

Notes from the **MRRH STAFF**

Build a home layout as modules, volunteers for Cleveland and Kansas City conventions, and more ...



Get your feet wet with modules ...

As we look at today's state of the art ways to build a home layout, we think there are better ways. Taking a fill-the-room-with-benchwork approach may not be the best way to do a layout, whether the layout is to be large or small.

We'd like to suggest a different approach – build the layout in modules or sections. Let's describe how we see this working.

Start with a town, important industry or scenic focal point like a key bridge and then build a single section that's say one or two feet (5 - 10 cm) wide and four to six feet (1.2 - 2.4 meters) long.

Build this layout section/module at the workbench in comfort, which will allow you to do your best work. When it comes time to do wiring or install turnout controls, just turn the module over for an easy install.

Finish this one section to a good level of completion, exercising all the needed hobby skills: benchwork, roadbed, trackwork, wiring, scenery, and structures. Get a starter DCC system that's expandable (NCE's Powercab or a Digitrax Zephyr come to mind) and learn some DCC.

Now take this module into the layout room and add some “flat-top staging” to each end. Flat-top staging can be nothing more than a 1x12 with a 5-6 track staging yard on it. Put one of these on each end of your module and you can now run trains through this module. If the module is a town or industry, you can also try some switching.

With not a lot of investment of time and money, you now have an operational layout that looks finished!

If that’s too small for you, then build another module section to add to the first, and again build it to a reasonable level of completion at the workbench. Once that’s done, take it to the layout room and add it in to your layout-that’s-a-building.

Voila! Instant layout expansion, and it too looks finished.

Using this approach, you can build to any size or you can stop wherever you want – and all along the way you have an operational layout that looks complete.

We see many benefits to this approach for doing a layout, and we believe it is *the way* to do a model railroad in the 21st century.

We like that this approach can put an end to huge layouts that never reach any satisfying level of completion. You’re much less likely to overcommit, and it’s also a route to quick gratification, which is a popular concept in today’s microwave world.

It also makes it easier to replace the older original sections where you made all your mistakes. As your skills improve, just build a new section to replace that old original one you built.

We think this approach to building a layout has so much going for it that we’d like to see it catch on. There should be fewer plywood pacifics as a result!