



Home on the Range

Connie Sauve turned an antique lantern into a rustic cowboy scene by installing a campfire where the lantern flame used to be.

BY CONNIE SAUVE

The next project for my "On the Road Again" series of articles, I thought I would slow things down a bit – way down! So far, I've used trucks, a snowmobile, vespa, and a car with a camper. The mode of transportation for this project, only has one horse-power. What is it? A horse, of course!

A few years ago, I had the idea of taking an antique lantern, placing a cowboy scene inside and putting a campfire where the lantern flame used to be. But after a couple years of looking in antique stores and online, I decided that real antique lanterns were just too small inside to accommodate the 1" scale scene that I already had envisioned in my mind.

I was about ready to give up on my idea of the whole project,

when one day I was shopping at my favorite craft store I was looking in the lantern section, and lo and behold! There was an antique looking lantern! I looked at it for a while trying to decide if the style would work and if the interior was large enough. I also took the glass insert out and realized it had a solid glass bottom. I knew I needed to have wiring go through the bottom of the scene, and didn't know how I would achieve that with a glass bottom. I tried flipping the glass around so the opening was on the bottom, but the metal top didn't quite fit right and I couldn't figure out how I would get the scene inside. I couldn't pass up the lantern, so I bought it and thought I would figure out all those pesky little details later.

Living in Arizona, I wanted the

scene to have a desert feel, so my first task was to find a realistic saguaro cactus to include in the scene. Not an easy task. They were either too tall, too small or not realistic looking. I remembered I had bought a couple saguaro cactus made by Schleich from a hobby shop. They are actually toys for kids. It fit inside the glass perfectly! It was realistically way too small compared to a real saguaro cactus, but who has room for a 1" scale saguaro cactus that in real life can be 40-60 feet tall, which would equate to 40-60 inches tall in miniature?

Before moving to AZ, the cactus would have been fine 'as is', but now that I live in Arizona and I know first-hand that EVERYTHING has spines, thorns and prickles. I knew I just had to add spines to this cac-



tus! Tan landscaping grass from the model railroading store was perfect to make the spines. I used about 3-5 pieces of grass for each tuft of spines, trimmed the end flush, put a dot of glue on the cactus, stuck the grass in the glue, then cut it off. I tested a few spines to see what it looked like and it looked really good, so I knew I had to finish the entire cactus.

Do you ever start something and see hours and hours and hours of work ahead of you and wonder if it's worth it? Then wonder whose

bright idea this was? Well, days and days later I was finally finished with my cactus. It turned out great! I couldn't resist, so I counted how many spines I had applied. Over 3,400 of them! I decided I'm officially nuts.

My next major problem was the solid glass bottom of the lantern. A hole needed to be drilled into it, so the wiring could go out the bottom of the lantern. I did some online research to find out how to drill holes in glass. At the hardware store, I found a drill bit that was made for

glass and purchased it. Next, I used a 4x4 block of wood and put the glass lantern over the wood. I made a little dam using masking tape where I wanted to drill the hole and poured some oil into it to lubricate the drill bit as I drilled. I was SO nervous to do this step, but couldn't put it off any longer. If I messed this up and the glass broke, the whole project would be derailed, or stopped, or else I would have to go buy another lantern. Ever so slowly I started drilling, keeping the drill going at a slow speed and

FEATURE



1 A plastic yellow snake was painted to look like a real snake.

2 A look at the lantern from the back. **3** The hole was drilled through the glass to install the electric. **4** A cattle skull was added for effect. **5** A close up of the dog and breakfast!





Connie added landscaping grass to the cactus for realism.

applying no pressure to the glass. It took quite a while, but eventually I drilled through the glass and the lantern was still in one piece. Whew!! That was scary!

To raise up the base for the interior scene to sit on inside the lantern, I added a few layers of black foamcore. I cut the plastic base of the cactus smaller to better fit inside the lantern and recessed it to sit into the top layer of foamcore. I also cut a hole in the middle of the foamcore to accommodate the wiring for the campfire.

Next, I started gathering items for the interior scene. Being that I live in the desert, it was easy to find some interesting rocks and a great piece of wood for the cowboy to sit on. On one of my morning walks, I scooped up some dirt from the desert. To make the 'desert' in the



scene, I mixed fine sawdust and Elmer's glue and spread it over the top layer of foamcore, then sprinkled my desert dirt on top and let it dry. I placed rocks and dry grass tufts for added detail.

Creating the campfire was next, which will be the focal point of the scene and the idea which started this whole project. Making realistic fire is always difficult in miniature. I started with small rocks I found in my backyard for the campfire ring. Finding appropriately sized twigs in the desert was easy, which I burned black with a lighter to make the logs. Then I painted them with oranges, reds, yellows and white to simulate burning logs.

Thinking back to my camping days on how to build a fire, I laid the logs in a teepee shape. I have a small stash of yellow cellophane that I use to make the 'flames' for fireplaces and now a campfire, and wired the LED 'fire' lights through the base that flicker under all the logs. For the final touch, I added a wisp of cotton to simulate smoke. I glued the campfire in place and hooked up the wires under the lantern.

I had a stash of wonderful aged leather goods I used for the scene. For the cowboy, I sculpted, painted and costumed him, then used aged leather chaps, cowboy boots, gun holster and cowboy hat by Prestige Leather. I also used their saddle bags and a canteen to accessorize the rest of the scene.

Other items I found in my stash were a rifle, cow skull, coffee pot, skillet with bacon and eggs cooking, plate, tin coffee cup given to me by Bill Hudson, and a working lantern which I also wired through the base. I glued the seated cowboy to the log and also all the leather accessories, and was able to insert it all at one



time inside the lantern.

Animals always add so much life to scenes, so I thought an owl would look nice sitting in the cactus. A cowboy's life can be lonely, so a dog by Leslie Frick makes a great companion to the cowpoke.

When we moved to Arizona, I never dreamed there was so much wildlife that lives in a desert. On any given day or night in our yard, we can have javelina, bobcats, deer, coyotes, badgers, roadrunners, quail, bunnies, many types of birds, lizards and of course rattlesnakes! We have a catch and release philosophy at our house, so when a rattlesnake wanders into our front yard, we catch it, put it in a metal garbage can and he gets a free ride and is released back into the desert a few miles away. So...I just had to include a rattlesnake in my scene to represent all the wildlife in the Sonoran Desert.

Years ago, at a party store I found a bag of 100 tiny plastic snakes and lizards. They were

surprisingly detailed and only \$4! For the rattlesnake, I chose a nice shaped snake, which was yellow plastic, found some pictures online of a western diamondback rattlesnake and painted the little snake. He turned out surprisingly realistic and looks great hiding behind the saguaro cactus. Sneaky snake!

I thought I was finished with the lantern, then I was looking in my stash one last time and saw several model horses waiting patiently in their box. I found a bridle to fit the horse I had chosen, and tied him to one of the lantern posts. He made a nice finishing touch to the scene. Because after all, what is a cowboy without his trusted horse?

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me by email at cmsauve2@gmail.com. You can also call me, Connie Sauve at 209-329-8978 or check out my Shutterfly site that shows pictures of all my miniature projects: <https://ConnieSauveAmericanInMiniature.Shutterfly.com>.