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# Model Railroader®

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# COAL AND STEEL FOR Rod Stewart's





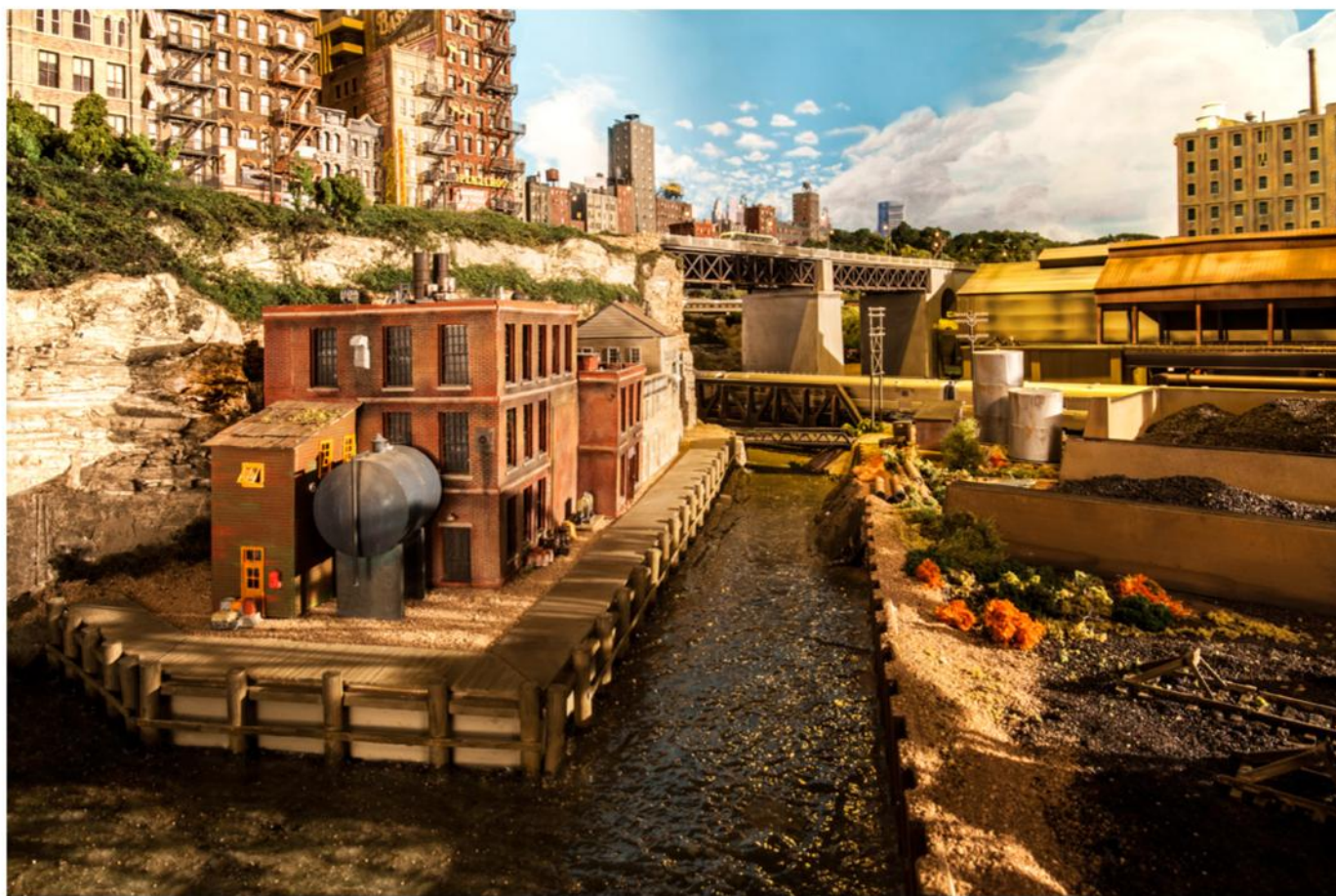
# masterpiece



1 This steel mill completes Rod Stewart's 1,500-square-foot Grand Street & Three Rivers RR, an HO scale model railroad 23 years in the making. The industrial scene is a showcase of scratchbuilt and kitbashed structures.

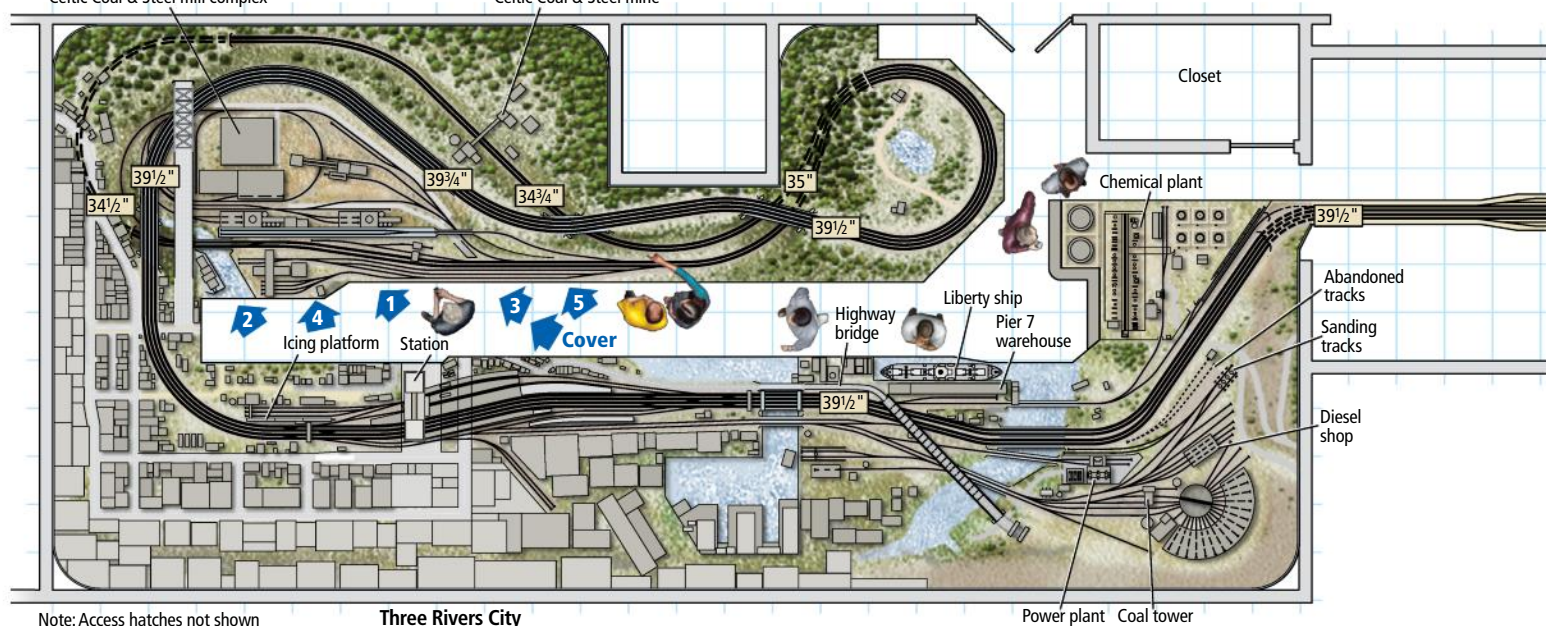


**By Carl Swanson • Photos by Steve Crise**



Celtic Coal & Steel mill complex

Celtic Coal & Steel mine



Note: Access hatches not shown

### Three Rivers City

Power plant    Coal tower



In the past two decades, Rod Stewart has recorded more than 50 songs, toured the world, been inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame (twice), been knighted by Queen Elizabeth II for his services to music and charity – and completed one remarkable model railroad.

The 23 x 124-foot HO scale Grand Street & Three Rivers RR fills a large room on the top floor of his Beverly Hills home. It's inspired by the landscape of Pennsylvania and the postwar industrial cities of the Midwest and East Coast.

"With all the time I've spent – in Chicago, New York, in Philadelphia – in hotel rooms looking out the windows and seeing all the skyscrapers, it was a bit more interesting than the English countryside," Rod said, regarding his railroad's setting.

The model railroad features a city scene made from hundreds of Rod's highly detailed kitbashed and scratch-built structures, including downtown skyscrapers that stand 5 actual feet tall.

A recently added mountaintop mine and an extensive steel mill complex mark the end of major work on the layout. The mill complex includes Hulett unloaders in the foreground surrounded by the raw materials of steel – stockpiles of coke, iron ore, and limestone. A scratchbuilt open-hearth furnace, a scratchbuilt rolling mill, and a kitbashed power plant flank two Wm. K. Walther's no. 933-2973 blast furnaces.

Overlooking this busy scene is the massive Celtic Steel building, which Rod made by combining the contents of "eight or nine" HO structure kits. Celtic Steel, one of the most distinctive build-

ings on the layout, is based on a prototype stamped steel products factory that once stood in Bethlehem, Pa.

Like many of the buildings on the railroad, Rod built this kitbashed structure a long way from Los Angeles.

Rod divides his time between England and California and tours frequently. Many of the hundreds of structures on his layout were built on the road. For many years, a set of large shipping cases filled with carefully organized structure kits, tools, paints, and adhesives accompanied Rod on tour. He would set aside a few hours each afternoon to work on models in his hotel room before heading to the show venue.

The hobby provided rare moments of peace and quiet concentration in his hectic and demanding schedule.

"For three or four hours a day I'm in heaven, absolute heaven," he told *Model Railroader* in a February 2014 interview.

### The power of partnership

Modeler Mike Cartabiano helps with modeling tasks in California, which means progress continues to be made even when Rod is out of town. An expert in model railroad electronics – he owns Durango DCC ([www.durangodcc.com](http://www.durangodcc.com)) – Mike installed 10 Digital Command Control detection districts on Rod's layout and expects the railroad will soon handle 20 moving trains at once, controlled by a laptop computer and specialized software. Mike also built some of the steel mill buildings.

The two have worked closely on the railroad for six years. Rod said, "Mike

has been absolutely wonderful – keeping the locomotives clean and running, and the track clean – and he's an excellent modeler."

Scouring the internet to locate items for the layout is another of Mike's tasks. In one instance he purchased hundreds of identical HO windows and shipped them to Rod in England. He also purchased the fleet of HO steel mill cars needed for the steel complex.

The way Mike sees it, his role is providing a solid foundation – smooth running track, reliable electronics, and basic scenery – to showcase Rod's buildings, which he feels are the real stars of the layout.

### 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 RR  
**Locale:** Pennsylvania  
**Era:** mid-1940s  
**Style:** walk-in  
**Mainline run:** 900 feet  
**Minimum radius:** 40"  
**Minimum turnout:** no. 6  
**Maximum grade:** 3.5 percent  
**Benchwork:** box grid  
**Height:** 39½"  
**Roadbed:** Homasote  
**Track:** code 70 flextrack  
**Scenery:** plywood table  
**Backdrop:** painted drywall  
**Control:** Digitrax Digital Command Control

## Grand Street & Three Rivers RR

HO 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 and Jay Smith

Staging tracks

Find more plans online in the  
[ModelRailroader.com](http://ModelRailroader.com) Track Plan Database.





"I'm the land developer and he's the property tycoon," Mike said. "It's a good partnership."

Glancing around at Rod's buildings, Mike adds, "I don't think of these as model railroad structures. These are artworks in three dimensions."

Rod signed and dated many of the structures. Because of his enthusiasm for the Celtic Football Club (a professional soccer team in Glasgow, Scotland), he often adds a match result or comment on the team's season to his signature.

### Long-distance builders

To complete the mine, Mike and Rod e-mailed measurements and photos of

coal mines from the 1940s and '50s back and forth as Rod built the structures in England and Mike worked on the land contours in California. So smooth was their collaboration that when the buildings finally arrived in California, they fit the compact footprints of the scenes exactly. Only slight adjustments were needed in the mine area.

The two followed a similar process in planning and building the Celtic Steel complex. A number of kits from the Walther's Cornerstone Ashland Iron & Steel series are represented on the layout. Some were built straight from the box and detailed and weathered. Other kits were combined and rearranged to better fit Rod's vision for the mill, guided by

**3** The blast furnaces and massive brick Celtic Coal & Steel building tower over the passing passenger trains on the layout's four-track main. The structures were inspired by Rod's visit to the former Bethlehem Steel Works in Bethlehem, Pa.

Mike's research and the historic reference photos he located.

For Rod, the process really came alive during a visit to the former Bethlehem Steel complex in Bethlehem, Pa.

With corporate roots stretching back to 1857, Bethlehem Steel grew to become the nation's second largest steel producer. A subsidiary, Bethlehem Shipbuilding, was the country's largest shipbuilder. The company was also heavily involved





in mining and was a world leader in rail-car production.

Steel production in its namesake city ended in 1995. Part of the 662-acre mill site was cleared for a \$600 million casino project. Ironically, a worldwide shortage of structural steel slowed the 2007 casino development for a time.

Sections of the former mill complex, including the plant's five gigantic blast furnaces, still stand near the casino. Tours of the remaining parts of the old mill are available, often conducted by former steel workers.

"We did a show in the casino, and in the afternoon I wandered around. My God, [steel mills] are so much bigger than you think," Rod said.



4 The new section of Rod's railroad focuses on heavy industry. The theme carries through from the scrap piles in the foreground, through the limestone and iron ore stockpiles in the middle, to the switcher working the high line in the background.

## A life in railroads

**Some of Rod's earliest memories** involve trains. The windows of his childhood home in the Highgate district of London overlooked a railroad yard and steam-powered passenger trains operating out of Euston Station.

His father bought him an electric train set when Rod was 7. He built his first model railroad, a simple 4 x 6-foot train table, as a teenager. A much more ambitious layout followed, a 2-foot-wide around-the-walls layout in his bedroom with a hinged lift section at the door.

The room was small, which meant the bed had to be tucked under the benchwork. This arrangement led to a mishap that has become a part of rock 'n' roll history. Rolling Stones guitarist Ronnie Wood, a childhood friend of Rod's, stayed over one night. On waking the next morning he sat up very quickly and cracked his head on the underside of the benchwork.

Not long afterward, Rod's music career took off. In 1971, his song "Maggie May" became his first major hit and enabled him to purchase his first large house. By taking decisive action Rod soon made space for an ambitious layout.

"I knocked holes through three bedrooms for the trains to go through and come back," Rod recalled.

Four years later, however, he left it behind and moved to the United States. From 1975 to 1993, Rod was without a railroad, but not without a hobby. He filled the time building structure kits.

When he moved into his present home in Los Angeles, Rod and Malcolm Cullimore, his personal assistant at the time, started planning the Grand Street & Three Rivers RR. — *Carl Swanson*

The singer was especially impressed by Bethlehem's role in the "Arsenal of Democracy." In both World Wars, the company was part of the industrial effort that helped achieve Allied victory.

From inspiration to historic photographs to steel mill kits and rolling stock, Rod had everything needed for

the final major scene on his Three Rivers City. There was one remaining challenge to overcome — and it was a tough one.

### Stuck and unstuck

More than 20 years ago Rod and a friend, Malcolm Cullimore, planned the





## Meet Rod Stewart

**Sir Roderick David Stewart** is a Grammy Award-winning singer and one of the best-selling recording artists of all time. He's also a *New York Times* bestselling author for his autobiography *Rod*. He tours extensively and is a headliner at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas. In 2017, his song "Maggie May" will enter the Grammy Hall of Fame. His Grand Street & Three Rivers RR has been the subject of three previous *Model Railroader* cover stories. Rod has eight children and is married to model and photographer Penny Lancaster.

footprint of the layout and established its track plan. Benchwork followed quickly, and Rod soon had the four-track main line winding around the room. Then Rod really set to work, adding structure after structure and street after street.

Downtown, with its towering skyscrapers, was first to take shape. A major passenger terminal followed, then a river port. After years of effort, a steam service complex and roundhouse completed one side of the layout. Turning the corner and working his way methodically back down the room, Rod added a rural countryside and laid out the mine scene.

Along the way, Rod decided a steel mill would be the finishing touch on his layout. With everything else completed, or nearly so, Rod faced a dilemma.

The downtown scene is on an elevated platform alongside – and a few inches above – the corner of the room reserved for the future steel mill. American cities don't typically have heavy industry across the street from its tallest skyscrapers. Although Rod's layout is freelanced, he's determined that it look like a place that could really have existed.

Separating downtown from steel town required a logical transition, and it could occupy no more than a few inches of layout real estate. Even as he was working his way around the room, Rod knew he

needed to solve that problem before anything could happen with the steel mill.

Even so, he wasn't overly concerned. Building a layout is a creative process, he feels. Drawing a comparison that comes naturally to him, he says model railroading is very much like writing a song.

As the author of classics like "You're in My Heart," Rod said songwriting and modeling are things that can't be rushed.

"It's all up to the imagination. It's like writing songs. One minute you've got an idea and then you think, 'No, that's not going to work, wait until tomorrow' and then it all came together."

In time, the key to finishing Three Rivers City appeared just as he knew it would, in a flash of inspiration.

Rod realized he could extend an existing downtown avenue in the foreground of the elevated city center across the future steel mill on a bridge running parallel to the back wall of the room.

With the bridge in place, he then added a backdrop of hills on the wall, crowned by building flats to form a picture of a city curving away in the distance, its grand buildings overlooking a valley of heavy industry. Between the bridge and aisle, a small river inlet with a dock scene separates city from industry.

"A eureka moment," Rod added with satisfaction.

Work on the layout's steel mill moved into high gear. A web of industrial tracks was laid, some on elevated trestles, followed by blast furnaces, rolling mills, a power plant, and the massive brick Celtic Steel building.

With these in place, the layout is nearly complete. There are a couple of small bare spots to fill in, and it's possible an older building or two may be retired and replaced by improved models, but Rod is content with what he has built.

In all, construction of the 23 x 124-foot Three Rivers City took 23 years of steady effort.

"Obviously that's not 23 years, every day, seven days a week," Rod adds. "I have to go out and earn a living."

As Rod's modeling skills got better, some of the early buildings on the layout were replaced by improved structures. Many details and small scenes were added as Rod went along, but he never revised the basic plans he and Malcolm developed two decades ago.

Asked if he would do anything differently, now that he can step back and assess the railroad as a whole, Rod said, "I would have liked it to have been more accessible. I wanted there to be real honest depth in the buildings, so I sacrificed the access points."

There are, he adds, a few places where one can gain access to hidden tracks, or crawl under the layout and stand up behind the hills, but other areas, especially the downtown buildings along the wall, are difficult to reach. Fortunately, he adds, the room is fairly dust-free.

"It's a really good room. We keep it very clean. We always keep the door closed and we filter the air."

Rod said the freelanced nature of his railroad is the challenge that kept him focused over the decades.

"I don't build cardboard mock-ups of things," Rod said. "I trust my intuition to get it right. There's about seven or eight buildings I didn't use because – when I was halfway through – I thought, 'No, not going to work. Try something else.'"

With the completion of the layout, Rod is facing a lengthy tour schedule without his traveling cases of tools, paints, and structure kits.

"There are a lot of mixed feelings at the moment," he said. "Yes, [the layout] is an accomplishment. Yes, I am very proud of it. Anybody who walks into that room and has never seen it is absolutely floored."

"They always say a model railroad's never finished. This one is finished." **MR**



5 Rod divides his time between Los Angeles and England, and tours internationally. The mountaintop Celtic Coal & Steel mine complex was built while Rod was on tour. Careful planning resulted in it fitting exactly into place when it arrived in Los Angeles.

