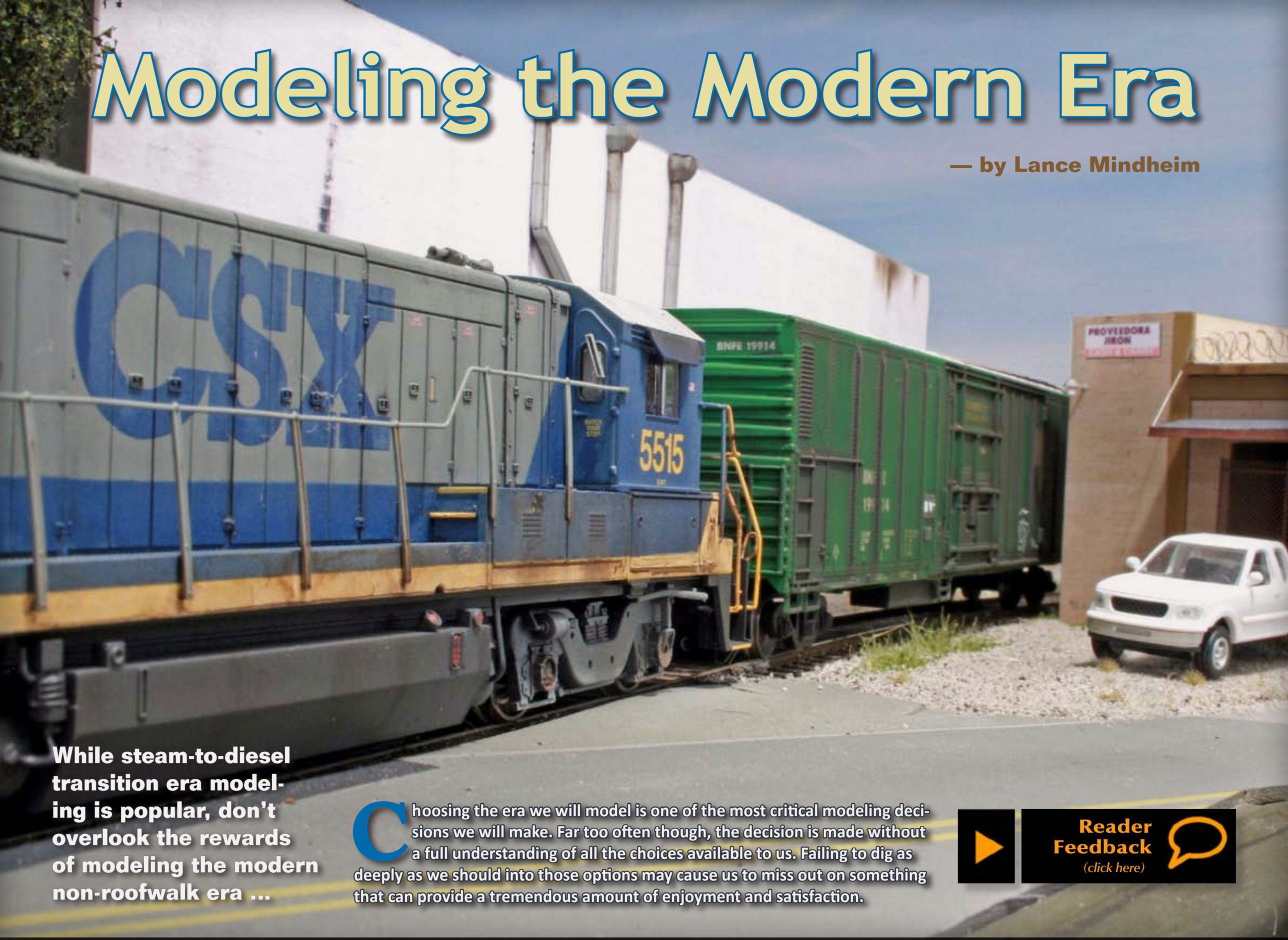
Modeling the Modern Era

— by Lance Mindheim



While steam-to-diesel transition era modeling is popular, don't overlook the rewards of modeling the modern non-roofwalk era ...

Choosing the era we will model is one of the most critical modeling decisions we will make. Far too often though, the decision is made without a full understanding of all the choices available to us. Failing to dig as deeply as we should into those options may cause us to miss out on something that can provide a tremendous amount of enjoyment and satisfaction.

Reader Feedback
(click here)

When it comes to selecting an era, you have a few camps. You have those that are passionate about a specific time period, understand its pros and cons, and forge ahead full-throttle blissfully content.

Then you have those that are somewhat ambivalent and settle into the steam-to-diesel transition era by default, knowing that is the most popular time period and there are many modeling products available to fill our needs.

Finally, you have those that have not decided what era to model, realize it's a crucial planning decision, and want to make an informed decision. This article is not meant to sway those who are happy with their era selection (probably the steam-to-diesel transition era). Rather it is geared to those who are actively looking for an era to model or are ambivalent.

For those groups I'd like to make a case for strongly considering modeling modern times, in particular the present. I'd also like to reach out to those modelers that have been building their layouts for some time, taken their theme as far as they can and are looking for a fresh start to re-energize their interest in the hobby. This was my situation.

Figure 1

Figure 1: With just a few inches to spare on each side, the switcher squeezes between the concrete canyon formed by Florida Bottling and Proveedora Jiron. Both shippers, although small, still take incoming rail shipments.

For over a decade I was a dyed-in-the-wool 1950s-era Monon Railroad modeler. During the time I had my Monon layout I viewed the modern era as the absolute *least* attractive option when it came to themes. This view was held solely out of ignorance as to what the era was all about.

I thrashed the Monon theme for all it was worth and it provided many years of enjoyment. As it neared completion though, a sense of malaise and boredom set in. The 1950's just seemed to be an era that was increasingly beaten to death.

In addition, research became increasingly time consuming and frustrating as I spent hours looking for critical information often coming to the realization that it simply did not exist.

I found myself building and operating the layout less and less until things ground to a total halt. Deep down I knew that it was time to start over with a new theme but really didn't know where to start.

As passionate as I had been about the 1950s era, I knew if I didn't move onto something else I'd quickly be back in the same boat. I really needed something new to re-energize my interest in the hobby.

The solution to my problem came from a rather unexpected source, senior railroad employees either recently retired or close to retirement. Given the depth of their experience and knowledge I particularly valued their advice. Their suggestion was to model the modern era.

These were guys with broad first-hand knowledge of a variety of eras. In their opinion, the modern era offered just as many interesting modeling subjects as previous time periods but had the huge added benefit of being able to experience it first hand. Five years down the road, it was some of the best modeling advice I've ever received.

It's an era that, surprisingly, many don't have an accurate understanding of , and dismiss far too quickly. My intent here is not to try to change the mind of anybody who is happy with their current theme. Instead my goal is to provide some food for thought for those searching for an era so they can make an informed decision

The Modern Era, The Myth

If most modelers were asked to sum up modern era railroading they'd describe double-track mains, very few small industries, and no local switching operations.

Many would think that the few industries that are still rail-served are massive characterless structures that would be difficult to fit on a model railroad. Rolling stock would be thought to consist of forgettable gray hoppers, containers, and auto racks. In other

words, when asked to visualize the modern era, most model railroaders have an image of a barren wasteland, devoid of character and modeling interest. Yawn . . .

The Modern Era, The Reality

As so many others likely do, my initial view of the modern era was personified by the myth above. What could be more boring than ribbon straight double-track mains, totally devoid of spurs and sidings, carrying an endless parade of plain vanilla unit trains. Answer, nothing could be less appealing. Why would anybody in their right mind chose to model the present day?

Here's why. The commonly-held, modern era myth, while having some basis in fact, is not the total picture of present-day railroading.

Regional and local situations vary greatly, and in many metro areas railroading is still very similar to what it was in the 1950s the difference being that you can put yourself trackside and still watch the action unfold.

I haven't done a nationwide survey of the various metro areas, so can't give a breakdown of those who hold interest versus those who don't.

The region where I live, Metro Washington/Baltimore, is pretty short on appealing modeling subjects and those that do remain are becoming fewer and fewer.

I live in a county with a population of almost 750,000. The CSX double-track main slices through end-to-end passing a mere half-dozen rail-served industries. Pretty bleak from a modeling standpoint.

In other cities however, the opportunities are much brighter. Miami, Orlando, Seattle, and many areas in California, to name a few, are packed with secondary industrial tracks serving interesting and easy-to-model industries, short lines mixing with class ones, passenger and commuter traffic etc.

Don't let a snapshot of one region of the country color your view of the entire modern era.

In simple terms, modeling the present day offers:

- Unlimited, easy to obtain, accurate research data
- Operational interest equal to that of other eras plus the ability to watch those operations first-hand.
- Structures as interesting as that of previous eras.

Figure 2a

Figure 2b

Figures 2a, 2b: A photograph represents only the situation as it exists at a moment in time and often does not give the degree of accuracy that you would get if you studied the situation over longer time periods. This harsh reality hampers the ability of the prototype modeler to be accurate when earlier eras are being modeled. If you were to have visited the overgrown spur in the left photo the day before the shot was taken, you could logically assume that the spur had been abandoned years ago. What a difference a day makes. A few moments later a switcher appeared around the corner and began working the spur (right photo).

- As much, if not more, variety in terms of motive power and rolling stock.
- Ability to incorporate digital photos of actual structures and their components onto and into our models.

The Research Dilemma

What is perfect research? It's being able to have access to every piece of information needed to accurately model a railroad. This includes photos of all structure faces, knowledge of operational practices, details on vehicles, signs, rolling stock, etc.

Figure 3: The sign on the side of this structure reads "Miami Waste Paper". Standing in front of the structure you see trailers of waste paper. This would lead one to reasonably expect that the boxcars spotted at the back of the building handle waste paper. Wrong! A walk around the back of the building reveals that the portion of the structure being served by rails contains stacks of rice and drink concentrate. this means Miami Waste Paper has sublet the rail served portion of the warehouse to another tenant that takes incoming rail shipments of food products and does not ship outgoing paper loads as would likely be assumed. The ability to make these types of distinctions is another advantage of modeling the modern era.

If having very accurate information is important to you, and you model an earlier era, you have a few problems. One is hat the information may no longer exist or, if it does, it often takes an enormous amount of time to track down. The problem gets worse with the passage of time as structures are demolished, memories fade, people pass away, documents are lost, etc.

Another issue that many don't think about is that photographs are just a snapshot representing a moment in time. Older photos often show the unusual rather than the typical. They don't necessarily represent what the typical situation is over long time periods.

A photo packed with freight cars tells you a lot. A photo of an empty siding tells you nothing. Is the industry abandoned? Don't make that assumption. Maybe there were three cars spotted there last week. Maybe it takes cars, but how often? Weekly, monthly, semi-annually?

Industries change. A factory may change owners and products over time. Structures may be repainted every several years. The one constant is change and all a snapshot captures is that one instant.

Access to an endless supply of research material is where the modern era shines. It is possible to have almost every piece of information you need.

With the advent of the internet we now have access to aerial photos of such quality that would have been impossible just a few years ago. These photos are of such resolution you can literally read the print on the side of a freight car. Modern aerial photos routinely capture trains going about their switching moves.

Google street view allows you to literally be at the site at street level and virtually walk around the area. Aerials are so good you can get 'good enough' dimensions to model any structure.

Modern industries have websites providing information about their services. Modeling organizations routinely contain current railroad employees who are very generous in terms of putting on seminars and answering questions about modern operating practices.

Most importantly, modeling the modern era gives you the luxury of observing longer time periods to get a more accurate sense of what is going on operationally.

A photo of the area I model would lead one to believe that the branch is essentially abandoned and serving only a customer or two.

Observation over long time periods has shown that the number of rail-served industries is probably ten times what I originally thought. Freight cars

Figure 4a

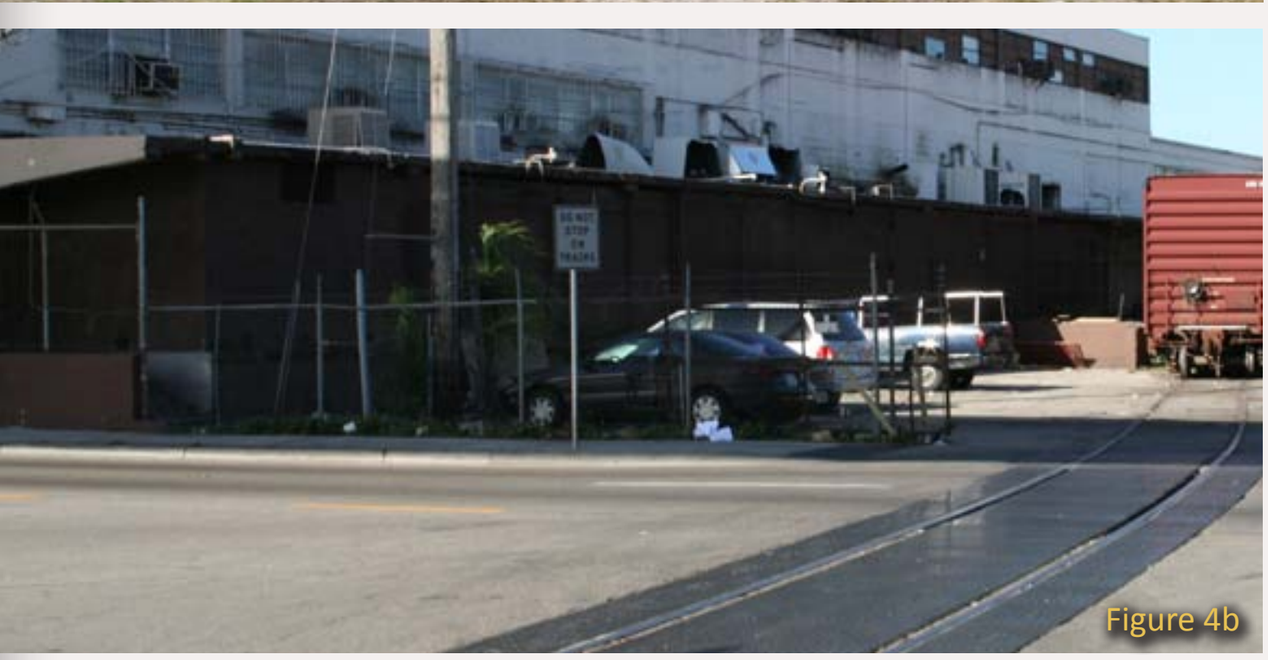


Figure 4b

Figures 4a, 4b: Snapshots can be misleading. The photo on the top is of a section of the 12th Avenue switchback in Miami. Upon looking at the weed choked right-of-way I erroneously assumed the track was abandoned. A few months afterwards I learned that not only was the white structure in the background still receiving rail cars but just beyond was a fascinating open-air courtyard (lower photo). Aerial photos and a second visit to the site allowed me to correct my original snap-judgment regarding abandoned rail.

don't stay on location long. They are spotted, unloaded, and pulled. Unless you happen to catch them the day they are spotted, you could easily assume the industry is not rail-served (Figure 2 on page 60 and Figure 3 on page 61).

Modern Era Research Tools

- Bing Maps: Birdseye View
- Google Maps: Street View.
- Site photos and observation.
- Interviews and seminars with modern era railroad employees.

Operations

Mainline operations have changed from what existed in the 1950s becoming more streamlined, efficient, and admittedly more boring. However, local switching operations, the most sought-after crew assignment in most operating sessions, remains remarkably unchanged from previous eras.

In most cases there is only one way to pull an empty boxcar from a siding and replace it with a load whether you are looking at 1955 or 2010.

Figure 5

Figure 5: There really aren't too many different ways to swap a loaded boxcar for an empty, whether you are looking at 1955 or the present day. In this photo the local switcher works a food-processing facility pulling the loaded cars and dropping off a load.

Likewise, a local entering an industrial park with a string of fifteen cars will likely perform the moves in the same manner they did fifty years ago. So, what many consider to be the most appealing operational aspect of model railroading, local switching, still exists in pretty much the same form as older time periods (Figure 5 on page 62 and Figure 6 on page 63).

Structures

We've all heard the statement that modern railroading is trending towards only serving customers that can provide hundreds or thousands of car loads per year. The conventional wisdom is that the railroads are perfectly content to, and would actually prefer to, let smaller industries haul by truck. In some regions I'm sure this is true. On a national basis however, this is just not reality even among class ones.

In many locales sales departments actively and aggressively seek new customers, even small ones that ship just a handful of cars per year. The result is an unlimited supply of industries that are small enough to be included on a model railroad without stretching the bounds of plausibility.

Figure 6

Figure 6: The equipment is newer but otherwise this timeless scene plays out the same now is it did decades ago.

Figure 7

Figure 7: Westway Terminals, Baltimore, MD.

These smaller industries handle a broad variety of car types and have enough architectural variety to pique anybody's interest. Certainly mega-box, white sheet-metal warehouses are a big part of the modern structure landscape, but there is much more out there beyond that.

Shown on the next two pages are just a small sample of some diverse, architectural-interesting, modern-day industries (Figures 8-12).

Rolling Stock

In terms of variety and interest, rolling stock is one area where the modern era has lost no ground to previous time periods being as varied, colorful, and interesting as any time in the past.

Most of the car types of previous eras still exist in a more modern form. In addition, new car types have come on the scene. The argument could made that modern cars are more colorful and diverse than ever before.

For example, the long trains of oxide-red boxcars that personified the '50's have been replaced with multi-hue, faded, and re-stenciled cars from the incentive per-diem craze (Figure 13 page 65 and Figures 14a and 14b page 66).

New Construction Techniques

There have been some changes in technology over the past decade

that add exciting new possibilities to how we build our models, specifically structures (or to be more accurate make old ideas much easier to implement). Advances in digital photography and printing now make it much easier and more practical to use photos or portions of photos as components of our models.

It is now possible to photograph a structure, or part of a structure such as a door, edit the photo and literally wallpaper it onto styrene yielding perfect colors and weathering patterns. Such digital techniques work well when modeling modern structures since it's just a matter of going to the site and taking the shot. Doing the same thing with earlier eras, while still possible, is more difficult because the structures often no longer exist (Figures 15a and 15b on page 66 and figures 16a and 16b on page 67).

The Craftmanship Mindset

For reasons that are well-deserved, certain eras and themes are associated with a craftsmanship mindset. This is a culture characterized by quality results from top to bottom and where doing whatever is necessary in terms of scratch building to bring the point home is the norm. Narrow gauge modelers are one such group.

There is really no reason why this same mindset can not be applied to any era, including the present day. When it comes to modern structures, many probably conjure up images of a shiny blue unpainted Rix warehouse kit hastily assembled and plopped into place. However, that same structure can be broken down, kitbashed, painted, detailed and weathered into something of quality equal to the craftsman structures we are used to seeing from earlier time periods (Figure 17a and 17b on page 68).

A Word About Passenger Traffic

Who could not be captivated by glamour trains of the past such as the Twentieth Century Limited. Not only was the equipment magnificent but the rolling stock variety and head

Figure 9: Vulcan Materials, Annapolis Jct., MD.

Figure 8: PanAm Frozen Foods, Miami, FL.

Figure 10: Lehigh Cement, Baltimore, MD.

Figure 11a

Figure 11b

Figures 11a, 11b: Modern times have brought us new, interesting, and easily modeled industrial structures that didn't exist in earlier time periods. The model in figure 11a shows a plastic pellet hopper being unloaded at a team track. Figure 11b is of a larger plastic facility.

operations were fascinating. Some of that lives on with Amtrak but it really isn't the same.

When it comes to modeling, changes in passenger traffic aren't necessarily so bad. We've lost some treasures of the past but, if you step back a second, we've also gained something that is easier to model. As wonderful as the passenger operations of the past were, they aren't always that easy to model, especially if you have a smaller layout.

Enter the modern-day commuter train. Drab gray and Pullman green commuter trains of the past have given way to stunning bi-level cars with dazzling murals on the side. Better yet, commuters with their shorter lengths, frequent stops, and smaller stations are easier to model on small to

Figure 12

Figure 12: Potomac Valley Brick, Derwood, MD.

Figure 13

Figure 13: Then and now. Locomotive styles have understandably changed with the times, but not necessarily for the worse. To this moderler's eye, the two switchers above, while from totally different eras, are equally interesting for their own separate reasons.

mid-sized layout. Passenger traffic has changed. It is different but not necessarily worse (Figure 18 page 69).

Summary

Many of the most appealing aspects of 1950's railroading still exist today. In fact, today's railroading even offers a few interesting elements that didn't exist in the past. In addition, the modern era offers the additional advantages of limitless and accurate research information and the ability to observe our modeling subject first hand. For those searching for an era, you owe it to yourself to at least explore the modern era. (See the following pages for more photos and Comparison Table.) ☑

Figure 14a

Figure 14b

Figure 14 a, b: The chemical tank car (left) and reefer (figure 15a) aren't much different than what you would have seen fifty years ago. The modern era has lost little in terms of rolling stock variety and even added new car types such as the lumber flat (above).

Figure 15a

Figure 15a

Figures 15a, 15b: The complex weathering patterns and intricate signs on the sides of International Freight Consolidators and del Toro Signs would make the structures extremely difficult to model using conventional methods. Technology advances make it possible to laminate digital photos of the actual structures onto styrene and then create 3D depth by adding stand-off details. The ability to go to the site and photograph the structures make this possible, whereas this might be more difficult with structures from earlier eras.

Figure 16a

Figure 16a: The complex graffiti on this masonry wall would be very difficult to do by hand. To capture the effect, a photograph of the actual wall was taken, edited, and affixed to styrene.

Figure 16b

Figure 16b: In a similar vein, the complex weathering patterns on the walls of the 12th Avenue Courtyard structure are more easily captured using the photo wallpaper technique.

Figure 17a

Figure 17b

Figure 17a, 17b: Craftsman structures need not be the sole domain of narrow gaugers and those modeling earlier eras. There is no reason the techniques and mindset taught by master modelers modeling those eras can not be applied to structures of the modern era. The top photos is of D&E Argentinas in Miami. The bottom is of the Miami Produce Market. Both models were entirely scratchbuilt.

ERA COMPARISON

Item	Present Day	1955
Availability of Accurate Research Material	√	
Ease of Obtaining Accurate Research Material	√	
Access to Railroad Employees	√	
Ability to Observe First-hand	√	
Interest of Switching Operations	√	√
Street Running	√	√
Rail Marine Operations	√	√
Small Towns with Depots and Freight Houses		√
Industrial Parks	√	
Interest of Main Line Operations (Mainline Timetable and Trainorder Operations)		√
Freight Car Variety and Interest	√	√
Caboose		√
Passenger Car Variety and Interest		√
Commuter Train Variety and Interest	√	
Structure Variety and Interest	√	√
Availability of Needed Modeling Materials		
Locomotive Availabiity	√	√
Freight Car Rolling Stock Availabiity	√	√
Vehicles	√	
Structure Kits		√
Miscellaneous Details (street Lights, fences, etc.)		√

Figure 18: Commuter trains with their short lengths, dazzling paint schemes and frequent stops at small stations make passenger operations much more viable for those with smaller layouts.

Lance Mindheim, is the owner of *Shelf Layouts Company, Inc.* a custom layout building and design firm.

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He is currently building a layout of Miami's Downtown Spur set in modern times.

Derailments

humor (allegedly)

"Big Boy meets Little Boy"

If railroad workers formed a football team and made it to the playoffs, where would they play? The steam dome or the sand dome?

Which part of a freight car can't be trusted around the cops? That's easy! It's the brakes - they're always squealing!

What's with the new lady track worker? You mean the one who only wants to work on crossings? Yeah! Well, she knows diamonds are a girl's best friend!

Got a good bit of humor? If you're the first to submit it and we use it, it's worth $10!

MODELING MIAMI'S DOWNTOWN SPUR

An urban light-industrial setting provides plenty of switching

BY LANCE MINDHEIM • **PHOTOS BY PAUL DOLKOS**

1. The Miami Produce Center is an open-air courtyard operated in a team track fashion on Lance Mindheim's HO switching layout. Arriving carloads of fresh produce are spotted in the lot so customers can pull up and transfer the items into small box trucks or pickups.

2. Family & Son, a major importer and producer of Latin American food products, is one of the more active customers on the branch. This view shows the southbound local passing the concrete loading dock for the Family & Son warehouse.

THE HUMIDITY IS FIRST THING

that hits you as you step out of the front door at Miami International Airport. Weather statistics don't convey the shock of its impact the first time you walk into it, particularly if you're from up North. Second is the smell of the ocean air. As you cruise down 22nd Street, parallel to the industrial spur I model, palms and Live Oaks arc overhead. Latin music pipes out of the open doors of the dozens of produce warehouses, and numerous signs indicate English is a second language.

Not only do you have the sense of being in a place like no other, when it comes to the rail scene, you feel transported to times past. As in the bygone era of the 1950s, industries still routinely take single-car loads, team tracks are common, and street running still exists.

The Santeria religion is prevalent in the area, including the regular practice of "chicken in a bag" animal sacrifices via locomotive. In an attempt to ward off bad luck, a live chicken and a wad of cash are stuffed in a bag and draped over the rails. The belief is that once the locomotive squashes the bag and its contents, the believer's fortunes will improve for the better.

SOMETHING DIFFERENT

After modeling the traditional steam-to-diesel transition era for many years, I was ready to try something different. Miami serves up "different" in large doses. I was also ready to try a new era and was intrigued by the idea of modeling the present. Whether it's 1950 or 2015, the methods of spotting a car haven't changed. If anything, it's more interesting today due to the added safety procedures employed. Getting accurate prototype information is also much easier in today's world.

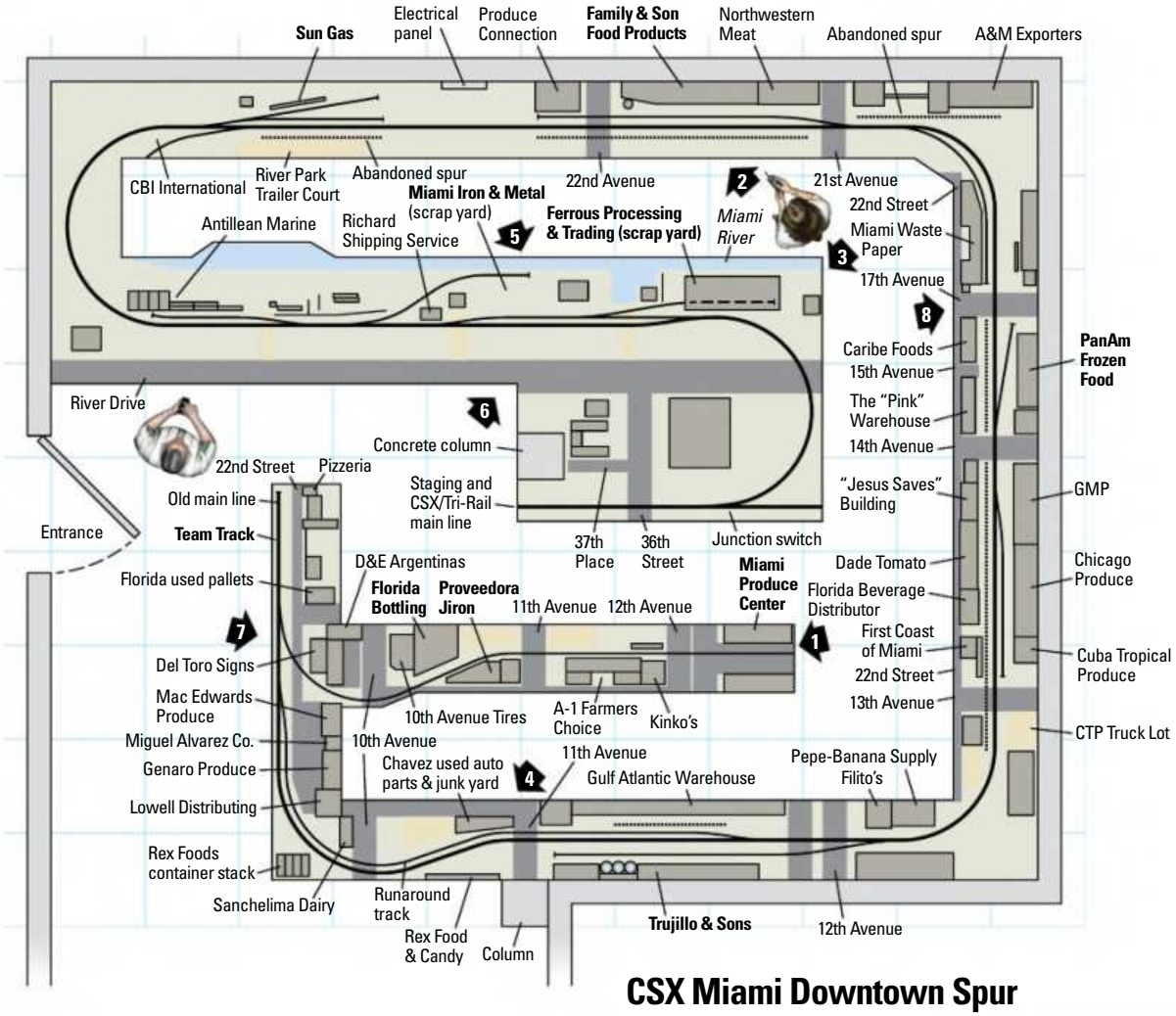
Miami offers more than most cities in terms of the number of industrial parks that would make great modeling themes. Ultimately I decided on the Downtown Spur, a 3½ mile branch of CSX near the airport. It hugs the banks of the Miami River for a mile, and then makes a straight shot east toward downtown before the rails disappear into the pavement at Seventh Avenue.

This spur is switched regularly, sometimes with two shifts during good economic times, and it has a tremendous variety of lineside industries.

The first mile of the branch serves a scrap metal business, a waste oil recycler, and a propane dealer. The balance of the line serves a variety of small food businesses that receive loads in boxcars, reefers, and vegetable oil tankers. Unlike the more modern structures we typically see trackside, those along the spur tend to be older, small, weather-beaten stucco affairs that only handle a car or two.

PULLING IT OFF

Most modelers want to capture a miniature version of a place or time that evokes strong and pleasant memories. To effectively pull off this theatrical sleight-of-hand requires an understanding of the factors that contribute to a successful model and putting your efforts there. If you want to feel like you're actually "there" when you enter the basement, your efforts need to be focused on scene composition (particularly keeping elements far enough apart), correct handling of color, scenery, and a commitment to neatness. If you work from photographs and apply these



CSX Miami Downtown Spur

HO scale (1:87.1)
Layout size: 17 x 21 feet
Scale of plan: ¼" = 1'-0", 24" grid
Numbered arrows indicate photo locations
Boldface names indicate railroad customers
Illustration by Rick Johnson

Find more plans online in the ModelRailroader.com Track Plan Database.

Now on ModelRailroader.com

To see Lance Mindheim's CSX Miami Downtown Spur modeling in action, you can check out the User Videos section of our website by visiting **www.ModelRailroader.com.**

THE LAYOUT AT A GLANCE

Name: CSX Downtown Spur
Scale: HO (1:87.1)
Size: 17 x 21 feet
Prototype: CSX
Locale: Miami
Era: 2007
Style: walk-in
Mainline run: 89 feet
Minimum radius: 24"
Minimum turnout: no. 6
Maximum grade: none
Benchwork: hollow core doors along walls, open-grid peninsulas
Height: 54"
Roadbed: none
Track: code 70
Scenery: extruded-foam insulation board
Backdrop: painted room walls
Control: CVP Easy DCC wireless

CSX Miami, Fla., Downtown Spur
Not to scale

3. Ferrous Processing & Trading, know locally as FP&T, buys scrap metal and shreds it to a uniform size before the processed material is loaded into gondolas. In this view, the CSX local crew will pull the pair of loaded scrap gons.

4. Numerous small family businesses, like Chavez Used Auto Parts, are scattered throughout the neighborhood between the railroad customers. Here, the local crosses 10th Avenue as it heads north toward the CSX connection at 36th Street.

principles, you'll get the visceral feeling you're after.

Even if your modeling is flawless, you can still fall short. Successfully capturing the feeling and mood of the area you're modeling entails sitting back for a moment to consider the area's defining features. A distinction has to be made between the common and ordinary elements that make a place what it is versus the typical model railroad approach of cherry-picking all the extraordinary features. In "my" Miami planning, the signature elements are the palms, the river scene, and the unique structures.

PALM TREES

Nothing says you're in Miami more than the ubiquitous palm trees. There simply isn't any hope to create a replica of the area without them. I wasn't happy with the appearance of ready-made palms on the market. To me, taking the easy way out and using them would have been visually jarring and ruined the effectiveness of any work I did in other areas.

If you want high-quality palms, they're available from Hart of the South (www.hartofthesouth.com), provided you're willing to build tree "kits." Since the palms are such a signature element, I decided the time to model them was well spent.

THE RIVER SCENE

It's really an odd feeling to be driving along a street with a five-story-high ship gliding by a few yards away behind the tree line. Many visitors are unaware that Miami actually has two active ports. In addition to the large and more typical Port of Miami, the Miami River inland port serves a string of small shipping companies whose names tip off the destinations they serve: Antillean Marine, American Caribbean Terminal, Trans-Haiti Shipping, and many others.

The Miami River scene defies belief in terms of plausibility. At many points, the river is only a few yards wider than

5. Miami Iron and Metal is another scrap-metal dealer along the river corridor. Unlike its competitor, MI&M doesn't shred the metal, but the scrap materials are sorted into various categories before they're loaded. Miami Iron ships its out-bound scrap loads in formerly utility-owned high-side coal gondolas.

MODELING MIAMI'S STRUCTURES

THE BASIC ARCHITECTURE of Miami's industrial structures is relatively easy to model, since most of it consists of masonry blocks covered with stucco. Construct a four-wall cube, and the base structure is essentially complete.

It's the pastel surface coloring that's unique and a challenge to model. Hand-painted murals and signs are common. Over time, the original artwork begins to fade, peel, and occasionally gets covered with graffiti. Modeling this convincingly using traditional techniques is nearly impossible. Since I had access to the area, I opted to use a photo-lamination approach. I simply photographed the structure, cleaned up the image using my computer's image editing software, and glued the finished photos to my styrene cube. Then, to add some visual depth to the flat walls, I added three-dimensional details such as awnings, rain gutters, steps, and loading docks.

My article "Building a modern shelf switching layout" appeared in *Model Railroad Planning 2009*. It featured a look at this layout during the planning phases and included a number of prototype photos. At the time it was written, construction had not started. It's also important to note the plan shown here is different from the one in that article. – *L.M.*

7. Here's the local backing slowly into a switchback as it crosses 22nd Street with a mechanical refrigerator car. The crew has to continue this move for about three blocks before it can spot the load at the Miami Produce Center.

the ships that ply it. The vessels that thread upstream tend to be very short, 300- to 500-foot-long container ships, barges, and ferries. Their hulls are streaked with rust and the ships seem to be a Frankenstein kitbash of whatever the shipyard could pick up on the cheap, including World War II landing craft. Given their short length and questionable seaworthiness, most of the ships primarily ferry vehicles and goods to nearby island nations of the Caribbean. Being able to work in some marine modeling with this layout is a welcome treat.

STRUCTURES AND SCENES

One of the great lessons I learned from my mentors is the importance of modeling the ordinary. As I decided

6. A Trackmobile moves loaded gondolas from Ferrous Processing & Trading onto a siding. Empty cars have already been spotted under the shed at right in the background.

which features made it onto the layout, I worked very hard to keep my emotions out of it. No consideration was given as to whether a structure was rail-served or not, or whether it had interesting architecture. If a building was in the scene, I included it without judgment.

Miami's interesting culture and rail scene never cease to fascinate me. I can't visit the city as often as I'd like, but thanks to photography I've captured the spirit and flavor of the area enough that I feel like I'm taking a railfan vacation when I step into the layout room. HTMTR

8. The lines of sight are obstructed approaching the 17th Avenue crossing, so the conductor often takes a position on the front platform as a safety measure while the locomotive crawls through the intersection.