



THIS O GAUGE LAYOUT SHOWCASES THE RUGGED LANDSCAPE OF THE LONE STAR STATE

By Roger Carp

Photos by Paul Hester and TW TrainWorx

Remember the Frank Sinatra hit song from 1959, “High Hopes”? Old Blue Eyes marveled at the ant so confident in its strength it tried to push around a rubber tree plant. Then he extolled the silly old ram determined to “punch a hole in a dam.”

Longtime O gauge enthusiast Glen Rosenbaum ignores rubber trees and would never give a thought to “buttin’ that dam,” but he has finished a project about as daring as anything Sinatra mentioned. He wanted to fit the best of his life into the train room at his new home.

Glen dreamed of building an O gauge railroad that conveyed what it was like to grow up in Houston during the postwar era. He dreamed of introducing visitors to the Texas coastal plains surrounding Houston and the majestic, rugged landscape of west Texas while highlighting the railroad history of that time.

“It can’t be done unless you build a layout the size of the old Astrodome or the stadium where the Dallas Cowboys play” – that’s what you’re saying. Sorry, but with the help of Roger and Dorcie Farkash and the crew at TW TrainWorx, Glen has accomplished a feat conceivable only in the Lone Star State.



MEET GLEN

Our host has no difficulty sharing the credit for his great 14 x 30-foot home model railroad with Roger and Dorcie Farkash and other artists employed at TW TrainWorx in Dallas.

1. Our photographer had to climb almost to the top of a radio tower to snap this incredible picture of the main yard on the HW&P. The finest behemoths from Lionel’s steam and diesel rosters rest comfortably, eager to be dispatched on their next journeys through the scenery crafted by TW TrainWorx.

COVER
STORY

DON'T MESS WITH TEXAS



2. The depot in Wharton, Texas, (a model built from scratch) hosts an absolutely stunning O gauge replica of the *Texas Special* passenger train. That Lionel streamliner assumes a starring role on Glen Rosenbaum's awe-inspiring layout, which beautifully conveys his memories and abiding love of the Lone Star State.

Scenic high points

Glen knew scenery was going to be vitally important if he wanted to replicate the stark and barren landscape of west Texas. He had driven through it, gazed at the forbidding canyons and rugged hills and felt the heat of summer.

Along with the mountains with their baked brown surfaces and red and gray rocks, Glen admired the sparkling Pecos River that snakes through the steep walls of the canyon. He felt awe when studying the bridge erected over it by the Southern Pacific. A replica in O gauge of that marvel would be a centerpiece.

Glen also found his brain crowded with images influenced by what he recollected from his youth about the stations and yards in Houston and small towns dotting the plains and deserts of Texas stretching out to El Paso and into New Mexico. Those images, with the Pecos River High Bridge, share a theme – their place along the Southern Pacific Transcontinental Line, completed in 1883.

No question that Glen's layout would need to capture those memories with models and scenes representative of life then. But this ambitious and thoughtful modeler also wanted his O gauge display to breathe life into his memories of the two places his family had called home

since 1949 – the newer home was recently remodeled to house the layout covered here. Finally, he expected to be able as well to express on the layout his support and love of opera in Houston.

Is your head starting to spin? Could a residential O gauge model railroad covering 14 x 30 feet encompass the landscape of Texas and a healthy slice of its railroad history, all the while reflecting the life and interests of the gentleman planning and doing much to construct it? As stated, Glen had high hopes on a scale of Sinatra's ant and ram.

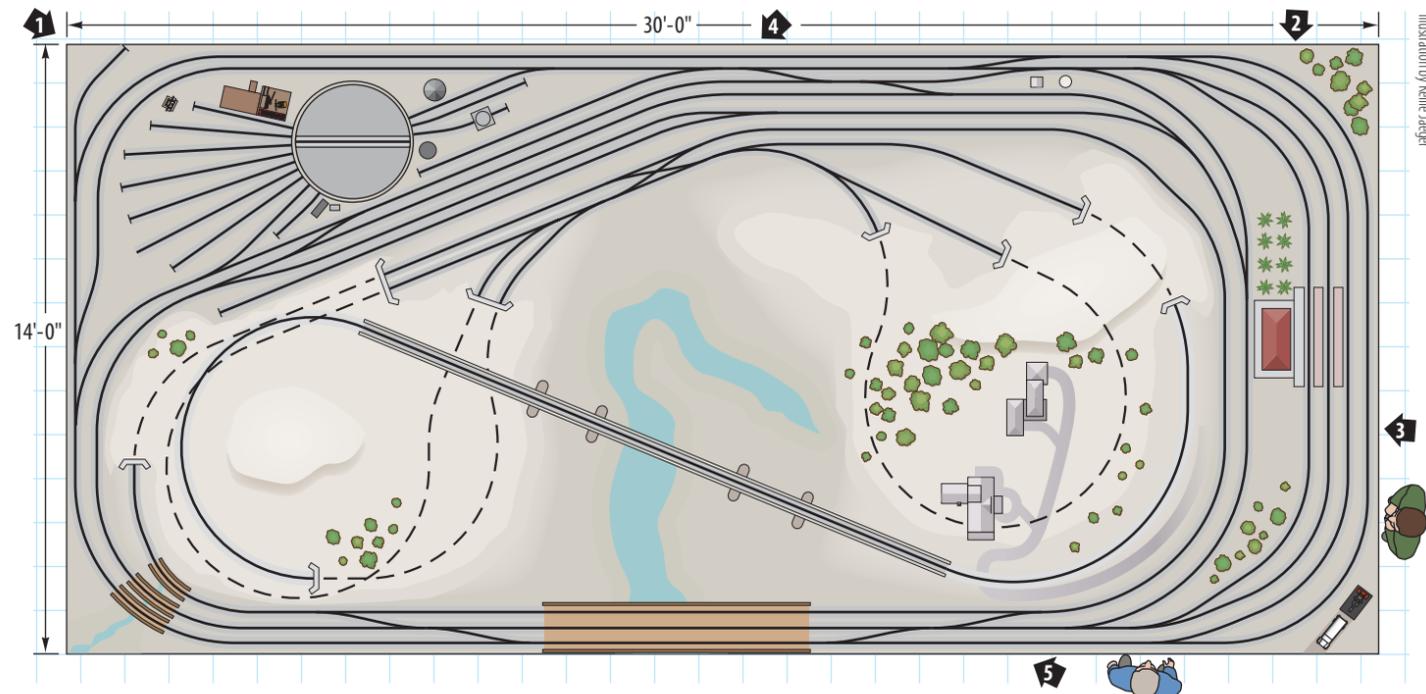
Always going bigger

The attitude encapsulated by the term “bigger and better” has long driven Glen. Nowhere does that become more obvious than when he begins talking about toy trains and how he has approached them ever since he received his first set of electric models as a toddler in the early 1950s.

“I was three or four,” Glen says, “when I received a Marx train from my parents. Pretty soon we had a ‘layout’ – I guess you could call it that – with one simple loop of three-rail track. I ran it so much I burned out the transformer!”



3. A Southern Pacific passenger train in the Daylight paint scheme passes models of the two homes where Glen and his family lived during his childhood in Houston.



Layouts Glen built as a boy and then for his nephew and great-nephew years later served as preparation for the hi-rail masterpiece realized by TW TrainWorx. The numbered arrows correspond to the numbers in each of the captioned photographs.

But even at the ripe age of five Glen imagined bigger and better trains. Maybe that was the reason on the afternoon he blew out six candles on his birthday cake he was also tearing off the wrapping taped to a box holding a Lionel no. 2179WS outfit. Originally cataloged in 1952, that four-car freight set featured a no. 671 steam turbine equipped with a smoke mechanism pulling a no. 2046WX whistling tender. Little wonder young Glen was mesmerized by all it could do.

Once again, a three-rail layout followed soon after the boy started putting his realistic locomotive through its paces. A basic oval of tubular track evolved into a complex network after Glen was given a pair of remote-controlled switches and a 90-degree crossover. Better yet, the flat railroad on a carpet rose to dazzling heights after a Lionel no. 110 trestle set and more sections of track became his.

Bigger meant better for Glen. He acquired more straights and curves until he had enough track to build an O gauge empire filling a room that was 16 x 16 feet.

Bigger still meaning better

Even after leaving toy trains behind once he entered high school, Glen preserved warm memories of those carpet layouts in his brain. The pleasures of the hobby lived on, so much so that almost two decades later he felt driven to unpack

his Lionels and build an O gauge display for his nephew, Sean.

Years passed, and Glen purchased and set up a new Lionel set for Sean's son, Morgan. As long as Morgan showed an interest in what began as a 5 x 10-foot layout, Glen justified investing time and real estate in it. Of course, that project nurtured his desire to create the layout filling his own dreams.

Consequently, Glen's prevailing attitude of bigger and better led to biggest and best a couple of years ago when after much planning and discussion visions in his mind burst forth in the incredible Houston, Wharton & Pecos RR shown here.

Finally ready to build

In June 2011, the moment of reckoning arrived. An architectural firm was beginning the construction drawings for the remodeling of Glen's family home, a project that would include a second-floor addition with a 22 x 38-foot train room.

Glen had sketched a track plan that included the principal scenes to be added and the structures needed to transform dreams into actual vignettes. Coincidentally, like Frank Sinatra's old O gauge railroad, Glen's track plan was derived in part from the layout opened at the Lionel showroom in 1949.

Glen decided to engage the services of

LAYOUT AT A GLANCE

Name: Glen Rosenbaum's Houston, Wharton & Pecos RR

Gauge: O

Dimensions: 14 x 30 feet

Track and switches: Ross Custom Switches (diameters range from 72 to 104 inches)

Motive power: Lionel

Rolling stock: Atlas O, K-Line, Lionel, MTH

Controls: Lionel CW-80 (3), 180-watt PowerHouse Power Supply (6), TPC 400

Track Power Controller (3) with Legacy Cab-2 command control

Accessories: Lionel (postwar), Millhouse River Studios, Z-Stuff for Trains

Structures: Lionel, MTH, scratchbuilt

Vehicles: Corgi, Ertl, Maisto, Matchbox, Road Champs, Solido, Yat Ming

Figures: Arttista, Preiser, Woodland Scenics



4. Did anybody mention that Glen has a special place in his heart for the Union Pacific? He admires the gigantic steam engines that railroad once operated.

TW TrainWorx in Dallas – professionals whose creativity and great work have been leaving folks impressed for years. They would understand what he hoped to achieve while having better materials, equipment, and artistic skills.

Conversations with Roger Farkash, at the helm of TW TrainWorx, had erased any doubts in Glen's mind. Roger and his team began by refining the track plan and designing the layout table. The teak hardwood used for mill work in Glen's home would serve for the cabinets installed in the train table base to display favorite models, the Lionel trains from his youth.

TrainWorx used top-grade 1 x 3 pieces of finger-jointed white pine for the supports and framing. It used ½-inch-thick sheets of cabinet-grade plywood for the tabletop. Next came 1-inch sections of Styrofoam insulation board. TrainWorx saw no purpose in skimping on the foundation of this 36-inch-high layout.

Personal experience and articles about other layouts in *Classic Toy Trains* had taught Glen the importance of adding roadbed under the track. TrainWorx recommended foam rubber whose thickness ranged from ⅛ to ¾ inches.

Decisions about the brand of track to buy cannot be underestimated. "For what I hoped to do on the HW&P," Glen said, "the track and turnouts from Ross Custom Switches were about perfect. I liked their realistic appearance and their reputation for quality."

The width of the sections screwed to

the smooth and level tabletop was far from uniform. The tightest curves on the layout measured 72 inches in diameter. At the opposite end of the spectrum were pieces with a diameter of 104 inches.

Adventures with electronics

Before turning attention to the task of developing scenery, Glen and Roger had to weigh options regarding electronics. Experience, knowledge and Roger's guidance again informed Glen at every step. Little wonder he's satisfied with the paths adopted when wiring the HW&P. "It operates all but flawlessly."

Let's quiz Roger about the kinds of wire and the types of power sources selected. The feeds to the bus lines around the layout are 14-gauge stranded copper wire. The primary bus connection is 14-gauge tinned copper wire. Feeder lines soldered to every 8 feet of track are 16-gauge stranded copper. Wires for the two Lionel accessories from postwar days (nos. 264 forklift platform and 362 barrel loader) are thinner: 18 or 22 gauge.

Did you think Glen's preference for postwar accessories means he went for a traditional system of control? He's going to shock you, then, because he insisted on command mode, installing Legacy Cab-2

from Lionel. "The superior features and outstanding performance guaranteed by Legacy are great," he says.

Generating the power for the network of track and switches, along with the accessories, is a bank of transformers. Glen directs attention to half a dozen of Lionel's 180-watt PowerHouses and three of its CW-80 models. Also standing guard on his panel you notice three of Lionel's TPC-400 track power controllers.

"The layout consists of 16 isolated blocks controlled at the central panel by 5-amp toggle switches," Glen told us. "It may sound complicated, but visitors, even those who have never used command control before, quickly get to know it."

Mountains and vegetation

The benchwork couldn't be stronger or more level. The track looked fabulous and provided Glen's fleet with a smooth and even network to travel. The electronics worked as consistently as desired. The ghosts of executives who had served the fallen flags represented on the HW&P would have deemed it worthy.

Except that scenery and structures awaited. These elements required the highest levels of creativity and skill to realize the HW&P's vast scope.

Roger's team began by assembling a plywood core for each mountain on the layout and then adding blocked urethane foam to finish the outer surface.

They carved realistic features, sealing them with an acrylic coating to create a hard shell surface, ready for painting. Next came a host of colors, which they glazed with transparent acrylic paints or added flat and clear enamels.

The artisans proceeded to sprinkle assorted colors and textures of commercial ground cover. As reported, they used products put out by Brennan's Model Railroading, Noch, Scenic Express, Silflor, and Woodland Scenics.

The arid, moon-like landscape of Glen's version of west Texas required nothing more than sparse vegetation. The handful of bushes and trees planted included items marketed by Creative Accents, Grand Central Gems, and JTT.

Turning to the Pecos River meandering through the canyon spanned by the model



5. Every visitor to the Houston, Wharton & Pecos RR feels the grandeur of west Texas. The stark and rugged landscape has been captured in breathtaking detail. Three levels of track offer Glen impressive runs for his unusually long freight trains.

of the Southern Pacific's monumental bridge, Roger states that first the bottom and banks were carefully painted. Then artists detailed the water with waves and rapids formed with clear gel medium. Roger carved the rock formations, being guided by photos of the actual canyon walls near the Southern Pacific Bridge.

Artisans at work

Good as the landscaping on the HW&P RR is, Glen hardly hesitates before telling visitors that TrainWorx really distinguished itself with the realistic designed models of structures its staff of expert craftsmen finished. They proved to be masters with the latest AutoCAD software when it came time to develop the eye-catching bridges, railroad facilities, businesses, and residences.

According to Roger, the modelers on his payroll developed and fabricated the structures following instructions from Glen. The chief architect of the HW&P explained that he wanted realistic models of two houses his family had dwelled in during the postwar era. Glen provided

TrainWorx the blueprints for both homes.

Also essential for Glen were replicas of towers dominating the Englewood Yard as he remembered it. The Southern Pacific had maintained that sprawling facility situated a few miles northeast of downtown Houston during his youth – the yard now is an important component of the Union Pacific system.

Then Glen requested something else. He wanted a highly detailed model of the passenger depot the SP had built in Wharton, Texas, a century ago. Donors had banded together to subsidize the restoration of that beautiful station in 2007.

Nothing to change

More than accomplishing the goals Glen considered essential to getting the layout of his dreams and capturing his life, the team from TrainWorx linked the structures with roads and highways noted for their realism and variety. Craftsmen there sculpted them out of Styrofoam and Sculptamold and then sealed the different surfaces with flat paints from the FlexCoat line produced by Rosco.

When you approach a project with very high hopes, as Glen did with the Houston, Wharton & Pecos, disappointment and frustration would seem inevitable. Yet he insisted he wouldn't change anything: "I am extremely pleased and satisfied with all aspects of the layout."

Plainly, the O gauge layout has done exactly what Glen had desired: It shows friends and acquaintances what it was like to come of age in Houston half a century ago. The terrain, roads, and buildings, not to mention the railroads that mean so much to Glen, come to life again. **CTT**

To learn about TW TrainWorx, along with the layouts it has built and the model railroading products it sells, contact Roger or Dorcie Farkash at 2808 McGowan St., Dallas TX 75203; 877-881-4997. Or go to www.twtrainworx.com

CTT ONLINE

TO WATCH A VIDEO of Glen Rosenbaum's O gauge model railroad, please go to www.ClassicToyTrains.com/LayoutVisits