



Scaling down

SWEDEN *Istvan Molnar has been building miniature cars, ships and trains for the past 30 years. He doesn't even need a blueprint for his models - a picture or sketch suffices.*

The eyes of a watchmaker, the hands of a surgeon and the patience of a lace maker: these are the attributes that make Istvan Molnar an exceptionally gifted model builder. His miniature ships are of museum quality, the railroad landscapes he creates are on the smallest scale to be found in the world, and he's always receiving enquiries from potential buyers. The master craftsman, originally from Hungary, considers creativity to be his principle strength. "I love being inventive and discovering how and from which materials you can make things. Multiwire cables, for instance, make fantastic trees," Molnar explains. These special talents also come in handy in his work for OSRAM. Molnar, who immigrated to Sweden in 1973 and has been on the OSRAM team ever since, started as a mechanic and was promoted first to supervisor and finally plant manager. When production ceased, he was named department manager of repackaging machinery for the do-it-yourself business. Today, he is invaluable as a technical advisor responsible for handling complaints and display material.

MUSEUM RESEARCH

Molnar built his very first model, of Christopher Columbus' ship the Santa Maria, in 1974, using just a sketch to guide him. Since then, he has produced 15 more ships and three complete model railway sets, for which he built everything - from the rails to the surrounding landscapes, houses, people and cars. He also has built over 100 other cars and buildings - among them a model of the building housing OSRAM Sweden.

But he is proudest of a miniature ship



Models inspired by American vehicles - such as the Ford Model T and this steam engine from 1886 - are Molnar's biggest passion.

that he built in almost painful detail. "I rebuilt the Arholma, a Swedish minesweeper, using a sketch. I must have visited the Museum for Marine History at least 100 times in order to be true to original details." He was offered €3,300 (\$4,200) for the Arholma. But he is not interested in selling it, and not only because he is attached to his creation. "If I spend 1,000 hours on a model - which is not unusual - and am offered €550 (\$700) for my work, this corresponds to an hourly rate of about €50 cents (60 U.S. cents)."

And so, Molnar continues to build primarily for himself, a few friends and acquaintances, and sometimes for visitors to his Internet site www.molnar.nu, where visitors can admire his creations. This winter he plans to build a few more pieces. The 56-year-old only pursues his hobby during the cold season, since this is when he and his wife, Marianne, migrate to their apartment in Stockholm. Their summers are spent in a quaint house with a prize-winning garden. "During the summer, gardening balances out my office activities. During the winter, building models helps me to completely switch off - I find that focusing on details really helps me to relax."

Istvan Molnar builds his models on a scale of 1:220 - over three times as small as conventional model trains, built in 1:87.

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