

Model what's common

Reverse Running: Stepping outside the box with a contrary view

by Don Hanley

How often do you visit a layout, or look at a magazine, and see all of those neat, unique creations? They can be bridges, buildings or rolling stock. While those pieces are eye-catching, should our layouts be populated with so many unique buildings, or signature pieces of rolling stock?



If that is what you want, then go for it. However, I believe that a majority of us want to create an every-day scene or overall impression on our layouts. At least, I know that I do. How do you achieve it? One of the key techniques is to model what is common.

How do you determine what is common? Rolling stock is relatively easy. Study photos, equipment registers, and any other data that you can get your hands on. Look for car types, road names, and any other features that you determine convey a realistic feel of the time and era that you are modeling. You may need to limit yourself to one or two “signature” pieces of rolling stock or motive power. As humans we have an amazing capacity to rationalize anything. One or two special pieces is one thing, but a whole fleet of them turns into a confusing mishmash.

Study the architecture of the buildings, their layout and overall appearance, and how they relate to each other. Those

structures with the turrets at the front corner are neat, but one or two in a town are all that is needed to convey the idea. You don't need one on every corner. Look for simple, common buildings. Remember, someone had to pay for the building and they were as likely to be concerned with cost as much as we are today. A rectangular building is much less expensive to build than one with a bunch of corners and angles. Yes, you can find those stand-out buildings, but are they common?

Many of us have seen the layout with a 2,400-square-foot factory that produces enough product in a day to warrant two or three 40-foot box cars. An industry that can handle that many boxcars more than likely will have 240,000 square feet of production space, if not more. And, not everything arrives and leaves by rail.

OK, you don't have enough space for that size of an industrial building. While selective compression is warranted to a point, there is a point where it goes too far. Not to worry, just model the loading/unloading dock area and have the rest of the building represented on the backdrop, or in the aisle space.

When you are planning the industries that will be on your layout, take your time to think about the space needed to service the industry. Where do trucks deliver materials? Where do they load shipments? This can include parking space for automobiles, and truck docks with room for trucks to turn and back in. Nothing can kill the overall look of a well-modeled scene faster than having an unrealistically small space for trucks and autos. Our eyes will see it, and our minds will immediately know that something is wrong.

In the future, take some time out to think more about the space, and the overall composition of your scene.