

Sparta Station Project – Part 2 – Exterior

By Richard J. Smith

The Sparta, WI station project started from a very nice kit by HRM Laser Models (<https://hrmlasermodels.com>) who makes numerous Milwaukee Road, C&NW, and Soo Line prototype laser cut structure kits.

I hope to share with you some of my lessons learned building this kit and maybe some tricks and tips you will find useful. Sparta Station is my 2nd HRM kit and only my 2nd laser wood kit ever. I have made plenty of mistakes on this one, but I am still learning!

Since I do not have a current layout for this model, I mounted the model on a wood base made of 1x2" pine spray painted black as shown in Figure 1. Clear Plexiglas scrap painted black from the back makes a nice control panel for two 3-position rotary switches for the train order signal plus a micro toggle switch for station interior lights. A firm base makes transporting the model easy and secure. I modeled the entire platform to be used on my future layout. Some might say why do that now? But if I only model a portion of the platform, the chances I can match colors and style for the remainder of the platform at some later date are slim.

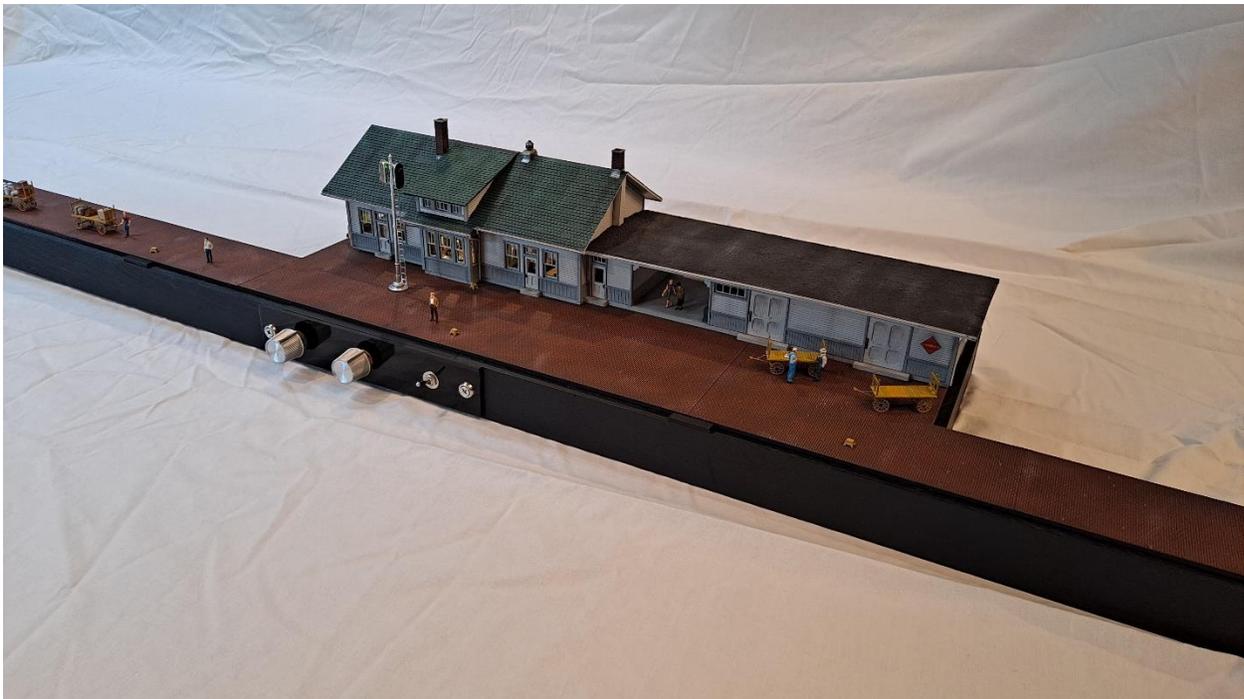


Figure 1:

Basic Construction Techniques

Like I said, I am a newbie to laser cut wood kits. You probably have your own techniques but these are what I used:

1. I sanded all flat wall surfaces with very fine steel wool before painting.
2. I painted (sealed) both sides of all wall surfaces, two coats. The first coat of paint (or primer) really raises the grain of the wood. If that is the effect you want, great! You're done. But for my walls, I wanted smoother, so I sanded again with the fine steel wool and then painted a second coat.
3. I used cheap Walmart light gray primer for exterior walls.
4. Final exterior color is achieved by brush painting cheap craft acrylic paints. Depending on primer color, these may take two or more coats too (more on these later). Be sure and buy flat! These paints work surprisingly well.
5. Doors, windows and trim molding (self-stick for this kit) are also spray primed, then brush painted with craft acrylics before applying to the wall sections (See Figure 2). Notice I use painters tape to hold them down to scrap paper to paint.
6. Wall sections were finished as much as possible before final gluing together (see Figure 3).
7. Wood surfaces are glued with Elmers wood glue. I also use Guerilla Glue CA as it is nice and thick and doesn't set too fast giving you some time to reposition pieces ... but not much time! Use clamps or weights where you can.
8. Roof shingle strips were supplied in the kit and the roof had nice scribed guide lines. I used Elmers white glue for the shingles from a dispenser with a fine tip. The baggage/REA section is a nearly flat tar and gravel roof. I liberally spread Elmers white glue over the roof and deposited sifted sand actually from Sparta, WI. How's that for realism!

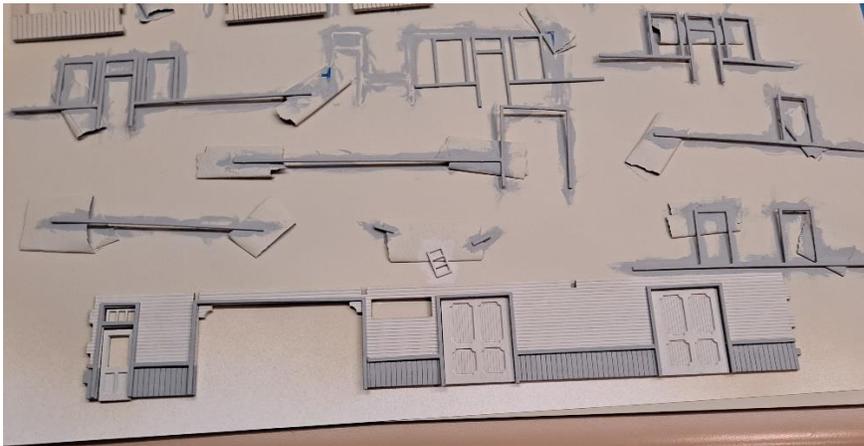


Figure 2.



Figure 3.

More on Painting

We all know several familiar model paints have been discontinued (e.g. - Testers Model Master, Pactra and Floquil) so we need to start getting creative! I am pleasantly surprised by the spray paint aisle of Walmart. There are more colors and subtle shades now by Rust-oleum and Krylon than I have ever seen before. Sometimes you can't get dead flat, but Testers Dullcoat solves that problem (hopefully they keep making that!). Another paint I have used since my military modeling days when I was a teenager is Humbrol from England. I use these for much of my detail parts and figure painting and they have a plethora of colors. They are dead flat and believe it or not, you can order these on-line from ... you guessed it, Walmart. I have some "tins" that are 40+ years old; some I used on Sparta Station details.

Those cheap craft acrylic paints mentioned earlier come in literally hundreds of colors, and brush paint or drybrush very nicely. Sometimes we are lucky enough to find color photos of our prototypes. Part 1 of this article showed a color picture of Sparta Station from the 1970s. I bought several shades of gray craft acrylic paint and compared colors to the photo (and some other photos I have of other Milw. Rd. stations) by painting swatches:



Figure 4.

You cannot tell what the color is looking at the bottle so you need to paint swatches. It is hard to really know actual colors of things from 50+ years ago. Pictures may not be color true, actual buildings fade, etc. But I found two colors that I like and seem reasonable as shown in Figure 4: Folk Art 424 Light Gray and Americana DA068 Slate Gray.

I also used craft acrylic paints to dry brush the Sparta Station platform and roof. The technique is a dark to light simultaneous painting/weathering method to actually paint the entire surface, not just highlight or weather. The technique works from dark to light shades of the desired color (red for platform, green for roof). I started by painting the platform and roof my Rust-oleum version of grimy black (“Charcoal” - Ultra matte “chalked”). It’s good to use enamel as a base paint since the acrylics we are dry brushing will never react with that base coat. Then you dry brush (and I mean dry) from darker shades of red/green to lighter shades. Yes that means you have to mix your colors (red or green in my case) with black and light gray as you go. I don’t use white for lighter shades, gray is more subtle. I also add a bit of orange to the red. Go to the Hudson Berkshire website for the Drybrush for Success clinic ([Dry Brush for success.pdf \(hudson-berkshire.org\)](http://www.hudson-berkshire.org)) for more on the technique. The results can be seen next in Figure 5:



Figure 5.

The baggage/REA section flat roof was spray painted several coats of Rust-oleum charcoal black. When dry, the standard dry brush technique picked up highlights with light gray acrylic paint as also seen in Figure 5.

Finally, I applied a very light touch of weathering of wall sections and roof with dark gray and soot Bragdon weathering chalks.

Details Details

Next I will point out some of the exterior details that I think add richness and realism to the model. Figure 6 below clearly shows an interesting gutter and downspout arrangement on both sides of the agent's bay window on the prototype. The HRM kit does not include gutters or downspouts.



Figure 6.

I modeled the two downspouts converging from the two roof lines as seen in Figure 7:



Figure 7.

The gutters were made from layering Evergreen styrene channel and strips and glued with Tenex 7R (hard to find today!) as shown next:

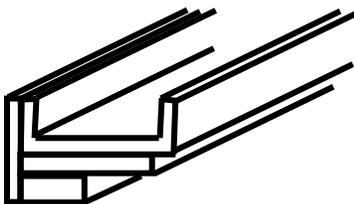


Figure 8.

Downspouts are solid brass rod and where the two join in Figure 7 was soldered. Much trial and error was required to get angles right and I almost gave up. But I'm glad I didn't because the detail is very interesting.

Another detail is door knobs and back plates. I modeled these simply by making a small cut of metal tape (left over when I got a new furnace several years ago) for the back plate and a small cut from styrene solid rod for the door handle glued with CA as shown in Figure 9 next:



Figure 9.

To make the detail “pop” I first painted the entire assembly black. Once dry, I painted the brass carefully to leave black outlines that extenuate the detail. In a way, this is not unlike the dark to light dry brush technique. This is a technique you can use for numerous details, like buttons on a coat, switches on a control panel, etc.

Also notice in Figures 7 and 9, all windows are double hung just as the prototype in Figure 6. These were part of the HRM kit. However, the kit comes with only one piece of laser cut clear plastic to attach across both upper and lower sashes. While the clear window plastic would correctly butt up with the lower sash, there would be a gap between the mullions and window pane for the upper sash. This is easily solved by simply cutting the window plastic in half and attaching both halves separately!

In Figure 5 you will see flashing for the chimneys and roof vent. Again, I cut metal tape to size and installed it as I was laying shingles using standard roofing practice. Since I spray painted the entire roof black before dry brushing, I had to paint the flashing using Humbrol “steel”. Also the stucco portion of the chimney in Figure 5 was constructed from 3 pieces of Plastruct stucco sheet plastic to match the prototype photos in Part 1 of this article. As for that crazy roof vent in Figure 6, that must have been some kind of Milwaukee Road standard article (or they got a good deal on a bunch of them) because it is the same on my New Lisbon Station and others I have seen. I tried to scratch build that crazy finned contraption, but to no avail. I ended up compromising with a vent from my parts box. I know, I know, you probably would not have even noticed it had I not pointed it out!

Last, the platform has some interesting details too. Figure 10 shows baggage carts with milk cans, mail bag, boxed perishables, and luggage.



Figure 10.

As many of you know, Jordan Products are no longer in business and they made a very nice baggage wagon. Now Tichy has filled that void with an equally nice kit and that is what you see in Figure 10. The sloppy black in the wheel hubs represents grease that has been applied in equally a sloppy manner on the prototype. Note, I created that Railway Express Agency sign in Figure 10 in Power Point because I could not get “crisp” enough image off the Internet.

Seal the dang wood!

My biggest lesson learned is the reason I decided to model the platform now. I have learned the hard way to seal both sides of all wood surfaces! I only painted the “concrete” color on the base of the baggage/REA side and only around the edges of the station portion. I did not paint the underside of the wood base at all. When I glued the scribed wood floor for the station section to the base the warping began (even after letting glue dry with weights on top). I managed to flatten the base using numerous techniques (wetting, clamps, weights, etc.) but the warp remained. I finally decided to mount the base on a “platform” to flatten the last bit of warpage.

The platform is one solid piece of 1/8” thick Sintra® lightweight foam PVC plastic product. This stuff is easy to cut and is very nice for many model building applications. The Sintra® is covered with Plastruct HO scale “rough” brick, cut to size and glued using 3M Super 77 spray adhesive. Spray both surfaces and get it right the first time when you press them together! I then glued the wood base on the kit to the brick platform also using the spray adhesive. I sandwiched the platform and station base between to very flat and true surfaces with weights on top (my basement workout dumbbells!). That did the trick.

Final Thoughts for Part 2

I hope you have enjoying reading this article as much as I have writing it, and I really hope Part 2 has given you some ideas to try for yourself. For me, there are no secrets in model railroading, just sharing of ideas and the commensurate comradery and fellowship. These articles are no substitute for being in person with you, but that time will come soon! But for now, stay tuned for Part 3 – Interior!