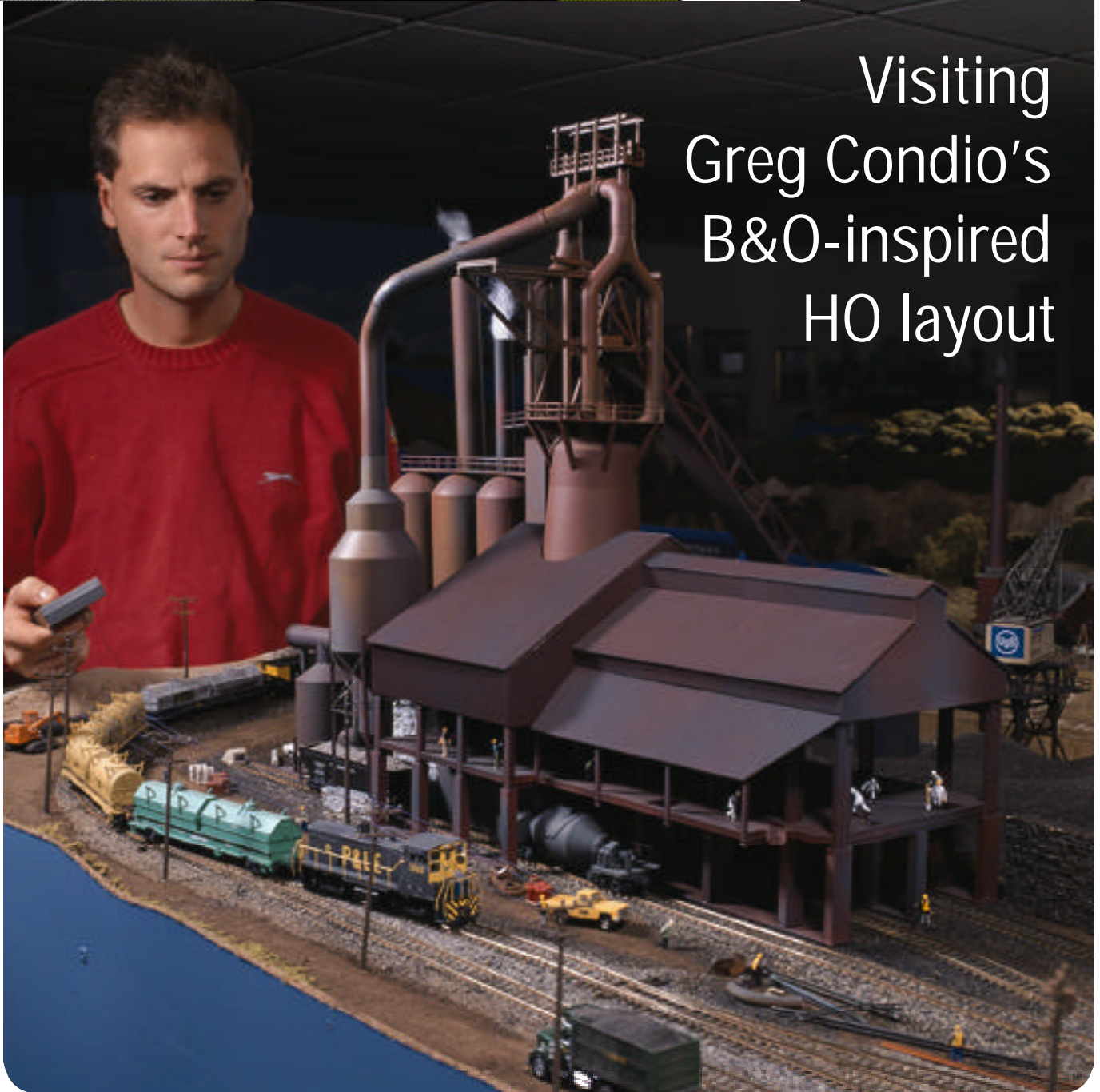


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Visiting
Greg Condio's
B&O-inspired
HO layout





PHOTOGRAPHS BY JIM CUNNINGHAM

With the day's work over, Pittsburgh & Lake Erie 1563 (above) is returning home after switching cars at the J&L steel plant. Chessie

4272 (right) rounds a curve at Cumberland. The city scene is a mixture of building flats and Realistic Background photo backdrops.

Visiting Greg Condio's B&O layout

by Greg Condio

Model railroading is not just a hobby about building scale models of railroad equipment, scenery or the supporting structures that fill out a scene or a layout, or even about operation. While these are important, they are only part of the story. Our model railroads really draw on our personal experiences and impressions of the world around us, which is what we are actually modeling, and they can grow out of our family histories, too. In the process,

they pay tribute to people, industries and regions, as well as the traditions and romance of railroading.

My HO scale Baltimore & Ohio Railroad grew from these roots. It is based on places like Cumberland, Maryland, and New Castle, Pennsylvania, and others near my home in the Pittsburgh area. My fascination with the region came not only from being raised here, but also from going railfanning with my Uncle Gus and listening to his stories. He was

a brakeman for the B&O in New Castle and we watched the transition of the B&O to become part of the Chessie System, then to CSX.

While the layout is freelanced in that it does not replicate a specific portion of the line, the equipment, setting and industries are "B&O" and are typical of this part of the state. The railroad is in a 34 by 41-foot train room and is a walkaround design with minimum 36" aisles. Planning for it actually began in

1989, when I sketched out a “someday layout” in a future dream home. I wanted a railroad similar to David Barrows’ Cat Mountain & Santa Fe or Rick Rideout’s linear Louisville & Nashville, but one that would incorporate the mountains, towns and industries commonly found in western Pennsylvania. I bought the videotapes on these layouts from a friend, Allen Keller, and used them as idea banks for designing my own railroad.

In 1992 my wife and I broke ground on that dream home, or at least as close as we could get and still be practical. The home included a basement big enough for a layout, as well as space for a workshop and a studio with a drop ceiling and corrected lighting for viewing trains and shooting photos and videos.

From paper plan to layout

The trackplan features two large yards, one at Cumberland and one at New Castle, and a double-track main over the mountains and through Pittsburgh. There are three smaller yards: one at Connellsville, one at McKeesport, and another at the J&L Steel plant near Sharon. This reflects the traditional rail-

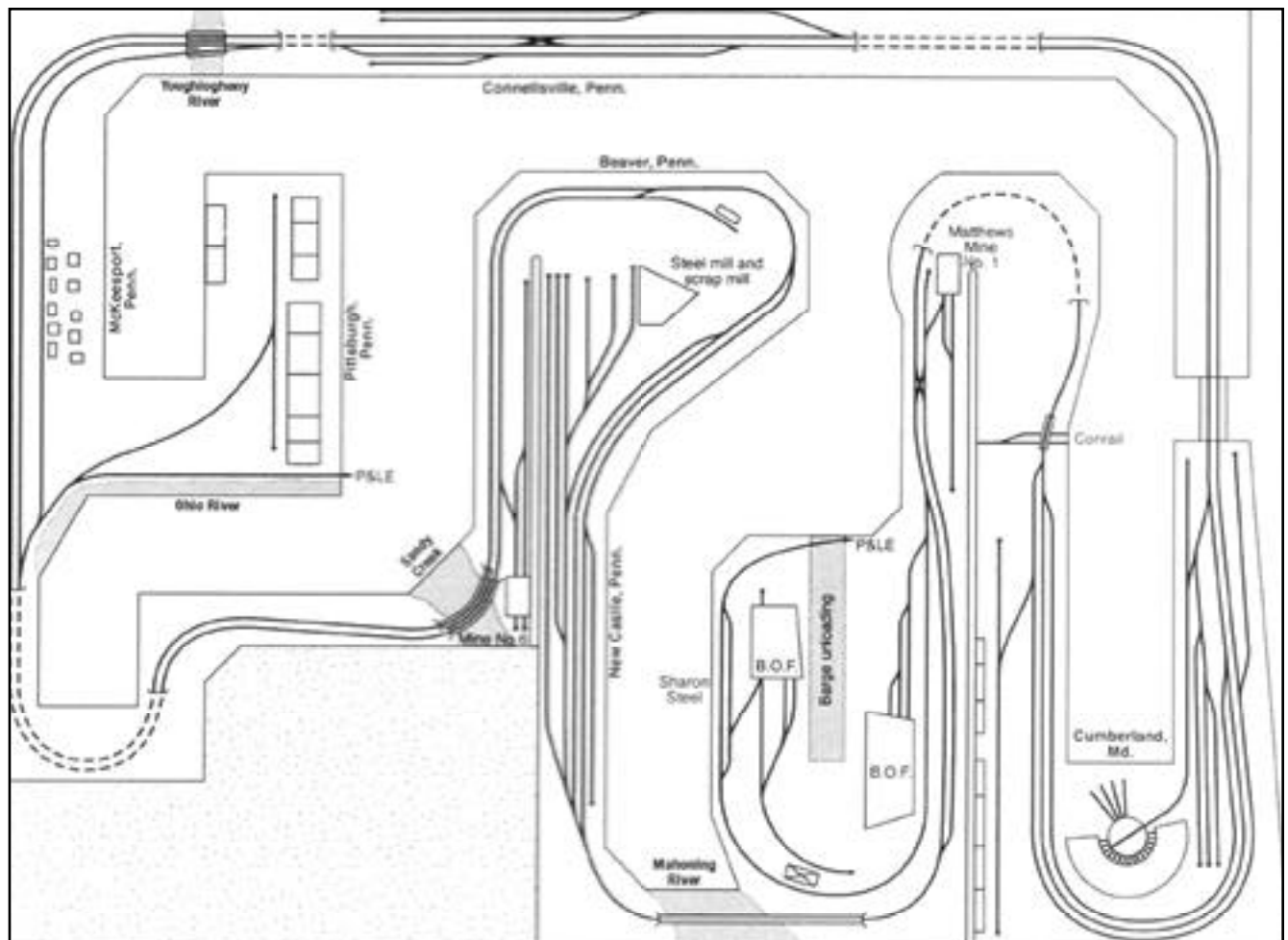


roading of the area, the time before yard and railroad consolidations when traffic moved from a local siding to a small yard to a classification yard to a through train, then reversed the cycle for delivery. Frequently an intra-city transfer between yards or railroads was part of the movement, too.

My favorite time period is between 1970 and 1988, a block of time that al-

lows me to explore many aspects of the B&O, Chessie and CSX.

The benchwork is a mixture of open grid done with 2”x4”s in a manner similar to house construction and L-girder framing. The height of the track ranges from 48” at New Castle to 54” at Cumberland. Trackwork is all Atlas code 100 flexible track with Peco and Shinohara switches laid on either



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P&LE 2056 helps to switch cars at Mathews coal mine No.2 (above). Like the scene on the previous page, this scene also employs one of Greg's Realistic Background backdrops. CSX 9024 crosses Sandy Creek and the No.6 mine. A farmer is walking his dog under the bridge (below). P&LE 2059 and 2033 pass the PFender Feed and Supply Company (bottom).



Homasote® or cork roadbed over 3/4" plywood. Two bus wires running under the layout are soldered to rail feeders every two feet to ensure electrical continuity. At present I am using an OnBoard system to control the trains. All turnouts are operated with Tortoise slow-motion switch machines wired to an acrylic plastic control pad at each yard. Interlocking signals are being installed at each junction, a project that still has a way to go.

Scenery

Most people enjoy running trains, switching locals and keeping traffic rolling. I have found that doing scenery is what I enjoy most. The methods used on my B&O are traditional, and they work well for this type of terrain. The mountains are made from screen wire

forms covered with plaster-impregnated cloth and detailed with milded gypsum perlite rocks applied directly to the base plaster. All the plaster is painted with acrylic paints and dyes, then drybrushed

with latex "earth," a homemade mixture of Pittsburgh Paint Company flat wall paint that is drybrushed on to bring out details and create the impression of sun reflection. I do not like drybrushing with white because it is not a natural color in the real world.

Large mountain areas are covered with poly-fiber coated with Woodland Scenics powdered dark and light green foams, while most tall foreground trees are done with Scenic Express Super Trees. Some large foreground trees are also made up of weeds, poly-fiber and foam to give the appearance of different species.

For streams, rivers and lakes, I use a two-part, Aristocraft brand, high-gloss epoxy. Before pouring it I detail the banks and streambeds with sticks, rocks and stones found while fishing with my son. I also add figures, tires, barrels and sifted natural topsoil to these waterways before the epoxy pours. Water flowing out of culverts and storm drain pipes is simulated with filter floss, found in pet stores, soaked in the epoxy and positioned before it sets, and the culvert pipes are made from scrap graphite golf club shafts.

I also enjoy kitbashing large buildings using available kits, styrene and wood. Pittsburgh is a great area to see and learn about heavy industry, and it is both fun and a challenge to model some of it. This often involves taking kits and rebuilding them to fit my layout needs. I usually use a combination of airbrushing, drybrushing and washes followed by applications of powdered artists' pastels for weathering structures.



Most of the structures also receive signs and billboards, something made a little easier for me to do since I work in the printing and graphics arts field. Some backdrop mountains are handpainted using a one-inch paintbrush and acrylics, while the detailed backdrops around the whole layout are from a company that I started to make and print backdrops for layouts (Realistic Backgrounds, by DQCI). The clouds on the walls are done with an airbrush using white and Dover Gray, or are on my printed backdrops.

There is plenty of action at the local coal mine where a former Conrail GP38, now owned by the P&LE (right), is busy handling the switching. An orange CSX maintenance-of-way loco and its train wait on a siding as another CSX freight passes by. Chessie 4272 (below) crosses the Mahonning Creek in Sharon and passes J&L Steels's electric furnace. The furnace was scratchbuilt.



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Finishing up

While this finishes this article, there's more work to do on the layout, of course. Since I am modeling the 1970's and 1980's, the choice of motive power is diesel. The yards are usually worked with GP35's, and SD40-2's head up trains over the mountains. The B&O interchanges with the now-gone Pittsburgh & Lake Erie R.R., so its locomotives are seen on the layout from time to time. The home-road diesels can appear in any of the several color schemes of the era, and Kato and Overland dominate the powered roster: there are a number of Athearn dummy locos and they are used as trailing units.

All freight cars from kits and, like the locomotives, are weathered from photos taken of equipment here in Pittsburgh. Every yard has card-order boxes installed and I will be adopting that system to generate traffic on the line.

Eventually there will be a CTC system and we will use headsets and a dedicated communications system on the railroad, but for now I have to build more buildings, design and build a concrete ready-mix plant and, no surprise to anyone who has ever modeled eastern scenery, make more trees.



A B&O SD40 leads a train across a stream near Sand Patch, Pa., with a mixture of freight cars bound for Cumberland (above). A Pittsburgh & Lake Erie local passes the P. Gentile brewery (below). This building was kitbashed using a trio of Magnuson buildings.

