



Staining and weathering stripwood

Part 2

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Mike Chambers 2008

Weathering railroad models is one of those “hot button” issues in the hobby. On some internet forums it ranks right up there with arguments over nail holes, whether Floquil Driftwood is overrated, and who makes the best DCC system.

Some modelers advocate weathering everything. Others say weather nothing. One weathered model that looks “great” to one person will look “overdone” and “unrealistic” to another.

And even within the camp

that says “weather your models,” there are degrees of acceptability: “heavily,” “moderate,” and “subtle” are terms typically used to describe weathering effects.

Whether you choose to weather your models is strictly up to you. And if you do choose to weather them, the degree to which you apply weathering techniques is also up to you. Don’t let anyone else make the decision for you.

As for myself, I do weather my models. However, I don’t favor any particular degree of weathering or any particular

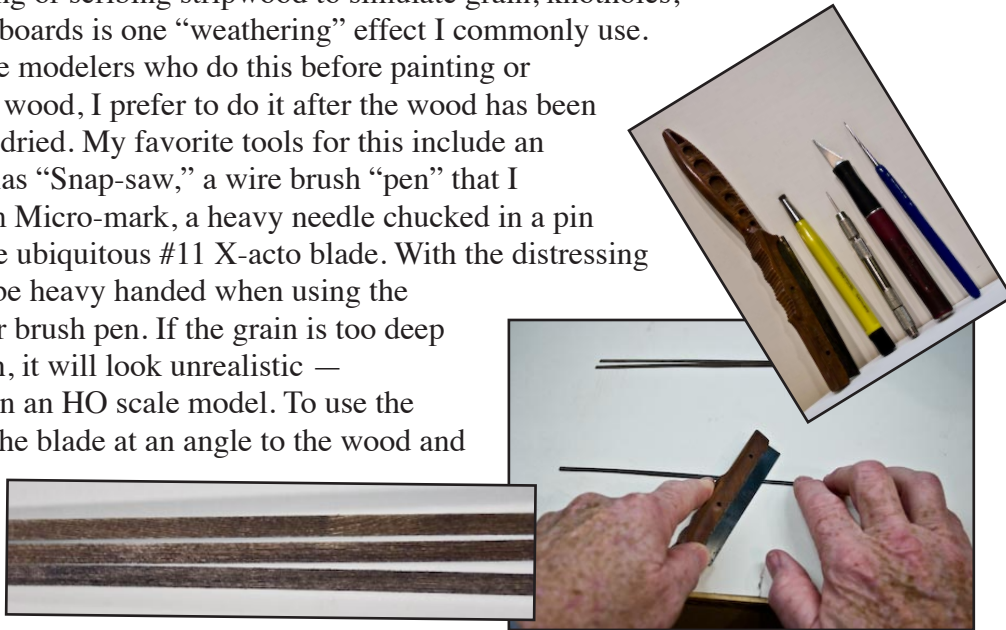
Oftentimes it’s best to let the model itself determine the amount of “weathering” you apply to it. What is an appropriate amount for one structure may not be for another.

prescribed set of “standard” techniques and materials. Rather, I let the model itself dictate the degree, materials, and methods used.

What follows is not intended to be a comprehensive weathering tutorial. Rather, it’s just an overview of a few of the techniques and materials I have used over the years for “aging” the stripwood on my structures. Let these techniques and materials be the starting point for your own explorations.

Creating grain, knotholes, and broken boards

Distressing or scribing stripwood to simulate grain, knotholes, and broken boards is one “weathering” effect I commonly use. Unlike some modelers who do this before painting or staining the wood, I prefer to do it after the wood has been stained and dried. My favorite tools for this include an old, dull Atlas “Snap-saw,” a wire brush “pen” that I bought from Micro-mark, a heavy needle chucked in a pin vise, and the ubiquitous #11 X-acto blade. With the distressing I try not to be heavy handed when using the Snap-saw or brush pen. If the grain is too deep or too rough, it will look unrealistic — especially on an HO scale model. To use the saw, I turn the blade at an angle to the wood and with medium pressure drag the dull teeth across each strip.



The scratch-brush pen is very simple to use and can create some very subtle grain effects in stripwood. How much texture appears depends upon how much of the brush is exposed (out of the barrel) and how much pressure you apply when “scratching” the wood. In general, however, the longer the bristles (again, out of the pen barrel), the softer the effects - or the harder you’ll have to scratch. Conversely, the shorter the bristles, the deeper the texture - but requiring less pressure.



Creating knotholes is simple but also easy to overdo. An occasional knothole here and there can add visual interest to the side of a structure. Make too many of them, however, and your model will start looking cartoonish. One way to make a knothole in a board is to twist the point of a sharp #11 blade into the wood until a small hole is made. Dress the edges of the hole with a small file or emery board to remove any wood “fuzz” or splinters. Another method is to heat a pin or needle and then “burn” a hole into the piece of wood. Probably the simplest way, though, is to use a small drill bit (#76, for example) to make the holes.

Like knotholes, broken boards can add a lot of visual interest to a structure. But they can also be easy to overdo. Further, consider *why* the board(s) might be broken or how they got that way. If you’re building a shed or a workshop, for example, a few broken or splintered boards might be expected and therefore



appropriate. On the other hand, if you're building an occupied farm home, broken siding would be far less likely.

One method I use to create splintered, weather-rotted boards is to lightly but randomly make a dozen or more small cuts at the end of the stripwood. As the small pieces of wood begin to tear away from the bottom of the board, it takes on the appearance of splintered or rotten wood. To further enhance the appearance, I touch a brush loaded with black alcohol to the end tip of the wood and let the alcohol mix wick up into the wood. As an alternative to the alcohol mix, I also sometimes hold the broad end of a Prismacolor 30% Cool Gray or Warm Gray marker to the end and allow the color to wick into the wood grain.

Another way to create a broken or splintered board is to simply take a small slice of wood from the edge of the strip with a sharp #11 blade. Just be careful not to overdo it. To use the old expression, less is more.



Simulating flaking, peeling paint

Creating flaking, peeling paint on “old” wood is relatively easy. If you search the internet or old magazines you will find there are many different ways to create this effect: dabbing the wood with an old sock or piece of towel that has been dunked in the paint first is one way. Another involves “setting” dry paint pigments into the wood grain with mineral spirits, acetone, or other solvent. Yet another calls for wetting the wood with a solvent, applying acrylic paint, letting it dry for a minute or two, and then lifting the paint with pieces of tape. And there are many other methods and variations as well. All are worthy; all are valid; all yield beautiful results.

However, the method I personally prefer is less involved than some of the others. While it does not lead to the “picture perfect” results obtained with other methods, it does take less time and does not involve flammable solvents or other scary stuff. All you really need is an old, gnarly 1/8” wide paint brush and your favorite color of inexpensive craft paint. In a nutshell, here’s how I created the



“peeling paint” effect for my Faulks’ Oil Co. garage: I lightly whisked a *semi-dry* brush back and forth along the distressed grain with no attempt to get even coverage. Doing so causes the paint to hit the “high points” in the grain texture while still allowing the weathered gray-brown wood itself to show through. I paint each strip of wood individually this way.

So... after staining and texturing the stripwood, I divided the wood into two batches with approximately three-quarters of the strips in one pile. Those strips were painted with the semi-dry brush treatment outlined above. I used Ceramcoat’s “Eggshell White.” I prefer it to the so-called “antique” whites because it has a grayer cast, while the antique whites tend to be more yellow in hue. I then made a dilute stain from some Eggshell White and blue windshield washer fluid (although you could use acrylic thinner as well) and brushed the wood in the smaller pile with that. I then combined all of the wood into one pile and cut it to the lengths I needed for the model.

Because the walls were assembled board-by-board over a stud frame, I was able to randomly select and apply the cut boards. This approach enhanced the appearance of uneven weathering and peeling paint on an old structure. To add visual interest to the walls, I added “nail heads” with a 5mm pencil lead, which I sharpened to a very fine point on extra-fine-grit sandpaper. The garage bay door, with their flaking, peeling paint were constructed in the same way as the walls.



Creating the "old wooden shed" look...

In the area where I live, wooden storage sheds and other outbuildings are a common sight. Regardless of their size or general "architecture," they all seem to have one thing in common: they were painted some shade of "barn red" at one time and then left to the elements. On many of them, the red color is so badly faded it's almost a memory. On others the weathering isn't quite as extreme, but the red is still faded and peeling. And under the fading paint, the weathered gray-brown boards can be clearly seen.

This is how I attempted to capture the "look" of an old painted wooden shed.

After staining the stripwood (described in "*Staining and weathering stripwood, Part 1*"), allowing the wood to dry thoroughly, and then scribing it for grain, I squeezed a small dab - actually little more than a smear - of Grumbacher "Indian Red Hue" watercolor pigment from the tube into a plastic water bottle cap. I then added a few drops of Solvaset to the cap using a medicine dropper. As always, I was aiming for a random application of the paint pigment, so I lightly touched the brush to the edge of the pigment and then streaked it through the Solvaset just enough to wet the brush. Then I began brushing strips of wood. As the brush began to either dry out (the Solvaset will evaporate within a minute or two) or the pigment ran out, I repeated the process. The brush strokes were light and quick up and down each strip in order to avoid applying too much pigment. When all of the strips had been covered with this semi-staining technique, I mixed them up (to increase the randomness of selection) and began cutting them to size.



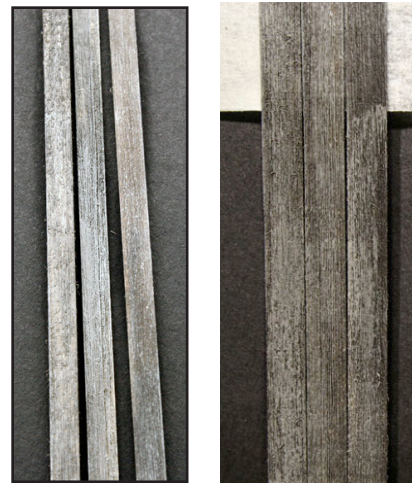
And finally... simulating old barn wood...

All of us have seen old unpainted barns that are so badly weathered the boards have gone beyond gray - they're actually starting to turn black from age and exposure. Creating that look for our models is fairly simple. The only "special" materials required are Ceramcoat Acrylic Thinner, Folk Art "Barnwood" craft paint, and Winsor & Newton "Ivory Black" gouache.

These are the steps I followed to create the heavily weathered look for the salvage barn (top right photo and title photo for Part 1) and the woodcutter's storage shed (second photo at right and on page 1):

- ❑ Using the basic brown-gray stain recipe (explained in "Staining and weathering stripwood, Part 1"), all of the stripwood was colored and allowed to dry thoroughly.
- ❑ The wood was then scribed for grain using the Snap-saw method.
- ❑ A second stain was mixed using 1 oz. of acrylic thinner and several drops of "Barnwood" craft paint. I use an airbrush jar with cap to mix stains like this. (Using an airbrush jar allows unused stain to be sealed and kept fresh for months.)
- ❑ The Barnwood stain was brushed over the gray-brown stripwood and allowed to dry. No effort was made to get even coverage or completely coat the wood with the stain.
- ❑ After the stripwood had dried again, additional grain texturing was done with the scratch pen.
- ❑ A dab of Ivory Black gouache was placed in a plastic bottle cap and several drops of Solvaset were added. Following the method described in the last section ("old wooden shed"), the gouache was randomly applied to all of the stripwood pieces.
- ❑ After the wood dried, it was cut to the needed lengths for the construction project.

For variation or as an alternative to the Ivory Black, you might want to experiment with Daler-Rowney "Warm Gray 2" and "Warm Gray 3" gouache. However, do not use this brand with Solvaset - they do not mix well. Instead, use ordinary tap water or distilled water.



The wood on the left has had Barnwood stain applied. The wood on the right has been streaked with Ivory Black gouache over the Barnwood. Note how both the original gray-brown and the Barnwood color still show through the black streaks in the photo on the right.