

# Making a Mini Scene With a Story

Connie Sauve shares her 1:12 scale diorama "Where to Lady?" with us as well as how she created this imaginative scene.

BY CONNIE SAUVE

This scene came about quite by accident. I was browsing through a shop one day, when my eye caught a colorful yellow checkered taxi sitting on the bottom shelf. My heart skipped a beat! I loved the 1930's style of the taxi. The only problem was, somebody else was looking at it too! I moved down the aisle a bit and waited, keeping my eye on the taxi. In my head I kept chanting "don't buy it, don't buy it", to the guy looking at it. He finally moved away, leaving it behind. Whew! I snatched it up, and immediately bought it. So started yet another vehicle project!

I altered the taxi very little, as it was just about perfect the way it was. But, I wanted back doors on the taxi. I made a mold of one of the door handles, poured two handles using resin and added them to the back to make two additional doors. The spokes on the wheels were a bit odd looking on how they stuck out so much, and were easily removed. I also added a 1931 license plate which helps set the scene's era.

The first part of this project went together very quickly. I borrowed the base from my "Surprise!" dollhouse truck project and changed out the main elements

and turned it into a whole new project. I borrowed the snooty rich lady from my Ray Whitlege, Georgian Antique Shop project. The taxi driver is Grandpa also from the "Surprise!" scene – he made the perfect taxi driver. The thrown-together project was displayed at the Good Sam Miniature Show in 2014. I left the scene together for about a week to enjoy it, then returned everything back to my "Surprise!" dollhouse truck scene.

After several years of having the taxi packed away, I decided to make a landscaped base specifically for it. I will always have the pictures of the original set-up of "Where to, Lady?" to remember it by. But it was time to finish the project by making a base specifically for the scene, so I could display it all the time. Since taxis are something you usually only see in a city, I thought it would be fun to set the scene in an upscale part of a large city, set in the 1930's.

For the new base, I started with a frame cut to size, turned the pieces on their edge and nailed them back together. I chose black for the frame to blend in with the black asphalt road. I cut a plywood base to fit inside the frame for the scene to sit on. A piece of 1/2"



Gatorboard was the perfect height for the raised sidewalk. A piece of wood roof gutter worked great to simulate the curb.

For the road, I used thick black card stock from the backing of a picture frame. I needed it to be thick enough so I could sink a manhole cover into the road. The road was aged by sponging on greys and splattering with black to simulate oil spots, and dirt was also added along the curb.

A plastic poker chip was the





perfect size and had some great details for a manhole cover. The chip was too thick, so I sanded the back until it was the same thickness as the black cardboard road. Next, I used a small round file to sand out the two rounded areas along the edge, to simulate where the workers insert a pry bar to lift out the heavy cover. Wanting a fun design in the middle of the manhole cover, I cut out a star from card stock and glued it to the middle of the cover. I drilled 5 drain holes and spray-painted the chip with matt black, then aged it with rust colored paint. Once the chip was inserted into the road, it made a very convincing manhole cover.

I like using backdrops behind the vehicles to help tell the story and thought a brick garden wall





**1** All the luggage is ready to be loaded on the Taxi. **2** The doll was repainted and dressed to look like a wealthy lady. **3** The scene has a few pigeons to give a clue that the story is based in a city. **4** The fancy pup spies the pigeon on the lamp post!

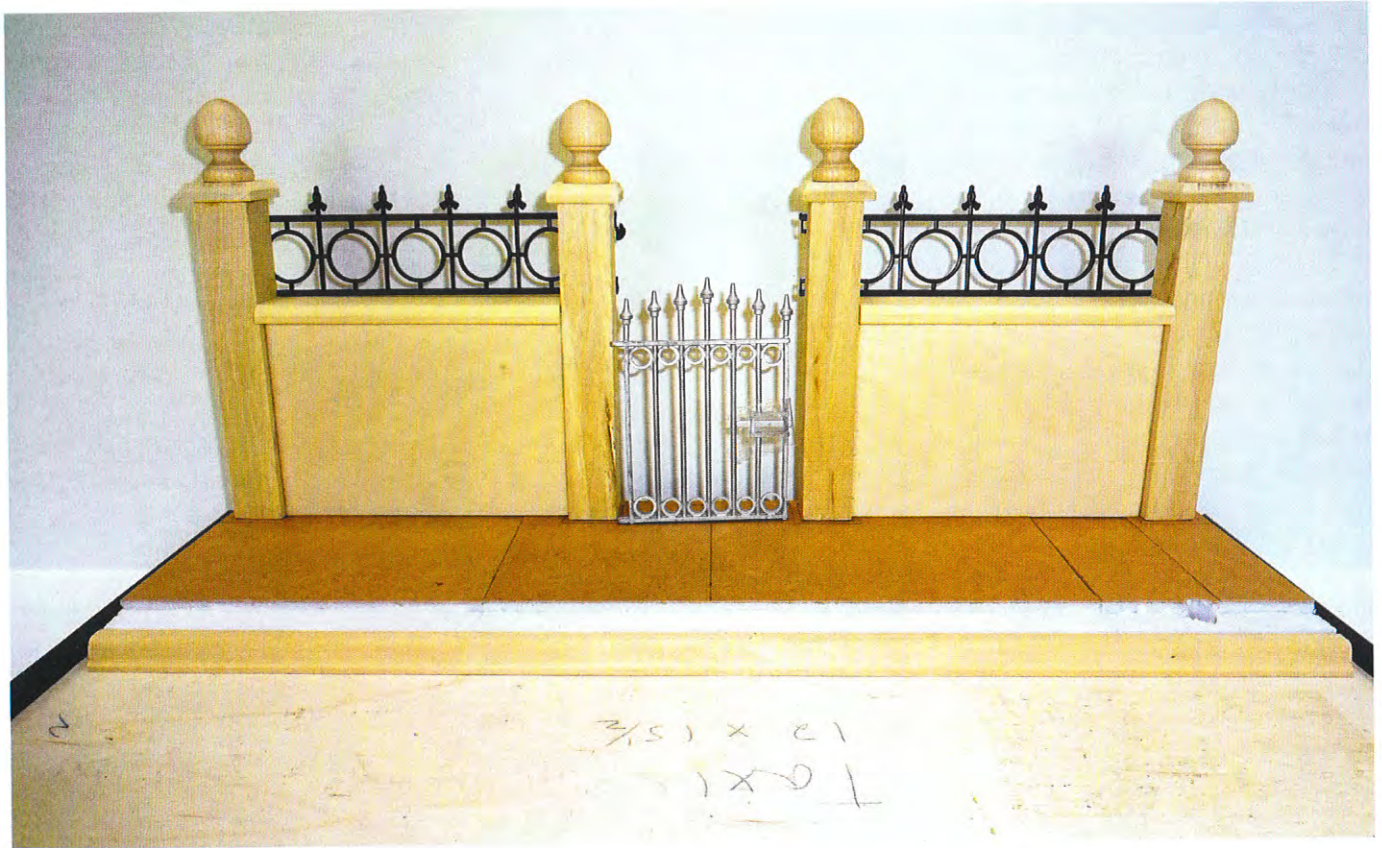


with a gate would look like an area of a city where a rich person lives.

The walls were built using stock wood. The posts are 3/4" square and topped off with a 1" wide piece of wood which I beveled around the top edges with my belt sander. The wall is 3/8" thick, which was also topped off with a beveled piece of wood. For the bricks, I planned on using egg cartons, so I had to take into account the thickness of the egg carton bricks, which would add additional thickness to the walls. The finials on top of the posts are stock turnings from the craft store. From my stash, I made two wood walls with a gate in the middle. Black plastic railing finishes off the top of the wall and adds a nice detail.



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Connie demonstrated making the bricks and bricking a wall at the The Mini Time Machine Museum of Miniatures.





I volunteer at The Mini Time Machine Museum of Miniatures, cleaning and repairing the exhibits. The museum likes to have people do demonstrations at the museum so visitors can see how miniatures are made. Most visitors to the museum are non-miniaturists, so it's always fun to show them how we make the miniatures and hopefully get some new people interested in the art form. I asked the museum if they would be interested in having me demonstrate making the bricks and bricking a wall. This was the perfect way to get my brick wall finished and have some fun while I worked on it too.

I set up my work table in the middle of the museum and went to work for a few hours. Cutting all the bricks out is rather tedious, so I had them ready to go before demonstrating. Laying the bricks goes rather quickly, and are easily cut apart with scissors for odd sizes. For added detail, I used a double layer of bricks for the vertical bricks under the top lip of the wall and column. I demonstrated the brick technique

a couple different times at the museum, and by then I had my wall completely bricked. I left the messy job of painting and grouting to finish at home.

**‘After the grout had dried, I aged the brick walls, stone tops and finials with a dirty water wash.’**

After the walls were bricked, I painted them using Burnt Sienna, applied with a sponge. I then painted some of the bricks using a wash of Golden Brown on some bricks and Brown Iron Oxide on others. Then I sponged on a wash of Dark Burnt Umber over all the bricks which helps blends all the colors together. The paint helps seal the cardboard bricks for grouting. I also added some bricks under the gate to simulate a walkway that leads up to the ‘residence’ behind the wall.

For the grout, I used DAP Fast ‘N Final Lightweight Spackling, mixed with Neutral Grey paint. I spread this into the grout lines with my fingers, working in small sections, then immediately removing excess grout with a damp sponge. If the grout is allowed to dry too long, it's difficult to get it off the bricks. It's OK to leave some of the grout compound in the surface crevices of the bricks for added aging.

For the cement/stone tops and finials, I first painted the bare wood with Neutral Grey paint. I then used an old paint brush and brushed on the same colored DAP mixture used for the grout and brushed it onto the wood. It took a couple layers of DAP to cover the painted wood completely.

After the grout had dried, I aged the brick walls, stone tops and finials with a dirty water wash. To simulate moss, I sponged on very watered-down Winsor and Newton Sap Green watercolor paint, in the areas where moss would grow along the bottom edge, and under the ledges. The back of the wall was kind of boring, so I added



some green vines to bring a bit of interest to the back of the wall.

To make the cement sidewalk, I used thin grey paper and covered the sidewalk and curb, then added cut lines in the sidewalk to simulate the separate squares like real cement sidewalks have. Using an X-ACTO knife I added cracks in the sidewalk along some of the edges and corners. Then I aged the paper covered sidewalk and curb with a sponge and dirty water wash, then used watercolor Sap Green along the edges.

For the wrought iron parts of the wall, I spray painted the plastic rails and metal gate, a flat black. I then painted with Rustall to age and rust them slightly. The gate swings open

and can be locked closed with a gate latch.

The topiary trees (by Falcon Miniatures) are resin, and by adding multi-green colored foam to the tree balls and dirt in the planters helped tremendously to make them more realistic. The fire hydrant is a fun addition to accentuate the city feel of the scene. The dandelions are from my stash and are the last of them, which I had made many years ago and add a fun little touch to a lot of my scenes. What city is complete without pigeons, which are also by Falcon. The streetlight is an accessory from a Todd McFarlane figure.

The designer luggage set I had

custom made for the scene, was made by an artist from Korea. I also ordered two extra logo fabric sheets she had used to make her luggage. I wanted to make two additional designer trunks, so I started with two Cats Paw trunk kits from my stash. I greatly altered both kits and custom made the two large trunks to add to the pile of luggage. I used photos of real vintage trunks to get as much authentic detail in the trunks as I could. I couldn't resist finishing

### artist details

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- 1 The beautifully detailed designer luggage kits are by Cat's Paw.
- 2 The red vintage fire hydrant confirms that this is a city scene.
- 3 The gate was given a rusted effect to look realistic.
- 4 The pigeon walking along the wall adds to the story.





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the interiors too, complete with a removable tray in the larger trunk, even though they may never be seen again. The insides of the trunks are finished with cotton fabric and over 600 faux nail heads from Dr. G's Brass were added to the exterior and interior of the trunks, along with brass hardware from my stash. A few vintage looking hat boxes added to the ever growing pile of luggage. The poor cab driver!

I dressed the taxi driver exactly the same as in my other set-up of the scene. I thought he made the perfect looking taxi driver just as I made him the first time. The snooty lady is also the same figure as before. I custom painted her

resin face and body, which is from Marcia Backstrom. I dressed her in cruise wear style clothes this time and accessorized her with custom made jewelry, leather shoes, hat, gloves and purse. She can't bear to leave her precious pampered Pomeranian behind, made by Leslie Frick, so she's going on the cruise too. The world traveler is also holding travel brochures which gives the subtle hint that she's going on an extended cruise around the world, and is why she is waiting for a taxi with a HUGE pile of luggage. I find it rather amusing, being a professional doll maker, that the doll figures are one of the hardest parts I agonize over. They are usually one of the main

elements of my projects that helps tell the story, but always seem to be the last thing I struggle with, to finish a scene.

This is the end of the road for my On the Road Again series...at least for now. Who knows where new roads will take me for future vehicle projects? I see a country road leading to a Christmas tree farm, an ice cream truck on a hot summer day, a wedding, a vintage bike, a fishing boat, and hopefully someday I'll finish my flower truck, which is what started me on this long journey in the first place!

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me, Connie Sauve at [cmsauve2@gmail.com](mailto:cmsauve2@gmail.com).

