



Basic Building Finishing

By Nancy Windes

Have you found that perfect plastic building for that vacant spot on your layout but not sure how to get it from the box to the layout? The following tips will help you finish your building. They are targeted to different levels depending on how much time you have to spend or how prominent the building will be on your layout.

The first consideration is whether the building is already painted or molded in an acceptable color of styrene. This would include a “built up” kit or a swap meet find. I’ll address this case first then give some additional information for unpainted building kits.

Painted or built up buildings-

The minimum step to improve the realism is to apply Testors brand DullCote (or other matte finish sealer) to eliminate the shine. If there is no window “glass” installed, then you can spray on the Dullcote. If window “glass” has been installed, apply liquid DullCote by brush on the walls. (A spray of DullCote will cause hazing of the windows.)

With a little more time, follow the DullCote application with the following steps:

1. Paint the window frames, doors and roof using a brush. If you have the option, this is easiest if the windows and doors are not yet installed. However using a small brush and with patience, it can be done on a building where they have already been installed.
2. Once dry, follow up with either chalk, dry brushing or add a wash to the parts of your building to add variation, highlighting, and bring out the details. Generally stay away from using a pure white or pure black color for the wash or dry brushing as it will be too stark.
 - To add chalk, use a powdered chalk or use an emery board or knife to make powder from a solid stick. Use a worn brush to “scrub” the chalk on the building.
 - To select your chalk color, consider the base color of the building. Use a slightly lighter shade to highlight. For grime, use a dark color—a shade or two darker than the shade of the building part.

3. Dry brush by dipping your brush into paint then wiping almost all of the paint off onto a paper towel or paper. Then brush your building lightly with the almost-dry brush. This is good for highlighting any raised areas. This technique can be practiced on a scrap piece of building material.
4. A wash of paint can be created by diluting a small amount of water-based paint into water. A dark wash can be created from 3 drops or 6 drops of India ink in 1 ounce of alcohol.
5. Also, regardless of which method you pick, go lightly and apply in layers (as more can be added but too much is hard to remove).

If you have more time to spend or the building will be more in the forefront, you can repaint the building. This is also what you would do for the second type of building—those that are unpainted.

Unpainted buildings-repainting buildings

If possible, wash the pieces first to remove any oils from the building. Look around at similar buildings to get ideas for the colors.

- Be sure to use a flat paint. Paint the walls and roof using an air brush, a spray paint such as Testors / Model Masters, a wide brush (walls and roof) or a narrow brush (window frames).
- When spray painting, don't try to achieve complete coverage in one coat but apply multiple (2 to 3) coats for a smoother finish. If your building is a preassembled kit you will need to paint it with a brush.
- If it is an un-built kit, paint it first, and then assemble it. Follow with one or a combination of chalk, dry brushing, or a wash.
- Additional final touch details would be to add window shades (from brown or tan paper), window curtains (tissue paper or purchased pre-printed), painted door knobs, roof details (small toilet vents made of very thin metal tubing, chimneys, stairwell entrances with doors, ventilation, etc.), down spouts, signs for a business, or external items such as trash cans, people or a dog or cat walking by.