Fall 2010 Baldwin Trophy Winner
Richard Walz's Factory Complex

Compared to the Biltmore-sized basements some people have at their disposal, my 9'x18' layout space seems kind of dinky. But with a limited number of square feet available to me, I assume I can model each of those feet as carefully, as slowly, and as well as I can—and still have hopes of completing my railroad before I myself am completed. And so I've concluded that having a constrained space has, in its way, improved the quality of what railroad I do have. Anyway, that's my rationalization, and I'm sticking with it.

I built my factory complex from a South River Modelworks kit—which is pretty much contest quality stuff even before it's put together. SRM kits justify all the hours it takes to build them—and I gave my kit plenty of hours, including a few to spare.

The kit has lots of windows—145, to be exact. If I'd had a 40'x40' space to fill, I'd have been very tempted to get through all that crummy fenestration as quickly as possible, and forge ahead with my next modeling project. But with my modest space, I felt I could afford the time to do extra work on my windows, hoping to add variety by rebuilding some of them "opened." For each opened window, I'd cut away and discard the lower sash from one window casting. Then from a second casting, I'd cut out the lower sash and its upper stile and glue that sash to the first casting—but higher up the frame than the discarded sash had been.

The complex has vast expanses of slate roofs. SRM suggested coloring these roofs with felt-tipped markers, and I tried that method. The coloring went quickly, and the results weren't bad. But after studying them, I decided that, redone with my trusty Floquil paints, the roofs would look even better. I also knew that if I were to leave the roofs looking significantly inferior to how they might look, they'd forever bother me. So out came the paint.

I use multiple steps to color most objects. Many things I'll simply paint and then stain with an India ink wash. But for some other things, the roofs eventually included, the coloring involves more steps. I first brush-painted the roofs with Floquil's Lettering Gray. With that as a base coat, I over-painted many slates with mixes of Lettering Gray and Reefer Gray, with Earth, and with Boxcar Red. I then dry-brushed the roofs with Lettering Gray, unifying them a bit. I considered where rainwater, soot, and rust would be concentrated (as in roof valleys and around chimneys) and darkened the roofs in those areas with washes of India ink and with Rustall. Finally, I used Winsor & Newton's Chinese White watercolor to add pigeon poop in likely areas.

To my knowledge, I'm not one of those truly insane, truly astounding model builders—the people who'd build roofs with 20,000 individual slates. But when I can identify a reasonable way to improve a model, I'll try it. The relatively modest size of my layout (a by-product of my laughably modest income) means that my compulsion to fill space quickly can also be modest, if not completely nonexistent—and so I feel okay about spending as much time and effort on each model as it might need. Put simply: I'm broke, and that's made my models better.

Is this a great hobby, or what?