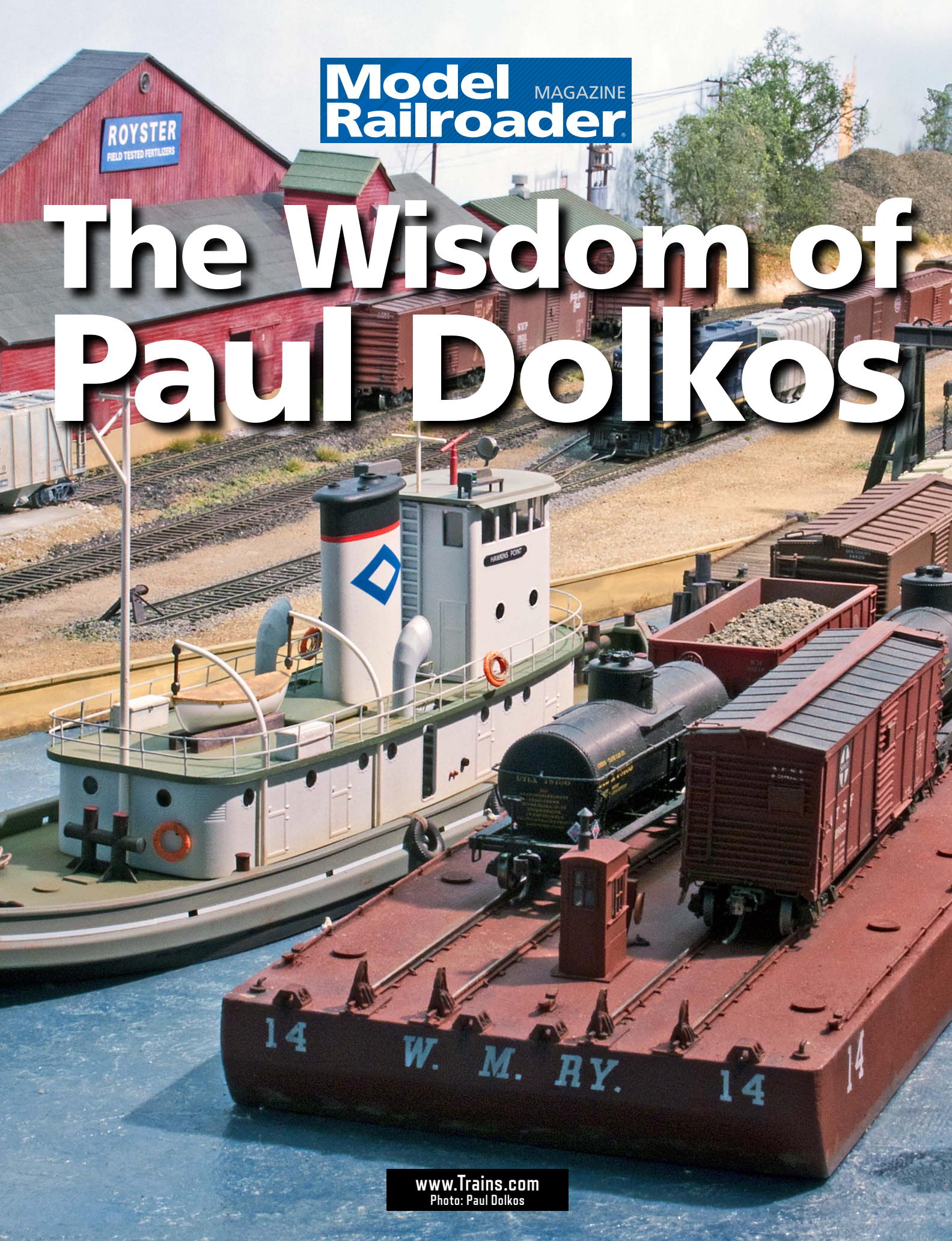
Model Railroader MAGAZINE

The Wisdom of Paul Dolkos



www.Trains.com
Photo: Paul Dolkos

Paul Dolkos describes planning a harbor scene on his HO scale Baltimore Harbor District layout this month. Next month he'll describe operations.

PART 1 Build an industrial district

ON THE WATERFRONT

Fig. 1 Early construction. The plywood for one of the two peninsula sections has been mounted on the grid. In the foreground, cutouts of the car float barge and tug are used to determine position before attaching the plywood.

A look at what went into designing and building the Wagner's Point area of the Baltimore Harbor District HO layout

By Paul J. Dolkos • Photos by author

Building a layout consists of finishing a wide range of projects. It's not like building a model airplane or ship. With those there's a sense of finality after applying the last bit of paint or rigging on an individual model. You don't look around the room and see bare benchwork, unlaid track, or unfinished scenery, as in **fig. 1**.

On a model railroad, the completion of each individual project reveals more things to do. However, more than a few modelers have achieved what they planned and consider their railroads finished.

After 15 years of work, my former Boston & Maine layout looked complete and I declared it finished. I operated and fiddled with it for another five years. But after two decades, I was ready to move on.

I introduced my new HO scale layout in *Model Railroad Planning 2010*. Articles in the October 2011, May 2012, and December 2012 *Model Railroaders* featured urban scenes on the layout. This two-part series will share ideas I used for planning, building, and operating an industrial district that includes a car float operation.

Planning

I enjoy shifting cars in sidings and yards more than just running trains from point A to point B. So an industrial terminal district setting seemed like a natural choice. Specifically, the idea of modeling several railroads serving a seaport, especially one with railroad car float operations, was very appealing.

Prototype settings that met this criteria existed in Baltimore and also the Virginia cities of Norfolk and Newport News. One attractive feature of the southern tidewater prototype setting for me was the colorful diesel schemes of the Atlantic Coast Line (purple and silver), Seaboard Air Line (red and white and many others), and Virginian Ry. (yellow and black).

However, I ultimately selected Baltimore as a prototype because it's only an hour's drive from home. The 21st century

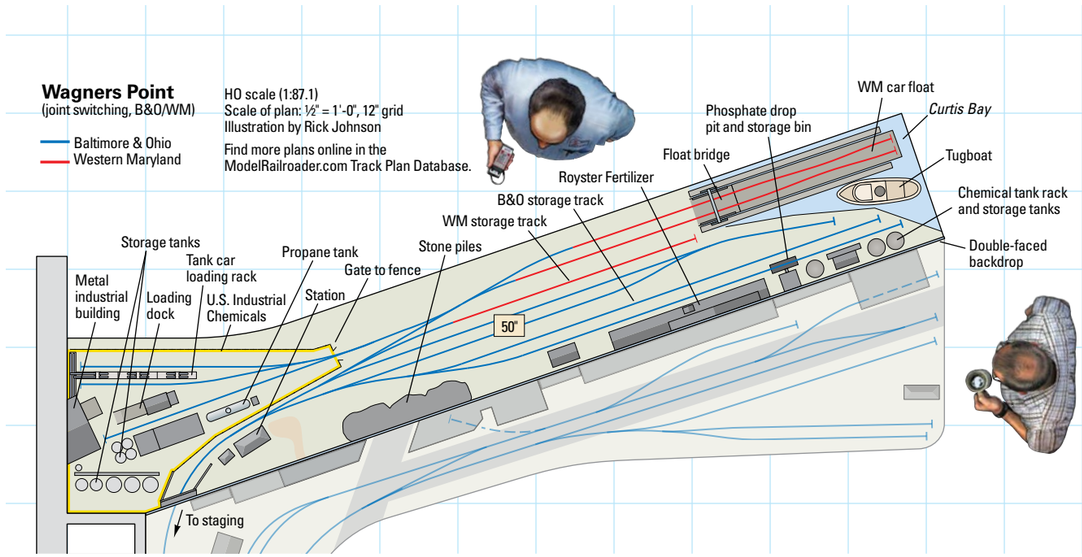


Fig. 2 Must-have feature. The chance to model car float operations helped Paul decide to model Baltimore Harbor on his new layout. This also allowed him to add the colorful Western Maryland RR to his operations.

landscape is very different from the one of 1955 I'm modeling, but enough artifacts remain to provide inspiration and information. Also easily accessible are historical archives, both of prototype railroads and regional history, as well as retired railroad employees and researchers.

Visualizing a layout, its theme, and its setting is the easy part and a delightful mind game for many. We all have favorite railroads and operations – probably too many. Determining how to depict even a few of these visions in the allotted layout real estate is the challenge. Studying the sprawl of Baltimore's railroad yards, piers, and industries, I saw many intriguing vistas. Nothing struck me as scenes that begged to be duplicated per the prototype in my 17 x 17-foot space. There were certainly many interesting inspirations in the city's sea of buildings and tracks, though.

So I endeavored to create a freelanced sense of place rather than exact locations. In model railroad parlance, this is called "prototype freelancing." My final scene choices included a big

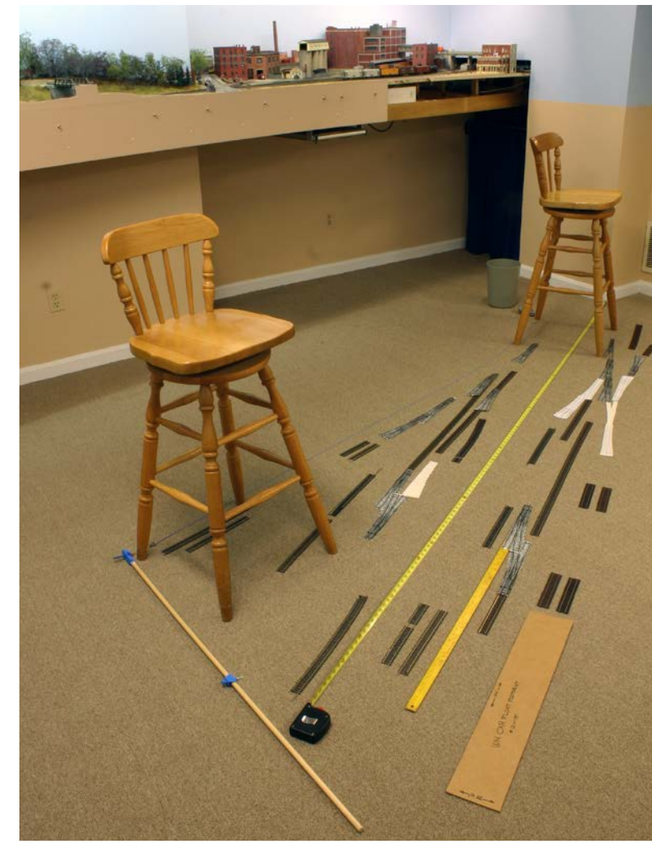


Fig. 3 Checking the plan. Arranging scraps of old track and paper copies of turnouts on the layout room floor helped validate the paper plan. The stools provide a makeshift boundary, providing a sense of aisle clearance.

Fig. 4 Subtle changes. Paul used ⅛"-thick foam core board under the Royster fertilizer plant siding to raise the track's elevation. The mostly flat prototype called for modest track and earth height variations.

Fig. 5 Busy industry. The chemical plant is the other large customer Paul chose for his waterfront scene. Choosing structures and details takes more time than laying track, which must conform to operational standards for reliability.

city downtown commercial/industrial district, tracks in the street, railroad-served piers, and the scene described here, Wagner's Point.

This was a zone of chemical, fertilizer, and asphalt plants, among other gritty industries. The prototype was served by water via a Western Maryland RR car float, a "must have" layout feature, seen in **fig. 2** on page 43, as well as over land by the Baltimore & Ohio RR. These elements made this jointly switched prototype industrial area an easy selection.

I assembled a collection of maps and industry lists for the Wagner's Point area, but since it's an industrial backwater where even railfans seldom ventured, I uncovered few photos. Today the area is served by CSX, but the fertilizer plant and most chemical plants have been razed, and the car float service was discontinued years ago. Internet aerial views, while contemporary, did allow me to peek beyond the fences of the remaining industries.

Once I envisioned specific model scenes, I began sketching a track plan. Having already built a railroad in the same basement space helped. There were three walls plus part of another that a railroad could be built along and still permit entry into the room without a duckunder. As long as the benchwork along the walls wasn't more than 24" to 30" deep, there was space for a peninsula in the middle of the room.

This footprint is similar to my previous layout, and I liked that flow. Other arrangements were considered, but none seemed to offer any advantages. I had no interest in a multi-deck railroad, especially since the industrial theme provided plenty of operation and modeling opportunities on a single level.

Before I built any peninsula benchwork, I mocked up the track arrangement in each switching district on the floor using sectional track and photocopies of turnouts, shown in **fig. 3** on page 43. I wanted to confirm that the planned peninsula width wouldn't constrict the aisles. I found I could adjust the angle at which the peninsula came off the wall to create acceptable aisle widths on both sides.

The narrowest of the aisles ended up being 32" to 40" wide, the tightest part being at the far end of the aisle. Two people can operate back-to-back without undue interference.

Modifying structure kits to fit your space and purpose

Paul used three different structure kits and two scratchbuilt structures to create this chemical company complex.

There are hundreds of structure kit offerings, and you'll probably find some that are just right for your railroad. But many are too big or small to fit the space and don't have the right shape to convincingly depict what you're trying to replicate. I like scratchbuilding structures, so that's often how I solve the problem. But you can also accomplish a lot by modifying kits.

First look beyond the label the manufacturer puts on the box. Just because it's called a furniture factory doesn't mean that's what it has to be. While the furniture factory can't be used as a coal mine, it may work as a warehouse or an office building. However, parts of a mine tipple structure could be used without the supports underneath as outbuildings for a furniture factory. Imagination opens up many possibilities.

Looking at the few bits of information I had about my chemical plant prototype, I noted it had a tank car loading/unloading rack and lots of medium- and smaller-sized storage tanks, plus processing and storage buildings. It was a distiller that produced numerous chemicals, providing a rationale for all sorts of car movements. My arrangement is freelanced. Chemical plants come in all shapes and sizes, giving modelers lots of leeway in building the facilities.

I used five different HO scale Walthers structure kits to create my model complex. The oil loading platform (933-3104) is three kits connected end-to-end. I was drawn to two other kits because they included multiple tanks I could use. They were the Magic Pan Commercial Bakery (933-2915) and the Energy Center (933-2978) from Walthers' ethanol series.

I also used the energy center processing building by cutting the back part off diagonally so it would fit a triangular space against the backdrop. The bakery kit's buildings were modified by removing the lower floor of the pump house building, and the four slim tanks were also shortened.

I used six short wall sections of the bakery warehouse to create a building with a smaller footprint. I also scratchbuilt a small shed and unloading dock. Paint and weathering were finishing steps that improve the look of any plastic kit. – *P.J.D.*

HO Walthers kits used

933-2915 Magic Pan Commercial Bakery
933-2978 Energy Center
933-3104 oil loading platform
933-3129 propane/ammonia tank
933-3105 piping kit

Construction

The peninsula consists of two benchwork sections back-to-back, one for Wagner's Point and another for Carroll Street, the track-in-the-street scene. Each is a grid of 1 x 4 boards topped with ¾" cabinet grade plywood and ½" Homasote sheet on top, as seen in **fig. 1** on page 42.

I use a Homasote base because some turnouts are handlaid and I want a base material that will firmly hold spikes. I use

Backdrops with paint and photos

6. Low horizon. Simple bands of gray and brown painted on the backdrop create a distant horizon line. Paul later added vegetation in front to visually ease the transition from 3-D to 2-D scenery.

Fig. 7 Adding photos. Photos of industrial complexes are pasted on the backdrop to extend the scene and fill in the blank areas behind structures.

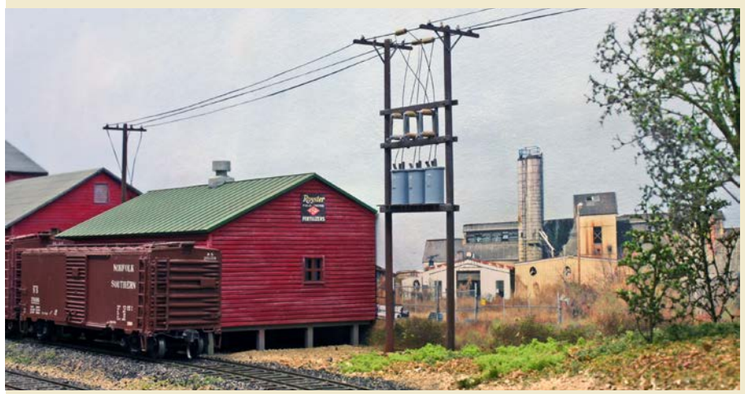


Fig. 8 Blending buildings. A bank of transformers on a pole support and trees provide see-through foils for a photo of a foundry on the backdrop.

In Baltimore, Wagner's Point occupies a relatively level peninsula extending into the Patapsco River estuary. Looking across the landscape, there are no hills in the distance. So, how do you render the backdrop? I didn't want sky blue paint dropping down behind the horizontal tabletop.

So I painted a low, irregular, gray horizon line on the vertical backdrop surface, then stippled brown and green on it to represent the continuation of modeled vegetation. This inch or so of color is enough to convey distant low-lying land. See **fig. 6**.

The base color of the backdrop is sky blue. Then I used white and gray water-soluble oil paints in tubes to create clouds (Winsor & Newton and Grumbacher are two manufacturers that produce the paint). This paint takes two or three days to dry, so when I didn't like my dabbing, I was able rub off most of the paint.

The resulting clouds are faint, perhaps more than I'd anticipated. But the suggestion of high clouds and slight haze is enough to create a sense of depth on the backdrop.

Looking around Wagner's Point, buildings of neighboring industries are visible. I depicted these with photo prints glued to the backdrop, shown in **fig. 7**. The task is to find suitable views clear of obstructions when the lighting is compatible with the modeled scene. In some cases I used vistas not from Baltimore, but generic enough to be appropriate.

Working with digital images on my computer, I sized them appropriately. I cut out the sky from the print and colored the resulting white edge. I glued the photos to the backdrop using an Elmer's Picture and Poster glue stick, which is photo-safe.

I installed visual foils such as trees or power lines in front of the backdrop images to disguise the transition to the backdrop. See **fig. 8**.

I built a low ridge in one corner because I wanted a road overpass to screen the B&O track entry/exit for Wagner's Point through the backdrop. See **fig. 9**. I originally planned to have the track disappear behind structures, but never came up with a satisfying arrangement. – *P.J.D.*

Fig. 9 Change of plan. Paul added the overpass in the left background when his original plan to hide the disappearing track behind buildings didn't work out to his satisfaction. Once the track is in place, it's time to work out the vision for the scenery and structures that were likely little more than a few notes on size and shape on the plan.

higher quality dimensional lumber and plywood to minimize warping, expansion, and contraction. Since the cost of benchwork lumber is relatively small compared to the overall investment in a model railroad, I don't think it pays to economize on lumber. A self-supporting 24" high drywall sheet was later inserted between the sections as a backdrop.

Most track is Micro Engineering code 70 and 55 flextrack, as well as several of the company's no. 6 turnouts. Where I needed sharper (no. 5) or broader (no. 7) curvature, I hand-laid the turnouts. I used Details West (www.detailswest.com) cast frogs and Proto-87 Stores (www.proto87.com) chemically etched nickel-silver frogs to ease that task. The manufactured track was glued directly to the Homasote with adhesive caulk. I inserted a layer of ⅛" foam core sheet under the fertilizer plant siding to raise the elevation. See **fig. 4** on page 44.

I like modest track and earth height variations, and probably should've created even more, such as ditches between tracks. I carved out a few depressions, but soon stopped. It didn't seem to be worth the time and effort. Ditches and depressions can be machine routed, but I decided the resulting mess of Homasote dust wasn't worth the trouble. Next time I might insert some thin shim material under the track to create some subtle variations.

Starting with a plan, erecting benchwork, and laying track goes relatively fast if you're able to keep working at it. On the first layout section I was switching cars three months after dismantling the former railroad and beginning construction.

Creating scenery and structures requires more time. Track alignments and arrangements can vary, but are governed by minimum radius, clearances, and grade considerations, making the decisions easier compared to all the possible scenery options. See **fig. 5** on page 44.

You can visualize track by laying down loose sections. Structures often start out as just a pencil notation on the plan, with the size, shape, and detailing not much more than a vision. And scenery plans can change when the vision doesn't work out. See **fig. 9**. The same is true with the terrain, roads, and water. I explain how I proceeded and outline some techniques used to create the Wagner's Point scenery in "Modifying structure kits to fit your space and purpose" on page 45 and "Backdrops with paint and photos" on the opposite page, as well as part 2 of this article in January's issue. MR

Next month: More modeling techniques and the operations of the two railroads serving Wagner's Point industries.

Paul Dolkos is a frequent contributor to Model Railroader *and* Model Railroad Planning. *He lives in Alexandria, Va., with his wife, Linda.*

ON THE WATERFRONT

Learn how competing railroads shared sidings and customers, and how to build a car float bridge and barge

By Paul J. Dolkos • Photos by author

A Baltimore & Ohio RR Fairbanks-Morse H10-44 ventures down the long Royster fertilizer plant siding to pull out cars on Paul Dolkos' HO scale Baltimore Harbor District layout. Royster is one of two large industries at Wagner's Point.

As I studied rail operations at Baltimore's Wagner's Point, it struck me as an ideal inspiration for a layout scene, as I said in part 1 of this story in last month's *Model Railroader*. In my era, 1955, two competing railroads switched several industries. The Baltimore & Ohio RR had secured the area early with a land route. Later, a large shipper invited the Western Maryland Ry. to provide service via car float. This combination of two railroads, one coming in via water, was irresistible to me.

Industries at Wagner's Point

My representation of Wagner's Point occupies a 2 x 12-foot shelf on a peninsula of my Baltimore Harbor District layout. Rather than modeling several small industries, I selected two larger ones with multiple car spots. One is a chemical refiner that produced a variety of products including Sterno, an alcohol-based fuel. There are nine designated car spots, plus some overflow space on three sidings, in a fenced 3½-square-foot area. The second industry, a fertilizer plant, has one long siding with eight car spots.

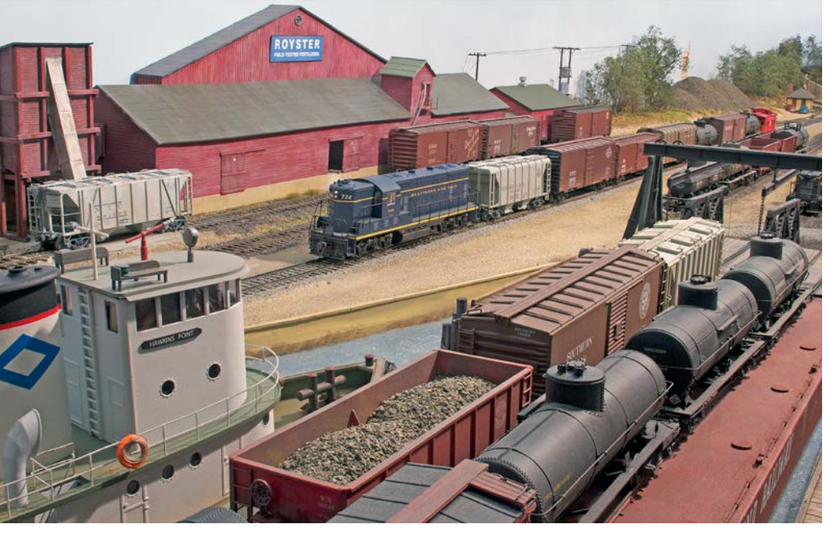


Fig. 1 Virtual industry. Two empty hoppers are pulled off the Western Maryland Ry. storage track to be placed on the outbound car float as part of a virtual industry operation scenario. The gravel piles and a backdrop tipple photo represent the Arundle Sand & Gravel Co.

The car float, while not an industry, also provides additional switching activity for Western Maryland crews. Its capacity is 8 to 10 cars. Unloading and loading the float barge takes as much time as working one of the industries.

I've also added what I call a virtual industry, Arundle Sand & Gravel, shown in **fig. 1**. Its presence is indicated by piles of gravel along the backdrop and a photo of a tipple for truck loading behind them. It was an afterthought, and I didn't want to allocate space for a siding, so I imagine it's around the corner, out of sight. Cars of gravel arrive and are spotted on a storage track because presumably the industry isn't ready to receive the loads.

On a prototype railroad such a move is called "constructive placement." Before the next operating session the gravel hoppers magically become empties.

Fig. 2 Shift starts. The Baltimore & Ohio switch job has arrived to work Wagner's Point industries. The B&O and Western Maryland both switch the industries here, but work on different shifts.

Building the transfer bridge and car float

The Western Maryland car float barge and transfer bridge closely follow the prototype. That meant I had to scratchbuild them. Fortunately, I had good barge data and photos. The basic barge began as a 1 x 6-inch clear white pine board. I cut it down to length and width and added ¼" shims underneath to increase its thickness.

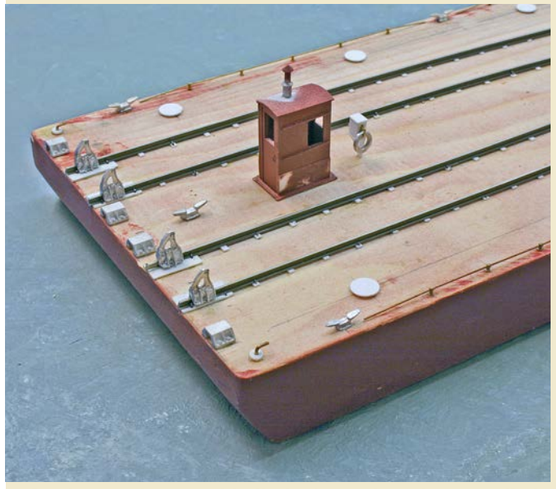
The rounded corners and the bow and stern angles were filed to shape. The work went very quickly. I filled the seams and other imperfections with Bondo auto body putty, sanded it, painted it, sanded it again, and so on until it could pass for a steel hull. I use Bondo as a filler in modeling because of its extended shelf life: a large tube of the material hasn't dried out after several years.

Sea Port Model Works and Frenchman River Model Works offer castings of fittings for the deck hardware found on car floats. The most tedious item to install was the rail. On most prototype floats, the rail is bolted to the deck using cleats and pads. I drew lines where the rail would run.

On this barge prototype, the two tracks curved toward the center and then back out again, rather than running straight. My guess is this was done to move some weight to the center of the barge. So following the lines, I glued short pieces of .015" styrene strip to the deck to represent the track cleats. Then I drilled holes through the pads and spiked the rails.

The counterweight-style WM transfer bridge is unusual, and I only had a couple photos to guide me. I had to guess its dimensions and ended up manipulating them to fit the space I had for the model. The bridge is built with styrene strips and a few Central Valley Model Works bridge trusses.

The rails are sections of Micro Engineering code 55 track that run off the bridge and onto land, where feeder wires are attached. The barge rails are also powered. The WM's light locomotives often ran onto barges, and idler cars were seldom used. The float bridge's concrete piers are plaster castings made from home-made styrene molds. – *P.J.D.*



Castings and a scratchbuilt doghouse have been applied to the unpainted wood barge deck. The hull is made from a piece of clear white pine 1 x 6 with several coats of Bondo autobody filler applied for a smooth finish. The code 55 rail is spiked through cleats glued to the deck.

This transfer bridge is similar to a truss bridge and is built of styrene strip and shapes, plus some Central Valley truss bridge sections. Micro Engineering track was used on the deck and extends onto land, making it easier to solder feeder wires to power the rails.

Operating on Wagner's Point

The turnouts for the chemical company and the fertilizer plant face opposite directions, so a crew can't simply work from one end of the yard to pull and spot cars. Crews need to classify incoming cars by industry and spot location, along with cars on storage tracks also waiting to be spotted. Crews must also look ahead and decide what to do with outbound cars so they don't block later moves.

Once a cut is in the desired order, a runaround move may be required, and a clear track is required for that. While there's enough track to accomplish all this, a crew must always be thinking ahead. One can easily spend an hour or more switching Wagner's Point.

The area is jointly switched, but the two railroads work on different shifts. So during an operating session only one railroad is on the job. Baltimore & Ohio trains originate in staging and run to the location. See **fig. 2** on page 40. The WM job begins work at Wagner's Point as if the barge has just arrived with inbound cars.

Crews encounter cars that've been spotted by the other railroad blocking the spot they need to reach. We assume it's okay with the shipper to move any car so the new inbound car can be delivered. If the car hasn't been released by the industry, it's listed as a "hold" on the switch list, and must be returned to the original spot. See **fig. 3** on page 42.

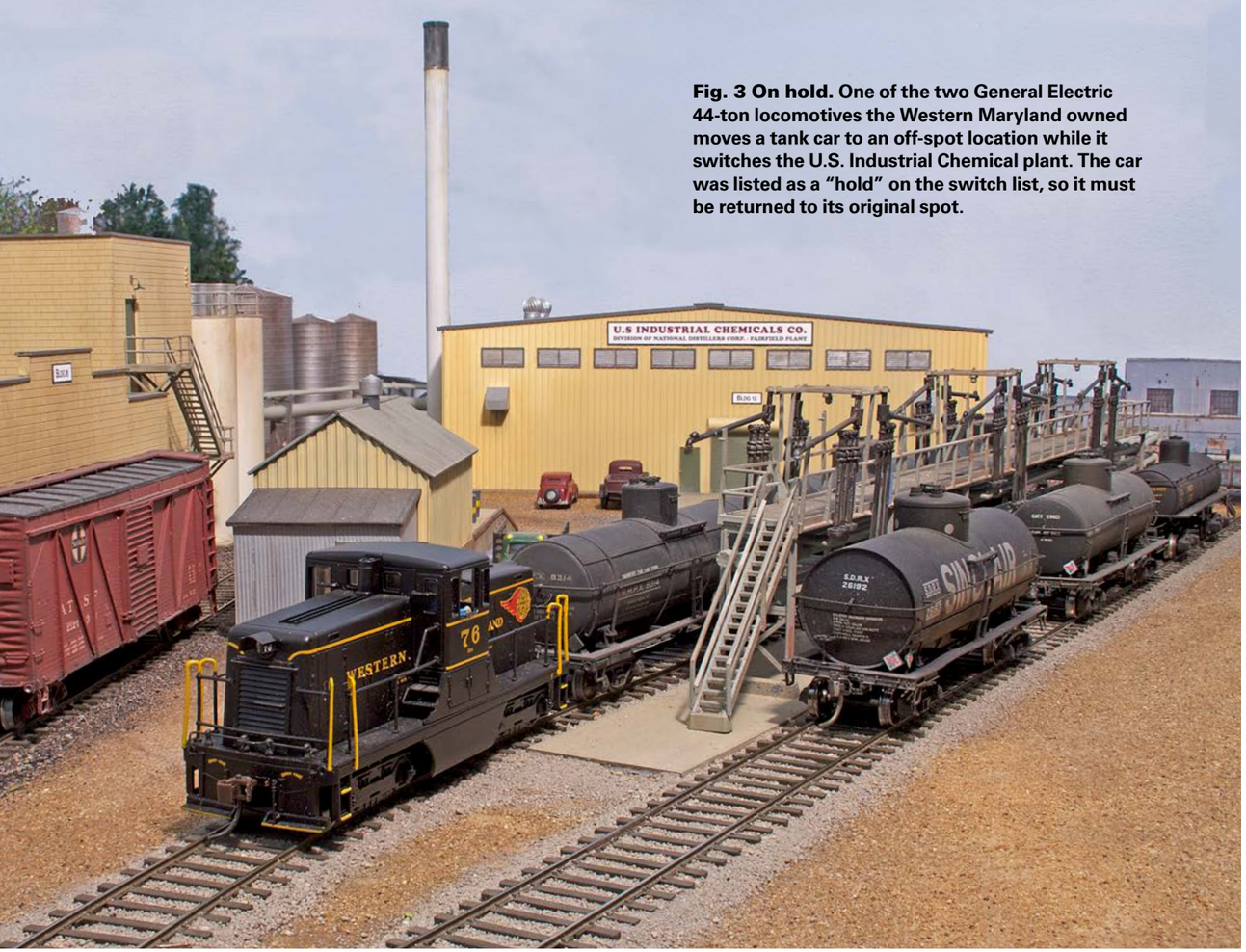
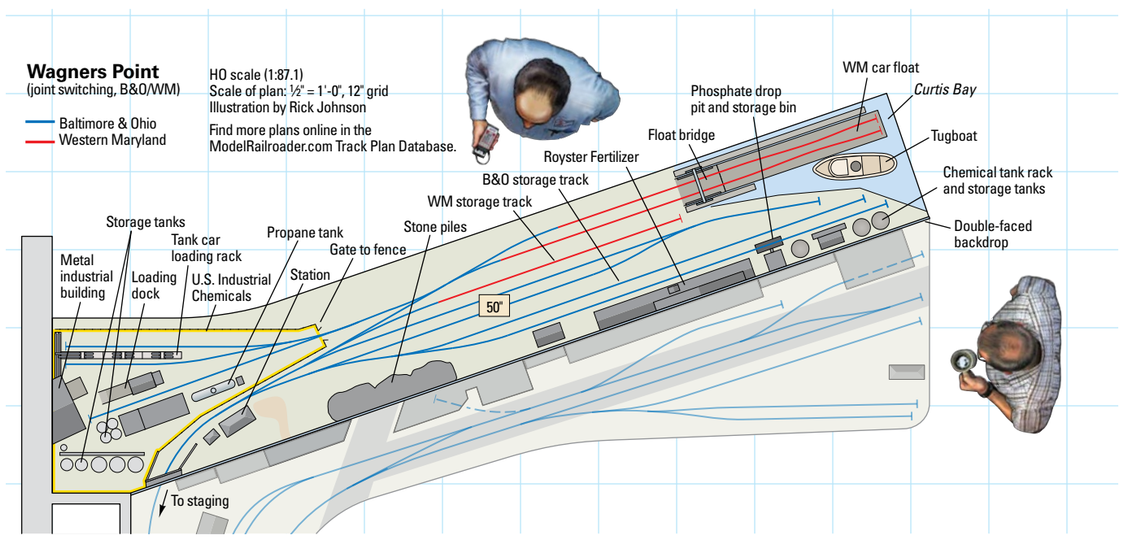


Fig. 3 On hold. One of the two General Electric 44-ton locomotives the Western Maryland owned moves a tank car to an off-spot location while it switches the U.S. Industrial Chemical plant. The car was listed as a "hold" on the switch list, so it must be returned to its original spot.



If the unloading or loading is complete and the car has been released to the other railroad, the crew can return it to the original spot, leave it at a convenient off-spot location, or move it to the other company's storage track. While some track belongs to the WM and some to the B&O, crews are free to use any track.

Inform your operators

Working with switch lists rather than individual car cards and waybills, crews have all the information they need on one or two pieces of paper. To set up an operating session, I prepare a switch list with the reporting marks, number, and the location of each car at Wagner's Point, and another for the inbound cars.

I have a file box of car cards with 4-cycle waybills sorted by location. I turn the waybills to determine where the cars will move next. This destination information is entered on the switch lists.

Balancing act

For the prototype, moving cars between floating barge and solid land is always a balancing act. Changing winds and tides, and varying car weights, will tilt the barge as well as the transfer bridge to one side or the other. The docking facility is designed to accommodate this movement, but there's a limit, and crews work to minimize problems. See **fig. 4**.

Normally cars aren't just pulled off the barge one track at a time like a factory siding. Crews will leave some cars in place on one track as a counterweight to cars on top of the water. There are no objectionable gaps. The advantage is that you don't have to paint around the objects. Just don't create high waves where a ship or other object will be placed.

Unlike Enviro-Tex, the gel won't creep up onto items like rocks or piers, creating an unwanted glossy fillet around them. – *P.J.D.*

Fig. 4 Safe harbor. Paul's barge sits on stable benchwork, but he simulates the operation of unloading the barge as though it were floating on the water's surface. The tug model is a Walthers kit that closely follows the prototype Lehigh Valley RR tugs used in New York Harbor service. The Lehigh Valley sold a tug to Curtis Bay Towing, which renamed it *Hawkins Point* and used it in Baltimore Harbor for years.

Modeling harbor water

If one wants a car float scene, that requires a reasonably large area of water. I didn't want to use a pour-on gloss finish like Enviro-Tex. Containing such watery materials in a large area that runs right to the benchwork edge would be a challenge. Also, water in an industrial seaport is seldom clear, so transparency isn't required.

I began by applying various shades of blue, gray, and brown craft paint directly on the plywood base. I didn't want a solid color, but a varied pattern of melded tones and shades. Once the color dried, I applied a heavy gloss gel made by Golden Artist Colors and sold by craft stores and art supply dealers.

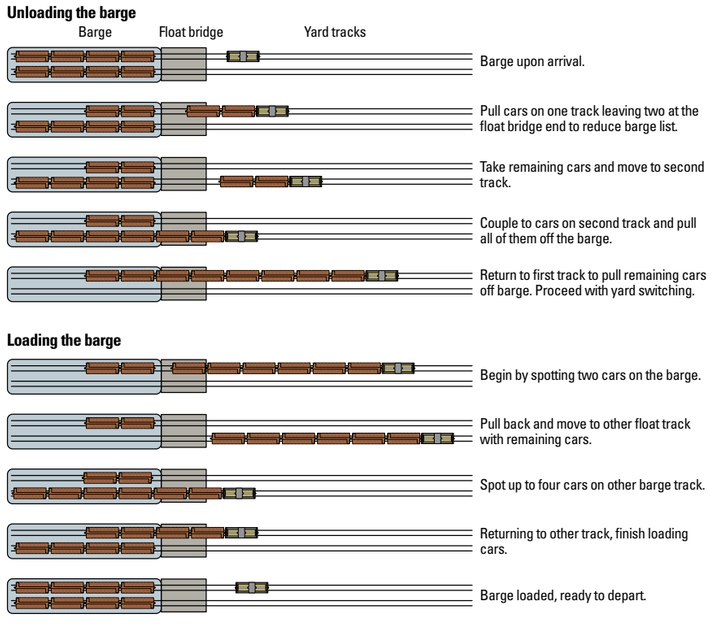
Golden offers a wide range of gels. I selected one labeled as being transparent, glossy, and thick. Waves built up with brush strokes will hold their shape as the gel dries. The gel is an acrylic polymer, and brushes and tools can be cleaned with water. Subsequent gel coat layers can be applied later.

I painted the water surface and applied the gel before installing any objects. So the tug, barge, and piers are on

This water surface is paint applied directly on a plywood base, then coated with a glossy artist's gel, creating a wavy surface. The paint and gel were applied before the piers were installed, making it easy to paint the area.

Fig. 5 Mind the gap. In the 1920s the Western Maryland installed unique counterweighted transfer bridges at several locations in Baltimore Harbor to service customers the railroad could not reach by land. Operators must take their time unloading the barge, taking into account the balance of the load.

Fig. 6 Barge instructions. This diagram is similar to one Paul Dolkos gives his operators so they can prototypically unload the barge at Wagner's Point. The key to safe switching is balance.



While there may be more or less than eight cars on the first move, still position a car or cars alternately on barge tracks for balance. Sometimes the superintendent will instruct crews to load the locomotive on the barge for return to Port Covington. Nominal capacity of the barge is eight 40-foot cars, but will hold up to 10 tank cars.

the other track or tracks. The barge and transfer bridge will list to one side or the other, but hopefully not enough to cause problems. Experienced crews proceed slowly and with care. See **fig. 5**.

John Teichmoeller, coordinator of the Rail-Marine Information Group at www.trainweb.org/rmig, says he witnessed a switching contest at a National Model Railroad Association (NMRA) meet that had a model car barge actually floating in water. Participants tried to load a mix of heavy and light cars onto it. It was extremely frustrating or amusing, depending on whether you were operating or just watching.

One doesn't have tilting and twisting problems with a model barge on solid modeled water, but the loading and unloading still presents an operational opportunity. I provide the instructions shown in **fig. 6** for unloading and loading my barge. The Western Maryland didn't have idler flatcars, but if buffer cars were needed, crews would borrow a low-profile gondola or flat for that function. Lightweight locomotives like a General Electric 44-tonner could run onto the barge.

It's often suggested that I have multiple car float barges and swap them in and out to provide a continuous flow of cars at Wagner's Point. I find that providing just eight inbound cars on the barge along with earlier arrivals not spotted provides plenty of operation during a session. My car float barge is removable, but feeling confident that I can always pick it up and move it without dropping cars is a concern.

A friend, Dave Ramos, tried this on his New York harbor layout and refers to movable model barges as "rotary Dumpsters." And I think moving barges in and out and keeping barge and transfer bridge rails properly aligned would be an issue. The prototype had similar gauge problems. It's much safer to manually swap out cars on the barge between sessions.

Satisfying operation

The Wagner's Point scene has provided the setting and operations I envisioned. This scene provides plenty of operation for two operators, with one serving as engineer and the other as conductor, and could exist as a standalone layout. MR

The clean fascia look

I think fascias should have a minimalist quality; no car-card boxes, town names, diagrams, or even control switches if possible. Many think otherwise, and that's okay. I've benefited from the guidance provided while operating other layouts, especially for the first time.

But I want operators to be looking at the railroad, not the fascia. I chose aesthetics over utility. My thinking is that place and industry names should be signage on buildings and signposts. I do provide a detailed track diagram for each location with track names and spot numbers, which I prepared using basic graphic features in word processing software. It's far more detailed than what can be displayed on the fascia, especially in an industrial switching area (See the Wagner's Point track diagram on page 42). I use switch lists, which eliminates the need for car card boxes.

But one does need a place to lay down the lists, pencils, coupler picks, track diagrams, and other items. To accommodate this I have pull-out shelves. If the benchwork is 50" or higher, it may also be possible to install a recessed shelf just under the benchwork edge. Installed at waist height, one can look down and see paperwork or sort car cards. The pull-out shelf shown here has a CVP EasyDCC command station and a programming track, but you can still place paperwork on it since it's not normally used during operating sessions.

Toggle switches for turnout controls aren't so easily removed from the fascia. I could use ground throws; they work well, and there's never a question about what switch is being lined. But I don't like their looks, especially in photos. There are also modelers who reach in to manually change sprung points, such as those on Micro Engineering turnouts. However, I wonder about access when one has to reach behind a string of cars or distances greater than 30", as well as the long-term durability of the switch point assemblies.

Clean fascia and an uncluttered room enhance the layout's appearance. Also, egg crate lighting diffusers were hung as a lower level suspended ceiling to hide the fluorescent tubes, especially when viewed from the peninsula end.

Accordingly, I equip my turnouts with Tortoise by Circuitron switch motors. The control toggle is mounted below the fascia opposite the turnout headblock ties, or at least as close as possible where there are parallel turnouts.

On the layout peninsula I was able to easily create a recessed mounting surface for the toggles by screwing a tempered hardboard strip on the back of the front benchwork stringer. The tip of the toggle lever is usually visible, and operators soon learn to intuitively reach for the correct control while switching. In addition to a clean, uncluttered look the fascia eases passage in aisles, especially in tight locations since there are no protrusions to brush against. – *P.J.D.*

Pull-out shelves mounted on keyboard slide hardware provide a place for paperwork, pencils, coupler picks, and other items. This one does double duty by housing a Digital Command Control programming track and control panel. The shelf easily slides under the layout and out of sight when not in use.

Paul slightly recessed switch machine toggle switches by mounting them on a strip attached to the lower benchwork stringer below the fascia. This keeps the switches out of the way in the aisles. The neutral color on the fascia blends reasonably well with the primary earth colors used for the scenery.

Meet the Modeler:
Paul Dolkos

This experienced hobbyist has enjoyed model railroading for more than 60 years

Conducted by Rene Schweitzer

Q What was your first train set (or locomotive)?

A Before the age of 10, I received a basic Lionel set along with a couple of turnouts for Christmas. I liked it, except for that middle electrical pickup rail on the track sections. I lived with that until I discovered you could have a two-rail railroad. Later I went with my parents to a downtown Washington, D.C., hobby shop to purchase two-rail flextrack sections. The owner/clerk asked my age. I said 13, to which he stated that I might be a bit young to handle flextrack. Nevertheless, my parents supported the purchase, and I was on my way to building my first railroad.

Q Describe your model railroading philosophy in 6 words.

A Read about and watch prototype railroading. Or: Modeling? Get to know the prototype.

Q What has been your biggest modeling success?

A It's been very satisfying hobby, building a number of model railroads and finding so many good friends in the hobby.

Q What was your biggest modeling mistake?

A Nothing so serious that I couldn't find a solution to the problem. It's a hobby, so I put mistakes out of my mind unless it's interesting or funny enough to talk about later.

Q What's your least favorite modeling task?

A No thoughts about that. If it's a real problem for me, I probably either avoid the task or find someone who can help me.

Q What project(s) have you been working on recently?

A Having finished my current railroad, the Baltimore Harbor District layout, I spend some time maintaining the railroad. But while recently looking for something new to do, I'm building a structure that I don't really need but I may end up finding a home for it on the layout. The structure is being built using only with parts I already have, so if nothing else, it's a good way to clean out some drawers.

Q What advice would you give to a new hobbyist?

A As you undertake new projects, talk to modeler friends to bounce ideas off them and avoid the mistakes we all experience.