

Model maker's art gives life to dreams

CHILDREN WHO play with dollhouses are enjoying a game of make-believe. Adults who play with dollhouses are helping to transform the ambitious dreams of today's real estate developers from make-believe into successful, large-scale housing complexes.

One of those adults is Richard Rush, sculptor and businessman, who for more than three decades has been creating a fascinating world populated by half-inch people, 14-foot grasshoppers, transparent women, and 30-foot mastodons. He is perhaps foremost among a select fraternity of model-makers who are playing a vital role in converting giant planned communities into a form that planners, zoning officials, lenders, salespeople, and eventually customers can deal with.

Rush is the founder of Richard Rush Studios, a cross between Alice's Wonderland and the Land of Oz across the threshold of a rickety elevator at 168 N. Clinton St.

Since 1939 he has been helping his clients, including industry, government, scientific and technical organizations, museums, and zoos, to "visualize in dimension form their plans, projects, products, and goals."

THE RUSH Studios, the biggest and busiest model-making concern in Chicago, will make a model of practically anything, which, Rush says, "may be above or below the scale of the actual object, or the same scale."

"We use wood, plastics, metals, clay—every sculptural and modeling material available—to design and fabricate painstakingly accurate reproductions," said Rush. "We carry projects thru from request to layout, design engineering, modeling or sculpturing, mold-making, casting, texturing, and finishing. No other firm of this type—or versatility—exists in the nation."

Rush concedes that while his business has been growing in all directions, one area that has expanded dramatically over the past 10 years has been his architec-



George Rourke, a partner of the Ventera Group, which is developing the Park Lane residential complex in Park Ridge, looks on as Elmer Fantl, coordinator of models and dioramas for Richard Rush Studios, explains progress on the 40-foot-square scale model of Park Lane.

tural modeling department.

The firm's credentials include, to name a few, huge scale models of such noted Chicago buildings as the First National Bank, Hancock Center, University of Illinois Chicago Circle Campus, and the Sears Tower. The Rush staff also converted an artistic model of the now-famous Picasso statue on the Chicago Civic Center plaza into a precisely scaled working model from which U. S. Steel Corp. was able to produce the actual statue. It also cooperated in creating a model of the Civic Center itself.

HOWEVER, WITH the over-supply of downtown office space, the market is down on skyscrapers these days. But any void this may have left in the architectural department of Richard Rush and other leading model-makers has been more than filled in the last two years by a rapid acceleration of model-making for residential developers.

"It is probably the single, fastest growing sector of our business," observed Rush.

He believes the evolution

of the large-scale, long-term planned unit development has triggered the need and utilization of fairly sophisticated community scale models.

"For all practical purposes there is no such thing as a small scale development any more. Real estate economics have spawned big, comprehensive, multimillion dollar developments that will take years to finish. The developer has a tremendous investment from initial planning thru acceptance of his plans, construction, and then marketing his development," said Rush.

"The scale of his development and the time he needs to complete it are obstacles. Frequently he is dealing with development concepts that are either so vast in scope or will take so long to complete that important groups simply cannot cope," he added.

THE "GROUPS" Rush refers to include planning and zoning bodies or the general citizenry which may, in many communities, be facing the concept of a planned unit development for the first time ever. And when

the plans are approved, salesmen and buyers also find it difficult to deal with big developments on a conceptual basis.

"The scale model can show important audiences what the finished community will look like, complete with buildings, landscaping, shopping and recreation facilities, lakes or ponds, paved areas, schools, churches, and even people. It eliminates the stress of trying to imagine with only the aid of drawings that which can capably and honestly be demonstrated in a realistic and precise scale model."

This is the main reason, Rush feels, that more and more developers have been turning to modelmakers in the past two years. Whether an individual is an official making a decision to allow the developer to proceed with his plans or a shopper making a decision about buying a home, a three-dimensional representation of what the development will look like when complete can be very useful and convincing.

According to Rush, developers are spending from \$2,000 to \$15,000 for develop-

ment models. No two are alike. Each reflects the originality of the planner and, usually, artistic contributions by the Rush staff.

FOR EXAMPLE, Rush is currently working on a 42-square-foot model of Park Lane, a \$32-million complex of luxury condominium homes and townhouses, which will open in the fall of 1973 on an 18-acre site in suburban Park Ridge.

From start to finish the one-inch-to-20-foot scale model, which is an exact engineers' scale, will take three to four months to complete, altho it could be completed in less time if there wasn't a mutual concern for accuracy to the last detail.

An unusual wrinkle of the Park Lane model is a special lighting effect that allows the viewer to see how the community will look day or night. The model contains a dimmer that will automatically turn daylight to dusk to nighttime while lights pop on in the multi-level buildings and townhouses. The night will yield to daybreak and the cycle will repeat itself.

For another developer, Rush created a model in sections that will eventually be 15 to 20 feet. "The model is being built with add-on sections so that it will actually grow as the community grows," said Rush. He noted that another benefit of this approach is that if there are any significant changes in the over-all plan it will be easier to replace one section than doing major surgery on a one-piece model.

AT THE other extreme, Rush artisans have also created a model community in a suitcase.

"The client had to discuss his plans with many, many people. He wanted both a representational model and mobility. The solution was a model that he could pop in and out of a small suitcase."

Early in his career, during World War II, Rush helped build three-dimensional models of the beaches of Normandy in France so they could be studied by Gen. Dwight Eisenhower for the

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allied invasion that led to victory in Europe.

Rush is the creator of Smokey the Bear costumes and to this day his firm has an exclusive franchise with the Forest Service of the U. S. Department of Agriculture to produce various forms of Smokey, ranging from plaques and six-foot sculptured figures to an animated model with a sound system.

RUSH STUDIOS took four years to produce Tam, which stands for transparent anatomical mannequin, a life-size transparent woman with a built-in sound system that is coordinated with a lighting system. Replicas take about four months to make. One is on display here at the Museum of Science and Industry, which features numerous other Rush creations. The 14-foot-long colored grasshopper, an entomologist's delight, is on display at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D. C.

The Rush Studios, which are themselves practically a

museum of giant and miniature models, occupy several floors. A good part of one floor is inhabited by a life-size hairy mastodon whose head and tusks stretch well beyond a 20-foot diameter pedestal. The huge beast is being re-created from bones discovered in Glen Ellyn and, when complete, will be on display at Wheaton College near Chicago.

The Rush team of 40 employees includes sculptors, carpenters, model-makers, designers, artists, and diorama makers. They design and fabricate painstakingly accurate, and frequently complex, medical, biological, anthropological, marine paleontological, and archeological reproductions.

From incredibly realistic, TV-screen-sized dioramas of how pre-historic man lived in caves to an enormous diorama-theater showing how man hopes to live on the moon, the Richard Rush Studio has been an important ally of museums, schools, business and public and private agencies thruout the world.