and the other lettering. Don't throw away the rectangular piece of paper you

cut out, as you will need it later. Spray the back of the piece of paper with the hole in it with Krylon repositionable adhesive. This product can be found in most art and craft stores. This adhesive allows you to remove the paper from the wood siding without damaging the paint beneath it. You could also use self-adhesive frisket paper, available at art-supply stores. Once this stencil is in place on the building, paint the red background color with an airbrush.

There are two tricks to remember when painting with an airbrush. Do not get too close to the surface being painted and apply thin coats of paint. You do not want the paint to be so heavy that it runs under the stencil. You also need to direct the paint away from the edges of the cutout, again to prevent paint from running or being spraying under the stencil. The wood siding is not flat and the paper stencil is only in contact with top edges of the siding.

To create the border around the red background, cut out another rectangular paper stencil a little larger than the red background. Again, spray the backside with adhesive and position this stencil around the red background, making sure there is an





The same technique was used on the front of the gas station for the “TEXACO SERVICE” sign.

equal border on all sides. Then take the original cutout piece of paper from the red background stencil, apply adhesive to one side, and position it over the red color. You can now paint the yellow border with your airbrush using the same technique described above.

The next step is to carefully cut out the lettering of the logo you have printed. Use a sharp X-acto knife with a #11 blade for this. Save the interior portions of the letters “o,” “l,” and “a” from the stencil—you will need to glue them in place on the wall to correctly form the letters of the stencil. Next, apply the adhesive to the stencil and position it over the red background. Fill in the letters of the logo with the cutouts, placing them in the proper position to form the letters. It is best to make an extra copy of the logo to refer to for the actual location of the cutouts of the letters. You are now ready to paint the letters white. Again, remember to spray light coats of paint and do not paint too closely to the stencil. The remaining lettering of the sign is done in the same way.

I also used the same stencil technique for the “TEXACO SERVICE” sign on the front of the building. I used my computer to



Careful work results in a very convincing sign applied directly to the surface of the structure, as can be seen in this closeup shot.

print out the text font in the lettering size I wanted and made a stencil for painting. The photo shows how well the sprayed lettering makes a true-to-life, “hand painted” sign. As an added note, I entered this gas-station diorama at the 18th National Garden Railway Convention in Cincinnati and it won First Place in the diorama category and the popular vote for Best of Show in June 2002. **II**