KITBASHING 101:

A Mediterranean look for Vollmer's #7609 three-track engine shed

by Blaine Bachman

Modelers of the Italian scene are hard pressed to find commercially-available structures to use on their Mediterranean-themed layouts. With much of the plastic kit industry headquartered in Germany, most of the products duplicate buildings found in that, and other northern European countries.

To be sure, there are structures that can be used with little or no modification, but most will have to be adapted in some manner or another. At the very least, a new coat of paint is usually required. What follows then, is an accounting of the steps I used to transform Vollmer's three-stall engine shed into a more typically Italian structure.

Gather the Needed Materials…

- One Vollmer #7609 three stall engine shed

- Kibri #6920 Terra Cotta roof sheet (Z scale – to make a new roof if you desire)

…and tools and supplies:

- Hobby knife with chisel blade
- Spot Putty
- Paints
- Liquid Cement for plastics
- Wet/Dry Sandpaper in varying grits
- Flat mill file

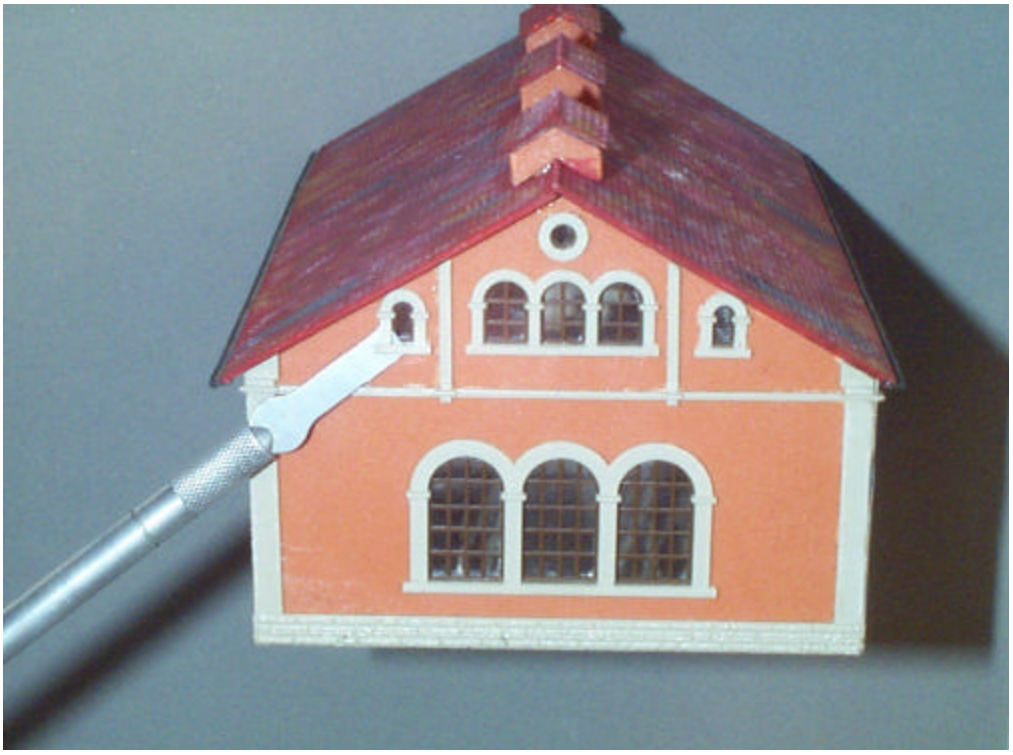
Planning the Work:

I began with an already assembled building purchased on eBay at a fraction of the U.S. cost of the kit. In many respects, it would be easier to start with the kit and just not install the items that need to be eliminated. If starting from a kit, I recommend that you make the kit roof removable for easy access to the interior. This will also allow you to come back and add lighting and internal details if you wish. The kit lends itself nicely to this idea; you can build the roof and the roof trusses as a single unit. The ends of the roof trusses slip into slots in the walls, holding the assembly in place without gluing.

If your engine shed is going to be illuminated or placed in a foreground position, I also recommend that you install interior walls. As built, the windows protrude into the interior in an unrealistic fashion. Furthermore, the inside surface of each wall casting is replete with molding marks and other distractions. Finally, the thickness of the walls is not adequate to represent the concrete or stucco construction of the structure. As a start, before you assemble the walls, take each one and trace a pattern of it on white paper (or photocopy the pieces). Later, you can use these patterns as gudes to cut internal walls out of styrene or cardstock (after making some adjustments).

In my opinion, the small ‘office’ annex attached to one side of the structure is often omitted on sheds of this type. I have chosen to remove it.

Wall and Window Modifications:



1. Fill the small second storey windows on both end walls (don't fill the small 'porthole' just below the roof peak). To do this properly, fill or back the holes with plastic and complete the process with spot putty. If you're modifying an already built kit, remove the raised framing around the windows using a chisel blade hobby knife, then fill the opening with putty (the clear window pane acts as the backing).

2. When the putty has set, smooth the surface by wet-sanding with progressively smaller grits of sandpaper. Repeat filling and sanding as needed. Cover the area with a heavy coat of primer

and as it dries, stipple the surface with a stiff brush to impart a stucco-like finish to the worked area to match the surrounding plastic.

3. Find the frames for the remainig windows and loco doorways. Modify them by cutting away (with the chisel blade) the 'fancy' bits. When done, you should be left with simple arch frames with lintels that do not extend beyond the outer edges of the arch. If you're going to omit the loco doors (most Italian sheds do not have them), fill the notches in the door frames and file them smooth. If working from an assembled model, these modifications can be done right on the model.
4. Remove the vertical trim pieces that bracket the now filled second storey windows on the end pieces.

5. Paint the exterior surfaces of the four main walls a pale yellow (or other suitable color) and set aside to dry; I used PolyScale Santa Fe Catwhisker Yellow. Assemble the four walls to the base, ensuring that all joints are properly aligned and glued.
6. Paint the window and door frames, the other trim, and the raised portion of the walls with a white or off-white paint. When dry, install the frames and trim pieces per the kit directions (if building the kit).
7. Complete the wall assembly as described in the kit directions.

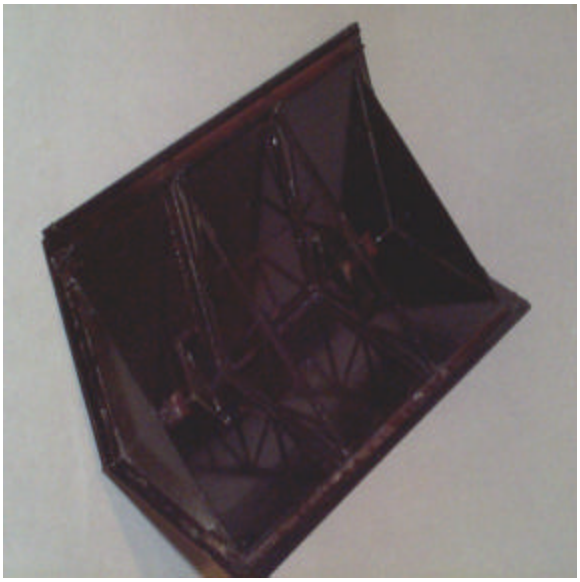
The Roof:

The roof may be built as-is and painted to resemble a Mediterranean red tile roof, or you may choose to replace the roofing material with new pieces cut from Kibri terra cotta tile sheets (use the product intended for Z scale – it looks better). I initially chose to replace the entire roof because I didn't like the roof jacks (smokestacks) and I wanted a different clerestory treatment. Somewhere along the way, I 'repented' and used the kit roof. I painted and weathered it to represent a typical red tile roof and added the clerestory to match Italian practice.

1. Cut new roof panels from the Kibri sheet. In addition, cut a second, smaller pair of panels to cover the new raised ventilation system. File the edgeof each sheet that will form the roof peak so that the joint will be smooth and strong. File the other three edges at an angle of about

45 degrees to reduce the apparent thickness of the material.

2. To make the roof removable, glue the trusses to the side walls using white household glue. This will hold the trusses in place but prevent the liquid plastic cement from seeping into the joint and permanently attaching them to the walls. Allow the joints to dry completely.



3. Position the roof panels in place and glue them to the trusses with liquid plastic cement. Faller PRO cement works well for this purpose. Also, lay a bead of glue on the joint between the two roof panels, but avoid getting glue along the joints between the roof and the walls.

4. When all is dry, you should be able to pop the white glue joints with gentle prying and remove the roof and trusses as a complete unit. At this point, reglue any joints that are not completely attached. If you are going to illuminate the building, you may want to install a light baffle around the underside of the roof, positioned to slip inside the walls to prevent any light from escaping. Make this from strips of plastic 1/8 inch wide.

5. Assemble the raised roof panels and install them atop the roof, centered along the ridge line. The intent is to give the impression of a raised area from which smoke and fumes can escape; if the relief doesn't look right, add some appropriately-sized plastic spacers between the main roof and the raised roof.

Final Touches:

1. At this point, install the interior walls if you wish. Test fit the pattern pieces for the long side walls and modify as necessary. When it looks good, cut the plastic or cardstock, test fit, make final adjustments, and paint the walls a light color. When dry, install them. Repeat this process for the end walls.

2. I installed 0.125" wide strips of 0.020 styrene in the door arches to give the wall more apparent thickness. I also added styrene strips on the interior walls in the locations corresponding to the outside columns.

3. At the loco door openings, paint the inside edges of the frames with the same paint used on the face. To warn of close clearances, paint alternate yellow and black horizontal panels on the vertical surfaces of the door frames. These stripes can also be done on the diagonal. In some cases these stripes slope down towards the door opening.

4. I glued the loco doors on the inside of the arches in the open position (opening inward). Roll-up metal doors are common, but since my shed is going to serve electric engines, this would not be the typical installation because of the overhead catenary.

5. Weather the structure with soot at the tops of the door openings and other dirt, grime, and dust as appropriate. To finish the roof, dry brush other colors to add a prototypical variety to the color of the individual roof tiles. Older roofs show flecks of color ranging from ochre (yellow) to charcoal black. Weather and seal the roof surface to your tastes.