



## “Tools & Tips”

By Morrie Fleishman

### Building Quick and Inexpensive Backdrop and Temporary Buildings

There are many times that a temporary building or buildings are needed to fill an open spot on the layout or to be part of a backdrop. Temporary buildings are great as they allow different buildings to be tried before making a commitment to building a detailed model out of wood or styrene (see figure 1). The computer is a good tool for this application. Sources of buildings printable from a computer include specialized software, buildings on the internet, and photos that can be modified in photoshop or some other program.



Figure 1, Mockup of LA Union Station (to be replaced by a Cornerstone Kit)

For several years I have been using **Model Builder** by Evans Design to help create that completed look on my layout. Using **Model Builder** I can create buildings that are flat or multisided in several different scales. After designing and printing out these buildings I have several ways of finishing them for installation on my layout.

If the buildings are for backdrops, I just print out the fronts of the buildings and I glue them to cardboard or foam board. This allows them to be more rigid and

easier to adhere to the backdrop. Foam board is 2 pieces of cardboard with Styrofoam in the middle. **Michaels**, a craft store chain, carries 3/16 inch thick foam board in black and white colors and various sizes. I use the white because it is easier to see cutting marks. If I am doing several buildings on a backdrop, I often print out buildings in **Z** and/or **N** scale. This allows me to create a sense of distance on the backdrop (See figure 2).



Figure 2, Z scale N scale HO scale  
Different Scale cutouts pasted direct to backdrop

If I am using foam board, I usually paint the edges black or the color of the building walls to make them more three dimensional (figure 3).

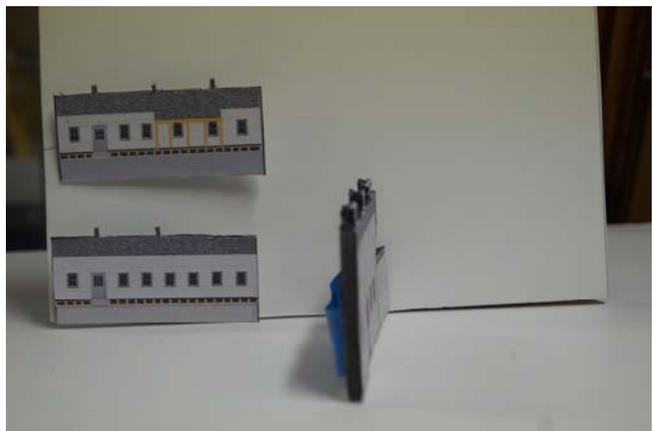


Figure 3, Printouts from program on commercial backdrop. Flat Buildings are mounted to 3/16 foam board with the edges painted black. Note: Blue tape used to adhere the building to the backdrop.

When I do a building with full or partial walls, I glue the printout onto the foam board. When you are doing a building with sides make sure that there is siding to wrap around the ends of the foam Board (see

Figure 4). **Always use a new sharp blade in your cutting tool to avoid ragged edges.** Before gluing the printout to the cardboard or foam board, leave extra space around the edges of the printout so that your final trim will be through the printout and whatever backing you are using.

At one time I used white glue to attach the printout to the backing and then I placed weights on the building while it dried to avoid warping. The warping is caused by the evaporation of the water in the white glue. I have since changed to using rubber cement. It is easier to put on, doesn't warp and when you get a little where you don't want it, just wait a few minutes and you can rub it off without damaging the printout. I would still place weights on it until it dries. **ALWAYS** place a piece of waxed paper on top of the printout to protect it from damage as the glue dries. There are many advantages to using this process. If you mess it up, or want to make changes it is easy to



**Figure 4**, Pacific Fruit (Building with walls). The Printout is wrapped around the ends of the building.

make the changes on the computer, reprint and start over. This doesn't take a lot of extra time or money.  
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