Details for toy train scenery

Photos 1 and 2 – Study the differences in these before (right) and after (above) photos. Peter made numerous small changes to bring this city scene to life, including the addition of streets, sidewalks, and window dressing.

Simple city scenery

Enhance an urban area on your layout with these tips

story and photos by Peter H. Riddle

GIVEN THE LIMITED TIME and money we have to build a layout, it's easy to gloss over some essential details, especially in city scenes. But after a while vacant visual cues – empty storefronts, a street with no sidewalks, or oversized building foundations and lampposts – may start to bother you.

Fortunately, simple and effective urban scenery can be created quickly, easily, and inexpensively.

Note the differences in the Photos 1 and 2 to the left. With just a few supplies and some basic modeling techniques, I turned an assortment of buildings in the "before" photo into a colorful and convincing scene in the "after" photo.

Instead of empty storefronts, there are "rooms" behind the glass. The paved streets, lined by sidewalks, and the trolley line are separated from the freight tracks by a retaining wall. The trolley line's rails are flush with the top of the street's blacktop. And everything seems to be in believable proportions.

These and other final details, however minor, are important to your layout. Following these easy tips, you can be sure to never again overlook the smaller details that bring life to your layout.

Foam-core streets and sidewalks

My best trick is achieving these important contour changes without cutting into my platform. Instead, I built "up" using an easy-to-cut product.

Office supply stores sell foam-core boards, an inexpensive product that is ideal for this use. It's rigid and lightweight with smooth surfaces made from heavy paper stock.

The 3/16-inch-thick sheets (which measured 20 by 30 inches before I cut them) come in a variety of colors. Black with a black foam core is best for streets, and light gray works for concrete sidewalks.

Begin by carefully marking your streets on the foam-core boards. Measure carefully before cutting. The minimum width for a street in O gauge is about 6 inches. Add an extra 1¾ inches to each side of the street where parking is permitted. Sidewalks vary in width from 4 to 8 feet in the real world, which translates into 1- to 2-inch strips of gray board. Obviously, keep the width uniform in your urban zone.

Cut the boards with a hobby knife using an X-acto no. 11 blade plus a metal straightedge for accuracy (photo 3). This narrow blade also allows you to cut irregular shapes, such as rounded curbs for street corners.

Scene shimming

Foam-core boards can also be used as

Photo 3 – Cut the foam-core boards to make streets (using black board) and sidewalks (using gray boards). Your knife blades will stay sharp longer if you use a cutting mat as shown here.

Photo 4 – Foam-core strips also serve as shims to hide foundations and raise the street level enough to bury the trolley line in pavement. They can be glued to the layout with yellow carpenter's glue.

Photo 5 – Attach the sidewalks and streets to the shims by applying a thin bead of glue down the middle of the shims. Position the top layer of scenery and then add weight, such as Peter did using a Lionel Geep.

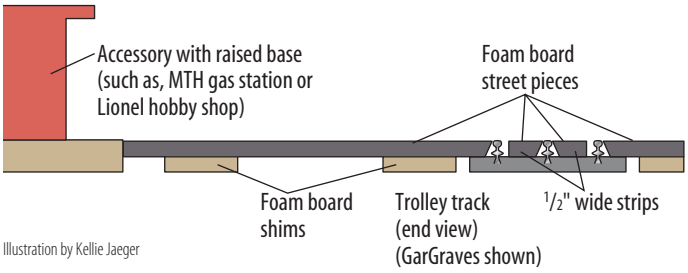


Illustration by Kellie Jaeger

Photo 6 – Add foam-core strips between the ties on the trolley line. Be sure the end of each strip is secure and dries flat. The beveled edge allows the strip to clear the base of the rail.

Photo 7 – Run a trolley or train car over the buried track sections to make sure the clearances are adequate. Don't wait until after the glue has dried to discover bumpy segments.

Photo 8 – Installing a short retaining wall between the freight and trolley tracks creates a nice scene partition and obscures the scenery height difference created by your shimmed streets. This Scenic Express foam wall is easy to cut.

scene-leveling shims. Because the street must be even with the top of the trolley rails, you need to elevate your foam-core scenery. Most track systems available today, including GarGraves and Ross Custom Switches, measure about ⅜ inches from the bottom of the ties to the top of the rails. So you need to raise the ⅜-inch-thick streets another ⅜ inches to create a flush surface.

Cut small strips of foam-core board to use as shims to support the streets and sidewalks. Attach these shim strips directly to the layout table with carpenter's glue (photo 4).

Once the shims are dried in place, attach the streets by running a thin bead of glue down the center of the shims. Add weight to assure good adhesion while the glue is drying. Locomotives work well for this purpose (photo 5).

On GarGraves track, the ties also measure ⅜ inches tall, so the ties themselves serve as matching shims. I placed my black foam-core street sections, as well as narrow strips between the ties, directly on the track to effectively "bury" it in asphalt. I merely added a beveled edge to allow the street boards to clear the rail base. Obviously, I also left some clearance on the inside of the running rails for the trolley's wheel flanges. (See diagram above.)

The ½-inch-wide foam strips that are between the rails don't need much glue to hold them in place – a dab every 10th tie or so is sufficient. However, make sure that the end of each strip is secure (photo 6). Again, apply weight until the glue is dry.

When completed, the buried track shouldn't hamper the trolley's path. You may want to test your trackwork just to make sure it doesn't (photo 7).

If you have train tracks adjacent to the street, you may want to separate them somehow. I chose to add a short stone retaining wall, a foam product offered by Scenic Express. The foam wall is easy to cut with a hobby knife so you can shape it to fit around difficult obstacles, such as the switch machine on a Ross Custom Switches double crossover (photo 8). In my application, the retaining wall also disguises the difference in height between the street and the top of the train table on which the track is mounted.

Scenery shims also help camouflage the oversized foundation bases on many accessory buildings, which have bases of varying thickness. Foam-core shims make such adjustments easy. You can shim under one building while leaving another building alone to balance the difference in their heights.

Detailing sidewalks

The gray foam-core sidewalks require some added attention. Details like expansion joints, lampposts, and people make your sidewalk scenes more convincing.

Before installing the sidewalks on the shim strips, draw lines for expansion joints and the curb with a pencil. Fit them loosely in place, and figure out where you want to place major detail items, especially lampposts.

On my layout, the lampposts are vintage American Flyer. They're a bit oversized for O gauge but provide a nice period atmosphere to the scene. Still, I felt compelled to hide the unrealistically large bases.

The foam core sidewalks make it easy to hide these bases. Measure and cut a hole in the sidewalk – in this case an octagonal opening – to fit over the part of the lamppost that will be visible (photo 9). Drill holes in the layout table to accommodate the wires, and glue the sidewalks in place (photo 10).

Add details such as fire hydrants,

Materials

Carpenter's glue
Foam-core boards (3/16-inch-thick, black and gray)
Track ballast
White fabric pencil (optional)
White or yellow paints or thin tapes (optional)
Window Works software (optional)
X-acto hobby knife (no. 11 blade)

phone booths, and newspaper vending machines, plus plenty of people and animals, to your sidewalk scene (photo 11). There's a wide variety of people now available for O gauge, so you can add as much character as you want to your street scenes.

Finishing touches

Other details will vary with your interests, but I'd urge you to consider some finer elements.

By adding ballast to your track, it will look more realistic. Ballast comes in a wide variety of colors and sizes, as does the various turf materials that you can add to further dress up your layout.

Don't forget to add lines on the pavement to represent directional lanes, crosswalks, and parking spaces. I drew these with a white fabric pencil, but you can use yellow and white paints or tapes to model the striping with which you're most familiar (photo 12).

Add vehicles to your street. Remember that your choice in vehicles goes a long way in establishing the era of a scene. I used die-cast metal cars representing models from the late 1950s.

Perhaps the most important fine detail is the addition of store interiors to the buildings (photo 11). I printed computer-generated images using software from Window Works, which provides a wide choice of business, office, and home interiors sized to fit these AmeriTowne storefronts. They can also be customized to fit virtually any model railroad building.

Admittedly, you may want to find other ways to dress up your windows if you don't want to use a computer and printer. Optionally, you can scour magazines for photos and illustrations, using a color copier to reduce some scenes for your windows.

When you've touched up your urban scenes, you'll have a hard time accepting anything less ever again. With this minimal investment in time and materials, you'll still have plenty left over for the trains you'll want to run through these convincing scenes. CTT

Photos 9 and 10 – Cut a hole in the foam-core sidewalk that matches the shape of your lamppost. Use shim material on both sides of the lamppost. When installed, the sidewalk will hide the oversized base.

Photo 11 – Sidewalk details add life to your scene. In addition to people and their pets, add common sidewalk items such as mailboxes, fire hydrants, telephone booths, and newspaper boxes. Note the computer-made window interiors.

Photo 12 – Street striping – indicating driving lanes, crosswalks, and parking spaces – can be added using white fabric pencils, paints, or thin tape.

Can you find the seams? While this photo includes a view of a layout access hatch, you'll be hard-pressed to find it. Peter has carefully planned and constructed a hinged hatch that's disguised by the blue house and garage, the home with a swimming pool, and the roadway beneath the tan-and-brown panel truck. Everything else in the scene is part of the main layout table.

How to HIDE access hatches

Careful use of scenery and structures can disguise these handy layout openings

story and photos by Peter H. Riddle

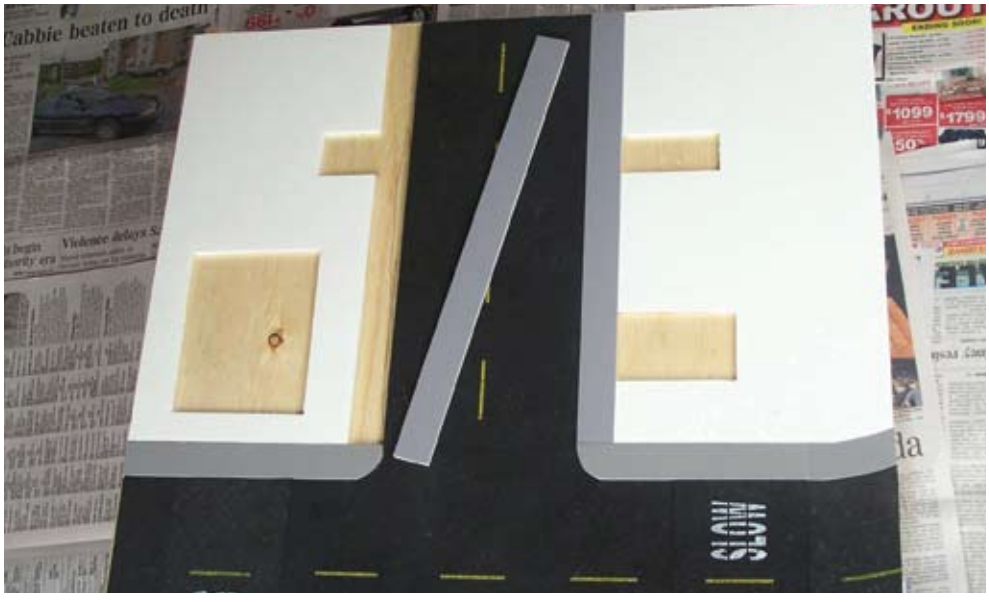
My O gauge layout is deep, spanning as much as 12 feet from the aisle to the wall. With delicate scenery and structures serving as immovable obstacles, layout sections that stretch even as little as three feet deep can be a challenge to reach. It's no surprise that visitors often wonder how I reach the remote areas.

My solution was to cut out a few strategically placed openings that are covered by drop-down hatches. By crawling under the layout, lowering the hinged hatch, and then rising up through the opening, I can easily reach points that would otherwise be inaccessible. With a bit of planning and use of carefully chosen scenery items, I was able to disguise the edges of the hatches and blend the scene with the surrounding area.

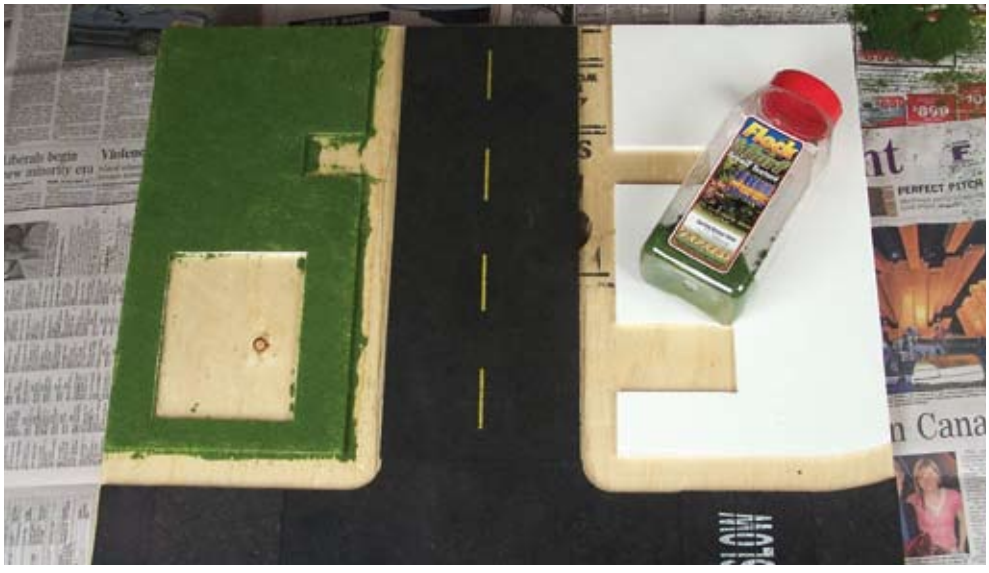
In the instructions that follow, you'll see the steps I used to add these well-hidden access hatches to the far reaches of my layout.

1 Form the hatch. This hatch is a simple square, measuring approximately 2 by 2 feet, which I cut directly into the plywood tabletop. By adding hinges to the underside of one end and a latch at the opposite end, I can easily lower the hatch to access the layout and secure it back in place when I'm finished working. When selecting hinges, be sure to use hinges with removable pins so you can remove the hatch to add scenic details. Curved areas are difficult to blend into surrounding scenery, so plan your hatch along natural straight edges, such as roadways, sidewalks, and property lines. Here, I'm modeling a residential neighborhood with a pair of houses facing each other on rectangular lots.

2 Build up the base. Scenery and structures must be fastened securely in a way that doesn't interfere with the motion of the hatch. In this view, I've installed simulated asphalt roadway and 3/16-inch-thick, white foam-core board (available from office and art supply stores in 20- by 30-inch sheets) that I'll make into lawns. The sidewalks I made using 1- to 2-inch-wide strips of gray foam core. The large cutout rectangle is the location for a swimming pool. The smaller cutout areas will accommodate pieces of foam-core board used to simulate a driveway and walkways to the houses.



3 Add scenery. An easy way to plant lawns is to brush on a coat of green latex house paint over the white foam-core board. Be sure the foam-core board is fully glued to the hatch, or the latex paint will cause it to warp. While the paint is still wet, sprinkle on artificial grass. The grass I used comes from Scenic Express (sceneryexpress.com or 800-234-9995), but there are other manufacturers who offer turf in a wide variety of shades and textures. When the paint is completely dry, use carpenter's wood glue to attach the sidewalks.



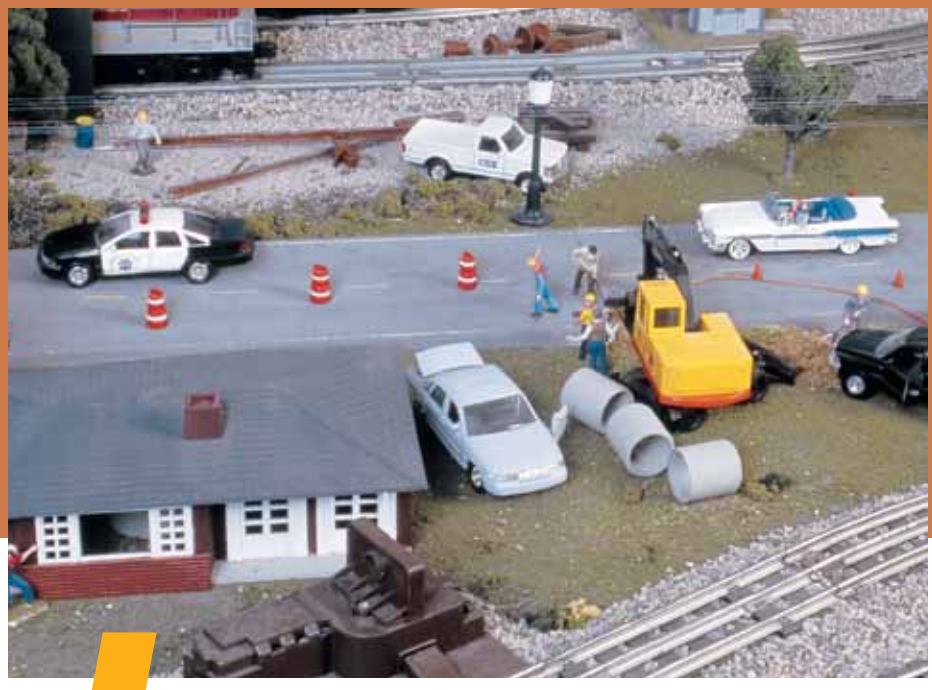
4 Complete the scene. Adding structures, walkways, trees, automobiles, and figures helps make the scene look realistic. Be sure that everything is permanently attached, with the exception of the miniature figures. Rather than using glue, I attached the figures and small details using a tacky, wax adhesive that temporarily holds them in place but is easily removable if I decide to change the scene. Mini-Hold is one brand of wax adhesive that's available from Scenery Express. The automobiles are too heavy for glue or the wax to hold them, so I screwed them in place from beneath the hatch.

5 Install the hatch. After everything dries in place, return the hatch to the layout, reattach the hinge pins, and raise the hatch into place to confirm that nothing interferes with the motion. When installed, the additional thickness of the road and foam-core-board lawns raises the hatch 3⁄16 inch above the surrounding layout. The next step is to build up scenic panels on the layout surfaces that abut the hatch. You may initially need to crawl onto your layout to situate foam-core board and scenery elements around the edges of the hatch. From that point on, however, all work can be done from within the opened hatch.

6 Add more detail. Use additional scenic elements to disguise the seams between the hatch and the rest of the layout. I glued the hedge behind the swimming pool to the main table so that it overlaps the hatch. Now, the only clue to the seam is the break in the sidewalk.

Materials

Artificial grass material
Carpenter's wood glue
Foam-core boards (3⁄16-inch-thick, white and gray)
Latex house paint (green)
Roadway material



Quick scenery details

Four single-evening layout projects

by John Souhrada | photos by Helen Adams

NO LAYOUT is really complete until some believable scenery has been added. While it's the big elements – structures and hills – that get noticed first, it's the small scenic elements that breathe life and realism into your layout.

Take a short car ride and think about the real world. Almost everywhere you look, you see a tree. And when those trees are opening up their leaves each spring, you'll probably notice another springtime phenomenon: bright orange road-construction cones.

You'll also see other things we all take for granted (or sometimes ignore) on that car ride – guardrails and road signs.

Such little details add to your layout, but I've found they can also add to your layout expenses. Since I prefer to spend my money on locomotives and rolling stock, I have tried to find ways to make convincing scenery that is not only inexpensive, but fast and easy.

Here are four additions I've applied to my own layout. The techniques, learned through trial and error or picked up from friends and at train shows, are simple, effective, and cheap.

Corrugated guardrails

Some corrugated packaging from GE light bulbs serves as the source material for making guardrails. The silver-painted strips are glued to stripwood pieces painted or stained a dark brown color.

When your scale motorists are driving down the highway at top speed, they can use your help making sure they stay on the road. Here, a corrugated light bulb carton comes to the rescue.

General Electric light bulbs, for one, come packaged in corrugated paper cartons. Cut strips of the package along the corrugations about ¾ inches wide and whatever length you want. Paint the paper silver. While the paint is drying, cut ¼-inch-square stripwood into 1-inch posts stained or painted dark brown to simulate creosote.

Glue the flat side of the strips to the posts. Finally, glue the posts to your roadside, making sure the paper guardrail isn't sagging.

Goldenrod trees

The best technique for making great-looking trees involves the use of dried goldenrod, a weed that is often as close as your nearest unmowed field.

When autumn rolls around, just about any field will provide plenty of raw material. The goldenrod blossoms often have a nice conical shape, which, with a little trimming, are readily finished as small trees. For bigger trees, gather a few blossoms and follow these steps.

Bunch and tape the stems together with brown florist tape to form a tree trunk. Then trim the blossoms with a pair of scissors to get the desired shape.

Now you can finish the tree. Holding the trunk with one hand, spray the foliage with black spray paint; this provides a shadowy look and serves as an adhesive to hold the "leaves" in place. While the paint is still wet, shake Woodland Scenics ground foam (you choose the colors) onto the branches. Shake off the excess, which you can collect and use on another tree.

Drill the appropriately sized hole in a piece of wood and stick the trunk into the hole to allow your tree to dry upright.

When the paint has dried, you will have a great-looking tree that took all of five minutes to make.

After taping the goldenrod stems together, spray black paint onto the weeds.

While the paint is still wet, shake on some ground foam to help your tree "grow" some leaves.

Wood-dowel traffic cones

Much as you may hate to admit, road construction scenes are eye-catching. At least they give your cars an excuse for standing still. And where there is construction, there are traffic cones.

To make them, pick up some ¼-inch round wood dowels at your local hobby shop or lumber store. Stick one dowel end in a pencil sharpener and turn it until you've formed a cone shape. Cut the conical part to about ½ inch in height. Cut a 5/16-inch square from a piece of cardboard and glue it to the cone to form a base. Paint the assembly bright orange (with black on the base, if you like). You decide how many traffic cones you need to create a real traffic jam.

Above: Use a pencil sharpener to create a pointed end on a wood dowel.

Below: Road construction zones consist of a cardboard base and a sharpened dowel end. You can paint the cone bright orange and, optionally, paint the base black.

Driver's Ed road signs

Road manuals intended for beginning drivers are a good source of scale road signs.

How about making official looking road signs that are readily available and free? Just drop by your local state license bureau or Department of Motor Vehicles office and pick up a learning manual intended for new drivers.

Make photocopies of the road signs in these manuals. I usually make two master sheets – one for yellow signs (such as curve or intersection warnings and crossing signs) and one for white signs (such as speed limit and no parking signs).

If you have a manual that has colored signs, use a color copier to print on white paper. If your illustrations are in black and white, feed either white or yellow paper into the copier feed tray, depending on what sign you're printing.

Use the "reduce" or "enlarge" settings on the copier to make your copies close to scale. You can measure the real signs and use precise settings, if you're a stickler for such details.

Glue the copied images to thin strips of basswood or plastic painted green or silver. Drill a small hole along the roadside, drop a dab of glue into it, and mount a sign.

All of these projects are fast and easy and can be completed in one evening. Remember, think small and take nothing for granted. Before you know it, your layout will be filled with real-life details. CTT

Quick scenery details

Four projects to enhance your layout

by John Souhrada | photos by Helen Adams

Scenery details can separate a hi-rail layout from one plopped onto the green surface of a ping-pong table. Visitors to my layout are endlessly fascinated with the little touches of life and details I've created from household items at little or no cost.

On these pages are four scenery projects guaranteed to bring life to your layout. They are just as easy to construct as those I described in an article in the September 2004 issue of Classic Toy Trains.

Once again, it's all about the simple, everyday elements that we often miss because they tend to blend into the background of daily life. Each of these projects can be completed in an evening or less. As with the previous projects, they will help make your layout look great, without having to spend a lot of time or money.

Fishing line phone wires

Here's a trick I learned at a train show. Telephone poles always add to the realism of a layout, but they're not too convincing without wire. Nylon fishing line makes great-looking "wire" and is easy and inexpensive to use.

Simply purchase a roll of .006-inch nylon leader line in the sporting goods department of any discount store. Start by gluing an end to one of the insulators of the first pole. If the pole has two crossbars, be sure to start with the lower one. Pull the line fairly tightly and wrap it around the equivalent insulator on the next pole.

A drop of fast-setting glue holds the line in place. The process is easier if a second person holds the line until the glue dries. Run the line around the insulators of each pole until reaching the one at the end of the layout, and then start back by wrapping it around the next insulator in line. Keep going until all the insulators are wrapped.

If you want your poles to simulate the glass insulating material of real utility poles, you can weather them with a little flat black or gray paint. Then paint the insulators with a bit of bright green paint.

Desiccant drums

An easy way to make steel drums is to use containers of desiccant, which are found in bottles of vitamins or medicines. Start by saving the little white containers, which are just about the right size for an O gauge 55-gallon drum. Mask the ends, or paint the whole container one color, and you'll have a convincing steel drum. To make it even more detailed, paste on a small label from an oil company, which can frequently be found in automotive accessory catalogs or car magazines. Keep an eye out for pictures in the advertisements, as they are often just the right size to be cut out and glued to the miniature drum.

Plastic surgery

You can purchase inexpensive, unpainted plastic figures by the bagful. To add realism to your pike, it's important to be patient and paint and place the figures on your layout. One problem: once you've painted a set, buying and painting more simply yields more of the same people. This situation can be corrected in a couple of ways.

First, paint different sets of "clothes" on similarly shaped plastic figures, as shown in the photo at the top right. This helps to add variation to your layout. To create the most vivid colors, put a coat of glossy paint over the entire figure before adding the final color.

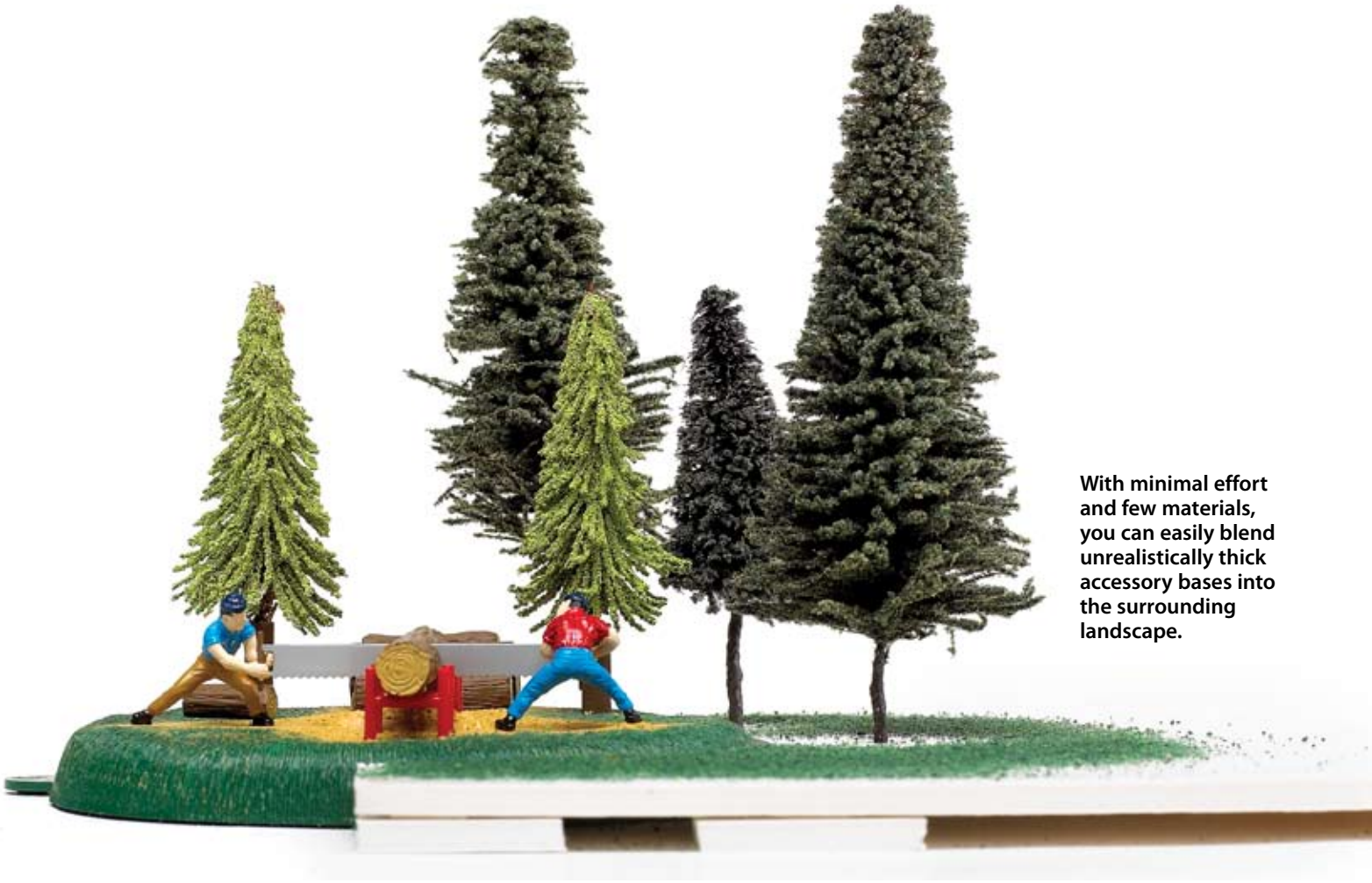
Another way to diversify your figures is to liberally cut off and re-glue their arms or the objects they are holding. The second photo at the bottom right shows variations on two different figures. The colors are different as well as the objects they are holding. A little imagination will yield a lot of ideas.

Trash cans from aluminum foil

You can find molded plastic trash cans at hobby stores or train shows, but they tend to be a little too perfect and always come with their lids on. Fortunately, there is an easy way to "empty" these cans and make more of them in the process. Simply take the molded trash can and tightly wrap some aluminum foil around it.

Press the foil hard with your fingertips so that the grooves in the cans are pressed into the aluminum foil. Press the extra foil around the end to form a bottom. Carefully slip the foil off and trim the top. Now you've got a great-looking empty can. By working the foil off you create a distortion, which gives the resulting can a banged-up look.

Follow the same procedure over the top of the can to make the lid. Remove the foil, trim the excess, and toss the lid onto the ground next to the empty can – very realistic. A little Testor's Dullcote or rust-colored paint will also add realism to the finished product.



With minimal effort and few materials, you can easily blend unrealistically thick accessory bases into the surrounding landscape.

Tricks to HIDE ugly plastic accessory bases

Use layers of foam-core board to disguise animated modules

story and photos by Peter H. Riddle

In addition to popular trackside accessories like signals and crossing gates, many toy train manufacturers now offer a wide variety of buildings, structures, and modules that include some type of realistic animation. Some of the most fascinating of these are Lionel animated modules like the no. 32987 Hobo Campfire, no. 24138 Playtime Playground, and no. 24137 Mr. Spiff and Puddles, which depict miniature figures and creatures engaged in daily activities.

Unfortunately, the mechanisms that provide these modules with such fluid and natural range of motion are mounted in a ½- to ¾-inch-thick plastic base. These accessories could be used just as they come from the box, but their thick bases detract from an otherwise realistic appearance and operation.

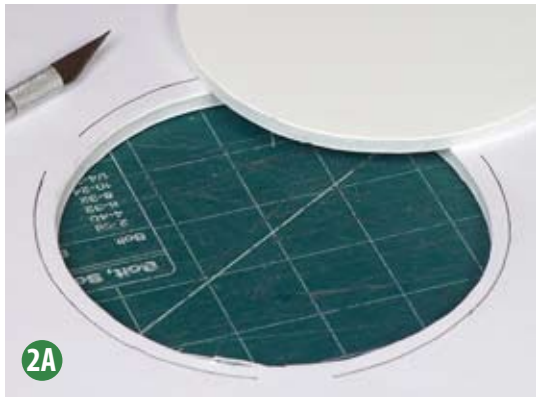
Blending the base with the rest of the scenery isn't difficult, nor does it require any special modeling skills or tools. While you could cut holes in your layout to accommodate the base, an easier solution is to build up the rest of the surrounding scenery. I'll show you how using inexpensive foam-core construction board found at art or office supply stores.

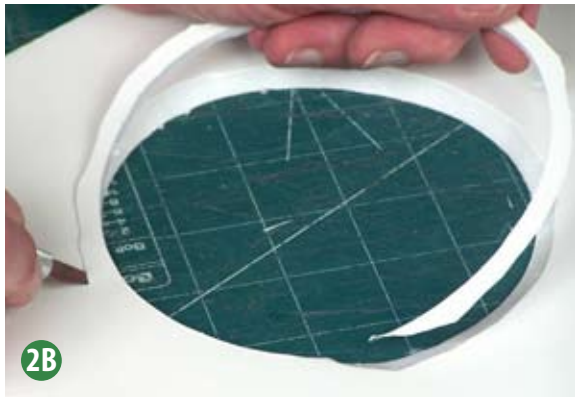
1 Survey the scene. Begin by considering where you'll install the accessory on your layout. Using a sheet of plain paper (tape multiple sheets together for larger areas), make a pattern of the entire area you plan to landscape around the accessory. Now place the accessory on the pattern and trace the outline of its base. Next, remove the pattern from your layout and tape it to your foam board. Use a hobby knife with a new no. 11 X-acto blade to cut out the landscape panel that will fit over the accessory.


1A


1B

2 Build a landscape panel. Using a hobby knife, cut a hole for your accessory ¼-inch inside the line you traced. Turn the panel over to make a ¼-inch beveled cut that follows along the edge of the hole. As you'll see next, the resulting beveled edge allows the panel to fit snugly against the rounded accessory base.

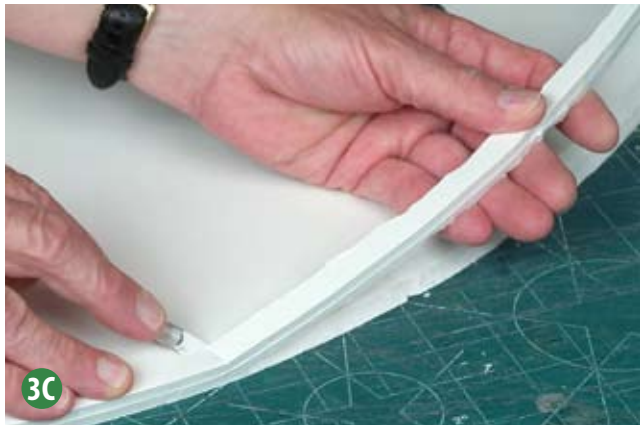

2A


2B

3 Raise the earth. Test fit the panel over the accessory, and trim the foam board as necessary. Don't worry if there are small gaps – you can disguise them later using scenery materials. Next, turn the entire panel over to build up the underside, especially around the edges and near the accessory opening, by gluing on scrap pieces of foam board. The Hobo Campfire base isn't quite ½-inch high, so two layers of 3/16-inch-thick foam board raises the panel to just about the right height. Now, turn the panel so the topside faces up. If you're placing the panel between railroad tracks, bevel the edges to simulate a ditch along the roadbed. Finish the edge using medium grit sandpaper.

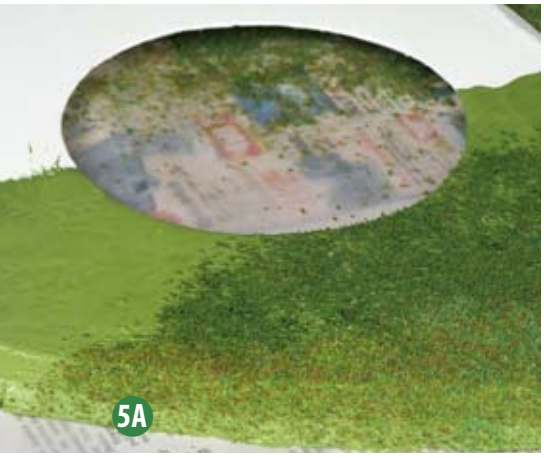

3A

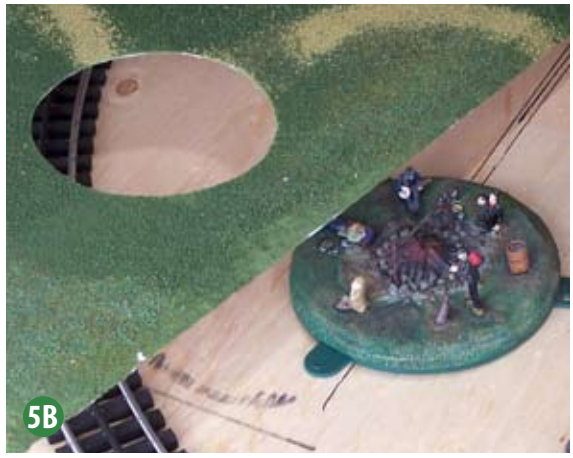

3B


3C


3D

4 Elements of disguise. I used artificial grass from Scenic Express (www.scenicexpress.com or 800-234-9995) to landscape my panel. Select a shade of grass that closely matches the colors of the accessory base. You'll also need green latex house paint, a paintbrush, and waxed paper. Paint the entire underside of the scenic panel first, and let it dry completely. The paint may cause the surface of the panel to shrink and curl slightly, but it will flatten out again when you paint the topside in the next step.





5 Cover the terrain. Cover your work area with waxed paper before brush painting the top of the panel green. Next, sprinkle various scenic materials over the panel while the paint is still wet. I used several different turf colors to simulate grass, weeds, and dirt along a footpath. Allow the paint and turf to dry, then test fit the accessory and panel. Remember to drill a hole in the layout table to route accessory wires.

6 Lock down the landscape. Fasten the panel to the layout table, using carpenter's wood glue or construction adhesive. Sprinkle small amounts of loose grass material to fill in the crack between the scenic panel and the accessory. Around my Hobo Campfire, I used coarse turf to simulate weeds. Make sure none of the scenery material interferes with the animation.

7 Blend into the scenery. Some accessories, like Lionel's Mr. Spiff and Puddles, are molded in an unnaturally bright green color. Covering the entire base with loose turf will help mute the color. This accessory is also higher than the Hobo Campfire, and requires more foam board to make the surrounding scenery rest flush with the base. If the thickness of three 3/16-inch foam boards makes the scenic panel too high, you could build up the terrace around the accessory instead, as I did for the Playtime Playground.

Painted figures add color and interest to a layout. Here, enthusiastic gas station attendants replenish the boss's Corvette, as some locals look on. The plastic figures are made by K-Line and Bachmann Bros., the 1:43 scale Corvette is by Ertl, and the gas station is Plasticville.

Painted ladies . . . and gentlemen too

How to put some color into your layout's population

BY ERIC SAYER PETERSON
PHOTOS BY PAUL WOODWORTH

RAILROADS were built by people, to serve people. So, it's only fitting that a toy train layout have a colorful citizenry all its own. By adding several tiny townsfolk to your train layout, you can make a ghost town into a veritable hub of mystery, action, and adventure.

If you don't have a number of unpainted figures stored away in a box somewhere, you're the exception. Many O scale buildings sold by companies such as Bachmann Bros. and K-Line come with an assortment of pink plastic people.

Breathe a little life in, or paint it on them (as the case may be), and they will be suitable enough to liberate from storage. You don't have to be another Picasso to paint a figure. All you need are the right supplies, a plan, and a little time.

FIG. 1. These are the basic tools and materials needed to paint plastic or metal figures: a hobby knife; a selection of round-tipped, red-sable watercolor brushes; paints with thinner and brush cleaner; and a can of flat white spray paint for priming the figures.

THE FIXIN'S

Before you begin, you're going to need a few of the fixin's shown in fig. 1: a hobby knife, brushes, and paint. Your knife should have two blades – the standard X-acto no. 11 and a no. 10 for cutting and smoothing curves, such as mold-parting lines on flat and concave surfaces.

Good brushes are worth the investment because they'll paint a better line. Round-tipped watercolor brushes with red sable bristles are best for this type of work. Higher-quality brushes are numbered on their handle – the higher the number, the more bristles. I recommend three different sizes (nos. 1, 2, and 3) for this project. Check hobby and art supply shops for a wide selection.

There are many kinds of paints to choose from, but for painting these small figures consider using Testor's Flat Enamels, sold in square, ½-ounce bottles. This

FIG. 2. During the manufacturing process, plastic oozes out between the two halves of the mold, resulting in a noticeable mold-parting line and, in extreme cases, flash. The two figures on the left need to have this excess plastic removed with a hobby knife. The two figures in the middle have been trimmed. On the right are finished figures.

line of paints is inexpensive and widely available in hobby stores. As far as colors are concerned, start with these Testor's Flats: white, black, red, sea blue, yellow, olive drab green, and brown. I would also suggest that you pick up a bottle of Testor's Enamel Thinner as well as a bottle of Testor's Brush Cleaner. Prime the figures with Testor's Flat White, available in a 3.2-ounce spray can.

PLASTIC FIGURES

If you don't have a multitude of miniature pink folk to paint, Bachmann offers a set of 32 Plasticville figures for about $8. It's best to work on about ten figures at a time; completing the first step with each of the ten figures before moving on to the next step, and so on. This approach saves time and money.

The first task is to remove the unsightly flash and mold-parting line on each figure using a no. 11 blade. As fig. 2 shows, the flash on the two left figures has been removed from the two center figures.

Flash can be quickly cut away with a sharp blade. A mold-parting line is handled differently than flash. Don't try to cut it away, just scrape along the seam by dragging the edge of the blade over the excess plastic until the area is smooth. Be sure to remove the line from around the entire body, including the insides of the legs. Clean up the base, because there's usually a line on it too. Use your no. 10 blade for this flat area.

After removing the flash and mold-parting lines, wash the figures in liquid dishwashing detergent and warm water. This removes the parting oil used in the manufacturing process, as well as the dirt and oil from your fingers. Thoroughly rinse and blot the figures dry with a lint-free towel, removing all the water from the small crevices of the figures.

Some of the figures will have sinkholes and ejector pin holes. If these depressions are shallow, you can even them out by scraping with the no. 10 blade. If they're too deep to remove by scraping, fill the holes with a drop or two of Elmer's White Glue. Elmer's shrinks as it dries, so a second coat may be necessary. Painting the figures will seal the dried glue in place.

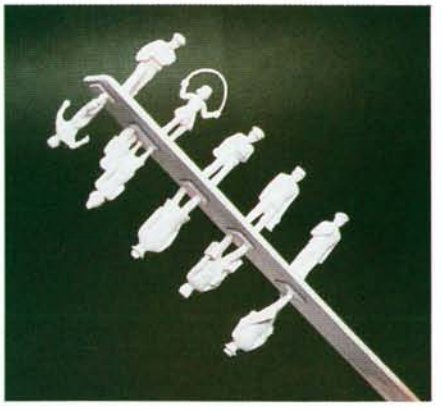


FIG. 3. Here are ten plastic figures ready to be painted. To reach this point they've been trimmed, washed, filled and smoothed, glued to the stick, and primed.

PAINTING

Prime your population with flat white paint before adding color with your paintbrush. Priming accomplishes two things: it helps you see and correct imperfections that are not visible on the unpainted plastic, and it makes the colored paint appear brighter and truer. To prime the

FIG. 4. Here's a colorful assortment of painted metal and plastic figures. Bright colors keep the figures from blending into the background. Note how the details cast into the figures are accentuated by using contrasting colors on their clothing.

figures, secure them to a flat stick with tape or super glue. As in fig. 3, place five figures on each side of the stick, spacing them at intervals of about an inch. After reading the instructions on the spray can's label, apply an even coat of paint to the figures. Too much paint will fill in the detail, so don't overdo it. With the figures still on the stick, it's best to set them aside to dry overnight.

To properly mix the bottled paint, you will have to stir and shake each bottle. For optimum paint coverage, the pigment (solids) must be thoroughly suspended in the vehicle (liquid). Stir the paint with a large, clean finishing nail. A nail is best because it won't break and is easily cleaned. Then tightly recap the bottle and shake it vigorously to break up the small chunks of pigment the nail might have missed while stirring.

Dip your no. 3 brush into the paint until the bristles are covered. Pull the brush straight up over the mouth of the bottle. Two or three drops of paint should fall off the tip of the brush. If this doesn't occur and the paint clings to the brush, it's too thick. Thick paint will obscure detail and leave a rough, uneven finish. Thin the paint by adding three or four drops of thinner, reshake, wipe off your brush, and try the test again. Be sure that you thin Testor's paints only with Testor's thinner. Other thinners tend to contaminate and coagulate the paint.

Now you're ready to make your characters colorful. Start with the lightest shades and finish with the darkest. To save time, paint one color at a time on all of the figures. For example, if you're starting with yellow, paint the girl's hair, the boy's shirt and the woman's skirt. Then move on to the next color. Paint the bases last, because you can hold the unpainted bases while painting the figures.

If the colored paint doesn't completely cover an area on your figure, resist the temptation to apply a second coat while the first coat is still wet. Otherwise, the fresh paint will act as a solvent on the first coat and you'll end up with a gummy mess on your hands. If you get a little paint in the wrong place, simply wait until it has dried, then go back and touch it up with the right color. Let the first coat dry overnight or longer if possible. Remember, these townsfolk will be on your layout for many years to come, so there's no need to rush through this project in one sitting.

The folks you see in fig. 4 are painted in colors that aren't available in the Testor's line. That's because they were *mixed* using the basic Testor's shades. For example, I think that Testor's Flat Brown is a bit too dark to use for skin tones. (They can't all look like George Hamilton.) To mix the paint, find a suitable palette, such as the lid from a baby food jar, then drop in about 20 drops of brown and 5 to 10 drops of white. Then, stir it with the finishing nail, *not* your brush. Add more of the appropriate color until you get the shade you're after. If it starts to thicken, stir in a drop of thinner.

Making a small batch like this is fine if it's a color you'll use only once. If it's a color you want to use again and again, mix it in an empty thinner bottle so you can seal the paint and reuse it later. Since it's difficult to duplicate a mixed color, I recommend mixing the paint in a bottle so it's the same shade every time. If you take a close look at the figures, you'll notice the details cast into their surfaces. Collars, neckties, buttons, belts, and pockets are all there, waiting to be accentuated by paint, just as I've done in fig. 4.

Choosing the right brush will make painting much easier. Use the no. 3 for large areas, such as bases and overcoats, and the no. 1 for buttons and buckles. The shades you apply to your figures are up to you, but try to keep them bright and colorful so they don't fade into the background of your layout.

METAL FIGURES

Metal figures are more expensive than plastic ones, but because they come in different clothing styles and poses, they're worth the extra money. Be warned, however, that many metal figures do not come with attached bases, which you will have to make. You can easily make bases of 1/32" sheet styrene. Epoxy is best to cement the two materials together.

Preparing and painting metal figures is very much the same as painting the plastic, with a few exceptions. Metal figures are a bit more delicate than the plastic variety, so they must be handled more carefully. Scrape the mold-parting lines in the same way, but be sure you don't ingest the metal particles because they have a high lead content.

If you plan on painting a number of metal figures, a good set of needle files will be useful for trimming the castings. After washing the figures, drop them in a cup of vinegar for a few minutes, then let them air-dry. The vinegar slightly etches the metal surface of the figures, giving the metal some "tooth" for the paint to adhere to. From this point forward, the process of painting metal figures is the same as with painting the plastic variety.

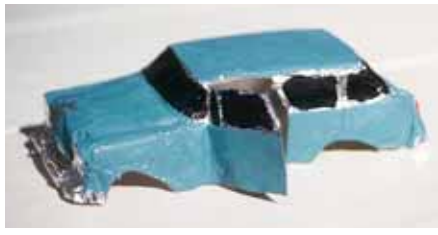
WHAT'S NEXT

Before I painted my ladies and gentlemen, people would visit my layout and ask, "Why don't you have any people in your town?" I would say, "It's nighttime, and they're all in bed." Since I've painted and populated my layout, visitors don't ask that question anymore. Now they ask, "Why aren't there any mountains on your layout?" It's always something, isn't it? CTT

Fender bending

Make quick-and-easy junked cars with foil

by Darryl White | photos by Ellen White



TOP: After wrapping foil around your "master" car, burnish in the details using a dull flat head screwdriver or similar instrument. With scissors or a hobby knife, cut away the excess foil. ABOVE: Some paint and an opened door make the model more convincing. Windows can be represented with gloss black paint.

Feel like you've been foiled in your efforts to find realistic, inexpensive scenery details? Well, junk autos – thoroughly dinged, dented, rusted, and stripped – can be yours for the low, low price of a roll of aluminum foil. Of course, you'll have to junk 'em yourself, but this easy project won't strain your how-to skills in effectively detailing your layout.

This simple method uses household aluminum foil placed over an existing toy or model car, which creates a shell that you can transform into a junkyard model. You will need heavy-duty aluminum foil, gloss black paint, your choice of flat colors, a hobby knife, a small, dull slot-head screwdriver, a pair of small scissors, and your choice of model cars for use as "masters."

To get started, cut a sheet of foil approximately 7 by 9 inches and lay it on the table dull side up. (The shinier side on the exterior will represent chrome parts once you're done.) Select the model car you want to reproduce and place it roof-down on the foil.

Next, pick up the foil and car and begin wrapping, continually holding the shaped foil in place. Wrap the car from top to bottom as tightly as you can without tearing the foil. Then, using the blade of the slot-head screwdriver, gently burnish the surface of the foil until the car's finer details show through the foil.

When you're satisfied that all the details are adequately represented, remove the excess foil using your knife or scissors from the car's fender wells and all around the bottom of the vehicle. With the screwdriver blade, smooth away as many wrinkles as you like (but remember it *is* a junk car).

Finally, carefully peel the foil off. You may have to loosen it from the bottom of the car to do so.

At this point, you have a raw model that you can customize further. Bend or bash the body to suit your trashy tastes and then decide how you'd like to paint the exterior.

Use black gloss paint directly on the foil to represent the windows or, if you prefer, carefully cut away the foil with your hobby knife.

Paint the inside of the shell flat black or a color resembling old rust. (For rust, I prefer Apple Barrel Nutmeg Brown no. 20521, a water-based brushable paint available in craft stores.)

To simulate chrome trim, you can leave certain areas, such as bumpers and windshield moldings, unpainted.

To create a more convincing look, use your hobby knife to randomly open doors, hoods and trunks. Leave just a little foil to represent a hinge.

In just a couple hours, you can create a whole junkyard's worth of cars. That's a "lot" of scenery, all for the price of a roll of foil. CTT

Welder-done

An easy-to-build scene to give your layout sparkle

by Don Woodwell

FOR ME, RUNNING TRAINS is just one aspect of our hobby. Creating interesting scenes around moving trains is another.

A while ago, I found myself intrigued by a miniature welding scene with a flickering arc-welding light. I knew I had to make my own.

An old plastic bus with a broken wheel seemed like a natural for a welder's "repair job." I figured a Lionel Barrel Shed, which is about the right size for a mechanic's workshop, could hide the electronic board that drives the flickering light.

I wanted the whole scene removable. It's easier to build that way, and if I ever need to make changes, sitting down at my workbench is a better repair posture than standing and leaning into my layout. Given the footprint of the shed and size of the bus, I determined I needed a 3/32-inch-thick, 4 by 5-inch base board, so I cut some basswood and sanded its edges.

Next, I assembled and painted the shed from the Lionel kit, but left the roof unglued. I positioned the shed on my layout, marked holes in the base for the wires, and then glued the finished shed to base. Once it was dry, I set a welder electronic board inside the shed and ran wires out of the holes.

Elsewhere on the basswood base, I glued the bus in place (leaving one wheel off) and then glued the small flickering light bulb onto the welder figure's hands, running the wires beneath the board inside the shed.

After hooking up the wires, I tested the flickering welder light with a 12-volt AC power source.

I finished assembling and painting the variety of castings and kits I chose to enhance the scene and then glued the welder, the junk pile, and these assorted pieces to the base. I topped off the scene with a little landscaping.

After drilling a hole for wiring and positioning the mini-scene on my layout, I installed a pushbutton on my control panel (you could also place it near the mini-scene). I ran wires from the scene to the pushbutton and to a 12-volt AC power source.

Little details such as these make layouts come alive, and help bond visitors' attention to our hobby. CTT

DON WOODWELL PHOTO

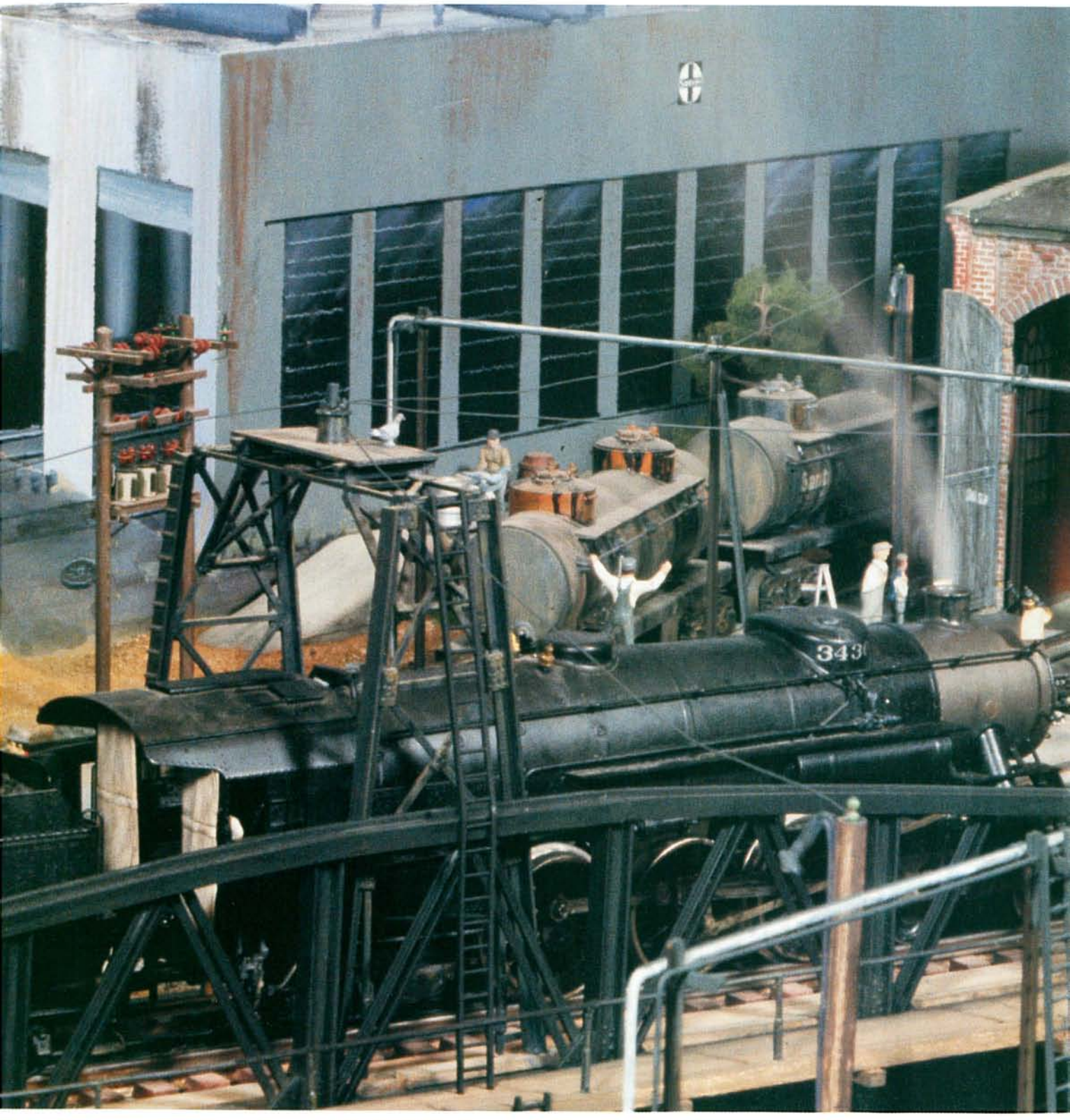
Parts list

- Welder Light Kit – Busch
- Barrel Shed with barrels and ladder – Lionel
- Vehicle – your choice
- Welder figure – Arttista
- Momentary contact pushbutton – Radio Shack
- 30-gauge hookup wire – Miniatronics
- Miscellaneous castings (tire jack, axle, muffler/pipe, oil pumps, engine block – Oakridge Hobbies
- Gas welding set and auto junk pile – Valley Model Trains
- Miscellaneous supplies (basswood, landscaping materials, and other welder bulbs and kits) – Your local hobby store

This Circuitron arc welder circuit is similar to the Busch unit Don used, but it has larger bulbs to simulate a welder working inside a building.

Turn your engine service area into an operational highlight

A home for your



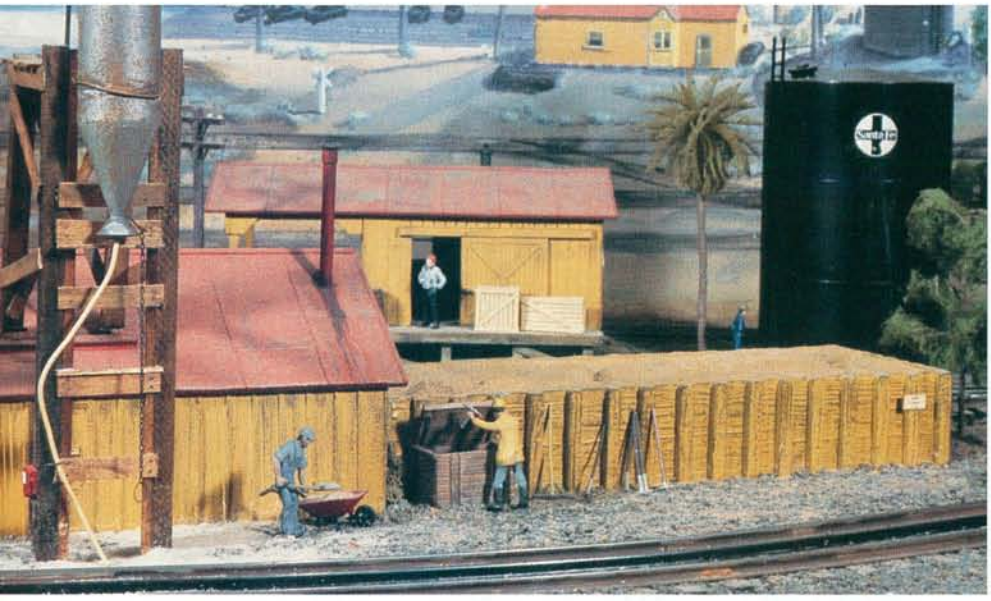
locomotives

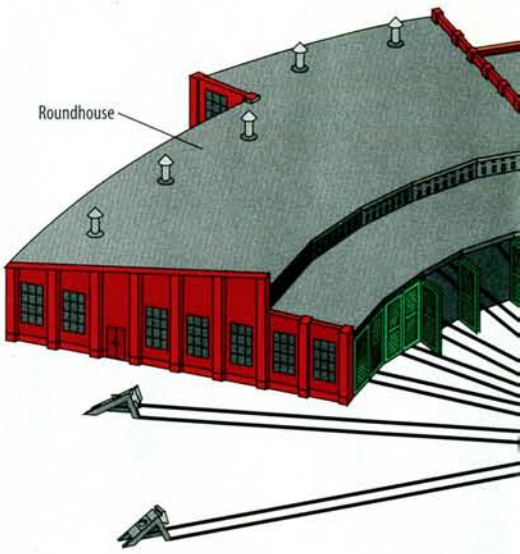
by Joe Lesser
Photos by author

A MASSIVE STEAM engine barreling down the high iron is the essence of sheer, volcanic power. But in reality, a steam locomotive is a delicate piece of machinery, often requiring maintenance – minor or otherwise – before and after every run.

The maintenance areas found on most model railroads are reasonable approximations of prototypical turn-around terminals. These facilities inspect locomotives between runs, make light (or "running") repairs, and fuel, lubricate, and water the engines for the next trip. If you model the steam era, chances are you already have the makings of a realistic maintenance area.

There is plenty of activity in the locomotive service area on the author's JL/ATSF Railway. Number 3430 is being readied for another run. A service area can be a terrific way to add interest to your layout.





TOP:The JL/ATSF sand house occupies a prominent spot in the yard with easy accessibility to the roundhouse and locomotives moving in and out of the service area.

ABOVE: The JL/ATSF turntable can align with 10 tracks. A Dallee Electronics optical infra-red sensor on the underside of the turntable automatically aligns the tracks leading from the turntable bridge. A Right-of-Way saddle tank switcher is seen here pushing a Williams Mikado off the turntable bridge.

Engine house or roundhouse?

Let's examine some facilities appropriate for our turn-around terminal. If only one or two locomotives are on your layout at a given time, Lionel's no. 12897 Engine House or International Hobby Corp.'s Engine House would be a perfect choice. Even a 4 x 8-foot layout can accommodate one of these structures at the end of a spur.

If space permits, a traditional railroad roundhouse is a wonderful addition to any model railroad. Korber Models makes a fine roundhouse. The basic kit includes three stalls and additional stalls are available.

A major service area on a steam-era prototype railroad might require 30, 40, or even more engine-service stalls. Since 30 or 40 tracks leading into a rectangular engine house would require an enormous amount of space, railroads favored the turntable-and-roundhouse combination. To efficiently serve a roundhouse, a turntable needs only a pair of approach tracks, one for inbound and one for outbound engines. Of course, turntables are also handy when a locomotive must be turned for its next run.

Turntable kits are available from Bowser and electronic controls that stop the turntable in alignment with the roundhouse tracks are available from Dallee Electronics and others.

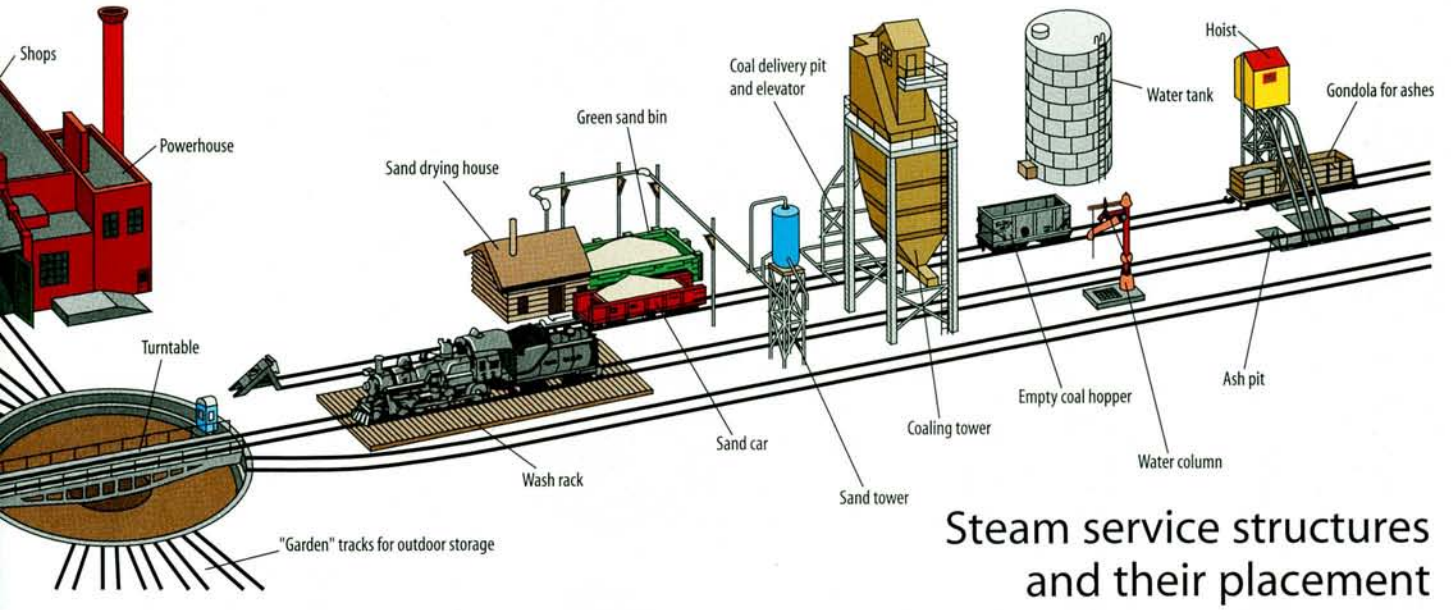
The diameter of the turntable pit, naturally, determines the length of the turntable bridge. A 24-inch bridge handles most locomotives, but three-rail manufacturers are marketing some very large locomotives these days, and sometimes it's impossible to install a bridge that's long enough. Even the roundhouse stalls may not be deep enough to accommodate, for instance, the 29-inch length of an MTH RailKing Big Boy. There is no need to fret – the arrival of longer locomotives caused the same headache for real railroads. Typically, railroads addressed the problem by building a track alongside the roundhouse to accommodate engines that had outgrown the roundhouse.

Beyond a turntable and roundhouse there are many possible service structures for your layout. A coaling tower, water tower, sand house and tower, fuel and water tanks, ash pit, storage facilities, standpipes, and tool cribs are all considerations.

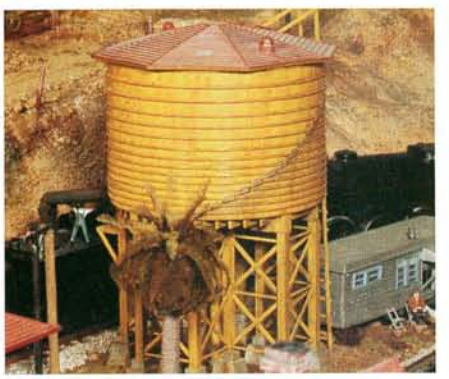
Water tank

Since steamers consume water four times faster than fuel, water towers were common in bygone days. Water tanks are usually located next to the main line for mid-trip fill-ups. A service facility would be more likely to have a water standpipe beside the outbound track. Standpipes save space, which is a precious commodity in both real and model rail yards.

Lionel saluted the association of steam locomotives and water towers with one of the company's earliest accessories – the no. 93 Locomotive Water Tank, which debuted in the 1931 catalog. In 1948, Lionel introduced the no. 30 Water Tower (renumbered as 138 in 1953), which has become a perennial favorite of operators – 50



Steam service structures and their placement



LEFT: A fuel-oil standpipe is ready to fill the tender on one of the JL/ATSF's oil-burning steamers. The storage tank in the background supplies oil to the standpipe.

CENTER: The trackside water tank is an icon of the steam era. Here one of Lionel's most popular operating accessories, a no. 30 Water Tower repainted in Santa Fe colors, is filling a tender.

RIGHT: Tool cribs are essential in any service facility. Happily, tool cribs are also easy to model realistically and miniature tools are available from several manufacturers.

years after its introduction, it still makes regular appearances in the catalog.

Coaling tower

A coaling tower or elevator is another key structure for maintaining locomotives – you have to burn fuel to heat the water to make the steam. Coal was the fuel of choice for most railroads in eastern states, while fuel oil reigned supreme in the West and Southwest.

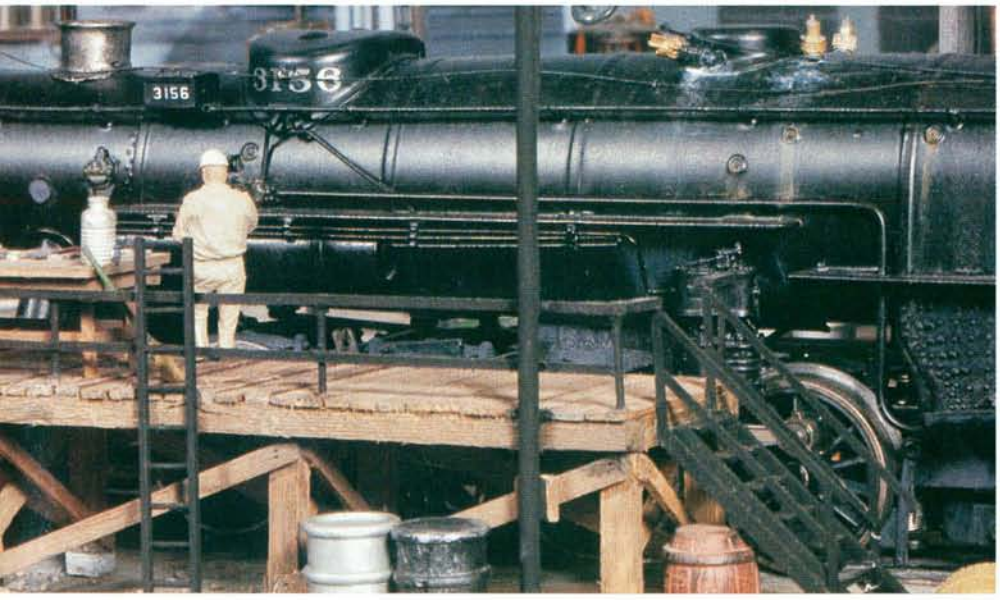
Easterners with coal-burning engines can choose between Lionel's no. 97 Coal Elevator, Lionel's no. 12904 Coaling Station, or Bachmann's Plasticville USA Coaling Tower.

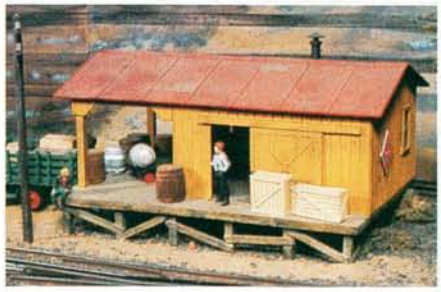
The no. 97 Coal Elevator, introduced in 1938, was Lionel's first remote control operating freight accessory. The elevator works prototypically, but Lionel never provided a tender one could load with coal. I suppose Lionel's product designers felt that manually emptying the tender before reloading would be unappealing. But gee, it would look so realistic!

Bachmann's Coaling Tower is a common sight on many layouts. (This Plasticville classic also graced the cover of CLASSIC TOY TRAINS in September.) Lionel plans to make a molded plastic three-piece coaling tower set (no. 6-22936) that would include tower, hopper shed, and work house. However, on the JL/ATSF, a western layout, steamers would theoretically be oil-burners. Large tanks and a fuel-oil standpipe are prototypical.

Sand house

Both steam and diesel locomotives spray sand on the rails when improved traction is needed, so a sand house is another necessary service structure. This building dries sand so that it will flow readily once loaded on an engine. Korber Models' sand house is space-efficient and combines a sand tower with the building. Sand houses are generally located along the outbound service track. If you have a Burro crane, you can equip it with a clamshell bucket and put it to use alongside the sand house to empty gondolas of sand.





TOP LEFT: This service platform located beside the roundhouse is at a convenient height for performing light repairs on a steam locomotive. Workbench, tools, barrels, lights and figures all add to this platform's realism.

TOP RIGHT: Shacks, shanties, and other small buildings can be placed practically anywhere in the service facility. They are used for storage, an office, or to house supplies. This Lionel no. 12773 Freight Platform does double duty as a freight storage facility and as an office for yard personnel.

ABOVE: This old American Flyer S scale tank car has a new lease on life. This detail is a simple project and also looks prototypical. The Santa Fe Ry. had a tank just like this one in its yard in Bakersfield, Calif.

Other structures

To work on steamers, railroads need big tools, cranes, welding tanks and torches, ladders, and all kind of fluids stored in drums. These details add realism and take up virtually no space.

A servicing platform is another neat touch and looks particularly appropriate alongside an outdoor service track for big engines. In the 1950s, Lionel's staff prepared the material for Bantam's book *Model Railroading*. (This paperback was reproduced by Greenberg Books a few years ago. Although it is now out of print, copies may still be found in hobby shops and train meets.) This book has excellent ideas and schematics for constructing yard buildings, including a section on building a servicing platform.

Usually a platform would have a workbench, welding tanks, electric lights, and space beneath the platform where junk was always discarded . . . sort of like sweeping dirt under the rug. And don't forget to add some hard-working "little people" to the scene.

Maintaining steamers required lots of hand tools, including some very large ones, so a tool crib or toolbox is a simple yet prototypical addition to your layout. A tool crib is easy to construct, and miniature tools are available from several manufacturers.

In every service area there are always tanks filled with lubricating oil, water, and fuel. You can find inexpensive junk tank cars at your local train meet and convert them into stationary fuel oil tanks. First remove the tank from its frame and paint it black or silver. Next, carve two cradles for the tank from balsa and paint them to look like concrete. Finally, cut a piece of Plastruct ladder stock, to fit between the existing tank ladder and the ground. The ladder, too, is painted silver.

There are usually several small buildings in a service or freight yard for storage or to house lubricating oils. (For fire safety reasons, flammable materials are isolated in a separate shed.) Sometimes a small building would house a fire wagon or fire truck. A small building is appropriate for a yard foreman's office, too.

Lionel's no. 12773 Freight Platform or no. 12718 Barrel Shed are simple kits that can serve as office and storage buildings. With accompanying figures and other details, these buildings can be quite effective.

You may also consider adding some junk piles around the service area. Unfortunately, railroad workers have not always been fastidious about the condition of company property. Anything and everything is thrown around, and metal parts are frequently left in piles awaiting the scrap dealer.

Around-the-clock operation

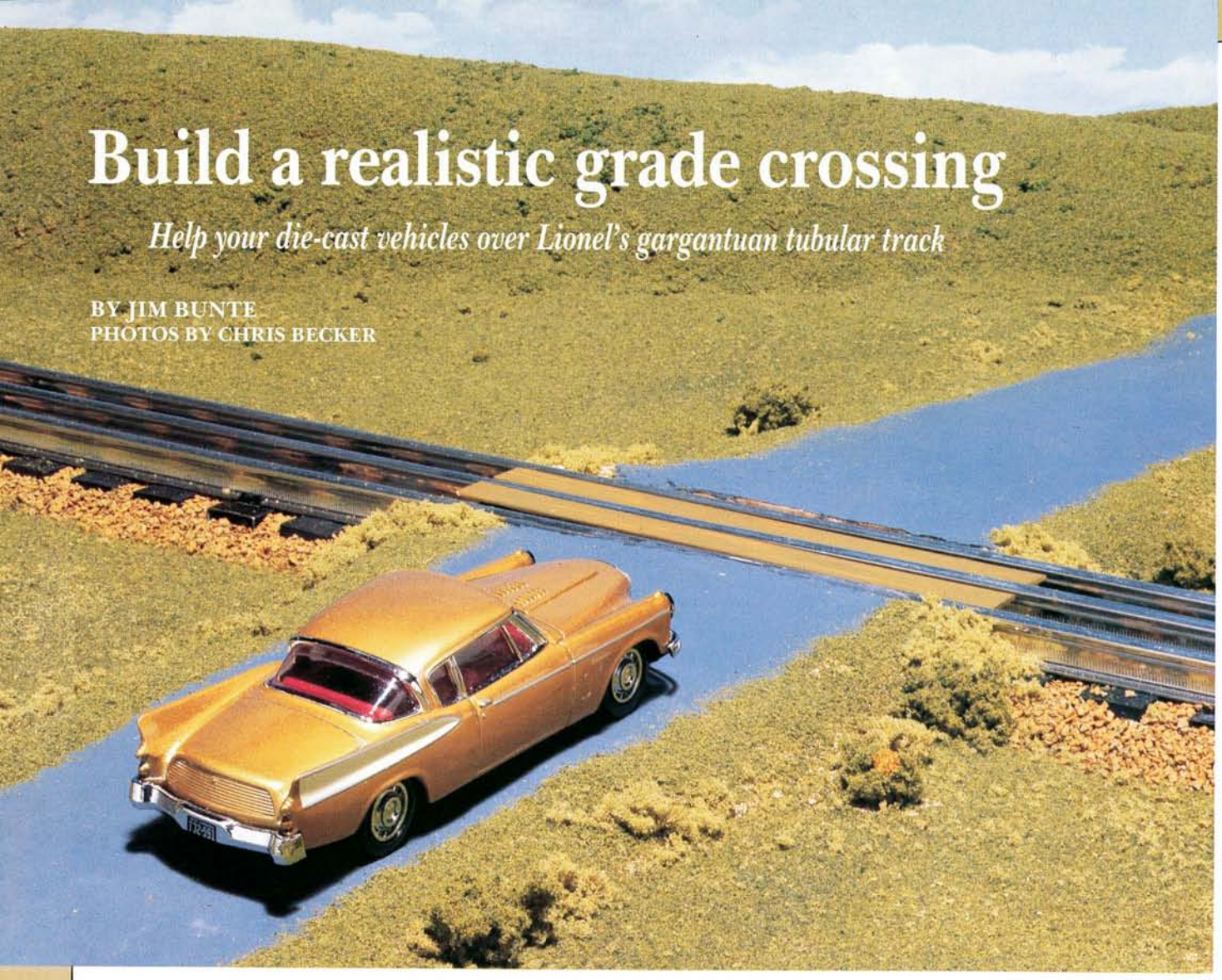
We forget sometimes that running a railroad is a continuous business. It must have been difficult indeed to repair a locomotive before electric lights came into use. But the railroads kept up with technology and lights in yards and service areas are prominent features. Over the years, Lionel and other toy train manufacturers have produced excellent light towers.

There are lots of other details you can model for your service area. Pictures of prototype railroad yards and pictures of model railroads in books and magazines are excellent sources of ideas for making the steam era come to life on your own layout. GTT

Build a realistic grade crossing

Help your die-cast vehicles over Lionel's gargantuan tubular track

BY JIM BUNTE
PHOTOS BY CHRIS BECKER



SUSPENSION OF DISBELIEF. It's that leap of faith you must make before you'll accept the incredible goings-on of a particular scenario. Take Tom and Jerry cartoons. Does anyone *really* believe Tom gets blown to smithereens by Jerry during each and every cartoon?

Of course not. That's suspension of disbelief. And it's a concept that works overtime when it comes to the wonderful world of toy trains. This acceptance makes toy train enthusiasts comfortable with even the most bizarre examples of proportion deficit. We never give it a second thought.

But I'll admit that even I can't accept *some* things. A scale 35-foot highway flasher, okay. But 3-foot-high Lionel tubular track at a grade crossing? Put a die-cast automobile next to Lionel track, and it looks like a 5-foot-tall teenage boy dancing with the captain of the girls' basketball squad.

Let's eliminate that disparity. With a minimum of materials and even less talent, you can build a believable grade crossing for your Lionel layout in short order. Cars can roll over Lionel track without fear of losing their oil pans. The teenage boy gets platform shoes.

GETTING STARTED

I like the look of Lionel sectional track with extra ties added, and the new rubber ties from Moondog Express are just right. This is a matter of taste, of course, but if you want to build a realistic grade crossing, you're probably going to want extra ties to further the illusion. After installing the ties, fasten the track securely to your tabletop with wood screws.

There's a wonderful product sold at hobby shops and art supply stores called Sculptamold. It's a paper product mixed with lots of glue, and when combined with water it makes a dynamite modeling substance. Using Sculptamold, you can build a "ramp" of appropriate length that brings your tabletop roadway right up to the Lionel railhead. Build the ramp any length — it's determined by the logistics of your layout. The ones I built for my diorama are roughly 8" long.

Mix the Sculptamold to the consistency of grandma's oatmeal — thick and sticky, and none too tasty. The more water you add, the soupier it gets, so keep it relatively dry. Get a small putty knife to apply the Sculptamold. Build the ramp from thick to thin; that is, start heavy right next to the track and work downhill toward the original road level. You'll be surprised how quickly the ramp comes together. See fig. 1.

After you've formed both ramps, use a wet finger to make the roadway surface as smooth as possible. Leave the outer edges of the ramp alone — they look more realistic when they're rough.

MIDDLE OF THE ROAD

Your cars and trucks now have a smooth approach to that monstrously tall Lionel track section. The next step is to carry them across the chasm between the three rails. Most grade

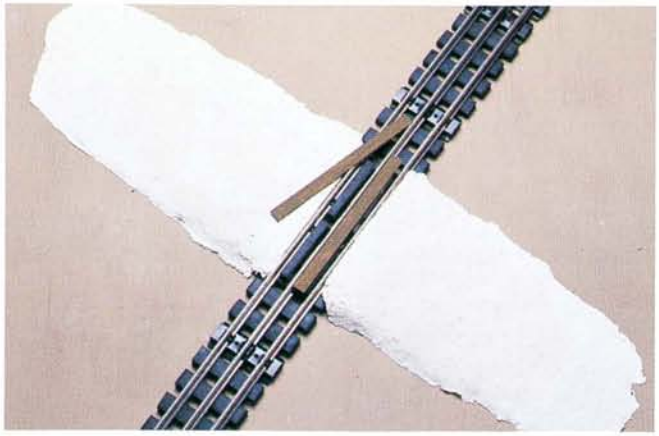


FIG. 1. Build your ramps with Sculptamold. Start at the rail and work downhill, making sure the Sculptamold is just below the tubular railhead. The "planking" comes from Evergreen styrene strips and appropriate-height spacers.

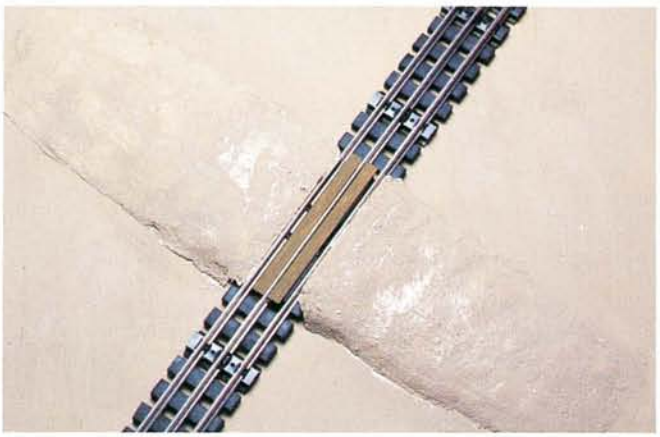


FIG. 3. After the Sculptamold ramps have dried, seal them with earth-tone latex paint. It provides a foundation for the Floquil roadway paint as well as scenicking details. Note the look of installed planking between the Lionel rails.

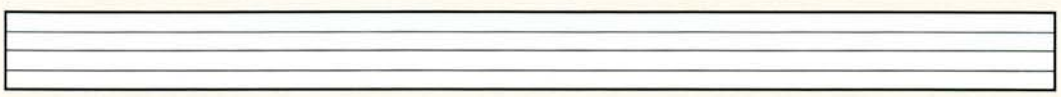


FIG. 2 GRADE CROSSING PLANK (ACTUAL SIZE)

crossings have one of three types of between-the-rails support: blacktop or concrete, steel plates, or wooden planks. Since my diorama represents a rural grade crossing, I went with wood. Again, refer to fig. 1.

Evergreen Scale Models makes great modeling materials that are available at virtually all hobby shops. Visit yours and ask for a package of no. 4100 V-groove sheet styrene, .040″ thick with .100″ spacing. It's perfect for O scale wooden crossings. Use the template in fig. 2 and cut two sections. A small amount of Polly S Brown paint will give them that wooden look.

Installing the two plank sections is a snap. You'll need something to shim the styrene to a position just below the Lionel railhead. I used sliced-in-half Moondog ties, but you can use anything that elevates the styrene. Plop your shims on either side of the center rail, and glue them down.

Place your plank sections on top of these shims, making sure the styrene hugs the center rail. The styrene sections are wide enough to carry the illusion yet thin enough to allow both postwar and modern-era wheelsets to clear the grade crossing. Test your crossing with various locomotives and rolling stock before gluing the planks into position.

FINISHING TOUCHES

It's amazing how quickly needed things come together! By this point your grade crossing should look pretty good. All you need now is some final scenicking details to complete the scene, including paint, ground foam, and that all-important element, die-cast automobiles.

The white Sculptamold surface leaves a lot to be desired, so find some earth-tone latex paint and give it a solid coat (fig. 3). While that dries, head over to your hobby shop and pick up a wide paintbrush and a bottle of Floquil no. 120132 Southern Pacific *Lark* Dark Gray. It's a perfect match for blacktop. Turn on a fan, open the windows (Floquil fumes shouldn't be inhaled), and paint a roadway. Don't worry about the road's edges — you can cover them with a sprinkling of ground foam.

Woodland Scenics foam products are easy to use and look great with minimum effort. A single coat of "grass" is all that's necessary, though you can add depth by using different colors and textures. Start by making a shaker bottle from an old glass jar with a screw-on top. Punch a few holes in the lid, and you're ready to go.

Next, get two spray bottles and mix a 20:1 water-to-white glue solution in one. In the other, mix a little dishwashing detergent with a lot of water.

Armed with your triple-bottle attack force, douse the area with a wash of the detergent mixture. Shake your ground foam container over the wet plywood and painted Sculptamold, making sure you *just* cover the edge of the *Lark* Dark Gray roadway surface. Apply a light coat at first; it's better to do two thin coats rather than one heavy application.

When you're satisfied with the foam's coverage and consistency, hit the grade crossing area with another misting of detergent water followed by the glue-and-water mixture. Some foam will scatter in response to the spray bottle effect, but most will stay in place. You can add small clumps of lichen, coarse ground foam, or even road signs. (How about a "railroad crossing" crossbuck?) Check the lead photo for one humble example of a finished Lionel grade crossing.

And don't forget cars — Ertl, Matchbox Dinky, Mattel Corgi, and Brooklins all manufacture 1:43 cars and trucks perfect for Lionel layouts. Selection depends on price: Ertl is the lowest (under $10), Dinky and Corgi are priced around $15 each, while Brooklins run in the $60 range. Contact CTT die-cast car advertisers for price and availability.

NO MORE OIL PAN JOBS

Simplicity and good looks — it's a good way to describe this dandy little project. Your die-cast cars and trucks will thank you when they see that wonderful grade crossing you've installed. And so will your overworked suspension of disbelief! CTT

Small scenes made simple

Three evening detail projects to bring a layout to life

by Stan Trzoniec
photos by the author

When it comes to putting the final touches on your layout, nothing stands out more than scenery and details. You can readily enhance your landscape with buildings, streetlights, cars, and people, all strategically positioned to make your layout more interesting.

But for many toy train enthusiasts, this final stage of layout construction is a sticking point. While they may feel well equipped to deal with the more structural aspects of building a layout, some folks feel intimidated by the finer aspects. For some, visualizing something from nothing can be daunting. Others can visualize the final outcome, but they don't know how to get started. For many builders with large track plans, the greatest problem tends to be: the bigger the layout, the bigger the problem.

Amid the weeds, several drums, tanks, and a relay cabinet complete a scene immediately next to the Shamokin Junction tower.

While constructing my SouthWestern Lines layout, I came across a simple strategy that seems to take away these anxieties. Basically, I start in smaller chunks, focusing on two or three square feet at a time. In this way, scenery projects seem easier to envision and accomplish. Using products on hand, I've found I can complete a scene in about three hours. That's roughly one evening of work per scene.

Here are three simple projects that are equally suited to both beginner and veteran. You can take them verbatim or use them as an inspiration for similar scenes on your layout.

Shamokin Junction

Though it doesn't even remotely resemble any scene in the real town of Shamokin, Pa., a junction scene I created does try to pick up the flavor of eastern railroading. This area, which took me three hours to complete, occupies less than two square feet on my layout but is a prime example of how noteworthy details can seemingly grow out of nowhere once you begin.

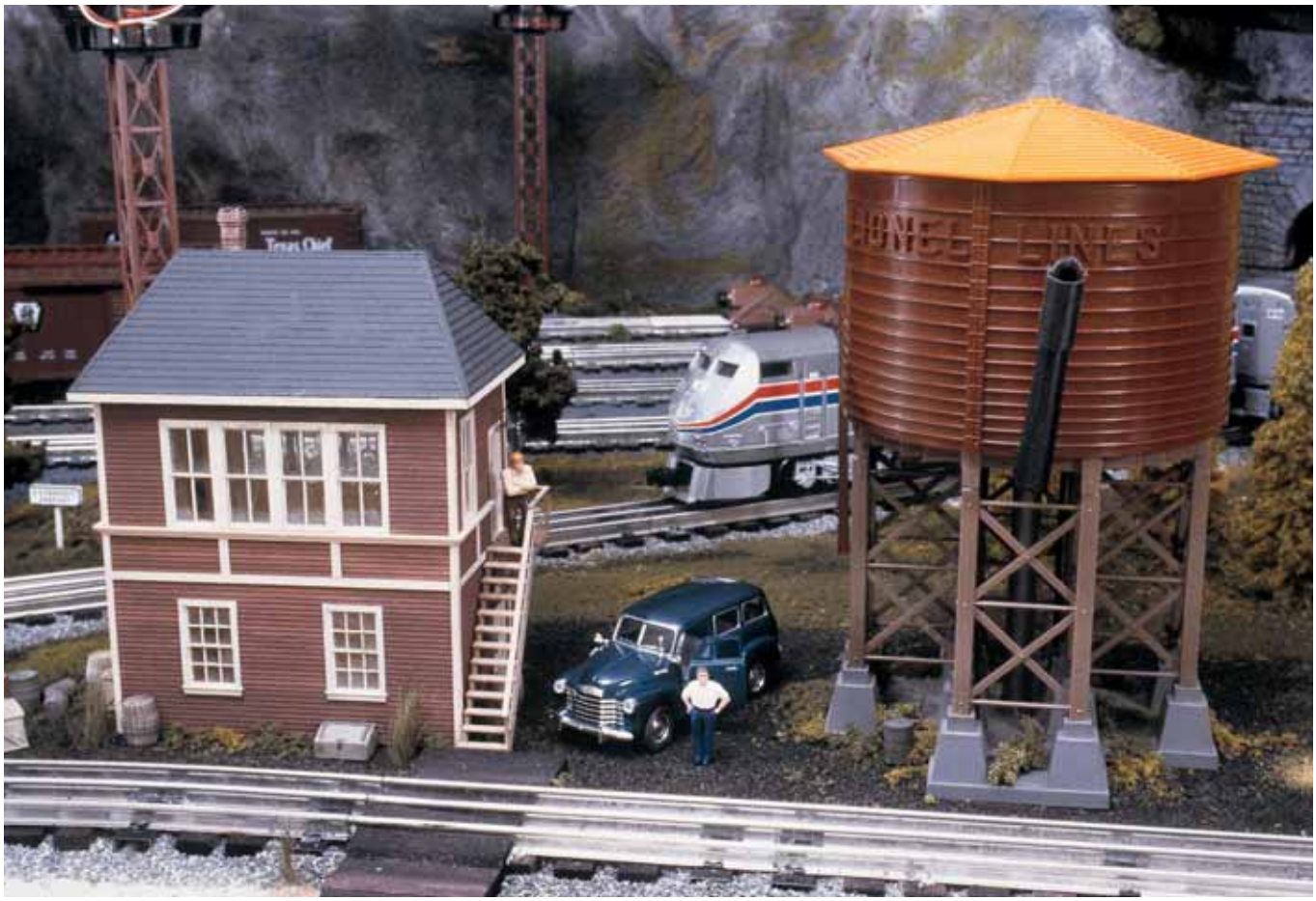
For starters, I broke off smaller pieces from a cast plaster retaining wall to help shore up part of an embankment near the junction. I secured these small wall sections with a hearty dose of Gypsolite and weathered them with a wash of India ink and alcohol. Then I finished them off with earth, grass, and ground cover.

I've found that time spent in planning can result in some pretty awesome scenes. With this in mind, I first decide which buildings I need, then I loosely position them and continue to move them around until I like what I see.

For this scene, I noted that a junction is an important part of a modern railroad's general operational scheme – a place where lines converge and orders are handed to crews. I visualized a switch tower and a water tank at minimum, knowing that I would add other details as I proceeded.

Finding a water tank was no problem. Digging into my cache, I pulled out a box containing a Lionel no. 138 operating water tank. (I plan to make it operational in the near future.) Next to that, I installed a scale tower that I purchased already built and slightly weathered. I felt it was reminiscent of eastern interlocking towers, complete with a staircase along an exterior wall.

After the buildings were marked and permanently positioned, I completed the groundwork. I ballasted the track and painted the "ground" a medium brown to hide the factory gray of the Homasote board used



on my layout. While the paint was still wet, I liberally applied cinders (made by Scenic Express) around both the tower and water tank, then added Woodland Scenics green blend ground foam, followed by additional colors to add depth.

As I progressed, I added a few telephone poles where appropriate, evergreen trees in one corner, and bits of lichen at the water tank's base. Smaller detail items – weathered drums, old toolboxes, an upright relay box, and weeds – give a finer appearance to the scene.

I then considered how I could add "life," or details that you can imagine to be in motion, to the scene. You can see the fellow (a miniature of me) who drove up in his spiffy Chevrolet Suburban to watch the next train. This railfan gives the tower worker an excuse to step out of his enclosure, if only to chat for a moment. Or perhaps he needs to inspect the oncoming train for defects.

Meanwhile, a PRR crew member busily unloads some chain link rolls from a pickup so that a fence can be installed to keep rocks from falling onto the main line.

Finally, to complete the scene, I added a few ties, serving as a timber walkway, to help the tower man cross the tracks to maintain the signal on the other side. For filler between the rails, I used N scale cork roadbed, which makes perfect grade crossing material between Lionel O gauge tubular track. (Make sure that the roadbed material doesn't interfere with wheel flanges when installing it.)

McDonald's Siding

In this area of roughly three square feet, I incorporated my prized Lionel no. 313 Bascule bridge and a Walthers mill (built from a kit) along a deserted siding. An open lead to a tunnel runs under the bridge. (I know it's not very realistic for a Bascule bridge to be built over a tunnel, but I wanted this impressive Lionel accessory to be clearly visible on my layout.) The overall effect is a scene with added depth.

After building the mountain behind the mill, I began to detail this scene by working on the siding itself.

Since I wanted to depict a well-worn siding, I sprayed the spur track with flat black paint, wiping the top of the

TOP: A Williams Amtrak Genesis highballs down the main line as a railfan (a miniature of the author!) watches the action at Shamokin Junction. Stan moved the two buildings (a scale tower and a Lionel water tank) around until he was satisfied with the scene, and then added smaller details.

ABOVE: A variety of details can be added, such as this maintenance worker who is dropping off a load of chain link fence.

BOTTOM: Looking down at McDonald's Siding, you can see the elements that make this scene an eye catcher. The Bascule bridge over the tunnel, the mill, and the rear bridge all add to the depth.

BELOW: Just like many real railroads, when the switch at McDonald's Siding was ripped up, many of the ties were left in place.

rails clean. Later, I added rust to the rails to simulate their lack of use. To firmly establish that this track has been abandoned, I haphazardly piled loose ties to represent the place where the switch had been removed by railroad workers. A bit of ground cover, weeds, and a Lionel bumper complete this part of the scene. (As a final touch, you might want to add a weathered and weary boxcar, which the mill might use for storage.)

The mill itself was custom built by Model Building Services (264 Marrett Road, Lexington, MA 02421). Owner Stu Gralnik did a heck of a job detailing the building with a rock-type foundation, period signs, tar paper roof, and other fine detailing, with just enough weathering to make it all come together.

To allow trucks to access the mill, I made a dirt road. (Eventually, I'll add a modified grade crossing to ease their trek across the tracks.) Men on the mill platform go about their daily routine of packing and shipping orders via truck. For the night shift, I added an MTH light pole.

Just behind the mill is another Lionel bridge, on which I attached weeds to enhance its appearance. (This is something I picked up years ago from the writings of legendary modeler Frank Ellison and his vine tricks.) To add depth, I placed a small hill between the Bascule bridge and the mill, then added a relay box and some vehicles to complete the scene.

This simple yet detailed project took a little more than two hours to complete.

Mechanicsville Yard

For a project that was actually an afterthought, my Mechanicsville Yard scene, which took about 3½ hours, turned out to be a great addition for two reasons. First, it's an area where I can fully test Lionel's TrainMaster Command Control on locomotives, accessories, and switches. Second, by electrically isolating the yard from the rest of the layout, I created a place for visitors to perform yard operations, even under the aura of yard lights at night.

In creating the venue, I wanted to give the impression that rocks had been blasted to make way for the yard. On the resulting rock faces, I used Gypsolite

sprayed with Woodland Scenics slate gray stain. I also soaked the nearly vertical cliffs with matte medium (you can also use diluted white glue) and then threw scenic material against the moistened surface. Admittedly, my approach was a little unconventional, but the material did successfully stick to hard-to-reach surfaces.

Any yard should be low on the list of things that a railroad superintendent should have to worry about. To that end, I wanted to give my yard a neglected look.

First, I purchased 10 pounds of gray Ballast King rubber ballast to install between the ties. Then, around and in between the tracks, I planted some lichen and ground foam to indicate maintenance neglect. In a few areas, a dusting of cinders help to convey this concept even further, especially around the fueling area.

Each track ends at Lionel bumpers, whose toy-like appearance I tempered with ground foam secured with matte medium.

I scratchbuilt the inside yard's only structure. In fact, it was one of the first structures I ever scratchbuilt, almost 40 years ago, using Northeastern wood parts. A few trees, generous piles of lichen, and a one-man yard crew attract your eye to this uneventful, but well thought out, area.

After I had spread the ballast and cleaned the rails, I positioned nine Lionel yard light towers. Before I screwed down the towers, I installed a set of leads to each, grouping the wires at a central point under the layout for hook-up later. Eventually, I decided to hook up these accessories so that I could vary the voltage – hence I can control the lights' intensity to represent different times of the day from dusk to dawn.

At the throat of the yard, I will eventually install a Lionel no. 395 light tower, a no. 415 diesel facility, and a no. 445 tower to guard the yard entrance.

Recently, as I was cleaning up this latest project, my wife came down the stairs to my "domain." She looked around and mumbled to the effect of, "Will all this ever be completed some day?"

I nodded, but between us toy train fanatics, we all know it will never be completed, right? To us, that's just part of the fun. GTT

TOP: Mechanicsville yard uses lichen and ground foam amid rubber ballast to give it a neglected look. The shelter, built by Stan almost 40 years ago, adds detail to the rear of the yard.

ABOVE: The yard comes to an end at Lionel bumpers, weathered to make them look less toy-like. Rocks had to be "blown away" to make room for the yard – at least, that's the effect Stan wanted to convey in creating the rock faces.