

Designing and Painting Forested Backdrops

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Striving for realism in our hobby requires a balanced approach to design, detailing and setting the stage on which our equipment are actors on a stage that includes track, structures, figures, scenery and backdrop. The backdrop can be seen as the single most important identification of geographical location of our stage play. It needs to be accurately portrayed as if we are out of doors and done in a way that supports and does not either detract or distract from the actors, our railroad equipment.

This clinic is designed to help all modelers design and implement a backdrop that supports their model railroad. Forested Scenery is the focus of this presentation but other types of scenery such as Arid Scenery use similar concepts and techniques even though the colors, landforms and foliage may be different.

The most ideal time to paint a backdrop is before significant layout construction. This avoids the potential damage to details, structures and three-dimensional scenery. Many have already completed much of their layout and have avoided a backdrop because they are uncertain or fearful of tackling this element.

The backdrop demonstration we will see today is on 1/16" thick styrene just to demonstrate that you may have a solution to the 'tardy backdrop' dilemma. A backdrop painted on a thin flexible material is able to be painted and then installed on the wall or view block. It can even be bent around an inside or outside radius. Styrene is also relatively easy to join at seams with plastic cement using a back patch. The joint if visible can be smoothed with plastic putty. The styrene is light enough to be secured to the substrate behind with hook and loop.

Designing the backdrop is an obvious first step. Scale or object size is used to portray distance; full sized immediately behind the three-dimensional objects and gradually smaller as distance away increases. As the distance away increases another phenomenon is apparent. The colors become less distinct and details are obscured because of the affect of dust and moisture in the air. Spray painting is used for this.

Colors on the backdrop are very critical if it is to support the three-dimensional scenery and the general realism of the layout. One must take care to select scenery material colors that match or closely match real trees, brush, groundcover, and rock. In turn the paint colors on the backdrop need to closely match these as well. Select both scenery materials and paint, out of doors, where the real stuff resides. Many commercially made materials are of an unrealistic color so plan on modifying them as necessary. The typical problem is they may be bright green and should be olive. Except for flowers mother-nature's colors are usually subtle.

Step 1: Design and Layout

The design has been generally discussed above but how does it get to the backdrop surface? The design is gridded in squares of at least 12" x 12". The design draw on paper at a small scale can be projected on the wall once the full sized 12" grid is laid out on the backdrop surface. The line work is applied after the basic sky color is painted.

Step 2: Clouds and Sky Elements

The sky is hazier at the horizon and a deeper blue at it apex. Spray painting a soft band of white provides this affect. Handmade templates with concave shapes are used to portray clouds.

Step 3: Distant Mountains or Hills

Distant mountains and hills are usually bluish gray. They may even have snow. This is portrayed by irregular patches of bluish white with bright white highlights. To visually separate this distant area from closer landscapes a soft band of white paint is sprayed at it's base.

Step 4: Intermediate Hills

As hills get closer the evidence of foliage color starts to appear as a gray-olive green. Tree shapes may be apparent also. More than one layer of these hills may be wanted. As in the previous step each layer is visually separated from its closer neighbor with soft band of sprayed white paint.

Step 5: Water Features

If a body of water is to be part of the design it needs to reflect the color of the sky but be slightly darker as waves break up the reflection. Visually separate this layer with a soft sprayed band of white spray paint.

Step 6: Closer Hills

Closer forested hills are a deeper olive green with more defined trees. Once again separate this band with a very light white spray paint band.

Step 7: Forest Floor Groundcover

As the backdrop approaches the three-dimensional scenery more details need to unfold. It begins with groundcover in a soft yellow green that represents wild grass or brush. Various deeper olive greens can be applied with a sponge for texture.

Step 8: Conifer Trees

With trees the trunks are first defined with gray brown colored pencil using a level or triangle to make sure they are generally vertical. Branches are also done with a pencil. A stiff flat brush is used to paint the fronses of firs and cedars in a deep olive color. Highlights or shadows of lighter green above or darker green below can also be added.

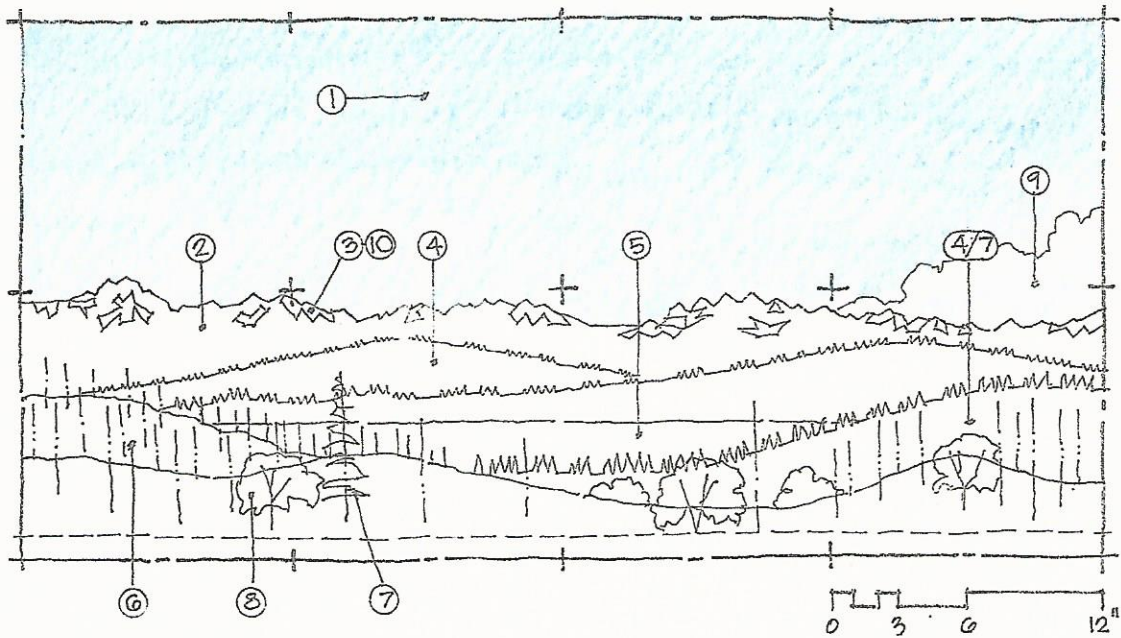
Step 9: Deciduous Trees

Like the conifers, deciduous trees start with a colored pencil trunk and branches. The foliage is a warm yellow green paint applied with a natural sponge. Highlights or shadows can be added with either lighter green or darker green dabs of paint.

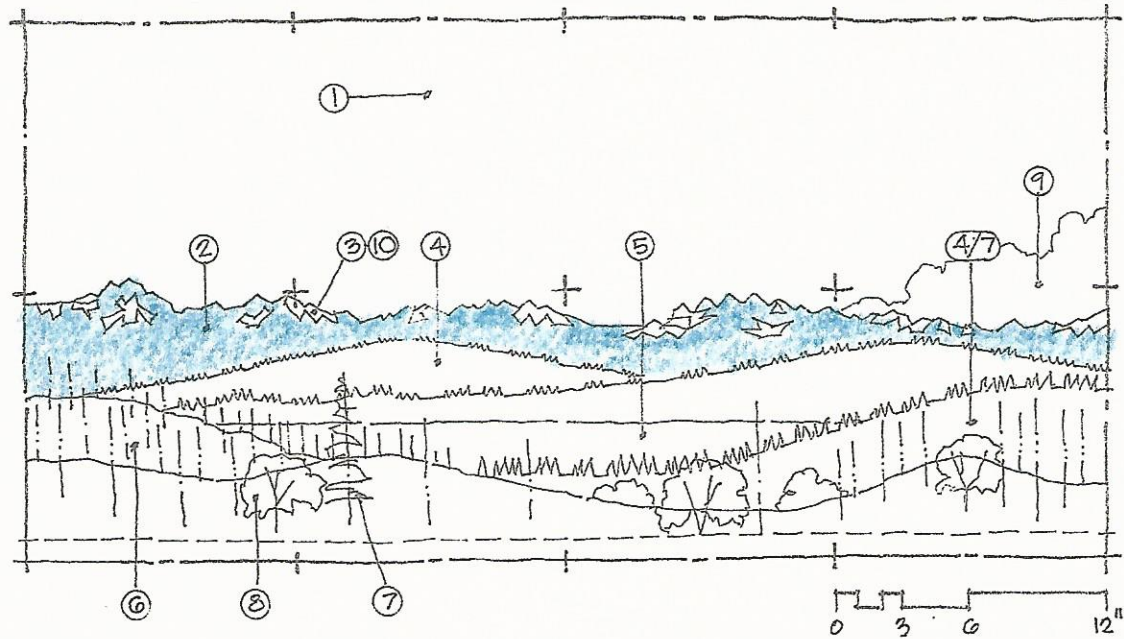
Paint Colors

Mark	Paint Color	Location
1	Rodda 536	sky color
2	Rodda 656	distant mountains/hills
3	Rodda 7306	mountain snow
4	Rodda 755	intermediate hills
5	Rodda 7342	water (reflects sky)
6	Rodda 13 (3) Rodda 882	ground cover/wild grass deciduous tree highlights
7	Rodda 827	conifer trees
8	Rodda 14 (4)	deciduous trees conifer tree highlights ground cover highlights
9	titanium white (use an air brush or Liquitex water based spray paint)	clouds and mist
10	glossy white or matte white acrylic model paint	mountain snow highlights

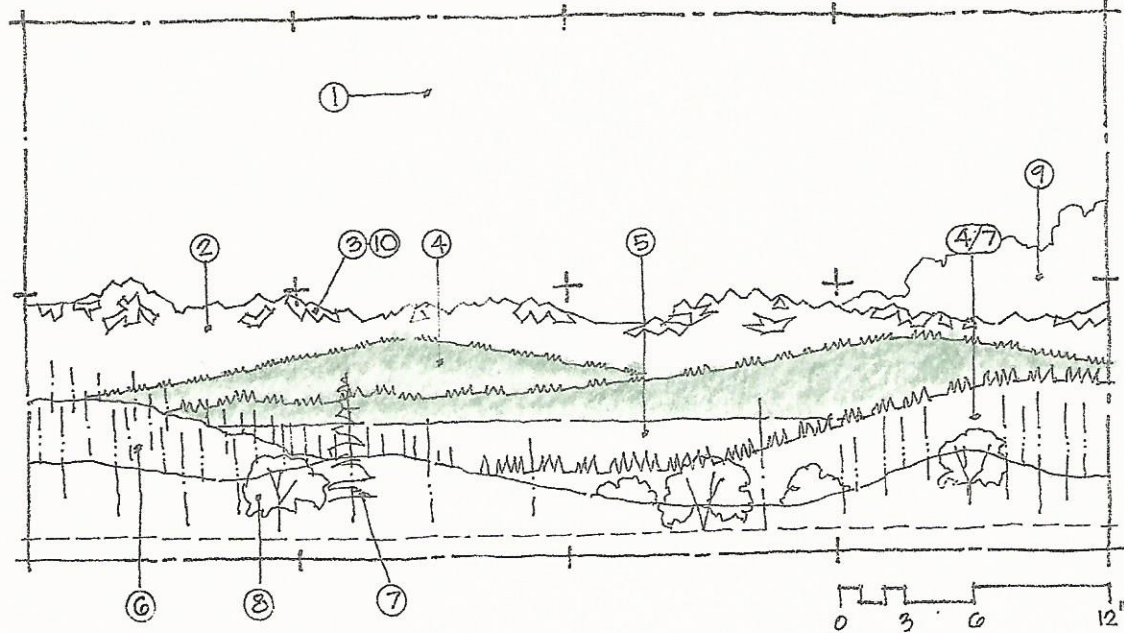
Paints can be tinted darker with black pigment or lighter with white pigment.



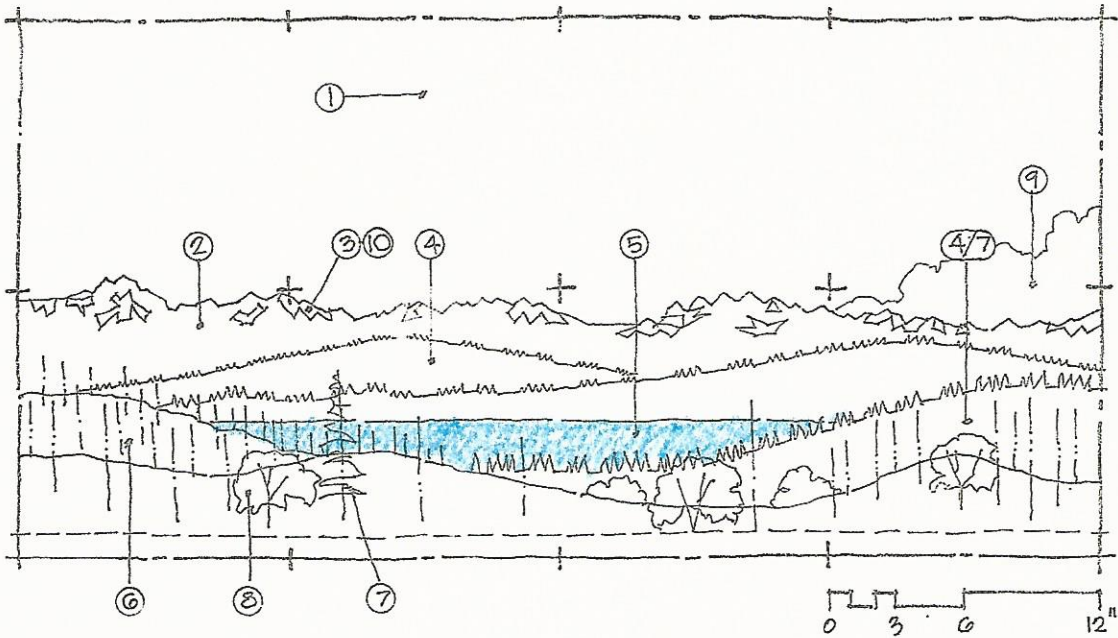
STEP 2



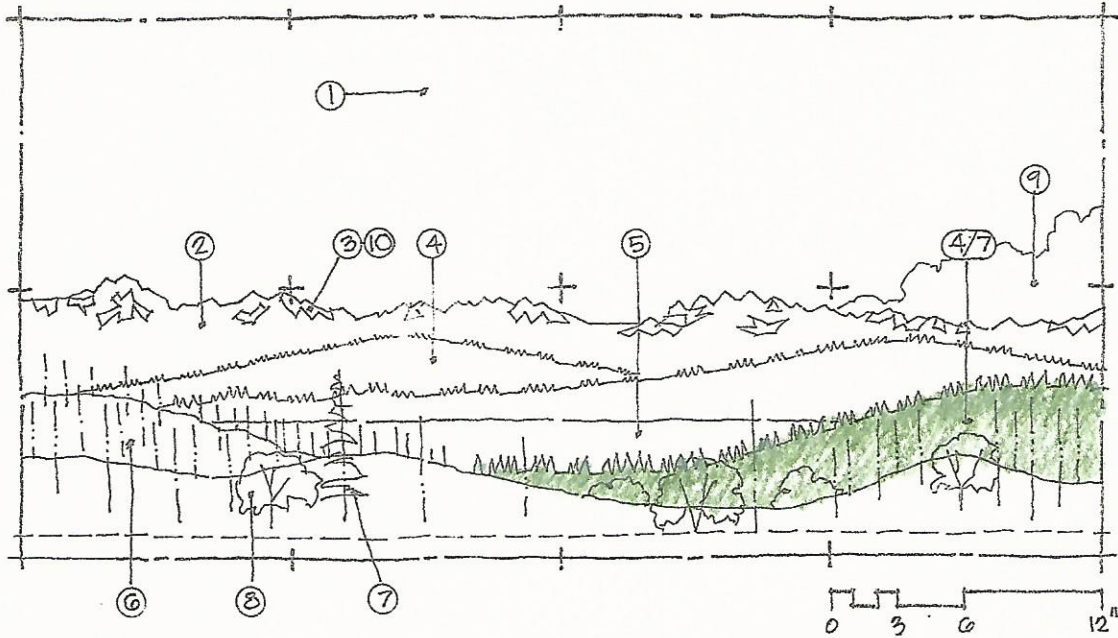
STEP 3



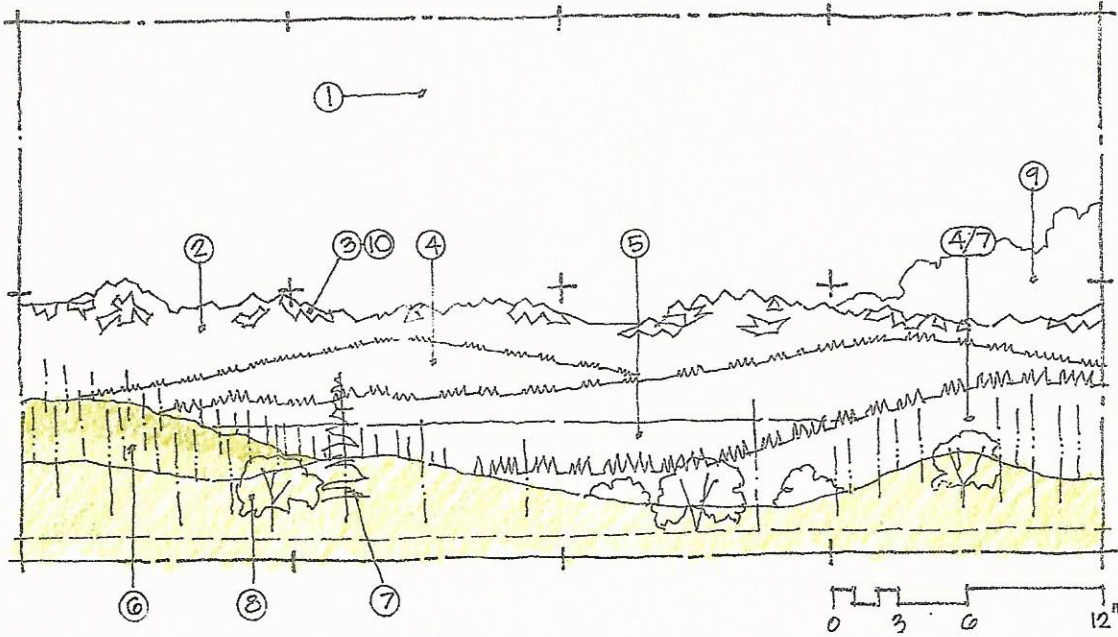
STEP 4



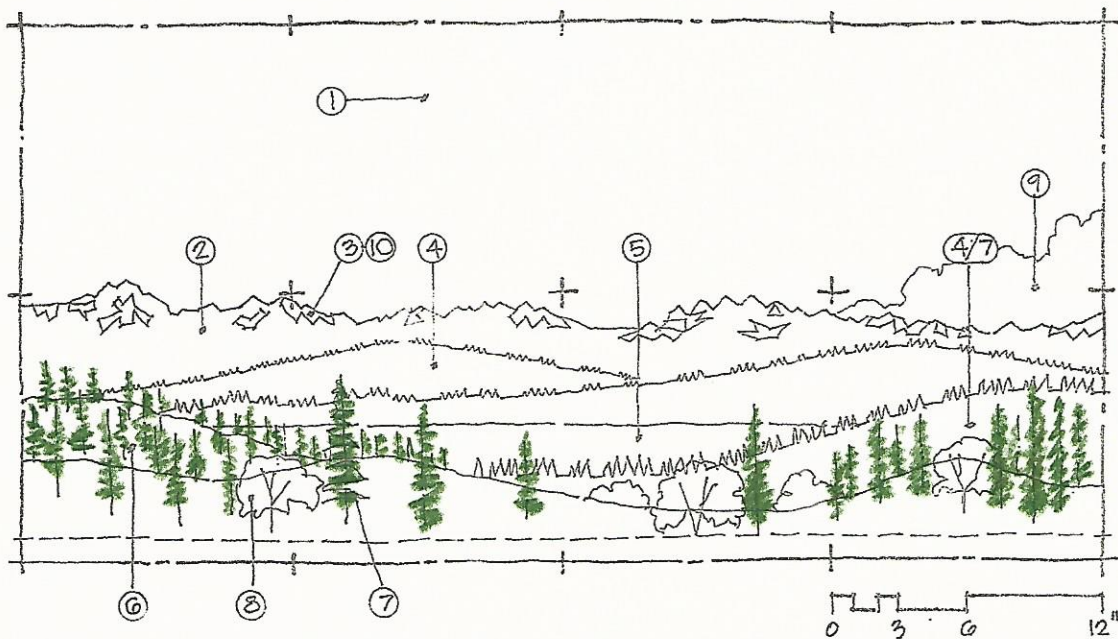
STEP 5



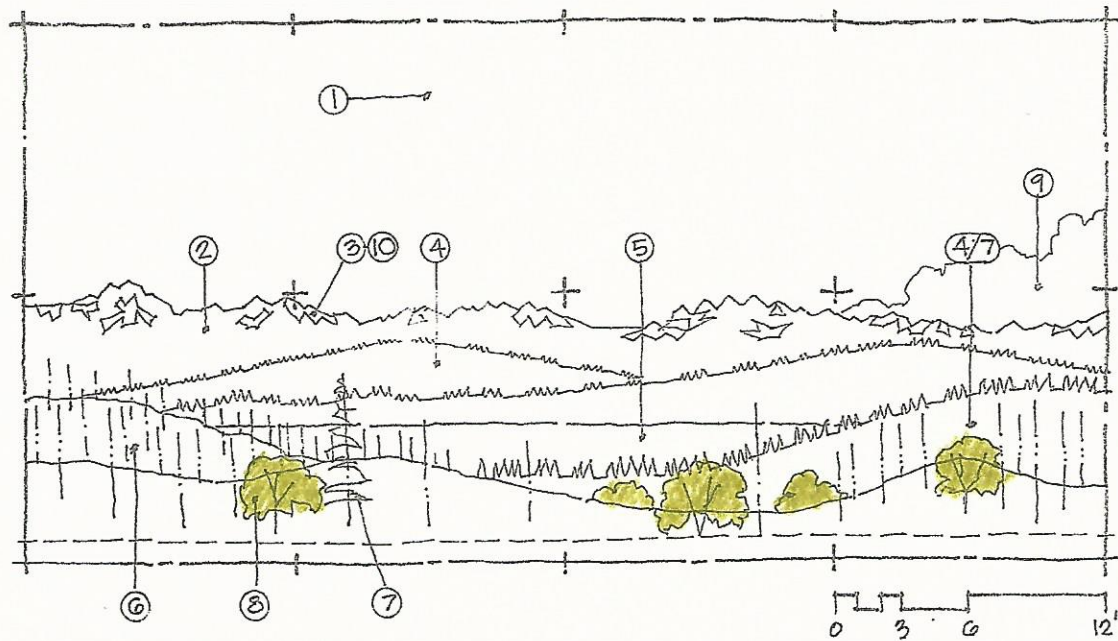
STEP 6



STEP 7



STEP 8



STEP 9