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EXCLUSIVE!

Learn how rock 'n' roller **ROD STEWART** builds this city

The curtain rises on his towering
H0 scale railroad

**Model realistic
signals and
signs**

Tall buildings dominate the skyline on Rod Stewart's Three Rivers City layout. Page 74

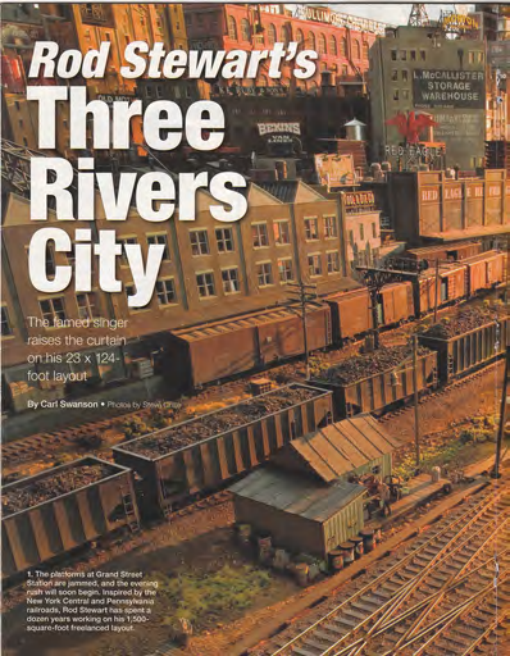
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Rod Stewart's Three Rivers City

The famed singer
raises the curtain
on his 23 x 124-
foot layout

By Carl Swanson • Photos by Steven Gray

1. The platforms at Grand Street Station are jammed, and the evening rush will soon begin. Inspired by the New York Central and Pennsylvania railroads, Rod Stewart has spent a dozen years working on his 1,500-square-foot freelanced layout.

For the past 12 years, singer and Rock & Roll Hall of Fame inductee Rod Stewart has been quietly and steadily working on a 23 x 124-foot HO layout that occupies the third floor of his Beverly Hills home. Recently, Rod has completed his Manhattan-like downtown area, which features block after block of highly detailed kitbashed and scratchbuilt skyscrapers.

The downtown section of Rod's free-lanced Grand Street & Three Rivers RR includes about 100 structures, occupies 25 percent of the visible layout space, and is the first scenicked part of a layout inspired by the 1940s New York Central and Pennsylvania railroads.

Remarkably, many of the towering structures were made in hotel rooms while Rod was on the road touring.

A jet-powered time machine

A popular recording artist, Rod had to be creative in finding time to pursue his hobby. For example, his 2006 album *Still The Same . . . Great Rock Classics of Our Time* debuted at no. 1 on the charts, and Rod performed 63 shows in five months for the album's North American tour. As an added complication, he was determined to spend as much time as possible with his wife and toddler son while the tour was in full swing.

It's a schedule that didn't seem to leave much room for modeling, but thanks to careful planning – and a very fast private jet – Rod was able to balance work, family, and hobby time.

For the duration of the tour, Rod relocated his wife, young son, and seven enormous cases of model kits and tools to a suite of hotel rooms in Chicago.

His kits have accompanied him for years, and Rod says hotels have become

used to his ways. Before his arrival, the hotel's staff removed most the furnishings in one of the rooms of his suite and brought in large tables to accommodate the makeshift workshop.

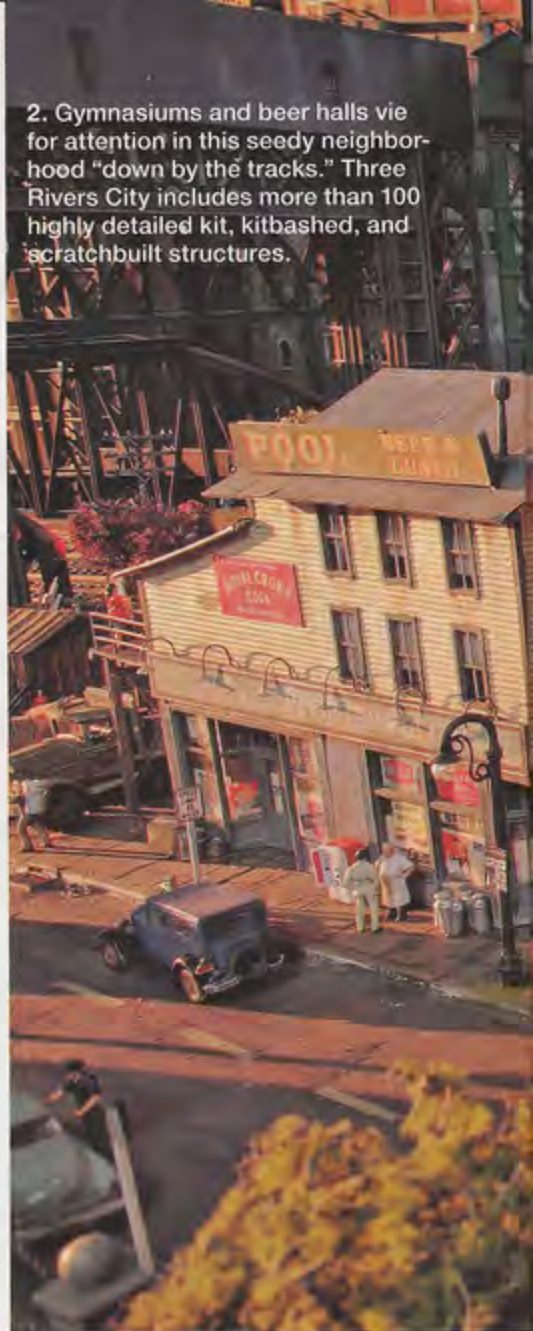
Chicago's central location made it a convenient departure point for flying to each show. Although Rod performed in a different city nearly every night, the 530 mph cruising speed of his Gulfstream business jet made short work of his daily commute.

After the performance, a limo would rush him back to the airport where his plane would be waiting. After a quick flight back to Chicago, and a few hours of sleep, Rod would be up bright and early and busy at his workbench. He

The layout at a glance

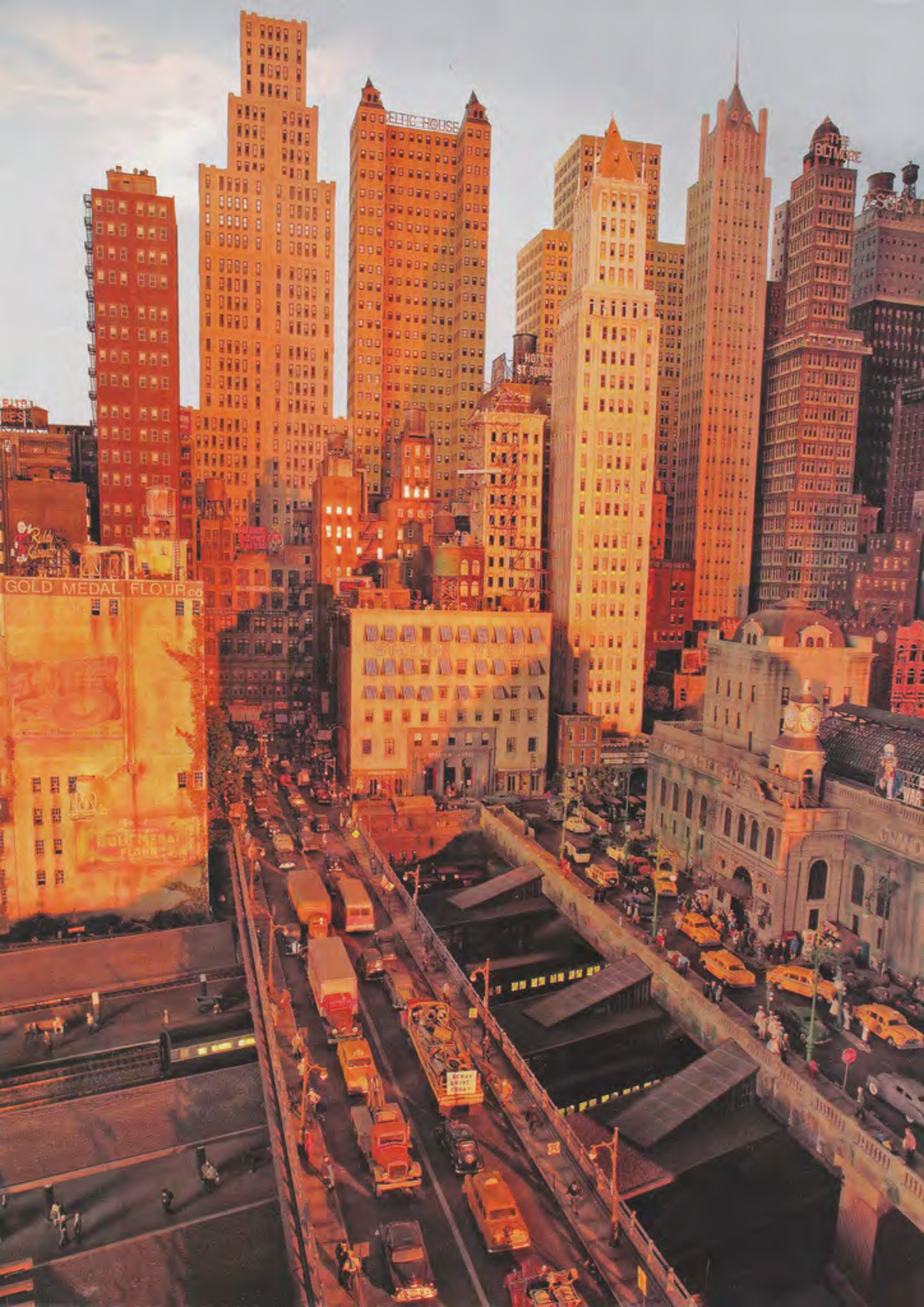
Name: Grand Street & Three Rivers RR
Scale: HO (1:87.1)
Size: 23'-0" x 124'-4"
Prototype: New York Central and Pennsylvania railroads
Locale: Pennsylvania
Era: mid-1940s
Style: walk-in
Mainline run: 900 feet
Minimum radius: 40"
Minimum turnouts: no. 6
Maximum grade: 3.5 percent
Benchwork: box grid
Height: 39½"
Roadbed: Homasote
Track: code 70 flextrack
Scenery: plywood table (city scene)
Backdrop: painted drywall
Control: Digitrax Digital Command Control

2. Gymnasiums and beer halls vie for attention in this seedy neighborhood "down by the tracks." Three Rivers City includes more than 100 highly detailed kit, kitbashed, and scratchbuilt structures.



Note: Access hatches not shown

Three Rivers City





could usually manage a few hours of steady model building before the sounds of his wife and child moving around the other rooms of the suite signaled it was time to put away the tools and spend the rest of the day with his family.

A life-long interest

Rod was born in 1945 in Highgate, North London, as Nazi bombs rained down on his neighborhood. Although he never had a train set growing up, he had the next best thing – British Rail operated not far from the shop his parents operated.

His early interest in trains was set aside while Rod pursued a career, first in professional soccer, then, briefly, as a gravedigger, and finally and famously as a musician.

After an attempt at a British-themed layout failed to get off the ground, Rod renewed his hobby focus in 1993, when his home in Beverly Hills was under construction. At this point, in an odd coincidence, Rod discovered that his friend Malcolm Cullimore, a long-time member of his road crew, was also an

3. When office workers in the towering skyscrapers head homeward, traffic gets hectic around Grand Street Station. The tallest building in Rod's downtown scene stands 5'-4". Many are built on medium-density fiber-board (MDF) supporting cores.

avid model railroader. For more than 25 years, the two men had been unaware of their mutual hobby interest.

Rod and Malcolm devised a sprawling track plan, highlighted by a visible staging yard linked to a hidden staging yard by a winding, folding, four-track main. Trains can operate continuously or point-to-point. Moving at a scale 25 mph, it takes a half-hour for a train to complete one circle of the layout.

Rod hired an acquaintance to build the extra-sturdy benchwork of 2 x 6s, topped with 1" particle board and 1/2"

4. Horns echo through the canyons of downtown and pedestrians scurry between cars and trucks. The size of Rod's buildings are impressive, but it's his painting and weathering skills that make this scene come to life.

Homasote, then turned his attention to building the many structures he would need for Three Rivers City.

Towering inspiration

In planning his urban area, Rod said he was inspired by the superbly detailed modeling of Earl Smallshaw

Proud to be a model railroader

Rod Stewart has never made a secret of his interest in model railroading. In fact, he says that reporters often raise the subject of his hobby in interviews and usually, Rod says, in a tone that suggests they're amused by the idea of a popular entertainer playing with little trains.

Rod says he tries to explain that the hobby is not like that at all. Instead, he tells them, it's an activity that encompasses a range of interests, develops a variety of skills, and engages the intellect on many levels. But the appeal of the hobby and the skills involved are difficult concepts to explain to a person who has likely never seen a serious model railroad.

Perhaps, Rod thinks, it would be easier to simply show interviewers some photographs of his work.

"I pity a man who doesn't have a hobby like this one – it's just the most supreme relaxation," Rod said. "Every person should have one hobby that really captures his interest."

"I'm proud to be a railway modeler. It means more to me to be on the cover of *Model Railroader* than to be on the cover of a music magazine." – C.S.



5. Small businesses thrive on the quiet side streets far from the bustle of downtown. Rod says the work of George Sellios and Earl Smallshaw inspired his urban modeling.

and George Sellios, and by his own memories of New York and Chicago, cities he has visited frequently. The downtown skylines of those cities, he said, have always struck him as profoundly beautiful.

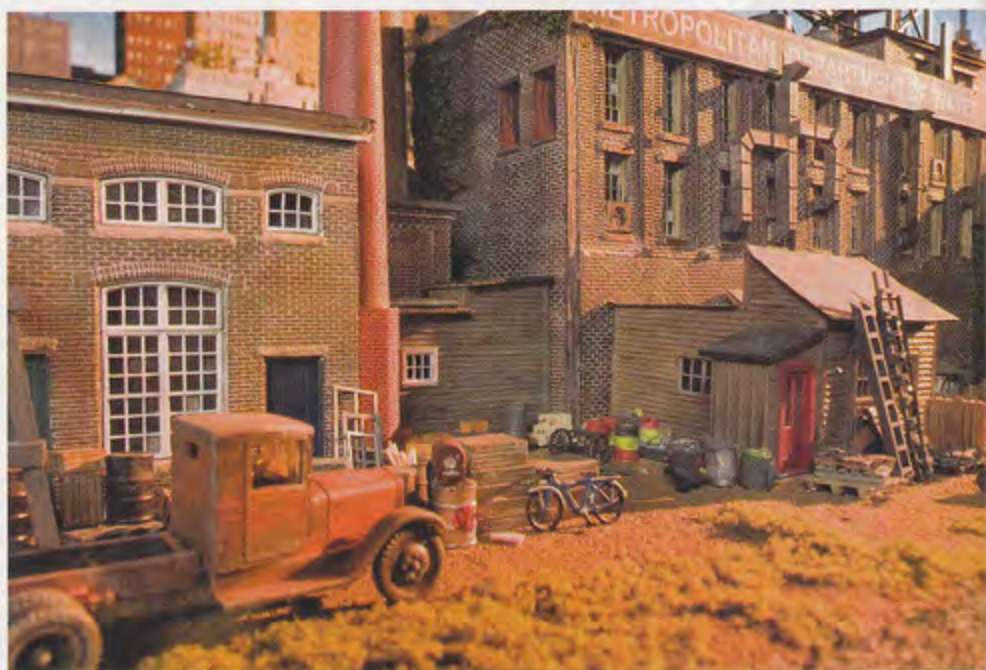
"Late at night," Rod said, "I used to leave my hotel and just walk around looking up at all the buildings."

Envisioning model skyscrapers was one thing, building them was quite another. It took years of trial and error and dozens of failed structures before Rod was satisfied with his results.

Rod kitbashed many of the massive skyscraper models from Bachmann's Spectrum City Scenes skyscraper kits. Rod estimates he uses five or six of the now-discontinued Bachmann kits to make one building.

Several of his buildings are more than five feet tall, and adequately supporting those soaring styrene walls was a critical consideration. Rod built the exteriors on a beefy core of medium-density fiberboard (MDF) – an engineered wood product with a perfectly even and smooth surface.

This has worked well, but Rod notes that five-foot-tall blocks of MDF are very heavy. Rod says it's entertaining to watch people attempt to pick up one of



his buildings only to be astounded by their considerable weight.

Solving a sticky situation

Two of the frustrations of structure modeling are seams that pop open or window sashes that fall off after a building is finished. To avoid these problems, Rod uses Barge All-Purpose Cement, a powerful contact adhesive.

He usually has three structures in progress at any given time. While the

6. The industrial district of Three Rivers City keeps the wheels of commerce humming. Rod uses a variety of building types and materials to create the impression of a city that's developed over time.

adhesive is setting on one model, he moves on to the next. While he's found Barge Cement easy to work with and very permanent, he notes that it is solvent-based and must be used in a well-ventilated area. That's a big prob-



lem: when your workshop is a hotel room. To keep the fumes under control, Rod sets up fans and keeps the windows wide open – even in the dead of winter.

Hunched shivering over a table of parts as icy winds whip through the room isn't the best of working conditions, but Rod said it's necessary.

"I have my little boy nearby," Rod said. "I have to be careful having paints and adhesives around."

A little friendly help

Nearly all of the modeling on the layout is Rod's work, but he's had a little help building some of the less-visible aspects of his railroad. For example, friends assisted with the track planning, built the benchwork, painted the sky backdrop, and provided many of the cars and trucks on the city streets.

Nick Barone and Bob Santelli from Allied Model Trains, a Los Angeles hobby shop, often swing by after store hours and help with wiring and other layout chores. The two recently completely ripped out the layout's original wiring and control system and replaced it with a Digitrax DCC system.

Nick and Bob say that working on Rod's layout has its odd moments.

While the owner was spending the first half of 2007 on a lengthy tour of North America and Europe, Nick and Bob said the modeled area of the layout would be unchanged for weeks on end as they worked steadily on the wiring. Then, literally overnight, an entire street of detailed structures would appear – evidence that Rod had taken advantage of a short break in his schedule to fly home and install his latest batch of completed buildings.

One day, a watch belonging to Rod's wife, Penny Lancaster, disappeared. A

few days later, a soaring art deco skyscraper appeared on the layout, with a very familiar clock face incorporated in its facade.

Nick and Bob say it's a railroad that rewards close inspection. Many of Rod's buildings have interior details, like crates stacked inside multi-story warehouses and desks inside immense office buildings.

"We've been coming up here for 18 months," said Nick, "and we're still seeing things we hadn't noticed before."

7. Passengers have just enough time to grab a newspaper or magazine to pass away their time on the train. Rod feels that attention to small details is as important as soaring buildings.

New challenges await

With the downtown area and Grand Street station nearing completion, Rod is devoting more time to the edges of the city, which includes a large harbor area that represents a major source of business for his railroad.

Rod figured that a highly detailed scale model of a World War II merchant ship would be a terrific addition to his harbor. But ship modeling requires its own skills, so Rod asked an expert, Fred Hutchins, to tackle the job.

Rod also wanted to include a large, detailed chemical plant for the city's industrial area. While researching the idea, he encountered a man who was willing to build a 5 x 6-foot model of a 1940s ethylene plant, precisely depicting all of the plant's processes.

It was an offer Rod couldn't refuse, but he has mixed feelings about other people building key scenes for him.

"I don't want too much of that on my layout," Rod said, "it would make the railroad too impersonal."



Meet Rod Stewart

Rod Stewart, CBE (Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire) has been internationally famous since the late 1960s, thanks to hits like "Reason to Believe" and "Maggie May." In his four-decade career, he has sold more than 250 million albums, and at 62 he continues to record albums and sell out arenas and stadiums. His latest North American tour was the top-grossing entertainment act of the first half of 2007. Rod has six children, who range in age from 2 to 28, and is married to fashion model Penny Lancaster.

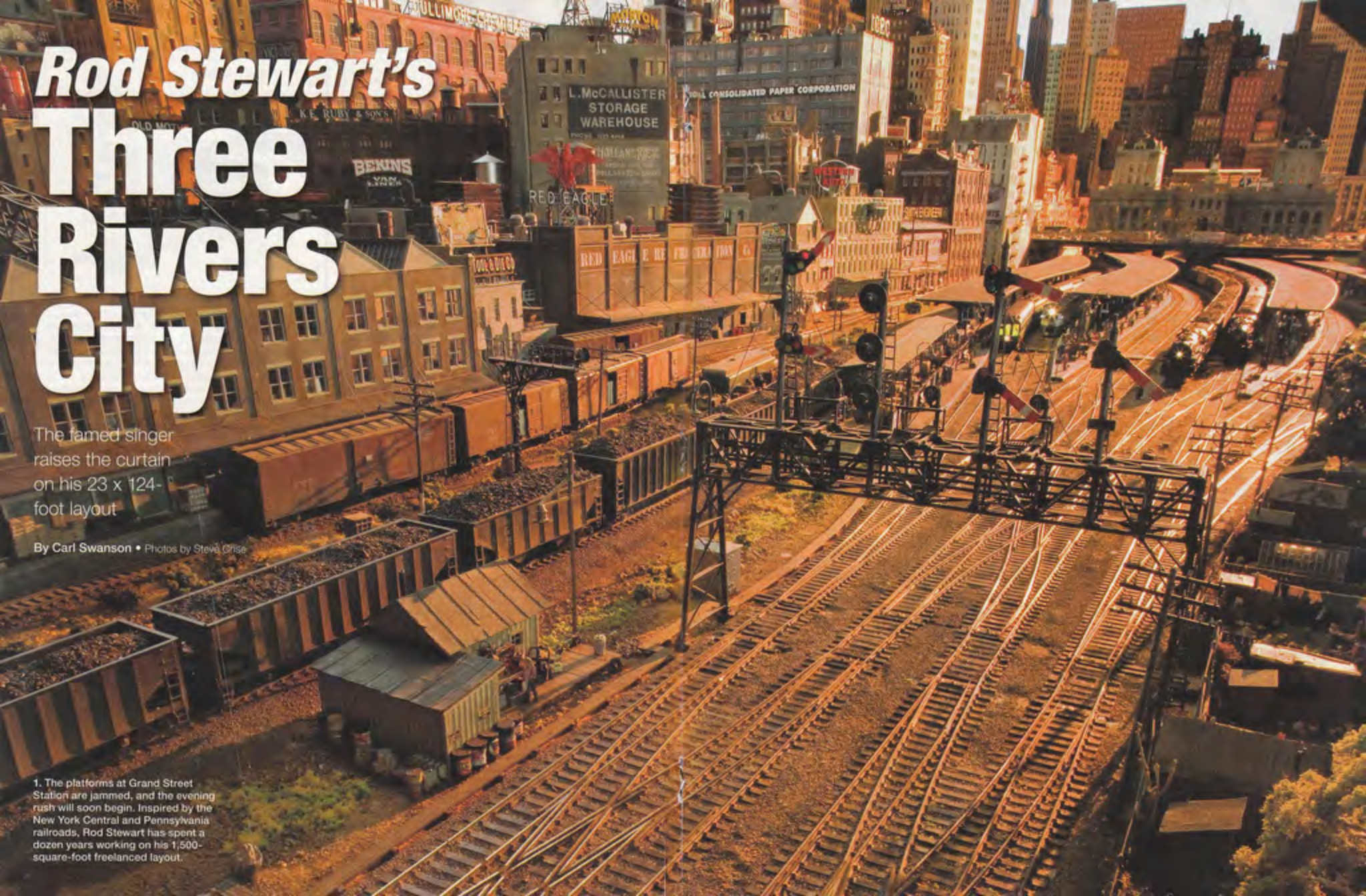
Self-made modeler

Rod's a self-taught modeler, learning the basic concepts during his decades of reading model magazines, then honing his knobishing and scratchbuilding skills through a dozen years of trial and error. Remarkably, this layout is his first attempt at a serious model railroad.

He will be leaving the city behind soon, and starting work on the rolling hills of Pennsylvania. Rod has never attempted natural scenery before, and he expects that it will take him a few tries to get exactly the right look.

"It will require learning new skills, but that's a big part of the appeal of the hobby," Rod said, sounding like a modeler who can't wait to get started. **MR**

Rod thanks the following for their help in tracking down kits and helping with other aspects of his layout: JoAnn from Win, K. Walthers, Douglas and Anna from FOS Scale Limited, Jeff from Custom Model Railroads, Andy from Downtown Deco, and Alan from New York City's Red Caboose Hobbies.



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