



Odyssey IN O GAUGE

Paul Ilyinsky's hi-rail layout bridges a fascinating past with the present

by Roger Carp | photos by William Zuback

THE 20-BY 38-FOOT O gauge layout in Paul Ilyinsky's home isn't the first model railroad he enjoyed. It may not have been his most prototypically accurate layout. From a collecting angle, the trains on it aren't the most significant he ever owned.

Yet anyone seeing the smile on Paul's face as he operated trains on his Algoma Central would have realized it was the most satisfying to him. A lifetime spent in Europe and America – with Märklin No. 1 gauge and HO scale trains – culminated with an O gauge railroad that Paul's family says was his favorite.

Czarist Russia and Märklin trains

Paul, who passed away in 2004, made quite a journey in life, traveling all over the world before returning to Florida in 1979 with his wife Angelica. Retirement never suited this active gentleman, although he did slow down. A vital part of his daily routine was to enjoy his layout, often sharing the pleasures of toy trains with his grandchildren.

Paul looked at his long and productive life as one big adventure. Never as a boy growing up in Europe in the 1930s could he have anticipated his future. Except, he might have interjected, "I might have

◀ **1. Arriving Great Northern Alco diesels and a departing Union Pacific train are all but lost amid the girders of the scratchbuilt double-deck curved bridge that serves as the centerpiece of Paul Ilyinsky's 20- by 38-foot O gauge layout.**

known toy trains would always be with me."

The earliest miniature trains Paul recalled were cast-iron models he pulled along the floor. Then came Märklin electric-profile locomotives pulling passenger and freight cars. Exotic for a boy growing up in New Jersey or California, but not surprising for a lad living in France.

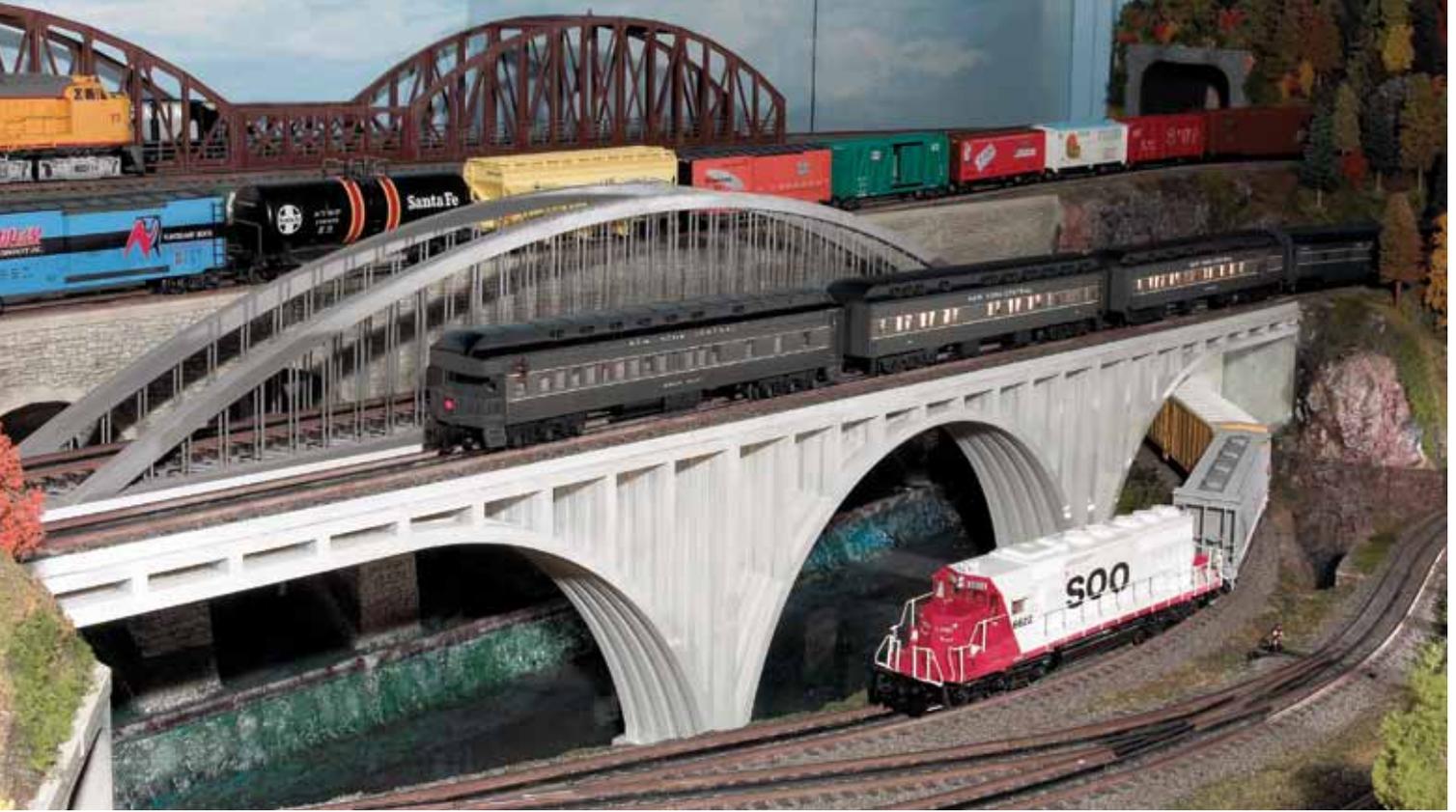
Especially if royal blood ran through his veins.



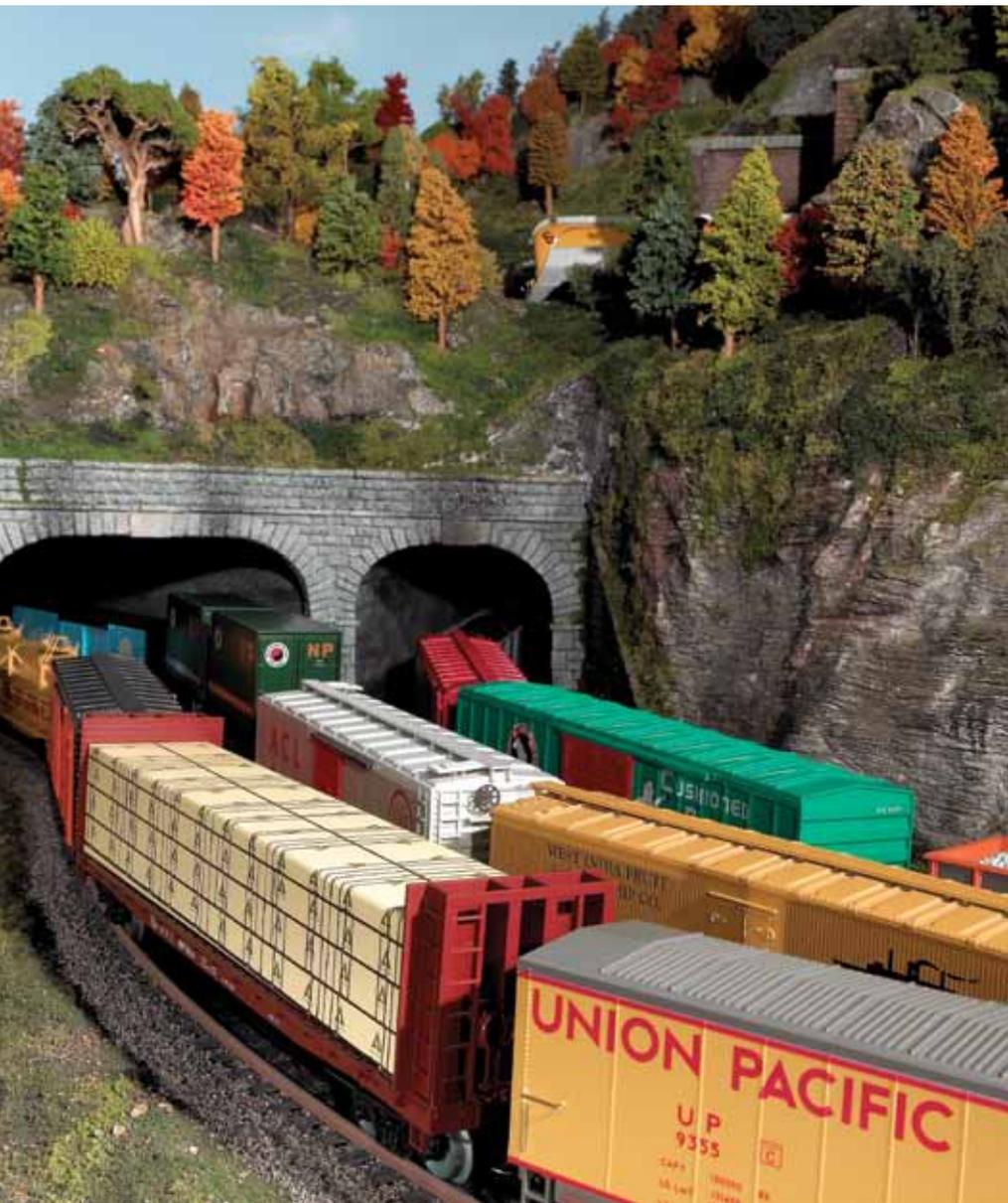
◀ **Paul enjoyed miniature trains all his life, from Märklin No. 1 gauge to HO scale and finally the superb 20- by 38-foot O gauge layout that Michael Hart's firm built for him.**

Paul didn't hide the fact that he was a distant relative of Nicholas II, the last czar of Russia. Once, after winning a mayoral contest in his adopted home of Palm Beach, Fla., he quipped that he was the "only Romanov ever democratically elected to office."

Without going into detail – this is a toy train magazine and not a historical journal – Paul's father was Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich, the youngest son of Czar Alexander II.



▲ 2. Water falling over a spillway on the lower level of Paul's layout drowns out the sounds of a Lionel Soo Line SD40 as it emerges from a tunnel with grain and cement hoppers in tow. Weary travelers aboard a New York Central passenger train spy on the action as their express rolls across a viaduct.



In 1916, irate over the influence that Rasputin, a self-proclaimed “holy man,” exercised over the royal family, Dmitri enlisted in a plot that succeeded in murdering Rasputin. For his role in the conspiracy, Czar Nicholas II banished him from Russia.

Being forced to leave his homeland proved fortunate for Dmitri. It enabled him to survive the Communist revolution that followed months later, during which the czar and other members of the royal family were killed. Dmitri ended up in London, where he met and married a wealthy and free-spirited lady from New York City named Audrey Emery.

Paul, their only child, was born four years later in 1928. While his father spent hours playing with Märklin No. 1 gauge sets, Paul was left to stage battle scenes with lead soldiers. His father, acting like an autocrat, refused to permit him to run the trains.

Paul's childhood lasted through the 1930s, to the moment when the Germans

◀ 3. The more colorful the freight car, the more Paul liked it. No wonder he put together such attractive trains like the three heading into and out of a tunnel on the outskirts of Algoma.



▲ 4. Step into Paul Ilyinsky's train room and this sight greets you. In front is a railyard crammed with tracks and rolling stock. At the far end of the yard is the impressive 12-foot-long double-deck bridge that brings trains in and out of Algoma, shown at the upper right.

invaded France in the spring of 1940. Fearful of being captured, Dmitri fled to neutral Switzerland. Paul and his mother ended up in the United States.

Paul never saw the Märklin pieces again, but he suspected that they were

claimed by Hermann Goering, second in command to Adolf Hitler in Nazi Germany. Goering, a model train hobbyist, had seen Dmitri's trains and expressed his admiration. Paul believed that Goering kept his father's collection after Dmitri left France.

From No. 1 gauge to HO

By the time that World War II ended in 1945, Paul's life had undergone still more eventful changes. His father had died three years earlier, and his mother

had remarried and then settled in picturesque Charlottesville, Va. Paul subsequently joined the U.S. Marines and rose through the ranks.

Soon married with a family of five children, Paul thought again of model railroading and eventually decided to try his hand at HO scale. His commitment to this scale, smaller than what he'd seen as a child, grew stronger after Angelica and he moved their family from Florida to Cincinnati.

Each HO scale layout that Paul built

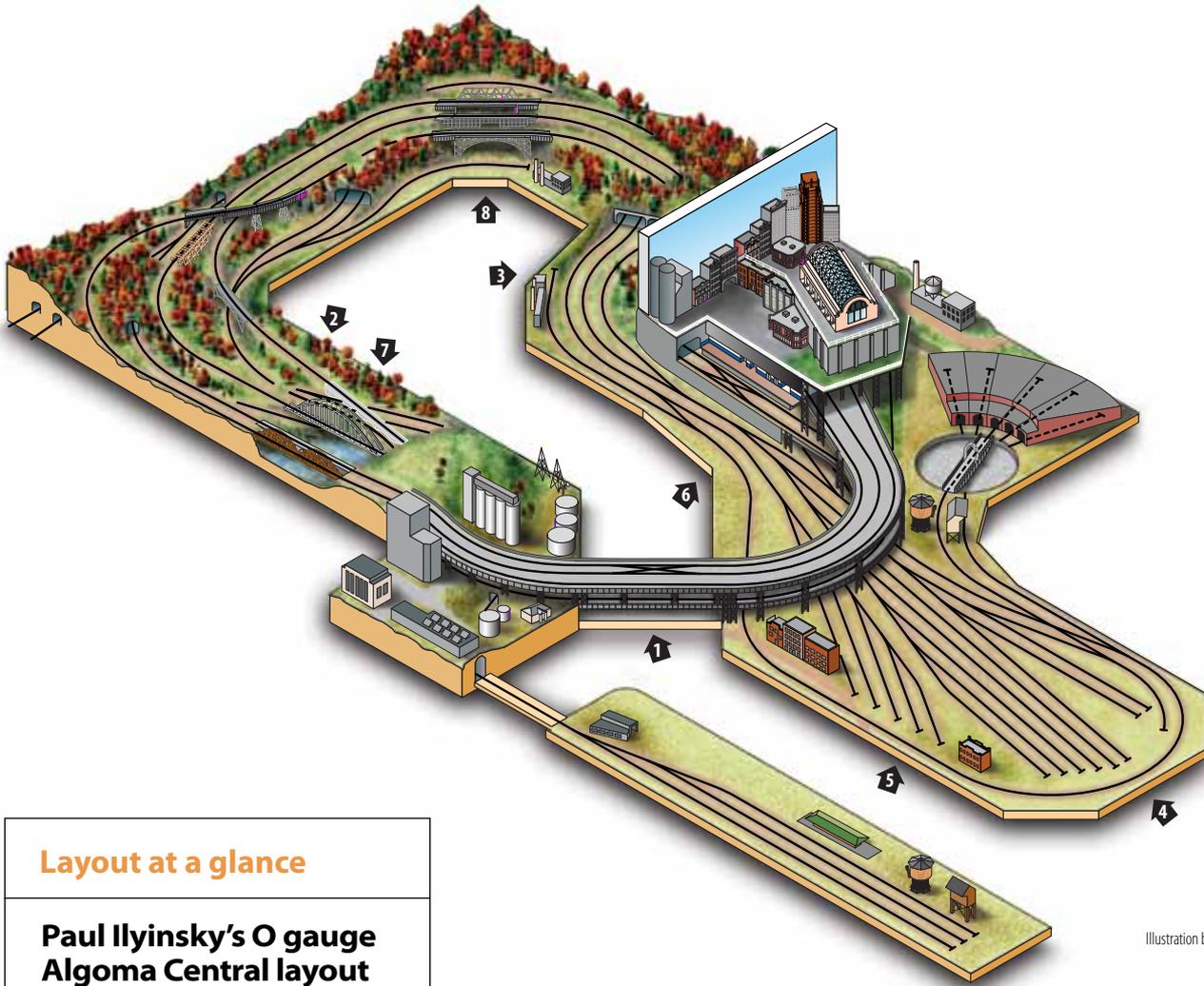


Illustration by SMARTT and Jay Smith

Layout at a glance

Paul Ilyinsky's O gauge Algoma Central layout

Dimensions: 20 by 28 feet

Setting: Midwest in the 1940s through '60s

Track: GarGraves O-72 to O-144

Switches: Ross Custom Switches with Tortoise machines

Motive power: Atlas O, K-Line, Lionel, 3rd Rail, Weaver, Williams

Rolling stock: Atlas O, Lionel, MTH, Pecos River, Weaver, Williams

Controls: Lionel TMCC with five power zones

Accessories: Lionel, MTH

Structures: Ameri-Town, Berkshire Valley, Downtown Deco, Gloor Craft, IHC, Korber, MTH, scratchbuilt, Walthers

Vehicles: Kinsmart, Matchbox, Road Champs, Solido

Figures: Arttista

surpassed the previous one. Only one thing stayed the same, his son Dmitri says with a smile. "My dad, just like his father, refused to let anyone else run the model trains. My brothers and sisters and I could only watch."

The nomadic streak that led Paul, as a Marine, to reside in Hawaii, Guam, and Japan, scarcely weakened, even as his family matured. Cincinnati was a good place to rear children, Angelica and he thought, but by 1979 they were back in Florida.

Somewhat surprisingly, this time Paul opted for HO equipment made by Märklin, which had produced the classic trains from his youth. But in time Paul grew disenchanted with HO scale, although not model railroading.

Paul had heard a lot about the O gauge locomotives and rolling stock that were being made by Lionel, MTH, and Weaver in the 1990s, and he liked what he saw.

So the former military officer and mayor made plans for the grandest layout of his life.

Ready for three-rail trains

The only obstacle facing Paul as the 20th century came to a close was his age. Building a large model railroad would take a lot of time, and Paul, then entering his 70s, doubted that he wanted to spend many years constructing benchwork and soldering wires.

Like other hobbyists in that uneasy position, Paul concluded in 1999 it was best to consult a professional builder.

Not far away – in Miami Beach – Michael Hart had established Scale Models, Arts, & Technologies Inc. (SMARTT) in 1995. This firm specializes in superbly detailed model railroads. Paul spoke with Michael and, feeling that he'd found a kindred spirit, made arrangements for SMARTT to construct what would be the layout of a lifetime.

Michael and the skilled designers, artists, model makers, and electricians on his staff, quickly got to work. Forgoing pencils and sketch pads, they relied on computers and up-to-the-minute software to develop a track plan for an O gauge railroad that ended up having

What adds to the depth and character of Algoma are the HO scale structures installed next to the backdrop to create a sense of forced perspective.

three principal sections spread over a couple of rooms.

“Paul didn’t make demands or put restrictions on me,” Michael says. “Instead, we discussed what he hoped to achieve on his model railroad. Then I spent some time looking carefully at the trains he owned and the dimensions and configuration of what he had made his train room.”

Two layouts in one

The more Michael studied that room, the more he realized that the layout would have to be separated into two distinct yet integrated sections. The front area would be devoted to creating a large city, complete with a downtown and a railroad station and yard, based upon Cincinnati, where Paul and his family had resided for many years.

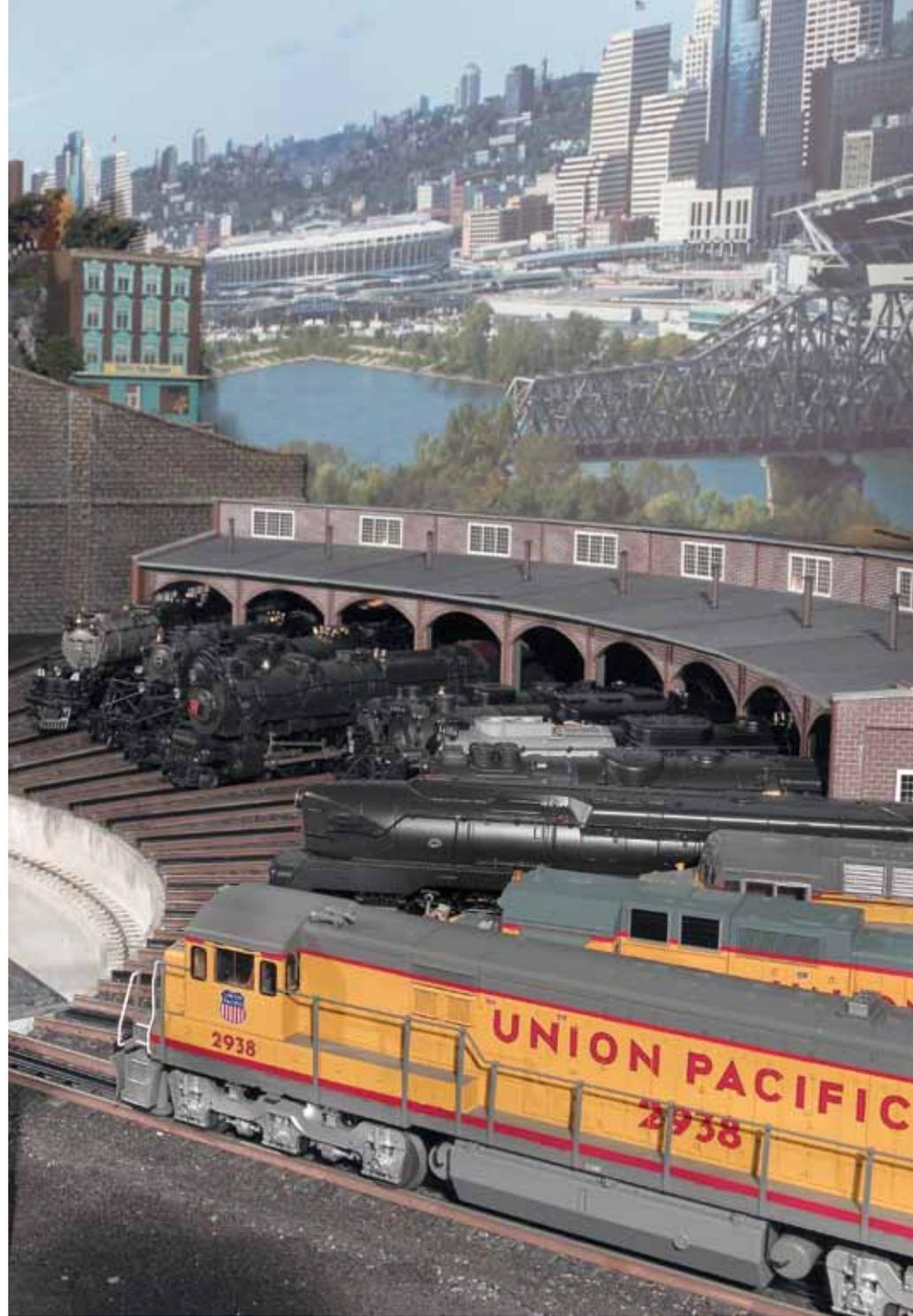
Algoma, as Paul named the metropolis on his layout, would be set on a hill. Although kept compact, it would feature a commercial district and railroad facilities that included a neo-classical terminal, a roundhouse and a scratchbuilt turntable.

“What adds to the depth and character of Algoma,” Michael continues, “are the HO scale structures we installed next to the backdrop to create a sense of forced perspective, plus the backdrop itself. Paul loved photography and had taken pictures of the skyline of Cincinnati. He blew up one of his shots and had it placed on the wall behind Algoma.”

Paul hired carpenters to remove a central partition and extend the outer wall of the train room. This provided Michael and his team with more open space to plan a large secondary section of the layout at the far end of the room.

Trains departing Algoma typically head east in the rear portion of Paul’s bisected train room. They wander over the prominent main lines into countryside reminiscent of the Allegheny Mountains in Pennsylvania. This area has bridges and tunnels at different heights and allows trains to run through mountains covered with trees and bushes.

The look of this second section is decidedly different from that of Algoma. All the same, it blends perfectly, thanks to the barely noticeable view-block that



separates the city from the countryside. Chalk up another triumph for the craftsmen employed at SMARTT.

Trains, including those led by articulated steam engines, can stretch out as they ease through broad curves. The dozens of freight cars being pulled add color and interest, leaving onlookers fascinated by the regional diversity of each freight.

Before long, steamers and diesels barrel out of the mountains and into the central part of the train room, crossing over streams and valleys. These locomotives wear the names of Paul’s favorite lines, eastern and midwestern stalwarts like the Chesapeake & Ohio, New York

▲ 5. Perched high on a bluff overlooking Algoma on Paul’s layout, we see the roundhouse and the city’s skyline. He ran a variety of “big mamas,” ranging from a Pennsylvania T1 from the 1940s to a Union Pacific U-boat from the 1960s (both Lionel models). Paul took the picture of Cincinnati used as the backdrop.

Central, Norfolk & Western, Pennsylvania RR, and Soo Line.

Big yard and a double-deck bridge

The trains travel on different levels until those on the highest two creep forward onto a 12-foot-long double-decker urban bridge, whose middle portion swings



▲ 6. The *Crescent Limited*, one of the Southern Ry's famous passenger trains, pulls out of Algoma. The conductor knows his train is on schedule before checking his pocket watch.



open like a Dutch door to let visitors walk to the other side of the train room. When properly closed, this impressive structure (with three tracks on each level) carries trains into Algoma.

Trains already on the lowest (table-top) level detour into the third main section of the Algoma Central layout. They circle around a staging yard added for variety and function. Here, amid structures designed by Stu Gralnik, you'll find parked a good portion of Paul's roster of Atlas O, Lionel, Williams, and other brands of rolling stock.

Anyone walking into the train room sees the yard first. Aware of that, Michael designed it to have great visual appeal. Three-rail tracks fan out from the center like spokes on a bicycle wheel. Meanwhile, the lowest of the main lines curve gently around the array of bumpers that were added to the ends of the different tracks.

The effect of combining a rounded main line with straight tracks laid almost perpendicular to that sweeping curve is a treat for the eyes. It may look simple, yet Michael points to it as one of the challenges his firm faced in designing this

◀ 7. A Union Pacific Dash 9 leads freight cars from the east on to the bi-level bridge that bisects Paul's layout. That big diesel and the mammoth Challenger in the foreground are Lionel products.



▲ 8. The guys at the railyard spruced up this old-timer for a fan trip. Right now, that Lionel Atlantic 4-4-2, specially painted for Paul's Algoma Central, is striding across a viaduct.

layout in a room whose square footage and configuration were quite limiting.

"We made good use of our experience and the need for a balanced ratio of scenery to track to achieve Paul's goals," Michael states. "Common sense, many well-placed details, some eye-catching vignettes, and a few obvious visual

tricks go a long way toward making a layout look fresh and interesting."

Worthy legacy

"My father spent part of almost every day in his train room," Dimitri Ilyinsky recalls. "Sometimes he explored the city of Algoma and was reminded of our life in Cincinnati. At other times he carefully assembled a train in the yard and sent it out through the mountains. And he loved inviting friends to join him at the controls."

Funny that Paul, after being denied the controls by his father and later keeping his own children away from the power packs, finally understood that with toy trains, sharing his favorite layout was most important of all. **CTT**



To see two more layouts that were built by SMARTT, go to classictoytrains.com and click on "Train layouts" and then click on "Layout visits." There you'll see the layouts of Bob Porges and Don Williams.