

How to make a Backdrop for your Model Train layout

Why do we want a backdrop?

- A backdrop sets the layout apart from its surroundings
- Gives the illusion the layout extends beyond the table top



Here's a layout before ...

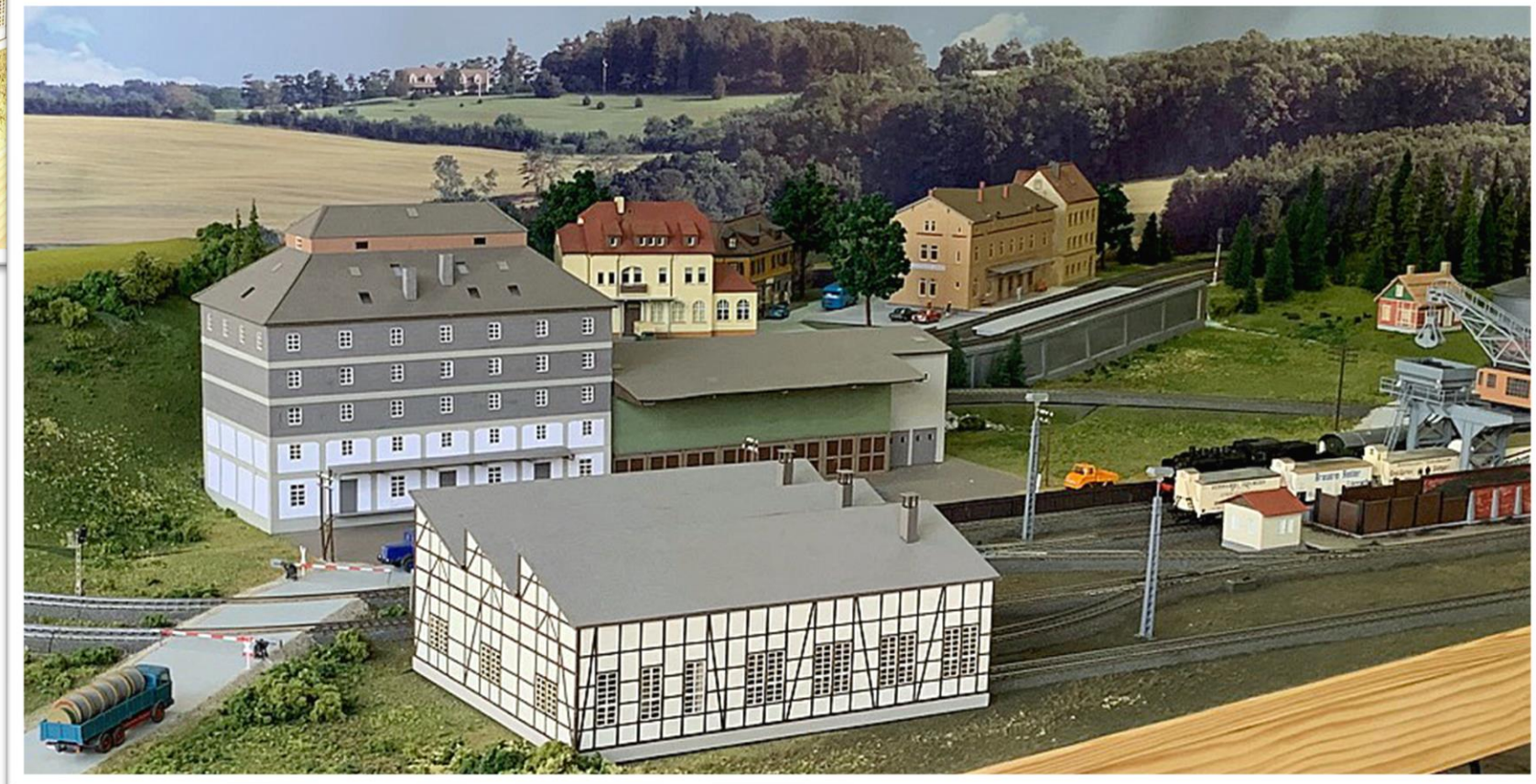
and after adding
a backdrop





Before...

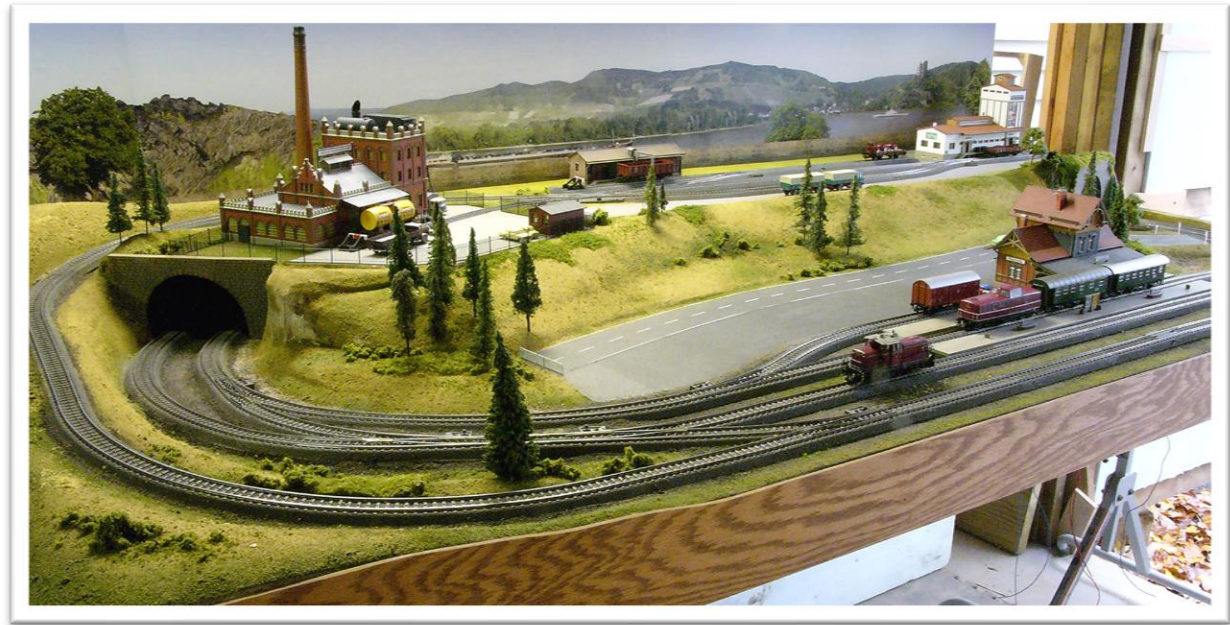
After



Backdrop choices

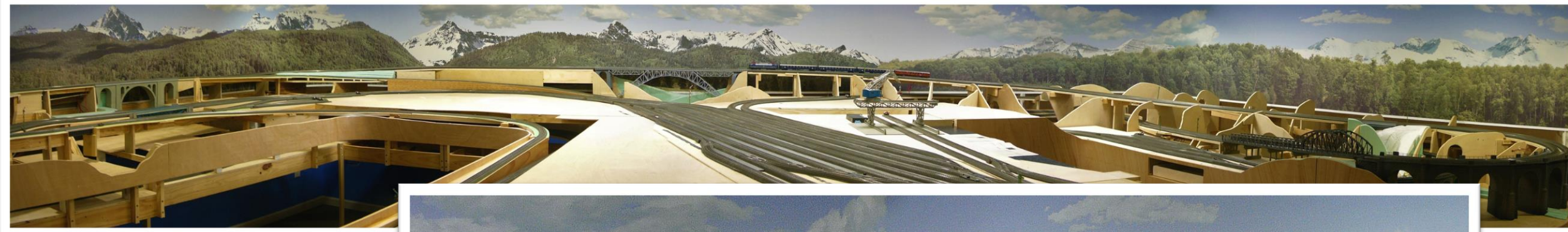
- ✓ Commercially available mural
- ✓ Photo
- ✓ Hand-painted

Commercially
available
backdrops

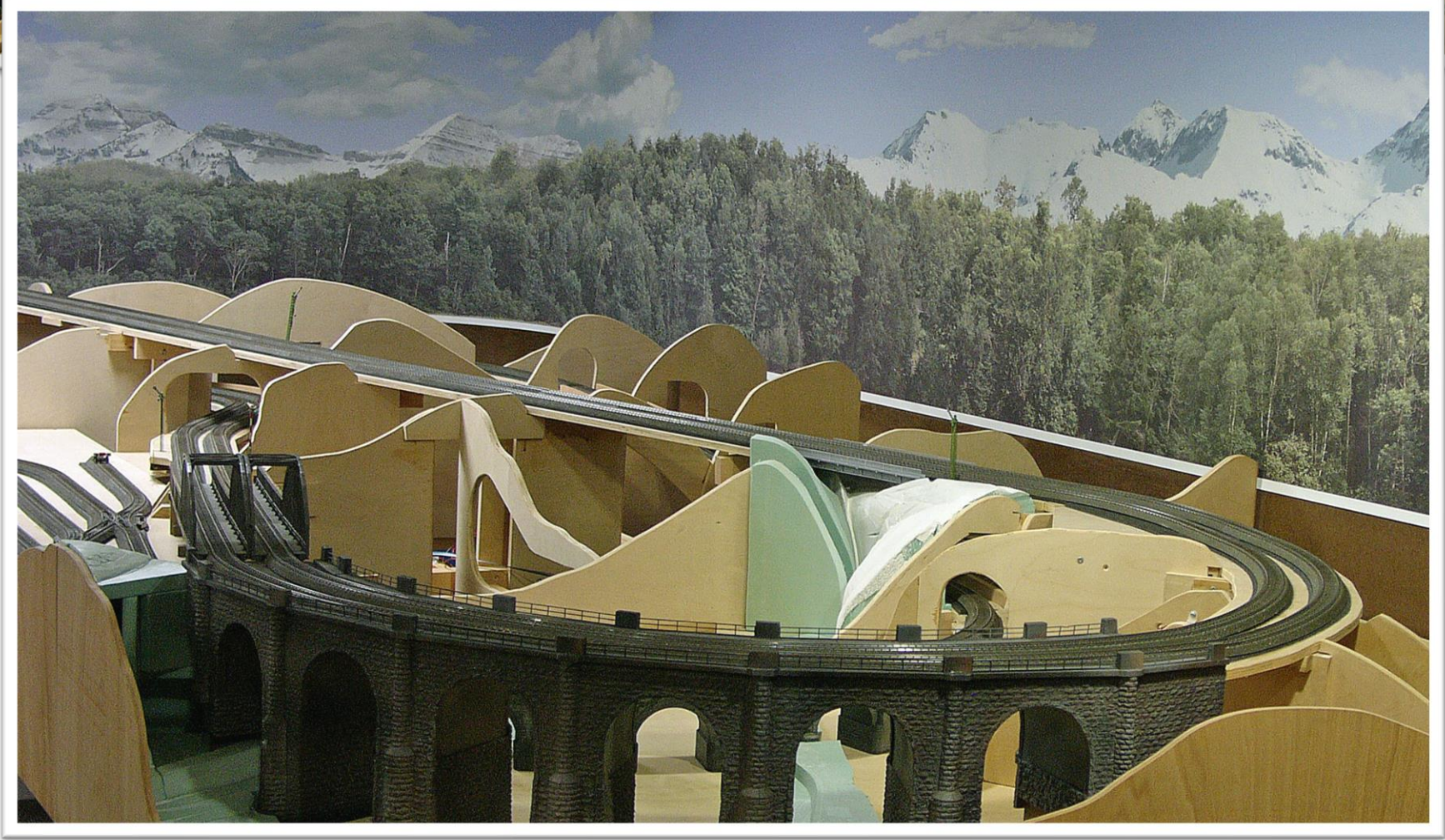




Two panels, \$20 each



Six panels,
\$230 each



Commercially backdrops available from Walthers, Busch



...and Backdrop Warehouse



Next we'll explore the
steps to hand-paint
your own backdrop

First you'll need to decide what to paint...

- Plain blue panel
- Sky with/without hills
- Full mural with details, structures, trees, etc.

Blue sky panel





Blue Sky with clouds



Blue sky with clouds & hills

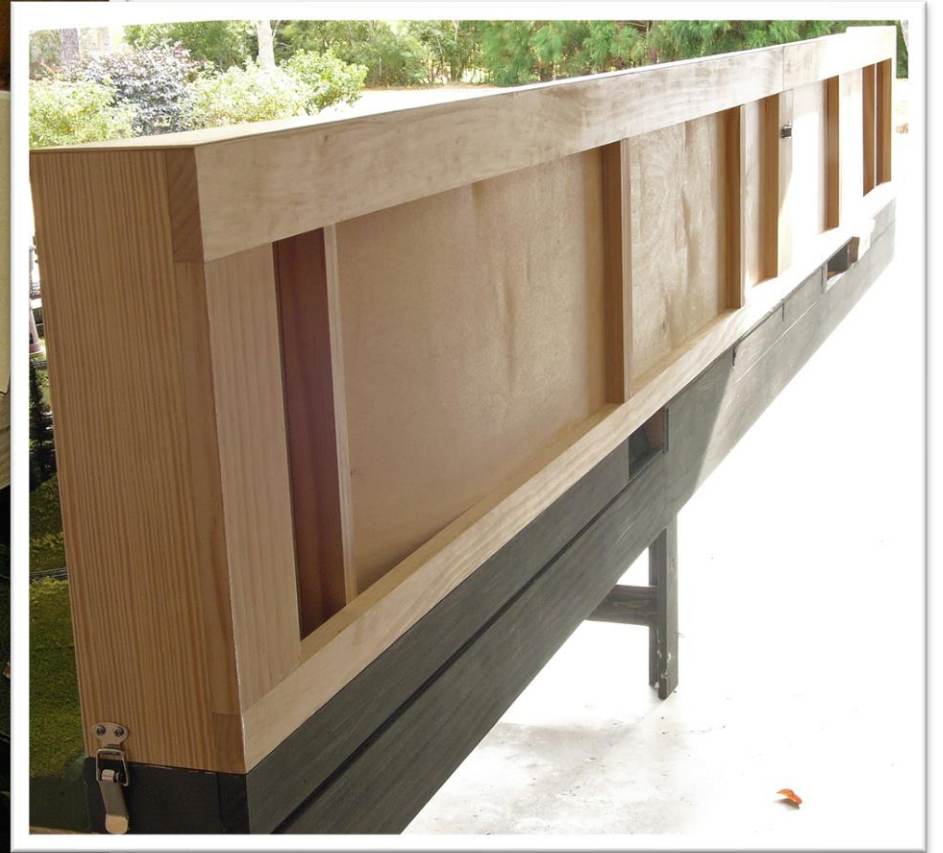


Whatever the choice you need to create a “canvas” for the backdrop.

Hard board “Masonite” or plywood makes a good surface. Where the layout is against a wall, this surface probably needs to be installed before the layout.



Free-standing layout, before
backdrop is added





Free-standing
Z scale
layout, the
backdrop
finish to be
added later



**Next we'll look at the step to
create a hand-painted backdrop**

Step 1 is deciding what you'll paint

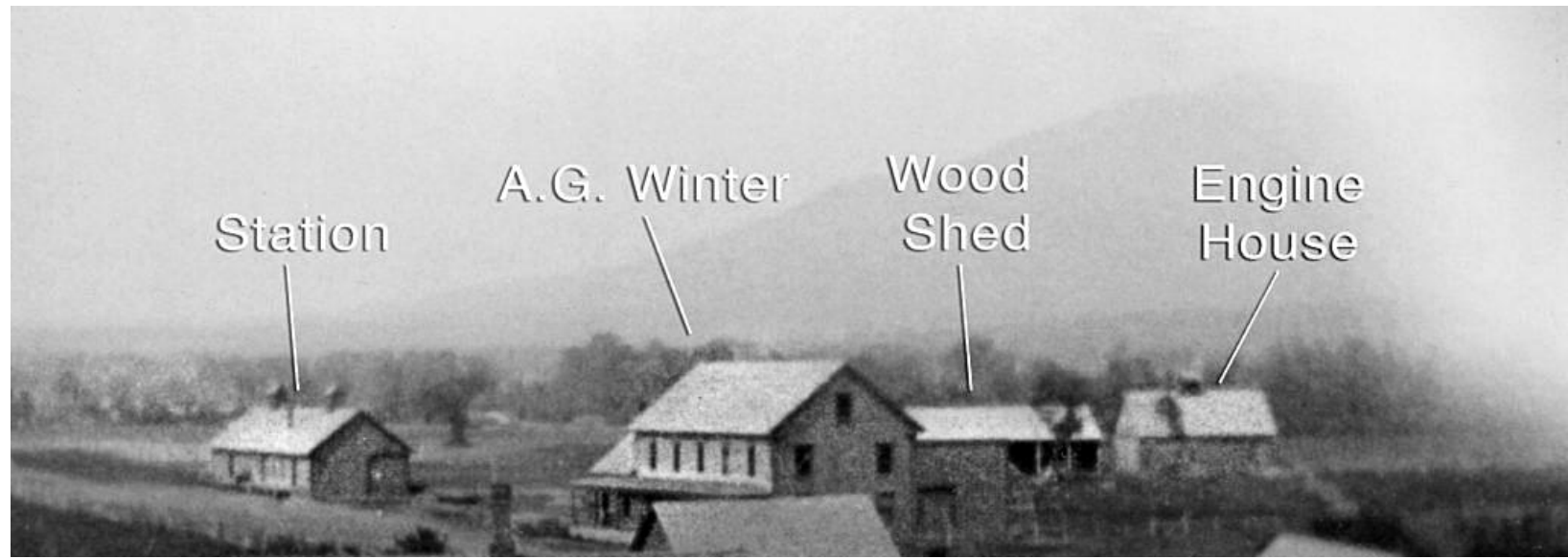
Working from a photo is key. Below is a Z scale layout with the locale in Germany's Black Forest. The terrain in the backdrop is different from the photo to the right but the color is the same and it works.





For our example today, we create a backdrop for “moveable” layout.

Our layout depicts Kingfield, Maine circa 1920. This black & white photo was taken in 1900

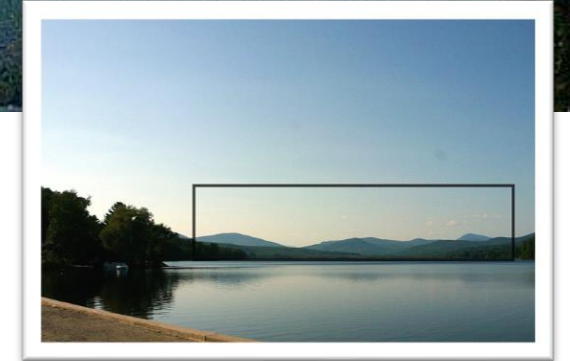


We're going to hand-paint a backdrop using a color photo taken recently in same locale

Area selected for our backdrop



This is the portion of the photo we'll use for the backdrop



...with the addition
of Mt. Abrams

Here's the Masonite "canvas"



Mounted in the alcove & curved at each end

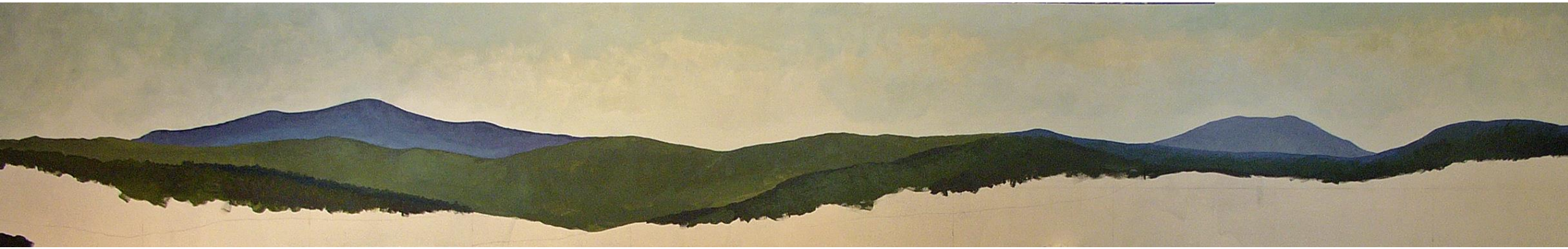
The sky is finished in these steps...

1. The top few inches is rolled with blue flat acrylic paint.
2. A few inches above the mountain line brushed white.
3. While **paint is wet** the upper and lower sections are blended with a 2" brush. The idea is to have the color go from dark at the top to light at the horizon.
4. Once the base color starts to dry, the clouds are brushed in using more white. Highlights in the clouds are made with a touch of gray.



When the sky is **completely dry**, you can begin to paint the land forms

- Start with the most distant mountains
- These will have a bluish grey cast
- They should have the least definition (detail)
- Each row of hills must be dry before painting the next



- Continue brushing the hills coming to the foreground
- Each row of hills should be more vibrant than the one behind it

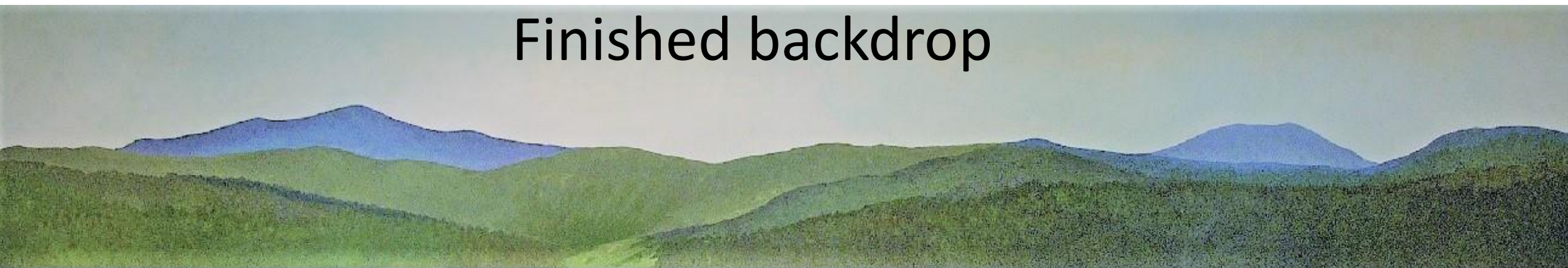
Each row of hills should be darkest along the top line and get lighter as you go down



Original photo

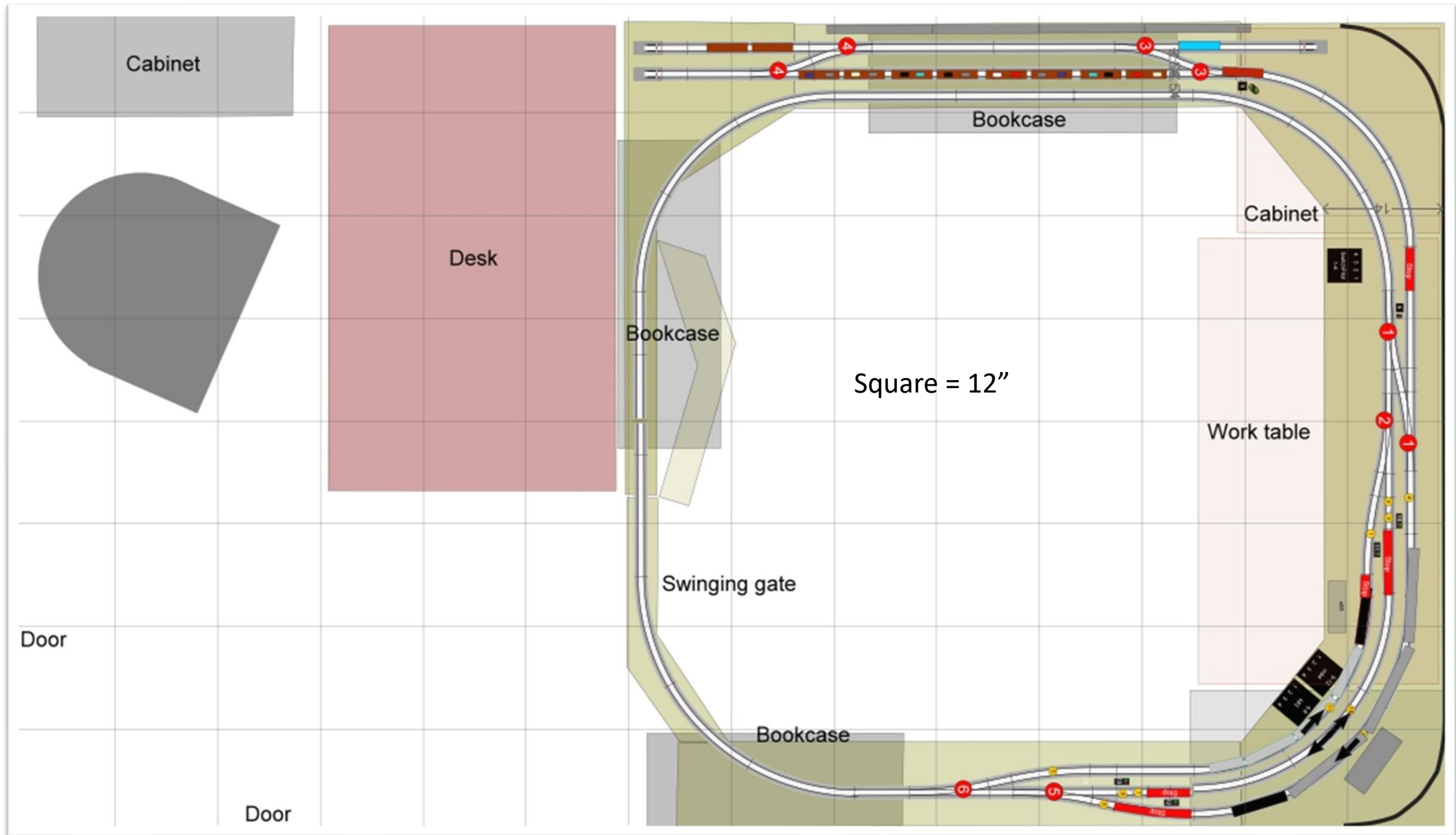


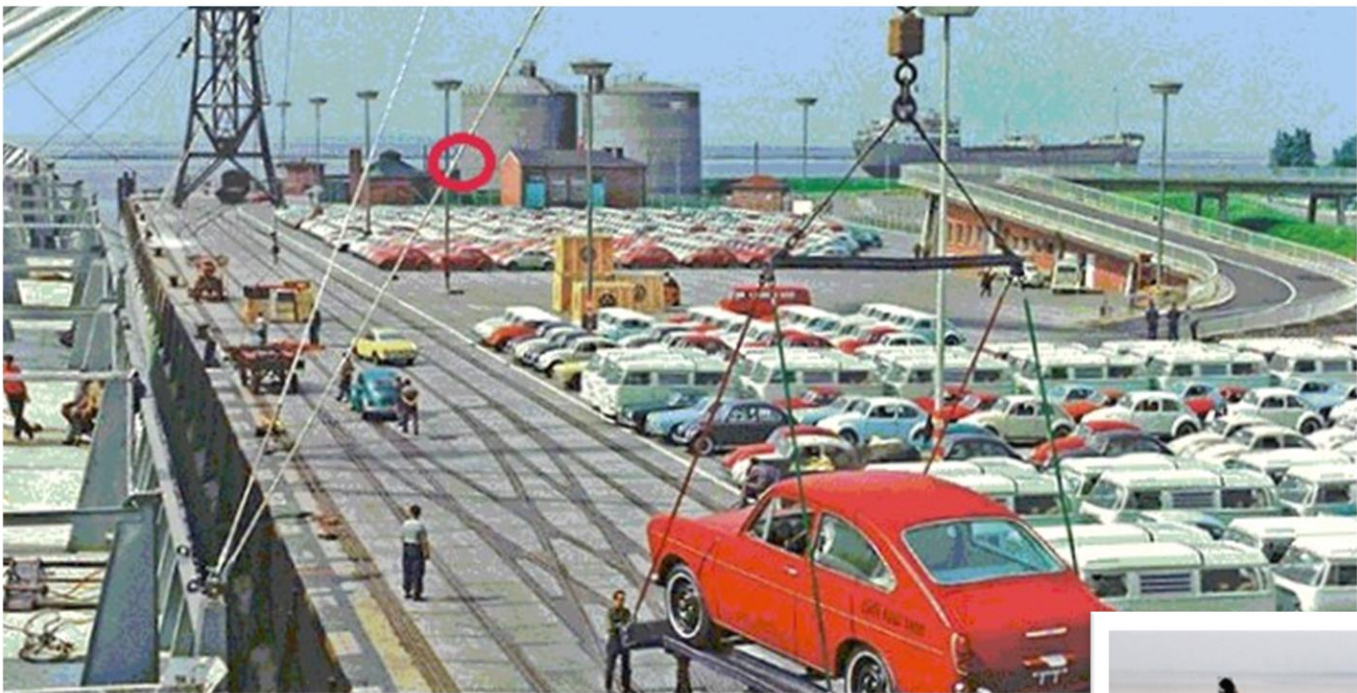
Finished backdrop



Finished backdrop in place

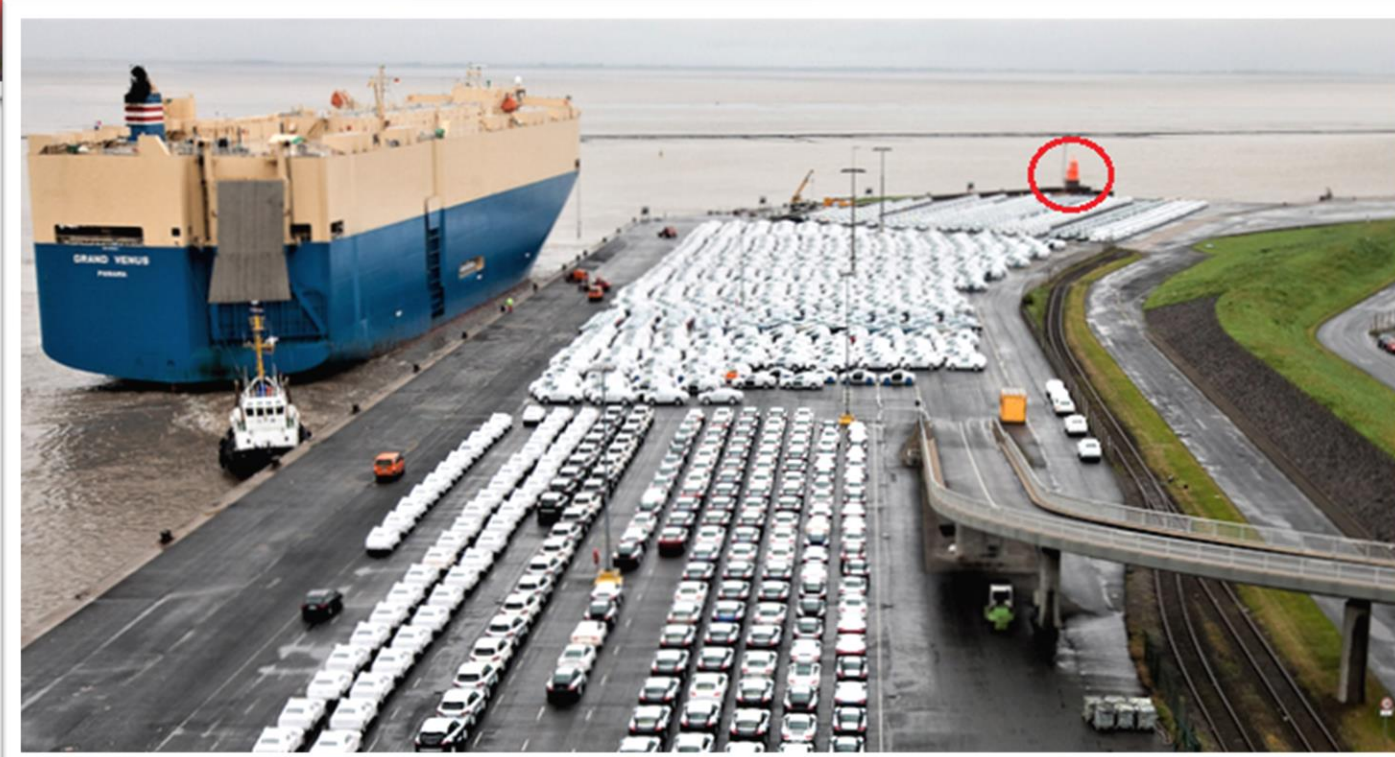


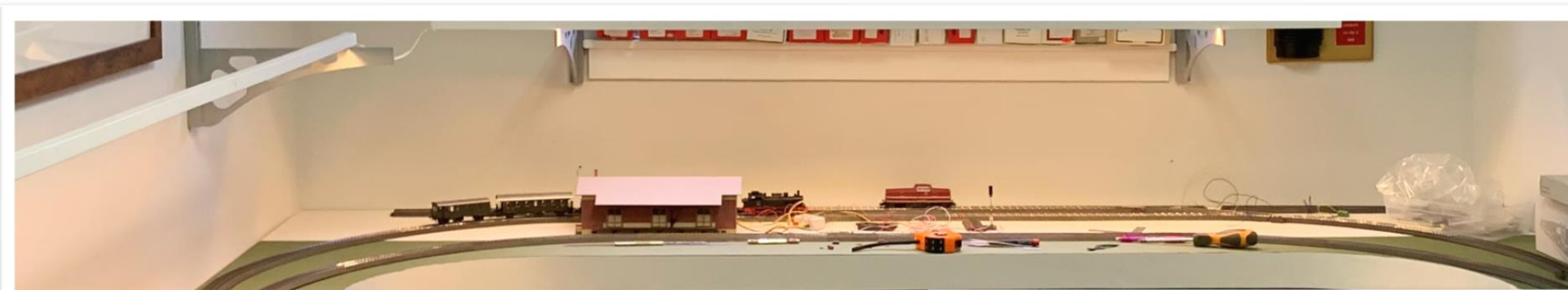




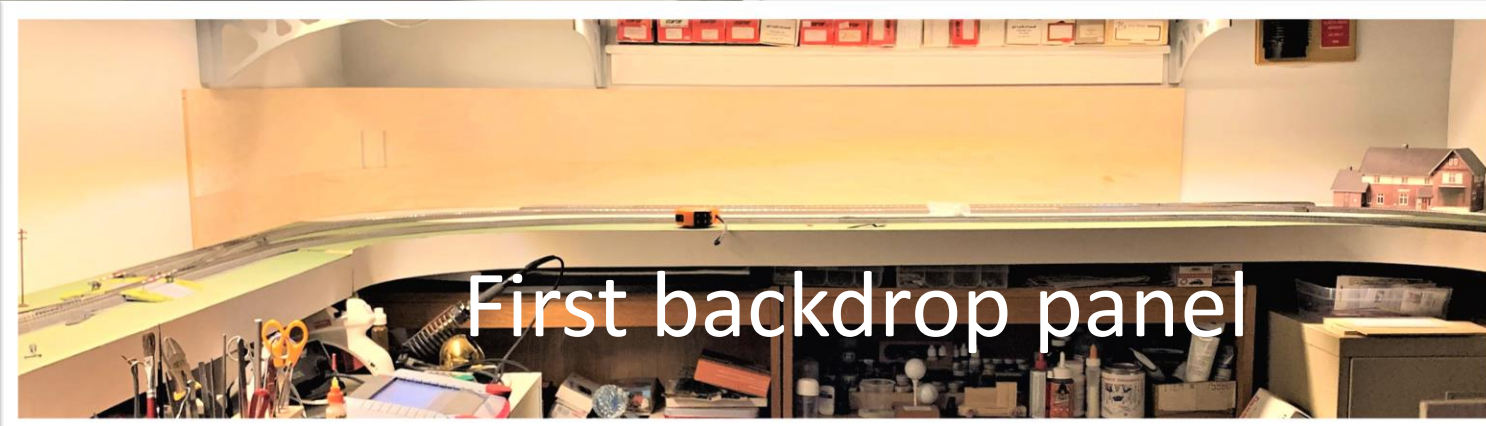
Auto export wharf
Port of Emden 1964

Same wharf
today





No backdrop



First backdrop panel



Still a work in process

