



A CAR REPAIR SHOP DIORAMA

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PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR
1:87.1 SCALE

SOME YEARS AGO I bought a SierraWest Railroad Camp kit. I used most of its buildings on a diorama I described in the 2007 *LOGGING, MINING & INDUSTRIAL ANNUAL*. Two structures (a truck repair shop and a boiler and welding shop) and a lot of detail parts remained. They and a passenger car are the focus of the diorama in the photos.

Recently someone asked how I design a diorama. He probably wanted to hear about how creative I am but my answer may have disappointed him. I am unable to visualize a complete scene. I have to experiment with mockups. I created cardboard representations of the two structures and

then decided to include something I had never built before: An all wood passenger car. It was fun to assemble and paint. If you have never built a wood car kit I recommend trying one from La Belle Woodworking's extensive line.

A car repair facility seemed the best way to display the three major elements. I forced myself to devise a multi-level scene to create visual interest. A car repair facility probably would sit on flat ground but, in this case, I decided artistry was more important than absolute realism.

Several other kits also were lying around including one for a wagon and two horses. It fit so I used it.

One trick I learned for creating interest is to design

mini-scenes on a diorama, little things to attract attention and entertain the viewer. Notice, for example, the two ladies talking to a worker; both women have bibles. What do you suppose they are doing? And look at the dog. He wants attention and is excited about the visitors. I love to include dogs and cats on dioramas. They are small but subtle placement tends to add life and interest to a scene.

I want to devote the rest of the article to scenery techniques.

Gluing Ground Cover

Some people have asked how to glue down ground

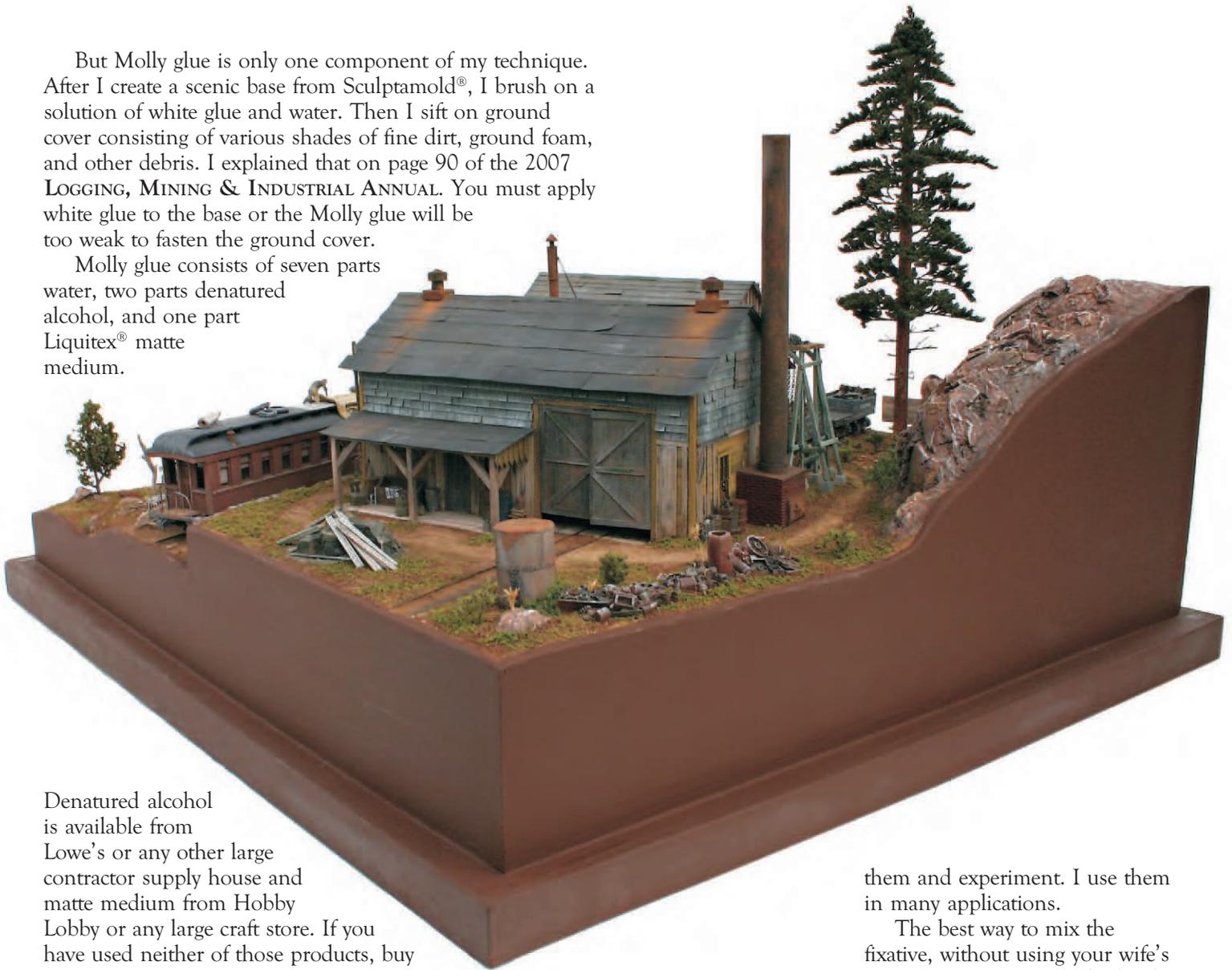


cover. I mix a simple solution I call “Molly glue”. Why “Molly”? My wife’s terrier, Molly, used to follow my wife wherever she went. That dog was virtually “glued” to my wife (and, I might add, was very protective). Hence the name.



But Molly glue is only one component of my technique. After I create a scenic base from Sculptamold®, I brush on a solution of white glue and water. Then I sift on ground cover consisting of various shades of fine dirt, ground foam, and other debris. I explained that on page 90 of the 2007 LOGGING, MINING & INDUSTRIAL ANNUAL. You must apply white glue to the base or the Molly glue will be too weak to fasten the ground cover.

Molly glue consists of seven parts water, two parts denatured alcohol, and one part Liquitex® matte medium.



Denatured alcohol is available from Lowe's or any other large contractor supply house and matte medium from Hobby Lobby or any large craft store. If you have used neither of those products, buy

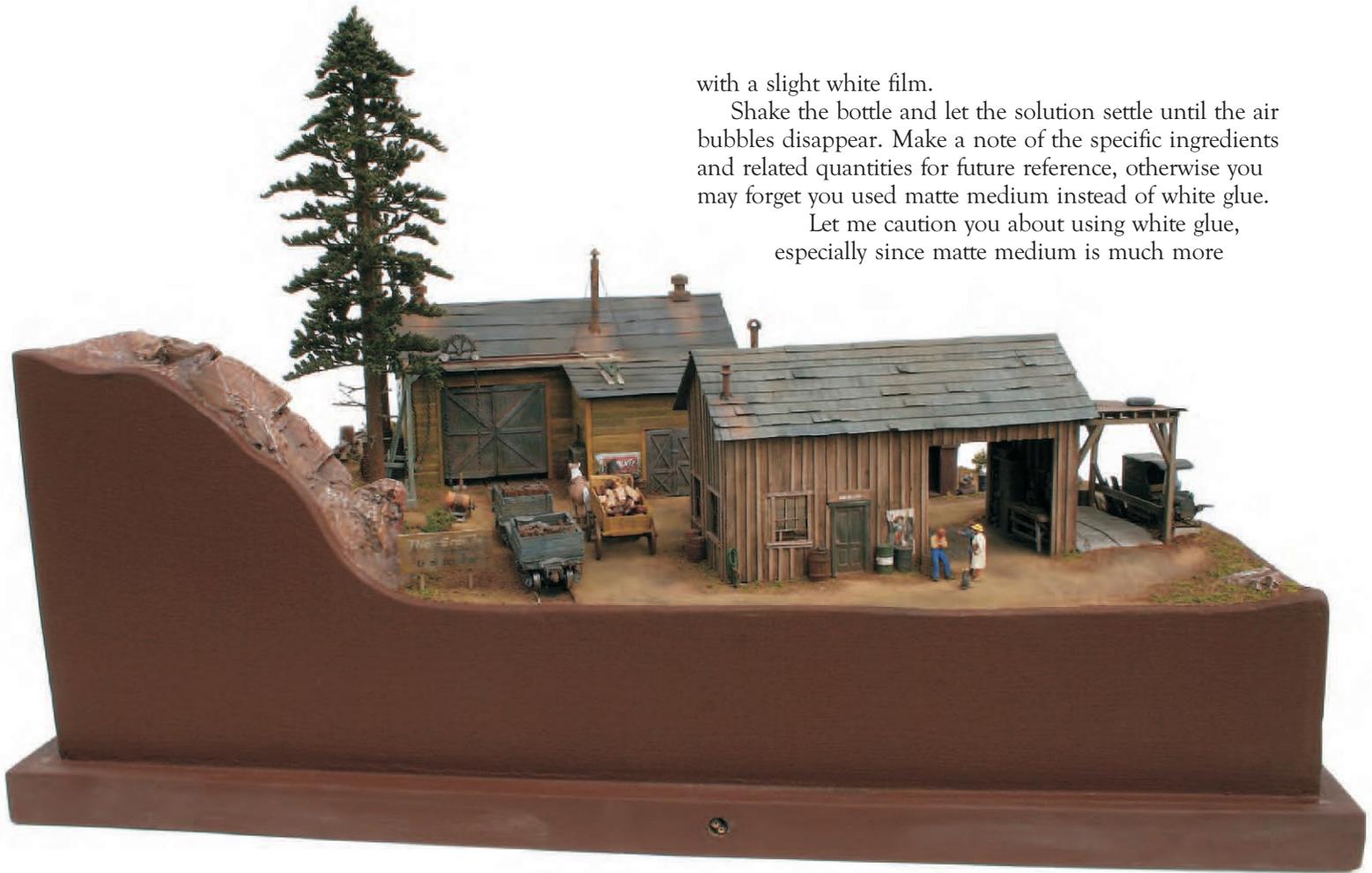
them and experiment. I use them in many applications.

The best way to mix the fixative, without using your wife's measuring cup, is to find a bottle with a good lid. It must be at least semi-transparent and the capacity should be more than ten ounces. My favorite bottle is 16 ounces.

Measure seven ounces of water in a measuring cup. Pour it into the bottle and use a black marker to make a horizontal line of an inch or less at the water level. That mark will make it easier to mix the next batch. Fill the measuring cup with two more ounces of water, pour it into the bottle, and draw another line with the marker. Add another ounce of water and draw the final line.

Pour out all but the first seven ounces (the first line). Add denatured alcohol until the level





with a slight white film.

Shake the bottle and let the solution settle until the air bubbles disappear. Make a note of the specific ingredients and related quantities for future reference, otherwise you may forget you used matte medium instead of white glue.

Let me caution you about using white glue, especially since matte medium is much more

reaches the second line. Mix in the matte medium until it comes up to the top line. I usually pour in slightly more matte medium since it is the glue. I experimented with stronger Molly glue using more matte medium but it dried

expensive: Glue is too thick to blend properly and tends to blob at the bottom of the bottle. Matte medium dissolves beautifully and is worth every penny and you may find yourself using it in many other ways.

I typically spend between one and two hundred hours on a diorama. The last step always is applying ground cover. Once I had a gallon of white glue and used it. Globbs landed on the ground cover and stayed there. I had to remove everything and have since given up using white glue.

Some modelers use a spray bottle to apply fixative to ground cover. I prefer an eye dropper. It takes longer but none of the mixture beads up on fine dirt and ruins my work. I first use an eye dropper with pure denatured alcohol to wet the ground cover. It absorbs into all the materials and holds them in place as I apply Molly glue.



The idea is similar to the well known “wet water” technique. “Wet water” is a solution of white glue, water, and a few drops of laundry or dish washing detergent. Supposedly it goes on easily when you apply it from a spray bottle but I find it always beads up on fine dirt. Denatured alcohol, on the other hand, absorbs so quickly into every material it never beads up. Then add Molly glue with an eye dropper, saturate the ground cover, and wait a day or two. It dries hard and the scenery looks great.

Roads and Vehicles

Gluing things to roads can be a challenge. The glue must be strong enough to withstand the rigors of transit and handling. Too much glue is unsightly. The key to hiding glue lies in the colors you use on the road. So let’s build a road and, at the same time, I will describe an easy way to create a strong, invisible bond:

Apply Sculptamold to your diorama base and wait until it starts to set. Rub your finger over the areas where you want roads and walkways. The more you rub, the smoother the area becomes. That helps to create the illusion of a



road since roads should be smoother than other scenery.

Mix up some fine dirt with plumber’s putty, a dry powder that will lighten the dirt. Roads typically are lighter than the surrounding areas. Glue down the road dirt (fine dirt and plumber’s putty), the surrounding dirt, and ground foam. Wait until everything is completely dry.

Apply pressure with your finger or a Bright Boy track eraser and rub the road surface. The larger granules will break off and the dirt color will change.

Then add vehicle residue with Bragdon black and dark gray weathering powders. I use a bushy paintbrush to splash down the chalk; then I rub it around. You may blend the shades together where appropriate.

