

Life

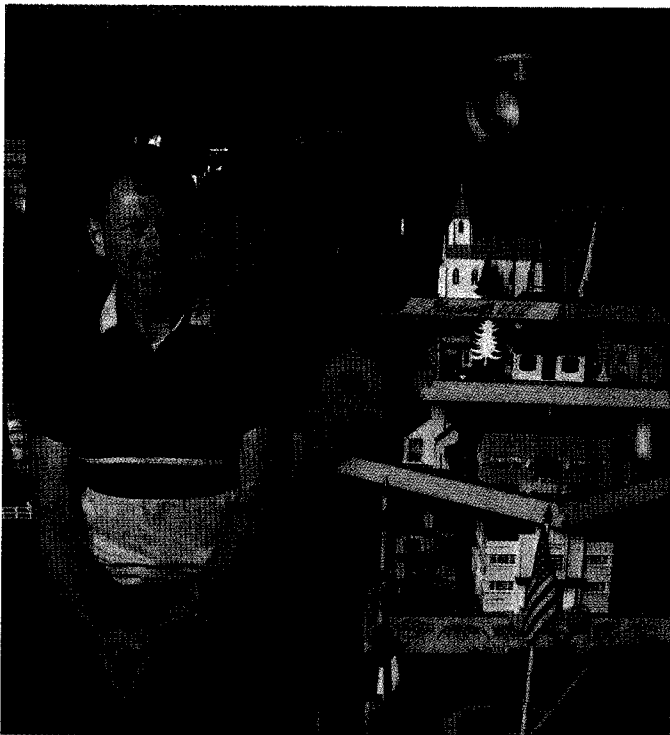
Dave Yost built a layout to showcase his Plasticville buildings



DAVID YOST MET MY PHOTOGRAPHER and me at the door of his home with a smile and an apology. “I hope you won’t be disappointed, but most of my Lionel trains are gone. I sold them a few years ago to try something different.” I assured Dave that from everything I had heard about his layout and collection, I wasn’t going to be let down—and I wasn’t. He has assembled a fascinating array of assorted structures and postwar and modern-era trains that leaves visitors impressed.

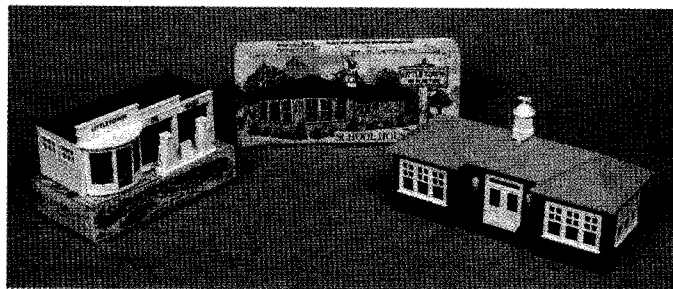
I knew a bit about Dave’s background before arriving. Yes, not too long ago he had put together a superb collection of prewar Lionel items, including nearly all the Standard gauge classics that most of us can only dream of having. He hadn’t neglected the postwar era either and had quietly assembled a superb collection of F3s, passenger outfits, and other desirable pieces. Why he eventually chose to sell them and revamp his collection intrigued me. I was eager to hear his explanation of how a layout featuring modern-era trains and numerous Plasticville buildings could more than make up for the *Blue Comet* and *Congressional* sets he formerly owned.

By Roger Carp Photos by Rebecca Saliture



(Top) Dave poses by the four-level Plasticville store display that he ranks as one of the prizes of his still-ample collection. Far in the back you can see evidence of his other passion: *Star Trek*.

(Bottom) Dave has acquired almost a complete collection of the plastic structures in the rival Littletown line. These two, the gas station and the school, became part of the Plasticville line after Bachmann purchased the tooling in 1956.



cars developed, he remained attached to the trains made before World War II. "You don't have to grow up with Standard gauge to really enjoy it," Dave, a true baby boomer, declares. All the same, his perspective on the hobby started to change 20 years ago. Dave's father had died, and he and his mother decided to look for a smaller home.

Maybe it was the act of moving and all the packing it entailed. Or perhaps it was Dave's realization that he had achieved so many of his goals as a collector. Whatever the cause, a voice inside was telling him that merely displaying and admiring toy trains wasn't enough to keep him happy with this hobby. There was something of a builder in him, and Dave felt the urge to construct a layout and expand his interests. He had been picking up prewar structures from a variety of manufacturers. Now, in the late 1970s and early '80s, he started to buy Marx accessories and Plasticville buildings while tossing around ideas of what he might someday do with these neat items.

Dave might have gone on letting his collection grow. However, fate stepped in almost a decade ago, when the burden of a 30-year mortgage on the new residence compelled him to make a decision. "I wanted the house paid off before I retired from the post office," Dave explains. "My trains enabled me to do just that in 1991."

The choice definitely wasn't an easy one. Dave loved his prewar and postwar beauties, but disposing of them would enable him to realize his dream of owning his home. Besides, he had no intention of abandoning the hobby. "I was changing focus anyway," Dave states, "and becoming more of a model railroader than a collector." An empty basement awaited him, and before long Dave was planning to build an immense layout there that would rejuvenate his enjoyment of the hobby.

Starting over

Dave didn't panic after the dust had cleared and he found himself facing row after row of empty shelves. Plenty of trains remained with him. Better still, he had not needed to sell his growing horde of structures. In fact, thinning his collection made it possible for Dave to better appreciate the items he had kept. He began to study them and take pleasure in their details and colors. A good example of this new perspective is the group of Bumpalow buildings in his living room. These six cardboard models were produced by Milton Bradley Co. in 1931. Dave's set retains many of the vibrant tones and intricate fixtures that first delighted children more than six decades ago.

Besides several cardboard and wood structures, a number of plastic accessories and buildings produced by Louis Marx & Co. also survived Dave's sale. "Collectors didn't show much interest in them," he confesses, "and I didn't want to part with them."

Instead, he created an eye-catching display of assorted postwar items that fills a corner of the dining room. Not until I saw this enormous gallery of signals, towers, lights, and bridges did I realize just how many different models Marx offered for kids to use with their electric trains. Quantity, more than quality, makes this part of Dave's collection impressive and worth noticing.

But Dave's goal wasn't to replace one set of static displays with another. Sure, many accessories and structures can be found standing on tables and cabinets in his neatly decorated domicile. Over the last 10 years, however, he has focused his modeling efforts on the basement, which he has transformed into a wonderful setting in which to operate O gauge trains and admire examples of virtually everything that Bachmann has ever made for its Plasticville line.

When collecting isn't enough

Like so many of those fortunate individuals who entered the toy train hobby back in the 1960s, Dave Yost managed to amass an excellent collection of Lionel trains without having to rob banks or prospect for gold in his spare time. By attending train meets and getting to know the right dealers, he was able to acquire outstanding Standard gauge sets and O gauge locomotives and rolling stock. His pursuit interested his mother and father, who insisted that he display his collection in the family's residence, where he lived until the late 1970s.

Dave never lost his appreciation for the stunning colors that distinguished Lionel's finest pieces from the 1920s and '30s. Even as a love of postwar plastic engines and

Dave's holdings also include scarce dealer displays. Even better, there are structures from lesser-known lines that competed with Plasticville during the 1950s. These include Littleton and Mini-Craft, along with the Storytown pieces that Bachmann also made. Elsewhere can be seen his die-cast vehicles, manufactured by Dinky, Tootsietoy, Matchbox, and other firms. No wonder visitors tend to linger for hours in his basement!

Going downstairs

Thanks to the excellent photographs we took and Dave's hospitality, we can imagine joining visitors in the lower portion of his home. Fortunately, we won't have to worry about ducking to avoid low beams above the stairs. Dave may not come right out and say it, but his friendly manner leaves no doubt that you certainly can take your time wandering around and viewing his layout. The same relaxed approach to life and congenial personality that make Dave popular with the people along his postal route guarantee that toy train enthusiasts will appreciate invitations to his basement.

"Start anywhere you like," he insists, which is like bringing your kids to the zoo and letting them go to their favorite animals. Where do you go first? Just as some kids would head for the lions while others ran to the seals, visitors gravitate to different sections of Dave's basement. "A lot of guys walk to the layout and ask me to run trains," he says. "I guess seeing my railroad is what's on most people's minds."

I tried to restrain myself. "Let's begin with your displays," I said, determined to keep my eyes on the walls and away from the layout, at least for a few minutes. Not that the displays could disappoint anyone! One made by Lionel in the early 1960s became Dave's property after a nearby hobby shop went out of business. He has done

his best to fill its shelves with the sets and accessories that Lionel would have placed on it more than 30 years ago. Although the cardboard has warped and faded over time, the display remains impressive and would be the centerpiece of many collections.

Also of interest are dealer displays and racks used to sell Plasticville structures and accessories. Being in the right place at the right time and exhibiting a genuine love of Plasticville explain how Dave acquired these unique pieces. "I had similar items during my childhood, when I would save my allowance until I could afford to buy a post office or snack bar or maybe some fences or trees. Then I would carefully assemble them and place them near the tracks I ran my Lionel trains on." Like so many of us, Dave had a great time creating a miniature section of the world that he ruled with a determination that the trains would never be late.

With an affection for Plasticville that dates back decades, Dave made sure his current collection featured the buildings he had wanted long ago. His basement amounts to a tribute to this

popular line of toy train structures, which continues to be produced and marketed across America. He especially enjoys pointing out unusual items, hard-to-find color variations, and materials offered to retailers only.

Most of Dave's Plasticville displays are small and feature one or two items, such as the log cabin in a rural scene or the church in a snowy setting just right for Christmas. But he also owns a few large ones, including a display shaped like the front of a steam locomotive that holds the Frosty Bar and House Under Construction. A rotating, four-level cardboard display showcases almost a dozen Plasticville items and remains one of Dave's favorites.

To the layout!

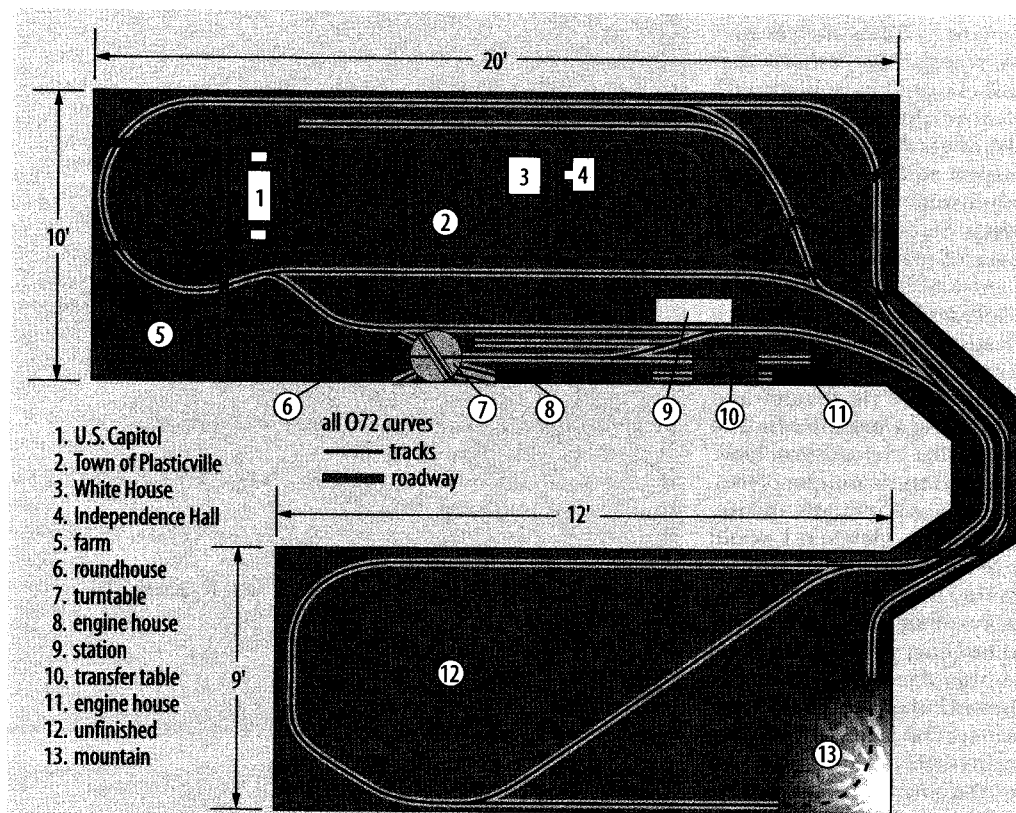
Okay, I had waited long enough. I had studied the shelves jammed with O gauge engines and rolling stock made by American Model Toys and Kusan, not to mention such outstanding contemporary manufacturers as MTH, Weaver, and William. I had admired Dave's collection of Marx presidential busts and examined a number of Storytown structures

**"EVERYTHING
(ON THE LAYOUT)**

**HAS BEEN
PLANNED AND
ARRANGED WITH
A PURPOSE."**

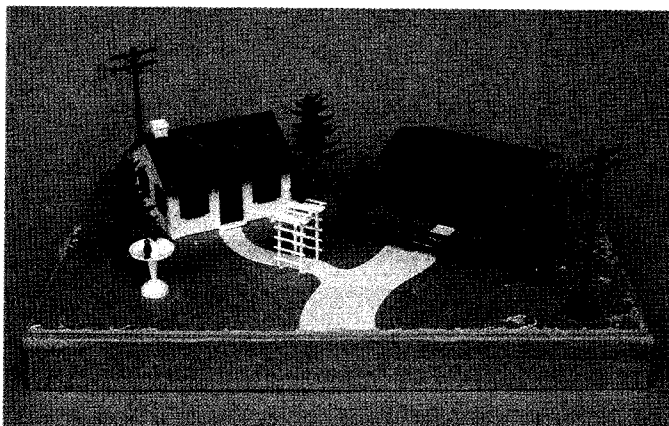
Automobiles and trucks fill Dave's town, winding their way along streets that are lined with Marx and Plasticville structures.





1. U.S. Capitol
2. Town of Plasticville
3. White House
4. Independence Hall
5. farm
6. roundhouse
7. turntable
8. engine house
9. station
10. transfer table
11. engine house
12. unfinished
13. mountain

Illustration by Kellie Jaeger



Here is another of Dave's Plasticville dealer displays. This one dates from 1950 or 1951 and shows several of the earliest entries into the product line, including the log cabin, Cape Cod house, and telephone poles.

depicting scenes from nursery rhymes. The vintage and current models had elicited questions and earned sincere compliments. But I couldn't stand it anymore. I had to get to Dave's layout!

What a sight his 10 x 20-foot model railroad is. With ample foresight followed by untold hours of planning and careful construction, Dave has created an O gauge layout that makes sense. It beautifully balances the whimsy of toy trains with the realism of their scale cousins. Can it satisfy everyone? Hardly. Operators whose ideal is a Lionel display layout will be irritated

by the relative lack of animated accessories. Meanwhile, doctrinaire hi-railers will complain about the absence of center lines on the streets and scale ballast between contemporary diesels. American Flyer fans will turn up their noses at the three-rail track, and postwar collectors will deride the modern-era pieces Dave frequently runs.

For those of us with more tolerance, however, this layout succeeds. It does so, quite frankly, because Dave understood how much preparation he needed to do before screwing down the first section of track. Rather than jumping in without fear or design, he looked at many other O and HO layouts and took mental notes of what he liked and what he did not. He read widely to become familiar with track planning, wiring, and scenery building. He investigated the scenic materials and structure kits on the market. Not until he knew what was available did Dave permit his imagination

to take over. He had to be sure that what he dreamed of constructing meshed with what he had learned was possible to achieve.

Planning involved consideration of what kind of world Dave wanted to model. The temptation for many operators is to amass many accessories and plant them anywhere and everywhere to show visitors that they do indeed own the entire postwar Lionel or Gilbert roster. Dave was too smart for this: Having sold so much of what he once owned, Dave realized he could enjoy this hobby without having to possess one of everything. Thus, he could pick and choose what would be on the layout. The key was placing the structures, signs, vehicles, figures, and trains in such a way as to create a believable world.

For that reason, Dave conceived of several small scenes, each having its own function and consisting of specific buildings, streets, and tracks. For example, he decided early on that he wanted a locomotive-servicing area. It should have a roundhouse, transfer table, and fueling facilities. Then he considered how much space such an area required, what structures were on the market, and where they ought to be located in relation to one another and the requisite tracks. The result is a well-planned, highly detailed scene that looks realistic despite the space constraints facing its builder.

Similarly, Dave went ahead and planned the residential and commercial sections. He owned so many colorful Plasticville houses and apartments that focusing mainly on industries and businesses wouldn't have brought him enough pleasure. To the contrary, he wanted to create a miniature city that suggested people lived and relaxed there when they weren't at work. Achieving this effect required that Dave first survey his models and check their scale and

color. Once he had finished that task, he arranged them along spacious streets and parking lots so they looked right together and complemented each other. Finally, he installed such details as plastic trees and lichen bushes, plastic and die-cast figures and vehicles, and a slew of telephone poles, to bolster the aura of realism.

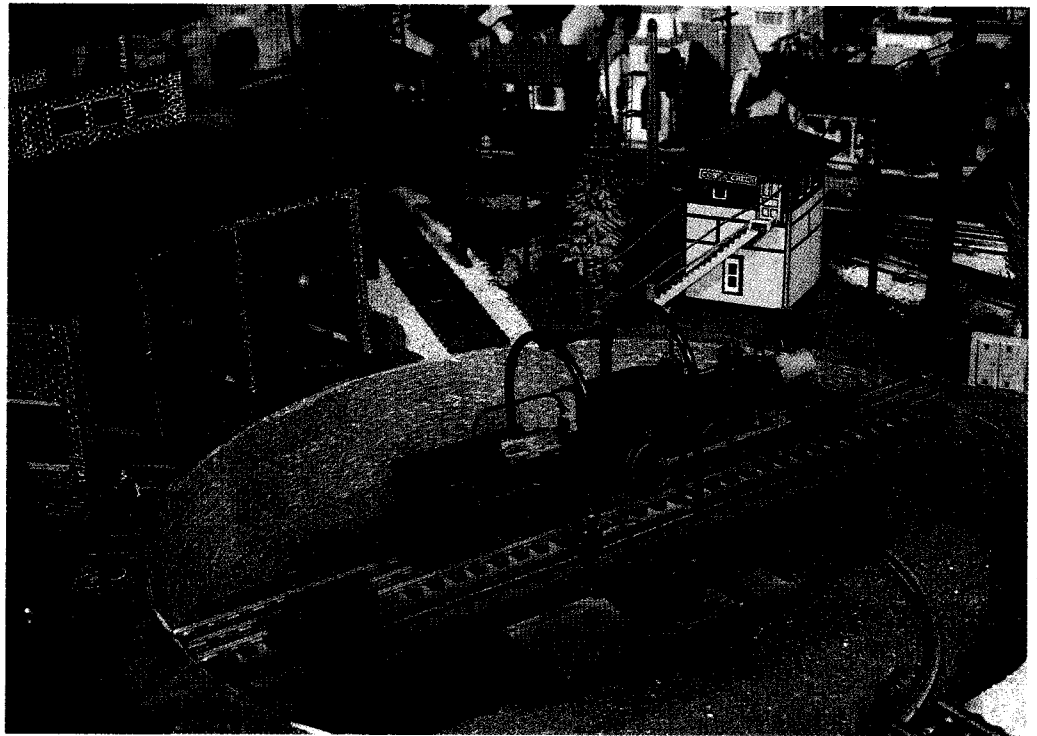
Missing to a large degree are the animated accessories that brought fame to Lionel. "They're lots of fun," Dave agrees. Ultimately, though, he decided that nearly all of them would disrupt his layout. Many of these accessories were too big; others took up more space than he could sacrifice.

He concedes that many viewers comment on the absence of automatic gate-men and bascule bridges, but they don't voice their remarks in a harsh or negative tone. "People come to see that my world looks right and the trains fit into it very nicely," Dave explains. "I haven't tried to overwhelm them or give them too much to look at. Everything has been planned and arranged with a purpose."

And it all comes together perfectly. Individual scenes contain enough features to hold your attention without leaving you confused as to where the central point of interest lies. Dave has placed structures in close proximity to the three-rail tracks and near each other in a fashion that quickly reminds us of actual railroads.

Naturally, he has taken a few liberties, notably including Marx models of the United States Capitol and the White House in his small city. All the same, a sense of orderliness and realism pervade because of his extensive planning and care. You won't find operating horse corrals next to coal loaders on this layout, just as you would not in real life.

Taken as a whole, Dave's outstanding model railroad neatly captures the middle

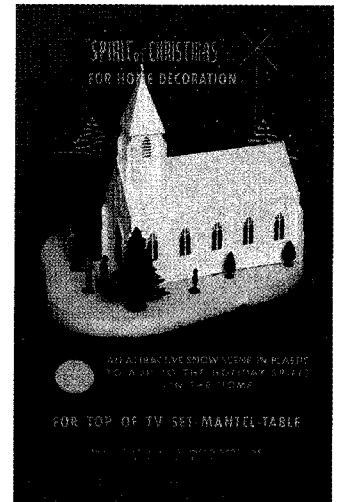
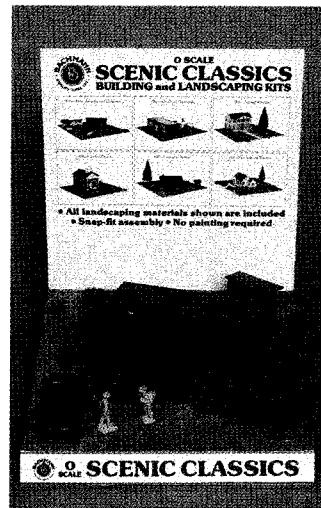


ground between a dealer display and the best in hi-rail modeling. It offers lessons to newcomers and longtime members of our hobby on how to design a model railroad that showcases structures and electric trains. Anyone seeing this layout can't help but come away impressed and determined to pay more attention to collecting Plasticville and building a layout that features that line of structures.

Plans for the future

The shelves surrounding the layout look filled, and the model railroad is packed with detail. "You must be finished with everything," I said to Dave, wondering just where he could go from there. He smiled and shook his head in disagreement. Of course. I remembered that no one in this hobby is ever totally satisfied or believes his or her layout is complete. Dave Yost fits the bill perfectly, and he doesn't hesitate to explain what he still hopes to do.

After naming the MTH locomotives he has his eyes on, Dave describes the modifications he has planned for his layout. Improving the lighting of his basement is



also high on his list of priorities. Even so, he has reached the stage where he can step back and take pride in all that he has accomplished.

Dave's enjoyment of the hobby has never flagged, although he has had to part with some magnificent trains and change his approach to model railroading. Building a layout and specializing in Plasticville have revitalized his enthusiasm. Changing your approach, Dave concludes, can be the key to maintaining interest and injecting fun into any person's structured life. Sounds like good advice for all of us. **CTD**

(Top) Local railfans begged and pleaded with the railroad to bring out its vintage motive power for them to admire. Lovely models from Thomas Industries are the centerpieces of this eye-catching scene, along with the scratchbuilt roundhouse and turntable.

(Above) These two small Plasticville displays show how Bachmann envisioned its structures as parts of larger scenes.