

Here you go...another great entry from

## ***O Scale Trains Magazine's Design-a-Layout Contest***



entry submitted by  
**Richard L. Gardner**

### **Constraints**

This layout design contest couldn't have come at a more opportune time. Having just rekindled the O scale fever, I was grappling with the all too familiar real estate challenges this king of scales presents. This contest has become a personal test of how much I could squeeze into a relatively small environment. The news of the minimum radius change came somewhat after I'd completed the preliminaries, so I was able to loosen up the design and allow more space to structures. It became downright enjoyable after that.

### **Concept**

O scale trains are big! The sheer mass and weight enable them to couple and un-couple with remarkable reliability. This makes this scale inherently suited to switching. That's a convenience for this layout because there's not a lot of room to run around in. If we want to do a lot of switching in a small space, the city is where to go.

### **But Not Just Any City!**

I've lived in New Orleans since the early '90's and only recently come to appreciate the wealth of railroading opportunities in the area. It has been home to dozens of railroads over the years but the one thread that ties the whole scene together is the New Orleans Public Belt (NOPB) Railroad. The company was organized on October 8, 1904 and acquired common carrier status in 1911. Initially formed as a non-profit organization jointly financed by the participating railroads, it is now owned by the City of New Orleans and managed by the Public Belt Railroad Commission.

The NOPB is probably most famous for constructing the Huey P. Long Bridge across the Mississippi river. But more

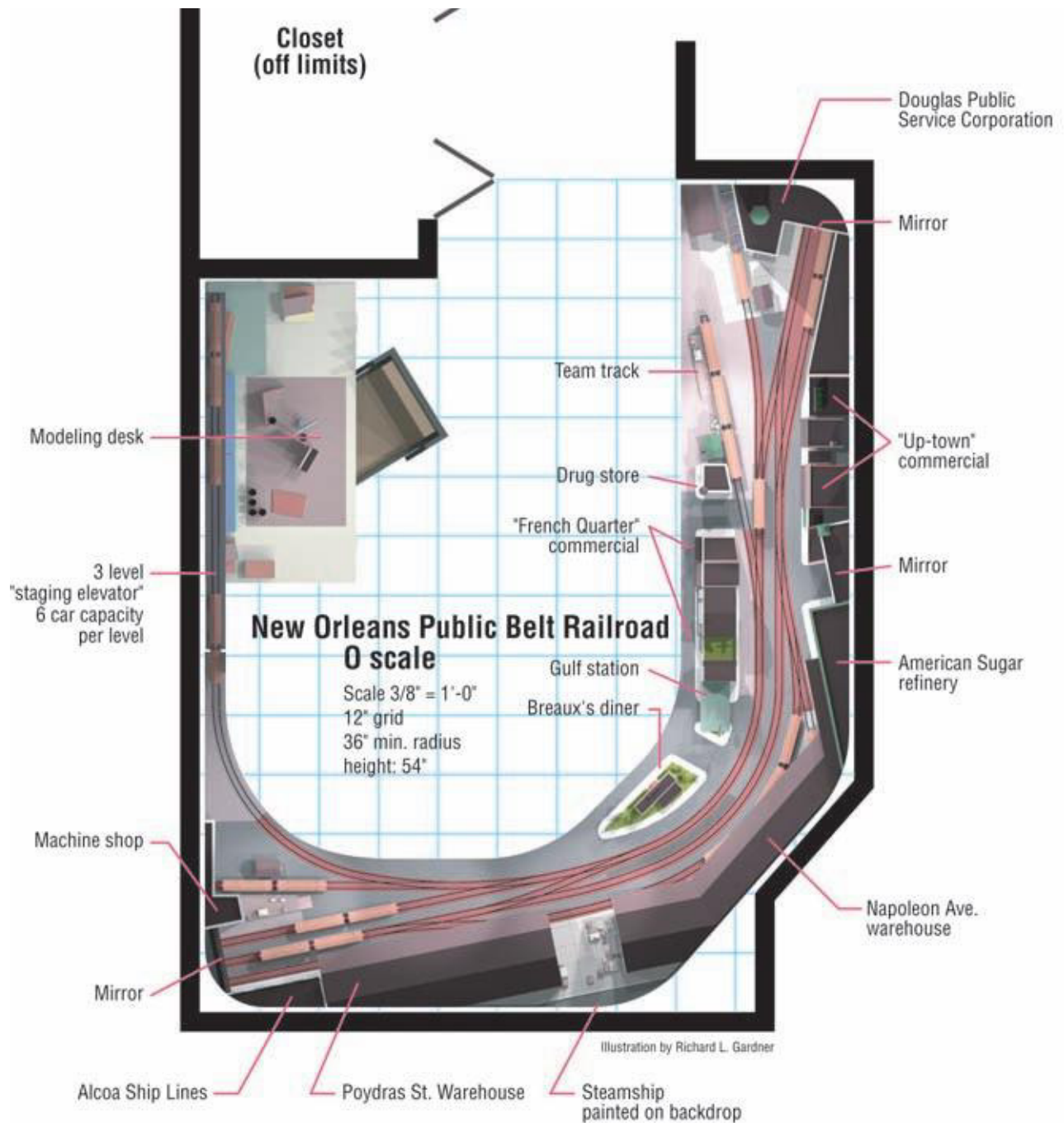
importantly, it was designed to address the complicated tariff issues of freight service for numerous railroads in a congested city. Today, the NOPB services no less than 73 industries as listed on their official web site. This is probably just a fraction of the traffic that was present during the late forties. There are dozens of wharfs and warehouses along the river and much more is found tucked into the fabric of this most exotic of cities.

Have I mentioned the French Quarter yet? It is still as charming as it was a hundred years ago and the railroad still runs through it. An engineer can stop his train, walk across the tracks to Decatur Street and get a café au lait at Café du Monde. Dense urban traffic with charming ambiance is just the teaser for inspiration.

### **Operating The Layout**

In such a small room, we can get only a snapshot of the complexity of the city traffic. But what a snapshot it is! The design only wraps around two of the room's walls, but there is room for some really neat warehouses big enough to look like they could use some train service. I'm talking big here; the Napoleon Ave. warehouse is almost four feet long. Other industries are four and five stories tall, not bad for O scale.

Schematically, the railroad follows the river corridor around and beyond the room limitations. Large mirrors at each end create the illusion that you are seeing but a small portion of a great expanse. Operationally, we will be bringing in a train from an interchange yard such as the Kansas City Southern yard on Airline Drive. A three level "elevator" staging yard accomplishes this task. Note: this was discussed in detail in the *Model Railroad Planning 2001* published by Kalmbach. Each track can hold six 40 foot freight cars. The tracks can be raised



and lowered as needed to provide access to the cars. This staging yard enters the layout at the end near the Alcoa Shipping building. We will be bringing in our cut of cars to be switched in this particular section of the right-of-way. An ambitious operator may double-up and bring in twelve cars or more!

Plenty of variety abounds for your modeling and operating pleasure. Starting up-river (on your right as you come in the room) there is a large machining and manufacturing building that may

ship and receive not only boxcars but an occasional flatcar loaded with heavy machinery. Just around the corner are the Alcoa Shipping Company and the Poydras St. warehouses. Boxcars for coffee and bananas are the norm. A reefer or two might be handy to handle more perishable cargo. The Napoleon Ave. terminal continues the theme with most anything likely to be loaded or unloaded from one of the ships. By the way, there is enough room between the wharfs to model believable buildings. A

large ship can be painted on the backdrop between. The main portion can be modeled in bas-relief. I can envision a neat mini-scene showing laborers unloading bananas from an open door in the hull. I've run across many pictures of just such a thing in my research.

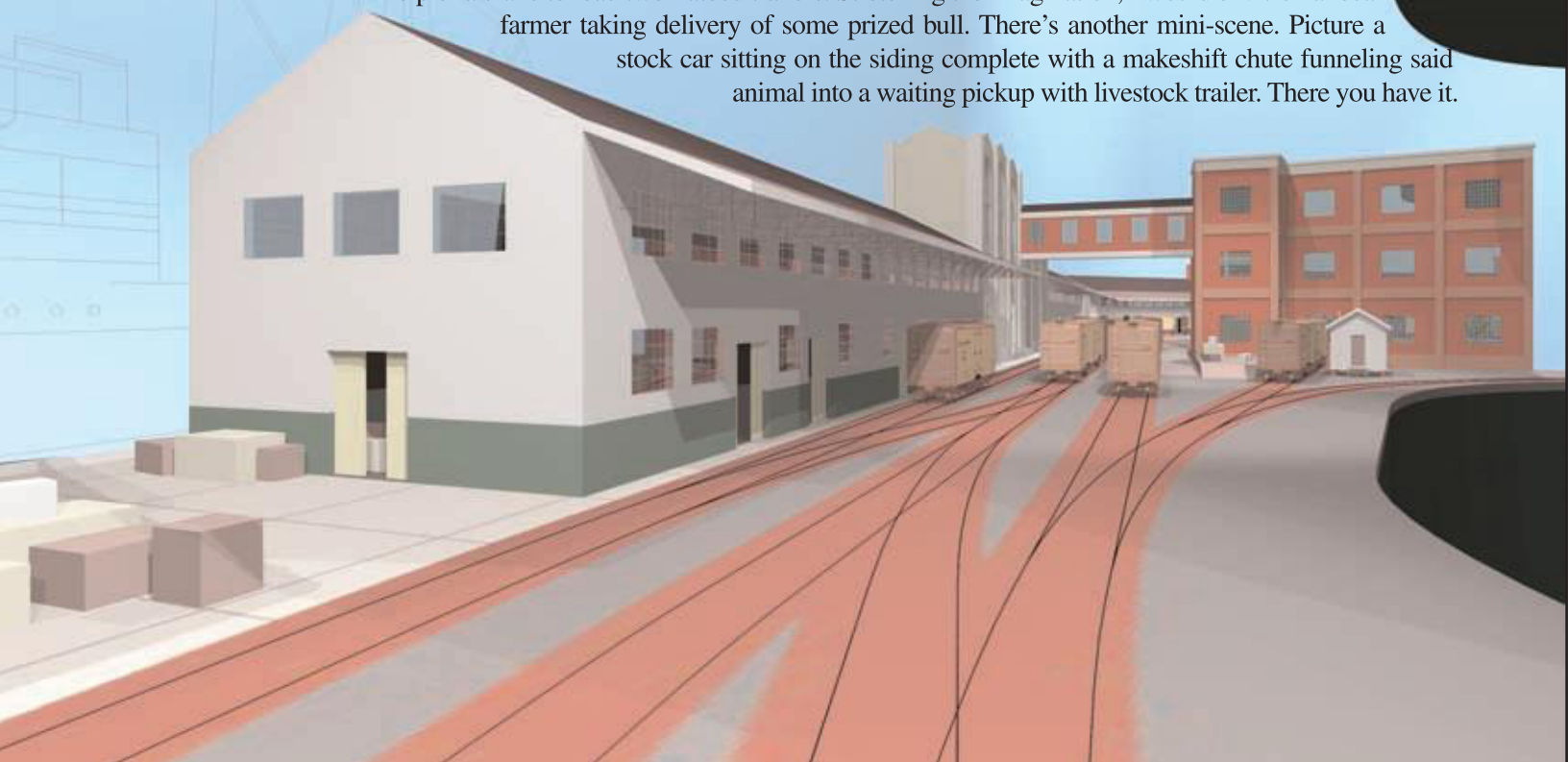
Continuing down river we come to the American Sugar Refinery (now Domino Sugar). Tank cars come in with syrup from the many sugar plantations nearby. Boxcars of bagged products will be shipped out. A little further down the





line  
we come to the  
Douglas Public Service  
Warehouse. This was a really big  
facility in the French Quarter between  
Decatur St. and the river. Lots of traffic is required  
for this impressive building.  
Finally, what respectable layout would not

have a team or less than carload (LCL) track. Anything goes here. There is one that I pass regularly that routinely spots a tank car to fill waiting tank trucks. Once a rather large piece of machinery arrived and it took most of a week with the help of a crane to load two flatbed trailers. Stretching the imagination, I would envision a local farmer taking delivery of some prized bull. There's another mini-scene. Picture a stock car sitting on the siding complete with a makeshift chute funneling said animal into a waiting pickup with livestock trailer. There you have it.





We even snuck in a stock car for operations.

### Layout statistics.

The layout was designed for the 11 x 14' room as speci-

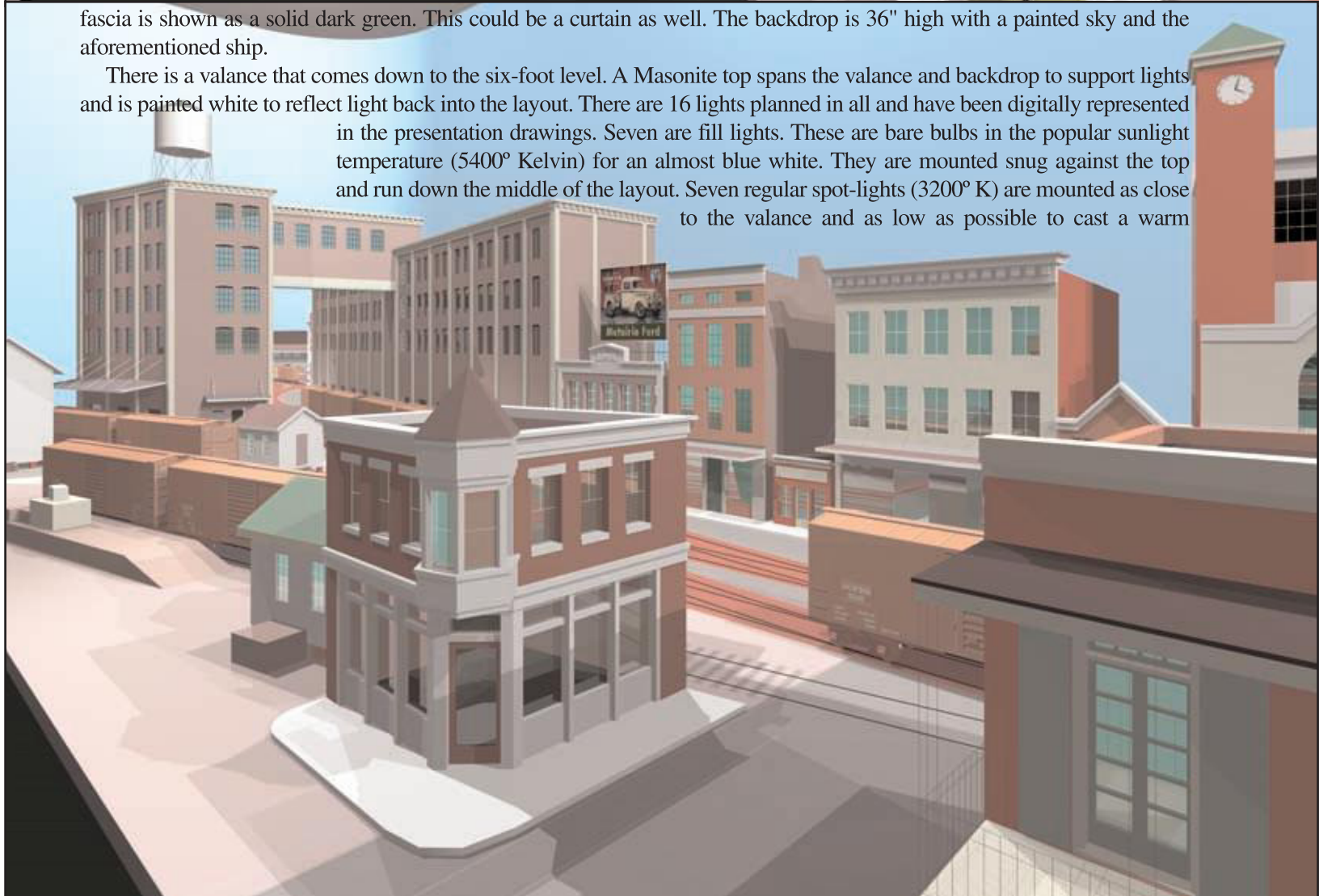
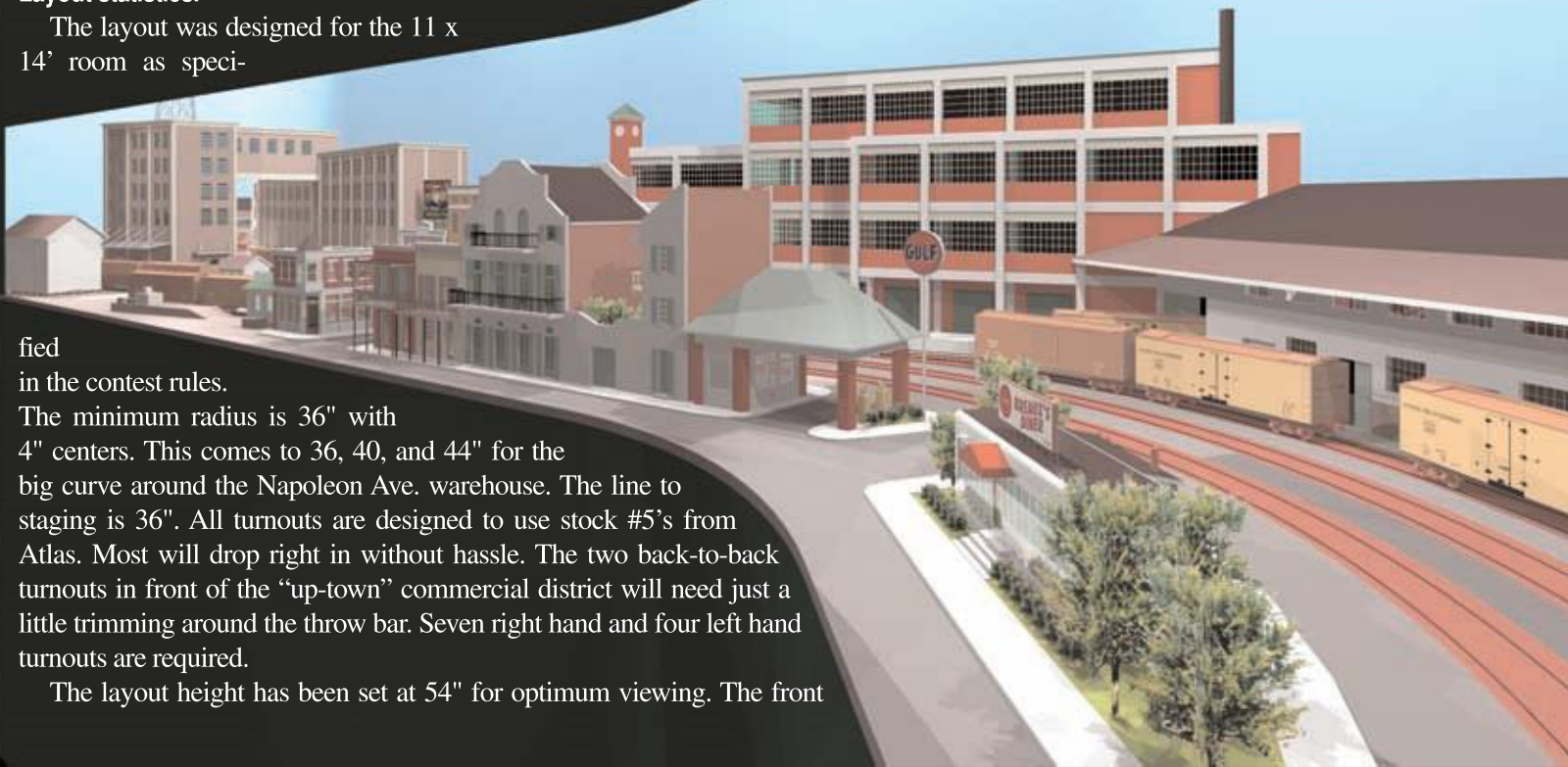
fied in the contest rules.

The minimum radius is 36" with 4" centers. This comes to 36, 40, and 44" for the big curve around the Napoleon Ave. warehouse. The line of staging is 36". All turnouts are designed to use stock #5's from Atlas. Most will drop right in without hassle. The two back-to-back turnouts in front of the "up-town" commercial district will need just a little trimming around the throw bar. Seven right hand and four left hand turnouts are required.

The layout height has been set at 54" for optimum viewing. The front

fascia is shown as a solid dark green. This could be a curtain as well. The backdrop is 36" high with a painted sky and the aforementioned ship.

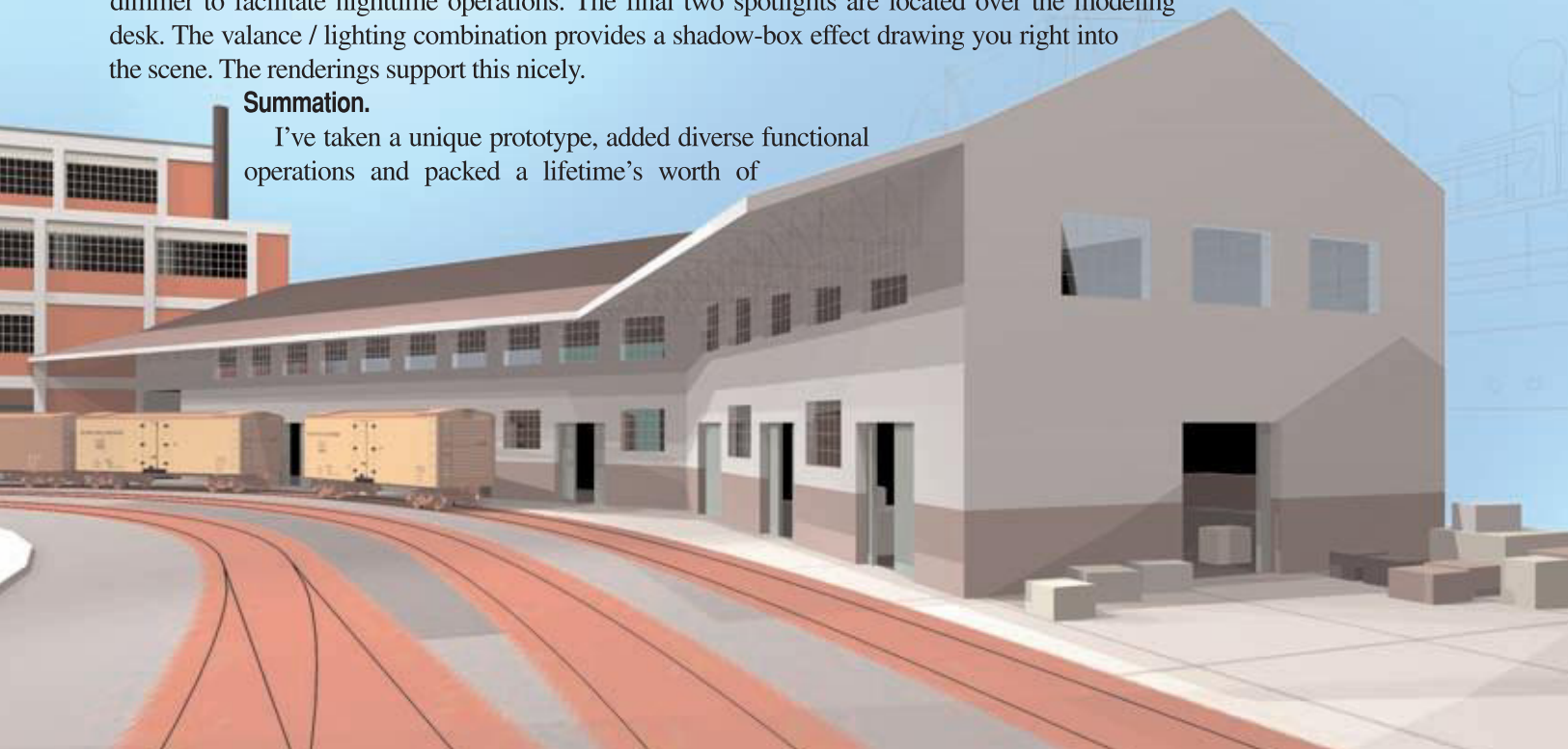
There is a valance that comes down to the six-foot level. A Masonite top spans the valance and backdrop to support lights and is painted white to reflect light back into the layout. There are 16 lights planned in all and have been digitally represented in the presentation drawings. Seven are fill lights. These are bare bulbs in the popular sunlight temperature (5400° Kelvin) for an almost blue white. They are mounted snug against the top and run down the middle of the layout. Seven regular spot-lights (3200° K) are mounted as close to the valance and as low as possible to cast a warm



accent light. Individual wattages need not be very high allowing you to use a standard household dimmer to facilitate nighttime operations. The final two spotlights are located over the modeling desk. The valance / lighting combination provides a shadow-box effect drawing you right into the scene. The renderings support this nicely.

**Summation.**

I've taken a unique prototype, added diverse functional operations and packed a lifetime's worth of



modeling and operating enjoyment into a small 11' x 14' room with room left over for a respectable modeling bench, not to mention the drop-dead graphics!







**References:**

*French Quarter Manual, An Architectural Guide to New Orleans Vieux Carré*, Malcolm Heard, Tulane School of Architecture.  
*New Orleans, Then and Now*, Richard and Marina Campanella, Pelican Publishing Company, Gretna, Louisiana.  
 Louisiana Photograph Collection — <http://nutrias.org/photos/>  
 New Orleans Public Belt Railroad — <http://www.nopb.com/>  
 The Louisiana Rail Site — <http://lrs.railspot.com/r-nopb-s.htm>

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