

Crossing

A photograph of a cable car system set against a dense, vibrant green background of foliage. Two red and black cable cars are visible, suspended from thin cables that stretch diagonally across the frame. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day in a garden or park.

TOP LAYOUT

**An excursion to the south:
A mountain railway is right at home in
a lovely northern Italian garden.**

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the border





AT A GLANCE

Construction started

1995

Size

300 m²

Tracks

200 m

Locomotives/cars

10/32

Bridges/tunnels

5/6

If you travel south from St. Moritz with Rhaetian Railway over the Bernina Pass, you will pass through the Italian city of Veltlin just before you reach your final destination. The last stop is Tirano, where the train runs slowly through the streets of this small town towards the Bernina train station. From here, it's another 10 kilometers or so until you reach Tirano station, but this one is in G gauge. This is where Donato Valenti lives – along with his own Rhaetian Railway.

A little piece of the Swiss train nestled in the mountains in northern Lombardy. The doctor for palliative care has 10 authentic Rhaetian Railway trains that travel over more than 200 meters of track in his garden, measuring 20 meters in length and 15 meters in width, with differences in height of two meters. People familiar with the originals will recognize the characteristic landmarks of Rhaetian Railway in Donato Valenti's garden straightaway – and they are just as attractive here. The attention to detail is apparent at every centimeter of the track. It starts with the stations: The Stugl/Stuls station, the striking Alp Grüm station at the Bernina Pass, located at an altitude of over 2,000 meters and constructed from the surrounding boulders, followed by the Filisur station and, of course, the large station at Pontresina, which



A Rhaetian Railway layout in the steep slopes: Donato Valenti shows how it's done.

is both the starting point and highlight of this layout. The historic station hall at Celerina Staz, built in the typical Engadine chalet style, shows the doctor's passion for craftwork. The layout also features the authentic wooden houses and farmhouses in Pontresina that blend harmoniously into the background.

"If there's a favorite building in my garden railway, then it has to be my home station of Tirano," laughed Donato Valenti. "After all, it was the starting point for building this project." He needed to replace this first model recently, however. The snowy winter in the mountains in Lombardy seriously damaged the wooden structure. This time, Donato Valenti drew inspiration from the Art Nouveau station building at Pontresina station (for more information, see "Building tips") instead of Tirano station. "There was enough time for restoration and renovation work this winter. We had so much snow, it was impossible to run the trains in the garden anyway. This is the only difference from the original."

Donato Valenti's love for garden railways dates back to his childhood, when he often stood at Tirano station and marveled at the Rhaetian Railway locomotives. Train travel later became a passion in life. He would take the train whenever possible to St. Moritz, as well as the lines to Chur and Disentis, to Davos and Arosa – in the summer and winter. When he built the garden railway, it was clear to him that he would only use Rhaetian Railway trains in his layout. The spectacular attractions he discovered on his journeys were

The mountains in Lombardy provide a stunning backdrop for this Rhaetian Railway layout.



The builder: Donato Valenti fulfilled a childhood dream with his garden railway.

Left: Generations come together – with the Ge 4/4 II and the ABe 4/4 in the background.





CONSTRUCTION TIP

Pontresina station

Pontresina station is more than just the heart of Donato Valenti's garden railway – it is also a real eye-catcher. The builder shares how he constructed this model.

Originally, the heart of Donato Valenti's layout was his own reproduction of his hometown station at Tirano. Over the years, however, the wind and weather caused so much damage to the wooden model, that it needed to be replaced. He decided to build a very large, elaborate and weatherproof replica of the Pontresina station.

First, he took several nearly one-hour car trips to Pontresina to measure and photograph the striking Art Nouveau station building. This enabled him to create an exact plan of the building in a scale of 1:22.5. When transforming this plan into reality, Donato Valenti did not first follow the proportions of the outer walls, but based his construction on the dimensions of the windows he bought from an accessories manufacturer online. The 41x12x15 (L x W x H) meter original became a model measuring 1.63x0.52x0.7 meters – very close to scale, but slightly shorter in terms of length.

The new station needed to be weatherproof. For this reason, Donato Valenti decided to create the body of the model using 10-millimeter thick PVC boards. Using a simple cutter, he carved out the 84 window and door openings himself. The individual walls were then stuck together to create the base structure.

It was then time to add the windows. Donato Valenti also used 4-millimeter thick



PVC to create the shutters. The substructure of the roofscape consists of thin wooden struts covered by a painted, weatherproof layer of tarred paper.

Like the top of the façade, the stone work on the ground floor of the station is painted by hand. Details like the ridge turret with clock, small upper windows, platform canopy and station signs put the finishing touches on this spectacular model.

The reception hall at Pontresina station is among the largest station buildings in Grisons. It was built by architects Schäfer & Sulser in 1906/07.



The large station building consists of 10-millimeter thick PVC boards.



The shutters on the model's 84 windows are made of 4-millimeter thick PVC.

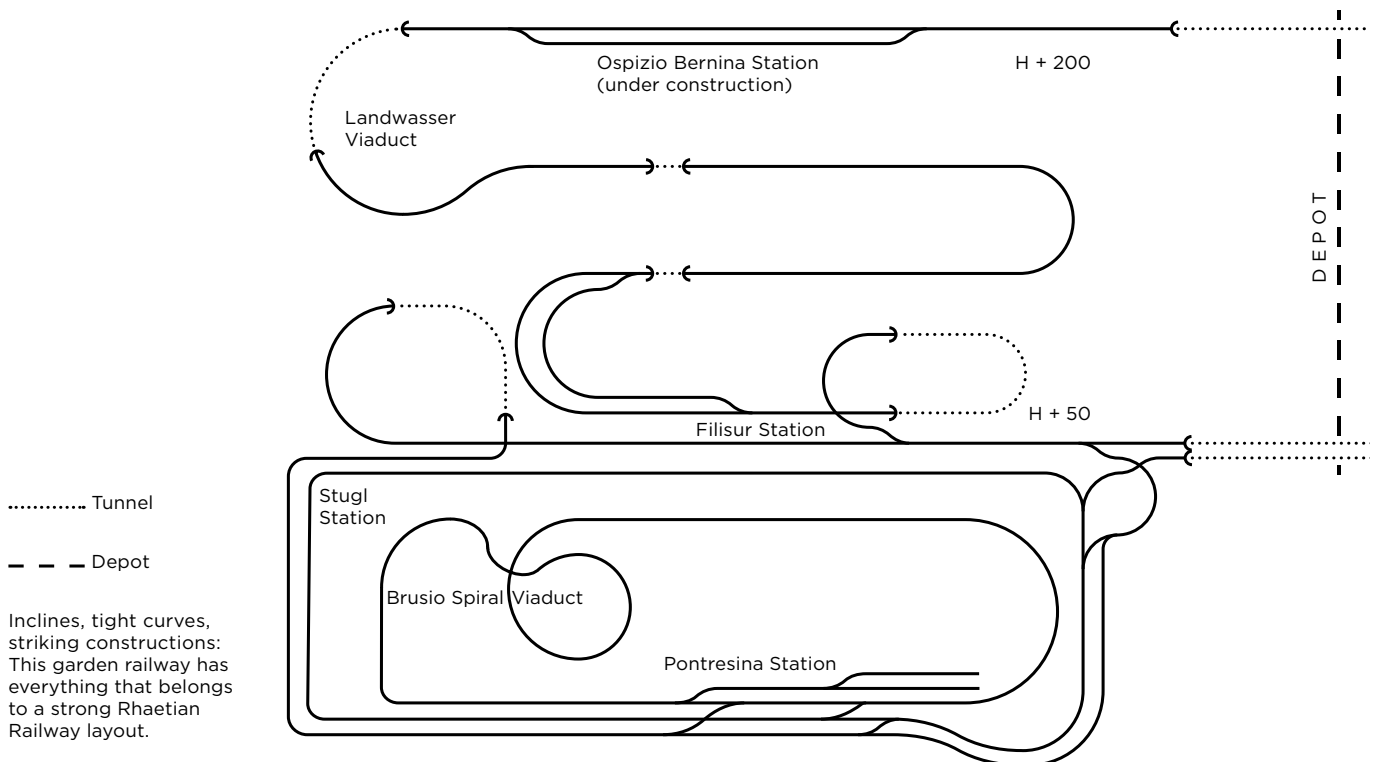


The hipped and pitched roof is covered with painted tar paper.

inspiration enough to reproduce them in his garden.

It all started nearly 20 years ago – with a Stainz locomotive and two cars that ran in a circle. Donato Valenti finally discovered the LGB train in a toy store, and bought it straightaway with a 50 percent discount. “When I was a little boy, I dreamed of having an electric train – but I never did get one. It was too expensive for my parents, and I didn’t have any money, of course,” he remembered.

Year after year, the “starter kit” grew into a full garden railway. Construction on the now 300 m² layout started in 1995. Donato Valenti



learned the hard way when building his first tracks – his curves were too tight, and the train cars derailed. The inclines were also too steep for the locomotives to make their way up. But the LGB fan wasn’t discouraged by such setbacks. On the contrary – he just became more ambitious. He devoted this passion to shaping the layout in the buildings he constructed and mountain track planning. Today, the look and atmosphere of the layout and its routes are just as stunning as the original.

Donato Valenti wanted to recreate several striking Rhaetian Railway routes and structures in his garden – first and foremost, the Bernina Pass. The approaching route was also to

have two tracks to allow the trains to pass going up and down the mountain. Another must: The highlight stretch along the Albula line, parts of the roller coaster-like route between Preda and Bergün and their tunnel curves. The large spiral viaduct near Brusio is just as impressive as Rhaetian Railway’s most impressive construction: the Landwasser Viaduct.

The topography in Donato Valenti’s garden made such wild and romantic routes possible. He only needed to cheat a little bit when building his model of the Brusio viaduct: “In my layout, the curve going up the mountain goes to the right – but in reality, it goes to the left. If you don’t look too closely, you’d never know,” he



Top: The Ge 4/4 II 627 "Reichenau-Tamins" crosses below a large gondola with the impressive Landwasser Viaduct in the background.

Bottom: The passengers in the Pullmann Express car enjoy the view of the Swiss mountains, here at Stugli/Stuls station.

says with a mischievous smile. The overall look of this stunning layout isn't in the least bit impacted by this slight difference.

Speaking of looking – Donato Valenti is always thrilled when model train fans come over to marvel at his layout. His many friends, neighbors and colleagues are welcome to discover new aspects of his creation any time. He'd rather avoid crowds of visitors, though. His response: "It's enough that the original is already so crowded." His outstanding creation should remain a treasure for Teglio's residents: "It's enough for me if the layout is just a local secret." 🚂