

The New York Central in S scale

— by Charlie Comstock

I had the chance to spend some time with Ed Loizeaux and his impressive S scale New York Central empire. He's constructed a wonderland of mountains, cities, bridges, a giant chasm with waterfalls, an industrial area, and logging and mining areas all presented with a sweeping, panoramic backdrop behind them.

Come along as I talk with Ed about his railroad.



Figure 1 - Telegraph wires are under repair as two freights pass each other in the Catskill Mountains on Ed Loizeaux's New York Central

Ed Loizeaux has a passion for trains and the New York Central that he came by as a kid living across the street from the railroad.

If you ask about New York Central and S scale most modelers in the San Francisco bay area will say, "Oh! That's Ed!"

Over the years his vision of the NYC through the Catskill mountains of upstate New York has emerged from raw benchwork to a nearly finished layout.

MRH: How did you get attracted to railroading?

EL: It started at the age of 5 which was 2 or 3 years ago as you can tell from my haircut [when] I lived across the street from the tracks.

MRH: Where was that?

EL: That was in Tamaqua Pennsylvania, the home of the Reading Railroad. We lived there across the street from the tracks. My uncle was a bartender - we lived upstairs [above] the bar. He served all the railroad workers and I got rides on the trains, I got rides on the caboose, I got tours of the roundhouse, and I hung around the station - it was a great place to grow up as a child. My bedroom was right across the street from the yard throat and there were coal trains in and out of there all day long.

MRH: So you just couldn't escape your destiny as a railroad aficionado?

EL: The die was cast. The other set of grandparents that I was living with - this was all during WWII [and] my father was over in Europe - lived right alongside the NYC line in Dobbs Ferry NY[on] the Hudson river and I spent 6 months with them. So



FIGURE 3: The Montclair station at the main yard has a fully detailed interior.

I'd go down to the station and watch the trains going down the 4-track mainline and that was pretty exciting also.

MRH: How did you get started modeling?

EL: It started when I was about 5 years old when dad gave me a Lionel train set -



FIGURE 2: This S scale refinery was built using many HO scale components from Walthers and Rix.

What is S scale?

S scale was popularized by A.C. Gilbert's American Flyer trains in the 50's. It is 1/64 of full size - about halfway between HO (1/87) and O (1/48).

S is often thought of as a craftsman scale because of relatively fewer ready-to-run offerings (structures, locos, rolling stock, etc).

Today there is a small but

strong group of scale modelers in S who prefer it because it's more substantial than HO without requiring the space of O scale.



Layout Summary

Layout name: New York Central

Locale: Catskill Mountains of upstate New York

Era: 1948-1958

Scale: S (1:64)

Track style: multi-lap

Mainline length: 305' double tracked

Min turnout: 8 (mainline), 6 (yard), 4 (industrial track)

Min radius: 48" hidden, 54" visible

Max grade: 1.4%

Control: DC with Aristo Craft radio throttles (converting to NCE DCC)

Turnout control: Switch Master machines controlled from local panels or by the dispatcher

Signalling: Under installation using C/MRI and JMRI

Track elevation: 42" to 61"



going around the Christmas tree. I came down in the morning and there it was in all its glory. Man it was neat, the horn tooted and the smoke and the lights. Every month or so there'd be a little more track or another switch or this or that and it expanded.

MRH: So after the Lionel where did it go?

EL: Well the Lionel got sold off in Jr. High School and I moved on into HO. HO looked more realistic - it had 2 rails instead of 3 rails. It also had more detail. I liked building kits and I liked building a layout - I had a layout on a 4x8 sheet of plywood - and it was a lot of fun.

MRH: But now you're in S scale. How did that happen?

EL: That started when I moved. I used

to live in upstate New York, now I'm in California. I got married, moved out here and started a job. The trains got unpacked about 2 years later when I bought a house. I looked at this stuff and all of a sudden some memories came flooding back.

MRH: What were those?

EL: Operational difficulties - things like brass track and brass wheels.

This was in a basement that was pretty dusty, lots of cobwebs, dirt and ash from a coal furnace. I was spending more time cleaning track than running trains. In my ignorance I concluded the problem was that it was HO (and had nothing to do with all the dust). In my mind the solution was [getting] bigger [trains] - then the dirt wouldn't bother it so much.

Well the choices were limited - it was S, On3 or O. O is very large and very expensive and I was a young feller at the time, didn't have too much money. On3 is just about the right size but I didn't like narrow gauge that much. So S scale seemed to be exactly right. It was the same size physically as On3, the structures were smaller, I could do mainline railroading and there were a half dozen engines available. What more could a guy possible want?

Two of 'em [the engines] I had no interest in at all but the other four engines were pretty decent so I thought I could get by. There was one caboose available not counting the American Flyer conversions people did back then. [I thought] let's give it a try so I bought a kit, built it and never

FIGURE 4: Engine 1859 passes Kingston station before heading across the tall stone viaduct. This is the major industrial area on the layout.

looked back. I've been in S scale since 1969 and I've loved every minute of it.

MRH: Is this your first S scale layout?

EL: Actually it's the third. The first one was a little 4x6 layout. It had a figure 8 and a loop around that - an over/under figure 8, a couple of mountains, tunnel portals, and all that. That was a test layout - I believe everybody should build a test layout!

I wanted to see what it [S scale] was like so I didn't want a humongous layout. A 4x6 on removable legs I could carry around in



the back of my car worked great. I could set it up at the club and run trains.

My second layout was similar to this layout except that it had a single track mainline instead of double track. It was a little bit smaller [than this layout] but it basically wrapped around the room three times the way this layout does. Job changes and relocations brought me to this house and I started over again with a similar concept except I like the double track mainline. I had a little more room so that all fit comfortably.

All the rolling stock and structures came here pretty well finished. We've added a few [new] things but by-and-large the rolling stock was [already] finished.

“... the rolling stock and the passenger cars are all New York Central because that's my favorite road ...”

MRH: When did you start this layout?

EL: In 1987, but I had two periods of inactivity - each about 6 months for some health issues and medical problems - it was one thing after another and you have to just rest and take it easy.

MRH: What style of modeling would you say you're doing here?

EL: Let me tell you about my philosophy of modeling and maybe that will answer your question.

The underlying goal I'm [seeking] is to have fun. I'm not trying to recreate a location at a specific time or specific this or

FIGURE 5: Crossing The Bridge. Look carefully at the waterfall - how many sightseers are climbing nearby? Hope nobody slips!

specific that and there are a lot of things on the layout that are absolutely not authentic - so they [can] fit into the space appropriately. My style is the locomotives and the cabooses and the rolling stock and the passenger cars are all New York Central because that's my favorite road and everybody has I think a favorite road but the layout itself is free lanced - set in a mountain setting which I call the Catskill mountains. The town doesn't

really exist in the real world. There's [even] a Westside Lumber Company operation (on the 'west side' of the Catskills...) adjacent to the New York Central tracks. Everything about the layout itself

is somewhat hypothetical.

MRH: But it does seem to have a New York feel to it...

EL: Everything has an East Coast flavor. All the structures, all the vehicles, all the trains are appropriate for the late '40s and early '50s, so in that sense I've tried to make things realistic, but it is not prototypically authentic.

MRH: So you're modeling a feel...

EL: Exactly! That's a good way to put it. I'm giving you the feel of the east coast from 1948 to 1954 (approximately) along some New York Central tracks. Everything is pretty generic.

MRH: Where did the track plan come from?

EL: Well, the track plan came from me. I took out some large quadrille paper and

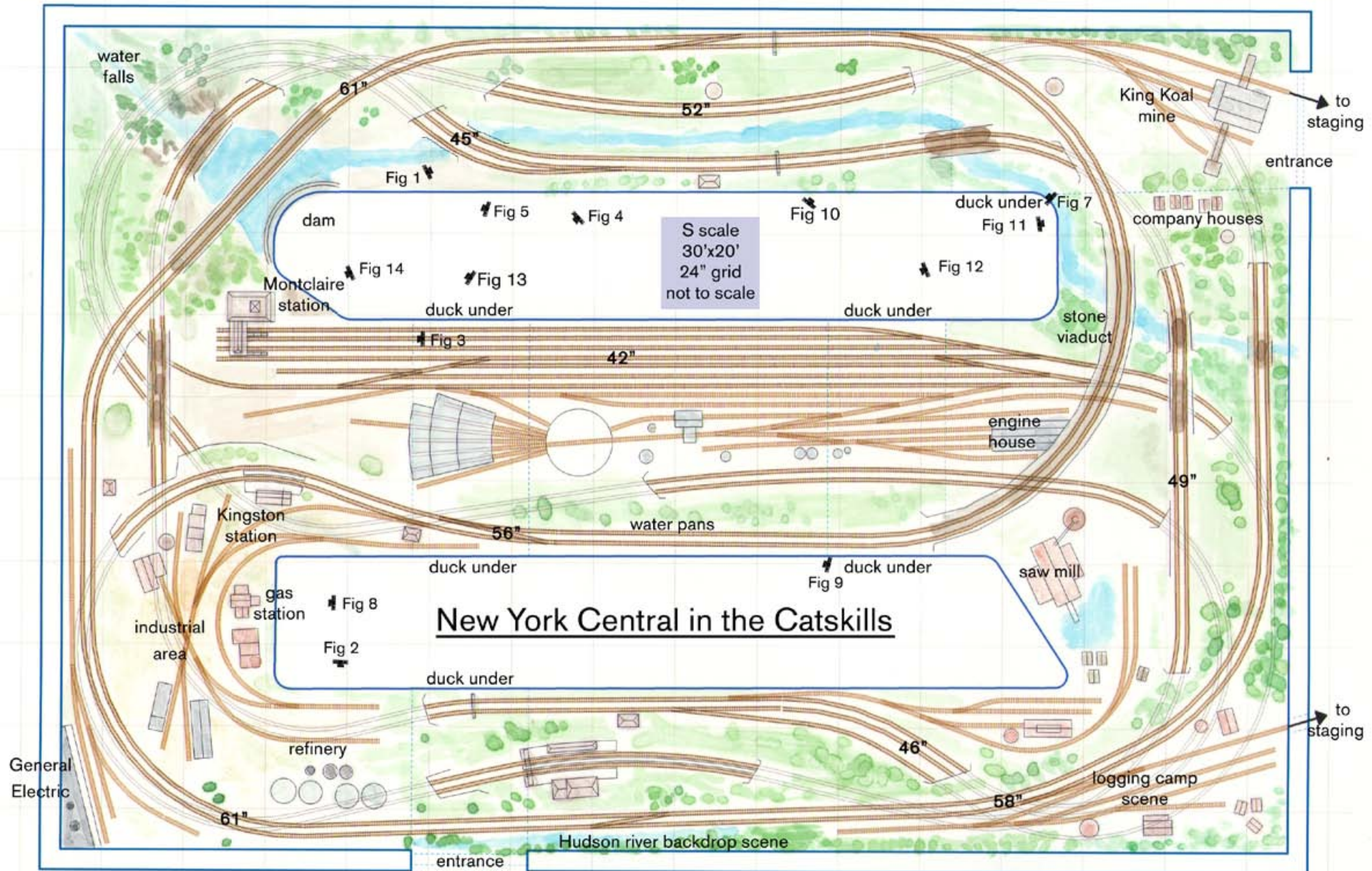


FIGURE 6: Track plan of Ed Loizeaux's S scale New York Central layout

started doodling. I think all of us model railroaders doodle track plans [until] we're blue in the face. I designed my layout to have a long mainline run - I didn't want a small layout - to fit a long mainline run in a moderate [space] the easiest way is to wrap around the walls 2 or 3 times .

MRH: About how many feet long is your mainline?

EL: The mainline is 305' long, a little bit longer than a football field (editor: about 3.7 scale miles) .

MRH: What's your minimum radius?

EL: The minimum radius is hidden and is 48"

(about 122 cm). I've 2 of them and they're under the mountains so you don't really see them.

FIGURE 8: S scale readily lends itself to super detailing!

MRH: Do you have a cosmetic minimum radius for visible scenes?

EL: Yes, [on] visible track the minimum would probably be about 54". I also have a nice large 6' radius that goes over that stone arch bridge and some broad curves that are 20' radius.

"... I didn't want a small layout - to fit a long mainline run in a moderate [space] the easiest way is to wrap around the walls 2 or 3 times ..."

MRH: What turnout sizes do you use?

EL: The smallest turnouts are #4 in the industrial switching areas. The coal mine

and the sawmill, have #4's. I used #6's in the main yard. The mainline turnouts are all #8s.



MRH: What about grades?

EL: The grade is 1.4%. The yard is flat at the bottom and the steel mill is flat at the top - almost everything else is on a grade.

MRH: As I look around the room, I see some really outstanding scenery here. The combination of trees, vegetation, rocks, cuts and fills, and weathering on the structures all holds together. Plus you've got this really great backdrop here. Who did the scenery?

EL: The scenery was done by lots of people. One fellow in Arizona did the large trees. The rock castings were done by **Keith White** right here in Santa Clara, California. The backdrop painting was done by **Michael Kotowski**, also local. The silver bridge over the water fall was done

FIGURE 7: A lazy day railfanning down by the creek.

by **Don Ledger** who also lives in Arizona. I did most of the trackwork and ballasting myself. The structures were largely kit-built by a variety of different people from all over the place. **Dave Adams** of On3 fame (editor: his Durlin Branch layout will be coming soon to the pages of MRH) did the Montclair station with the red roof on it. In total around 55 people from all over the world built something for this layout.

MRH: It's good to have friends!

EL: Very good friends to put it mildly. I feel a little like a general contractor with a team of highly qualified sub-contractors. .

MRH: The Hudson River scene intrigues me. **Mike Kotowski** did something extra tricky there?

EL: It was a difficult artistic feat because the track [in front of the backdrop] is going uphill but the river [on the backdrop] is





Ed Loizeaux was born in New York State where he fell in love with the smoke and lightning stripes of the NYC at an early age. After graduating from college, he moved to the Los Angeles area. When smog caused allergy problems Ed moved to the cleaner environment of the San Francisco Bay Area raised five kids and is helping out with four grandkids. Ed feels it is now time to concentrate on finishing his NYC-themed S scale layout.

Ed invites you to come visit his layout during the NMRA 2011 national convention in Sacramento.



level. The idea was to make it appear to the casual viewer that the track is level and it's going right along the edge of the river and everything is level. So how do you accomplish that? He started where the [opposite river bank] land is up close to the track and as you move to the right the land keeps moving farther and farther back into the distance. (*editor: see the video clip at the end of this interview*)

MRH: So it looks like the river is receding into those distant hills.

EL: Right! [But] you're right up close to the

land on the other side there. You have a strip of river that's about 3/4" [wide] that's almost a constant width, yet the illusion is that it's going back into the distance. So your mind tricks you and you assume the water is flat yet it's parallel to the track so you assume the track must [also] be flat.

So it looks like the track is following a flat river but in reality it's going up a grade. It's an optical illusion and Mike's very good at that kind of stuff.

MRH: What kind of control system are you using to run trains?

EL: Right at the moment I'm using DC. I have a couple of Aristo Craft wireless throttles so I can walk around and do switching from anywhere in the room.

The goal for the end of the year or early next year is to have DCC installed and operational. I've got all the wiring for it in place for it so it's just a matter of hooking up the command station and attaching it to the track, putting decoders in the engines and so forth. Once that's done we'll be up and running with DCC. I like the NCE system. I'll have operating signalling

FIGURE 9: The NYC signature track pans used by passenger trains to replenish the water in their tenders - without stopping! (Mike Kotowski photo)

which accommodates bidirectional signals on both mainlines using **C/MRI** and **JMRI** tied together to make the layout fully functional.

MRH: So you're using Bruce Chubb's **C/MRI** (*Computer Model Railroad Interface* www.jlcenterprises.net) system?

EL: Chubb's hardware, **JMRI** (Java Model

Railroad Interface - jmri.org) software. I'm using **Panel Pro** to put the track diagram on the computer screen the dispatcher uses. You can just do a mouse click to change [mainline] turnouts or change signals and so forth.

MRH: How do your crews operate turnouts?

EL: There's two ways. There are control panels along the edge of the layout and I can throw these turnouts by using the push buttons on these panels.

If we have a dispatcher then the [mainline] panels can be disabled so they don't do anything and the dispatcher throws them from [the] computer screen.

The yard turnouts and the switching turnouts at the local industries are [always] thrown by the local operator.

MRH: How do you move the points?

FIGURE 10: Example of the superb rocks on Ed's layout!

EL: All of the turnouts have a Switch Master machine with two auxiliary sets of contacts on them. One set of contacts communicates to the computer (through the **C/MRI** hardware) the turnout positions. The other set of contacts is used to illuminate [position indicator] LEDs on the [local] control panels.

Panel Pro is used to show the dispatcher the signal aspects and the positions of all the turnouts [on the layout].

MRH: You're moving toward hosting organized operating sessions on your layout?

EL: Correct. I hope to have formal op sessions within 18 months after I finish the layout.

I have a sort of vision that says we'll have anywhere between 5 and 12 people involved in an op session all doing their



jobs whether its yard master, dispatcher, engineer, conductor or whatever [with] time tables and car forwarding systems. We're going to try to do it all.

MRH: The original track plan didn't have any staging areas in it?

EL: That's true. A friend suggested I should have some staging yards. There's no space in the [layout] room for them so I had to go elsewhere. After a serious conference with the wife and keeper of the financial keys around here we agreed it was OK if I



FIGURE 11: Company houses for the King Koal mine.



FIGURE 12: Kingston station and downtown area.



FIGURE 13: Ed made use of forced perspective in this scene using progressively smaller trees toward the back . There's a row of N-scale hikers on the skyline to the left of the waterfall.

poked a hole in the wall and went through into the adjacent room with a modular staging yard that I can put up during an op session. I can have as many as 12 tracks each one capable of a full length train of about 24 cars. When the op session ends

I just take it down and put it into a closet. It's all modular sections on legs and highly portable so as long as I only do it for a few days here and a few days there [it's OK].

MRH: Do you get together on a regular basis with other S scalers?

EL: Well there's a club here in the San Francisco bay area. We've got about 40 members and we

“... HO targets on an O scale Plasticville signal bridge put together to resemble something that looks like S scale ...”

do get together - we rotate around to different homes. Most of us have a layout, some of them are quite small, some of

them are sizeable, and we just have fun doing our little S scale stuff. I think in the big picture we represent only about 3% of the hobby and so it's

really a small group of people.

We all know each other. I know probably

every serious S scaler in the whole country at least by name and by sight.

We probably have more brass imports per capita than any other scale. Have you ever thought about that?

MRH: Maybe that's the reason I don't want to be an S scaler, I can't afford it!

EL: Not much plastic but lots of brass. If you can do it in short volumes it's worth doing in S scale, there's a pent-up demand for products. But you're never going to sell as many as you would in HO so if you're into short-run production and brass is sort of inclined in that direction they do very well in S scale.

MRH: Do you find that you can sometimes use items from other scales on your layout?

EL: I use things all the way from N scale to G scale. Just one example is a signal bridge. The basic bridge itself is Plasticville. I cut off the bottom to lower it a little bit and built bases to set it on. The [signal] targets are Tomar. They're sold as an HO product but believe it or not, if you measure

them they're just about perfect for S scale. There's also a relay rack here which is HO.

So I have HO targets on an O scale Plasticville signal bridge put together to resemble something that looks like S scale.

MRH: Your oil refinery isn't completely S scale either is it?

EL: The oil refinery is actually mostly HO parts. It is up on a hill so everything is taller than it might normally be. It's mostly Walthers HO, the oil refinery kit. Two



FIGURE 14: The interior of the Montclair station is fully detailed!

smaller tanks are Rix, they're sold as silos for a farm scene! But there were oil tanks of that size and shape.

MRH: It looks like the layout is almost complete. What's next?

EL: I think the plan for the future is to finish the layout!

MRH: Well thank you very much for having me here Ed. I really appreciate it.

EL: That's quite OK, come back any time.



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Play interview video

Ed tells how the Hudson River backdrop was painted and about his between - the - rails water pans - plus clips of his trains in action!