

Modeling Railroad Served Industries

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Model railroading is a very diverse hobby practiced by people of all ages and modeling skills. Each person's approach to the hobby reflects their own particular interests which often change over time. But in all cases I know about, the modeler creates industries to give their model railroad a purpose. These industries can be created from the many kits available, kit-bashed (combining standard kits with parts from other kits and separate detail parts), or scratch built from any of a number of materials. Whatever the approach, there are factors that should be considered in order to achieve a reasonable representation of the industry you are modeling. Some broad categories to consider include era or timeframe of the industry model as built, size and selective compression, distinctive industry features, rail service access, painting and weathering, sound and animation, and accessibility. These will be treated individually below.

Industry Era

Usually the era of the modeled industry will reflect the era the modeler has selected for the model railroad. Industries can of course be older than the model railroad era but will make the model railroad less believable if it is more modern than the overall layout is depicting. The advantage of selecting a particular era or timeframe for both the layout and the industry is that it provides a coherent look and feel to what you are modeling. Some modelers select a range of time that their layout represents, while others select a specific year (or even in rare instances a specific day in a specific year). Whichever approach you select is up to your tastes. If you have a specific timeframe for your industry that will help in determining what equipment it would be using, what signs would be appropriate, and perhaps even what form of packaging the product would use. Very old, small industries were often built of wood. Larger industries would be brick, corrugated metal, stone or concrete depending on era and purpose. Try to select your structural materials appropriate to your era. If you are modeling a modern era it is easy to look at what is around you, books and magazines, or Internet searches. For older eras you need to search a little harder to find examples that fit what you are trying to model, but there is material available for about any era you may choose. I recommend a little research before just embarking on a model for your industry.

Size and Selective Compression

Unless you are modeling a very old era in a rural or frontier environment you will most likely need to use some selective compression in order to model your industry. Seldom does a model railroad have the space to duplicate a large, full sized industry with associated railroad sidings. The approach to the selective compression will vary with the size of the prototype and the space available on your layout. This can range from a basic minimum depth structure along a wall to an industry with multiple structures and associated trackage. One of the keys to a good compression is to retain the look and feel of the prototype with those elements that are most representative of the industry and which will support the type of operation you intend for the layout.

Distinctive Industry Features

It is best to include distinctive features of the industry you are modeling rather than to merely stick a building in place and add a sign that says what the industry is. The features used should be in keeping with the era as mentioned before. Examples of this would be hoists, derricks and cranes; fuel and storage tanks, appropriate loading platforms, bins and material piles, etc. The viewer should in most cases be able to look at your industry and know approximately what kind

of business it is without relying on signs. Again, a little research will aid in selecting these features.

Rail Service Access

While some industries were served directly from the mainline many years ago on small railroads, that is not typical and should be avoided. Industries can and do share sidings so you can place multiple industries on a single siding in some cases. Some small industries can also be served by use of a team track and placed away from the railroad itself. Larger industries should have multiple tracks and sidings, or the layout could even be devoted to a single large industry such as a steel mill.

Painting and Weathering

How you paint and weather your structures will be a matter of taste (model railroading is actually an artistic endeavor) but a few basic methods will enhance the realism of your industries. In my opinion all plastic model structures should be painted and never left as the raw plastic whether you want to keep the original color or not. The plastic has a sheen that just looks phony. At a minimum give the structure an over-spray with a clear flat such as dullcote. You do not need to use an airbrush to get a good paint job on your structure. I make heavy use of the large aerosol paint cans that you can buy in you local hardware store. Be sure to use only flat finish paints. I usually then add weathering washes or India ink and alcohol solution to further dull down the finish and provide some weathering. A final dusting with weathering powders or chinks will give you a nice used industrial appearance.

Sound and Animation

Just as model locomotives are now commonly employing sound, you can enhance the industry model by using appropriate industrial sounds. These can be as simple as the 30 second sound chips sold by a number of vendors to a more detailed sound environment using CD's or other devices for a longer, more varied industrial sound environment. A vendor that I have acquired very nice industrial sounds from is Fantasonics. Their products can be found at <http://www.fantasonics.com/store/store.html>. Another medium that has some adherents is animation. That can include such things as oil pumps moving up and down, conveyors running, dumpers dumping, etc. To what extent you choose to incorporate these mediums in your industries is up to you.

Accessibility

When you locate an industry on your layout you need to keep in mind accessibility for such things as uncoupling of rail cars, cleaning dust, and making improvements over time. If the industry is now within easy reach of the layout edge consider crating a lift-out section nearby.

This has been a very brief overview of some things to consider and may be expanded or updated as time allows in the future. If you have questions or suggestions feel free to contact me at srknotts@comcast.net.