



## THE CONSTRUCTION OF ITALY

Interview with Gerhard Dauscher, Head Model Builder at Miniatur Wunderland

### Gerhard, how did the idea for Italy come about?

The idea was actually born many years ago. In fact, after opening of the Scandinavian section back in 2005, it was already clear to us that we not only wanted to extend to the north but naturally also to the south, towards the Mediterranean. We decided specifically on Italy, as we particularly liked the mixture of unique vegetation, historic buildings, and a vibrant lifestyle. What's more, many of us had pleasant memories of holidays that we wanted to save in the model for posterity.

### When did you actually begin planning the section?

At the start of 2012. The first few months mostly involved research. I read and watched a great deal about Italy, then I travelled to the country as a tourist. Initially, the biggest challenge lay in sorting all of the images and impressions in a more or less sensible manner and transferring these to the track plan. I started with this six months later and pondered over it for many months. The questions of what to build and what not to build, how to create everything so that all parts were geographically in tune with one another, and how to satisfy the expectations of both German tourists and Italian natives were my constant companions during this time.

### The section was increased from 90 m<sup>2</sup> to 190 m<sup>2</sup> in size during the planning phase. Why was this?

We realised that we would only have space along the wall with the 90 m<sup>2</sup> we had planned. So essentially a long row that would ultimately only allow space for Rome, Venice, the Amalfi coast, and Vesuvius. Key to the decision to expand the area was our desire to have space for Rome to allow visitors to walk around, take a peek into all of the alleyways, and view all of the structural masterpieces from countless different angles. This meant that we needed a second room. What's more, we wanted to create a plausible link to France and decided to also recreate Liguria and Cinque Terre. We simply needed more space for this.

### How do you go about creating a model world based on real life?

I enjoy spending time out in nature, and soak up the atmosphere of the romantic or also dramatic scenery. Detailed images of scenery that makes you want to stroll through it yourself one day then begin to form in my head in quiet moments. The "transformation" from real life to model also takes place entirely in my head. This is then naturally also something of a dream world, though I have also seen many of the places for myself before or read a great deal about them. Before we began constructing the model, all of our model builders travelled to the regions that they would later have to recreate in miniature. This meant that they already had real-life images in mind of the effect that the respective parts of the finished work should have. We often also use photos taken of the real-life buildings at the various sites to help us in our work.

### What did you particularly like?

I was very taken with Atrani. It's a little town on the Amalfi coast that is simply full of steps. Over the centuries, attempts have been made to cram as much living space as possible into this steep gorge. It is perhaps for exactly this reason that I found it so very homely, despite being an entirely different world in which life largely plays out on the roof terraces. And countless motifs could be seen there that



we never would have come upon for ourselves. The multitude of steps means that many of the narrow alleyways cannot be accessed by motor vehicles, for example, which is why donkeys are in part still used today for the transportation of goods. And we naturally also integrated this into the model.

**What was the biggest challenge for you when planning the section?**

Definitely the downsizing and reducing. We simply did not have space to recreate everything that people are familiar with from Italy on 190 m<sup>2</sup>. For example, we had to decide if we wanted to recreate Rome, Florence, or rather Pisa instead. It is not always about entire regions and buildings though, but rather about the details; tiny little stories and views with the most possible layers. And there can never be enough of these. To give an example: we were in Atrani and asked ourselves how the rubbish is collected in the steep, narrow alleyways. We had not put any thought into this in Hamburg, and had completely forgotten to include the donkeys that characterise the streetscape there and help with the collection of rubbish. We came across exactly such details and little stories hundreds of times.

**What is different in the Italy section compared to the older sections?**

In classic model building, the layout slopes towards the visitors. At the back are the mountains that form the backdrop and house the staging yards, while the layout flattens out towards the front to allow the scenery and landscape to be depicted. In contrast, we have played with the perspectives a lot more in Italy. We have brought the high mountains along the Amalfi coast to the very front, for example, to allow visitors to gain a better feel for the depth and space. This is also why we have positioned the largest building in Rome, St. Peter's Basilica, right in the foreground. At the same time, we have "concealed" details behind this so that visitors have to walk around a mountain or look up a deep valley to see all of the details. What's more, we once again raised the bar in model building even higher. Almost all buildings were designed entirely in-house; there are barely any ready-made parts. Particularly the monumental buildings in Rome were extremely complicated to construct. Alone the St. Peter's Basilica complex with the colonnades and St. Peter's Square comprises more than 22,000 parts, most of which were produced in-house. The outcome is a richness of detail that has never been seen before.

**And finally: what is your favourite part of the new section?**

Rome is looking fantastic and the scenery of the Amalfi coast is also amazing, but my favourite place has got to be Schiara. This little village perches on the mountainside behind the coast near Campiglia. The real-life village has been virtually a ghost town since the 1950s – indeed, most of the houses are today just holiday residences. It affords a peaceful, idyllic location and the simple construction style is very typical of this part of Liguria. In the model, the village is located close to the edge so that it is also possible to discern the hustle and bustle in the little alleyways. Similar to in real life, wonderful views can be enjoyed out over the sea in our model, too. I certainly wouldn't mind kicking back and relaxing there with a beer after a hard day's work!