



# All about the base...

**Dirk Bonne** shares details of an incredible diorama built to serve as home to an equally realistic and impressive working cargo vessel when she's not out on the water...

**W**hen not sailing our model boats, they are usually either packed away or displayed at home on cradles/stands, perhaps on shelves or in glass cases. Recently, however, I decided to have a go at showing one of my models off as the centrepiece in a quay-side diorama. I realised, of course, that creating such a setting would

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require required a lot of time and effort, but I've always loved a challenge! And now complete, I believe all my hard work has really paid off.

## **The star of the show**

The resulting diorama is now home to the cargo vessel originally known as Mypuck. Built in 1956 in Delfzijl (Holland), she spent most of her working life in Scandinavia under the ownership of various companies. In 2003, however, Mypuck was purchased for use in the remake of the spectacular film King Kong. For this role, she was transformed into a 1930s' steamship





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and given a huge chimney, big vents, a wooden wheelhouse, and, of course, a rusty weather-beaten look, and renamed the SS Venture, Special scale models of her were also built for use by the studio’s visual effects team.

Afterwards, she remained inactive for a very long time, simply moored up in Wellington harbour in New Zealand. Sadly, after years of neglect, she finally scuttled to create an artificial reef in 2010.

Various pictures I managed to find online helped me to build this ship. A good base for my reconstruction of the SS Venture was Caldercraft’s SS Talacre. I was able to use the hull of this old freighter, and some of her vents, winches and lifeboats. Of course, the hull needed many modifications, particular to the stern, which needed to be expanded. I built a new funnel in light metal and installed a smoke generator (6V) from Seuthe, together with a plastic injection tube as an oil-fumes collector.

When it came to lighting, I chose bulbs of a more yellow shade, to better correspond with the spirit of that era; only the spots on the masts are strong white LEDs lamps.

Both the smoke generator and lights were connected with a 6V battery in the first cargo hold. When sailed, I place another battery (6V) in her cargo hold, which is covered with an extra deck hatch. The ship’s engine is a Graupner speed 600, which provides a leisurely and realistic pace.

Nowadays, once rusty old bucket has fulfilled her duties of providing some pond side entertainment, I simply clean her up, take her home and return to her quayside residence ready for the loading a consignment of new tractors!



*As you can see, Dirk Bonne’s superb model of SS Venture wasn’t built as a static model, and she looks simply spectacular and performs beautifully out on the water.*

### Putting the more into moored

I based my diorama on the port of Ostend, in Belgium. There are still some fascinating old harbour buildings there, amongst which is Hangar No. 1. Built in 1906, it is today the

sole surviving large warehouses serving the port (there were originally four). Unfortunately, the building is now in bad shape, but there are plans afoot to restore it to its former glory. This, along with a loading shed, container



When not attracting the admiration of those pondside as she cruises effortlessly through the water, SS Venture is now displayed as the centrepiece of this superb dockyard diorama, based on the port as Ostend, Belgium. No longer requiring a cradle for support, she sits securely in a slot cut into the insulating board used to create the foreground, convincingly finished to represent the murky quayside water.

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yard, coal storage, railway tracks, etc, were all to be included.

Scaled down to 1:50 in keeping with SS Venture, the original warehouse, which has a length of 200-metres, would measure in at a whopping 2-metres long! Obviously, that would take up an enormous amount of display space at home and would be way too

bulky and heavy to transport should I decide to exhibit it any shows, etc. The solution to this dilemma proved to be a nifty little trick. I would construct only half of the building (which, when reduced to 1:50 scale, would measure up at a more manageable 40 inches) and affix a mirror to one end, so that when viewed from a certain angle, the reflection within would create the optical illusion of the entire hangar having been modelled.

For the brick walls I used plastic wall panels, while the quays and the cobblestones were created from foam panels. To create an aged effect, I applied a thinned down grey paint to the walls of the hangar with a cloth, before wiping this off so that the only trace of remaining could be seen in the mortar, before painting the bricks using a brush. I employed the same technique for the cobblestone panels, but this time used a brown wash

between the stones, which themselves were painted grey. I also added little detail touches to just about everything else; for example, rusting the metal gates, weathering down the wooden fencing, etc.

Honing your weathering skills takes time and a great deal of experimentation. If you're a complete novice, there are some little tips I can pass on, though. For example, never apply paint as straight on to the item in question. Instead, first dilute it with a dash of white spirit and then application use a piece of cloth or a hard brush rather than a paint brush to spread, blend and soften the whole effect. If you're not completely satisfied with the result, you can simply wipe it away and start over; there will be a lot of trial and error but after some practice you'll find it will get a lot easier to achieve the effect you want.

The 'water' at the front of the diorama, in which the hull of my cargo vessel now sits, was made from a 6 cm xps insulating board. Once I'd cut out the correctly sized and shaped gap into which my model could be inserted – which, I am not going to lie, did prove quite a challenge – I sprayed the remaining surface with a glossy dark green paint of the insulating board, already backed with a heavy grade paper, to simulate still water.

My crane represents one of the six half gantry cranes installed at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By happy coincidence, one of these has been preserved and had an exhaustive restoration about a year ago. Having managed to get hold of the plans, I was, therefore, able to build a scaled down replica from various plastic parts available at the hobby store. The resulting model has also been heavily weathered as, rather than represent it in its restored form, I wanted to represent it as it would have looked back in the 1960s.

In fact, nearly everything you'll see in my photographs got this treatment, save for the consignment of shiny new tractors ready for



Shown here on a traditional wooden cradle, SS Venture looks magnificent in her own right, but Dirk decided she deserved to be viewed and appreciated both on and off the water in as realistic a setting as possible.



loading onto the ship. I wanted to pack in as much detail and realism as I could, so I've even cheekily incorporated the exterior of a tiny brothe!

The figures ashore and on the ship are a mixture of modified Preiser figurines and (printed) 3D-Studio-Figures, an excellent 3D scan service offering a lot of (unpainted) figures at different scales, in a variety of poses, to suit a wide range of scenarios.



### Go on, take the scenic route!

While this venture was hugely time consuming, enormously challenging and really stretched me as a modeller at times, all of this was balanced out by the fun I had. So, if you're pondering a new challenge for 2022, embarking on a project like this will allow you to create something truly unique. |

*The closer you look, the more detail you will find packed as. Dirk clearly spent hours considering all the little touches he could add into this diorama to really bring the whole scene to life!*