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Detailing and Weathering Structures -
Take your structure from STANDARD to STELLAR!**

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Like many model railroaders, I never tire of looking at layouts. Large or small, no matter the scale, I love ‘em all! However, I’d not been in the hobby long before I realized that many of the structures looked eerily similar. That’s when I learned that details make all the difference between a building that just sits there taking up valuable real estate, and one that becomes a focal point for the layout.

It isn’t necessary to spend a lot of money in order to have an interesting model. Many inexpensive styrene kits have architectural components cast in place, needing only a touch of paint to bring out the details. One word of caution – some kits manufactured in Europe may not be true to scale, or may contain architectural elements that appear distinctly European.

Once you have chosen the appropriate kit, plan your colors carefully. Much of the painting and weathering is done prior to assembly. Whenever possible, leave all parts attached to sprues until painted. Not only does this facilitate painting and weathering by making the parts easier to handle, you are less likely to lose them.

Wash the kit parts in warm soapy water to remove all mold release agents and set aside to dry. Begin by painting any brick surfaces with a base coat of color, usually a dark red or tan. On many buildings built prior to the 1940's, the front walls were more expensive red brick, while the sides and back used less-costly blonde brick.

There are several methods of creating the illusion of mortar on brick buildings. One method is to use a wash made by thinning solvent-based paints such as Model Master or Floquil. Brush the wash on smoothly over the entire area. Allow the piece to set undisturbed until the paint is almost dry. Then with a cotton swab moistened with thinner, remove any excess mortar color from the bricks.

Another way to apply mortar effects is to use a solvent-based paint to the bricks and use a water-based craft paint for the mortar lines. This way you don't run the risk of removing the brick color by mistake.

Weathering chalks may also be used to add mortar lines as well as dimension to the brick. A micro brush works well for this application of the chalks but nothing beats your finger for fine blending and buffing of colors.

One word of caution when using any of these methods for mortar lines – avoid using white or any very light color. This can give an unwanted pink look to your building.

Once the brick and stone work are complete, trim work such as door and window frames should be painted. Use a good quality brush and water-based paints for the fine detail needed. Solvents can cause the bristles on the brush to “flare,” ruining a favorite brush.

After the door and window frames are painted and installed, weathering can be added under the windows, on chimneys, and along the tops of the walls. Weathering can be applied in layers until the desired effect is achieved. Paints or chalks or a combination may be used. Don't forget to use dull cote to “set” the chalks between layers.

Sometimes dry transfers may be used on the sides of the buildings to give a period look. One special technique is to apply the transfer as directed, then lightly scraping the surface with a fingernail to achieve an aged, peeling look.

Window treatments may be applied to windows before or after the building is assembled. Window treatments add detail and life to the overall look of the building. These treatments may be purchased, or you can make your own, using small bits of colored paper.

Another simple, yet effective, detail to add realism to your project is to paint the interior walls black. This step renders the walls opaque, eliminating the “lampshade” effect commonly found when using interior lighting. What is the “lampshade” effect? This is when the structure glows from within like a lampshade. In unlit structures, black paint darkens the interior, giving a more realistic appearance to the model.

Don't overlook the roof when detailing your structure. This is often the first area of the building we see, but it is one of the least detailed. Giving the rooftop texture is one way to detail. Fine grit sandpaper may be used to simulate a gravel roof. Masking tape cut to a width of three scale feet and painted becomes a very realistic tar paper roof. Add plastic vents, hatches, and rooftop air conditioning units along with a "patch" here and there and you have a much more interesting model.

Another area often overlooked by modelers is a foundation. Any model should always appear as if it were truly built on that site. Simply affix a piece of .040 styrene to the bottom of the model so that it protrudes from the front of the building to form a stoop or sidewalk. Then you can add foliage, gravel, or other material to make it unique.

I hope that you enjoyed my clinic, and have a better understanding of how to detail and weather an inexpensive kit to get a model that really stands out on your layout.

If you have any questions about doing these models, feel free to e-mail me at b-n-ferrco@cfl.rr.com or visit our website at www.b-n-ferrco.com

Tools and Equipment

- Scale ruler
- Adjustable square
- X-Acto knife with #11 blade
- Sprue cutter
- Side cutters
- Needle-nose and bent-angle tweezers
- Burnishing tool
- 100/180 grit nail files
- #10/0, 15/0, 20/0, 3, 5 red sable brushes
- Testors – small synthetic brushes
- Microbrush – fine and superfine
- Masking tape
- Double-sided tape
- Small plastic palette
- Tweezerman – Stork scissors

Acrylic Paints

- Titanium white
- Oxide black
- Yellow ochre
- Raw sienna
- Burnt sienna

Acrylic Paints (continued)

Raw umber
Burnt umber
Vandyke brown
Neutral gray

Misc. Paints and Supplies

Poly Scale – Aged Concrete
Model Master – Flat Finish (brush-on)
Testors – Dull Coat (spray)
Testors – Flat Aluminum (brush-on)
Hunter Green acrylic
Assorted craft paints
AIM Produces – weathering powders set
Tenax-R7