

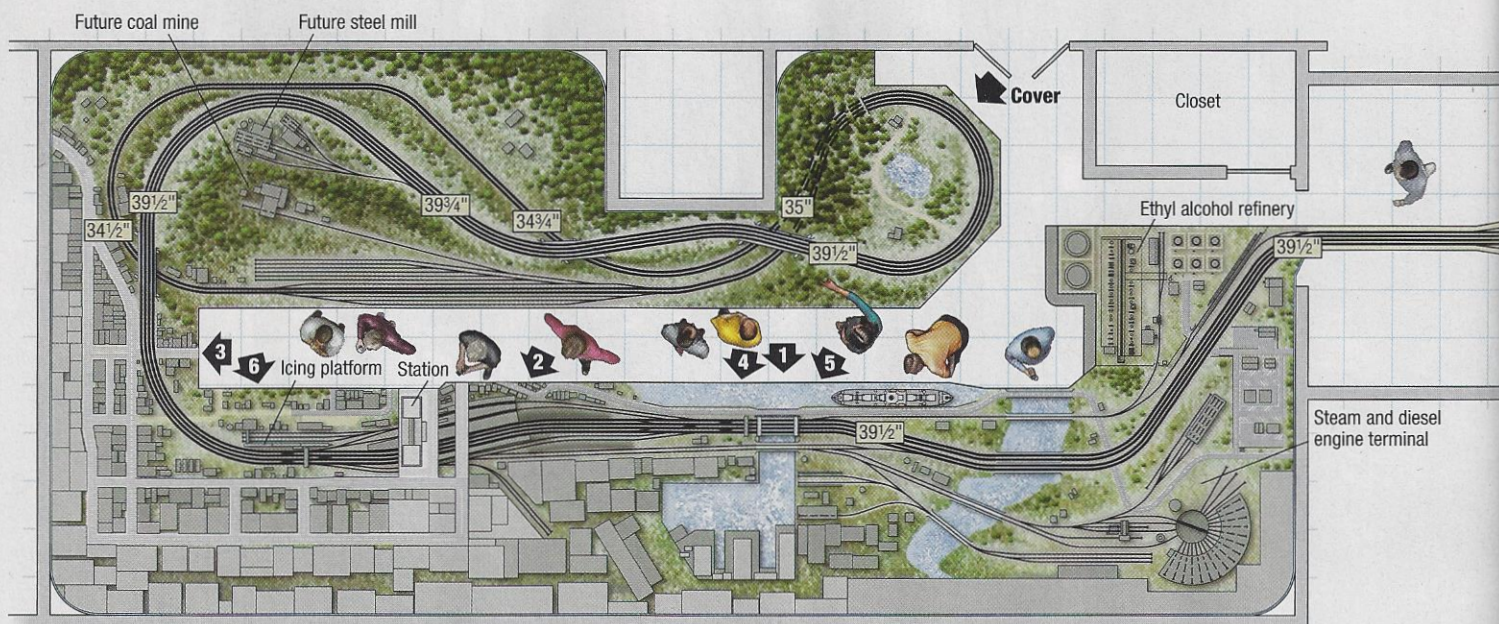
ROD STEWART'S Three Rivers City

Here's what's new on the
rock 'n' roller's layout

By Carl Swanson
Photos by Steve Crise

1. The harbor with its four-track lift bridge is one of the recent additions to Rod Stewart's HO scale Grand Street & Three Rivers City. The factory with two water towers to the right of the headline gives an idea of the size of this area. Made from five Wm. K. Walthers kits, it's three feet wide.





Note: Access hatches not shown

Three Rivers City



2. Richly textured vignettes like this one abound on Rod Stewart's layout. From the lonely figure toiling in the foreground to the overflowing trash barrels and rickety fire escapes, all the elements work together to create a realistic scene.

Rod Stewart's 23 x 124-foot HO scale Grand Street & Three Rivers layout has changed considerably since *Model Railroader* first visited in December 2007. The layout is rapidly nearing completion and even the city scene highlighted in the initial article has changed – it's bigger and some of its structures have been replaced.

"They weren't up to scratch," Stewart said, noting that his layout has always seen a fairly steady series of renovations as his modeling skills have developed.

Beyond the city limits, the previously unfinished rural scenes on the layout are

also taking shape, and other areas have received new details.

Time for railroading

While there's been a lot of progress in the past three years, it hasn't come easily.

Staging tracks

39½"

Grand Street & Three Rivers

H0 scale (1:87.1)

Room size: 23'-0" x 124'-4"

Scale of plan: 1/8" = 1'-0", 24" grid

Numbered arrows indicate photo locations

Illustration by Rick Johnson

Even on days when he is able to squeeze in some model building, Stewart is generally limited to only three to four hours of work a day – and usually only by getting up early or staying up late.

"It's hard to find time in my business. I get a couple of hours work in, and then the phone rings," he said. "Having a 4-year-old takes a lot of my time, too."

Since he's determined to keep progress on his railroad moving forward, he decided to seek the help of Mike Cartabiano, an expert scenery builder.

"I came to the realization that the layout was never going to get done otherwise," he said.

It was a straightforward decision, given his determination to have his railroad finished to a uniformly high standard.

"I've given scenery a go. I'm not great at it," he says with a shrug. "Mainly I work on the buildings."

Perhaps, he added with a smile, he can talk Mike into giving him lessons.

The layout has always been a collaborative effort between Stewart and a handful of friends he jokingly calls "the Beverly Hills Railroad Club."

Involving other model railroaders brings fresh ways of doing things and keeps the layout moving forward in spite of the considerable demands of Stewart's performing career.

Stewart estimates about 80 percent of the railroad is his doing, including the layout's signature scene – a stunning Manhattan-like cityscape of structures highlighted by a busy downtown filled with meticulously detailed five-foot-high kitbashed skyscrapers.

The structures on the layout are Stewart's pride and joy – and many of them

Start with a clean slate



Much of Rod Stewart's model building takes place in hotel rooms. Here he works on a pair of kits during a stop on his 2010 tour of Europe and the Middle East. Photo by Penny Lancaster

Years of working on kits in hotel rooms and bringing his kits with him when he travels between his homes in the United States and Europe has made Rod Stewart an expert in model railroad organization. Even those of us who put less mileage on our models can learn from his methods.

At the end of each session he invariably takes time to clean off his workbench, putting away tools, paints, and loose parts.

When he returns to the workbench, his first step is to place a large sheet of white cardstock on the table to serve as a perfectly clean and defined work area. Draping an old shirt across his legs to catch falling parts is the last thing he does before he starts work.

"It's amazing how much time is saved by not always having to stop and look for things that have landed on the floor," he said.

Finally, he said, it's important to know when to put down the tools and do something else.

"When I find myself focusing so intently on a model that it ceases to be fun, it's time to walk away, have a cup of tea, and come back to it later."

Relaxation can go too far. "I've learned the hard way that I can't build after a couple of glasses of wine – the results are never good!" – C.S.



3. Five-foot-high kitbashed skyscrapers create this urban canyon scene. In building Three Rivers City, Stewart drew inspiration from the modeling of Earl Smallshaw and George Sellios and from his memories of New York and Chicago.

were built a long way from sunny California while Stewart was on tour.

Item 1: A workbench

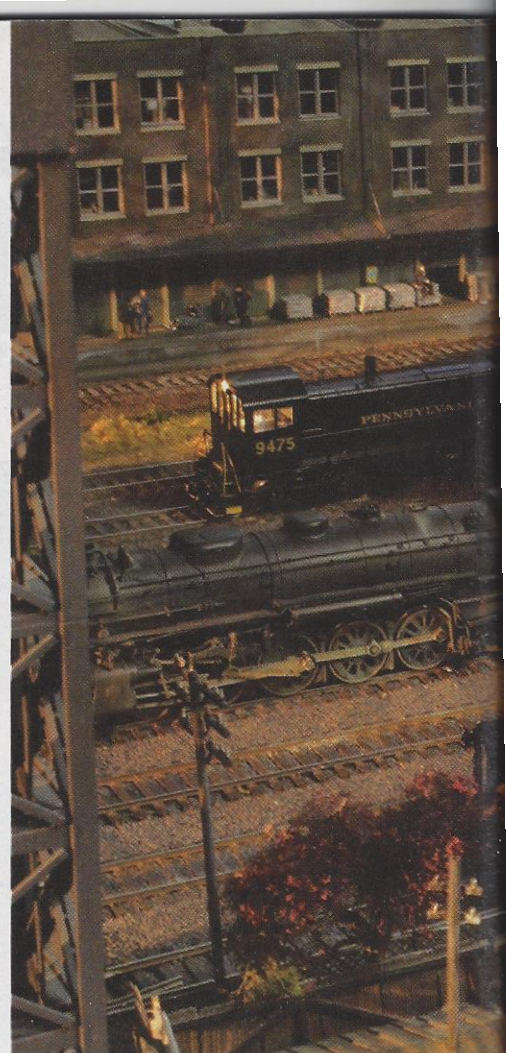
Layout chores like building roadways or wiring turnouts can only be done in Los Angeles, but structures can be built anywhere. Hotel rooms, for example.

Traveling performers routinely send form letters to hotels and concert venues specifying, often in very precise detail,

how they prefer to have things set up for them on each stop of the tour.

The first requirement in Stewart's standard hotel room agreement is "a large table."

Even in the unconventional world of touring rock acts, this is an out-of-the-ordinary request, but Stewart says that hotels tend to be remarkably understanding when it comes to making sure his room includes a suitable place where



he can relax and work on his hobby. Add a couple of high-intensity work lamps and he's all set to commence work as soon as he can unpack his tour cases of kits, tools, and adhesives.

As he works, he usually keeps a fan running. Adhesive fumes irritate his lungs, and that's no minor concern on days that end with Stewart entertaining a stadium filled with fans.

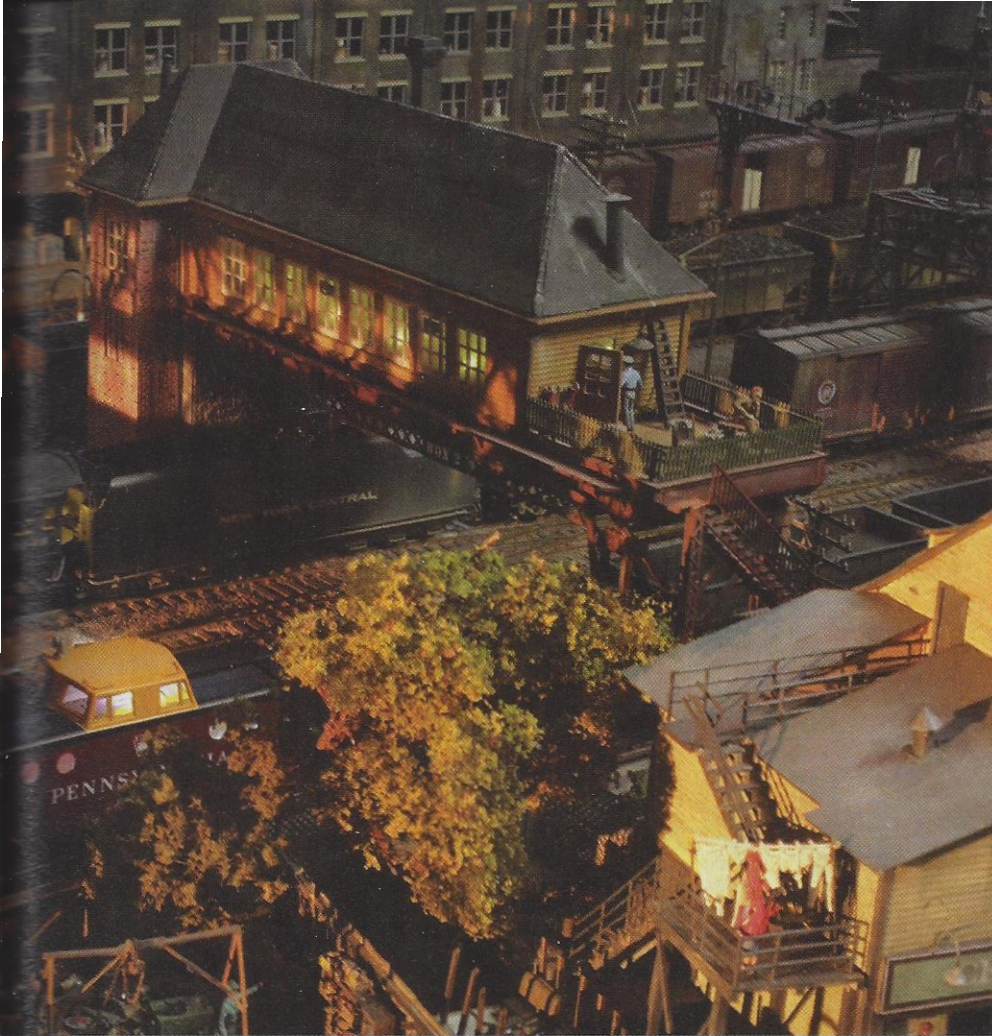
Incidentally, those tour boxes also include a copy of his first *Model Railroader* layout feature. Stewart said the magazine helps puzzled Customs officials make sense of the contents of the cases.

A feel for light and color

Once he has assembled a structure, Stewart applies a coat of Tamiya plastic primer, which is a favorite of military kit builders. When this base coat has dried, he starts bringing the building to life by applying various washes of India ink and alcohol and dustings of chalk. He continues until it looks right.

"Painting is all about having a feel for light and shadow," he explains.

Stewart also pencils the start and end dates inside each kit he builds, along with a comment on the current performance of his beloved Celtic Football



4. This tower controls a set of crossovers governing movement into and out of Grand Street Station. Rod Stewart began construction of his layout in 1994 with the placement of this structure and its associated track.

Club of Glasgow, Scotland. (Stewart is a lifelong fan of the Scottish Premier League team, and is an active soccer player at age 65).

All the buildings are removable to simplify the task of dusting the layout, a chore that generally takes two days, and as he takes each structure off for a thorough cleaning he always finds it interesting to reread the notes.

The city he models is inspired by the skylines of Manhattan and Chicago in the postwar years. He feels the key to successfully modeling a cityscape lies in finding the right building for the scene.

"You have to have an eye for proportion," he says, "a sense of what fits naturally, right down to the placement of the advertising signs."

His feel for how a city should look was developed over many years of staying in downtown hotels, looking at skylines, and watching how light changes from morning to evening.

Very few people, he said, take the time to closely observe the world around them, yet he feels it's an essential skill for any modeler.

For example, he says, consider the range of tones found in a small section of concrete or a piece of stone. Finding just the right color for something as simple as a sidewalk can be very challenging.

More than anything, he says it's this feeling for color and hue, highlights and shadows, that he works very hard to capture in his layout.

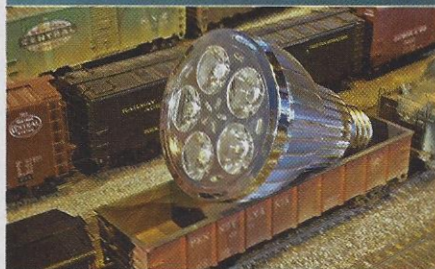
Building Three Rivers City

Work started on the present layout in 1994, with the installation of the first buildings of what would eventually grow into Grand Street & Three Rivers City.

It's his first serious attempt at building a model railroad, although he has been building structure kits for 30 years, gradually moving from individual buildings to assembling complete street scenes. Construction of his Beverly Hills home in 1993 provided space for a layout and workshop.

Over the years Stewart hadn't kept his hobby a secret, but hadn't spoken much about it either. The depth of his interest and the evident skill that has gone into the construction of his HO layout only

Casting new light



Energy-saving light-emitting diode bulbs and theatrical gels add a new element to the layout.

One of the recent changes to the railroad has nothing to do with structures or scenery. The original bland room lighting has been replaced by high-tech fixtures that bathe the layout in a golden light suggestive of late afternoon.

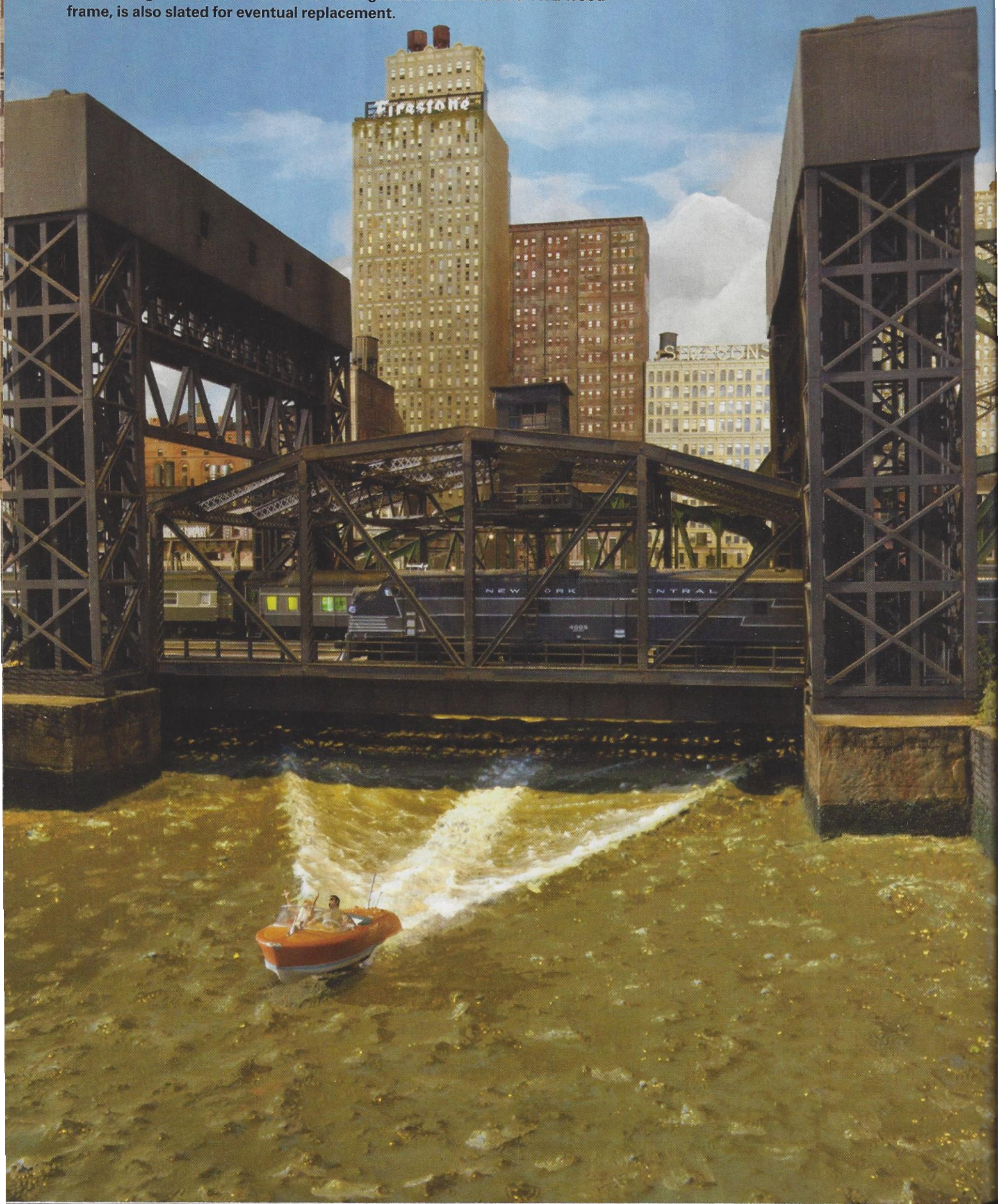
Los Angeles estate manager Warren Cady says the project started as a way of saving energy by installing LED bulbs.

"Being the house manager, I'm always thinking green and always trying to save my boss money," Cady said. "I sampled a couple of the LED lights, saw the difference, and was instantly sold."

"After we installed the new lights on a section of the layout, we discovered that they created an incredibly bright light – too bright for the layout," Cady said. "So I called in photographer Steve Crise, who provided us with colored theatrical gels. Now the light they give off is extraordinary."

Stewart is happy with the new lighting, and Cady appreciates the low energy consumption and long life of the LEDs, saying, "Although you have to pay out a little more at the start, you must remember that what you're doing is an investment." – C.S.

5. Stewart frequently revisits completed scenes. For example, he's not satisfied with the appearance of the water in this area and plans changes. The skyscraper in the background, made from 14 to 16 Magnuson resin kits on a 1 x 2 wood frame, is also slated for eventual replacement.





became widely known after the railroad appeared in the December 2007 issue of *Model Railroader*.

That story triggered a great deal of attention, especially in the British press, but Stewart was much more interested in how his fans would react to his hobby. As it turns out, his fans have been very supportive of his interest in model railroading. Some of the items tossed on stage in recent concerts have included railroad caps and even HO scale railcars lettered with Stewart's name.

During one memorable concert in Germany a fan even threw a solid metal TT-scale locomotive paperweight.

"It hit the stage with this tremendous crash," Stewart chuckled.

Fans have also contributed structure kits, including some kits that were long-out-of-production and difficult to find. Some of these kits are likely to find a home in Three Rivers City.

In other instances the items have been less useful. "Mostly that's because the buildings are just the wrong era," he said, "but you can see that their hearts are in the right place."

Wherever he goes, Stewart said he tries to spread the message, "Model railroading is a great hobby."

6. Stewart pays close attention to rooftop details. This ice house, a kitbashed Magnuson (now S&S Models) Victoria Falls Hotel, features a large water tank and extensive piping, although he wasn't able to locate a prototype photo. "It's what I imagine an ice house would look like," he said, adding that creative use of imagination is one of the most enjoyable parts of the hobby.

Although it's too early to say, there might be another Stewart getting into model railroading. At age four, Stewart's son Alastair has begun to outgrow Thomas the Tank Engine, and while he enjoys pushing boxcars around on his dad's railroad, he is especially interested in creating buildings. Stewart showed Alastair how skyscrapers are typically built – wider at the base and stepping back section by section as they increase in height. Then he cut wood blocks of varying sizes, sanded and painted them, and set Alastair to work.

From time-to-time, Alastair will report his progress. "I built another one Dad," he will say, adding, "It's better than yours." **MR**

Rod Stewart thanks the following for their assistance in finding kits and helping with the layout: Nick Barone, Mike Cartabiano, Sam Feldman, Dick Allmon, Douglas and Anna from FOS Scale Limited, Jeff from Custom Railroad Models, and Randy from Downtown Deco.

▶▶ Meet Rod Stewart

Rod Stewart, CBE (Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire) is a Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame inductee and has sold in excess of 200 million records. He has had top 40 hits in every decade from the 1970s to the present.

His latest album, *Fly Me To The Moon, The Great American Songbook Volume V*, was released in October 2010. He is married to fashion model and photographer Penny Lancaster. The couple are expecting their second child, Stewart's seventh. Photo by Penny Lancaster

