



## Closer Inspection

**Japanese models** aren't always released after their larger counterparts; "often the model will come out first," Matthew Davis says. The most common size in Japan is N-scale: 1/150, "one foot on the model is 150 feet in real life," he says. In the States, the popular scale is HO (1/87), nearly twice the size of N. The reason for Japan's smaller size is a lack of space in that country, Davis says.



This **street scene** is a typical old street in Japan, Davis says. The restaurants have miniature menus advertising noodles and tempura as well as fried fish, beer and curry rice.

**Tracks** are plastic with metal rails, as "the trains are powered through the rails," Davis says. This distance between the rails on N scale is 9 millimeters.



Davis says his favorite model is this miniature of an electric freight **EH500 locomotive**. When he lived in Japan's Iwate Prefecture from 2007 to 2009, Davis says, "those were running

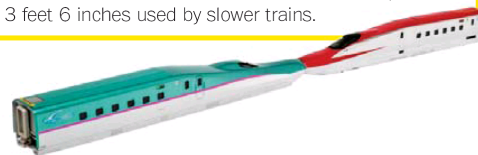
by my house a lot." The train is nicknamed **Kintaro**, for the Japanese folklore figure depicted on its side.



The **chrysanthemum** denotes this as an imperial train, pulling Japan's emperor and his family. In real life, this specific steam-powered locomotive never pulled the imperial train, Davis says. "It was used as a stand-by." Today, the imperial train is electric.



**Bullet train** models are scaled to 1/160 instead of 1/150 because of the wider tracks real-life bullet trains use: 4 feet 8.5 inches, compared with 3 feet 6 inches used by slower trains.



# Tiny pieces of Japan

### He travels east without leaving home

BY KRIS CORONADO

As Matthew Davis sits at his kitchen table, a low train whistle sounds in the distance. "Well, of course, I live near a railroad," the 42-year-old says with a chuckle. The passing train might belong to CSX or Amtrak, but the Silver Spring resident is much more interested in trains from farther afield: Japanese model trains.

Although Davis collected American model trains as a child, it wasn't until

after taking Japanese classes at San Antonio's Trinity University that his love for Japanese models grew. After visiting Japan in 1993, Davis became enthralled with its rail system, particularly the high-speed bullet trains, called shinkansen. "I was in a hobby shop there ... and saw that they had models of bullet trains, and I thought, *If I ever get back into model railroading, that's what I want to do,*" he says. Seven years later, after moving to Silver Spring from Albuquerque with

his wife, Stefanie, Davis did just that.

Today, Davis, who works as penmaker and silversmith, estimates he has 80 Japanese model trains, which are smaller than U.S. models. It's a passion he shares with the dozen members of the Japan Rail Modelers of Washington D.C. ([japanrailmodelers.org](http://japanrailmodelers.org)), a club he co-founded in 2004 that builds and displays Japanese model rail scenes at a handful of local events annually. Here, Davis delves into details of his miniatures.