

MINI MODULES



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Like many model-railroaders (in-all-scales) I have been frustrated for years by lack of space and the limitations of having to live in a dwelling, which also happens to house my model railroad. Very few wives, I imagine, really like the idea of having the washer and dryer “bridged” or the water heater serving as a support for a helix. I would also think there are few who support that duck-under bridge to the hobby room.

Having been a prolific HO modeler in the early 1990's, I came to realize that I was quickly running out of available layout space in my basement. During that time, I was also building public

display HO modules in conjunction with my local railroad club. One of the joys of building these modules was the fact that I didn't have to store them. So I could keep model building and let someone else worry about the storage space requirements.

After a brief hiatus from modeling caused by a renovation of my basement, including the installation of a pool table and some new dividing walls, it occurred to me that I could run a new N scale layout around some of the perimeter walls. I would have to stop short, however, of bridging the laundry area or helixing the water heater.

Starting with a cabinet-top layout

approximately two feet by eight feet, my aforementioned prolific modeling soon filled this area and I began surveying new real estate. Realizing that any new real estate would also soon be filled up, it finally dawned on me that I could use a variation of the freestanding module idea and create some mini-modules. These would buy me some more modeling time and make use of open shelf space below the layout. The idea would also allow me to change the look of the layout on a moments notice.

After pondering available materials at the local hobby shop, I settled on using $\frac{1}{4}$ " thick, 12" x 24" BIRCH plywood as the base for each mini-module. One



Photo 1



Photo 3

source for this plywood is Midwest Products Co. I decided on the plywood, versus foam, due to the rigidity of the material and the lower likelihood of damage from handling. The thickness is not as important as choosing plywood thick enough to provide the needed rigidity. Anything in the $\frac{3}{16}$ " to $\frac{3}{8}$ " range should do. I also decided to use only two consistent sizes in the base size, which gives me some options to build a large or small scene. A number of sheets of the hobby plywood were taken to a local wood shop who cut them all to the exact dimensions for a few bucks. The main advantage of using a woodworker shop is the fact they can cut a number of sheets in a sandwich to assure all are the

exact same size. After these decisions are made, basic modeling techniques come into play. Some specific tips I have developed are as follows:

1. Use a generic backdrop behind the module area. As my mini-modules all back up to a wall, I have used building backdrops or tree lines to blend into the background.

2. Using a Dremel sanding drum, bevel the under edges and corners just slightly to allow the mini-modules to slip in and out smoothly. Do not bevel the top edges, as you want a tight fit on the top surface. You can also add a very small slot on one edge, just big enough for a small flat-blade screwdriver, to



Photo 2

aid in popping the mini-module out of the cavity.

3. Paint all surfaces (top, bottom, and edges) with common latex interior paint to seal the plywood against moisture from scenic techniques. Use an earth color to help visually hide the outline joints. I sometimes scribble notes on the plywood of future ideas for scenes. The scribbles will later be covered with scenery or structures.

4. Mount at least one major structure VERY securely as you will find yourself using it as a handhold when installing or removing the mini-module.

5. Choose a strip plastic of exactly the same height as the plywood to build your cavity outline. The outline can be scenicked right up to the edge to help disguise the outline. Be careful, however, not to get any scenery materials in the cavity, as they will affect the fit of the scene in the cavity. I have found that the slight gap does not bother my eye, but the gaps can be hidden with a loose filler of Woodland Scenics underbrush if desired. The accompanying photos show this effect.

6. Try and pick a consistent entry point for your new industries. On some of mine, the entry is to the viewers left and on some there is an implied entry point in back, which is out of sight.

For those of you out there who are running out of real estate, this idea may prevent you from asking your bride if she would mind a junkyard scene on top of the washer and dryer. However, all those back issues of *N-Scale Magazine* will have to be stacked higher to make room for mini-module storage. And there is the implied hilarity of dispatching your operating buddy to drop a gondola at the JUNKYARD and he realizes that last week it was a STOCKYARD. 🚚



Photo 4



Photo 5

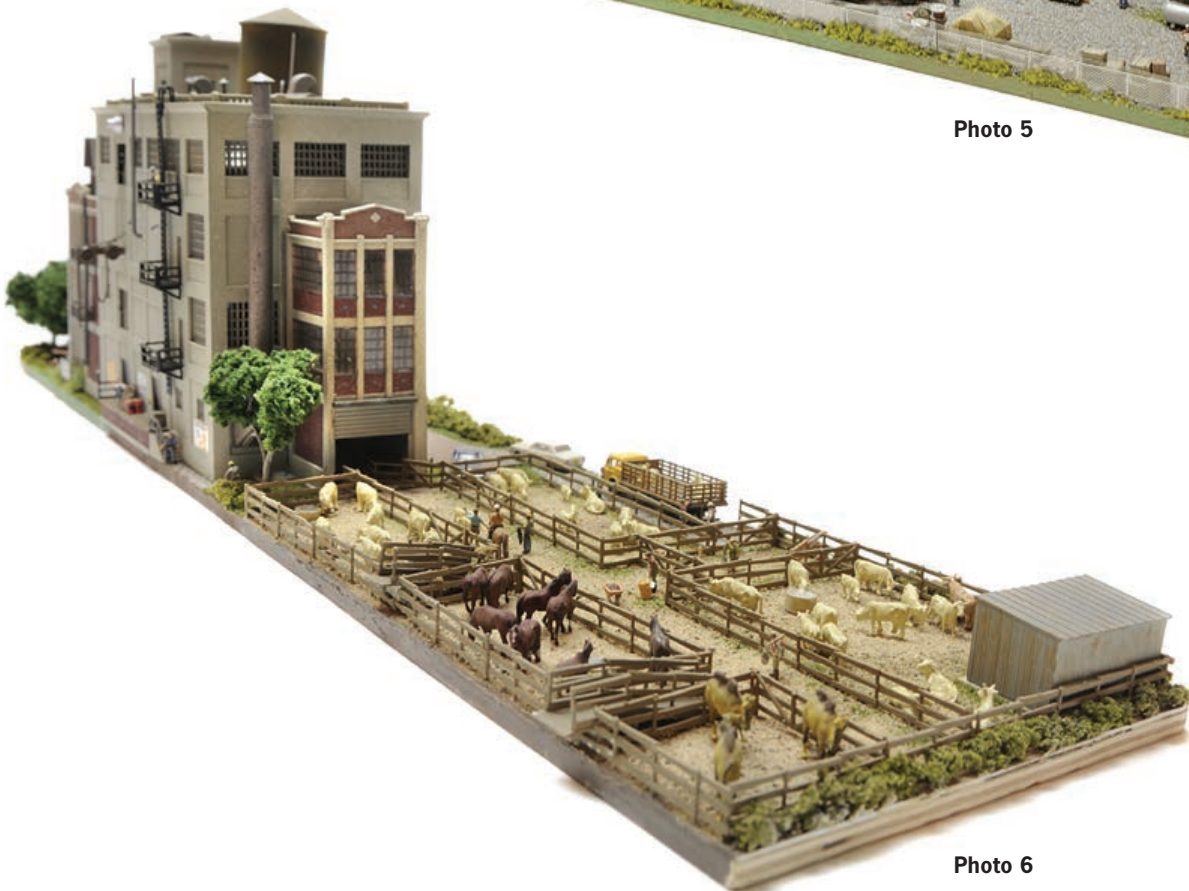


Photo 6



Photo 7



Photo 8



Photo 9



Photo 10



Photo 11



Photo 12



Photo 13



Photo 14



Photo 15



Photo 16



Photo 17



Photo 18



Photo 19



Photo 20

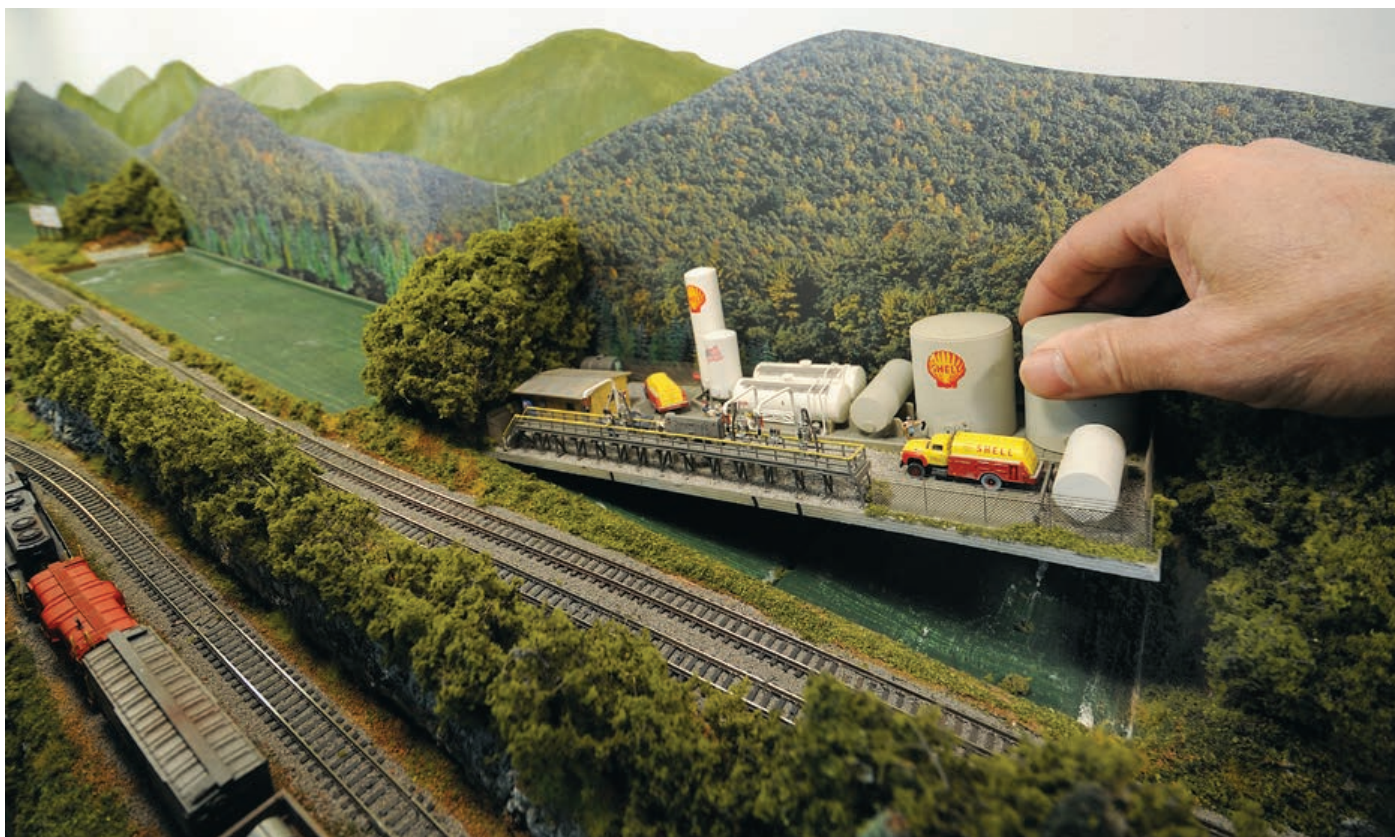


Photo 21



Photo 22



Photo 23



Photo 24