Quick Trees

One of the key scenic elements on my High Wycombe layout is the huge retaining wall that makes a dramatic backdrop opposite the down platform. This carries Totteridge Road which has a garden wall boundary for 4 large Victorian villas – alas only one remaining, the others having been replaced in the 60s with characterless low-rise blocks of flats.

I made the wall itself some years ago (my first venture in laser cutting), but I wasn't happy with the garden wall which I created from embossed card and Slater's flint sheet. I hadn't got the proportions right and the entrances to the lanes leading up to the houses were too wide.

Having rebuilt the wall with laser cut parts, I was happy with that aspect, but was faced with producing around 25 trees to place along this boundary wall. All the photos I have dating back to the 30s, show a dense tree line with specimen trees mingled with shrubs, bushes and saplings. Easily identifiable are two or three Scot's Pines.

Paul's excellent tree making course imparts the skills needed to make high quality individual and identifiable trees. The thought of making 25 or so seemed somewhat daunting and I looked for a quicker solution. The answer lies in Sea Moss. I had bought a box of this stuff some years ago – sold as 'Forest in a Box' – and dug it out to have a look. Sea Moss is a natural, delicate product (see photo) which comes in various shapes and sizes from short or tall, to fat or spindly. The pieces are tightly packed and need to be separated with care as the stuff is brittle. It comes pre-treated so shouldn't rot or anything like that. Small, thin leaves are best carefully removed with tweezers.

I have used two methods to produce trees and the photo shows the sequence. Spray the 'armature' with the cheapest (and stickiest) hairspray you can buy. Quite what this does to women's hair, I can't

imagine, but I doubt they would need a crash helmet for bike riding. Next sprinkle on the scatter of your choice. All mine are of the minced foam variety acquired from various manufacturers over the years – Woodlands Scenics, Greenscene, Heki and some of indeterminate origin. The model is set in early autumn, so I enlisted the help of Gill's eye in getting the colour right. We spent a few weeks in late September/early October paying attention to leaf colour – particularly on the trip to Romney. The variation is considerable, with some trees still in summer colour, some in lighter shades of green and yellow, while others show an explosion of oranges and reds. Some trees have the colour uniformly distributed throughout the foliage, but others have occasional branches that have 'turned' first.

Back to the methods. The photo on page 21 shows 2 methods. The first simply scatters the minced foam onto the armature and results in an open airy feel to the tree. The second method involves draping some Polyfibre onto the sea moss first. The fibre comes in a dense wadge and only a small piece is needed. Tear this off and then really tease it out so that it is gossamer thin. Lay this over the sea moss, apply liberal amounts of hair spray and then scatter. With both methods, I usually do 2 applications.

The photo on page 21 (clockwise from top left) shows an untreated piece of seamoss; seamoss draped with Polyfibre; Polyfibre tree with scatter; simple tree with scatter. As you can see the covered tree is much denser. This one is poorly shaped and only for demo purposes.

The other photos show the wall with the shrub/sapling line in situ. Some gaps have been covered by inserting small fragments of coated seamoss in from behind or

pushing in a scatter coated chunk of polyfibre. Some mature trees now need to be added and some further work is needed to improve the density of the tree line. Putting a green coloured card behind will help, I think. Finally, you will see some ivy trailing over some walls. This is achieved using postiche which is fine hair. Teased well out and then coated with dark green scatter, it is then tacked onto the walls with a bit of pressure sensitive glue.

Tim