





(the talent behind Sierra West Scale Models) laid out the Foss Landing diorama in his detailed instruction booklet. Then I decided to make some changes. Brett once told me he loves when customers modify his kits. So unleash your creativity.

I wanted both docks at the same level and in a line rather than staggered. I purchased some wood similar to the pier timbers along the edge of the diorama where you see the sign "Foss

Launch Co." I replaced the kit's small dilapidated boat with what might seem an almost "ready-to-float" boat. I added some detail and made two acetylene torches from some parts in my scrapbox. I painted on the name Kayla (after one of my daughters). Warning: Such decisions inevitably make your other kids demand you name something after them, so keep building.

Now let's talk about the water. I began by copying a

technique by a very talented modeler, Dave Revelia, in the 2004 LOGGING, MINING & INDUSTRIAL ANNUAL. Dave wrote, "I needed a way to avoid the lack of control inherent in the use of [watery] Envirotex resin. I discovered Crystal Clear latex caulk, a product I could apply from a tube and texture with a brush. Once I had textured the 'underwater' scenery, I squeezed the caulk onto the ground cover, used a brush to create ripples, and stippled on additional material to represent waves. I

dry brushed some wave peaks with light gray paint. Then, when everything was dry, I painted Envirotex resin over the caulk to 'soften' some areas. Using a brush to paint on the Envirotex not only allowed complete control over the application of 'water' but also eliminated the 'creeping' problem so many modelers experience."

I even called Dave for more information. Then I tried it myself.





I always had thought you get only one chance when modeling water. Wrong. I made several mistakes on my harbor scene. Let me explain:

Actual water material is very thin so the key is painting the right colors on the base. Then I covered the base with several textures. It looks deep but really is very shallow. I experimented with inexpensive Apple Barrel paints from Wal-Mart—deep blues and deep greens. I blended them with lighter shades near the edges of the harbor and darker colors for the “deeper” parts. Your eyes and brain will perceive darker colors as deeper water. Except for the shoreline, avoid the temptation to make the base physically deeper and shallower; paint will do it for you.

The next step is to apply a clear acrylic silicon caulk. It is water soluble so you may thin it. I found Alex Plus by DAP at a Lowe’s home building store. You apply it with a caulking gun. Another brand is Crystal Clear latex caulk. It comes in smaller tubes and requires no caulking gun. The caulk goes on white but dries clear.

As a precaution, I would test any acrylic caulk to ensure it really will dry clear. Normally the only truly clear caulk is the non-water base silicon variety. It is of no use to us since we must use some water on a paint-brush to push around and thin down the caulk. It might be a good idea to check with building supply houses before buying an unfamiliar brand.

If you just pour on clear caulk or resin, it will dry with a perfectly flat surface. But the water in any harbor has undulations. Pushing around the

silicon will create those waves and ripples.

My problems began when some air bubbles formed in the harbor. I had to cut out a triangular section of water. Keep in mind I had been telling both of my friends one gets only a single chance to model water but there I was, preparing for a second attempt!

I touched up the paint on the base because I had removed the caulk very clumsily. Panic and desperation propelled me forward. I applied more clear silicon over the repainted base. I waited. I ground my teeth. I bit my nails. I paced. It took hours but the caulk finally dried.

If you thought I somehow had repaired the disaster, think again! A beautiful triangle sat right in the middle of my harbor scene!

I tried again, my third attempt, and painted the entire water surface! Yes, I brushed paint over the dry silicon. I blended a little dirty brown near the pier for a real harbor look. Painting the surface obscured most of the color on the base I had earlier slaved over but I had no choice.





It still looked bad.

So I brushed on a thin coat of Envirotex Lite high gloss varnish. That gave the surface the wet appearance of real water. I took a few pictures outside and it reflected the sky just as real water. Look at the photos. You also may notice the water seems to undulate. That is because I brushed on the Envirotex finish. Had I poured it on, the water surface would have been perfectly flat.

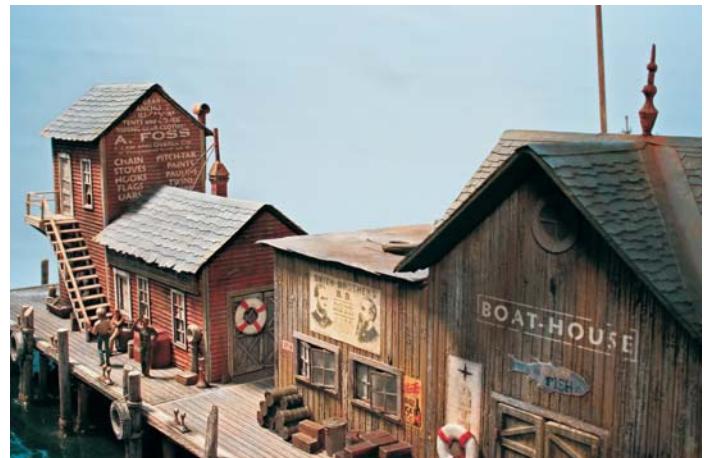
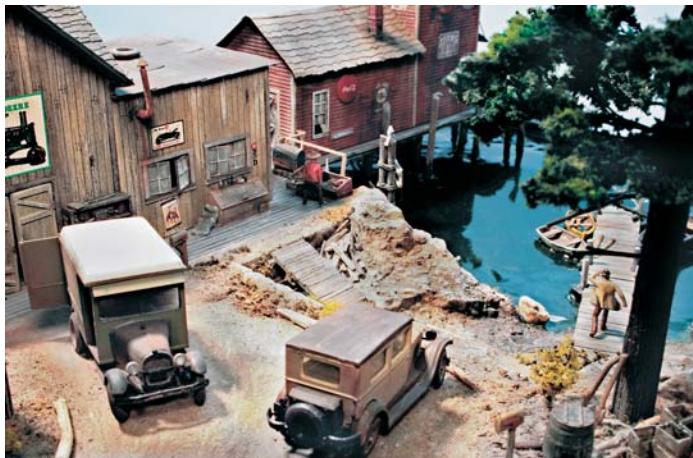
I still must decide what I have learned from that string of disasters. In the future I may skip painting the base and, instead, color the top of the silicon. At the moment I am inclined to ask another modeler to experiment and share his results.

Now a word about adhesives: The more glues you own, the better.

One of my favorites is contact cement. I buy it in the smallest possible quantity because the more often you open the container the faster it dries up. And make sure it is of the proper consistency. I once purchased a defective batch; it was watery and impossible to blend.

You must use contact cement for the proper application. It is different from other glues. I watched a contractor use contact cement to glue a Formica® counter top to a wood base. It was almost amazing. He spread the contact cement on both surfaces, both the underside of the Formica and the top of the wood base, waited twenty minutes, and pressed together the pieces. The contact cement still needed to cure but was so tacky the union was instantaneous.

With miniatures wait only a few minutes and, of course, apply the contact cement to both surfaces. The



key is making both surfaces tacky. My favorite use of contact cement is to join walls. White glue takes too long to dry and makes it difficult to bond two walls at both a 90-degree angle and flat on the work surface. When I finally erect two mostly complete structure walls, I want to see the result at once, not two hours later.

I apply contact cement to every edge contacting another edge (at least two edges per wall). I let the glue dry for a few minutes, then connect every wall without waiting for one pair to dry. You will see how easy it is.

Although the walls stick together they remain pliable for at least twenty minutes so you may adjust each joint with a square to ensure it is perfectly perpendicular and sits flat. I apply the same technique to any difficult-to-glue subassembly and wherever I will need to make an adjustment.

I truly enjoy modeling and the challenge of each diorama. I usually get inspiration over time; I never could sit down and conceive of a final scene. It is a process rather than an event and begins with concepts and incomplete mental images.

I often cut out the footprint of each structure from white paper. Then I move the pieces around the base to come up with possible locations for each building. That also creates more ideas for things to enhance the scene.

I avoid flat scenes; each diorama has grades and



elevations. My favorite scenery base material is the pink and blue insulation board from contractors' supply houses. Want to save some money? Watch for new construction in your area because they throw away unused pieces. Stockpile them when you find them.

Very recently I discovered why my 12 year son has avoided modeling: He thinks his first attempt must produce a perfect, museum quality result. Does that sound familiar?

Avoid comparing your work with that of other modelers. Instead, compare it to unfinished kits still in the box. Your model always will be better! Just have fun with our fascinating hobby. Your finished pieces will last for generations and your modeling will improve with time, just as a fine wine. Enjoy the journey.

