

EXPAND YOUR HORIZONS WITH BACKDROPS

Backdrops, or backboards, expand your layout and add realism to it. They connect your models to their wider world, while hiding our much larger world.

1. Mix and match possible **applications** and **materials**:

Applications
On room wall
Scene divider (4' X 8' or peninsula)
On back of module or layout bench-work
Curved or coved corners
Hide staging behind visible layout – layered backdrops

Materials
Wallboard or drywall
1/8 th inch tempered hardboard (Masonite)
.060 or .080 styrene
MDF or signboard
Gatorboard
Thin MDF or fiberboard
1" insulation board (pink or blue foam)
Aluminum trim coil
Back of vinyl or linoleum flooring
Combination of materials

2. Steps to **creating a backdrop**:

- Mount backdrop directly to layout or build a support frame
- Hide seams or screws/nails
- Prime using spray or roller
- Simplest approach is just sky color paint (blue or gray)
- Blue fading into white at horizon
- Photo versus painted backdrop details
- Photo backdrop ideas

3. **Tricks and tips** for a backdrop that expands and creates depth to the modeled world:

- Higher layout viewing height
- Relatively low horizon line
- KISS principal – maybe just a faded sky color
- Similar colors on layout and backdrop
- Lighter and more muted colors suggests distance
- White spray between layers as “haze”
- Avoid obvious shadows on backdrop
- Avoid shifting perspectives (conflicting vanishing points) or edges of buildings meeting the backdrop

4. **Disguise the 90° angle** where the backdrop meets the layout:

- Scenery elevated so joint is hidden
- Rivers at acute angle
- Roads dip behind scenery or meet photo backdrop
- Natural features: 3D hills, trees, shrubbery
- Human features: background buildings or flats, fences, signs

5. **References and Resources:**

- Backdrop labeled posts on my model railroad blog: <http://gnbranch.blogspot.com/search/label/Backdrops>
- NMRA members-only clinic: <https://www.nmra.org/backdrop-painting-forested-scenery>
- *Model Railroader Magazine*: June 2018, Backdrop Special
- *Model Railroader Magazine*: December 2009, Step by Step: How to Build a Backdrop
- Model Railroad Academy sample video on painting backdrops: <https://www.modelrailroadacademy.com/video/tips-for-painting-backdrops-for-model-railroads-010359/>