

# THE CLYDE KINZEY FREIGHT COMPANY DIORAMA

BY SCOTT KINZEY  
PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

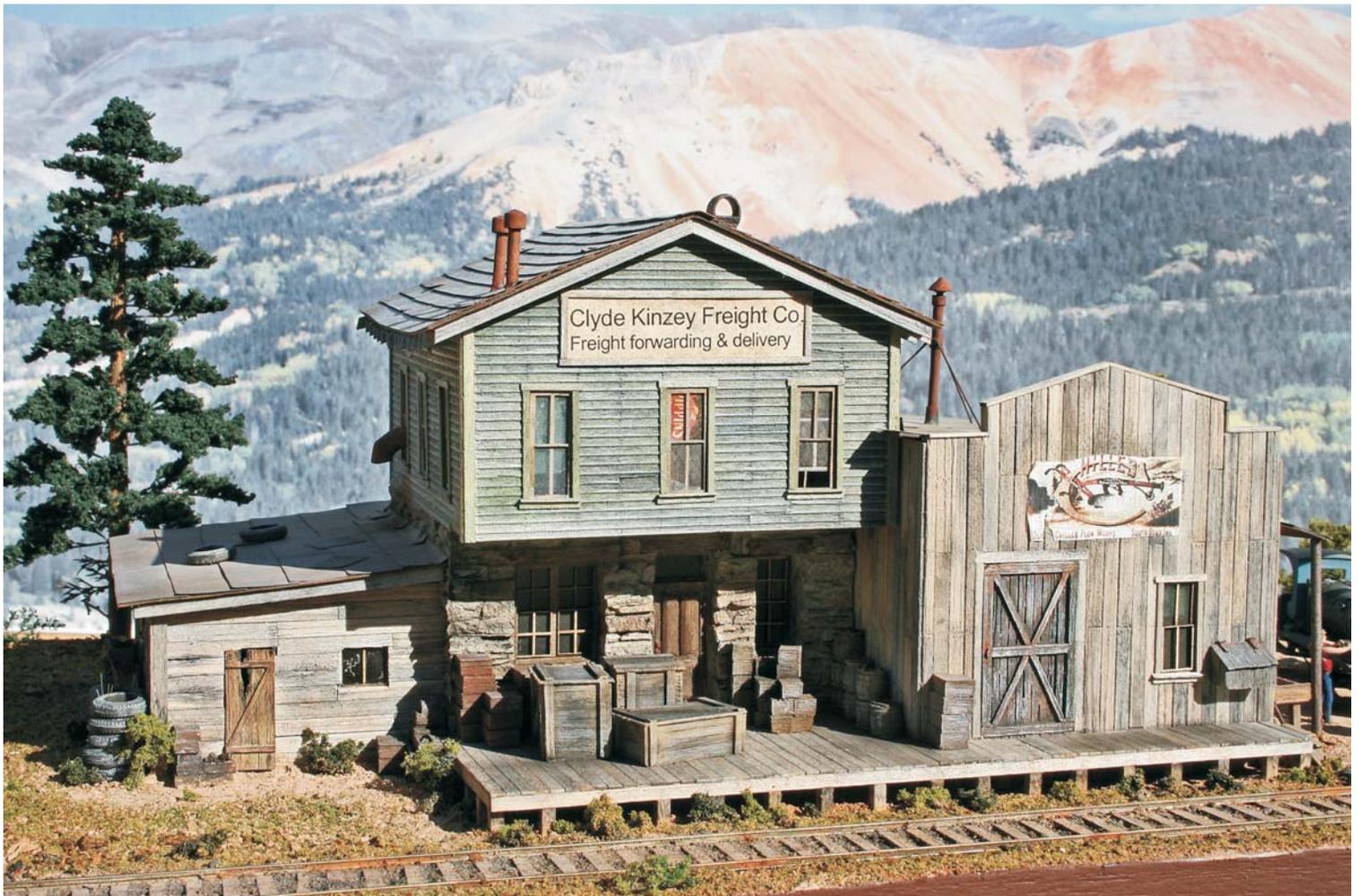
SOME PEOPLE DISLIKE fishing because they never catch anything. But, if you learn to catch fish, suddenly fishing is fun. Modeling is no different. If we are unable to build good looking models, it's no fun and we stop. Why are some modelers better than others? Are they smarter or more talented; do they have more time? No. They simply learned how to build. And then it became fun.

As a teenager I felt frustrated with my military models; they never looked as good as the ones in the store. I felt both love and hate when I looked at the store models. That changed when I purchased Shepard Paine's book, *How to Build Dioramas*. I realized I could absorb his

knowledge and duplicate his techniques. So read as many how-to publications as possible. Start a small library. Talk to other modelers and ask them how they do it. I copied every technique I used on my HO scale Clyde Kinzey Freight Company diorama from somebody else. So let me use that diorama as a means to pass along some tips.

**Collect kits for future projects.** Visit hobby stores to look for good models (I happen to prefer the unusual), then decide what you want to build. I have several kits in the closet, some small and others major craftsman kits, each waiting until I have time to assemble it.

**Think about a scene you want to create.** Try to avoid





perfectly flat terrain. Even the land in Kansas undulates. I started my diorama with an HO scale Sierra West “Railroad Camp” kit. It included five buildings—too many for what I wanted. I also had a very old V&T Shops jib crane kit; it started me thinking about building a loading dock scene. So I analyzed the five Sierra West buildings and picked three, including one with a loading dock, and put the crane next to that structure.

**A key to realism is to weather, stain, and dry brush all wood parts before you build the model.** That may seem awkward but it works. I wanted the paint on the jib crane to appear very old and washed out. After distressing and weathering the wood (Sierra West provides a detailed instruction book on the techniques with each kit), I stained each piece with red oil base paint. The exact color is unimportant; just pick one you like. Most of the time my favorite color is the only one I have.

**The next trick is to dilute the paint thinner than an out-of-the-bottle stain.** Unless you thin it, you will obscure all the weathering detail. Put on a pair of latex rubber gloves to avoid staining your fingers. Your family will appreciate that. Then dip a rag into the thinned paint and rub it onto the wood. The color should be

subtle enough for the weathered gray to show through. Leave some areas unstained. Notice how I stained only the swiveling part of my jib crane. The remaining unstained parts provide contrast.

**Conclude by dry brushing.** I prefer to use water base paints for that and my favorite brand is Apple Barrel, available at such stores as Wal-Mart.

The brush actually has more to do with the overall effect than the paint. I use very soft (thin hair) brushes of medium stiffness. If the bristles are too thick they put too much paint on the model and if the brush is insufficiently stiff it lacks the ability to “rub off” the paint. Instead it just deposits blobs.

I dip the brush in the paint, then try to remove most of it on a scrap of cardstock. I brush the wood just enough to hint at the color. Less is more! The more strokes it takes to transfer the paint the better. You should feel almost as though you are ruining the brush as you apply the color. Too much paint will destroy the finish. And, as you work, imagine how things look outdoors in full sun. Where does the light fall? Mostly on the edges, so they should receive the most paint to produce a highlight effect.

Most people never will notice those paint highlights.



emotional effect. A glass case also has two very practical attributes. It keeps out dust and prevents people from touching your delicate model. A local glass company builds my cases. The cost is only a few dollars for eighth-inch thick glass.

The next step is to cut a wood base. Avoid plywood or hardwoods; use high grade pressboard. It is very smooth and dense. I fill rough spots with plaster before I paint the wood. I have used flat brown but green or black also would work well.

Set the glass case over the wood to determine the cut lines. I prefer the case to sit on top of the base so, when I pick

up the diorama, the glass is part of it. In that event, the cut lines should be at least an eighth-inch beyond the outer edge of the glass.

The extra step of creating a beautiful base will draw the viewer's eye into the scene. Conversely, a crude base is an eyesore and will detract from your model.

**Use imagination to plan your scene.** Diorama building is entirely trial and error. I find it impossible to visualize a three dimensional scene in my mind but, if I move the components around long enough, I eventually arrive at something satisfactory.

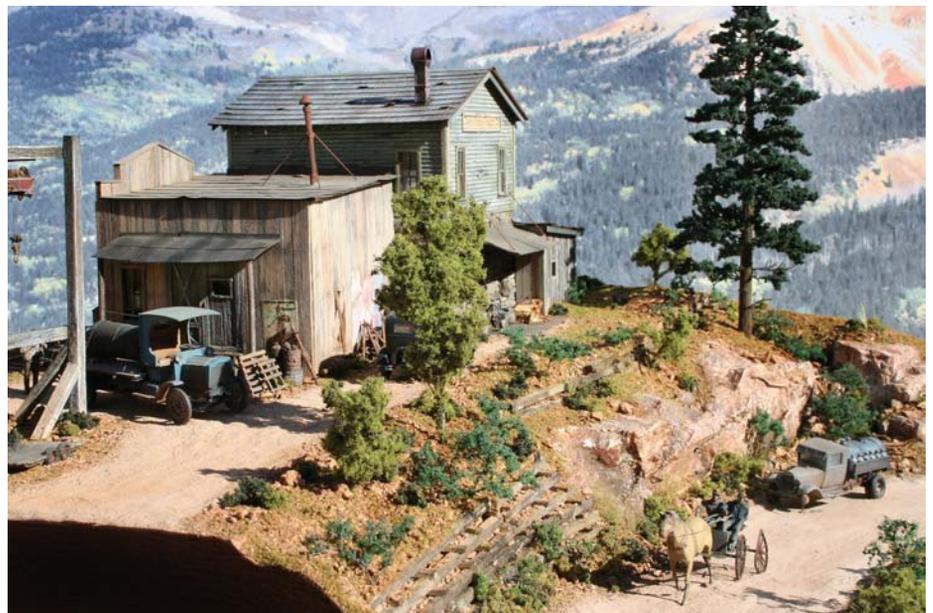
I wanted to experiment with Bragdon Enterprises geodesic foam rocks so I built my diorama in two levels with a road running up the back. I cut pieces of blue or pink builder's insulation board to create elevation. Then break out the hardcore stuff to glue down the sheets:

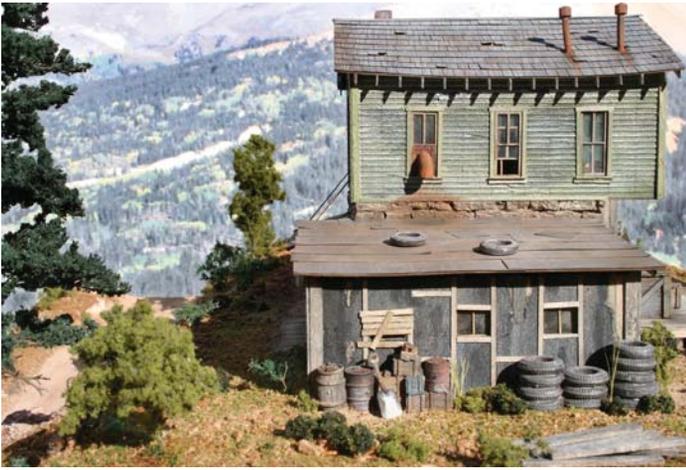


Instead they will perceive a three-dimensional effect and think you are an amazing artist as you think to yourself, "A six year old could do that." Sometimes the effect is so real it even fools *you*, and that is the greatest joy of modeling.

**Presentation is critical; a diorama's base is worth considering.** Before even starting it, complete all the buildings. Then plan the scene so you know how big the base should be. The overall size of my HO scale diorama is 18 by 14 inches. If you display your dioramas, it helps to build each on a base of a different size. I cover each scene with a glass case.

Seeing a diorama under glass somehow produces a much stronger





Liquid Nails. It is one of my favorite substances for fixing anything.

Also glue down any rock castings. You will see gaping holes and open areas between the rocks. Ignore them and press on. At that stage of construction, even I have doubted myself!

I use Sculptamold® to create the basic terrain. If you have never worked with it, I recommend you try; it is at all train stores. Use it to fill those grotesque empty spaces. Work in the material with an old spoon. It takes very little time to master the technique. Avoid the temptation to paint the Sculptamold or mix paint into it; soon you will cover all the terrain with dirt and rubble. Make sure any roads are smooth by dipping a two inch paintbrush in water and leveling the surface.

Let the scenery base dry completely. It may require several days. In the meantime consider the color you prefer for topsoil since the next step will be to color the rocks.

**Credible rocks require a series of individual washes and each application must dry completely or the result will be a nondescript muddy mess.** Again, dry brush the rocks to suggest highlights from sunshine. The result will be awesome.

Now for ground cover. I reel in stunned disbelief at the number of imitation dirt products people buy at the hobby stores. Why would anybody do that?

**Nothing looks more realistic than real dirt so forget about fake dirt; use the real thing.**

Collect dirt samples when you go to the mountains. Even the dirt in your backyard will work. Sift it through sieves of at least two different sizes to yield grains of three sizes.

Re-sift the finest grains through panty hose. Exercise caution as you steal your wife's panty hose. And plan to keep them because, once you have filled them with dirt, she probably will consider them defiled. If you are unmarried, I recommend against asking friends for pantyhose. They may get the wrong idea.

Use the finest dirt for roads and areas of heavy traffic. It should be of a lighter color to contrast with the rest of the soil. Sunshine on a dirt road makes it appear lighter.

**Use plumber's water putty to affix the dirt.** It is a dry, cream colored powder and mixes nicely with fine sifted dirt. Gradually add powdered putty until you arrive at a lighter shade. Incidentally, sifted fireplace ash also makes excellent roads.

I apply all dirt by painting dilute glue onto the dried Sculptamold. Squirt down the glue, then use an old brush to apply water. Mix it up right on the base. It's messy but easy. Sprinkle the sifted dirt over the glue. Some also should land on rocks since, in nature, dirt is everywhere. Sift some coarser dirt and rubble onto the edges of the road, near rocks, and wherever else seems appropriate. But the coarser earth is unable to soak up the watered-down glue mix. So how do you secure it?

I dislike the "wet water with glue" method. It always seems to create bubbles in fine soil. **Instead I use a special solution of one part matte medium, seven parts water, and two parts denatured alcohol to glue down**







Clyde Kinzey Freight Co.

**fine topsoil.** Matte medium is available at any craft store and denatured alcohol is at any general discount store. First use an eye dropper to “wet” the ground cover by applying straight denatured alcohol. Then, with the same eye dropper, apply the matte medium solution. It will secure the finest dirt without causing bubbles.

While the ground cover is wet, add ground foam and other foliage. Also sprinkle ground-up leaves and bark from thin branches around the base of each tree. If you use your wife’s blender to make that stuff it might be a good idea to buy her a new one. I recommend against attempting to steal her blender because a female will kill not only to protect her young but also her blender.

**Create tarps, such as the one on the small flatcar, from a bathroom tissue such as Kleenex.** Toilet paper is too flimsy. Cut a piece of tissue to the size of the tarp. Drape it over the item you want to cover and use a very soft brush to paint on the same matte medium solution I described above. As it soaks into the tissue it will adhere it to the item beneath (simulating the force of gravity).

Use the brush to push around the tissue to create curls, sags, and folds. When the paper is completely dry it will be quite hard and you may stain it.

I do that with very thin water base paints. They soak into the tissue and capillary action draws color to the edges while keeping it from whatever is underneath. If the paint is too thick it will spread to adjacent parts and the appearance will be unconvincing.

Add shadows when the color is completely dry. I use a very dilute dark stain (a solution of rubbing alcohol and black shoe dye) and powdered black pastel chalk. Apply it between the folds where you would see shadows. Let it completely dry again, then dry brush the highlights and use pastel chalks to simulate dirt.

I enjoy not only a finished model but also its creation. Some people may build better dioramas than mine but that’s okay because I compare my completed models only to unassembled kits still in the box. And that reminds me: Next time you walk past the closet, open the door, take out a box, and give life to an unassembled kit. Your model will thank you.

