

N-Circle Railroad Update 25 – July 17, 2025

Building a Laser-Cut Wood Theater Kit

With the experience of building the laser-cut wood American Model Builders Country Barn in Update 24, I decided to apply those newly acquired skills immediately to the next wood kit on my priority list: the Majestic Theater from Laser-Art Structures / Branchline.

[N-Circle_25-06-24_Theater](#)



This Laser-Art kit comes with very complete and detailed instructions, with extensive text accompanying each assembly diagram, telling how to build it. Probably the best kit instructions I have seen.

However, none of the parts are labeled or numbered either on the parts or in the instructions. There are many similar size and shape trim pieces, so you need to be very careful that you have the exact correct window or door or trim board pieces to fit on the main walls before removing them from the sheet and assembling them. Personally, I think I prefer numbered pieces on plastic sprues...

The instructions do not mention warping issues with acrylic paints, so an inexperienced modeler may learn about this the hard way. The main walls in this kit are thicker than in the kits I have

built previously, so I dove right in and painted the interior and exterior surfaces of all the walls with an acrylic Vallejo surface primer, using a bristle brush. As with the barn kit, a brush was needed to ensure adequate coverage of the clapboard ridges. Despite the thicker wood, and still being in the supporting frame, the large front and rear walls did bow slightly,

I did not use a much imagination in picking a paint scheme for the building – I went with off-white walls and blue trim like the photo on the box! I used Polly Scale “Conrail Blue” on the trim as I had it available, it could as well be “Old Theater Blue” to the non-discerning eye, right?!

As with the Country Barn kit, I painted the window and door frames and trim pieces with a micro brush before removing them from the sheets – this is much easier than after they are on the walls! As with the barn, the challenge is that you cannot paint the outer edges that are still in the laser-cut grooves, they must still be painted after the parts are removed from the sheet. And of course it is only necessary to paint the front side, not the back peel-and-stick side.

[N-Circle_25-07-02_Theater](#)

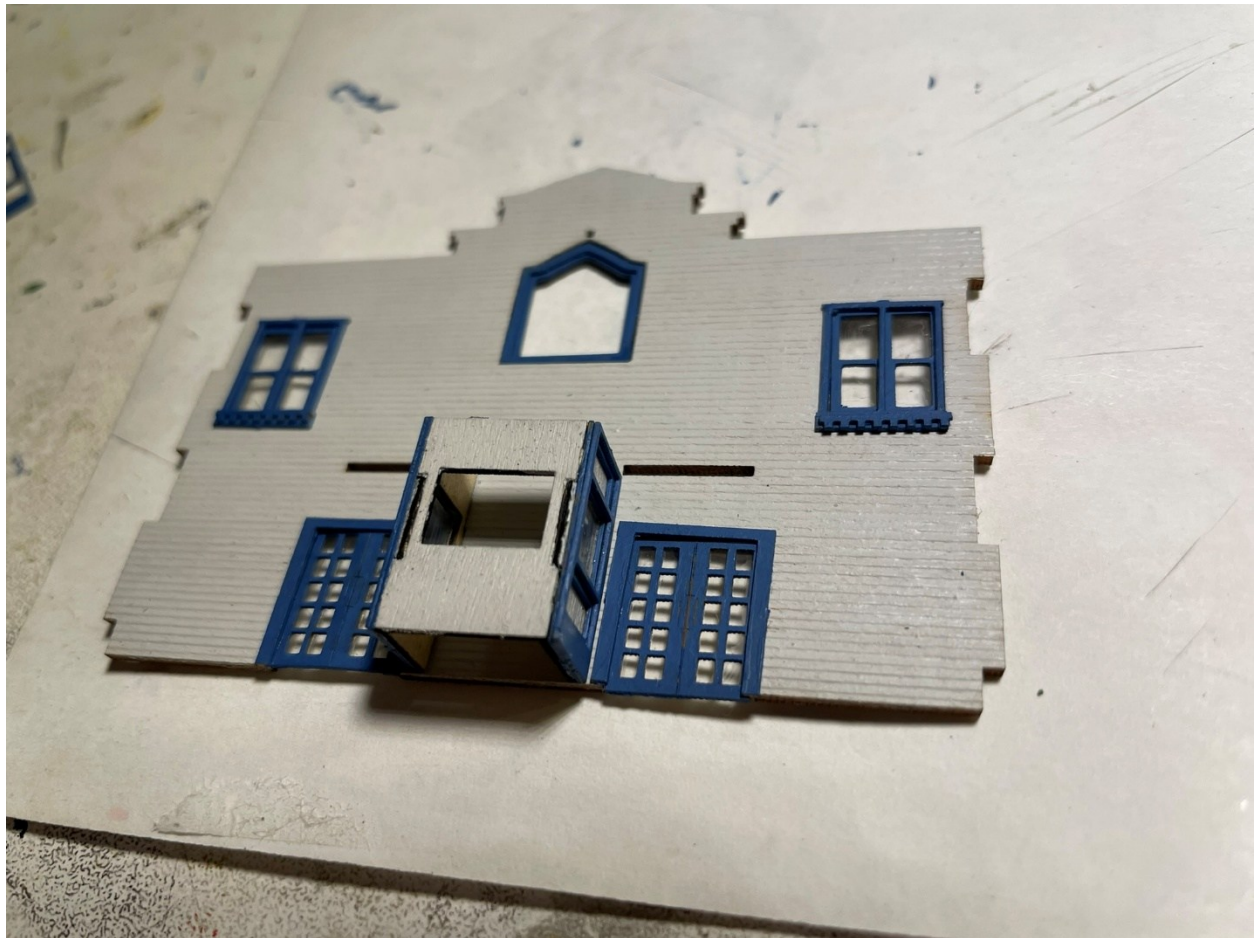


Also, as with the country barn kit, I did the assembly out of order from what is recommended in the instructions and added the windows and doors to the walls before assembling the walls. Again, it is much easier to align and attach these tiny pieces with the wall lying flat on the workbench – I cannot imagine doing it on the assembled building!

I put a thin bead of white glue around the edges of the windows and doors from the inside of the walls, not trusting the peel-and-stick frames alone to hold things in place. This is much easier to do with the wall unit on the workbench, not already assembled with the other walls.

I assembled and attached the ticket booth and marquee to the front wall before the final assembly too. I attached the decorative frames to the side walls before attaching these walls to the building. When doing things in this order, you must think through very carefully how these frames need to be aligned to the rear and front to allow the alignment tabs on the walls to interlock. There are no details in the instructions to guide you on this. I did not attach the decorative frames to the front of the booth until after assembling the three booth walls, as these frames must align to overlap the frames on the side walls.

[N-Circle_25-07-06_Theater-1](#)



When I attached the frame to the front of the ticket booth, I realized that despite “thinking it through,” the frames were upside down – the money slot was at the top of the window, not the bottom! But it was too late to redo these stick-on panels. And yes, that could be seen in the assembly diagram in the instructions, I just overlooked it. But fortunately, this theater will not be placed “front and center” on the layout, it will be viewed from the side on a side street, so I doubt anyone, including me... will notice after it is in place on the layout!

To get the marquee panels which overhang the top of the ticket booth to be square, I used a clamp to hold the horizontal roof panel against the top of the ticket booth. Again, I don't know how one would do all of this if the front wall were already assembled with the main walls of the building.

[N-Circle_25-07-06_Theater-2](#)



I did not use all of the second layer of decorative boards that go over the main trim boards on the front wall and around the ticket booth – just too many tiny peel-and-stick pieces to paint the edges of and apply! I also felt that if these are not aligned perfectly – which is difficult to do – they will do more to detract from the appearance of the structure than add to it. Even in the product photo in the kit they are less than perfect!

I also did not use the brick panels that are included to frame the entrance. They would require multiple rounds of painting to obtain a good brick and mortar appearance and seemed out of place for this style of old wood structure.

To assemble the staircase, I first glued the inner stringer to the wall and let it dry. Then, because the wall was still a separate section, I held it vertically between two bottles as shown in this picture, to be able to keep things stable while attaching the outer stringer. This would not be necessary if one followed the directions and assembled the four walls first.

I glued the top and bottom stair treads in place to establish the spacing between the stringers when attaching the outer stringer. And note that I used white glue on the treads and did not rely on the tiny edge of peel-and-stick at each end of the treads to hold them in place!

[N-Circle_25-07-08_Theater-1](#)



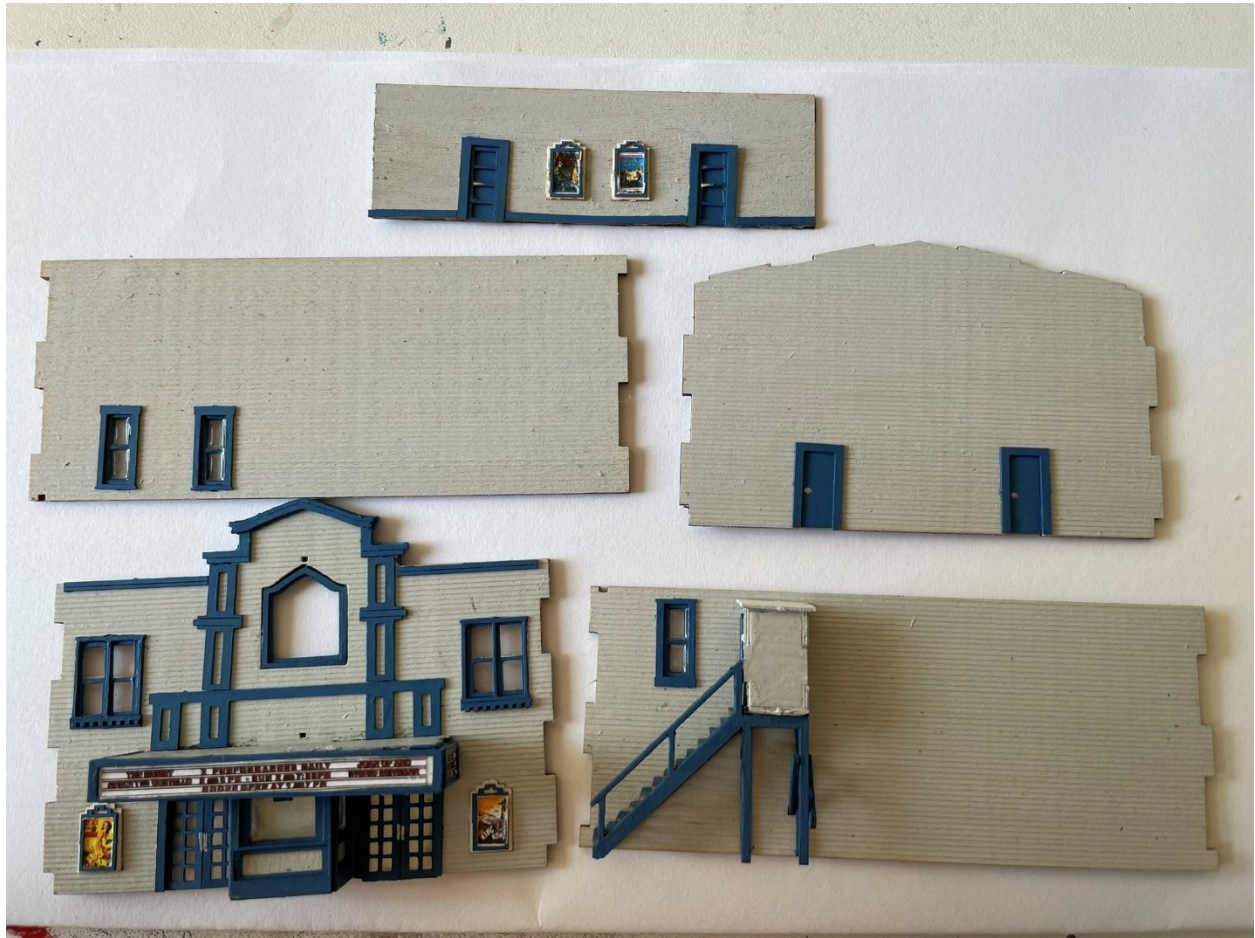
The thirteen stair treads on the stairway must be individually glued to the stringers... meticulous work with a pair of needle-nose pliers. After the initial glue was dry, I reinforced them with another drop at each tread end applied from underneath. They came out okay, but I find that after this task, I am not morally opposed to molded plastic stairways like on the Atlas Yard Tower in N-Circle Update 21...!

[N-Circle_25-07-08_Theater-2](#)



Here we see the four walls with all the details attached before final assembly. The fifth wall is an interior wall, intended to depict the separation of the front lobby from the theaters in the rear. But without significant interior lighting, this wall will not be visible. And even with lighting, the interior would only be visible if one were at close eye-level with the front of the building. So, while I did complete and attach this interior wall, I did not develop other interior details at this point.

[N-Circle_25-07-10_Theater-1](#)



By attaching the ticket booth and stairway to their respective walls in advance, I think it actually made assembling the four walls easier. They stabilized the front and side wall vertically while aligning the other two. Here we see the walls assembled, with magnets holding them in alignment.

[N-Circle_25-07-10_Theater-2](#)



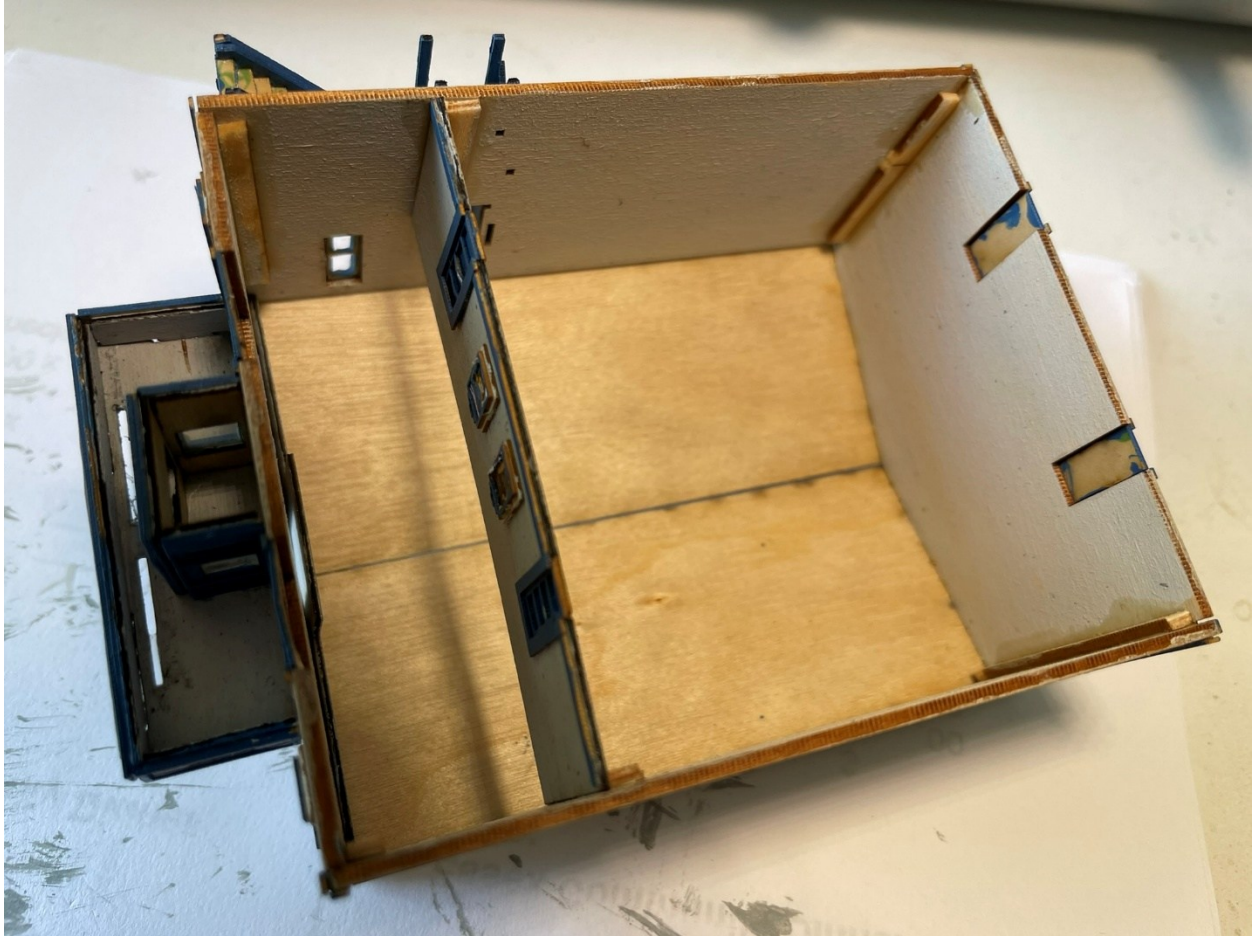
At this point I could also attach the main roof panels immediately, which put everything in alignment while the glue was still wet on the wall corner joints, rather than dealing with any slight misalignment of these roof tabs-and-slots later, which would be required if one followed the assembly sequence in the instructions. Doing it this way was difficult enough. And while the instructions provide no guidance, there is a very slight difference in the slot spacings in the roof panel relative to one edge versus the other. I thought I had it correct, but found after an initial attempt that indeed they went the other way...

[N-Circle_25-07-10_Theater-3](#)



After this assembly had dried for a day, I inserted the interior wall and reinforced all the interior corner joints with strips of wood from the leftovers of the laser-cut sheets. Hopefully this will keep this fragile structure solid for many years...

[N-Circle_25-07-13_Theater](#)



Note that the open bottom of this structure would allow adding interior lighting someday to highlight that interior wall.

I painted the dark interlocking ends of the wall panels at the corners before applying the corner trim boards, to prevent these edges from being visible if the trim boards did not completely cover them. These end pieces really soaked up the acrylic paint into the end of the wood grain and required a lot of paint to cover.

Even after painting all the edges of the trim pieces after removing them from the sheets and applying them to the structure, a lot of touchup painting is required of the final assembly.

Attaching the strips of tar paper roofing to the roof sections was fairly straight forward, using white glue. Much simpler than the strips of peel-and-stick shingles on the Country Barn kit.

And I remembered to cut the slots in the paper on the marquee roof for the tabs of the Majestic sign! However, whoever thought the tabs on the bottom of the sign would fit in the slots after the roofing was attached hadn't tried it... I trimmed the edges of the paper along the edges of

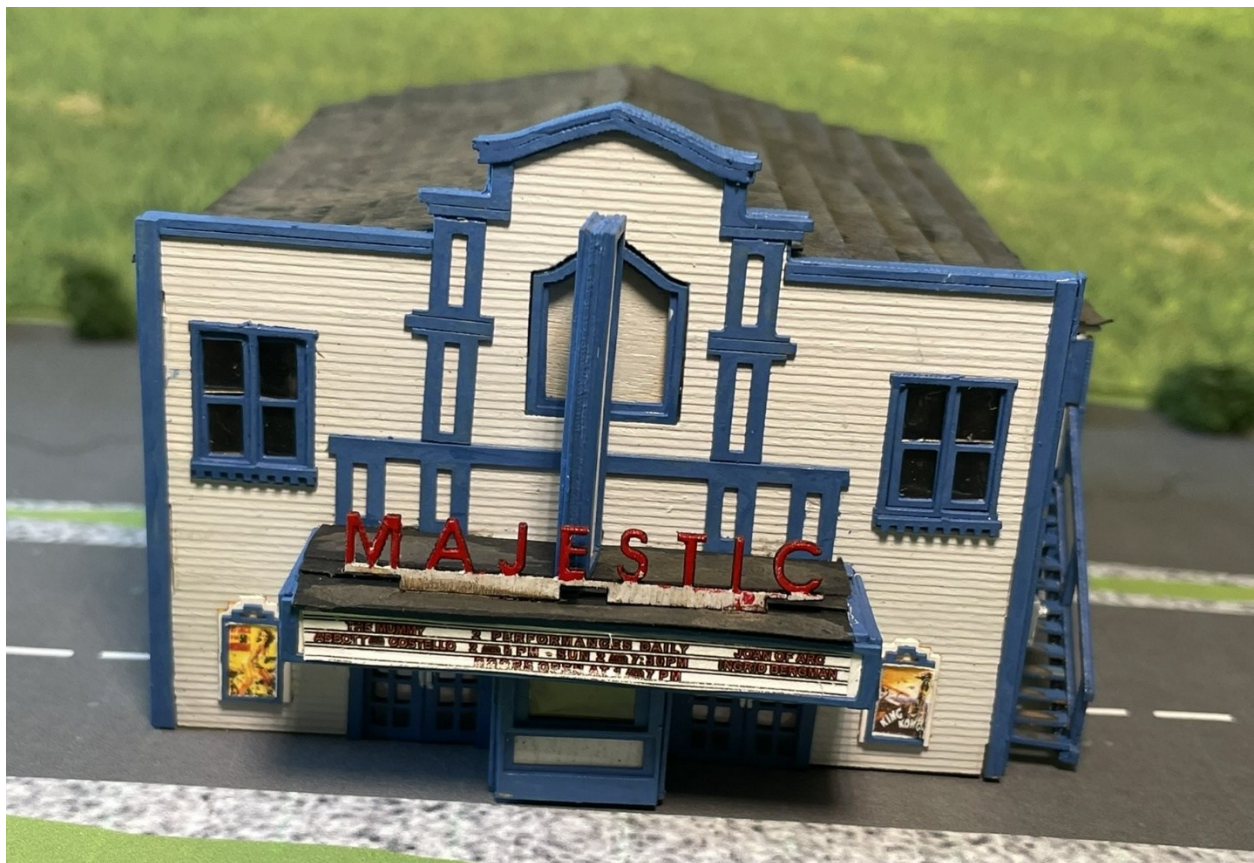
the slots with a sharp knife, but still the tabs could not be forced into the slots without endangering the fragile structure, so the sign is mostly perched on top of the slots, secured with white glue. But if you look closely at the photo in the instructions, they had the same problem.

I applied a watery mix of dark grey and brown paint to the roof, to weather the semi- shiny black paper. The mix soaked into the paper roofing, so the end result looks pretty good. I also applied some of the mix to the stairway treads to show wear.

As a finishing touch I added a 3-D printed plastic gooseneck light over the stairway and a utility meter on the wall over the stairway.

In this straight-on view of the completed model we see the details of the marquee and ticket booth.

[N-Circle_25-07-16_Theater-1_Cropped](#)



This three-quarters angle shows the details of the stairway and vestibule on the side. Note the weathered stairs and added light and utility meter!

[N-Circle_25-07-16_Theater-2_Cropped](#)



The back side of the building is boring, but it will be hidden in an alley next to other buildings. But note that there are two fire exits in addition to the front doors!

[N-Circle_25-07-16_Theater-3_Cropped](#)



The other side of the building is equally not exciting – all the detail is on the front!

[N-Circle_25-07-16_Theater-4_Cropped](#)



In the end, my modeling produced a reasonable facsimile of the picture on the kit box. The picture on the outside of the box says it is of the HO version of the kit, where obviously the detail parts would be larger and easier to deal with. Their photo in the instructions is probably of the N-scale version of the kit and shows more imperfections...

Therefore, despite earlier stated plans to place the theater on Church Street where it would mainly be viewed from the side, I decided to move it to a more prominent forward-facing location, swapping it with the Old Fire House Restaurant from Update 8 on the corner of Church and Main, as seen next. One of the advantages of not finalizing and attaching anything on your layout...!



Note that in this typical viewing angle, indeed one cannot see the interior in normal layout lighting. And you cannot see that the money slot on the ticket booth window is on the top...!

This theater kit took about 18 hours to complete over 25 sessions, as there are many sequences where paint or glue must be allowed to dry before moving on to the next step. Thus, this is not a “couple of evenings” project – it will be on your workbench for a while!

I thought at first this kit would be as easy and more pleasant to build than the barn kit in Update 24, not having the roof trusses and sheets of shingles to deal with. However, this was made up for by the many, many tiny peel-and-stick window, door and trim pieces that must be placed in carefully aligned layers with sub-millimeter precision.

In conclusion, compare and contrast this craftsman wood kit to the plastic Life-Like City Hall building next to it. Clearly more three-dimensional detail in the windows, but worth the effort?

[N-Circle_25-07-16_Theater-6](#)



These laser-cut wood kits are an interesting challenge for an experienced model builder and produce a nice final structure if done well. But I would not recommend them to a less experienced model builder who just needs some decent-looking structures for a home layout. There are many quality plastic kits on the market for many buildings. The instructions in these wood kits do not address the painting techniques required to avoid warping and many other issues. So, one needs to read the available resources in modeling magazines and on websites before attempting one of these kits, especially in N-scale.

As mentioned in Update 23, I have numerous other laser-cut wood kits for freight and yard buildings, etc., but most should be relatively easier to build than these in Updates 23, 24 and 25. So stay tuned!