

# Mithril Modelling Guides

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## Tutorial 3

### Bases and scenic effects Part 2

#### Part 2 Methods and Techniques:

- 2.1 Layering.
- 2.2 The Foundation base and hard landscaping.
- 2.3 Painting the foundation base:
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- 2.5 Light sand stone effect.
- 2.6 Marrying the two bases.
- 2.7 Adding the undergrowth and plant life.
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Now we have assembled sufficient material to make our base we can look at the techniques and procedures used to construct a scenic environment. I construct my base and ground work in layers: Fig 1

#### 2.1 Layering:

Fig 1 Building up the layers

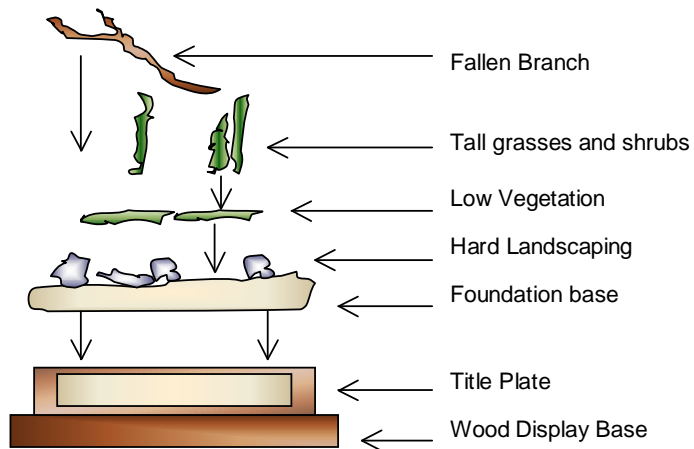
1 Form the foundation base and hard landscaping.

2 Add the grass and low plants and vegetation

3 position the reeds, tall grasses and shrubs.

4 Add any extras such as fallen tree branches etc.

5 Fix the nameplate to the display base.

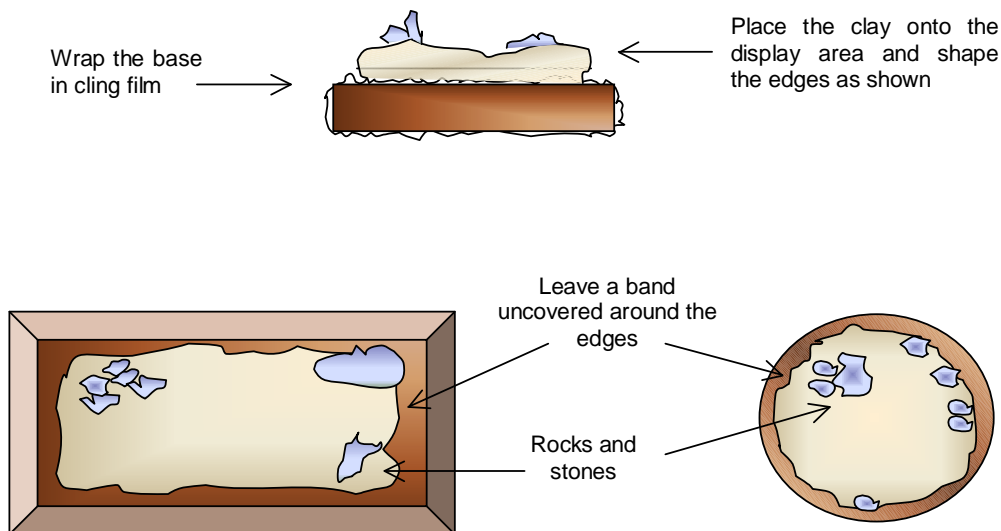


This basic order is good for both single figures and vignettes. There are of course exceptions to this order when other elements are added to the scene such as water effects, buildings and structures and we will examine these in a later tutorial.

## 2.2 The Foundation base and hard landscaping:

First we need to make the basic land structure or 'foundation base' on which the scenic materials and plant life are placed. As we will be using Das modelling clay the wooden base needs to be protected, this is done by wrapping it tightly in two or three layers of cling film. Next take a piece of modelling clay and form it into flat shape that will fit the base display area leaving a band uncovered around the edge, the thickness will be determined by the type and size of your model. Das is an easy material to manipulate with clay modelling tools it can also be worked with a wet brush making fine adjustments a relatively simple task. Any rocks or rock formation are added at this stage whilst the Das is still wet to allow the clay to be worked into the rock structures where necessary Fig 2. Das does shrink whilst curing and will set hard overnight in a warm place. Placing Das in an oven set on low heat will accelerate the curing time. If you are making a large base which is relatively thick and bulky you need to give it a longer time to fully cure. For a single figure 0.5cm is more than sufficient and for a three or four figure vignette it should be about 1cm.

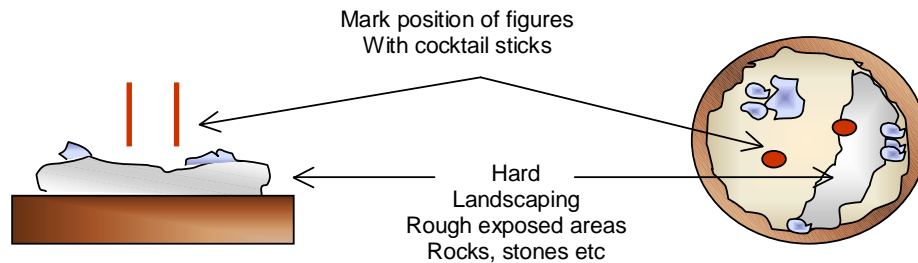
Fig 2 The foundation base.



Areas that are going to be exposed should be treated next. Paint the edges of the clay foundation base with white glue and sprinkle with a mixture of coarse sand and aggregates. Fig 3 The aim here is to create the impression of exposed earth and soil. Do the same with the surface area to form rough areas of ground; any additional small stones can also be glued into place. Experiment with different materials until you are happy with the result. Next position your figures onto the base and mark with a pencil,

drill a small hole at each place and push in a cocktail stick, this will prevent the positions being lost.

Fig 3 Exposed earth and soil with figures marked:



### 2.3 Painting the foundation base:

I would suggest that the colour of the base is kept fairly light, as a dark colour will distract the viewer from the figures. The aim here is to simulate exposed earth and hard ground and can be done by a process of under painting, washes and dry brushing to finish. Experiment with different colours schemes for earth and soil tones before starting. Painting is with a combination of matt enamels and oil colours and is a slow process because each stage the paint must dry thoroughly over night.

### 2.4 Lime stone effect:

1. Under paint the areas with a medium grey with just a touch of blue and allow to dry overnight.
2. Mix up a well-thinned wash of dark grey again with a touch of blue. Load the brush well and apply with the point till the area is covered dry overnight.
3. Using the thick paint from the bottom of the tin make a light grey colour with just a touch dark earth. Load the brush then brush back and forth on a piece of tissue paper until the brush is almost dry. Lightly pull the brush over the area to highlight the rough texture. Once again this must dry thoroughly.
4. Repeat this process 2 or 3 times using a progressively lighter tone each time.

### 2.5 Light sand stone effect:

Using the same dry brush technique above use the following colours:

1. Under paint with Light Sand.
2. Wash with a mix of Burnt Siena; Yellow Ochre and a touch of black.
3. Dry brush with a mix of Light Sand and White.

These are just two earth effect colours; try experimenting with different colour combinations. Use the same medium for each stage instead of a mixture. The process can be done with Acrylic colour but be aware of the quick drying time when dry brushing. A more advanced technique is to mix the paint on a pallet and add light and dark tones without too much mixing, this will give you a variation of colour to apply to the areas on your foundation base. The aim here is to give a more natural appearance.

Remember to keep your colours light, it is easy to tone down using washes but trying to lighten a dark colour is more or less impossible. If a mistake is made the best thing to do is start again with a fresh under paint. Dry brushing is the key stage in making realistic earth and soil areas, several light dry brush runs will yield better results so be patient and allow each stage to dry thoroughly.

If your aim is to make a winter scene with deep snow Das modelling clay makes this easy. Once your base as hardened overnight wet the surface with water cover the whole area with small pieces of clay and spread it out with a knife blade or modelling tool, then use large wet brush to smooth the surface to represent the snow. To give the appearance of deep snow press your figures into the soft clay, the deeper they are will determine the depth of the snow. When this is dry, paint with 2-3 coats of white acrylic. Fig 4



Fig 4

The snow effect in this small vignette is made with Das modelling clay. Note continuation of the groundwork around the contour of the base. The creeping foliage has been dry brushed to give the illusion of frost. These old Mithril figures are painted with artist oil colour.

## 2.6 Marrying the two bases:

Once the foundation base is completely dry it's time to glue the two together. Separate the two components and remove the cling film from the display base and clean with a damp cloth if necessary. Place the foundation base onto a sheet of sand paper and rub it gently until the underside is flat and smooth. To glue them together roughen the centre surface area of the display base with sand paper to provide a key, coat the foundation base with white glue leaving a narrow band around the edges. Bring the two parts together and check that the position is correct. Press down firmly and hold for a minute or so until the glue reaches its 'grab' point then allow to harden off.

## 2.7 Adding the undergrowth and plant life

As I stated in the introduction I feel that the base should be an integral part of the whole, one technique I use is to continue the groundwork onto and around the wooden display base itself. There are a number of ways this can be done, one of the easiest is to glue some clumps of static grass to the edges and perhaps add some foliage or

plants. Climbing ivy can be made from epoxy putty. Roll out the putty into long very thin sausage then apply it to the area to be covered, work it into a rough texture with the point of a modelling knife or cocktail stick. To obtain a finer texture use a pin or a large needle.

Next we add the low growing vegetation such as grass and low growing plants. This can be made from any suitable material as listed above. To use static grass sprinkled it onto an area that has been painted with white glue, as soon as has been applied gently blow across the area from one side, this will cause the fibres to stand up creating a very realistic effect. A light dry brush over the area when dry gives added realism. If you want to create an area of dense clumps of grass give the area two treatments one on top of the other. To cover a large area with static grass I would recommend that the area be first painted with green acrylic. Bushes, shrubs, tall plants, and reeds are added next, these are made from any of the natural or manufactured materials as listed above. Natural moss washed and cleaned is excellent for undergrowth and bushes. It can be used in clumps or separated to represent small plants; some species have tiny seed heads, which make very convincing flowers. It is important that all of your foliage is positioned correctly to maintain a realistic natural distribution. Be careful when placing foliage next to the figure positions; keep it small and low to avoid obstructing the view. There are no hard and fast rules when it comes to adding vegetation, undergrowth plants and bushes to your land area, it is a matter of trial and error, the aim is to create a natural environment that will look pleasing to the eye without drawing the viewers attention away from the figures. Fig 8 and 9

## **2.8 Painting the Foliage and vegetation:**

There are two schools of thought here some would argue 'paint everything' others (like me) 'paint only if necessary' by this I mean if using natural plant life like moss and lichen and it looks good why paint it. I appreciate that sooner or later this material will loose its colour, however it is relatively easy to paint afterwards and it is surprising how long the colour will last. Even using manufactured static grass and field grass, both look good unpainted. So here we have a matter of choices and it's down to personal preference. If your choice is to paint green foliage, I would suggest that paints are kept well thinned and a number of different tones are used, natural materials, moss, lichens etc, absorb paint readily so don't over do it or the natural look will be lost. Painting static grass responds well to paint and a couple of light dry brush runs will yield a very convincing sward of grass.

Creeping ivy using epoxy putty will of course need painting and is applied using the under painting and dry brush procedure. Start by under painting with a couple of coats of very dark green acrylic colour, acrylic is best for this procedure because a considerable amount of dry brushing is necessary to achieve the finished effect whereas an oil based paint could lift during dry brushing. The dry brushing uses progressively lighter tones of green however just adding white to the base colour will result in pale unnatural colour. Subtle amounts of blue and yellow are added to keep maintain the rich green tones needed for a realistic finish. As the tones lighten the detail will become apparent and it is a matter of personal choice as to have far to go. I give a very light and subtle dry brush of light green with a distinct yellow tint to finish. Dry brushing works just as well with smaller brushes which can be used to good effect on small areas.

## 2.9 Monochromatic colour schemes:

Some times bases call for what is termed a 'Monochromatic colour scheme' which means 'all one colour'. (40 Shades of Green is the title of an old Irish folk song and sums up exactly this painting technique). Some bases and figures respond well to this sort of painting for example if we are making a base for the 'Nazgul' most of the elements and ground work will be very dark or even black so we need to add some extra interest which can be done by using many different shades of very dark colours. The base featured in Fig 5 is close to a 'Monochromatic scheme' because of the various shades of green. When set out building this piece wanted to reflect the type of landscape where Elves would live and multiple greens was one way of projecting this theme. I would suggest that try this on your next figure base, you will be surprised how many tints and shades of one colour can be included into a single project.

The images below are examples of structures and foliage to show what can be achieved with the materials discussed in this tutorial. Complex items such as these can be regarded as separate projects on their own and can take longer to make than the figures themselves. Fig 5 and 6



Fig 5.

This structure has been made entirely with Das modelling clay using the techniques explained in the text. The water effect uses a clear casting resin. The foliage includes miliput creeping ivy, moss, static grass, field grass, and seedpod from a garden plant. I will paint and add the figures to this Structure in tutorials 5 and 6



Fig 6.

This tower is also made from Das modelling clay and the door from plastic card. The model is set on a homemade base of Yew wood. The final positioning will be made when the figures are added. The piece is painted with Humbrol matt enamel colours. Note the creeping ivy made from miliput.

## **Conclusion:**

Over the years I have given much thought to the 'humble base' and it has become a source of particular enjoyment for me. It takes a considerable of effort to come up with the best way to display figures and bases for 25 – 32mm figures are a real joy to work with. The groundwork can be modelled with a degree of detail using a wide range of materials, which in some cases are not suitable for larger scales. As I explained in the text sometimes bases could become a project in there own right and I would encourage you to give these techniques a try.

If you would like to expand on what has been written here I would get hold of a copy of 'Terrain Modeling' by Richard Windrow, published by Osprey this book contains a wealth of information on making bases and terrain also there is a chapter on how to make trees and some of the models are amazing.

## **Introduction to part 3**

A neat name, or title, plate will finish off the presentation of a model. On the other hand a poorly made title can spoil the appearance of an otherwise attractive display. In part three I will explain the methods and techniques I have used to create interesting title and name plates.

## **Part 3 Name, Title Plates and Finishing**

Introduction.

Using a computer for title plates.

Dry transfer lettering.

Engraved nameplates.

White on black.

Coloured backgrounds.

Old parchment types.

Fitting the nameplate to the base.

Computer generated title and nameplates.

Completed base for Aragorn figure

Aragorn figure nameplate

Examples.

As usual with these tutorials, if you have any comments or questions related to the contents you can e-mail at [mike@bum955.wanadoo.co.uk](mailto:mike@bum955.wanadoo.co.uk) and I will do my best to answer your queries and provide further guidance. In the mean time. I hope you will find something useful here that will enhance your knowledge, skills and techniques and give you encouragement to try my approach to this subject.

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Mike