



Bricking the Easy Way

What we modelers have always needed has been a good and easy process to make the details stand out on our structures' brick walls. Injection-molded plastic walls for O gauge structures, such as the ones we sell in our Ameri-Towne line, have always had a nice advantage because the color of the brick has been molded right into the plastic. That made it relatively easy to simulate the appearance of brick mortar because when you wipe water-based acrylic paint over the wall, the paint gathers in the cracks for the mortar as well as on the face of the brick surfaces. With a little scrubbing and some paint thinner, you can wipe the excess white paint off the surface of the bricks, leaving the rest of it to show up as brick mortar in the cracks.

But a problem with this method is that only brick-colored raw plastic can be used to apply brick mortar using flat white paint. If you start with a painted brick-colored wall, when you apply the white acrylic paint for the mortar and wipe it off, most of the brick-colored paint wipes off



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along with the white acrylic paint, leaving a mess. Since there is now a wonderful choice in painted, built structures, finding a product that will allow you to easily apply mortar lines without ruining the brick color paint becomes important.

I found something that will work perfectly. I give credit for this handy tip to our forum contributor Cheryl Watson, who does repairs and sales for Michigan Model

Train Center in Pinckney, Michigan. When I posed the dilemma to her while visiting the store, she said, "Oh, that's easy. Just use Roberts Brick Mortar."

I had never heard of this product. The store didn't have any on hand, so I looked them up online. Roberts Products Company is located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, (www.robertsbrickmortar.com). Mr. Roberts was on vacation, but I got in touch with a train store in Minnesota that had a 4 oz jar of Roberts Brick Mortar, which sells for \$15.95. It is also available in a 1 oz jar for \$7.95, but I wanted the larger one for all the projects I plan to use it on.

The 4 oz jar is what you see in Photo 1 along with the only other material or tool needed to easily obtain perfect brick mortar the first time, and every time after that. Roberts Brick Mortar and a soft rag made out of something like an old bed sheet or T-shirt work great. Also, be aware that this product needs a lot of mixing.

One of the secrets to the success of this product is that it is water soluble. It is a



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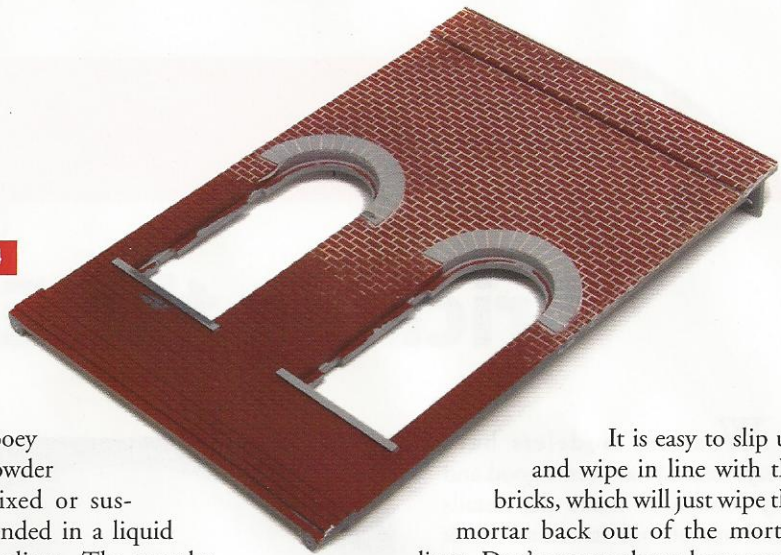
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gooey powder mixed or suspended in a liquid medium. The powder easily separates from the liquid, so it is very important to stir the mix frequently while applying, as shown in Photo 2. When you first use it, a lot of mixing and shaking is required to get the right consistency. If it appears thin and watery like paint, then it is not mixed well enough. I use a coffee stir stick to first get the congealed white powder thoroughly mixed up. Then I shake the jar very frequently between applications to keep it mixed. What it should look like is very thin pancake batter when it is mixed properly and well.

Take a small rag, dip it into the mix, and lightly apply it right onto the brick wall without worrying about the brick-colored paint that you are applying it over. Wipe it on diagonally across the mortar lines making sure that it gets into all the lines. I used a wiping motion that is about 45 degrees to the lines, allowing it to get deeply into all the mortar lines without wiping it back out.

It is easy to slip up and wipe in line with the bricks, which will just wipe the mortar back out of the mortar lines. Don't worry about how much gets on the bricks, just make sure that it does, indeed, get into the mortar lines well. Photo 3 shows what it will look like as you go.

As the product instructions say, wait until the solution dries to a hazy appearance. Then, using a lightly damp rag wrapped over your fingertip, simply wipe the white haze off of the brick paint, and you will see spectacular-looking brick mortar appear right before your eyes. Remember to again wipe diagonally across the brick surface so you don't remove the mortar from the lines. Using very light pressure, frequently change the position of the rag around on your fingertip to keep a fresh part of the rag doing the work.

With very little practice on a scrap piece of wall, you should be able to get results as shown in Photo 4. Since all real building walls don't have perfect mortar lines, you will quickly see how you can give any wall distinctive characteristics and an individual look by

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simply how much of the mortar you wipe away with the rag. You can get very distinct lines such as what you see in my examples, or you can obtain lighter and thinner mortar lines by just wiping a little more here and there. The important thing is to keep a fresh damp piece of cloth on your fingertip, and the mortar should come off easily without taking the brick-colored paint with it. And, if you remove too much mortar, it's still not a problem. All you need to do is reapply some more Roberts Brick Mortar—as much as you like—and repeat the process until you obtain the desired result.

The rag does not need to be very wet. I keep a wet sponge handy and push the rag into the sponge when I want to dampen it. Since this mortar compound is not permanently bonded to the plastic brick, when you get to the point where you are satisfied with the appearance, spray the model with Testors Dullcote, and the brick mortar will be sealed beneath the soft flat finish.

Photo 5 shows a project I'm currently working on. I am making an MTH engine shed into several stalls against the end wall of my layout room. I'll cover that project in a later issue. I snapped the window frames out of the



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wall, and then I applied the mortar over just the end panel of the building. In Photo 6, I cleaned the bricks off and snapped the window frames back in place. Without damaging any existing painted surface and without adding any new paint, you can see the dramatic difference in the photo between the front wall and the end wall.

Photo 7 shows another application on the MTH brewery. For something like

this, I disassembled the building, applied Roberts Brick Mortar on all the brick surfaces, and then wiped them down. Note that any painted surface, including pad-printed surfaces such as the signs painted on the building's brick walls, were not damaged after applying and wiping off the Roberts Brick Mortar. When finished, the reassembled building was sprayed with Testors Dullcote. Hmm! I like it so well

I just might try the same treatment to the shingled roof. I think it would look like dust right at the edges of the shingles. Another nice thing about this product is that if you don't want a bright white appearance to your mortar (or shingle dust), it is very easy to wipe a stain over the finished mortar surface. The brick mortar will change color as it absorbs the stain, but the brick will not. When you are satisfied with the appearance, apply Testors Dullcote and seal in all your efforts.

I've also tried this treatment on unpainted, brick-colored plastic walls, such as those in our Ameri-Towne line. The results are equally dramatic. The beauty of this product is that if you change an item like the engine shed that already has painted surfaces, you can still add the brick mortar and make it any color without harming the finished wall.

After using this product for just a short time, I heartily endorse it. The results are spectacular, and it is easy to work with. I often tell modelers at my seminars that the real definition of an expert is somebody who has done absolutely everything wrong at least once. Then the expert gets to tell everyone the right way to do it. This stuff works so well that, thanks to Cheryl's tip, when it comes to brick mortar, we can all be experts now. 