2016 NMRA Convention – Indainapolis IN.
July 3 – 10, 2016
Adding Interior Detail to Your Buildings

By Benita Jameson

As an ever increasing supply of detailed structure kits are made available to the modeler, it seems that so many of them wind up on the layout unfinished. The exterior may be beautifully detailed, but without an interior the finished model will lack realism.

All structures should have some type of interior, even those in the background. The most basic interior is a view block. It can be as simple as a piece of construction paper or made from .040 styrene to give the impression of separate rooms. The goal of the view block in background structures is to prevent the viewer from seeing straight through the building.

For mid-ground structures, window treatment makes all the difference. They add interest and character in addition to providing a view block. A myriad of these are available commercially, City Classics is my personal favorite. For a more economical approach, color chips from a paint section of your local hardware store can become colorful window shades. Don't overlook catalogues and magazines when looking for materials. Photos of fabrics can easily be trimmed into various types of curtains and drapes. Fancy-edged shears, used in scrap booking, come in a wide variety of sizes and shapes. These can be used to fabricate everything from fancy borders on store front displays to scalloped borders on canvas awnings and café umbrellas. "Shredder" shears create perfect vertical blinds.

Simple window treatments and view blocks work well for smaller residential and high-rise office buildings. However, store front windows present a different problem altogether. Fortunately, there are several options available depending upon the building's prominence on your layout.

If your structure will come under close scrutiny, consider adding complete interiors. Several manufactures offer items suitable for store interiors. Add a few simple flat scenes as a backdrop and your store is complete. While this option will give the most authentic results, it does have some drawbacks. It is the most costly in terms of both time and money. Also, the variety of items is somewhat limited, particularly if you are modeling the modern era. "O" Scale modelers, consider using ¼" scale dollhouse furnishings as the selection is wider.

Computer generated interiors are another option. These can be easily fabricated using Microsoft Visio software and are suitable for all scales. One advantage of this method is that the flooring can be fabricated as well as the walls. This method is particularly effective for apartment building and hotels.

One thing to consider when modeling store front details: most stores have window displays that obscure the store interior from the street view. Giving your store fronts realistic window displays is much easier than constructing full interiors.

Clothing stores are perhaps the easiest to model. Simple styrene "shadow box" frames are constructed behind the store windows. These are painted a soft neutral color and become the backdrop. Next select two or three unpainted figures. Choose standing figures that have a lot of clothing details. Next, using putty, obscure the facial features. Once the putty dries, paint the clothing in bright, eye catching colors and paint all exposed body parts gray. You now have very effective store dummies. Female figures with large hats can be cut off at the shoulders and modified to create a milliner's window.

You can also create stunning window displays from photographs. If you have a digital camera, a computer and a color printer; you can duplicate any prototype window display. Using the "shadow box" concept mentioned earlier to hold your photos in place - especially if slightly curved - creates a very realistic effect. Be sure to use a thin matte finish paper. This will allow you to back light your windows for a striking night scene.

Every grocery store in the 50's, 60's and 70's used wide white butcher paper, hand lettered with water colors to advertise the "special of the week" and other sales. The colors normally used were red, blue, green, orange, or black and applied to the advertisements with a 1½ wide brush. These signs seemed to cover just about all the window space on the front of the store! This is a colorful way to hide the empty space that is really in the grocery store.

Don't forget an empty store front. In the 50's, 60's, and 70's the windows were soaped over to hide the empty store interior. Today many times when a store is being renovated for a new user, the windows are papered over from the inside to hide what is going on inside. These are easy to do and they add to the realism of your scene.

Industrial structures should not be overlooked. Warehouse details include empty pallets stacked near the entrance along with refuse barrels, shelving along the walls stacked with boxes, and

perhaps a forklift on the loading dock. Several manufacturers have suitable crates, boxes, and pallets. The refuse containers can be made by wrapping a small bit of foil around a scale 55 gallon drum. Firmly press the foil into the drum so that the foil takes on the details. Carefully remove the foil, using a pair of tweezers. Tiny scrapes of styrene, when painted and placed in the barrel, give a very satisfactory result. Don't forget to weather the floor of the structure with oil stains and tire tracks (from the forklift).

Remember, multistoried structures require a view block between floors as well as separate rooms. This can be constructed in a grid pattern from styrene and affixed to the base of the structure. The "rooms" can then be detailed quite easily using the computer generated interiors discussed earlier. The grid pattern also facilitates the addition of interior lighting. The hollow center core of the grid hides the wires and the grid construction itself allows some rooms to be dark while others are lit.

No discussion of interior detail would be complete without mentioning interior lighting. There are a number of lighting kits available for modelers, depending upon the effect desired. LED lighting is a good choice over incandescent bulbs. The LEDs burn cooler, and last much longer than other types. LEDs can also give special lighting effects depending upon the color of the LED. The original "white" LEDs actually gave off a blue – white light, similar to a fluorescent light, the "golden white" LEDs produce a warmer color similar to incandescent lighting. The choice of whether to back light or light from above will depend upon the structure and your choice of interior detail. Displays that overlap in layers will appear in silhouette if lit only from behind, while overhead lighting can sometimes appear harsh. Many times lighting from both angles not only improves their visibility, the effect is more prototypical. The drawback to LED lighting up to now has been the space required to house a traditional T-1 or T-1½ LED. With the invention of the surface mount device (SMD) LED, space is not an issue. SMD LEDs come in red, green, yellow, blue, "golden" white, and white. The SMD LEDs are a bit more expensive than the T-1 or T-1½, but not a lot. The wiring for the SMD LEDs is normally 30 gauge, which makes it easy to hide in the room. The other nice thing about SMD LEDs is the current requirements are much less than that of incandescent bulbs.

It is not necessary to detail every structure to the same degree, but a few well-placed details can add character and realism that will make any structure worthy of a stellar location on your layout.

If you have any questions about detailing building interiors, feel free to e-mail me at b-n-ferrco@cfl.rr.com or visit my web site at www.b-n-ferrco.com