

# Diorama... a never ending fantasy!

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**I don't believe I will mix words here...**"do it any way you wanna". There is no set of regulations for the art of diorama. You might run into some "hobby shops" that don't carry much diorama inventory, but you don't have to go very far to accomplish some pretty neat scenery for your layout. The "chain-store" moonbeams, they don't sell contact cement or much of any adhesives that are not politically correct. No "glue sniffers" are going to shop at those places anyway. They go to the real source. Like Home Depot or Lowes where super glue has an all new meaning. You can buy 20 pound bags of sawdust at Lowes or on-line; you don't need to spend \$5.99 for 5 ounces of saw dust. You can color the sawdust in a coffee can with some acrylic paint, and a good shake. Most all hobby shops and art stores will sell paints and balsa wood products. But finding the correct size brass tubing or plastic tube in long lengths, well that will require some searching on-line. Never rule out your back yard! In the kitchen too...tea leaves makes great foliage. A spray bomb or two of browns, greens and textures, these are great for adding color. Depending on the scale you are working with, there is a world of "organics" you can choose from. Lime stone ("B" gravel) , kitty litter, shale, sand (fine and gritty). You want black cinders or coal; try buying "sand blasting media". You can get 5 pounds for less than \$3.00 a pound...you can build roads to hell and back for \$10.00! Some of the greatest scenery has been concocted from weeds, flowers and bushes along the highway. One more tip, stop throwing away all that packing material. Build your terrain with "insulating foam", Styrofoam packing stacked in layers or use bubble wrap and window screen to add scenery along vertical walls.

The best thing to happen to diorama was all-purpose "sheet-rock" wall board compound. Mix this with damn near anything to make textures for mountains, hills and even banked turns.

Don't go spending hundreds of dollars on "fabricated trees" for a race track. You will be very upset when some racer loses control and all those expensive trees are broken in half by a hurtling Ford Mustang flying through the air. Yes, it will happen.

Start smart, first look around on your layout. Where do you want to spend the most time? Do you want a realistic pit scene, or a winner circle? Is it important that your pit-garage be "businesslike" or "pragmatic". Will some racer be pissed-off if there is a "noose" hanging from the garage door? Are you shooting for 21<sup>st</sup> century racing or is a "scratch-built" set of bleachers Ok with you?

**Scale is important.** Let me remind you...in 1:32 scale, 1/32 of an inch = 1 inch. In 1:24 or 1:25, 1/32 of an inch would be approximately 3/4 or 5/8 of an inch. You see 1/32 is smaller; therefore 1/32 of an inch is larger than 1/24<sup>th</sup>. You must consider, in 1:24 scale 1 inch = 2 foot. In 1:32 1 inch = 2 foot 8 inches.



A six foot figurine in 1:32 would be (72 inches) or 2 1/4 inches tall. What is nice, most 1:32 – 1:24 figurines can be interchanged with little loss of realism. The scales 1:43 and of course 1:64 these don't work out at all on 1:32 scale diorama. Stay away from those figurines scaled for "O" gauge train sets. *A tip: The Homies figurines are two inches tall. These are perfect for 1:32 scale. However, these things have become collectibles and are very expensive.* We have quite a collection of Homies, including the "ice-cream vendor", the "Homie kneeling before the cross" and the "Homie Hip Hop dancer". Some critics claim "homies" are a bit "cartoonish". Hello...this is a hobby, it is not a contest!

**Your tools are important.** Your computer is a tool. You will want a good laser color printer. Perhaps a 3D printer or some form of fine scale vinyl sign cutter. Soap files are required to form foam or styrene into scale shapes. You will want a standard “vibrating” type jig saw in the shop; this goes without saying. A decent drill is also required. The more small hand tools in your tool-box the better. The usual X-acto knife set is required, plus a selection of straight-edge cutting tools. Make yourself a set of rulers for your scale. Use a nice metal 12 inch rule and mark the scales for inches using the 1/8 and 1/4 and 1/2 marks. This way you can easily measure the coffee sticks (stirrers) to 2 inch by 4 inch lumber. An 8 foot long board is 96 inches or 3 inches in 1:32 scale diorama.

**Adhesives are not all the same.** You already understand the different types of plastic glues that are available. You are working with kits and small plastic racecars, so there is no need to explain the difference between Polyethylene and styrene or fiberglass. There are some acrylics that are made stronger with the addition of polymers. There are 7 types of plastics. Each type is identified by a Resin ID number. In TOYS, however there are several different chemicals in a plastic “slot-car” body, so they are simply graded as “hard”, “soft” and “foam”. This relationship to safety and durability is not worth any further consideration in this article. You need to be concerned with the “adhesive” you use. This is your concern. Some glues will literally melt certain plastic resins. You must be aware of these adhesives. You want MEK based glue. That is Methyl Ethel Ketone. You should look for Cyanoacrylate (super glue, Pascofix). You can also use a two part (resin-hardener combination) in an epoxy. I suggest that old favorite JB-Weld. The original is still a great product for diorama. The KwikWeld product is also a good adhesive for model applications. The last type of plastic glue is old fashioned “model glue”. These glues are available from many producers. You are familiar with Testors brand. You can also look for Pascofix, a chemical weld adhesive for plastics. Pascofix literally welds plastic and can bond with several types of compounds and materials. This product is considered the strongest “super glue” available.

For diorama you will use specialty adhesives for wood, plastic, sand, sawdust and foam products. You will also want a good supply of “contact cement”. The best, and most available is Weldwood Original. This sweet smelling product can be toxic, but if you want to build reliable landscape diorama, you have very little choices out there, so just buy the best. The DAP products are reliable and reasonable in price. You apply with brush or spatula and your tools clean easily with petroleum based cleaner. Your fingers too!!

Obviously the standard white glues and compound wood glues from Gorilla and Elmer’s Glue work well. There is another wood bonding adhesive that I use...that is Weldbond. It is “non-toxic” and bonds balsa wood together very strong and it dries fast and almost invisible to the eye. It is ready to paint within hours and is easy to use. It last long on the shelf too!! I scratch built an “O” gauge trestle bridge, almost 24 inches long, using this product. The bridge never failed.

**Grass, what do you do about grass?** In so many instances grass (sawdust or powder) does not look like grass. For instance, a flat meadow without some mixture of terrain simply looks like shit!! What you want to look for is Bachmann Scenescapes, green foliage mat. This is a square foot of green mat that works as a ground cover. Use a spray like 3M #45 General Purpose contact cement. Lightly spray the base surface and then lightly spray the pre-cut mat to fit. The mat will form a very nice light covering that can be shaped almost into any form. Now spray over again and shake powder or sawdust grass coating. Don’t overdo it!! Unless you are modeling the Whitehouse, the lawn should resemble a “real lawn” not something the tax-payers paid for. If you are building diorama for a racetrack, forget about the putting green!

## Diorama, kit buildings versus scratch built:

Well pretty simple stuff here. There is not a lot of 1:32 scale buildings for slot car tracks. There are a few books on how to build a scale building, but really all you need are the basics of construction and the knowledge of design with scale in mind. Let me say this again...in 1:32 scale, 3 inches is 8 FOOT. You can figure most anything out from there. One inch is equal to 32 inches.

In order to build scratch, you need tools. The Exacto [R] knife is best...maybe three or four of these with different blades. A decent table top scroll saw; these are available on-line for less than \$50.00. You will want a small square. A decent ruler with inch marks at 8's and 16's and CM. Buy a decent set of hobby files. A variable speed Dremel [R] and a Proskit 900-215 nibbler are "must have" tools when building scratch.

So I was on-line looking for a two bay pit garage. There were a couple of kits, none for 1:32. I said this was a problem. I found some plans that I could pay to download. No way am I going to spend \$10.00 on a PDF file download for some set of building plans. There are more construction plans on line than you need, but you will have to do "scale conversions".

One example: A 1:32 scale two bay pit garage, in kit form, will require a loan on your mortgage. If you build "scratch" you might be able to save a few dollars. Let us compare "scratch" with the Green Hills [R] 1:32 pit two bay pit garage with visitor boxes. The kit comes in at \$49.00!! By the time I finish my two bay garage, no pit boxes, I will have about \$35.00 in this plus my time. However, I will have everything I want inside and outside the building. My windows will have shades; the garage bays will have racecar tools, cabinets, work tables and Homies [R] to use them. I will have bay doors and a "noose" (20 gauge wire) hanging from the door. The outside will be Brick and wood siding applied over "chipboard". Windows all around and the clear roof will be held up with actual scale I-beam girders with a block and tackle will be located on one of the I-beams.

There will only be one built like this, no knock-offs here.



The Homies are gathered around a scratch built shop table. The 1:32 scale dimensions are 32 inches by 46 inches. This item will be placed in the two bay garage along with a grain scale, a drill press, small shop cabinet and other items.

The end result is shown on the next page. The clear roof allows direct viewing of the shop interior. Additional tools, and shop items will be added as needed or when I can actually find scale tools and a tool cabinet that does not cost more than the real thing. The idea is to use what you can find, kit bash, make or modify. I am fashioning a "block and tackle" out of a cheap jewelry, chain neckless, snap hooks, and parts taken from an old cassette tape player.

I will try to update the images in this article, but you can find all the diorama scenes and new additions to "Churchfield Raceway Park" on the Gallery Page. One thing to keep I mind; the success of any diorama scene is based upon your interests. Don't waste your time trying to satisfy the GURU next door. Nothing in this world is more boring than to listen to some critic attempt to rationalize his artistic value through your mindset.



Scratch built 1:32 scale, 2 bay safety and technical inspection garage.

