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Where the layout ends and the real world begins

Backdrop Installation Guide

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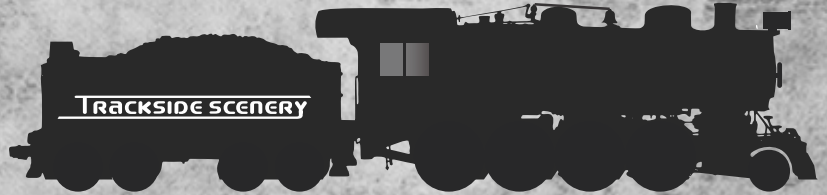
Model Railroad Products

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Install Guide

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Getting ready for the new view on your layout or diorama?

There are many methods out there that you can use to install a photo-realistic backdrop. Some may work better than others for your particular install. Installation will be simple and easy if you plan ahead. Obviously, the status of your layout can dictate some of the considerations and variables that you will need to address.
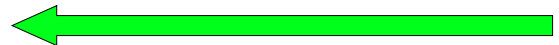
Obviously, the best time to install a backdrop is prior to installing any physical scenery. This way you don't have to worry about reaching over and disturbing anything. We know how exciting it can be to get up and running. You may already have scenery on the layout and that's ok. We cover one such install where the owner already had scenery in place.
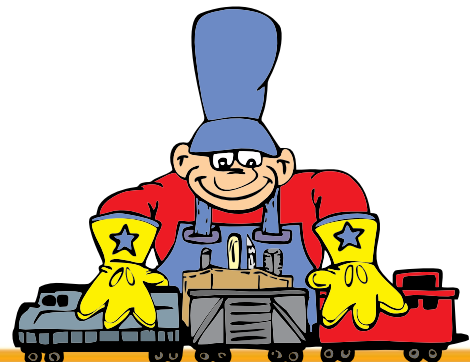
Installation Video

1ST STOP!

If you have not seen our installation video, now is a good time. This video demonstrates a simple spray adhesive install method.

Click image above to go to video or visit

www.youtube.com/tracksidescenery

Must have internet connection to view video.
Direct video address is https://youtu.be/bNGwUtCc8ls

Planning for Installation

Explore the options that work for you:

There are many methods out there for installing a backdrop. Some might work better than others, but it all comes down to which ones will provide a professional appearance and which ones will last.
We surely can't cover all aspects of installation, but we can give you some tips on which route to take.
Keep in mind that this guide only covers the installation of backdrop prints and not backing panels.

Prior to installing your backdrops, you will need to consider what you are mounting the backdrops on. The most often asked question is "what do I put the backdrops on?". There is no single answer as there are many, but you should mount to something that has a clean and flat surface. Some good substrates are Masonite, Foam Board, Gator Board and polystyrene or Lexan plastic.

Masonite:

This product is readily available at most hardware stores and be cut to the desired dimensions. This is a relatively inexpensive substrate that we find to be most used for backdrops. The downside is that it is fairly heavy and must be securely fastened to the wall or layout. Typical sheets are 4x8' and thicknesses are typically 1/8" and 1/4". We've used both with equal success.

Foam Board:

This product can be a bit harder to find in large sheets, but it is lightweight and easy to work with.
It's possible that you can find this at your local sign shop.

Gator Board:

This product is available through online outlets and through some local print shops. It's typically used for sign and artwork purposes. You may find this in Black or White, Glossy or Matte, and in various thicknesses. It's sturdy and does the job nicely, but can be expensive, especially to ship.

Polystyrene or Lexan:

Used extensively in sign shops, this substrate will provide a nice flat surface to work with.
Again, it can be more expensive compared to other substrates.

Drywall, Plywood or other:

We always suggest against mounting directly to the "wall", simply because the surface is typically not flat or clean. Additionally, when mounting to the wall, you'll want to be sure that your inner walls are well insulated and your room doesn't see extreme temperature changes.

Sure, we have plenty of customers that mount to the wall and to plywood with success, but if you have the inclination to explore the other options, now is the time.

Planning for Installation

Which way do you want to go?:

Once you have figured out what you are mounting the backdrops on, now is the time to start planning how you will execute the job. We'll assume for whatever substrate you choose, it will be cut into specific sizes or panels. These panels will then be lined up in a vertical position at some point.
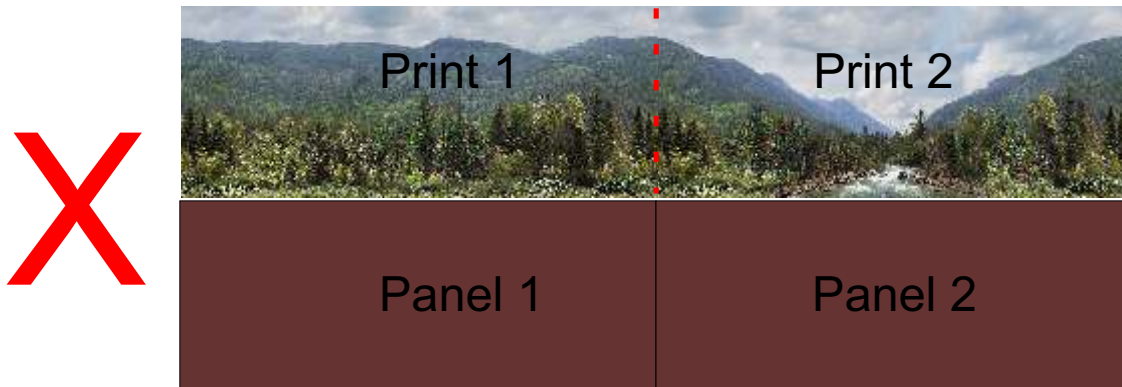
Will you be mounting the backdrops while in a horizontal position on a table or will you be mounting them directly in a vertical position? We'll take this into consideration now, as it will play into the installation process where seams are concerned.

Our backdrops are design to mate in a seamless fashion. Obviously, when mating two prints together there will physically be a seam. With care and attention during the install, you will want to make the seam as less noticeable as possible. It can be done and there are many layouts that we have seen where you literally can't tell where the seams are. Your install method can dictate how the seams might appear.
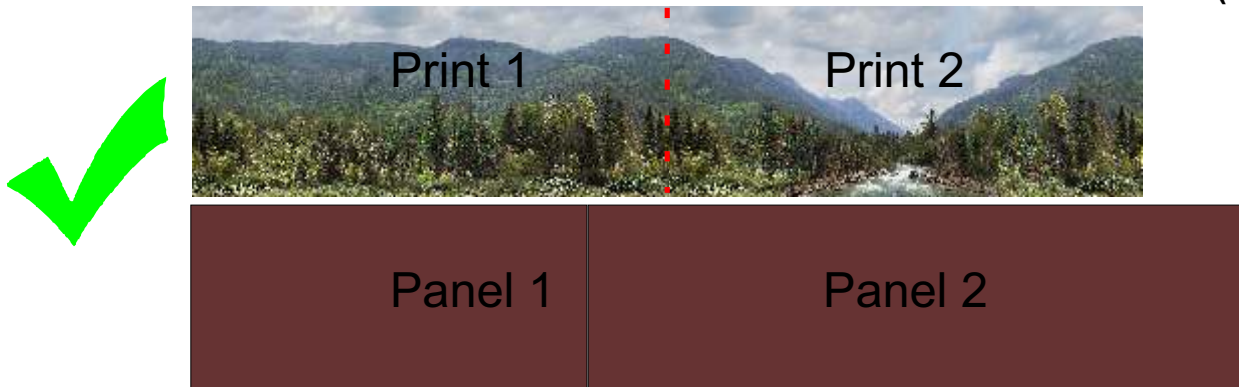
If you are mounting your specific sized backdrop on a panel of the same size, it's sage to say you will end up with a double seam. That's the seam of the panel and the seam of the backdrop. This may or may not make the seam more noticeable. This might be the case for mounting them to the panel while on a table in the horizontal position or doing it in a vertical position.

The other option is to mount the substrate vertically, and then mount the backdrops. A tip here would be to not have the panel seams and the backdrop seams meet in the same place **(Fig 1)**.

Example prints 60" x 24" ea

(Fig 1)

Mounting

Making it Stick?:
There many schools of thought when it comes to installing backdrops. Rightly so, because there are many different methods. Spray adhesive, roll on glue, peel and stick and so on. The correct one is the one that does the job without destroying the print. As mentioned, our backdrops are photographic prints and with that, they must be treat as such. Just like your favorite locomotive or structure, you would take extreme care in handling. Clean hands, watching where you spray or apply adhesive is a must. We always say backdrops are models too.

FEAR NOT! Many people choose an adhesive backed print because it offers a quicker approach with the peel and stick and plug and play appeal. Today's (PSA"s) Pressure Sensitive Adhesives leave less room for adjustment - similar to that of a postage stamp. Once it is pressed on, It is harder to make a adjustments depending on your mounting surface. Give consideration when weighing your selections.

The process itself for adhesive backed versions would nearly identical to the applied adhesive method, with the exception of the fact that the adhesive is already on the print. Considering that, we'll move on and discuss the applied adhesive method.

Which Adhesive?:
As the backdrops are paper based products, it should come as no surprise that water based adhesives can be harmful to the prints. This eliminates wall-paper paste and water based glues. Use only solvent based adhesives when installing any paper based product.

There are a lot of products that can get the job done with success. To be fair, we can only suggest the products that we have experience with. While we tried quite a few with success, we all tend to lean towards the ones that we use the most. With that, most of our backdrop projects in the shop have been applied and installed with 3M Brand Super 77 Spray Adhesive. We find this product to the user friendly and it provides a good initial tact without curing too fast to move along at human pace. This very product is seen in our INSTALLING BACKDROPS video.

Another product that some of our customers have been using with success is Elmers Rubber Cement.

Supply List for installation:

1) Backdrops
2) Adhesive
3) Something to smooth out the backdrop (clean squeegee, paint roller etc)
4) Clothes pins or small clamps to hold backdrop temporally in place
5) Small artist paint brush and disposable cup
6) A helper if available

Keep your hands clean.....

Mounting

Your new view awaits?:

Whether you install the backdrop on wood, drywall, or one of the preferred methods previously described, the process is simple and basically the same for all forms. If you are installing on a painted surface, extra care should be given to making the surface as smooth as possible without sanding dust or dirt.

Once you have your surface prepared, you can now go about installing the backdrop. Whether you are using spray adhesive or a pre-installed adhesive backing print, the process is to move from one end to the other. Vertically or horizontally, you should always open the print out and pre-fit to make sure you have it lined up. Rehearse the process with the print before you start as this will also give you the opportunity to see where a hard to reach area might be or spot any imperfections on the mounting surface.

Whether horizontal or vertical, be sure to mask any areas that may receive over spray. It's prudent to do this even to cover other or neighboring backdrops.

1)
Line the print up in the starting position where you need it to be and clamp the starting end down as you roll the print out and inspect for proper fit. As you roll it out, rehearse the pressing down motion with your hand over the print. As you go, make yourself aware of any hard to reach areas and any imperfections that might need attention before starting the actual mount.. Use clamps as show in (1) to hold the print in place. If mounting vertically, have your helper hold the print up.

2)
Have your spray adhesive shaken and ready to go per the manufacturers instructions on the can. Keep the starting clamps on the starting end of the print as shown in (2). Now, spray a light coat on the entire working area to get a light cover of adhesive working. This will start to set just enough so when you apply more it will really start to bite as you work your way down the line.

Mounting

Your new view awaits?:

3)
Knowing that the print is lined up properly and clamped on the starting area, we are actually going to start spraying a few inches into the area first as show with green arrow in (2). Start spraying back and forth across the rolled print from (bottom to top in this case) and while spraying, keep making your way out about 12-15 inches. Apply enough spray to get it to stick. Use your smoothing tool (squeegee etc) to smooth out the backdrop as you go.

4)
Once you work your way across and the central portion of the backdrop is secure, go back to the left side and apply adhesive to the left side and secure.
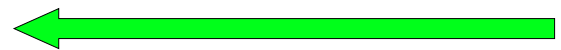
5)
If you are at the mating point of two backdrops and you know they are properly lined up, spray some adhesive in a disposable cup and brush on the adhesive using care not to foul either print.

Tip: When smoothing out the print, be careful and sure as to not get adhesive on the smoothing device. Keep a watchful eye on it so you do not get any on the prints.

Again, there more detail in our Installation video

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Resources

Online and at your service:

Contact Us Directly:
Website - www.tracksidescenery.com
Email - tracksidescenery@gmail.com
Phone - 304-279-7375 (Normal business hours EST)

Our contact information is on every page of the website at the bottom.

Our Facebook Page:
Updated regularly, we feature not only product announcements, but photos, video, project updates and much more. Located here www.facebook.com/tracksidescenery

Our YouTube Channel:
Here we feature How-To videos, real railfanning, layout tours and much more
Located here - www.youtube.com/tracksidescenery

Our customer photo gallery is full of customer photos showing how they use our products.
Located here > CUSTOMER PHOTO GALLERY

Thanks for your interest in Trackside Scenery Backdrops

Happy Modeling.........

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