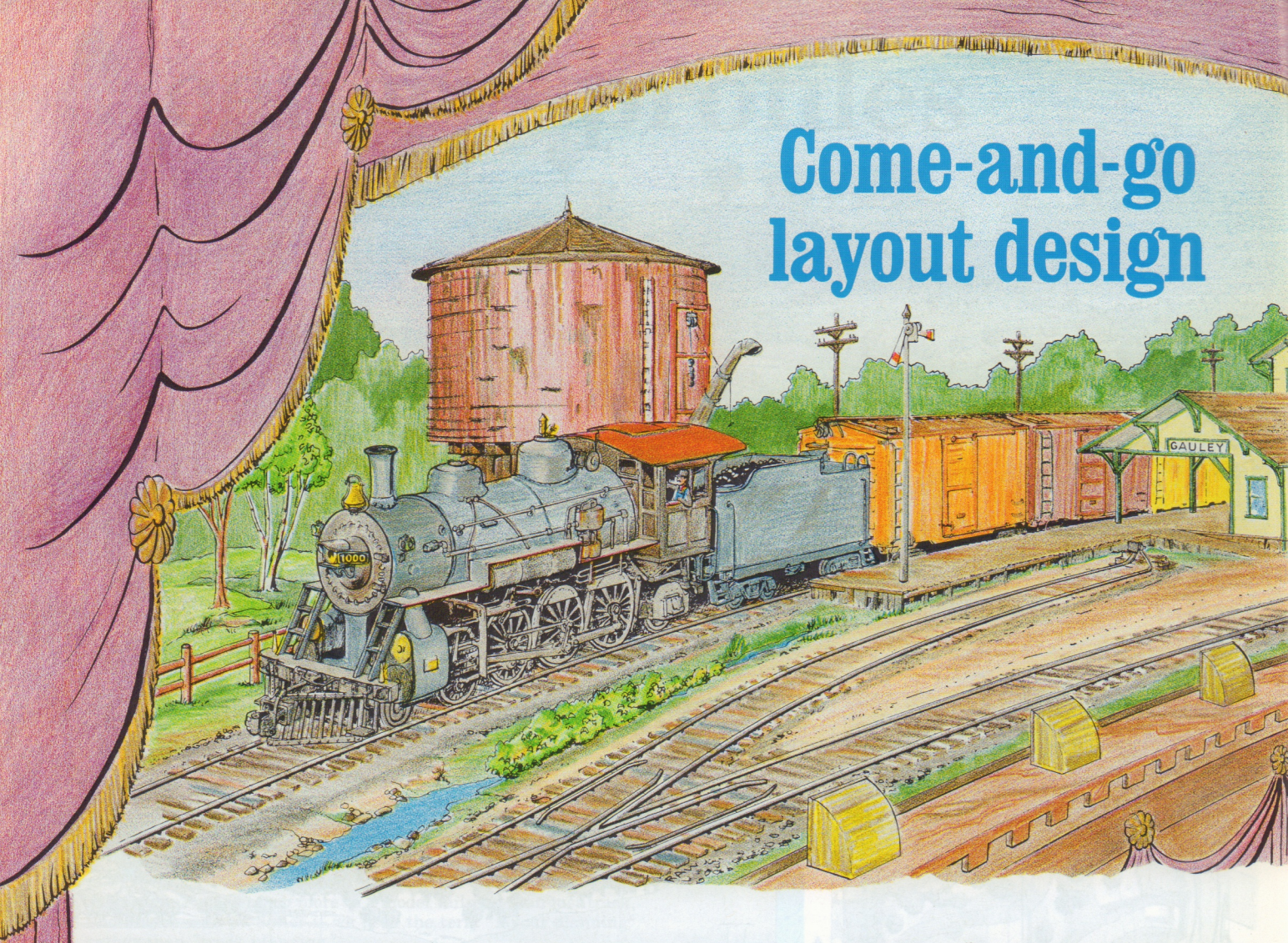
Come-and-go layout design



Our trains are the actors; the layout's a stage

BY JEFF MADDEN

A HIGH-STEPPING eastbound Northern, a string of hotshot reefers in tow, slows for the depot, responding to an orderboard signal. A set of orders is plucked from midair, and the caboose disappears, its reflection chasing it down the shining rails. Soon a whistle blast breaks the calm, and the westbound *Limited* appears around a low rise and glides into the station. The engineer eases his Pacific up to a water plug, and passengers and mail are shuffled on and off.

Thirty minutes later, a grimy 2-8-0 pulls in with an assortment of cars to be switched to local industries. An eastbound coal drag is being held at a signal just outside town until the passenger local departs — and the parade goes on. A similar sequence in our more modern era would see GP40s, Amtrak, trailer jets, and grain trains replacing the trains of yore, but the excitement and suspense would still hold.

This could easily be an excerpt from the action on a typical small railroad city on a Class 1 main line anywhere in our good ol' USA or Canada. Or it could be a design feature of your model empire.

ALL THE ROAD'S A STAGE

Frank Ellison described a model railroad as the stage and the trains as actors who enter and exit. The modern concept of walkalong layouts follows this theme, except that as we follow a train we are using a series of stages, not just one.

Many modelers I have met — especially those working in the smaller scales — have said they wanted to run long mainline trains but didn't want to construct large layouts. Yet these same modelers would like some sort of scheduled train sequence without the constant making up and breaking down of trains. In short, they would like to watch the trains as if they were a railfan watching from one location.

For these modelers I offer the "Come-and-Go" design concept. It just might be the answer for the modeler who has a fair amount of space for a layout, but wants something simple with only a single stretch of main line being on display — a stage if you will.

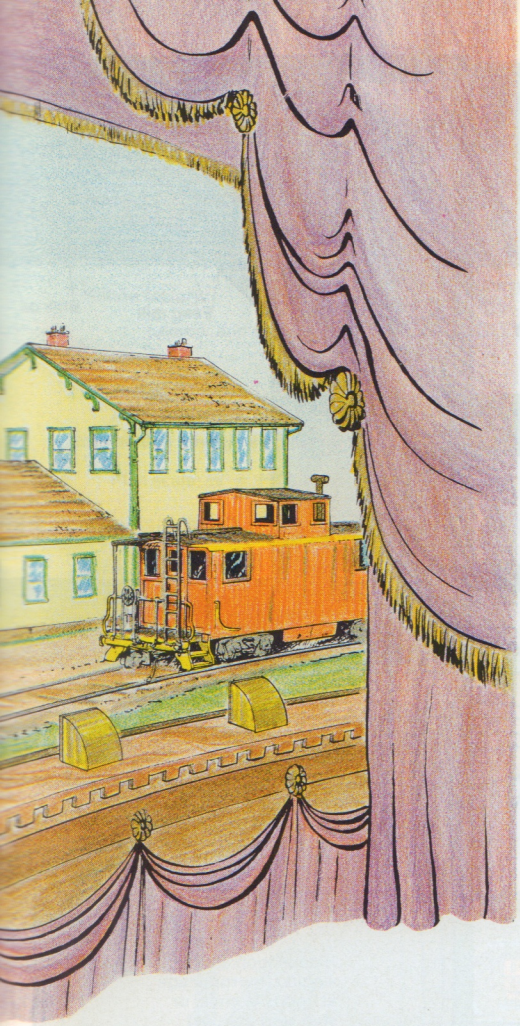
Figure 1 shows some possibilities for these mainline segments. These would be showpiece sections built mainly along one wall, with some open portions curving around corners to reach the staging areas, which would be out of view.

Option F in fig. 1 is sure to be a winner for Pennsy four-trackers, who are often frustrated with trying to design a layout that is both scenically and operationally realistic, yet doesn't require a gymnasium to put it in!

Staging options are shown in fig. 2. These areas are meant to be out of sight and unscenicked. They could be placed in a closet, wind around the furnace, duck under stairs, go on a shelf over the laundry tubs, or whatever.

Note that options A and B offer continuous running, whereas the others would require 0-5-0 switching, using your hand to redirect the trains after each operating session. (The British refer to this as "fiddling" — see Paul J. Dolkos' article on page 82 to learn more about layout concepts in Great Britain.)

These simple, dogbone-like designs



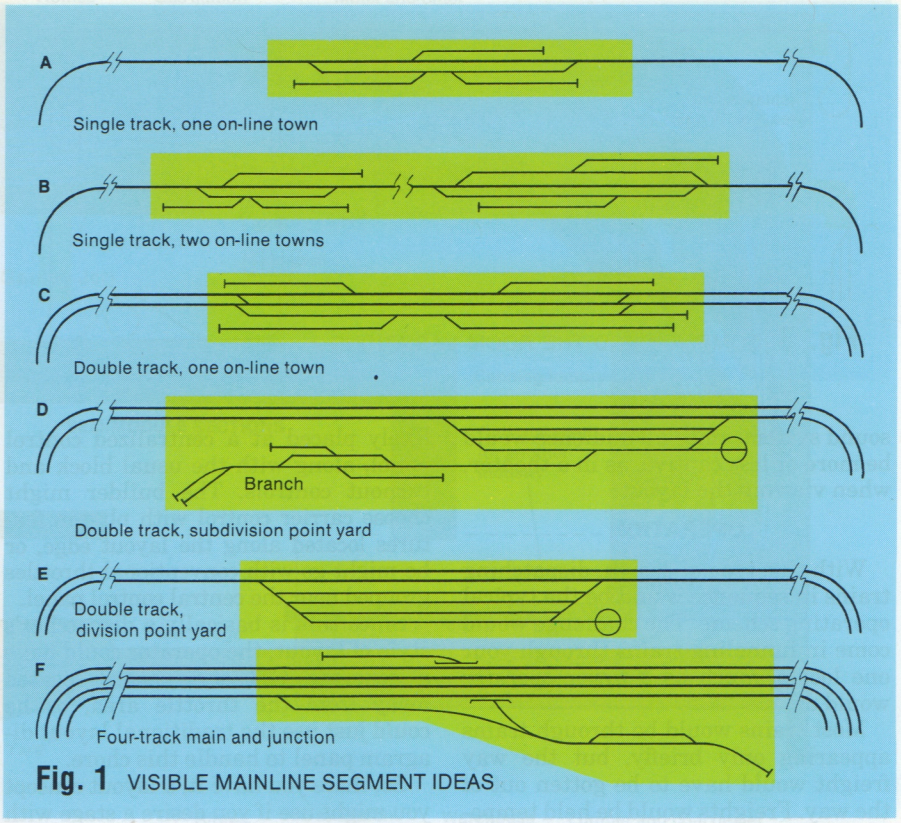


Fig. 1 VISIBLE MAINLINE SEGMENT IDEAS

can be adapted to virtually any medium-size or larger room, as shown in fig. 3. In HO scale, there should probably be at least 15 to 20 feet of visible layout between the staging tracks or return loops.

Since return loops will double as staging yards, it will be important to use as large a radius as possible, so that your staging tracks will be long. In HO scale, a 30″ radius on the inside loop would be a preferred minimum. If tighter curves were necessary, perhaps some trains could be restricted to the sharper curves, others to the wider.

ADVANTAGES

Here's a list of good reasons for building a come-and-go layout:

- Easier track planning. You have none of the complexities and impossible scenicking situations often seen in bowls of spaghetti.
- Simpler benchwork. You could build it in take-apart, modular sections for the scenicked portion of the design. Staging areas could be portable, knockdown, or foldaway sections, or even be folded up or rolled out of the way when not in use.
- Limited scenery area. You can concentrate your efforts while saving time and money.
- Unscenicked portions can be run into areas that need not be finished off — a laundry or furnace room.
- Grades can be eliminated, which would make operation more trouble-free. Of course, gradual mainline grades can always be added for effect or to justify helper districts.
- A winding branch or secondary main can be added, thereby making your modeled town or towns serve as junction points.
- No duckunders. You'll probably need pop-ups in staging loops though.
- Control can be central, walkaround, or both.
- Cheaper prefab track and turnouts can be used in unscenicked areas. With a simpler track configuration on the scenicked portion, handlaying track would be easier than on a larger layout.
- Full signaling would be much simpler than on a layout with track strung out all over the basement or train room.
- Ideal opportunity for installing a

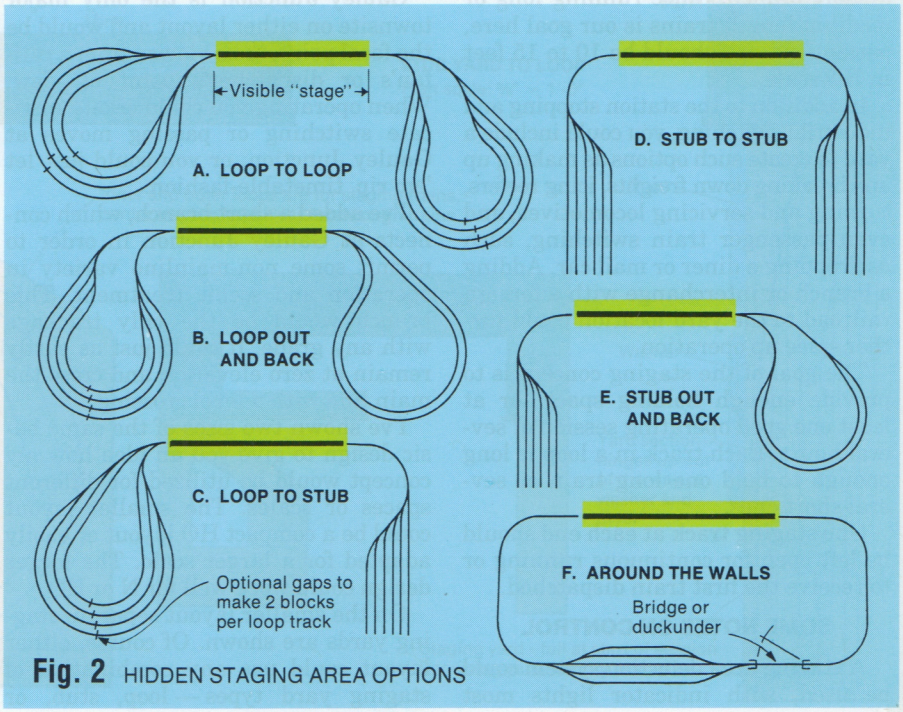


Fig. 2 HIDDEN STAGING AREA OPTIONS

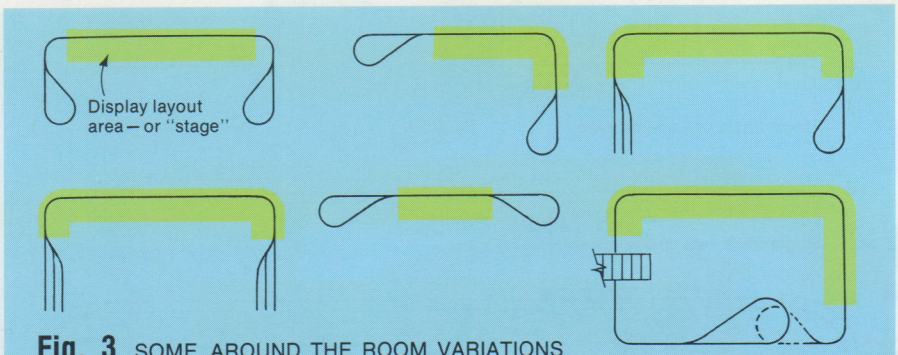


Fig. 3 SOME AROUND THE ROOM VARIATIONS

sound system, since an audience would be more or less captive, as in a theater, when viewing the layout.

OPERATION

With this type of design, dispatching trains in sequence would be the typical operating scheme. The challenge would come in funneling trains through your one locale, much as a tower operator would do.

Most trains would be through trains appearing only briefly, but the way freight would have to be gotten out of the way. Freights would be held temporarily away from the station area while waiting for passenger trains to clear. Slower-class trains would have to wait in the hole while hotshots passed them on the opposite main, and so on.

Towns offer numerous operational possibilities, and most likely at least one should be included on the visible stretch. These would provide many industrial switching opportunities, depending on design.

Another option is for the town to be an interchange point or a junction with a short branch. Since running long or medium-length trains is our goal here, passing sidings should be 10 to 15 feet in HO scale.

In addition to the station stopping and industrial switching, you could include a yard to create such options as making up and breaking down freights, icing reefers, turning and servicing locomotives, and even passenger train switching, such as dropping a diner or mail car. Adding a branch or interchange with a foreign railroad to the yard location could further spice up operation.

The goal of the staging concept is to provide enough holding space for at least one good operating session of several hours. Each track in a loop is long enough to hold one long train or several short ones.

One staging track at each end should be left open for continuous running or to receive the first train dispatched.

SOME NOTES ON CONTROL

A staging area detection system could be used, with indicator lights most likely placed at a centralized control panel, along with the usual block and turnout controls. The builder might choose carrier control with plug-in features located along the layout edge, or he might go with conventional throttles grouped near the central control panel.

Since this is basically a dispatcher's style of layout, the operator could have a separate CTC-style board located away from the throttle area, or he could just use the traditional layout diagram panel to handle this chore.

So, there you have it, a layout concept you might use if you desire a stage with actors (trains) coming and going — rail-fan style, if you please. Now let's look at a couple of complete designs.

THE GAULEY RIVER RR

I have developed two come-and-go track plans, as shown in fig. 4. Both are based on semimodular construction, with portability and flexibility being the prime goals. For example, the Gauley Junction sections could be constructed and scenicked in an apartment. Later they could be pieced into a layout.

Gauley Junction is the only major townsite on either layout and would be the focal point, to be viewed from a rail-fan's or dispatcher's point of view. When operating you could create intricate switching or passing moves at Gauley Junction, or you could just let 'em rip, timetable-fashion.

I've added a short branch, which connects at Gauley Junction in order to permit some non-mainline variety in operation and scenic treatment. This branch would be the only trackage with any grade. It could just as easily remain at zero elevation and cross the main line with a level crossing.

I've shown two sizes of the same basic design to give you an idea how my concept would be utilized for different spaces or scales. The smaller layout could be a compact HO layout or easily adapted for a larger scale. The larger design could work well for N or HO.

On the smaller layout separate staging yards are shown. Of course, either layout could use any combination of staging yard types — loop, stub, or through. The larger layout shows a through staging yard serving as both ends of the railroad wrapped into one location, with continuous running as an option. The only drawback is the inconvenience of a lift bridge.

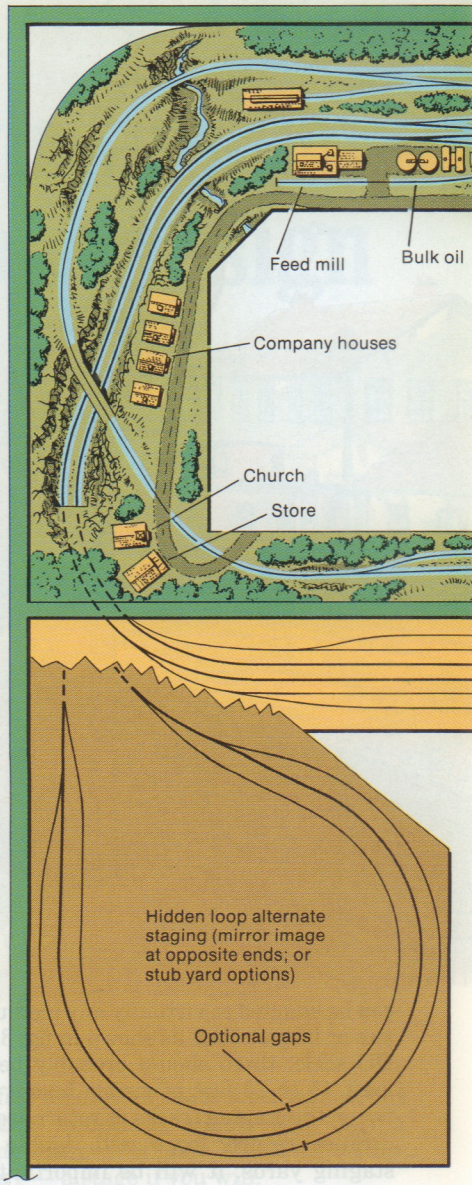
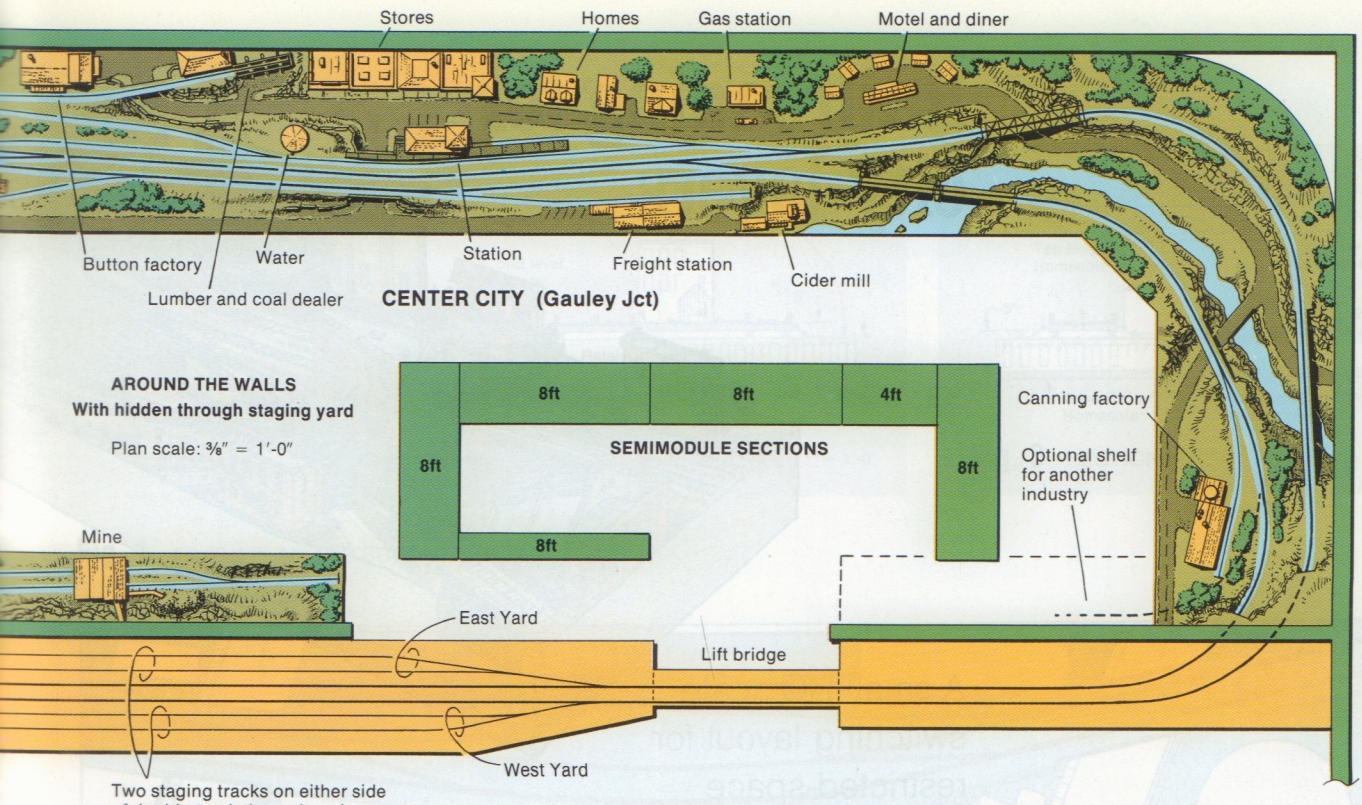


Fig. 4 COME-AND-GO TRACK PLANS

On the smaller layout about six normal-size trains could be set up for one operating session. That's usually plenty for any home layout.

One to four operators seems about right for these layouts. A lone wolf using a tethered throttle can easily step back from a single main panel to view the trains in the staging area. Just as easily, two or more operators can divide the duties and run several trains at once.

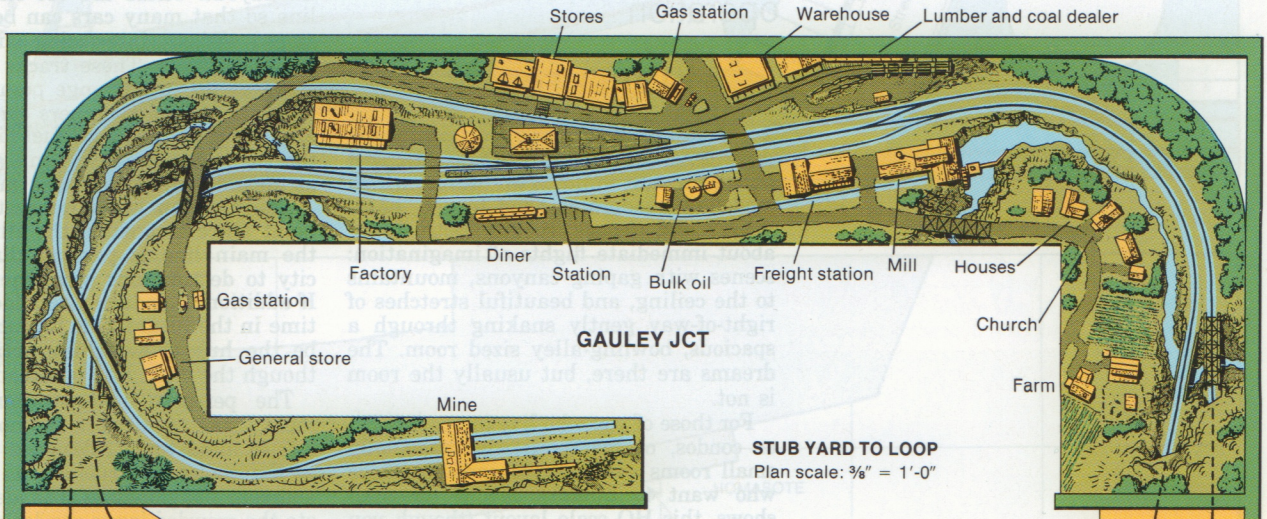
Perhaps this brainstorm of mine will give you some ideas for a home layout that can have the appearance of an empire, provide plenty of mainline operation, and yet be simple to construct, wire, and maintain.



AROUND THE WALLS
With hidden through staging yard

Plan scale: ⅜″ = 1′-0″

Two staging tracks on either side of double-track through main



STUB YARD TO LOOP
Plan scale: ⅜″ = 1′-0″