

Paper people for any pay grade



Make your structures pop with inexpensive figures that fool viewers

By Mike Tylick • Photos by the author

I'm always disappointed when I look into the windows of a structure and see nothing inside. I don't expect to see an expensive and time-consuming interior in every model, but a few shapes and colors go a long way toward fooling the viewer that something is going on in there (see my article "Quick and easy interiors" from the August 2009 issue of *Model Railroader*). Even more satisfying is picking out tiny people who appear to live and work inside; occasionally I catch a face peering out the window.

As scales grow larger, the nicer figure sets can be expensive, especially if you don't want to spend time painting them. Some inexpensive figure sets suitable for interior detail are available in smaller scales, and there are a few bargain basement sets in O scale. But when I started looking for patrons for my large scale Chester Depot (1:20.3), I quickly discovered that the least expensive cost more than lunch at a nice restaurant. It would

only take a few of them to quickly quadruple the cost of my structure. After a few days of pondering, I realized that if I could use photographs for interior walls and details, I could probably use them for people, as well. Since there is only one viewpoint, it's difficult to tell they're not three dimensional.

To my delight, the photo flats looked great in place. As objects get farther away, it may be possible to use paper people (and other details) for the exterior of distant scenes, possibly gluing them to the side of a structure. For those uncomfortable with photo manipulation, paper people make excellent photo props, as well. **MR**

Mike Tylick needs no introduction to longtime Model Railroader readers. The Massachusetts resident has been writing articles for the magazine for more than 35 years. Mike models the Marshfield & Old Colony in On30.

The paper people in the Chester Depot on Mike Tylick's large scale layout are busy tricking viewers.



① Small wood blocks are painted black and glued to the feet to help support the paper figures in this wing of Mike's large scale Chester Depot (1:20.3). People are easily seen through the window with this technique. Other quick interior detailing includes: wainscoting drawn with paint and felt-tip pens; photos of clocks and calendars; and "wanted" posters. The bench is made from a few blocks of wood.



② These photographs of models are a better match for three-dimensional model scenes rather than photos of real people. The images here were taken from various manufacturers' online catalogs, resized to fit large scale, and printed. Where else could you find nice, clear images with neutral backgrounds? The figures to the left have been cut out and glued to a manila file folder.



③ Mike initially planned to paint the back of each figure black. However, a viewer may see the figures from both sides, so he details the back, too. Since no one sees both sides of a figure at the same time, Mike uses "double-fronted" people. A mirror image of each figure is printed, cut out, and glued to the back. Figures are then coated with clear finish to prevent warping prior to placement in a structure.



④ Here, some paper people are seen gazing out the window of the waiting room looking for the next train. Since this structure is going on a different model railroad, Mike resized the same figures used for his large scale depot. The rear of this station is seen from an obscured, distant viewpoint, so he painted the figures' backs black. If seen at all inside the model, they will show up as silhouettes.



⑤ In Birdie's Tavern, an O scale structure from Design Preservation Models, Mike placed paper figures and signs in the window before placing the interior photo because of how shallow it is. This background photo of a diner was found on Google Images. It creates an attractive look to further interest viewers. Mike says you don't always need to see the person's face to convey the idea of people doing something.



⑥ A photo shot farther away from the structure (Design Preservation Models' Schultz's Garage) gives the viewer an idea of how these figures might look on an HO scale layout. Mike placed one person in each of the three windows. Here, the viewer can imagine what the paper people are looking at. Perhaps a fancy new car, a traffic accident outside, a train, or maybe even a parade.