



CHATEAU/HAUNTED MANSION Bill Lankford, 2001 Location: The Enchanted Realm

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The Mini Time Machine Museum of Miniatures

Tucson, Arizona

The term is *curb appeal*, an expression that business owners, home buyers and realtors know all too well. The appearance of a building contributes greatly to a viewer's perception of its value, whether it is a home or a dentist's office. Predictably, the popularity of exterior improvements and landscaping designs are readily apparent in TV shows, magazines, and websites dedicated to do-it-yourself improvement goals, as well as the countless businesses which cater to the needs of beautifying a building's exterior. However, any miniature enthusiast will quickly point out that there are just as many resources for adding curb appeal to a *miniature* home as there are for the full-scale counterpart. When it comes to recreating the world in miniature, the right landscaping either pulls a piece together – or sends it unraveling.



Chateau/Haunted Mansion. Bill Lankford, 2001. The Chateau view is on the left, the Haunted Mansion view is on the right. Photo by Emily Wolverton.



Chateau/Haunted Mansion (detail). This painting figure is located on the Chateau view. Photo by Emily Wolverton.

One piece in our collection is distinctly different from the rest, playing off of the importance of landscaping in a way that makes it truly unique. The piece is called *Chateau/Haunted Mansion* (2001), a prototype for a workshop taught by its creator, Bill Lankford. As the name suggests, Lankford

tackled two variations on a common structure, altering the basic form of a grand manor into two juxtaposing halves. From one side, he conceived of a haunted mansion in disrepair; from the opposing view sits a picturesque chateau on a lovely summer's day. Unlike most of the works in our collection, the manor itself does not open to reveal any interior,

keeping the viewer's focus on the building's surroundings.

Two singular accounts are told entirely through the art of landscaping. The *Chateau* seems alive with the buzz of bees, flowers are in bloom, and green lichen and shrubs cover the ground. A painter sits at his trade beside the bridge, painting *en plein air*. The residence exudes a sense of timeless welcome, in spite of its imposing size. The *Haunted Mansion* gives an altogether different impression. The green ivy on the walls has been replaced with dried vines. Dry leaves and dead flowers have blown about the porch, and the davenport is covered in dust and patchy holes. Instead of a pleasant painter at work, the viewer is treated to a cemetery scene, complete with grave digger, constable and open grave. The buzz of bees has left this place, leaving behind only whispered rumors.

Bill Lankford is a master miniature artisan and landscaping is his forte. He became a model railroad enthusiast in 8th grade, specializing in railroad landscaping materials as an adult.¹ It was through model railroading that Lankford discovered the larger 1:12 scale employed by most miniaturists for dollhouses and roomboxes, and he quickly took interest in the potential. Anne Day Smith, author of the article “Haunted Image: Bill Lankford Sees it All in His Head,” points out that Lankford’s experience with model railroading is not his only strength. “Bill brings to miniatures all the visual acuity he has acquired after more than 30 years in another creative endeavor, the flower business. He and his wife, Lynn, operate a flower rental service in Amarillo, Texas, where they live.”² With a keen eye for floral arrangements and a finely honed sense of scale and proportion, it is no wonder that his museum-quality landscaping materials sell so well.



Chateau/Haunted Mansion (detail). This graveyard scene is located in the Haunted Mansion view.
Photo by Emily Wolverton.

With such sought-after skills, one might think that Lankford would guard his trade secrets religiously but, in fact, teaching workshops is what really brings him joy. “I like teaching classes because you can see people’s faces light up when they are learning something new. The excitement of seeing people accomplish something that came from you; there’s a little bit of you in what they are doing,

and that really makes me feel good inside.”³ Typically, Lankford will start by creating a particular piece, such as his *Chateau/Haunted Mansion*, which might take a few weeks to complete, sometimes more. He then makes molds of the piece, so that students in his class can recreate it from the original prototype.⁴ In class, he demonstrates how to use antiquing solutions and grout powder to make a home seem derelict, and how to properly damage window panes with a

hammer, for that perfect abandoned feeling. He shares all of the details with his students, providing tips on everything from making boulders to lighting the dining room. Once the class is over, Lankford will often sell his original at a miniature show, which is how our museum founder, Pat Arnell, acquired this particular work.

Landscaping can tell a story as well as any indoor scene, revealing the personality of the resident in subtle ways. Still, much can be up for interpretation. Is our *Chateau/Haunted Mansion* illustrating one spooky story, depicting the passage of time in one house? Or is it telling two distinct stories, two possible fates from the same path? Just who is the painter? Or, perhaps a better question is, who are they burying? Every viewer can fashion a tale of their own – which is what Bill Lankford enjoys most about his work. “I like to put a story with everything because this is life. Everything you do, everything has a story to it in some way or another.”⁵

Emily Wolverton
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1. Harp, Sybil. “Somewhere, USA.” Nutshell News. April 1990. Volume 20. Number 4. P. 63 -66.
2. Smith, Anne Day. “Haunted Image: Bill Lankford Sees it All in His Head.” Nutshell News. October 1992. Volume 22. No 10. P. 41
3. Ibid. p. 47
4. Smith, Rain. “Miniature Scale Models Bring Fall Branch Man Worldwide Notoriety.” TimesNews.net Published March 12th, 2007, 12:00 AM. <http://www.timesnews.net/article.php?id=9000973>
5. Smith, Anne Day. “Haunted Image: Bill Lankford Sees it All in His Head.” Nutshell News. October 1992. Volume 22. No 10. P. 43