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Blocks

ISSUE 65 / MARCH 2020

MEET THE TEAM



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WELCOME



Cover Pic: Phil Wrighton

AS YOU'RE NOW holding Issue 65 of Blocks, some quick maths tells us the mag wasn't around in 2013. But if it was, we could have done a lot worse than handing a cover over to 70505 Temple of Light – or more specifically, NINJAGO's original golden mech. Fortunately, the NINJAGO Legacy theme is one big second chance: for you to buy and build reimagined versions of classic models, and for us to give them the spotlight they deserve.

And that's exactly what we've done, because you'll find reviews of each and every 2020 NINJAGO set squeezed into these refreshed and upgraded pages (did you notice?). But that's not all we've been up to in the early months of the new decade. Graham's been spending time with Camille Walala for DOTS, I've been catching up with a bunch of LEGO pros, and Daniel's been busy building the second part of his UCS Star Destroyer interior.

We've gone into detail on all those throughout another packed issue, which also includes our verdict on the latest modular building, a recap of the LEGO Group's most tumultuous time period, and a seriously brilliant Baby Yoda build. (Spoilers!)

Chris Wharfe
Associate Editor

**THE
NINJAGO
LEGACY
THEME IS ONE
BIG SECOND
CHANCE**

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SEE PAGE 60 FOR DETAILS....



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LEGOtalk



Rounding up the brick conversation each month.
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STAR LETTER

DEAR BLOCKS, I wanted to follow up on an article in the magazine about missing parts. I recently purchased a LEGO Friends Treehouse set the same week that I brought a dog home from the local humane society. For some reason this dog was obsessed with destroying my treehouse. I put the thing up, hid it, and did everything I could to protect my project. The dog would not leave the thing alone.

After several days, I noticed several parts were missing. I am sure the dog must have swallowed several large pieces of plastic. He seemed to be in good health anyway still, but I was very upset. I called the LEGO customer service number, and I will never forget their patience and understanding.

I recited an itemised list of all the missing parts, and within a couple of weeks I received a packet in the mail with everything in it that had been digested/destroyed, free of charge.

This is something I will always remember; the LEGO customer service department will always help.

Ashlie Guthrie
Portland, USA



41335 Mia's Tree House is not safe to eat.

You are absolutely right Ashlie – even when something goes wrong, the LEGO customer service department is always keen to resolve it. Touches like that are what make fans feel confident in the LEGO brand – Graham

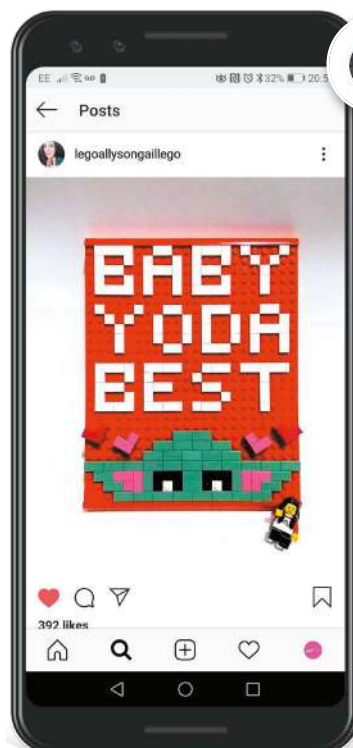
Do other readers have experiences, be they positive or negative, to share about LEGO customer service? Send your stories to graham@blocksmag.com

BUILD SPOTLIGHT



Iron Venom by Blaine Rampulla

INSTAGRAM SPOTLIGHT



@STEFANO__FABBRI



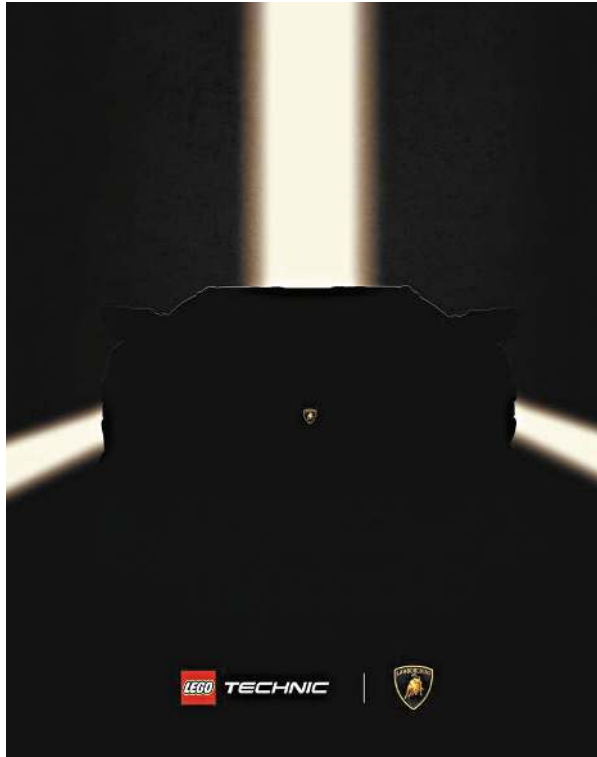
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READER REACTIONS

TECHNIC LAMBORGHINI TEASE

A LEGO Technic Lamborghini set has been teased for later this year. Here are the initial reactions on Facebook...



■ ■ I PREFER THE CREATOR EXPERT VEHICLE SETS, WOULD LIKE TO SEE SOME MORE OF THEM ■ ■

KARL SMITH

■ ■ I HOPE THIS IS WHAT I THINK IT'LL BE. AND THAT BEING A LOVELY TECHNIC LAMBORGHINI AVENTADOR IN SIMILAR FASHION TO THE PORSCHE 911 AND THE BUGATTI ■ ■

THOMAS N CARELLO

■ ■ I'LL MAKE MORE ROOM OR MAKE MORE SHELVES ■ ■

SIMON PEAT

■ ■ YES FINALLY!!! LAMBO! ■ ■

ADAM LH

■ ■ STILL HAVEN'T OPENED MY PORSCHE, BUGATTI OR RANGE LOL. NO TIME TO BUILD THEM YET ■ ■

SAM OMDAL

■ ■ LOVING THE TECHNIC BUILDS ■ ■

PATRICK VANDERMALLIE



The LEGO Group clearly doesn't care about sun damage.



BUILDING THE THEATRE OF DREAMS

LEGO football's coming home – for Manchester United fans, anyway

IF YOU'RE LOOKING at the images on these pages wondering why the LEGO Group would ever make something so market-specific, you might not be aware of the magnitude of Manchester United's global reach. According to a 2011 survey, the club has somewhere in the region of 659 million followers worldwide. That's nearly one in every ten people on the planet, and an even bigger percentage of adults – and around half of those are said to reside in the Asia-Pacific region.

With those numbers in mind, it's maybe a little easier to see the Danish company's rationale behind 10272 Old Trafford. The 3,898-piece replica of the Red Devils' iconic stadium has launched just in time for its 110th anniversary, and is specifically described as a 'building kit for adults'. In a year that's set to see the LEGO Group focus its attention further on the adult market, this intersection of two brands with enormous worldwide influence begins to make a degree of sense.

At 18.5cm high, 47cm long and 39cm wide, 10272 builds into a formidable testament to Manchester United, but as with all things Premier League, it requires deep pockets. You'll have to sign a transfer fee of £249.99 to walk out of a UK LEGO Store with it, or \$299.99 in the US, or €269.99 in Europe.

If you are enough of a diehard supporter to take the plunge, though, you'll

■ ■ IT'S A FORMIDABLE TESTAMENT TO MANCHESTER UNITED ■ ■

find a set that's steeped in celebration of one of England's most historic clubs. Along with the pitch, all four stands and the players' tunnel, Old Trafford includes statues of Sir Alex Ferguson – British football's most successful manager – and the United Trinity. LEGO and sports are a rare pairing (flip to page 18 for the proof), so if nothing else, Old Trafford at least represents more diversity in the LEGO Group's output. ■

10272 Old Trafford is available now.

PRICE MATCH

How does 10272 compare to Manchester United's other merchandise?

Coffee machine: £430
LEGO Old Trafford: £250
 Men's home shirt: £65
 Duvet cover set: £35
 Heritage football: £25
 Monopoly set: £25
 Cushion: £12



THE BIG QUESTIONS

THE CLONE WARS

No, not the Clone Wars you're thinking of, but the LEGO Group's real-life battle against counterfeit companies



the court's final decision and appreciate the efforts from all stakeholders in this case,' Robin Smith, the LEGO Group's Vice President and General Counsel for China and Asia Pacific markets, said. 'It also shows the Chinese authorities' commitment in creating a favourable business environment for multinational companies.'

Which sets was Meizhi Model copying?

According to the LEGO Group, its NINJAGO, NEXO KNIGHTS and LEGENDS OF CHIMA themes were all being infringed by Meizhi Model and its associates. Due to their designs and imagery, these sets are all considered 'products of certain influence' in China, so it's

IT SHOWS CHINA'S COMMITMENT IN CREATING A FAVOURABLE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

these themes that most of the court cases have focused on so far. In August 2018, the Chinese courts ordered Lepin to pay £1.7m in damages, highlighting its infringement of those three themes – two of which have been discontinued by the LEGO Group.

Where does this fit into the wider battle against Lepin?

Last year, Shanghai police raided a Lepin factory, and arrested several executives of Meizhi Model. There's now an ongoing criminal case against those execs, which the LEGO Group is apparently heavily involved in, supporting both the police and the Chinese prosecution office, the Supreme People's Procuratorate. On a more general level, it's yet another positive outcome for the LEGO Group in a battle that's been full of them – but there's still some way to go to stamp out clone brands altogether.



UNLESS YOU'VE BEEN living under a brick-built rock, you'll know that the LEGO Group has been waging an intellectual property war in China for several years now. In the early 2010s, multiple companies sprung up producing counterfeit versions of original and licensed LEGO sets. And as the Danish company continues to push into what is currently its fastest-growing market, it's imperative that it keeps a lid on those copyright-infringing corporations. The latest chapter in the saga is an important step towards making sure that happens.

So it's good news for the LEGO Group? Simply put, yes. In November 2018, the Chinese courts ruled that Shantou Meizhi Model Co., Ltd. and its affiliate companies were liable for selling Lepin products that breached the LEGO Group's copyrights. According to Guangzhou Intellectual Property Court, the 18 sets and minifigures that Lepin reproduced are protected artworks under Chinese copyright law. Meizhi Model and the other defendants appealed these rulings,

dragging the case out even further. But in January 2020, the court announced that it would uphold the original ruling.

Sets seized in last year's Lepin factory raid.



Does that mean it has to stop selling Lepin sets?

It sure does – the court ordered Meizhi Model, along with all other companies involved, to 'cease infringement immediately'. They've also been instructed to pay damages to the LEGO Group totalling around £500,000, and must make a public apology for the breach on China Toy and Juvenile Products Association and Guangdong Toy Association's websites. 'We are pleased with

■ BLOCKS BOOKS // **LEGO MINIFIGURE A VISUAL HISTORY**

Look, this is a safe space. You can admit it to us: every LEGO book you've ever bought has been down to its exclusive minifigure. And we won't judge you for buying LEGO Minifigure A Visual History New Edition solely for the first orange Classic Space minifigure.

■ RUMOUR MILL // **THE LEGO CHILD**

Everyone's new favourite Star Wars character is reportedly joining the LEGO line-up, but probably not in the way you think. Yes, word has it that Baby Yoda will soon be part of the BrickHeadz theme. We'll just have to keep waiting for the Mandalorian character to get its own minifigure.

EYE ON EXCLUSIVES

40370 [Steam Engine]

At the time of writing, we don't have an official set name for this gift-with-purchase, but it could well be simply 'Steam Engine'. That's because, as the stickers allude to, it's a faithful recreation of the 1980 train set 7810 Steam Engine, only updated to reflect the modern part palette. The single-piece base of the original has been replaced by a brick-built chassis, while the 1x2x2 bricks on either side remedy the classic set's use of stickers across multiple pieces. Despite those alterations, though, the build feels wonderfully nostalgic, and really flies together by virtue of its simplicity.

LEGO trains have been around much longer than 40

years – the first locomotives arrived as far back as 1966 – so this is a curious choice for an anniversary model. But that doesn't make it a bad one, and train collectors will no doubt snap it up, so it could be a savvy choice for investors too. Depending on when you picked up this issue, 40370 should still be available in LEGO Stores and at LEGO.com, as a freebie with purchases over £99 (or \$99/€99). The promotion will run until March 15, or stocks run out – whichever happens first. Looking further ahead, we're crossing our fingers that this promo is hinting towards a brand new Creator Expert steam train (and if one has been announced by the time you read this, just call us prophetic).

40370 is a total blast from the loco past.



NEWS IN BRIEF

■ **DISNEYHEADZ**

Two new Disney-themed BrickHeadz are now available at LEGO Stores, with 40377 Donald Duck and 40378 Goofy and Pluto joining 2018's 41624 Mickey Mouse and 41625 Minnie Mouse. If you want to get your hands on those now-retired sets to complete the collection, you're looking at paying a pretty penny.

■ **HOUSE MAKEOVER**

The LEGO House has reopened for 2020, but Le Gourmet hasn't. The Billund attraction's premier dining experience will soon be replaced by a new 'share food' restaurant, to better serve the growing numbers of visitors. In 2019, nearly 300,000 people made the pilgrimage to the home of the brick – a 15% uptick on the previous year.

■ **DUPLO COASTER**

The world's first DUPLO rollercoaster is coming to LEGOLAND Windsor when the park re-opens this month. The dino-themed ride is aimed at kids between two and five years old, and will contour around the newly revamped DUPLO Valley area.

■ **GET TO DA CHOPPA**

If you somehow haven't had your fill of LEGO helicopters from CITY, then good news: Marvel Super Heroes has just released a brand new one (that looks suspiciously like all the old ones) to tie in with the upcoming Black Widow spin-off movie.



HOT TOPIC

Blocks staffers debate the big bulletins

This month: our thoughts on the LEGO Group's return to football



Graham **Hancock**

■ ■ WHY SHOULD POPCORN MUNCHERS HAVE ALL THE FUN? ■ ■

Football? Oh yeah, football. Considering it's the national sport here in the UK, I'm quite proud of how frequently I forget it exists. I have not even a slither of interest in it – when the World Cup or Euro contests roll around and England are playing, I still shrug. On that basis, it's only now that LEGO Creator Expert has tackled Old Trafford that I've noticed how rarely the LEGO Group dips into the world of sports. For cinephiles like me there are endless movie-based products, with Star Wars, Indiana Jones, Ghostbusters, Back to the Future and James Bond all leaping to mind, yet I can't think of any sports-related sets outside of CITY or Friends. And whatever you say, motorsports don't count. So this set is great news, because why should screen-obsessed popcorn munchers have all the fun? There are a lot of sports fans in the world, and they deserve some LEGO too.



Daniel **Konstanski**

■ ■ I HAD NOT EVEN HEARD OF OLD TRAFFORD BEFORE SEEING 10272 ■ ■

The LEGO Group has released niche products before, but 10272 Old Trafford seems to be in a class all its own. Unlike Voltron, for example, which has appeal even beyond the source material, buyers of this set must be both fans of LEGO and fans – or supporters, as my UK brethren inform me is the proper term – of Manchester United. The prospect is even more stark as a US resident. As a non-sports person, I had not even heard of Old Trafford before seeing 10272, and I would imagine many of my fellow citizens of North America are in the same boat. I could find no reliable data on the number of Manchester United fans on this side of the pond, but it is surely far fewer than the LEGO Group normally aims for with its licensed sets. It will be interesting to see if 10272 starts a trend of niche sports products targeted at very specific demographics, or if it fades into history as a one-shot experiment.



Chris **Wharfe**

■ ■ THE REAL QUESTION IS, WHY ISN'T 10272 AN ARCHITECTURE SET? ■ ■

As the mag's resident football fan, I'm happy to welcome Old Trafford into my house with open arms – partly because my loyalties lie with a basement league team, so I have no real affinity with Premier League squads. I just enjoy the game. I probably wouldn't be saying that, though, if I was a Liverpool or Manchester City supporter. And that's where the issue with this set lies: it's not often people have a reason to actively dislike a LEGO set, rather than simply choosing to ignore it, but this seems like a model built to divide. Even for the club's supporters, it's just another sad indictment of how much its owners have focused on merchandising, arguably at the expense of the actual game. But the real question is, why isn't 10272 an Architecture set? We could have had a subtheme of famous stadia at a more realistic price point, but it seems unlikely that we'll see multiple football grounds at this scale.



■ POLY-AMOROUS // 40375 SPORTS ACCESSORIES

This bundle of sporting odds and ends feels vaguely useful for kitting out your minifigures, as long as they're happy to partake in either skiing, roller blading, archery or hockey. The goalposts seem like a bit of a waste, though, and it would definitely have been improved by the hockey helmet introduced in the Collectible Minifigures.

■ RUMOUR MILL // ADULT SETS

No, the LEGO Group hasn't suddenly pivoted to X-rated material. Instead, it's just shifting its attentions to the booming adult market, and planning an entirely new theme aimed at the 18+ crowd. There's no indication what this will entail, but it may include multiple licences.

REVENGE OF THE PREQUELS

A LEGO Ideas poll has signalled a seismic shift in the Star Wars fanbase – one that could influence the future direction of the theme as a whole

It's been seven years since the last Republic Gunship launched from Billund.

IF YOU'RE STILL clinging to the belief that the original Star Wars trilogy is the only decent thing to ever come out of a galaxy far, far away, you might need to get with the times. In a rare move, the LEGO Group recently reached out to its fanbase for help in choosing the next Ultimate Collector Series set, with three options on the table: a Nebulon B Escort Frigate, TIE Bomber or Republic Gunship. The troop carrier, which first debuted in *Attack of the Clones*, stomped home with more than 50% of the votes.

Unless you've been living exclusively in an early 2000s Star Wars vacuum, the result probably wasn't all that surprising. While the prequels were widely criticised on release by adult fans who grew up with episodes IV-VI, today's adult fans are the kids who grew up with *The Phantom Menace*, *Attack of the Clones* and *Revenge of the Sith*. As a certain Sith Lord might say, the circle is now complete.

The dual machines of YouTube and Reddit undoubtedly played their part, but it doesn't take much to galvanise this segment of the Star Wars fanbase. The prequels are now wildly popular, and this poll is all the proof the LEGO Group needs. So while

the prospect of a UCS Republic Gunship is in itself spectacular, the ballot should also give fans a new hope that the Star Wars design team might recognise the thirst for more prequel sets in general.

Franchise veterans may recall that the LEGO Group has reached out to Star Wars fans before, most recently for help deciding the theme's 10th anniversary set in 2009. The Home One Mon Calamari Star Cruiser took top prize then, with Palpatine's Arrest and Slave I bringing up the rear. It's a pretty safe bet to say that if that poll was re-run today, the Senate's showdown would instantly take top spot. (If you don't believe us, just type 'prequel memes' into Google.)

Regardless, all three of those sets eventually hit shelves – so we could yet see the Nebulon B Escort Frigate and TIE Bomber in UCS form somewhere down the line. The Republic Gunship will come first, though – presumably in 2021, given the company's usual lead time on designs. And from there, who knows? Public opinion on the prequels has clearly shifted, so we could be looking at the start of a new wave of UCS sets.



The original minifigure-scale Republic Gunship arrived on shelves in 2002.

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ FASTEST FALCON FIRST

A record-breaking copy of 75192 Millennium Falcon has been auctioned off for children's dementia charity NCL Foundation. Four builders assembled the set in just under three hours, achieving a Guinness World Record in the process. The certificate was bundled in with the set, which at the time of writing had just surpassed the €1,000 mark.

■ SHOTS FIRED

David Turner, an artist from Belfast who grew up during the Troubles, has drawn criticism from parents after displaying his brick-built guns at Sheffield's Brick by Brick exhibition in January.

■ TOY SALES DOWN

The UK toy industry declined by 6% in 2019, a change some pundits have put down to uncertainty over Brexit. Total sales still reached £3.2 billion, though, with the UK remaining Europe's largest toy market. 'We are entering a new era with many structural and economic changes ahead,' said toy analyst Frederique Tutt. 'The toy market is no exception to other retail sectors and is in a transition period.'

■ VIP SWEEPSTAKES

The LEGO VIP Rewards Centre has kicked off its new sweepstakes with the 2012 San Diego Comic-Con-exclusive Shazam minifigure. A single entry costs 50 points, with a maximum of 15 entries per person.

BOB STRIKES BACK

The poll also asked fans to suggest a minifigure to be included alongside the set – and voters quickly rallied around an updated Jedi Bob, a fan-favourite character first released in 2002's 7163 Republic Gunship. We'll have to wait for the final set to see if that particular dream has been realised.

LEGO THROUGH THE AGES...

2002

7163 REPUBLIC GUNSHIP

The inaugural LAAT/i (that's Low Altitude Assault Transport/infantry, in case you haven't consumed a Star Wars Visual Dictionary) arrived alongside *Attack of the Clones*.

2003

4490 REPUBLIC GUNSHIP

A year later, this 102-piece mini building set offered a much cheaper way to get your hands on a Gunship, only sans troopers.

2008

7676 REPUBLIC ATTACK GUNSHIP

The Clone Wars brought us our second minifigure-scale rendition of the Republic Gunship, this time with bonus interchangeable nose art.

2009

20010 REPUBLIC GUNSHIP

This Brickmaster-exclusive polybag reimaged the mini version with just 94 parts.

2013

75021 REPUBLIC GUNSHIP

Eleven years on from its release, the LEGO Group turned to Episode II for a fresh wave of sets. Among them was the most streamlined

Republic Gunship to date.

2015

75076 REPUBLIC GUNSHIP MICROFIGHTER

Finally, a budget Gunship that could just about squeeze a minifigure in. As long as you didn't mind it looking like a kid on a supermarket ride.

20??

UCS REPUBLIC GUNSHIP

Only a select few people in Billund know what the next Gunship will look like – the rest of us will have to wait and see.



THE Blocks CONVERSATION

We shoot the brick breeze with prominent AFOLs. This month, **Andrew Clark** – the man behind LEGO Ideas 21304 Doctor Who and 21316 The Flintstones – talks early Technic sets and dream Dalek builds

What's the first LEGO set you remember building?

As a kid I built a lot using the LEGO we had in a drawer, but as for an actual official set my first memory was 8851 Technic Excavator. I loved the pneumatics and caterpillar treads.

Did you have a dark age?

I did, from around 18 to 27 years old. Those years were consumed with college, and trying to create a portfolio of artwork to apply for jobs.

What's the most versatile LEGO element you own?

That might be a 1x4 plate, or perhaps SNOT (Studs Not On Top) bricks. Most of the models I use have these parts and are ones I tend to use a lot. The 1x4 plate is good for smaller builds, but still spans a distance for stability. The SNOT bricks are good for adding extra details on the sides, and building outwards.

If you could resurrect one theme, what would it be?

It's a tie for me – either something space-based like Blacktron, or Castle-themed.

What's your 'one that got away'?

That might be the Monster Fighters set 10228 Haunted House. I love the design, colours, and details, such as the printed wood tiles on the windows, which give them a boarded-up look and add character. The minifigures are cool, and I even like the box art and Monster Fighters logo.

What are you building right now?

I'm having to take a bit of a break as I'm moving house, but I'd like to tackle a Doctor Who Dalek MOC, that has interior details on a UCS scale.

What's the most recent set you bought?

What did you think of it?

That would be the Overwatch set 75976 Wrecking Ball. I love the details and how it can fold into a ball. Also, the Hamster figure is great!

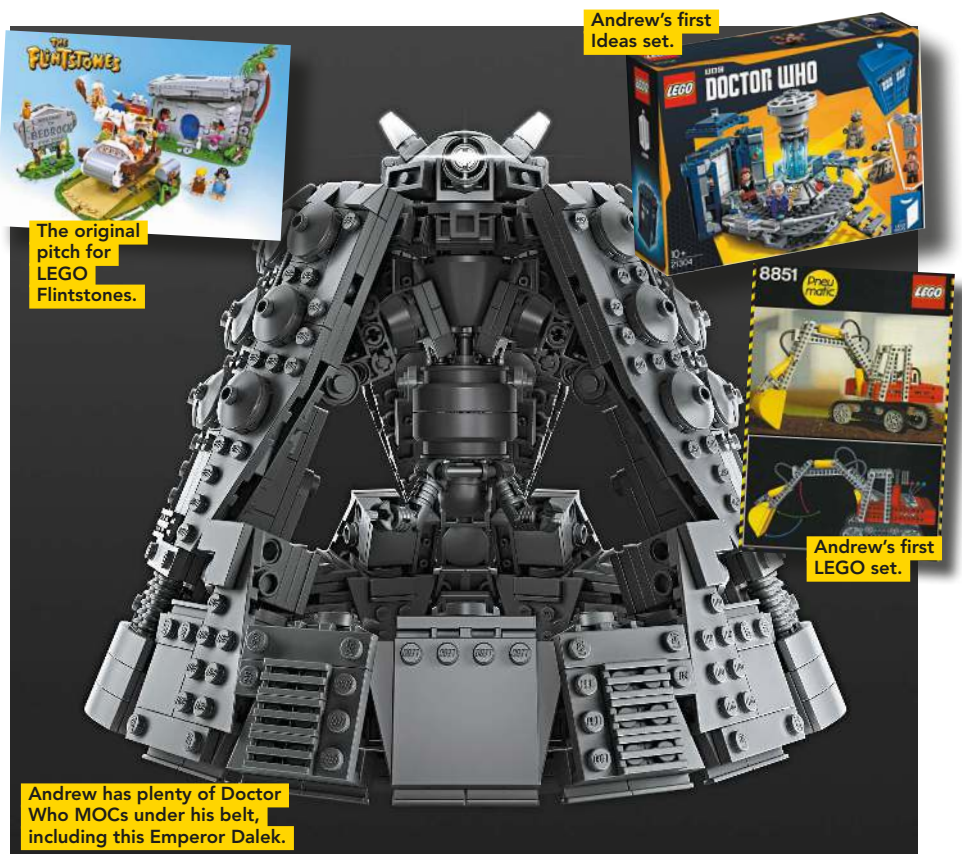
MY FIRST LEGO MEMORY WAS 8851 TECHNIC EXCAVATOR

What's top of your to-buy list?

The LEGO Ideas Dinosaur Fossils! It's a great display set and looks very accurate, and cool!

What's your ultimate dream build/MOC?

My ultimate dream build/MOC is typically the one I'm planning next, as I put all my efforts, thoughts and passion into it. It may be a UCS-scale Dalek, or maybe some sci-fi Star Trek ship. When I do finish a model, real or digital, I upload it to Flickr: <https://tinyurl.com/u25nyxp>.



■ POLY-AMOROUS // 40376 BOTANICAL ACCESSORIES

The second of two new Xtra polybags for 2020 will be music to the ears of any budding brick horticulturalists. For £3.99, you'll bag 32 elements for fleshing out a LEGO garden, including multiple styles of flowers, two trees and a pair of fence posts.

■ RUMOUR MILL // POTTERMANIA CONTINUES

The boy wizard will apparently be back once again in the summer, with a range of sets focusing on the Order of the Phoenix and the Half-Blood Prince. Expect to see the Room of Requirement, Gramp and the Astronomy Tower on shelves soon, as well as a Chamber of Secrets-inspired 4 Privet Drive, and another series of Collectible Minifigures.

FIVE THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT...

THIS YEAR'S TOY FAIRS

Wheels at the ready – 2020 is shaping up to be one for the motorheads

1. NEW SETS ARE HEARD, BUT NOT SEEN

We've gone to print on this issue slap bang in the middle of Toy Fair season, so the New York event hasn't happened at the time of writing. That's usually when images start to emerge, but the London and Nuremberg events still showcased plenty of new sets for 2020 – even if photography wasn't allowed. At UK Toy Fair, we glimpsed a Creator 3-in-1 Pirate Ship, a wave of NINJAGO sets that combine into a tabletop board game, a new CITY airport, and a range of jungle-themed Friends sets.

2. THE LEGO GROUP HAS TEAMED UP WITH LAMBORGHINI

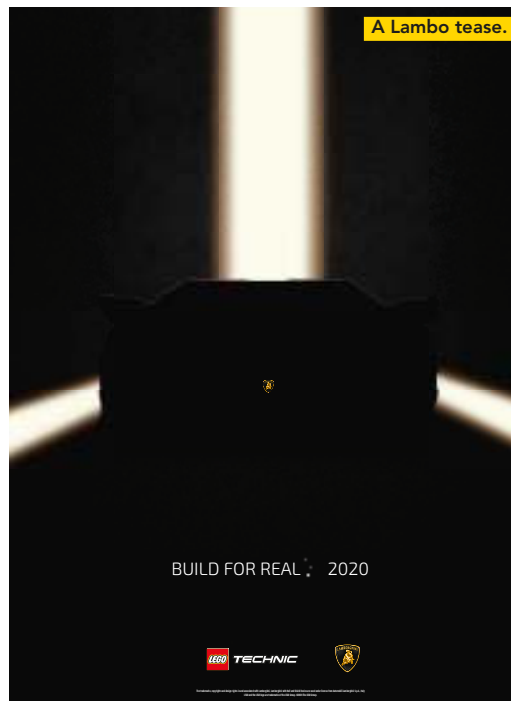
More specifically, it's partnered with Automobili Lamborghini for the third set in the 'LEGO Technic Ultimate' series. If, like us, that's the first time you're hearing that term, it's referring to the sportscar subtheme of Technic, which currently counts 42056 Porsche 911 GT3 RS and 42083 Bugatti Chiron among its numbers. The new model is set to arrive in 2020, though there's no other info on it available just yet.

3. TECHNIC'S GETTING FAST, TECHNIC'S GETTING FURIOUS

The Lambo isn't the only vehicular crossover the Technic theme is getting this year. A Fast & Furious tie-in is also on the way to coincide with the ninth chapter in the seemingly never-ending story. Again, details are scant beyond a release date – April 27 – and the set's age recommendation, which will apparently be 10+.

4. 2020 IS FOR THE ADULTS

In Germany, a whopping 10% of LEGO sales are apparently made to adult fans, while Switzerland's most popular set in 2019 was the eye-wateringly expensive 42100 Liebherr R 9800. Those are impressive numbers, and the LEGO Group knows it: 2020 will apparently



mark a concerted shift towards targeting the adult market. Expect to see multiple sets with '18+' on the box, including an Iron Man bust and a new Architecture rendition of the White House.

5. THE LEGO GROUP IS STILL THE EXCEPTION TO THE RULE

The global toy industry may be suffering, but nobody's told the LEGO Group. In Germany, sales actually increased by 3.2% in 2019, while UK buyers purchased a LEGO product once every second between October and December. If our maths checks out, that's just under 8 million sets.

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ PRIME TIME

LEGO Education's new coding product, SPIKE Prime, has finally been released for schools and colleges. The STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths) set combines BOOST technology with a bespoke app to teach kids the fundamentals of programming.

■ TENCENT TO STAY

For the past two years, tech company Tencent has worked with the LEGO Group to bring digital play experiences to kids in China. The two companies have now announced that their partnership will continue, with the emphasis remaining squarely on creativity and safety. Their next project will be a LEGO-themed social network, akin to LEGO Life.

■ OOSTEN'S OUT

The LEGO Group's Chief Digital Officer JJ Van Oosten has left the company after just nine months in the role, at a time when it's focusing heavily on its digital footprint. Oosten has now returned to Kingfisher as the Chief Customer and Digital Officer.

■ BECKS' BLOCKS

The world's most well-known AFOL is continuing to enjoy his retirement surrounded by bricks. Ex-footballer David Beckham, who recently assembled the 6,020-piece 71043 Hogwarts Castle, has picked up 42110 Land Rover Defender for his latest project.



MAKING SPACE

The latest Ideas set once again leaves planet Earth behind, and heads out into near space

OF THE 29 LEGO Ideas sets released so far, four have been NASA-branded, while five have touched on space exploration. There's clearly a substantial market out there for real-world LEGO adventures beyond the confines of our planet, and the LEGO Group is only too happy to keep tapping into it – just as the fan community keeps voting for it, as happened in last year's 10th anniversary Ideas poll.

Four once-rejected projects were given a second shot at being turned into an official LEGO set, and Christoph Ruge's International Space Station romped home the clear winner. And a few short months later, it's already on shelves. 21321 International Space Station packs 864 pieces into the box for just £64.99 (or \$69.99/€69.99), making it a little more wallet-friendly than 2017's 21309 NASA Apollo Saturn V.

The ISS is a particularly unwieldy shape to place on a shelf, so the final release helpfully includes a more streamlined version of the display stand in Christoph's original pitch. And if you're reaching for your LEGO pitchfork at the thought of aligning stickers for each and every one of the eight solar panels, you can drop the brick-mob mentality: they're all printed. For more on 21321, look out for our review in next month's issue.

21321 International Space Station is available now.



The original LEGO ISS, 7467 International Space Station, hit shelves in 2003.



CRUNCHING THE NUMBERS

The stats behind LEGO's love affair with modern space

14

The number of official LEGO sets that cover real-world space exploration.

1975

The year the first LEGO moon landing set arrived on shelves.

6

The number of sets in the 2003 Discovery Channel subtheme.

5

The total number of LEGO Lunar Landers, including the mini version in 21309 NASA Apollo Saturn V.

1,969

The number of pieces in 21309, the largest NASA set to date (and the year of the first moon landings).



■ EYE ON EXCLUSIVES // 5006171 THE UNITED TRINITY

Early adopters of 10272 Old Trafford bagged this ode to the Manchester United trinity of George Best, Denis Law and Bobby Charlton, which was available as a gift-with-purchase. Don't feel bad if you missed out, because the minifigures are completely generic.

■ KEY QUOTE // GENEVIEVE CAPA CRUZ, LEGO MARKETING STRATEGIST

'Adults with high-pressured jobs are telling us they're using LEGO to disconnect from the mania of the day. They're looking for a relaxing, calming experience – and they like instructions because that's what helps them be in the zone.' Expect even more adult-targeted sets in the near future.

WHAT NEXT FOR BRICKLINK?

CMO Julia Goldin sheds a little more light on the LEGO Group's acquisition of BrickLink

WHEN THE LEGO Group announced it had acquired secondary marketplace BrickLink, the fan community mostly responded with hesitancy and scepticism. It's not hard to see why: increased control generally means reduced independence, and that could spell trouble for buyers and sellers alike. Hoping to alleviate some of those concerns, the company held an 'AMA' (Ask Me Anything) session on BrickLink's forums in January – here are the key takeaways...

THE LEGO GROUP WILL PROVIDE SET DATA.

BrickLink's set inventories and images have historically been uploaded manually by volunteers. One benefit of the LEGO Group's involvement is its ability to provide that data automatically, which it's currently looking for a way to implement.

IT WON'T ENFORCE ITS OWN BRAND GUIDELINES – FOR NOW.

The LEGO Group follows a strict set of brand values that guides the content of its products. For

■ ■ WE DON'T WANT TO CURB CREATIVITY, BUT WE ALSO DON'T WANT TO COMPROMISE SAFETY ■ ■

instance, religious buildings and modern military settings are entirely off-limits. But according to the company's Chief Marketing Officer Julia Goldin, those guidelines won't be implemented on BrickLink for the time being. 'Our current approach is to continue with what's working on BrickLink,' she explained. 'We will draw the line with builds and behaviours that divide and offend, but honestly we don't see that very often.'

THE CUSTOM PARTS BAN IS APPARENTLY THERE FOR A REASON.

One of the first changes the LEGO Group made to BrickLink's terms of service was a wholesale ban on custom or modified elements, much to the chagrin of the community. However, the company has at least now provided a reason for the change: 'We made it because we have no way of knowing details about the safety and quality of custom parts, especially chrome ones,' Julia said. 'We don't want to curb creativity – but we also don't want to

compromise on quality and safety, something we are obsessive about.'

YOU'LL STILL BE ABLE TO BUY AND SELL COMIC-CON EXCLUSIVES.

The LEGO Group is only banning sales of non-LEGO elements, so any legitimate products – including Comic-Con-exclusive minifigures and sets – are still fair game. Just don't expect the company's approval, because while Julia confirmed the LEGO Group will still produce those exclusives, she also remarked that it's 'always disappointing when people exploit these good intentions for personal gain.' So next time you use the marketplace for its intended purposes (or, erm, 'exploit' it), just remember the benevolent company that made it possible, with its good intentions to wall products off to a select few people.

STUD.IO WILL BE THE HOME OF DIGITAL BUILDING.

Back in 2016, the LEGO Group announced that LEGO Digital Designer would no longer receive funding from the company. While it's received a couple of minor updates since then, the focus going forward will apparently be on BrickLink's digital building tool, Stud.io, with multiple new features and upgrades in the works.

HOT SELLERS WON'T INFLUENCE NEW PRODUCTS.

Using BrickLink sales data to see what's hot among AFOLs seems like one of the most obvious reasons for the acquisition – but 'obvious' and 'LEGO' have never been great bedfellows. It should really come as no surprise, then, that the company actually isn't planning to take advantage of that data to influence the existing part catalogue.



The LEGO Group's hoping to reassure BrickLink users.

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ LEGO PUZZLES

A series of LEGO-themed books targeted to adults are on the way from publisher Chronicle, containing postcards, artwork and still life projects. More interestingly, it's also planning to launch LEGO jigsaws, allowing you to assemble pictures of bricks in a mind-melting mash-up of mediums.

■ GROWING PAINS

The LEGO Group is pushing ahead with its commitment to growth in China, with more new stores on the way in 2020. That's despite a minor setback in December 2019, when a series of LEGO Education Learning Centres in Shanghai suddenly shut up shop – leaving parents who had enrolled in classes empty-handed.

■ A BRICK SPLASH

If your next holiday involves a trip to Verona, you might want to pencil in a day at Gardaland Resort. Merlin Entertainments has announced that Europe's first LEGOLAND Water Park, which is currently under construction in Italy, will open its doors to the public on May 28.

■ POPULAR MASTERS

LEGO MASTERS USA's premiere episode, which tasked the teams with creating working theme park models, pulled in a strong 4.8 million viewers – proving the competitive building show is just as popular across the pond. Alas, there's still no word on when a third series is coming to the UK.

TOP TEN

LEGO SPORTS CROSSOVERS

10272 Old Trafford isn't the first time the LEGO Group has dived into the sporting arena, but it is a rare occurrence

Words: Chris Wharfe Pics: The LEGO Group

75956 QUIDDITCH MATCH

This might feel like a bit of a stretch, but fictional sports are still sports in our book. And that means Quidditch totally makes the cut, not least for providing us with some excellent sets over the years. Sure, none of them have been inherently playable (unless you happen to have a few extra limbs), but as a recreation of the wizarding world's most popular pastime, they've rarely missed the mark. In fact, 75956 Quidditch Match completely nailed it in 2018, as doubling up on copies gave you almost everything you needed for a full game.



10

10272 OLD TRAFFORD

It doesn't have the universal appeal of the rest of this list, but Old Trafford earns its place by virtue of being so different to anything the LEGO Group has produced before. There's no playability on offer here, with the value instead lying entirely in the build experience, but it's still the most detailed recreation of a football stadium the company has ever released. And even if you don't support Manchester United, you can at least cross your fingers for your own team's stadium somewhere down the line.



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BASEBALL TIE-INS

While we had to wait for the Collectible Minifigures to get our first wide release baseball player minifigure, the LEGO Group has been running promotional baseball tie-ins for decades. Back in 1999, for example, a handful of lucky kids were given a free Boston Red Sox minifigure at Fenway Park. The torso is the only unique element, but it still fetches over £100 today. Brick-built baseball players have also made appearances as LEGO Store opening promos in the US, and at both Fenway Park and the San Francisco Giants' stadium in the 2010s. They're niche products with a niche audience, but that's exactly what makes them so collectable.

8

FOOTBALL (TOWN)

The original LEGO football subtheme launched in 1998 to celebrate the World Cup, and took a wild new approach to collecting. Instead of offering a complete football experience in a single package, the Town spin-off split everything up across 17 different products. 3302 Field Bases showed what was possible if you had the drive to pick up every set in the range, but that particular release only included a pair of bizarrely studded baseplates for the pitch. The goals, stands, floodlights and even players were all sold separately – as were the hooligans and riot squad, in one of the LEGO Group's strangest sets to date, 3314 Police Unit.



6

CITY

The modern iteration of Town has flirted with sports a few times over the years, but it most recently – and obviously – crossed the line with last year's 60203 Ski Resort. Alongside a tiny ski slope that evoked memories of Gravity Games (which we'll come to later in this list), the 806-piece set included skis, snowboards, and even a shop for your minifigures to stock up on their winter sports gear. With 2018's 60200 Capital City also including a skate park and basketball hoop, these annual slices of modern life may be our best bet for traditional minifigure-scale sports at the moment.



5

FERRARI

There's an argument to be made for the entire Racers theme appearing on this list, but it was the Ferrari offshoot of the 2000s that steered the line closest to sporting territory. The 20 sets carrying the iconic Prancing Horse logo delivered Ferraris in practically every imaginable scale and style, from smaller minifigure-driven cars to hugely-detailed Technic iterations. A handful of road vehicles peppered the line-up, but the focus was predominantly on Formula 1, with plenty of pit stops, finish lines and podiums to enhance the experience. All that was missing was a competitor to race against...



4

SPEED CHAMPIONS

In steps Speed Champions, then, which to date has no fewer than 12 different racing manufacturers under its belt. While the theme is divided up by its licences – you won't find two different brands in the same box – it's the ability to combine those sets within the same framework that makes Speed Champions so special. Of course, this year's move to eight-wide cars has basically broken that premise, or at least reset it, but the breadth of driving styles encompassed by the theme is enough to make it a stand-out in LEGO sports history.



FRIENDS

If you're finding CITY's mild dabbling in sports frustrating, you'd be wise not to ignore Friends. Unburdened by the shackles of constant police and fire repeats, the mini-doll theme is free to explore new horizons with each and every new wave. Over the years, the Friends have tackled gymnastics, football, snowboarding, basketball, cycling, skiing, hockey, skateboarding, tennis, ping pong and go-karting. Not every sport has been given equal attention, but the sheer variety of activities on offer to these plastic people is incredible – and puts CITY to shame.



3

2

COLLECTIBLE MINIFIGURES

The blind-bagged minifigures haven't shied away from sporting characters across the 19 regular series released so far. In fact, we have them to thank for the majority of our modern LEGO sports accessories, including the tennis racket, hockey stick, golf club, rugby ball, and plenty more, each bundled in with a relevant athletic minifigure. But those useful elements aren't this theme's only contribution to the world of LEGO Sports. In 2012, 8909 Team GB Minifigures introduced nine different Olympians, while 2016's DFB series gifted us the entire German football team.



1

SPORTS

The original Sports theme only ran for five years, but in that time churned out over 100 releases across four different categories: football, basketball, hockey, and 'Gravity Games', the LEGO Group's catch-all term for skateboarding and snowboarding. The former three sports were anchored by enormous specialised moulds that turned them into tabletop games, either through spring-loaded mechanisms or Technic axles and discs. Essentially, they were the LEGO Group's take on Subbuteo and table football – and despite not being very good builds, the finished sets were surprisingly good fun to play around with. This was LEGO sports at its purest, and we'd love to see a modern take on the theme.

SCIENCE BY STUDS

Communicating scientific concepts can be tricky – unless you have a box of LEGO bricks to hand

Words: Chris Wharfe **Pics:** Richard Leggett, Earlham Institute



through to plants and animals.

What is a DNA sequencer, and how does your version work?

DNA is a kind of biological program that contains the instructions that make different species unique. It is present in the cells of living organisms and is composed of four chemical 'building blocks', represented by the letters A, C, G and T. A DNA sequencer is a device that can 'read' a DNA molecule and output the sequence of letters that it represents.

IT HAS ALL THE PROPERTIES OF THE IDEAL RAPID PROTOTYPING TOOL

Our Blocksford Brickopore LEGO sequencer was built as a communication tool to help explain these ideas to the public. Instead of reading real DNA molecules, our sequencer reads LEGO DNA made from four colours of 2x2 bricks, representing the four chemical building blocks in DNA, joined together in a sequence. The way it works – moving the 'molecule' past a sensor, brick-by-brick – is similar in principle to how the latest DNA sequencers work (made by a company called Oxford Nanopore – hence our name!). Once a LEGO DNA molecule has been read, our software lets the user search against a large database to see if there is an animal, plant or bacteria that has the DNA sequence they have created.

The system is based around Mindstorms EV3 and is built entirely from LEGO. However, we found the Mindstorms software couldn't provide the live visualisations we wanted, so we ended up writing our own software. We run something called ev3dev on the EV3 brick, which is a version of the Linux operating system. We then run our own software on top

of that, and we have another bit of software we wrote that runs on a laptop and communicates with the brick to provide a nice display.

Where did the idea for the Brickopore sequencer come from? Were any of you fans of LEGO before coming up with the idea?

Iain [Macaulay, research group leader] and I were already big LEGO fans. Richard did have a bit of a dark age, but came out of that thanks to his son Tom (who built the EI logos for us). The sequencer came about when Iain got hold of a Mindstorms kit, and this triggered discussions at work about doing some science with LEGO. Pete [Bickerton, scientific communications and outreach] got a sniff of a public engagement activity, secured a couple of Mindstorms kits for the institute, and encouraged the other two to keep going. A few months later, we had our first prototype!

Have you found LEGO useful for making the sequencer more accessible?

Science communication can be a real challenge and the original hope was that the LEGO could help to demystify what we do. LEGO has been a fantastic tool for bridging the gap with the public and communicating sometimes difficult ideas. When it comes to DNA, people often use the analogy of 'building blocks' to explain what it is, so we just took that idea literally and translated it to LEGO building blocks.

What do you think makes LEGO such a versatile tool for real-world applications, particularly within the scientific field?

It's the same thing that makes it the perfect toy – that the limit is just your imagination. For science, it has all the properties of the ideal rapid prototyping tool, so it's very easy to imagine something and to have a go at building it. Richard has a Twitter account, @ScienceBricks, which features a bunch of other things that scientists have used LEGO for. It's really quite amazing.

EVER JOKED THAT LEGO is part of your DNA? While that will never be true scientifically speaking (we're great fun at parties), a group of bioscience researchers in Norwich have found another way to link the two. Blocksford Brickopore is the Earlham Institute's brick-based riff on a traditional DNA sequencer, fusing LEGO with science to make its work more accessible to the general public. We caught up with Richard Leggett, Group Leader of the Institute, to find out more.

Blocks: Can you tell us a little about yourselves and the Earlham Institute, and the work you do?

Richard: We all work at the Earlham Institute (EI) in Norwich, which is an institute dedicated to research in bioscience. We have a particular focus on genomics, which – broadly speaking – is the analysis of the DNA of living organisms. We study everything from bacteria



Where have you shown off the sequencer so far? What has the reception been like?

We've used the sequencer at the Norwich Science Festival this year and last, plus we've taken it to the Eden Project in Cornwall and also into schools. Hundreds, maybe thousands, of people have come along, built their LEGO DNA and sequenced it on the device. The reception has been fantastic – we've found that everyone from pre-school kids to pensioners have enjoyed playing with the LEGO and, through that, have been asking us all kinds of insightful questions about the science we do.

What future plans do you have for the sequencer?

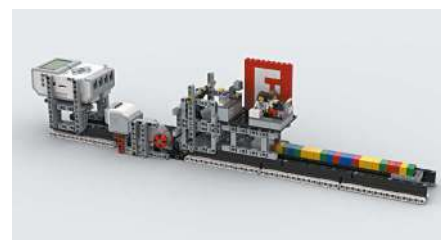
We're taking our sequencers to the Royal Society Summer Science Exhibition in London

later this year, to be the focus of EI's stand there. This is a really prestigious public science exhibition and we are super excited. We've just made the build instructions and software available through our website, and we already

■ PEOPLE OFTEN USE THE ANALOGY OF 'BUILDING BLOCKS' TO EXPLAIN DNA – WE TOOK THAT LITERALLY ■

LEGO-based science communication that go beyond the sequencer. ■

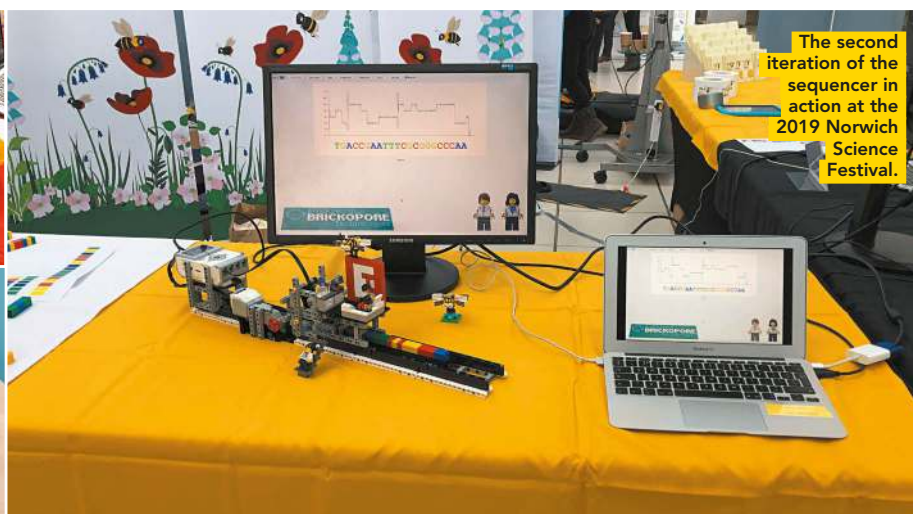
For more on Blocksford Brickopore, head to brickopore.co.uk or find the group on Twitter @brickopore.



The first version of the sequencer at the 2018 Norwich Science Festival.



The second version of the sequencer ready for action.



The second iteration of the sequencer in action at the 2019 Norwich Science Festival.



Star Wars displays at Brix N Blox 2018.

SALUG

Adam Murtha introduces us to a group of Canadian LEGO fans in Southern Alberta

Words: Chris Wharfe
Pics: Adam Murtha, SALUG



What does SALUG stand for, and where is it based?

Southern Alberta LEGO User Group, in Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

How many members are in the LUG?
21 currently.

Who is the ambassador?
Adam Murtha.

How and when was it formed?
The club was formed in 2003 after a few local people got together. Shortly after, we planned our first display at a joint show at Supertrain in Calgary, Alberta, with NALUG from Edmonton, Alberta.

How often do you meet? What do your meetings involve?
We meet monthly for a social gathering, show planning, discussing any club business, parts drafts, and sharing MOCs.

Are you involved with any local shows?
We are involved in several local shows, the largest being the annual Calgary Comic and Entertainment Expo that has over 100,000 guests attend over a four-day show. We have been displaying at this event since 2012.

What's your favourite thing about being part of the LUG?
Being able to share our enjoyment of the LEGO hobby and our creativity with the public.

Has the LUG reached any milestones or

WHAT IS A LEGO USER GROUP (LUG)?

- A group of AFOLs, recognised by the LEGO Group
- Non-profit, driven by volunteers
- A supportive environment of like-minded individuals
- Welcomes all ability levels
- Hosts regular meetings to discuss ideas, news and builds
- Organises and participates in public events and conventions
- Works with the LEGO Group through their appointed Ambassador

WE GET TO SHARE OUR ENJOYMENT OF THE HOBBY AND LEARN FROM OTHER AFOLS

done anything you're particularly proud of?

We have put on our own show called Brick Round-Up for a number of years, and we have worked with another local LEGO display called Brix N Blox.

What are the benefits of joining a LUG like yours?

We get to share our enjoyment of the hobby and learn from other AFOLs. Each person has their own interests and strengths with their

own creativity, and it's always enjoyable to learn from the other members.

Are you a member of any other LUGs? If so, which ones and why?

Several of our members work collaboratively with the CLTC (Calgary LEGO Train Club).

What plans do you have for future events?

We are currently working to plan a local show to collectively display the talents of SALUG and CLTC.

What's the best show you've ever been to?

There have been many shows that I have enjoyed personally. One that I enjoy and recommend is Brickspo that the SLUG (Saskatchewan LEGO Users Group) plans every year in Moose Jaw, SK.



An Endor display with speeder bikes on a 9v train track at Calgary Expo 2013.

LUG members at Calgary Expo 2019.



Star Wars displays at Calgary Expo 2016.



Wil Wheaton checking out SALUG's Calgary Expo 2012 display.



LUG

SPOTLIGHT

00000130

A huge Avengers Tower by LUG members at Calgary Expo 2019.



Super Hero City at Calgary Expo 2019.



A Tatooine display at Calgary Expo 2016.



Daniel Konstanski

MUSING ON MOULDS

Can one-off elements provide clues to abandoned plans for LEGO sets and themes?



WRITER BIO

Lifelong LEGO obsessive passionate about collecting. With a thorough knowledge of LEGO over the years, he is Blocks' historian.

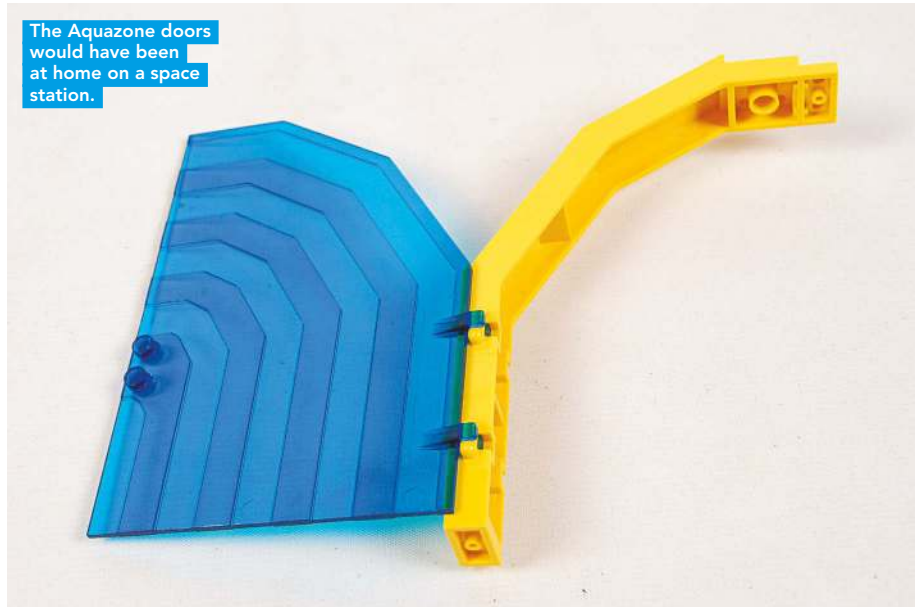
THERE ARE SOME elements that necessitate new moulds being produced, even if their use will be extremely limited. The Indiana Jones set 7623 Temple Escape, which depicted the iconic opening scene from Raiders of the Lost Ark, had to have the idol for Indy to swap or the set would not have worked. As a rule, when paying out for the expense of a new mould, the LEGO Group tries to find as many uses for it as possible to drive down the per capita cost. When specialised pieces are required, it generally tries to make them small to limit expenses as much as possible.

IT'S HIGHLY LIKELY THAT THE LEGO GROUP HAD BIGGER PLANS FOR AQUAZONE'S WATERTIGHT FRAMES AND DOORS

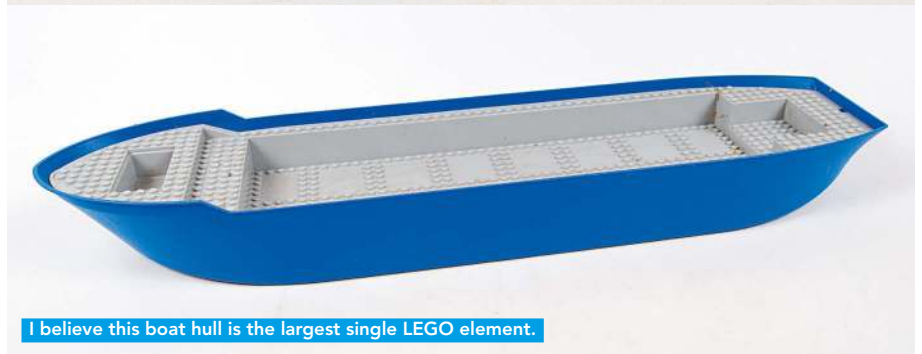
However, through the years there have been some major, glorious exceptions; colossal pieces that were so large, you have to assume that they were intended for more than a couple of appearances, or in the case of some, a single outing. Trying to figure out what the LEGO Group had in mind for certain pieces from this elite group – based on the era they were produced, what happened in the wider product line around that time, and other clues – can yield some tantalising 'what ifs'.

One of the most intriguing possibilities was included in the 1995 Aquazone set 6195 Neptune Discovery Lab. That enormous undersea base boasted two elements, the frames and doors, which only appeared in this set. They were incredibly functional, allowing for a fully enclosed base that could still be

The Aquazone doors would have been at home on a space station.



I believe this boat hull is the largest single LEGO element.



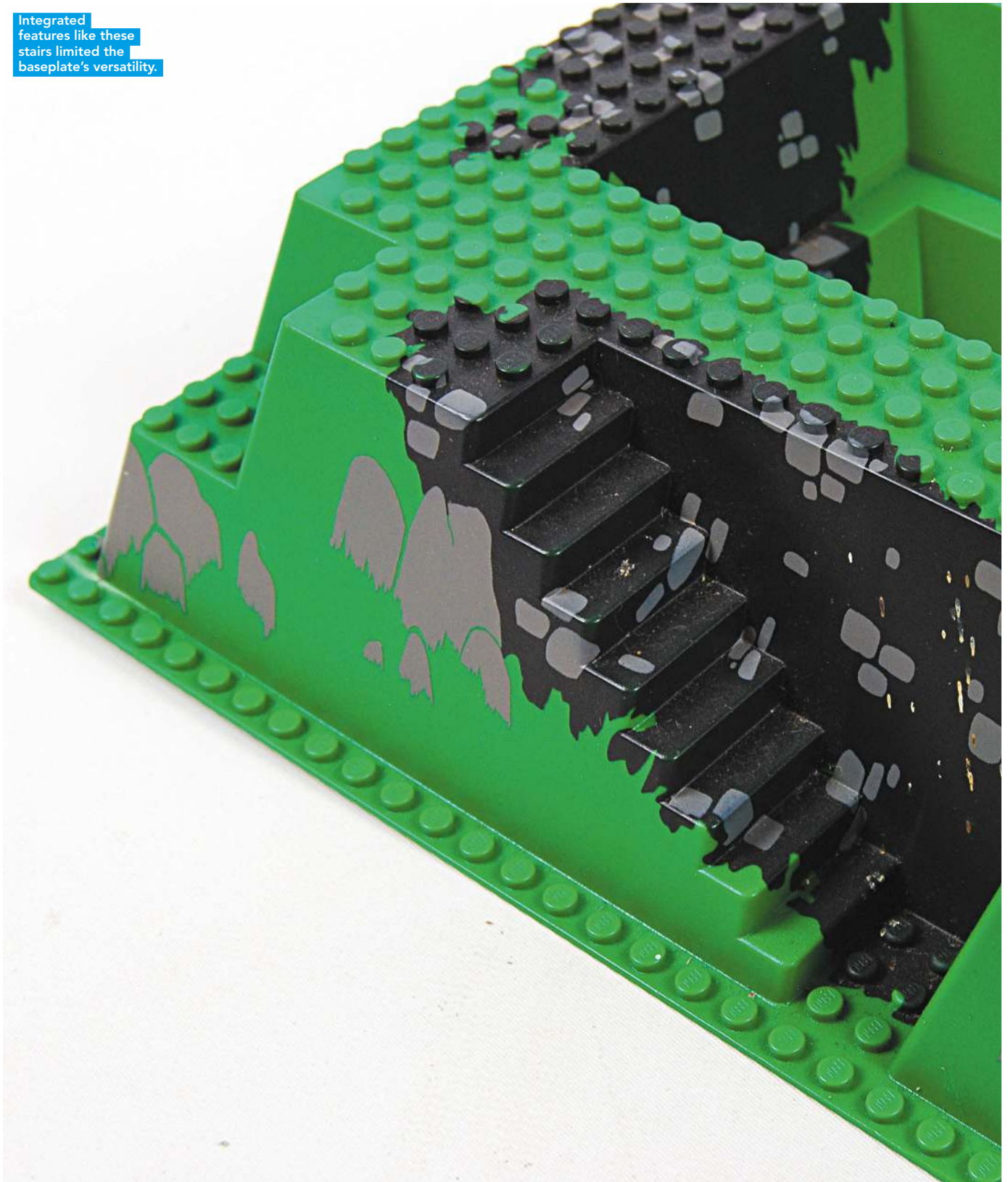
accessed by small hands for play. However, that feature was not necessary. None of the later underwater base sets were watertight, and all of the many space bases before it had ignored that feature too.

The elements could easily have crossed over into the Space theme, so it is highly likely that the LEGO Group had bigger plans for this pair of components. I have a theory: we know that Aquazone grew from an earlier idea for a theme called Seatron, which would have been an underwater planet in the Space theme. Prototype images that have leaked out of the LEGO Group indicate that a monorail was envisioned for this theme. These doors would have been perfect to access a monorail train terminal. Further, this was right in the

midst of the time when a monorail set was being released every three to four years, with the final one arriving a year before Aquazone. When sales of that set failed to justify a fourth version, the future application for this part could have died with it.

1995 had not just one, but two examples of the big element phenomenon, including the largest of them all in the 3D baseplate for 6090 Royal Knight's Castle. This hunk of plastic was enormous – at 32x48 studs it tied with only a couple others for largest footprint, but beats the competition thanks to having a walled edge on all sides. While every other 3D baseplate found at least two uses, 6090 is the only set to include this one. Its implementation would have had to be

Integrated features like these stairs limited the baseplate's versatility.



highly specific, thanks to integrated features such as the ramp and a set of side staircases. Venturing again into the realm of speculation, it is my guess that this baseplate was simply found to be too specific and was replaced by 30271, which is the large 3D baseplate that saw widespread use and had the same footprint.

My final example – though there are surely

others – comes from 2007, and the fantastic boat hull included with 7994 City Harbour. Carrying the element number 57789, I believe it is the largest single element ever produced. Thanks to its dimensions, there is really no purpose it could serve other than being a freighter, which was likely its doom. For the very next harbour set, the LEGO Group produced a shorter hull that could

accommodate more styles of ships across a broad range of themes, including Arctic. The tantalising possibility with this is that originally the plan was to do another Nautica-type subtheme, where there would ultimately have been multiple large seagoing craft with harbours and other infrastructure as well. As Nautica is one of my favourite retired themes, that would have been a true dream. ■

Graham Hancock

ALL ABOARD FOR FAMILY BUILDING

Graham shares the joy of building with his nephew and unwraps a DUPLO train



WRITER BIO

Long term LEGO fan specialising in everything from Pirates to Star Wars, with a soft spot for exhibitions and LEGOLAND.



WHILE THIS COLUMN will not be in anyone's hands until March, at the time of writing Christmas is a fresh memory. There are still little bits of Christmas tree getting picked up by the vacuum, plenty of chocolates around to be munched and liqueurs in the kitchen that seem to only exist every December.

A highlight of Christmas this year was giving a special present to my nephew, Hunter. Many LEGO fans I know have spoken of the joy of sharing their hobby with their children, but still being an overgrown child myself, I haven't gotten around to that phase of life yet. Thanks to my nephew, I can at least get a small sense of it.

Despite an age recommendation of two on the box, and Hunter only being around 18 months old, I decided to get him the DUPLO 10875 Cargo Train for Christmas. As soon as he was born I started thinking about what DUPLO sets I would get him, so I was quite proud that I had managed to wait this long, rather than trying to get a new-born baby to grip the oversized blocks.

It was an absolute joy to give him the gift, as his reaction was better than I had expected. He immediately spotted the various characters on the box and started pointing at them, noticing different details on the artwork. The packaging designers clearly know what they are doing to stimulate little people.

Given that he is only 18 months old, he became frustrated that he could not pick up the box, which was too wide for his arm span to grab hold of, so I helped him show it off. The next thing to do was clear all the wrapping paper out of the way and tip all the pieces out. Once we had made a suitable mess, Hunter sat on the living room floor with me and Martin (his dad and my brother) as we rifled through the pieces.

Martin and I focused on following the instructions and putting the thing together, while Hunter found various bits of interest, with the figures and animals proving particular hits. I had anticipated having fun building with my nephew, but it hadn't occurred to me that this would be the first time in a good few years that my brother and I would sit on the floor building together. There was something quite surreal about being back in that childhood dynamic.

I WAS QUITE PROUD THAT I HAD MANAGED TO WAIT THIS LONG, RATHER THAN TRYING TO GET A NEW-BORN BABY TO GRIP THE OVERSIZED BLOCKS

Hunter did manage to put the odd bricks together with some help, but was more adept at pulling them apart. Of course, the best part about a train set like this is laying all the track down. 10872 Train Bridge and Tracks helped to add some variety to the layout.

The 'push and go' system that the train operates on really is fantastic, as all a toddler needs to do is give it a bit of a nudge and it will start moving. It's a great introduction to

the concept of moving train sets. I was also impressed by the action pieces, which rest on the track and trigger a specific response as the train travels over them, like making a sound or changing direction.

My nephew was delighted with the moving train and fascinated by it – at times gingerly stepping over the track to avoid any calamities, and at other times playing Godzilla to the presumably terrified DUPLO citizens, who saw their environment come crashing down. His efforts to drop the figures into the carriages as the train went by were impressive, although his determination to immediately retrieve them led to a lot of short journeys.

Putting this together with my brother and nephew really was a highlight of Christmas. We were all able to get involved in an activity together that was new for the little fellow, but very familiar and nostalgic for the 'grown-ups'.

It is probably apparent that a good chunk of my motivation for this gift was that I wanted to play with the DUPLO train myself, and I was very pleased to have found an opportunity to do so. It doesn't take a lot to amuse me, and technology in toys is one of the things that works like a charm. While I continue to build up my collection of LEGO System train track, I will continue to keep Hunter supplied with DUPLO train track – and other bricks – so that I can marvel at what is produced for the smallest hands. ■



A mesmerised audience.



10875 Cargo Train also includes a boat and a crane.

Chris Wharfe

SHAMEFUL STORAGE SOLUTIONS

Chris realises his method for organising his LEGO collection isn't exactly practical



WRITER BIO

Experienced journalist with a lifelong addiction to LEGO, Star Wars and Super Heroes. Blocks' resident northerner.

BACK IN FEBRUARY, I pulled two plastic boxes out from under my bed, and prised the lids off for the first time in around a year. Staring back at me were a mountain of discarded, long-forgotten LEGO sets – once the new kid on the block, now yesterday's news. Many of them were barely two years old, but they'd already been consigned to the dumping ground. I hadn't bothered to dismantle them and bag them up, or even given much care to ensure their parts at least stayed together within each box.

In that moment, I was less Archimedes crying 'Eureka!' and more Newton sitting under the apple tree. Like the falling fruit that supposedly struck the scientist's head, the realisation hit me with a dull thud: my storage solutions were seriously shameful. After a fleeting feeling of empathy for Toy Story's human characters, I grabbed one of the boxes, a bunch of zip-lock bags, and a sharpie.

If there's a duller aspect of LEGO fandom than organising your collection, I don't want to hear about it, because what followed was already enough to make me question my entire hobby. Disassembling sets is a great way to make LEGO feel like a chore, but after January 1, I really had no choice.

The start of the year is traditionally a euphoric day in the brick calendar: hundreds of new sets launch from the talented minds of Billund's designers, ready to be plucked from store shelves and given a good home. This year, though, New Year's Day represented a tipping point in my LEGO collection. With the introduction of a bunch of new sets into the Wharfe household, the number of models I wanted to build and display outweighed the amount of space I had.

I'm not just talking about shelf space, which reached maximum capacity around two months after I moved into my current place. I'm also talking about those plastic boxes I've been using to store previously-displayed



From plastic bag to plastic bag, it's the brick circle of life.

sets, now displaced by the next hot product. Throwing fully-constructed sets into boxes is essentially the least efficient storage method going, so it doesn't take long for me to reach maximum capacity. And while I'd usually just go out and buy more boxes when things begin overflowing, it's slightly more difficult to go out and buy new rooms to put those boxes in.

IF THERE'S A DULLER ASPECT OF LEGO FANDOM THAN ORGANISING YOUR COLLECTION, I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ABOUT IT

Instead, I resigned myself to what will no doubt be a year-long project, which involves going through every single one of those boxes and dismantling, bagging and labelling each set. I know this isn't a typical approach for most builders, who would probably be happy to part out old sets for MOCs. At the moment, though, I don't have the time, ability, space, storage methods or even the inclination to organise my collection by parts. Unless this is your first time reading the mag, it probably hasn't escaped your notice that I'm not much of a builder. (And if you still don't believe me, flip to page 110 for the proof.)

In organising my collection by sets, I'm essentially planning for a future I can't be sure will ever come, in which I either: a) have enough room to rebuild and display more sets than I currently have out; b) dismantle a current display set in favour of rebuilding an older model, rather than replacing it with something new; or c) sell off chunks of my collection. If that last one sounds heinous, come join me in my other existential LEGO train of thought.

With new sets pouring in every year, even bagging up the older ones will eventually be futile. It seems inevitable that I'm going to reach a real tipping point in the amount of LEGO I can hold on to without having to rent out a storage unit, and I think that's the moment when I'll seriously begin to question my life choices. In an attempt to pre-empt that inevitability, I've begun holding on to the original LEGO boxes (another problematic storage decision), just in case I ever want to sell any sets. And now I'm organising my collection by individual sets – just in case.

Even if my motives are questionable, though, and the long term picture is something I'll do my best to not think about, the end result will still be the same: a LEGO collection that doesn't consist of hundreds of sets hastily tossed into plastic boxes, and will actually be easy to chronicle and catalogue. It's still a pipe dream for now, and will naturally take plenty of time and effort to achieve, but hopefully it will mean fewer metaphorical falling fruit in my future. ■



The world's most inefficient storage solution.



This took a lot of work.



One of the boxes I pulled out. I know, I know.



Holding on to LEGO boxes seems like a disaster waiting to happen.

WELCOME TO THE HOUSE OF DOTS

To celebrate the arrival of LEGO DOTS, the LEGO Group enlisted Camille Walala to design London's most colourful house

Words: Graham Hancock Pics: The LEGO Group

THE HOUSE OF DOTS is welcoming its first guests. This temporary installation's cascade of colours contrast with its surroundings on a chilly January morning in London's Coal Drop Yard, bringing a bit of cheer to an otherwise dreary month.

The occasion for this unique interactive experience is hinted at from the exterior of the pop art house, as those familiar with LEGO elements will spot the distinctive shape of the 1x4 circle tile, and the less distinctive shape of the regular square 1x1 tile. The tiniest of tiles forms the basis of the theme that this event is launching, the brand new LEGO DOTS.

'What sparked it off was actually a lot of research we did across the US, Germany and China,' says Lena Diken, LEGO Senior Vice President and Head of Product and Marketing Development, sitting at a coffee table in the House of DOTS. 'We really wanted to understand children's play needs and play behaviours, so we spoke to many parents and children and conducted more than 21,000 play observations. We discovered that many kids were seeking a form of self-expression. We could see there was a need that we are currently not covering with the LEGO portfolio, which is more arts and crafts-related.'

LEGO DOTS isn't aiming to appeal to children – or adults – who are already accustomed to the building system. While the LEGO Group will no doubt welcome such fans buying this new product, the intention is for it to reach out to those who have not yet realised how enjoyable getting hands-on with LEGO pieces is.



The LEGO Group
invited Camille
Walala to design the
installation.



The concept is simple – take a special bracelet covered in LEGO studs or build something with flat surfaces, then cover those studs with 1x1 tiles. It's an opportunity to focus on patterns and colour, to design in a more 2D way than the traditional 3D building.

'We were co-creating with the children, and many of them wanted it to be really open-ended,' Lena explains. 'We didn't have to give them much guidance, but rather show different patterns and then they would really start to design by themselves. This was a really positive surprise and showed how intuitive it was.'

Figuring out that the 1x1 tile was a great creative medium was one thing, but deciding exactly how to package that into a set number of products was another matter altogether. There are two distinct product types in the theme's launch wave – bracelets for children to wear, and home décor items that have to be built before being decorated.

'We had a lot of different concepts,' recalls Amy Corbett, the LEGO Senior Design Manager responsible for DOTS. 'We knew that it was really important for kids to show off what they have created, to showcase their personal style and share it with the world. We were always looking for something that made it possible to take LEGO out of the house to the playground, so the bracelet came up quite early on as a really natural way to do that.'

'There were a lot of different iterations of what that bracelet would look like. How you would interact with it – would you build the bracelet? We actually looked at taking the product in two different directions in the beginning. Was it going to be wearables, or was it going to be something that stayed inside the house? We tested the two different directions and the kids actually told us this is one product line.'

The bracelets and the buildable items are an important part of the theme, but

■ ■ WE KNEW THAT IT WAS REALLY IMPORTANT FOR KIDS TO SHOW OFF WHAT THEY'VE CREATED ■ ■

you need to look to its title to find what binds them. DOTS is a word that is now synonymous with the classic 1x1 tiles, which are presented in the sets in an array of LEGO colours. New printed tiles, developed especially for this creativity-infused theme, are included in the bracelet and refill packs.

'We tried a lot of different colours,' Amy says. 'My team has really been focused on the trends – what is happening in fashion right now, what are the trends of the future? How can we bring the colours we already have in LEGO together in a way that feels really new and fresh and different? So we experimented with lots of different colours, trying all the colours in one creation or limiting the colour palette a little bit more, until we got what we feel is a very fresh and new expression. You can see we actually use a lot of colours from the LEGO palette. It's just the way they are combined that makes it feel very different and fresh.'

Given that these pieces are so very, very small, there is an obvious contrast with the House of DOTS, which thanks to its size and distinctive colour scheme is unlikely to go unnoticed by anyone walking through this area of Kings Cross.

'We needed to do something quite different and extraordinary, because when you say LEGO and building with LEGO, people have such a clear idea of what it is,' Lena enthuses. 'Because this is the same but yet so different, we wanted to find an artist who is a symbol of the things we would like to do.'

Enter Camille Walala, the East London-based artist known for her vibrant colours and bold style. She has worked all over the world, going beyond her textile work into art direction and interior design. 'Camille was such an obvious choice,' Lena continues. 'She is quite rebellious as an artist, and all about getting creativity out there for everyone. Her patterns and her colours seemed perfect for us.'





DOTS come in a variety of colours and with new prints.





The first LEGO DOTS products have just hit shelves. Here's what makes up the theme...

BRACELETS

The first wave includes five different bracelets, with unique printed tiles in each pack.



41904 ANIMAL PICTURE HOLDERS

This set builds four stylised blocky animals that can hold photographs.



41905 RAINBOW JEWELLERY STAND

For the LEGO fan with accessories lying around, this stand can be built and then dotted.



419036 PINEAPPLE PENCIL HOLDER

This simple pencil holder build provides four surfaces for dotting – plus a watermelon slice for small accessories.

Today, the infectiously enthusiastic artist is getting to see people react to her work as they leave the House of DOTS. 'I wanted a completely fantasy house where nothing is real, with everything made – almost like a cartoon – with LEGO and LEGO DOTS,' she says. 'All of the furniture inside is quite simple. The idea was for different rooms to be a different experience, a different feel, and using the colour palette and style of pattern to define each room.'

Camille was inspired by the colourful houses of South India, the style of the Memphis Group and Bolivian architect Freddy Mamani. 'I think it is nice with architecture when you don't constrain yourself to a lot of the rules,' she reflects.

Those influences are visible throughout the house, with each room featuring solid colours in playful patterns. Throughout the rooms, LEGO DOTS have been used to tile certain objects – mirror frames have been dotted, lamps have been dotted, the bathroom floor has been dotted... there must have been some sore fingers after all of that clicking.

Figuring out how to use the tiny elements in the expansive space – the house is made up of eight shipping containers – was a challenge for Camille and her team. 'How do you use this pattern, because they are so small?' she posits. 'I thought maybe by using the shape to create the house, to create furniture, to create seating. It was actually quite nice to have the shape to play with. I worked with the style studio to calculate all the pieces of furniture. They needed to match all the little plates, which are smaller squares to be covered by the little dots.'

If there's one group of people who enjoy spending hours and hours with LEGO elements in their hands, it's adult fans. And that's exactly who Camille turned to for the significant amount of tiling that needed to be done.

■ ■ ■ WE ACTUALLY USE A LOT OF COLOURS FROM THE LEGO PALETTE. IT'S THE WAY THEY ARE COMBINED THAT MAKES IT FEEL VERY DIFFERENT AND FRESH ■ ■ ■

'It was great to be part of a team building something big for the launch,' says Caz Mockett, one of the fan builders who was roped in to help. 'It definitely felt like a collaboration between us and the two Master Builders, Libor and Peter from the Kladno Model Shop [in the Czech Republic]. There were problems along the way, but we were all able to contribute ideas and solutions, rather than just being instructed what to do all the time.'

'They had CAD files showing us how the furniture would look with the tiling done in Camille's patterns,' adds Daniele A. Combatti.

The kitchen features a huge number of LEGO plates that are covered in patterns created with 1x1 tiles. This was one area where Daniele and the other adult fans had a little creative freedom. 'Despite being white tiles on white plates, they let us build whatever patterns we wanted, and some of us included references to other LEGO themes and pop culture stuff,' Daniele says. 'I'd challenge anyone visiting to spot them all.'

Guests have the opportunity to try out dotting in the house too. At the kitchen's dining room table, visitors can decorate their own bracelet and wear their creation. Upstairs, a bedroom features a colour palette that matches another selection of tiles that are available for designing on an 8x8 plate. 'Even for us in the studio, the more you can get familiar with the product, the more your creativity expands,' Camille gushes.

For Amy, this event sees her launching an entirely new LEGO theme for the first time, just days before she becomes a familiar face on LEGO MASTERS. DOTS is just the beginning for this type of LEGO creativity through official products – and she sees plenty of potential for it in the future.

'We have the minifigure and the regular building system, and then we have definitely struck on something here, with this new language of decorating and creativity using the tile, and the more 2D design process,' she effuses. 'It's something that we see a lot of opportunities within the company to expand and use in different areas. I'm sure people are going to see a lot more of it in the future.' ■



Price: £149.99, \$179.99, €159.99 / Minifigures: 5 / Pieces: 2,504

10270 BOOKSHOP

The latest chapter in the modular building series has a lot to live up to. Will it be a page-turner?

Words and Pics: Chris Wharfe

THERE ARE ENOUGH INVENTIVE BUILDING TECHNIQUES TO KEEP THINGS FRESH



FEW THEMES – or subthemes – carry the immense weight and expectations of LEGO fans like the modular buildings. The annual releases set the bar high early on, meaning each and every subsequent model has had big shoes to fill. Thankfully, they've mostly hit the mark. Can the Bookshop continue that trend?

We'd love to give you a clear-cut yes or no, but like most things in life, the answer isn't quite that simple. In some ways, 10270 is a delight to put together. For veteran fans, it's a familiar feeling – you know you're assembling a modular building from the moment those first tiles go down – but it's still one that has

enough inventive building techniques to keep things relatively fresh.

The strips of patterned corner tiles comprising the townhouse's roof, the satisfying curvature of the bookshop's top floor façade, and the wraparound construction of the birch tree's base are all highlights of the build, and they're undeniably interesting ways to make the most of the modern part palette. These sets are all about teaching you new ways to use your bricks, and 10270 plays the part in subtle ways. The angled stairs up to the townhouse, for example, are a pertinent reminder that your

builds don't always have to rely on traditional connection methods.

Elsewhere, new takes on old designs show just how versatile the ever-expanding official inventory is: the candle elements introduced in the Wizarding World theme's launch wave bridge the bay window gaps that have plagued this line since 2008's 10185 Green Grocer, and leave the old townhouse from 10210 Pet Shop looking decidedly dated.

Meanwhile, the LEGO Group's apparent need to justify reintroducing teal to its range continues to throw welcome colour schemes our way. The townhouse is a vibrant mash-up

The rear balconies cut into the footprints of the upper floors.



Neither building sticks to the usual storey pattern.



The townhouse's top floor splits into two.



The townhouse's first floor interior.



The stairs incorporate a pentagonal tile.



THE TOWNHOUSE IS HARD TO PLACE IN THE EXISTING STREET

Here's how 10270 lines up next to the two most recent buildings.



of blue hues, contrasted by swathes of bold white. Unfortunately, its lively shades only serve to make the Bookshop's dark flesh and grey combo appear even more muted than it really is, but that's where you'll feel the real benefit of having separate buildings.

It's been nine years since we last had a modular building that could split in two, with 10255 Assembly Square regrettably passing on the opportunity. 10270 rights that wrong, and even crams full interiors into both buildings (something Pet Shop couldn't quite manage back in 2011). There had to be a trade-off to keep 10270 within a reasonable price point, though, and it's come in the form of the diminutive size of the townhouse.

The result is a curious visual effect, as the elegant door and window frames appear oddly oversized against the backdrop of a smaller building. It makes the townhouse hard to place in the existing modular street, because its exaggerated features clash with its more subdued predecessors. Birch Books, on the other hand, blends in almost

VERDICT

This pair of wildly differing modular buildings won't set your LEGO world alight, but they're still commendable additions to the range – provided they aren't your first.

76/100

too easily. It doesn't boast the bombast of the townhouse's architecture, but its flat, understated design works to its advantage in the wider context of the range.

These buildings are essentially polar opposites, then, rather than the complementary pairing on offer in 10210. That makes 10270 a poor jumping-on point for the subtheme, as you'll need a few of the previous buildings to really make the most of it. That's a pretty big issue for such an expensive set, but it's not the only real flaw of the Bookshop.

If you've built any other Creator Expert

sets, you'll know they usually have a trademark 'aha!' moment, where you realise just which part of the build you've been assembling, or discover the maths behind a particularly intricate design. For all its cool techniques, 10270 lacks that moment.

It's a delicate criticism to make of 10270, because for all intents and purposes, this is still a very good LEGO set. And if it didn't have more than a decade's worth of predecessors demanding only the best, we probably wouldn't even be mentioning it. After all, you can't scratch an itch you don't know you have – but that's exactly what the remarkable legacy of this subtheme has given us, and it's hard to say that the Bookshop is sharp enough to solve the problem.

If you're a subtheme completist, you'll still snap it up, and probably feel pretty good about the purchase – particularly as you can split the two buildings across your existing street. But if you're more selective with your modular buildings, you could probably stand to sit this one out. ■

✓ **Pros:** Two separate buildings. / An interesting, if not mind-blowing, build ✗ **Cons:** Townhouse has jarring aesthetics / Bookshop interior is limited

YOU MIGHT ALSO WANT...



10255 ASSEMBLY SQUARE

10255 Assembly Square is the oldest modular building currently available, so you might want to grab that one first. Birch Books looks great next to it, too.

BRICK SPOTLIGHT



The vine-like element used for the townhouse's railings appears in black for the first time. The neutral shade should help it find wider applications in MOCs.

BRICK SPOTLIGHT



The candle element first appeared in 2018, but 10270 ties with the Architecture skyline 21052 Dubai for the most in a single set. There are 28 in the box.

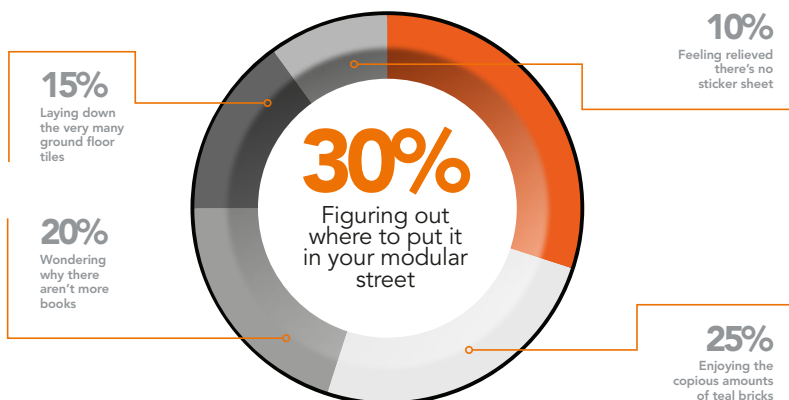
TECHNIQUE SPOTLIGHT



Birch Books' doorway combines 12 1x2 rounded plates to create an inspired stone arch, matching the pillars that brace both the entrance and building.

ESSENTIALS

HOW YOU'LL SPEND YOUR TIME WITH 10270



Price: £34.99, \$39.99, €39.99 / **Minifigures:** 4 / **Pieces:** 456

71702 GOLDEN MECH

NINJAGO's modern mechs are a credible sign of the times, and the perfect fix for Exo-Force fans

Words and Pics: Daniel Konstanski

THE NINJAGO LEGACY series has been a delightful addition to the theme for a variety of reasons, not least because it's rare – beyond Star Wars – for models to get updated. The Golden Mech is a reimagining of a vehicle that was originally included in 2013's 70505 Temple of Light. While it looked fine for its time, this updated version, despite being absent the temple, is a dramatic improvement. 71702 is therefore a fascinating case study in how far building techniques and the part catalogue have come in just seven years.

Any Exo-Force fan will find delight in these

modern mechs, because they also show how far that genre has come. These are the sets we all wanted back then: huge, towering mechs that are armed to the teeth, and far more solid than those first experiments. The Golden Mech is detailed, poseable, comprised of a fabulous colour palette, and still remains true to the original's unique aesthetic. Swap out the minifigures, and it would look right at home in the old 7709 Sentai Fortress.

The Golden Mech's only

weakness is its empty second hand, as the LEGO Group has diverged from its typical formula of a ranged weapon and a melee weapon. It's not a difficult modification, but it would have been great if, for a tiny price

bump, the set had included a second weapon. That said, it's very welcome that the set is dedicated entirely to the single mech, instead of trying to pack in a second model. The number of pieces applied to the mech feels just right.

VERDICT

Fans of NINJAGO, both young and old, will find a lot to love about this set.

80/100



This set showcases how far designers have come in seven years.

Every part was poured into the single model.

Price: £69.99, \$79.99, €79.99 / **Minifigures:** 6 / **Pieces:** 810

71712 EMPIRE TEMPLE OF MADNESS

Breaking the mould from structures of old, NINJAGO's latest temple mixes in a hint of madness

Words and Pics: Daniel Konstanski

VERDICT

A refreshing change of pace for NINJAGO temples, combining a unique aesthetic with serious playability.

80/100

THE AESTHETICS OF NINJAGO have shifted in a radical new direction this year, which at first glance could be off-putting to veteran fans. After all, the colours and general TRON vibe are a far cry from the gorgeous architecture of the theme's usual temples. As it turns out, that's not necessarily a bad thing. While the Empire Temple of Madness isn't the most handsome display piece ever to come out of the theme, it is an exceptional playset with a few interesting techniques and a lot to love – especially for the price.

Anyone who has ever played a videogame is familiar with the boss battle. This set is NINJAGO's boss battle. The key swords that appear across all the sets from this subtheme can be inserted into matching colour slots. While the bottom two are static, the pedestal atop the tower can be turned to flip open the doors at the bottom. With its alternating panels, this doorway is unique among LEGO sets, and the speed with which the mechanism works is startling. It feels very appropriately like a videogame.

Once the door is open, the boss character Unagami can rise from his throne, where he has been overseeing the ninjas' progress through the game on various monitors. He is a very detailed minifigure, and will surely find his way into some TRON builds in the future.

Two identical paths lead to the top of the tower, which each involve arrowed blocks for the ninjas to hop from. Again, it is amazing how the designers have captured the feel of a videogame in a physical model – it looks like something Mario would encounter, just with a very different aesthetic. One side even includes a trap with falling barrels, in a nod to another iconic videogame character.

The Temple of Madness also calls back to another much-loved LEGO theme, Adventurers. Each set in the desert subtheme included another piece of the map, adding another element to the story – and all leading up to the flagship model, 5988 Temple of Anubis. 71712 feels like the equivalent for NINJAGO. Once all the adventures collecting the key swords are complete, the final battle takes place here. For kids, it's the apex of playability.



Price: £29.99, \$29.99, €34.99 / **Minifigures:** 9 / **Pieces:** 218

71708 GAMER'S MARKET

NINJAGO tries something new with its first people pack, but is that enough to make this set extra special?

Words and Pics: Daniel Konstanski

THE LEGO GROUP has recently started releasing 'people packs' in the CITY theme. Set in a location like the mountains or the seaside, it's basically a collection of minifigures with a few small models thrown in to set the tone. However, the purpose of these sets is not the models, but to acquire a bunch of minifigures for the theme. 71708 is NINJAGO's first people pack. Unfortunately, it is a bit of

mixed bag.

The market stalls are fine, though they feel a little bit juniorised thanks to the use of large pieces. It's in the minifigures that things get middling. Of the nine characters included, four are common and fairly ubiquitous in other sets within the line. Two are shopkeepers, and while they have cool face prints and accessories, are not especially

distinctive.

The remaining three have some appeal, most notably Zane in his pink garb. This is also one of the only current sets that includes Nya, and Harumi – the Kill Bill-esque white-haired woman – is highly desirable due to her unique outfit print. If you buy this set, it's going to be for one of those three minifigures.

VERDICT

For a set focused so heavily on minifigures, the characters are surprisingly middling.

64/100



Of the nine minifigures, only three are highly desirable.



This is a NINJAGO people pack.



Price: £44.99, \$49.99, €49.99 / **Minifigures:** 5 / **Pieces:** 518

71711 JAY'S CYBER DRAGON

The world of NINJAGO is home to dozens of dragons, but can delving into the world of computer games refresh its ranks?

Words and Pics: Daniel Konstanski

THE TOY INDUSTRY is a maddening one. Your target audience is constantly aging out of the market, so you have to captivate a host of new imaginations every year. To that end, the LEGO Group releases certain basic sets on a regular basis, so each new generation can have theirs – the base model of a theme, if you will. For NINJAGO, that's dragons.

The cyber dragon's colours match the 2020 aesthetic, and the new wing elements have been employed to resemble a dragonfly, but 71711 isn't trying to reinvent the wheel. It ticks off all the NINJAGO dragon checkboxes: a flexible tail, poseable limbs, chomping teeth, a seat for a ninja, and spring-loaded missiles.

However, it would be wrong to dismiss familiar material as mediocre solely on that basis. While not innovative, 71711 is nonetheless a solid set that boasts an incredible amount of playability and value for

the price. Five detailed minifigures are also nothing to scoff at; you could get just this set and have everything you needed to play quite happily in this digital NINJAGO world. Bottom line, kids will love this set.

For AFOLs, the picture is a bit more complicated, but that has long been the case with NINJAGO. The dragon is well built – there was no skimping

on parts. However, it's not to the level of something you would display on your mantlepiece. The parts selection is good, but not extraordinary.

It really comes down to what you're in the market for. If it's an excellent dragon, and a set that's bursting with playability, then this is an easy recommendation. Otherwise, you can safely steer clear.

VERDICT

A solid entry-level NINJAGO build, but it won't set your LEGO collection on fire.

74/100

An impressive five minifigures are included.



■ **Price:** £44.99, \$49.99, €49.99 / **Minifigures:** 5 / **Pieces:** 576

71699 THUNDER RAIDER

The best of 2020's NINJAGO line-up channels both an earlier set from the theme and, delightfully, an even older and more hallowed model

Words and Pics: Daniel Konstanski

71699 THUNDER RAIDER is the best NINJAGO set of 2020 so far. In the early 2000s, the LEGO Group began experimenting with the Big Bang approach to products with Exo-Force. Giant mechs battled in this theme, and those models, while huge, were limited by the parts available at the time. It was therefore very exciting a few years ago when mechs started showing up in NINJAGO. Designers now have enough experience and specialised parts to make something that feels like the fully-realised successor to Exo-Force. 71699 Thunder Raider could slot right into a rebooted series.

As part of the Legacy series, 71699

technically is a remake. Specifically, it revisits 70723 Thunder Raider from 2014, but it is much improved. Like that earlier offering, it consists of a treaded car and black mech.

What may not be immediately obvious from the box art, or for those who didn't have the previous model, is that the mech can be carried into battle on the back of the car – hence its rising rear. Racing into battle and deploying another vehicle is an undeniably cool play feature.

Thanks to the aesthetic and excellent construction, 71699 also

holds appeal for adults. This is a model that's good enough to display, could be included in a futuristic battle layout, and for those who remember Exo-Force, could be dropped into a collection from that theme with nothing more than a character swap. Five minifigures, nearly 600 parts, and an excellent selection of elements only add to the value.

71699 is an easy recommendation, and belongs in a variety of collections for different reasons. If you only get one NINJAGO set this spring, it should be this one.

VERDICT

A home run set that should appeal to more than just NINJAGO fans.

89/100

■ ■ THE BLACK MECH CAN DEPLOY FROM THE CAR'S REAR ■ ■



The ghostly samurai is a highlight of the set.

Price: £24.99, \$29.99, €29.99 / **Minifigures:** 3 / **Pieces:** 322

71709 JAY AND LLOYD'S VELOCITY RACERS

This type of NINJAGO set is almost a cliché at this point, but can 71709 stand out from the crowd?

Words and Pics: Daniel Konstanski

NINJAGO HAS BECOME a core theme. For the evidence, you need look no further than the fact that it now has its own equivalent to police and fire stations. There are two types of sets that now appear in basically every NINJAGO wave in some form: a dragon, and a mid-priced set that includes two vehicles and three or four minifigures, split between good guys and bad guys. For 2020, the latter has arrived in the form of 71709 Jay and Lloyd's Velocity Racers.

There's nothing wrong with this set, but there's also nothing super interesting or exceptional about it. These types of sets are meant to be entry level for kids just aging out

VERDICT

Does its job well, but that job involves appealing to a very specific audience.

53/100

of the 4+ range. They offer more advanced building techniques, but at a price point and difficulty level that will pull parents in to give NINJAGO a try. In pursuit of that goal, 71709 performs admirably. This is a set that knows exactly what it is and does its job well.

However, there is little here

for older fans, and the TRON-like elongated transparent elements that stick out of the rear of each vehicle are annoying. They make the racers much longer than they need to be, which results in them being a pain to store.

Kids of the right age will find this set satisfying, just as they must have found all the others – the LEGO Group wouldn't stick with it if it wasn't successful. But if you don't fall into the target demographic, don't bother.

The vehicles are inconveniently long.



Price: £34.99, \$39.99, €39.99 / **Minifigures:** 4 / **Pieces:** 419

71710 NINJA TUNER CAR

Cars at this shape and price point have been solid winners in NINJAGO. Can 71710 continue the tradition of excellence?

Words and Pics: Daniel Konstanski

ON PAPER, 71710 Ninja Tuner Car seems like a winner. But the reality is much different. From questionable building techniques and mediocre play features to storage space completely disproportionate to the model's size, Ninja Tuner car is a disappointment.

Car sets of this size have been really cool and fun in the past. NINJAGO has done the formula well, as have Super Heroes, Agents and more. NINJAGO has also done vehicles with blades that pop to excellent effect. If you think about it, this is a pretty gruesome play feature when taken to its logical conclusion. If giant blades like those included in 71710 were to deploy in the real world, the results would be quite graphic. Decapitations aside, it's a great play feature, but it requires two attributes to be enjoyable.

First, the blades should pop out reliably and easily. Unfortunately, they don't with

71710. Instead of a simple spring-loaded mechanism as in previous sets, a turntable has to be rotated in each direction to separately push the blades out, but it doesn't work very well. Second, the effect works best when the blades are somewhat hidden before release. Due to size and colour this was not an option with 71710, so instead of transforming from stealth mode the blades go from vaguely close to the car to slightly further out. In storage mode, the blades also stick so far

out the back that the effect is muted, and it has the additional downside of making the car hard to store.

On top of that, the sides of the vehicle are poorly executed and prone to breaking very easily. 71710's only saving grace is its four minifigures, which are highly detailed and make for easy play. This price point is not worth it just for the minifigures, however, making the Ninja Tuner Car an easy pass.

VERDICT

Fails at its key attribute, making it an easy pass – unless you want the minifigures.

37/100

The car looks cool, but is weak upon closer inspection.



Price: £8.99, \$9.99, €9.99 / **Minifigures:** 1 / **Pieces:** 47-49

NINJAGO ARCADE PODS

The latest line of small NINJAGO sets containing a single figure and accessories feels like it's missing something

Words and Pics: Daniel Konstanski

NINJAGO WAS BUILT on the premise of a single minifigure with accessories. In the very first wave it was the spinners, which allowed competition on the playground, that caused the new line to catch fire. While never reaching that same height, this price point has been reserved in subsequent waves for some sort of kinetic accessory. Since then, an updated spinner, helicopters, gliders and rollers have all been thrown at the wall to see what would

stick. And they all shared a common trait: they did something. These arcade pods, not so much.

They just sit there, as a home for minifigures that are included in multiple other sets in the line. Are kids really hankering for a brick-built closet? Furthermore, these elements are so specialised – the arcade box is a single piece – that

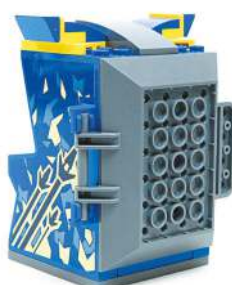
VERDICT

It's hard to think of a reason to buy into the latest gimmick.

32/100

their usefulness is ridiculously limited. They're not scaled to the minifigures, so they can't even be used in an arcade build.

These seem a far cry from the kinetic small sets of NINJAGO past. Even after building all of them, it's hard to tell what the point is.



The lack of scale limits the parts' usefulness.



Price: £24.99, \$29.99, €29.99 / **Minifigures:** 3 / **Pieces:** 286

71713 EMPIRE DRAGON

By now, you generally know what you're getting with a NINJAGO dragon. Will the Empire Dragon continue to toe that line?

Words and Pics: Daniel Konstanski

AT THIS POINT, the LEGO Group has perfected the formula for constructing dragons. 71713 is accordingly well-executed, just like the other dragon released this year – and practically every fire-breathing beast for the past few years. It looks cool, is highly

playable and contains multiple desirable parts. Furthermore, this particular entry utilises the big transparent blades, which have undermined some of the other sets in the theme, to great effect.

The Empire Dragon achieves exactly what

it is supposed to, in that it gives kids new to the theme a fun dragon to play with, while still satisfying veteran fans. Like the constant cycle of fire and police stations in CITY, it puts a new skin on an established design, and contributes another solid entry to the stable.

VERDICT

Ticks all the right boxes for a dragon set, but doesn't push boundaries.

73/100



Unagami, the big bad, matches the dragon.



Price: £8.99, \$9.99, €9.99 / Minifigures: 1 / Pieces: 127

71700 JUNGLE RAIDER

NINJAGO has struggled with small sets in the past. Can the Jungle Raider buck the trend?

Words and Pics: Daniel Konstanski



VERDICT

Forgetting the formula has worked wonders for this pocket money-priced set.

88/100

THE LEGO GROUP has struggled with the sub-£10 set in recent years, and not just in the NINJAGO theme, but across the board. Jungle Raider feels like a breath of fresh air. This is how you make a small set.

The key to this model is simple: it breaks from the rule of including both a bad guy and a good guy in the same set. While that's

a great formula in most circumstances, it can prove a burden too extreme for the pocket money offerings. Dividing a limited part count amongst multiple minifigures and vehicles can leave one or both feeling short-changed. Pouring everything into a single car and minifigure allows for a set with more substance than normal. The results are fantastic.

Jungle Raider is everything a small set should be. It's fun to play with, detailed, and it just looks so speedy. There aren't a lot of play features, other than the cleverly-designed working rear shocks, but there's also no juniorisation here. In fact, Lloyd's car looks detailed enough that it could easily have appeared alongside NINJAGO City.



JUNGLE RAIDER IS ONE OF THE BEST SMALL SETS TO COME OUT IN YEARS



Not including a bad guy frees up parts for the car.

■ **Price:** £17.99, \$19.99, €19.99 / **Minifigures:** 2 / **Pieces:** 217

71707 KAI'S MECH JET

Is it a mech? Is it a jet? Yes and yes – just not at the same time, so keep your expectations in check, and ignore the box art

Words and Pics: Daniel Konstanski

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT: it isn't immediately obvious from the box art, but this set does not transform between a mech and a jet. 71707 channels the Creator formula with multiple instruction manuals – one for each model. If you're expecting something akin to Transformers, you might find yourself a bit disappointed.

Neither of the models are bad, but this isn't an ideal approach to LEGO sets. Each model suffers a bit, because a piece that is absolutely

necessary for one build gets shoehorned into the other, when an alternative option would have been better had the given model stood alone.

The designers have done an admirable job of limiting that here as much as possible, but there's no escaping it altogether as it's a necessity for this type of set. Asking people to keep the extra pieces handy, and take the time to

disassemble and rebuild a different toy with the same parts, has always felt like a tall order.

Kids won't notice the little inconsistencies, and will surely get a lot of play value out of this model. That fact ultimately saves it from getting a lower score, but few fans will be alternating between the two transport options much.

VERDICT

A slightly misleading premise – adjust your expectations accordingly.

64/100

■ ■ **DON'T LET THE NAME DECEIVE YOU – IT'S NOT A MECH JET, BUT A MECH OR A JET** ■ ■



This set is like a Creator model, with multiple instruction manuals.

Price: £64.99, \$79.99, €69.99 / Minifigures: 8 / Pieces: 882

80104 LION DANCE

The LEGO Group's focus on the Chinese market is reaping dividends for the rest of us

Words and Pics: Chris Wharfe

VERDICT

Much like its bigger brother, this Chinese New Year set will stand out on LEGO Store shelves for all the right reasons.

91/100



THE CHINESE NEW Year sets exist in a strange vacuum among the LEGO Group's wider line-up. Almost as if to illustrate that point, they're nigh-on impossible to find on LEGO.com without typing their set numbers into the search bar, because they don't carry any theme branding. And perhaps in reflection of that odd inventory tic, the physical models also feel disconnected from the rest of the product assortment – in all the best ways.

For one, there are no stickers in either Lion Dance or 80105 Chinese New Year Temple

Fair, even for elements in different colours bearing the same decoration. That's one of the most forgivable uses of stickers imaginable, but the LEGO Group has refused to cut costs on these sets all round. And that's also true of the design work that's been put into them. If you were pressed to place these sets into another theme, it could well be Creator Expert.

That's not necessarily indicative of the building complexity here, because 80104 still says 8+ on the box. But the sheer attention to detail, inventive part usage and number of

small parts positions Lion Dance in unfamiliar territory for a set targeted to that age range. The lion heads in particular can prove fiddly to build, but you'll be too busy marvelling at their construction to notice, with bananas, frogs and plant pots all incorporated into the genius design.

That goes some way to alleviating the repetitive assembly required for the five lions, which are almost entirely identical beyond a few colour swaps. Helpfully, they're also staggered throughout the instruction manual,

Are you supposed to hold fireworks like that?



interrupted by the platform of pillars – which is used by the acrobats during traditional lion dance performances – and the percussion stage. The pillars are surprisingly sturdy, locked in using a combination of clips and studs, while the musical segment makes smart use of a wheel for the drum.

The final supplementary build creates a symmetrical temple gate, which is the strongest indicator that this set would be at home in the LEGO Group's most complex themes. Again, the techniques used aren't mind-blowing, but they incorporate so many elements in fresh ways – including golden frogs (there are 22 of the amphibians in total), flame yellowish orange ingots, and the new 1x1 bows – that you can't help but be

enthralled.

Eight minifigures are included in the box, though many more legs will spill out of

■ ■ LION DANCE IS IN UNFAMILIAR TERRITORY FOR A SET TARGETED TO THE 8+ AGE RANGE ■ ■

the bags, with each lion using two pairs to represent the costumed dancers. Fortunately, the stars of the show aren't solely relegated

to leg appearances, as a single standalone dancer is included, with his lower limbs matching those used in the red lions. But there's a more obvious standout minifigure here: the costumed character marking the Chinese Year of the Rat. The brand new headgear is evocative of the Collectible Minifigures mascots, and surely destined to be a favourite of collectors.

In an age of tried and tested – and often predictable – themes, the Chinese New Year line feels like a breath of fresh air. 80104 offers incredible value for money, an engaging build experience, and a final model that's so unlike anything the LEGO Group has ever created. It probably won't stick around for long, so make sure you don't miss out. ■

Ratman, China's most popular superhero.



You'll still be impressed by these even after you've built five.



The dream percussionists' stage: nobody's left holding the tambourine.



The Mayor's scarf is new in red.



Price: £89.99, \$119.99, €99.99 / Minifigures: 13 / Pieces: 1,664

80105 CHINESE NEW YEAR TEMPLE FAIR

Can the largest Chinese New Year set to date help to ring in the decade in style? The short answer is: yes

Words and Pics: Chris Wharfe

OF THE TWO sets released this year for Chinese New Year, 80105 just about takes the biscuit. But as you'll know if you've read our review of 80104 Lion Dance overleaf, it's a close-run thing. Just like that set, the Temple Fair incorporates stunning architecture, innovative build techniques, and a bevy of printed elements. Only this time, it does so with even more detail, an even greater variety of colours, and an even wider range of must-have parts.

Things kick off with one of the two cherry blossom trees, which will feel brand new

regardless of how many previous official LEGO trees you've constructed. Their closest relative would (appropriately) be the foliage protruding from 70620 NINJAGO City, but the red flowers, hanging lanterns and banners make the Chinese New Year trees distinct.

You'll then move on to the market stalls, and while they're each built on a similar hinged template, they're remarkably varied builds. That's partly because where they share design elements, such as their roofs or pillars, they don't share colours – so, like the lions of 80104, they still feel fresh. And those shared

designs are pretty rare anyway, with three unique roof patterns across the four stalls, each more inspired than the last.

However, the variety also comes into play in the details packed into each of the stalls. As you go along, you'll populate the market with stuffed animals, steamed buns, figurines, fireworks, waffles, vases, balloons and a barbecue, to name just a few examples. It's not often a set can delight parts junkies with every new bag opened, but 80105 just about manages it. That's not solely thanks to its litany of printed pieces – there are plenty of



One of several brilliant roof designs.



80105 is a great source of LEGO animals.



interesting structural elements alongside the decorative ones – but it's still refreshing to not have to wrestle with a sticker sheet.

The eponymous temple is where things falter, if only temporarily. Constructing the four identical bushes at the base is painstaking, particularly as the leaf elements are tricky to align on the surprisingly inflexible flower stems. That said, it's still rewarding to see them come together, and the results look great. The same principle applies to the roof – it's repetitive, but the new 1x1 bows are oddly satisfying to lay down, perhaps owing to how

smooth they are. Lining them up can be fiddly, though, so this is definitely 80105 at its most grating.

Ultimately, it's a blip you may not even remember by the time the full structure is finished, particularly given the innovative construction on display elsewhere in the temple. It all assembles into a beautiful slice of Chinese architecture, the likes of which the LEGO Group has rarely tackled in the past – at least with this level of

care and detail.

And when you bring the full, sprawling display of the Chinese New Year Temple Fair together, complete with its 13 minifigures and a baby – many of which feature notable recoloured elements – it's impossible not to be impressed by what's in front of you. Just like 80104 Lion Dance, this is a set with no cut corners, no lack of attention to detail, and absolutely no reason to not pick it up. ■

VERDICT

A home run model by any metric. Just imagine if every LEGO set was given this kind of attention.

96/100

The market stalls are connected by strings of lanterns.

Barbecue, anyone?

Those tiles, like all decorated elements in this set, are printed.

These vases use nipple plates, BB-8 heads and plant pots.

■ ■ IT ALL ASSEMBLES INTO A BEAUTIFUL SLICE OF CHINESE ARCHITECTURE ■ ■

BECOMING A LEGO PRO

There's more than one way to turn your hobby
into a career. Just ask the professionals

Words: Chris Wharfe

Pics: Robin Sather, Ryan McNaught, Dirk Denoyelle, Rene Hoffmeister



Certified
Professional



The first wave of
LCPs at LEGO HQ
in Enfield, 2006.
(L-R) Dan Parker,
Robin Sather,
Nathan Sawaya,
and Sean Kenney.





Dirk Denoyelle,
the LCP for
Belgium.

IF YOU'RE READING this magazine, chances are you've wondered what it's like to work with LEGO for a living. Generally, the dream job involves uprooting to Billund and working for the LEGO Group directly. But that's not the only way avid AFOLs can turn their hobby into a career. If you prefer being your own boss, there's always the LEGO Certified Professionals (LCP) program.

Even if you're not intimately familiar with the LCP program, you might have heard of one or two of its members. Probably the most famous name among the mix is Nathan Sawaya, the lawyer-turned-LEGO artist behind multiple touring brick exhibitions. His iconic sculptures, including a whole host of superhero characters, are a perfect example of what LCPs do.

As you can probably guess, LEGO Certified Professionals work with bricks in a professional capacity, whether for the LEGO Group, a third party client, or themselves. What sets them apart from other people doing the same thing is the official stamp of approval from the Danish company. They aren't employees in

■ ■ WE BRING THE JOY OF LEGO TO MORE PEOPLE, IN MORE PLACES ■ ■

the traditional sense – rather, they're simply trusted business partners.

'I envision LCPs as an extension of the Group,' explains Robin Sather, the man who first brought the LCP program to life more than 15 years ago. 'I see us doing things that the LEGO Group does not have a mandate for, and/or the resources to do. We bring the joy of LEGO to more people, in more places, and in more ways than the LEGO Group has the desire or ability to do so.'

Helene Techert, Head of Market Integration and Engagement at the LEGO Group, echoes that sentiment. 'LCPs are a valuable partner to us, and help us realise a lot of creative projects that we are not able to do ourselves,' she says. 'With 20 LCPs spread across the globe, it's possible for us to work on local projects, with an LCP adding local relevance and authenticity to our marketing activities.'

To date, those local projects have included the likes of LEGO MASTERS, which has utilised the talents of LEGO Certified Professionals for each of its regional spin-offs, and the Rebuild the World advertising campaign, which required the building skills of three European LCPs. In China, meanwhile, Wei Wei Shannon Gluckman – the only current female LCP – is currently helping the company to increase its market presence through a series of hands-on workshops.

Dirk Denoyelle's 3D map of Almere in the Netherlands took his team six months to build, using 1.5 million bricks.





A sample of Robin's work as an LCP, including a giant DUPLO strawberry.



The LEGO Group hasn't always had this wealth of dedicated builders to call upon, though. Rewind the clock by 15 years, and the LEGO Certified Professionals program was only just beginning to get off the ground, following months of collaboration between Robin and a couple of key figures from the LEGO Group's community engagement team in the early 2000s.

EARLY DAYS

The story begins with the Vancouver LEGO Club, one of the early LEGO User Groups to emerge from Canada. Robin played a key role in establishing the club, and in its earliest days, focused on organising events for members to display their builds. But it turned out to be a double-edged sword: while his hobby allowed him some relief from his day job in IT consulting, it also ate into his spare time, and eventually his working hours.

'I realized that something was going to have to change,' he recalls. 'Either I would have to cut back on my LEGO club activity, or I could find a way to monetise it, and make at least a partial living doing something LEGO-related. I chose to pursue the latter.'

Ultimately, it was the events Robin had spent so much time organising that provided the initial spark of an idea. 'We would go to a shopping mall, and display our stuff, run a train layout, and not do much more, but people would be lined up out the door. The mall would see a huge bump in foot traffic.

The management, and the merchants, would be ecstatic. I realised that malls, museums, family attractions, and other venues would pay money for these kinds of events. And that was the start of it for me.'

From there, Robin launched his company Brickville DesignWorks, along with two partners who have since bowed out. And as he began to grow the business – taking on commissions, exhibiting at public events, and even running kids'



Robin working on a model of the Bank of China for a Hong Kong exhibit.

■ ■ WE ARE ALL ENTREPRENEURS, AND WITH THAT COMES ALL THE ASPECTS OF RUNNING A BUSINESS ■ ■

workshops – he saw the potential for something greater.

'It seemed like a big win for the LEGO Group to have me out doing this sort of thing, especially since it didn't cost the company anything,' he explains. 'But I knew that TLG would have concerns about protecting its brand, and would always want to make sure that any public presentation of LEGO creations, bricks, and concepts lined up with the company's core values and high level of quality.'

At the same time, Robin's vision for this new era of collaboration yielded benefits for LUG members, too. 'There was a lot to be gained by clubs getting some support from LEGO for events and activities, and also being able to communicate directly with the company. I envisioned having specific people put forth by the clubs, and then approved by TLG, to be LEGO ambassadors.

'So, with all this in mind, I wrote up a white paper, detailing how a formal relationship between the LEGO Group and qualified entrepreneurs like me could be a win-win for everyone, as well as the public, who would have the opportunity for more LEGO love in more places, and more often.'

Robin pitched his white paper to community team members Jake McKee and Tormod Askildsen in February 2004, at Brickfest PDX in Portland, Oregon. 'It was a great meeting, and both were excited at the ideas. So began several months of working together to create these new programs. It was 2005 before we were all ready to go.'

THE FINE PRINT

Robin couldn't take on the mantle of LEGO Certified Professional all by himself, but only a handful of people were running LEGO businesses back in 2005. From those he pitched, three ended up joining him in the first wave of LCPs: Nathan Sawaya, Sean Kenney and Dan Parker. And the initial quartet quickly found

A giant super robot Robin built for a charity event.





Ryan McNaught, the LCP for Australia.

that having an official link to the LEGO Group helped make their work more authoritative – just as it does for the 20 LCPs operating today.

‘Some have utilised the ‘LCP’ brand more than others,’ Robin explains. ‘Others have focused more on developing their own brand, but they’ve certainly still received a lot of benefit from having the LCP moniker. For me, it is definitely important. My clients want a ‘LEGO presence’ at their events, and for the many local and regional events that make up most of my activity, the LCP branding and tagging is really the only way to achieve that.’

While the LEGO Group has taken complete ownership of the program and streamlined it over the years, it’s not a case of simply including the branding on your business. Becoming a LEGO Certified Professional involves maintaining a close relationship with the Danish company, and in turn, adhering to its brand values.

‘We sign a lengthy contract, which includes guidelines and standards for how we should be running various business operations and model production, as well as the types of activities we undertake,’ Robin says. ‘It also lays out the areas of subject matter that are okay, maybe all right, and definitely a no-go. We also pay an annual licence fee, which surprises most people.’

That contract is over 80 pages long, and includes over a dozen appendices – so it’s not surprising to find that it can be restrictive. Dirk Denoyelle, a Belgian comedian who specialises in portrait sculptures, says it’s the one major downside of LCP recognition. ‘It’s very one-sided,’ he explains. ‘There is a lot of stuff that we are not allowed to do, which would not be so bad, if it weren’t for the fact that AFOLs don’t have those limitations.’

From the LEGO Group’s side, the contract is more of a template than a set of constraints. ‘LCPs have their own businesses and we are one of their many business partners,’ Helene explains. ‘The contract provides a framework for LCPs, and I’m merely a sparring partner to them. LCPs work with the local LEGO office, and here the collaboration is more project-specific. They are given briefs, and at times they are also involved in concept creation.’

For Robin, it simply circles back to that idea of giving authority to brick-based businesses. ‘LCPs, who agree to be trained and certified in LEGO standards, methodologies, and quality levels, bring their game to a higher level, and gain the blessing and credibility of the LEGO Group,’ he says. ‘It’s a win for both.’

A DREAM JOB

A common misconception surrounding LEGO Certified Professionals is that they spend their entire day building, but the reality is much different – largely due to the commercial aspect the role naturally entails.

■ ■ THE FIRST YEARS ARE ALL ABOUT DREAMS COMING TRUE ■ ■

‘We are all entrepreneurs,’ Robin says. ‘And with that comes all the aspects of running a business – marketing, accounting, personnel management, and general operations. Then there’s the ordering, receiving, and shipping of LEGO bricks, creations, and all the stuff that’s needed to run events, manage exhibits, and more. We have to do it all.’

Unless, of course, you have staff to help you. Rene Hoffmeister, the founder of German LEGO fan website 1000steine.de, became the first European LCP in 2008. And he’s since grown his operation to include a number of employees. ‘There is a lot of paperwork to do, as in every business, but I get a lot of help via my project manager,’ he says. ‘I also have an inventory manager, who keeps track of the materials, where they’re stored, what needs to be ordered and such.’

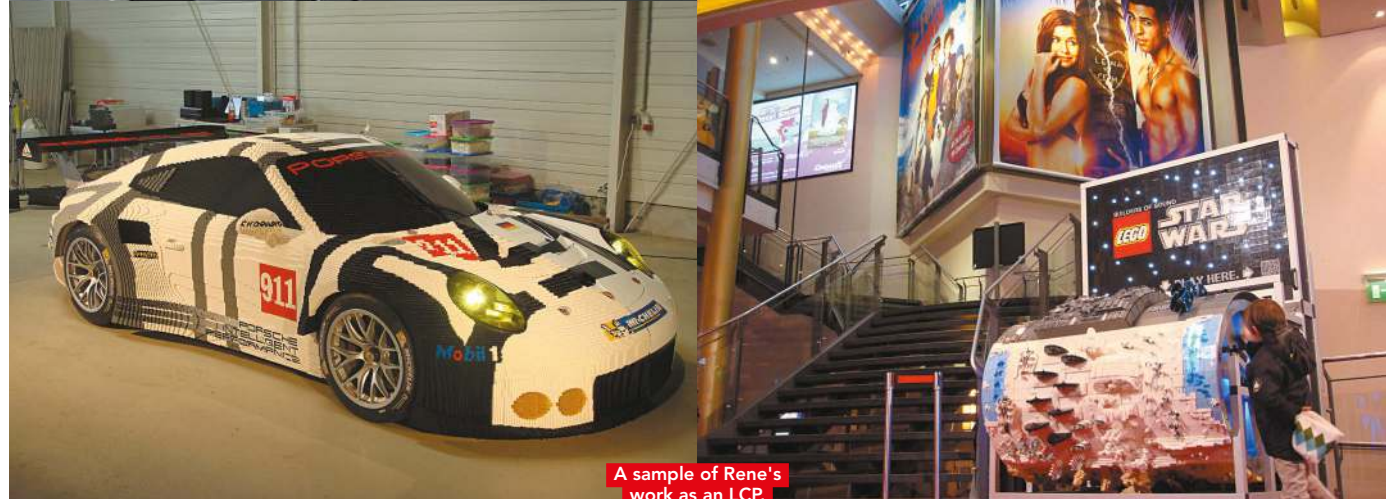
It’s not uncommon for an LCP to have their own staff, but not all choose to do so. ‘Some LCPs, like me, have stayed small, and prefer to be one-man operations,’ Robin explains. ‘Others have grown into major operations, with large, advanced model shops, lots of employees, and the ability to create massive and impressive pieces.’



A sample of Ryan's work as an LCP, including a May the Fourth event.



Ryan's team built this life-sized Honda for LEGO MASTERS.



If you fall into the former camp, you might find the reality of being an LCP quite different to your expectations. 'The first years are all about dreams coming true,' Dirk acknowledges. 'In my case the access to tonnes of bricks was not new, but the recognition and the 'title' really gave me a thrill.

'Today, the day-to-day burdens of running a business, having not enough time for actual creativity and having to spend too much time solving issues of whatever nature, kind of lays a shadow on the brightness of the brick. But then again, when I do get a chance to build and create, it always gets me back on track.'

Dirk isn't alone in that experience, however. 'Like any job – and I've been an LCP for a while now – you go through peaks and troughs,' says Ryan McNaught, the only LEGO Certified Professional in the southern hemisphere. 'I still love LEGO, and I'm still learning about what the brick can do every day. Over the last few years since being involved with LEGO MASTERS, my relationship has changed a bit, in that I'm often more talking about LEGO than doing LEGO.'

When LCPs do get the opportunity to go hands-on with their bricks, it could take the form of anything from a huge commissioned build to a small make-and-take model – and everything in between. For LEGO MASTERS Australia, Ryan spent 1,000 hours designing and constructing a life-sized Honda Civic. Dirk has constructed dozens of brick portraits, including commissions for Ed Sheeran and the Dutch royal family. And Rene has broken several LEGO records, including the longest ship and largest bridge in the world – but it's a decidedly different project that sticks out most in the German LCP's mind.

'The weirdest thing we've ever built was a working Star Wars-themed music box,' he recalls. 'We built a series of Star Wars landscapes on a large cylinder, with different towers at certain points. When rotating the cylinder, these towers



LCPs take on a wide range of commissions, including this brick sculpture by German LCP Rene Hoffmeister.

■ ■ THE CONNECTION TO THE LEGO GROUP IS WHAT MAKES THE LCP PROGRAM SPECIAL. THEY ARE THE ONLY PROFESSIONALS WE ENGAGE WITH ■ ■

pushed little levers, each playing a specific key on a real keyboard, which played the original Star Wars movie theme.'

FUTURE THINKING

The LEGO Certified Professionals program has come a long way since Robin's initial pitch in 2004. With the addition of Graeme Dymond to the roster in late 2019, there are now 20 LCPs operating around the world. And that number will only continue to grow, in line with the needs of the LEGO Group.

'We select LCPs when there is a demand from a local LEGO office,' Helene explains. 'It's important to us that the local LEGO office is engaged and interested in an LCP and their unique talent. The connection to the LEGO Group is what makes the LCP program special, as they are the only professionals we engage with, as they fulfill our strict safety and quality requirements.

'Safety is very important to us, and we therefore spend a lot of time talking about safety and best practices to learn what capabilities and safety understanding the person holds. The LCP title is personal, and we want to ensure that the energy and connection between the person and the local LEGO office is good, and that they understand and live by our brand values.'

It's clear that the relationship between the LEGO Group and LEGO Certified Professionals is what underpins the entire program. And while it's not without its restrictions, it does illustrate a viable – if mostly exclusive – way to make a living out of LEGO that doesn't involve relocating to Denmark. ■

An enormous Mickey Mouse installation built by Rene.



To find out more about the current roster of LEGO Certified Professionals, head to www.lego.com/en-gb/aboutus/lego-group/programs-and-visits.

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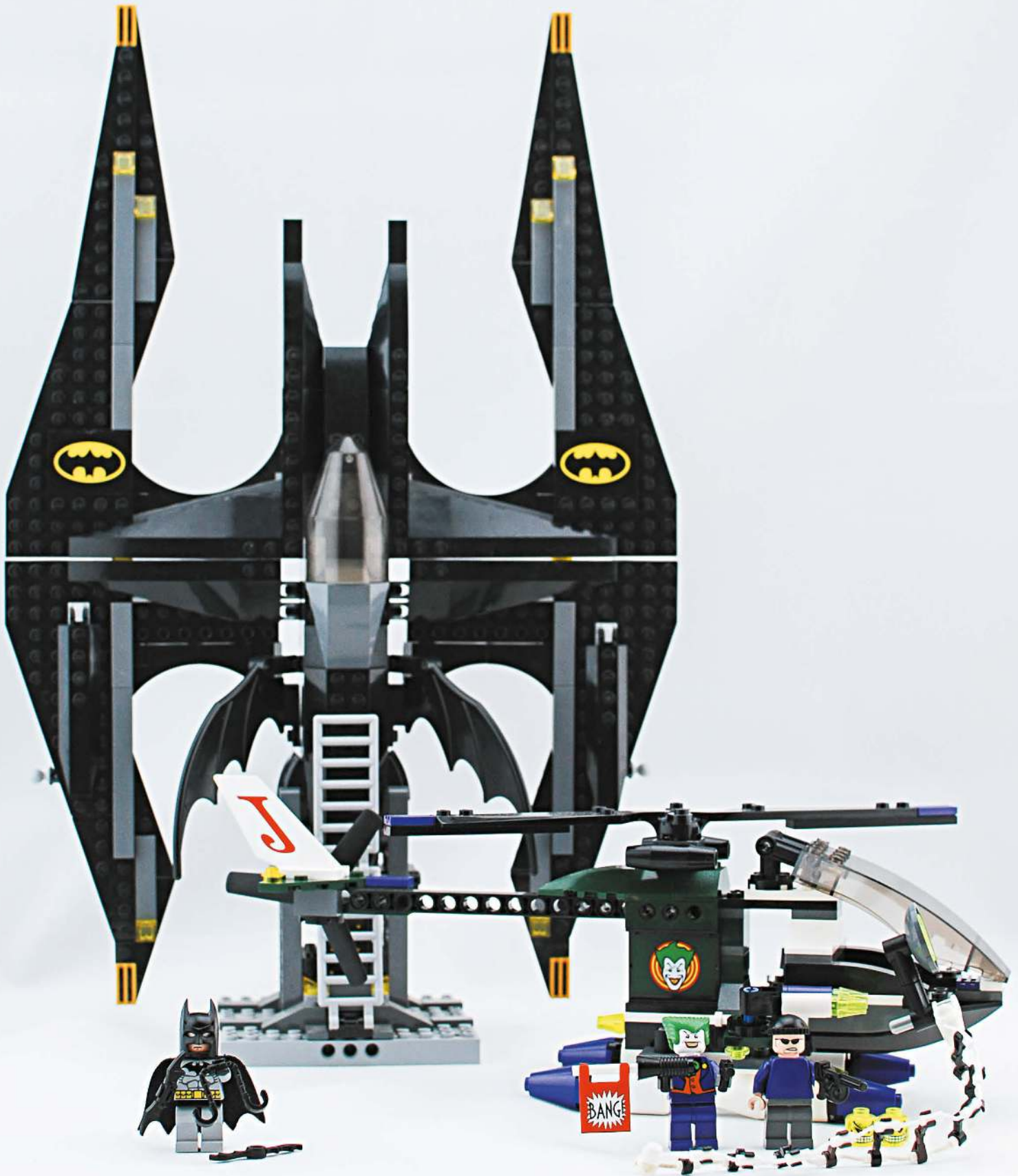
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BUILDING BLOCKS

THE HISTORY OF THE LEGO GROUP: THE 2000s

The most tumultuous time in the company's history is a tale of two extremes

Words: Daniel Konstanski **Pics:** The LEGO Group

IT WAS THE best of times, it was the worst of times.' So begins Charles Dickens' famous novel *A Tale of Two Cities*, but the quote also perfectly describes the state of the LEGO Group at the turn of the millennium. The year 2000 saw the LEGO brick selected as Toy of the Century by both *Fortune* magazine and the British Association of Toy Retailers. At the same time, the lack of a new *Star Wars* movie meant that sales of the company's only big seller fell precipitously.

New to the licensing game, the LEGO Group had not anticipated this and was forced to respond by laying off employees, among whom were the old guard – the standard-bearers who held the institutional knowledge of what had once made the company great. In another sign of the times, the US moulding plant in Enfield closed that same year, followed by the Neuhof factory in Switzerland less than a year later.

The brick was loved the world over, but the company that made it was on the brink of financial ruin. The decade of the 2000s is the story of near fatal disaster, followed by one of the most astonishing business turnarounds of our generation. The depth of the fall was exceeded only by the resounding speed and completeness of the LEGO Group's resurgence.

The '00s have been scrutinised by the outside world more than any other period in the company's history. We discussed in last issue's instalment how, as an institution, the LEGO Group began to lose its way in the '90s. The rise of digital leisure tools such as videogames,

more extensive children's programming, and smart toys threw doubt on whether physical playthings could remain relevant. That fear still permeates the toy industry as a whole, and the LEGO Group still wrestles with it to this day.

However, the strategy now is very different from what it was then. Today, the company seeks to find ways to integrate digital play and have it coexist in synergy with the brick. At the dawn of the new millennium, the strategy was instead to diminish the brick's role, in favour of leveraging the company's well-known brand to gain entry into new markets and expand its customer base. The result was a host of products that nobody wanted. In 2001, it had been seven years since the LEGO Group had produced a toy that cracked the list of top 20 sellers in the US.

Products that nobody wants are a death sentence in the toy industry. More than almost any other consumer goods industry, turnover is the defining mark of the toy game. Retailers have limited shelf space, and that was especially true in the early 2000s when online shopping was still in its infancy. A single product displaces any number of other

■ ■ PRODUCTS THAT NOBODY WANTS ARE A DEATH SENTENCE IN THE TOY INDUSTRY ■ ■

options that could be stocked. Toys that don't sell are quickly removed, often after as little as six weeks if they fail to prove themselves. The failures are relegated to the toy industry's hall of shame: the discount bin, alternatively known as the place toys go to die.

In a few short years, the LEGO Group's products had gone from sure performers to a backlog of unsold products that retailers had to figure out how to offload. They were not happy, and the LEGO Group's financials fell deeply into the red. The company was adrift, having lost its way.

Two product lines saved the Danish giants from the abyss. Not because they singlehandedly returned the company to profitability – that requires a large volume of products performing well across multiple market segments – but because they brought in enough cash to keep the boat afloat while management figured out a path forward. Those product lines were, of course, Star Wars and BIONICLE.

We recounted last issue how Star Wars was anathema to the perceived ethos of the company, and how Kjeld Kirk had to personally intervene to make the licensing deal happen. BIONICLE was also a radical departure, but for different reasons. First, it was a revolutionary take on the iconic System range that had defined the company. However, despite not having a stud or tube to its parts catalogue, BIONICLE retained the essential elements of the System. Building was complex, and all the various

Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen and Jørgen Vig Knudstorp at the 2008 Nuremberg Toy Fair, celebrating the 50th anniversary of the LEGO Brick.



A 2004 press conference introducing Jørgen Vig Knudstorp as the new LEGO CEO. From Left: Jesper Ovesen, Jørgen Vig Knudstorp, Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen and Mads Øvlisen.



THE HISTORY OF LEGO

Sales of Harry Potter sets were one of the few highpoints in the early 2000s.



parts worked with all the others. The pieces looked different, but they worked together in the same way as regular bricks. Kjeld Kirk correctly predicted that it would work when he said, 'Parents may not identify it immediately as LEGO, but kids will.'

Despite that radically different look, the second attribute was an even greater change. BIONICLE was almost entirely devoid of what the toy industry calls inherent 'play value'. Play value refers to whether a toy can be enjoyed and successfully interacted with by a child, even if that child knows nothing about the story that toy exists in. LEGO products had always been overflowing with play value; they had to be, as the company almost never placed its products in anything more than a meagre outline of a story.

It worked because a child could pick up a LEGO set and it was immediately apparent what you were supposed to do with it. Even a licensed character like Buzz Lightyear can have play value – you don't need to have seen the movie to get a sense of how to play with him. BIONICLE, however, was essentially worthless without the story. Pick

■■ THE RESULT LEFT THE BUSINESS WORLD WITH ITS COLLECTIVE JAW ON THE FLOOR ■■

one of those bizarre figures up without knowing the world it came from, and you would have no idea what to do with it. The gamble paid off because kids ended up loving the story, and the LEGO Group invested heavily in it.

In fact, the common trait of both Star Wars and BIONICLE was their story, and the LEGO Group learned that lesson well. The money made from those two lines couldn't prevent losses over the next several years, but they did blunt the extent of those losses to avoid total catastrophe. In 2002, Jørgen Vig Knudstorp – a new employee hired just a year earlier from a business consulting agency – was tasked with the thankless assignment of reviewing the company's situation, and laying out for the Board of Directors where the LEGO Group stood.

He did so against the will of his boss Poul Ploughmann, who didn't agree with Jørgen's analysis. However, his assessment was a turning point. He foresaw that 2003 would be a disaster, and that prophecy came to pass. The LEGO Group nearly filed for bankruptcy in 2004.

In business, management often chooses to shoot the messenger. Rather than accept responsibility for poor leadership of a company, it is far easier to malign the person pointing out such mistakes. Thankfully, Kjeld Kirk did not follow this pattern. Instead of minimising Jørgen's assessment, he promoted him to CEO, firing Poul Ploughmann from his role as COO at the same time. Together with another newly-minted

manager – Jesper Ovesen, in the role of CFO – Jørgen and Kjeld Kirk formed a leadership triad that would get the LEGO Group back on track.

Alas, there isn't space here to go into all the details of how they did it – books have literally been written on that subject. The summary is that they reinstated the brick to its former place of primacy, but also paired it with an emphasis on storytelling, both through licensing and developing extensive internal themes. As the decade went on, that storytelling would expand to multiple aspects of media, including comic books, TV shows, internet web portals, videogames, and more. Most importantly, the products became desirable once more – fun to build, and brimming with detail and size.

The result left the business world with its collective jaw on the floor. In the year 2000, the LEGO Group lost \$120 million. In 2004, the deficit reached \$297 million. A mere two years later, in 2006, profits soared to \$207 million. That same year, Jørgen Vig Knudstorp was named Denmark's best business leader for his role in bringing the LEGO Group back from the brink. That's not bad for a CEO who was largely

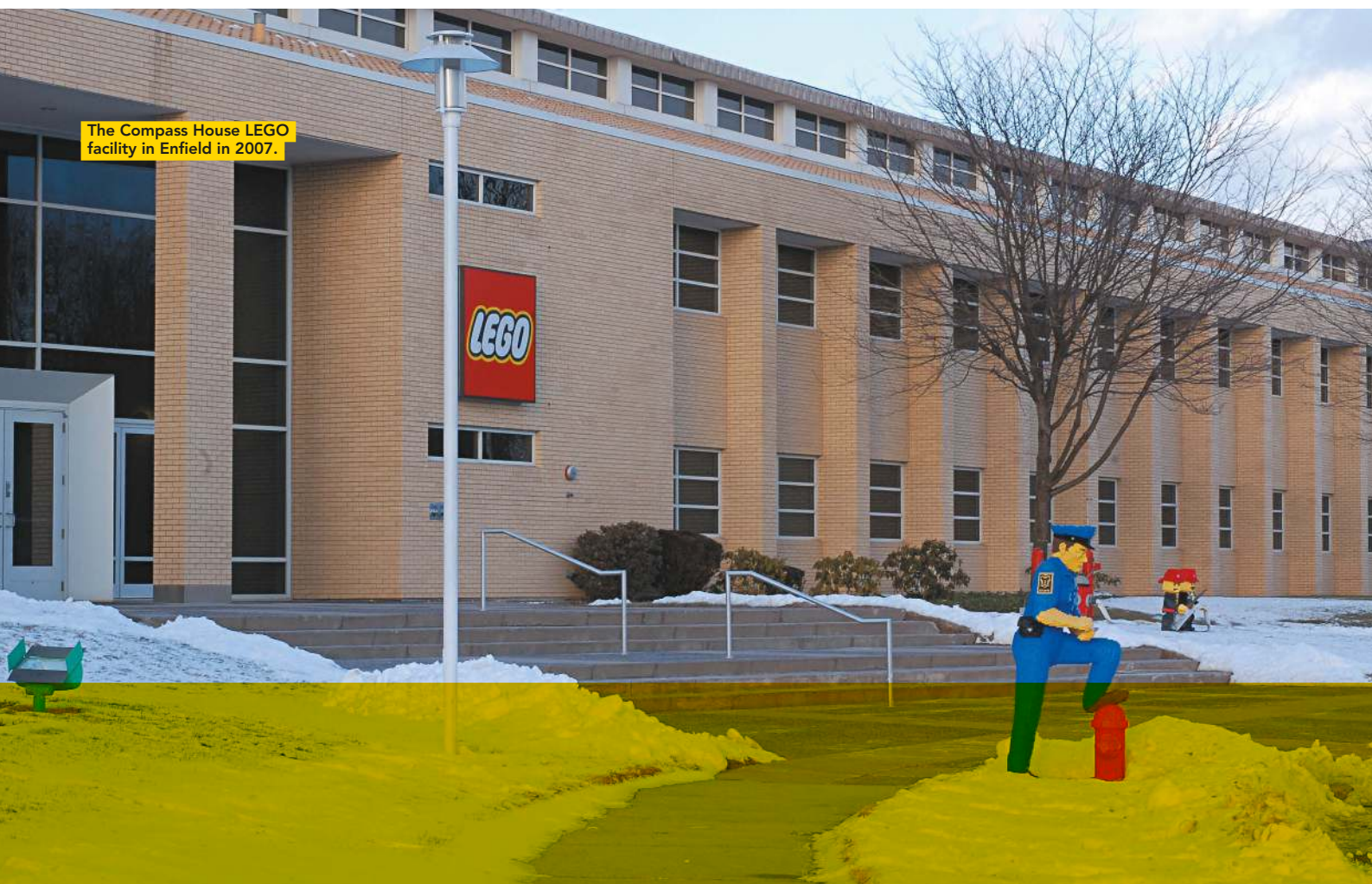
■ ■ THE MODULAR BUILDING SUBTHEME BEGAN IN 2007 WITH 10190 MARKET STREET AND 10182 CAFÉ CORNER ■ ■

dismissed by the business community when he was handed the reigns, as everyone assumed he did not have enough experience to right the ship.

A host of memorable product lines – many of which survive to this day, or continue to influence current lines – came into being in the 2000s. The modular building subtheme began in 2007 with 10190 Market Street and 10182 Café Corner. Exo-Force pioneered the beginnings of the 'big bang' approach that would lead to NINJAGO. An early Batman line tested the waters and proved that superhero products would sell – an experiment that positioned the LEGO Group to secure the rights to Marvel and DC Comics just as the Marvel Cinematic Universe was taking off, allowing the company to get in on that phenomenon at precisely the right time. The list could go on.

The LEGO Group began the 2000s in the midst of a crisis more dire than any of the fires that had physically threatened the company in years past. In 2004 the financial meltdown nearly burned the company to the ground, but thankfully it survived, and enacted such an amazing turnaround that by 2010 it was thriving. While the next decade would certainly contain its share of bumps in the road, that success has continued right up to the present day. ■

The Compass House LEGO facility in Enfield in 2007.



8534 Tahu, launched in 2001, was part of the inaugural BIONICLE wave.

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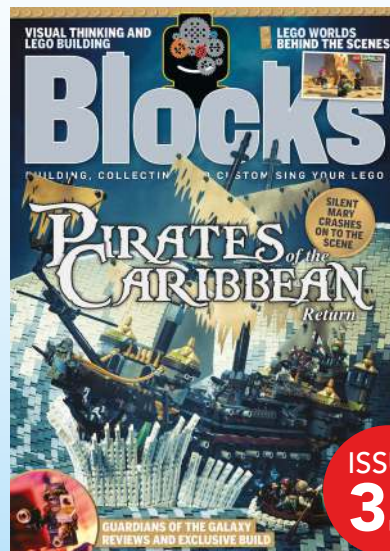
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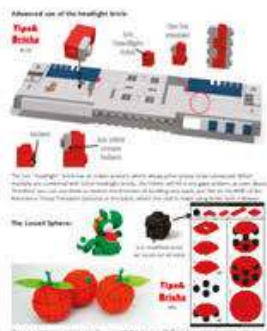


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Across

2. Latest LEGO Ideas set, second word (5)
 6. 1x1 tiles applied to bracelets (4)
 9. Not only Fast (7)
 10. Acronym for a fan group (3)
 11. Latest LEGO Ideas set, first word (13)
 12. Material early LEGO toys were made from (4)

Down

1. Next supercar for Technic (11)
 3. The C in LCP (9)
 4. Often used as gift with purchase (7)
 5. Theme with new storybook sets (6)
 7. Latest LEGO Ideas set, third word (7)
 8. Musical characters on tour (6)

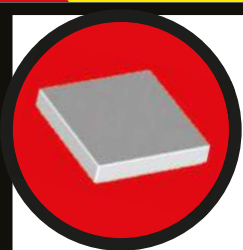
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Answers
 Across: 2) Space, 6) DOTS, 9) Furious, 10) LUG, 11) International, 12) Wood
 Down: 1) Lamborghini, 3) Certified, 4) polybag, 5) Disney, 7) Station, 8) Trolls



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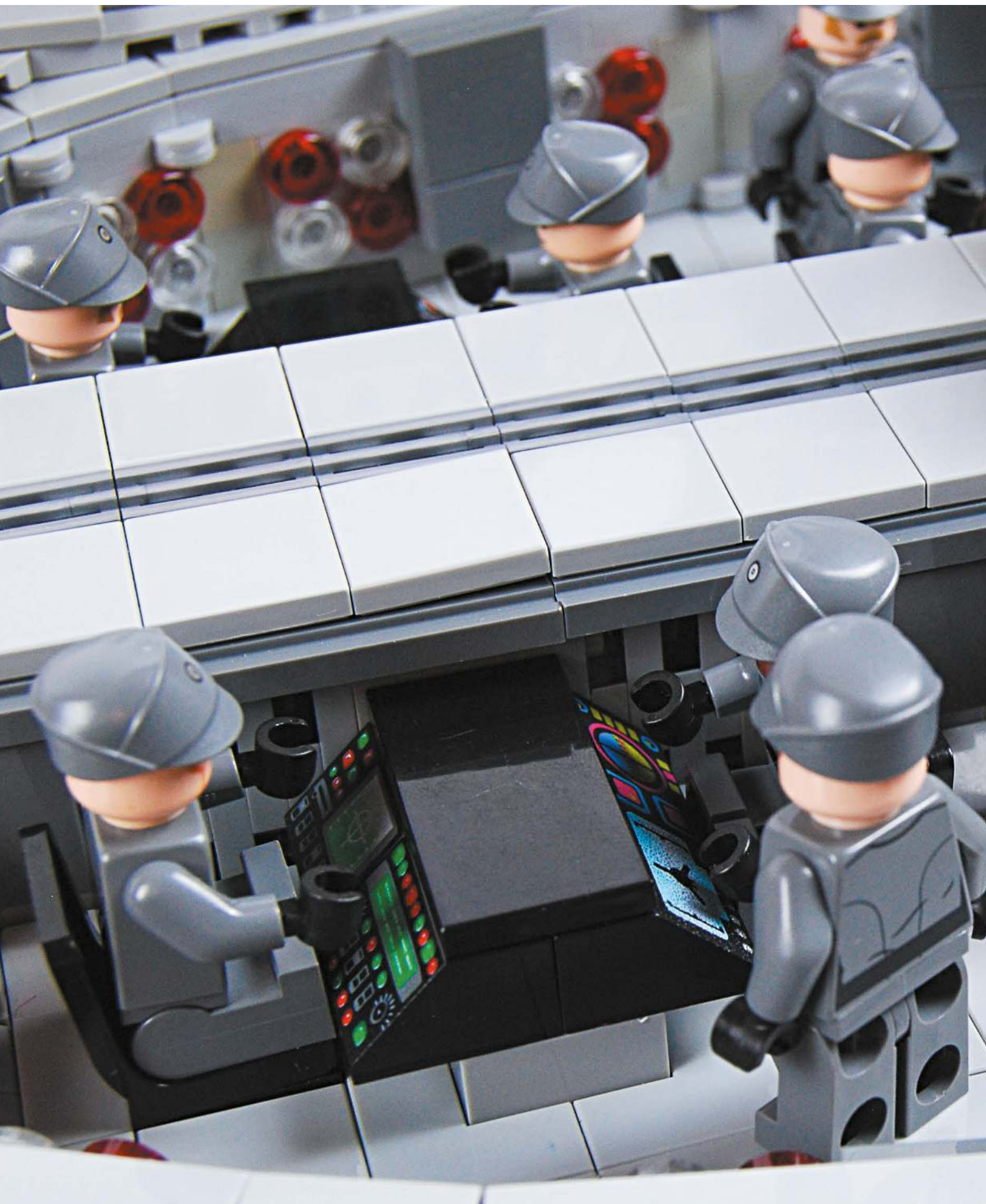
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A detailed LEGO UCS Star Destroyer interior scene. In the upper left, a white LEGO figure in a Star Wars-style uniform with a blue helmet and a black belt stands on a grey platform. Below and to the right, three grey-clad LEGO figures wearing grey helmets are positioned around a black console. One figure is seated at the console, which features a small green screen displaying a white symbol. The other two figures stand nearby, one holding a black object. The background shows more of the grey, tiled interior of the ship.

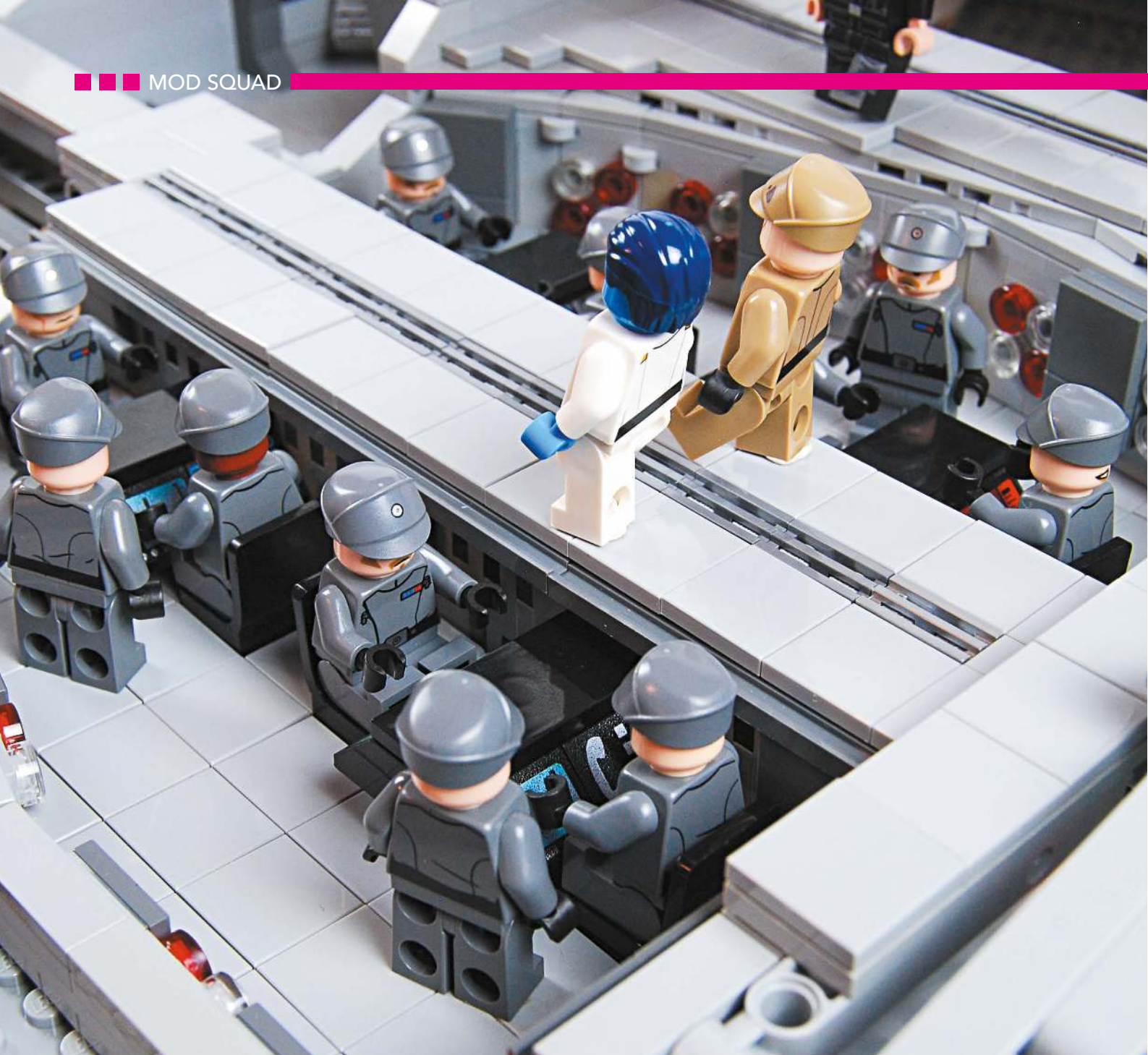
MOD SQUAD

UCS STAR DESTROYER

PART 2

With the Probe Droid nook in place, we target the most memorable part of the latest Ultimate Collector Series flagship

Words and Pics: Daniel Konstanski

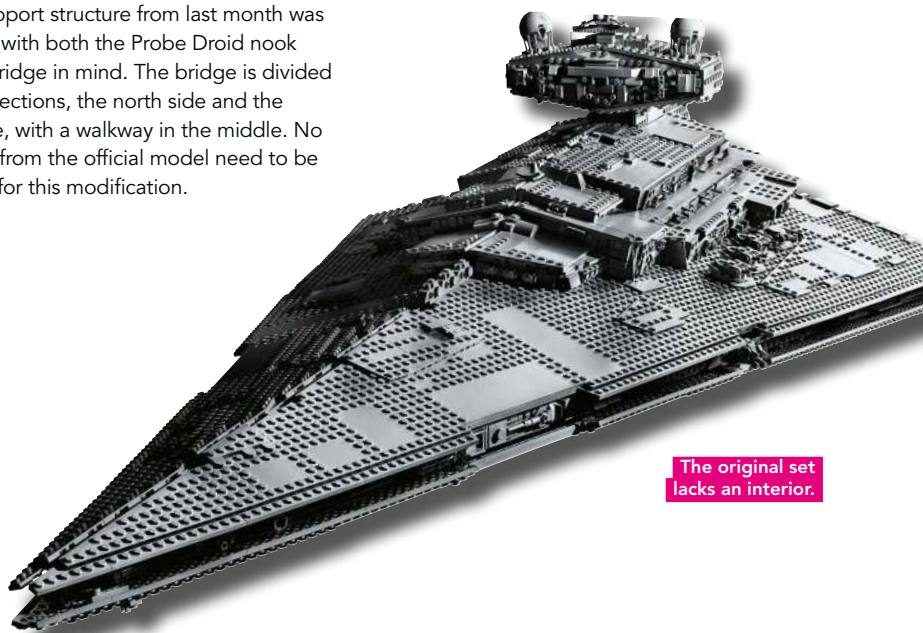


THE MOD SQUAD has LEGO Star Wars 75252 Imperial Star Destroyer up on the workbench. Unlike the smaller versions of the ship, this Ultimate Collector Series (UCS) masterpiece did not have an interior.

We've set out to remedy that, beginning with the addition of a foundation in the massive empty interior along with a fully fleshed out Probe Droid nook where Darth Vader oversees the hunt for Luke Skywalker.

While that little corner has a decent amount of screen time, it's nothing compared to the bridge of the Star Destroyer, a distinctive trio of walkways divided up by navigation pits. Some version of this bridge has appeared in every trilogy, modified to fit the aesthetic of that era's capital ship. Thanks to the size and depth of the space available in 75252, there is almost enough room to appropriately scale these for the first time ever in an official model.

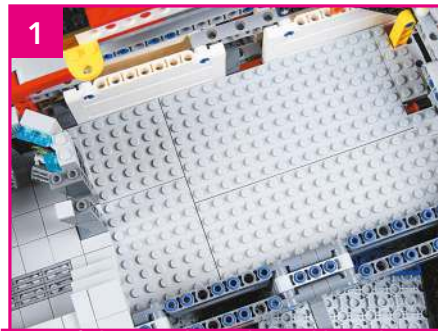
The support structure from last month was designed with both the Probe Droid nook and the bridge in mind. The bridge is divided into two sections, the north side and the south side, with a walkway in the middle. No elements from the official model need to be removed for this modification.



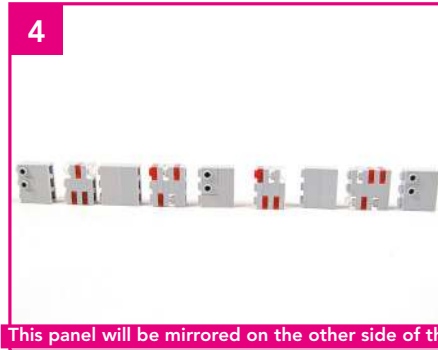
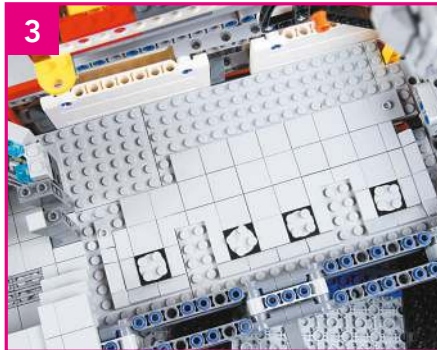
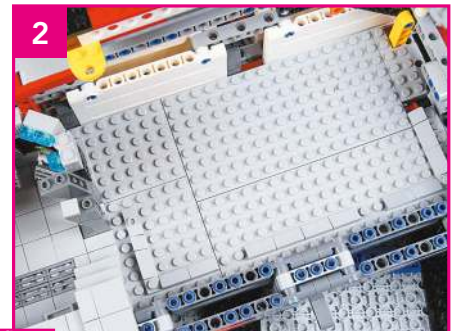
The original set lacks an interior.

THE NORTH PIT

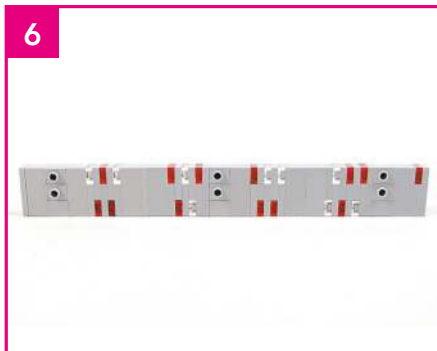
The central support from last month forms the dividing line between the north and south side of the modification. There are some tight spaces on this side of the ship, owing to the build having to fit between the official central support truss and the new one added last month. The build has been designed to sit on the supports without being solidly attached, to facilitate easy placement and removal.



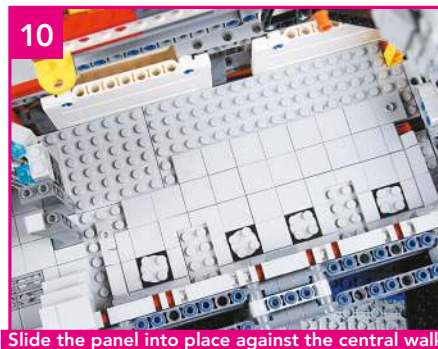
A mix of tiles, consoles, and turntables make up the floor.



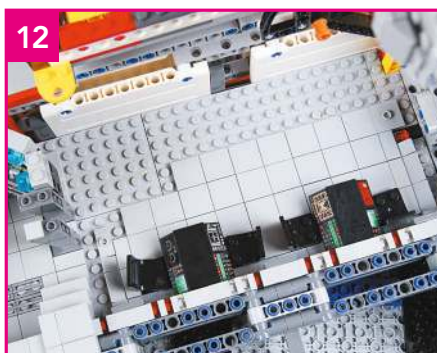
This panel will be mirrored on the other side of the walkway.



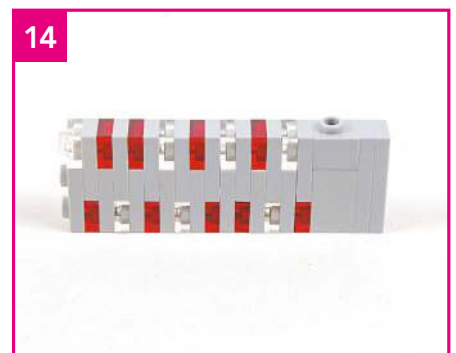
These panels will keep the crew busy.

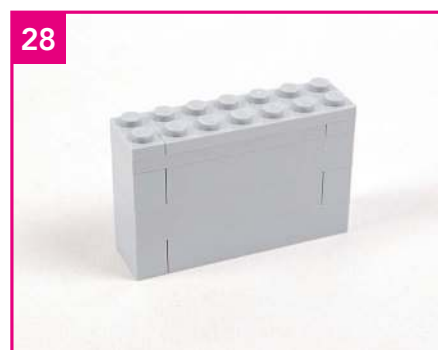
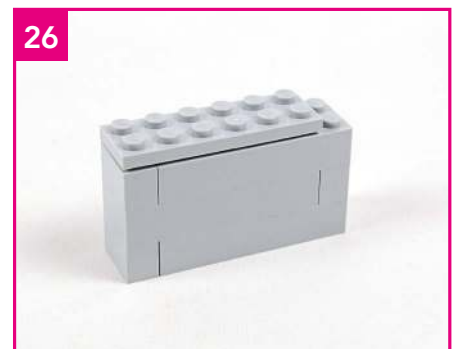
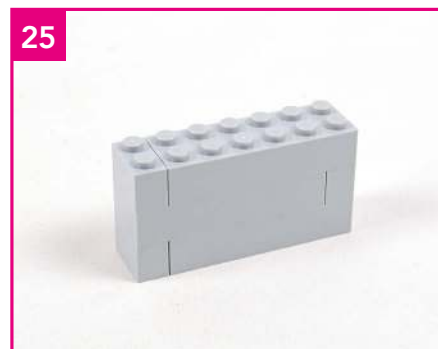
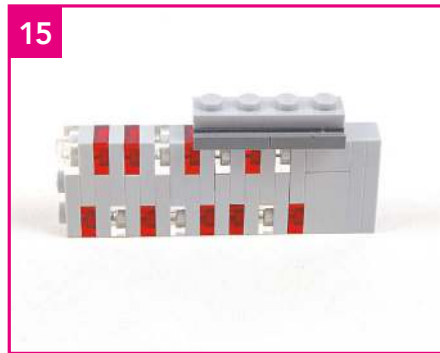


Slide the panel into place against the central walkway.



Several panels like this will be constructed.





30



31



Place the supports as shown.

32



This build will form the north wall of the pit.

33



34



35



36



37



38



39



40



41



Place the wall and then build the north walkway.

42



43



44







With the first pit complete, Part 3 will see the bridge really come together.

Words and Pics: Simon Pickard

HANGING LIGHTS

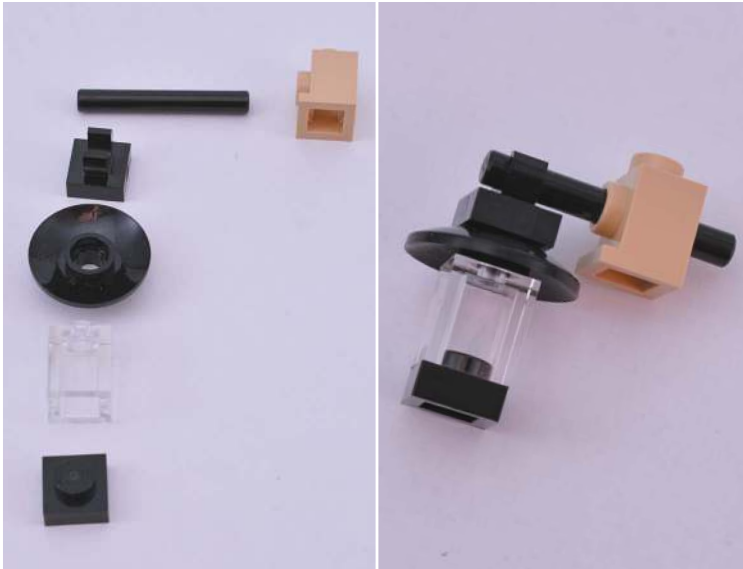
Turn the porch light on using these methods for hanging lanterns on the LEGO wall



THIS MONTH'S TECHNIQUE

This month's guide will take a look at various ideas for outdoor lights that are hung from the walls of buildings. This is the first half of an exploration into the creative ways to develop lanterns for buildings, covering lamp concepts that hang downwards before exploring versions that support the light from underneath in Issue 66.

As always these are starting points, with the best solutions likely to mix and match ideas. While the fan community at large offers a wide variety of creative solutions, LEGO designers also know their way around the system. Creator and Creator Expert sets provided the inspiration for this look at porch light techniques.



BAR AND CLIP

This first lamp uses a bar for attaching into the wall. From this the lantern can be hung using a tile clip. The small satellite dish is ideal for a lantern's top and crops up in many of the designs. Round bricks can be substituted for the standard brick. This also works without the plate on the bottom.

KEY CONCEPT

The erling is critical in this design. While the bar will slot into a cross's hole, it is too long for the right effect. However, the erling has an open back, meaning the bar can be inserted further into the wall. This allows a perfect fit for the intended lamp shape.

■ ■ THERE ARE MANY UNUSUAL
LEGO PIECE SHAPES THAT CAN
BE INCORPORATED INTO THESE
DESIGN CONCEPTS ■ ■



KEY



1X1 CONE



1X1 PLATE WITH CLIP



1X1 PLATE



1X1 ROUND PLATE



1X1 TILE WITH CLIP



1X3 BAR



BAR WITH STUD



ERLING



EXTINGUISHER TOP



FEZ



GEM



GUN BAR



INVERTED DOME



PAINT ROLLER



PLUMBING WHEEL



POLO



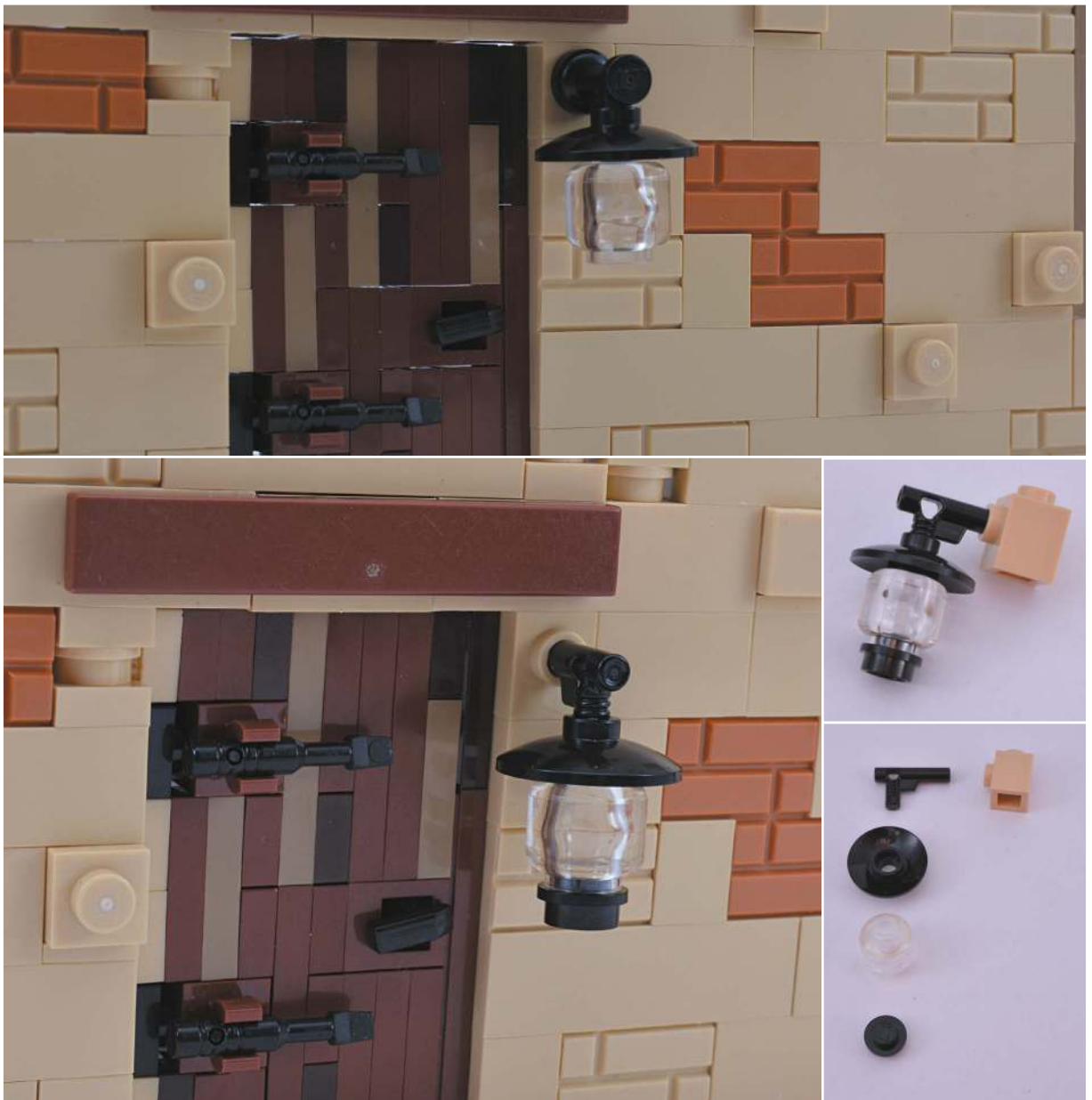
SHAPED BAR AND SUPPORT

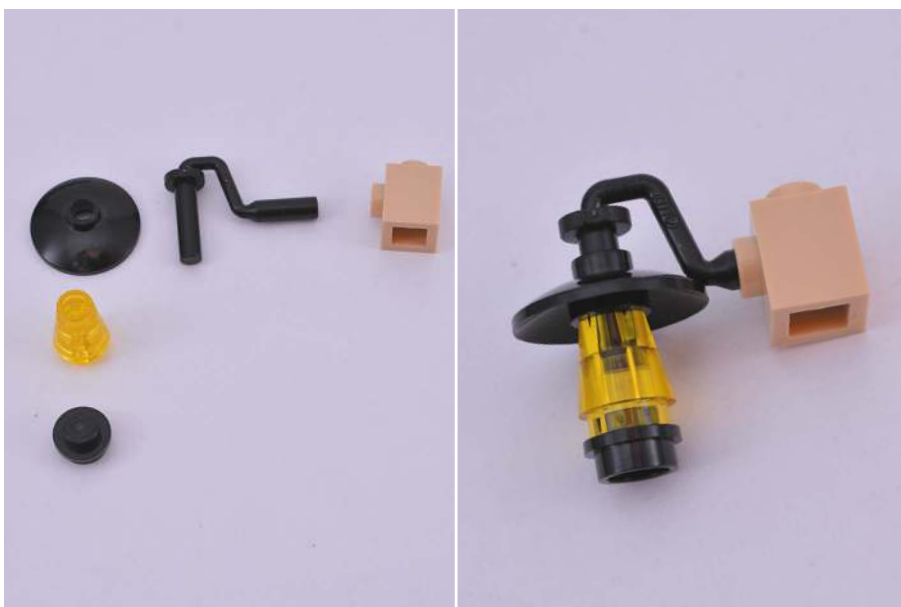
The next two examples take advantage of the shaped bars available. The first of these is the extinguisher top. This piece offers the spout as a downward connection, which fits inside the stud holes available on many pieces. It also has a stud receptacle that allows a connection directly on to a side stud in a wall. The second shaped bar option has a similar downward option, but now also fits into a stud hole in the wall.

KEY CONCEPT

The key concept here is reducing the size of the support structures for the lantern hanging below. By using smaller bar pieces, which fit inside the stud, more streamlined lantern designs become possible.

CHECK OUT REAL LANTERNS – HOW THEY ARE SHAPED AND SHADED



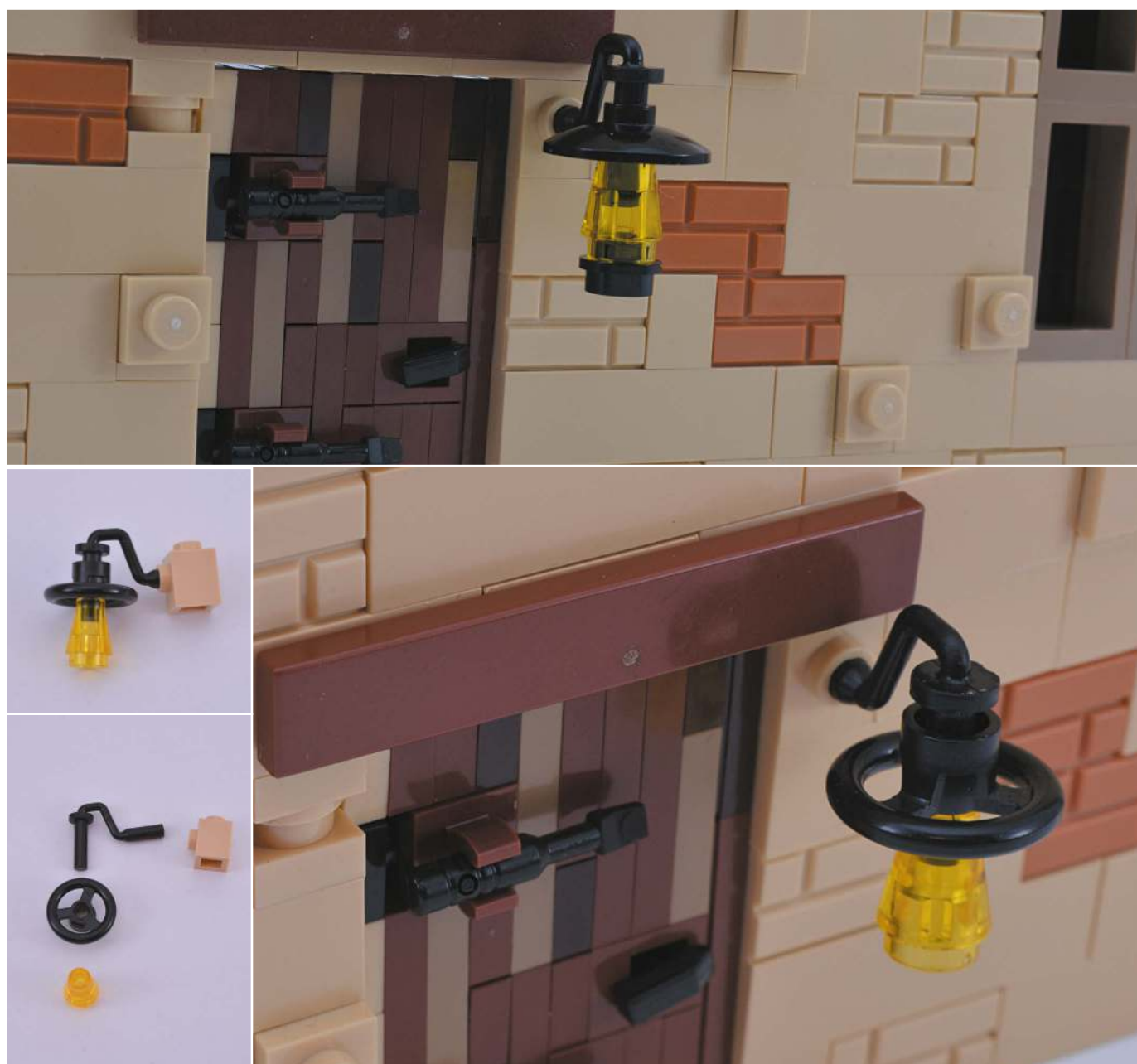


CREATIVE SHAPES

There are many unusual LEGO piece shapes that can be incorporated into these design concepts. The first example here uses the paint roller handle for a more decorative look to the lantern's hanging support. The handle slips nicely into the stud hole on the wall, while the roller end is long enough to slip into the lantern hole and support items further down as well. This is crucial for the second example piece, as it not only allows for the attachment of the plumbing wheel, but also holds the lamp part lower down.

KEY CONCEPT

It is always worth experimenting with more unusually-shaped pieces. One of the most valuable sources for these are the various minifigure accessories, like those used in the examples here.





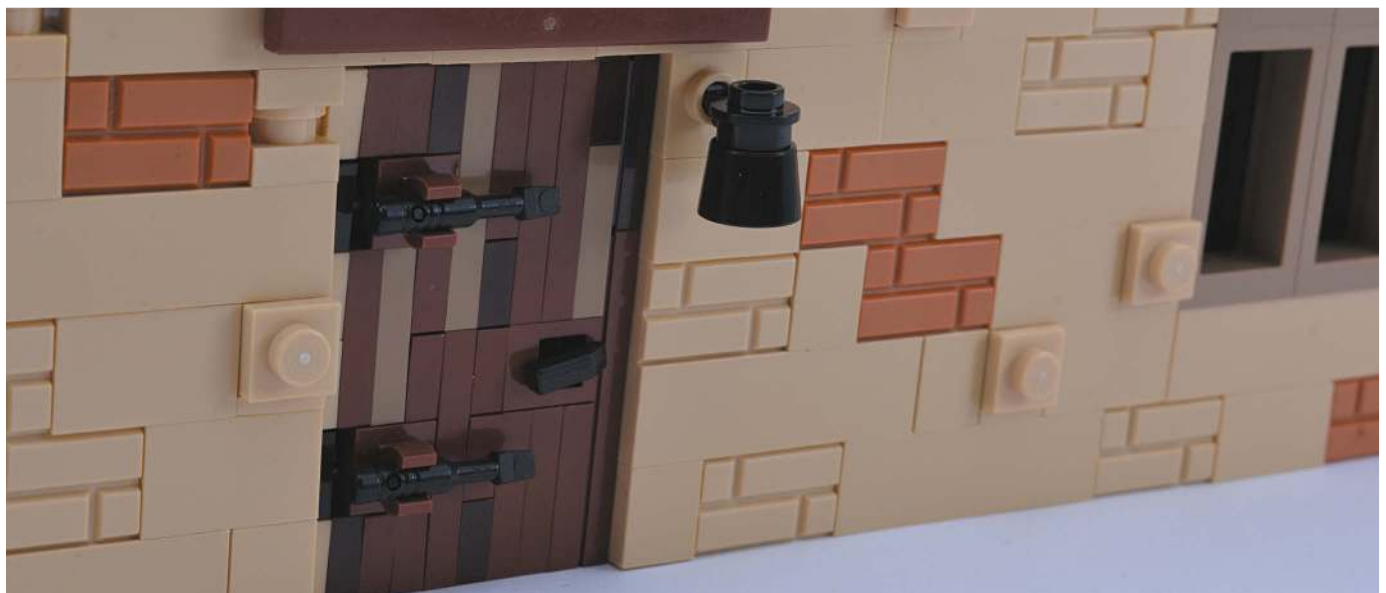
SHADED LAMPS

The lanterns so far have focused on those that provide a clear piece for the lantern. It is also possible to use pieces that offer a shaded lamp effect instead. The smallest example uses just two pieces. The fez piece is attached to the bar with stud.

KEY CONCEPT

Check out real lanterns, and how they are shaped and – crucially – shaded. There is almost always a range of elements that can reach a desired goal, often by turning pieces upside down.

AS ALWAYS THESE ARE STARTING POINTS, WITH THE BEST SOLUTIONS LIKELY TO MIX AND MATCH IDEAS



EMBEDDED LAMPS

This example uses pieces built into the wall itself. The first design takes advantage of the handle shape that is fitted to a variety of LEGO plates and bricks. The clip then allows the lantern to hang. Naturally this idea could be reversed to have the support coming from underneath instead.

The final technique is probably the most compact option. It takes advantage of a piece with a clip on its side for attachment to the wall. There are a wide variety of parts that have clips on the side, and also include different rotations so a bar plate can be used to hang the lantern. The jewel piece also shows just how compact this can be.

KEY CONCEPT

There are many pieces that have handles and bars on their side, which enable more unusual connections than the standard stud and hole combinations used in this guide. ■



Name:
Simon Pickard
Flickr ID:
brick.spartan



LEVER HANDLE

A little dismantling is the source of this creative part usage

Words and Pics: Simon Pickard

WHILE PURISTS MAY cringe a little at this concept, there are a wide variety of LEGO elements that can be dismantled in order to achieve a desired goal. This is very different to the concept of customising LEGO pieces or cutting them up.

The lever handle is one of the best examples of this concept in action. While the lever piece itself is intended to be a single part, it is possible to remove the handle and make use of the segments individually. The butterfly here has utilised this concept in two important ways.

The first is the most obvious, and can be seen at the head of the butterfly. Two lever

handles have been inserted into the underside of a 1x1 round brick. The flat circular base of the handle means that they grip together inside the brick and the friction is enough to

DISMANTLING LEGO ELEMENTS OFFERS A WHOLE NEW WORLD OF CREATIVE OPTIONS

ensure the pieces do not fall out.

Lever handles are also used for the feet of the butterfly. The four bases are in the centre of the body. These are held in place by trapping the pieces in place between two 1x1



round plates. The four levers are then slotted over the stud part of a 1x2 slope. These four levers are all that hold the entire weight of the butterfly in its perched position.

When it comes to dismantling pieces there is the risk of breakages, which is why the LEGO Group does not recommend that these handles, or other elements such as minifigure hands, are removed. While it might not be officially recommended, dismantling LEGO elements offers a whole new world of creative options for any budding LEGO builder. ■

RETIRED PIECE: CROCODILE HEAD

A far more versatile piece than it may first appear, the crocodile head has a long and varied history

Words and Pics: Daniel Konstanski

6027 HAS A unique distinction. What it is remembered for most prominently is not what it was used for most often. Take one look at this piece and it is immediately associated with the original crocodile. But it wasn't always used as the top jaw of that fierce reptile. In fact, its original production run was as the top jaw of an even more intimidating beast.

1993 saw LEGO Castle take its first steps into the realms of fantasy with Dragon Masters. Three of those sets included the now classic original dragon, and this was its top jaw. The official crocodile didn't make

its debut until a year later, featuring in every Islanders set except the very smallest.

The element appeared most frequently in those two themes. However, Fright Knights, Pirates, and Town all contained crocodiles, alligators or dragons in animal form, while Adventurers used the same piece as those creatures, but in statue form.

The clever application it was later used for was as a tongue. In the early 2000s, the LEGO Group produced a range of dinosaurs, and the moulds were crafted so that the alligator head could click into place within the mouth of 6720 Tyrannosaurus Rex and 6721 Mosasaurus. The same technique was used a couple of years

later in Mission Deep Sea for Alpha Team, with water beasts controlled by the nefarious Ogle.

Pirates, Castle and Adventurers are some of the most beloved themes of the 1990s and early 2000s, meaning that this element was included in many classic sets. With the introduction of more modern creature moulds, beginning with dragons in the Fantasy era of Castle, the element's days were numbered. 6027 lasted a long time, as alligators held out until the end, being one of the final original animals to get a makeover. It had a strong presence in the original Agents line, as well as popping up in a few random themes including The LEGO Movie in 2014. ■

Dark grey versions stood in as statues.



The part became a tongue for larger animals.

Part 6027 was used in a few different ways.

Number: 6027

Official Name: 6027 Alligator / Crocodile / Dragon Upper Jaw

Unofficial Name: Crocodile head

No. Sets Included In: 42

No. Colour Variants: 6

Years Produced: 1993 – 2017

First Appearance: Castle, 1993

Final Appearance: 70907 Killer Croc Tail-Gator

Why We Miss It: Used extensively in the mid-1990s, it is fondly remembered for its inclusion in a variety of fan-favourite sets and themes.



WORKING WATERFALL

Mechanical maestro Liam is hoping to make a big splash on LEGO Ideas with his functional force of nature

Words: Chris Wharfe **Pics:** Liam Spall, A Fellow Player, pacific_bricks

INFO

Ideas ID:
LEGOParadise
Project:
<https://tinyurl.com/wuyunga>



A mineshaft adds character.



Details abound even in the base.



Some tree-mendous vegetation.



The build is full of hidden extras.



Just in case you want to blow up the waterfall.



WHAT WAS THE last LEGO set you built? Did it have any working functionality? If not, chuck it in the bin: in 2020, we're only interested in mechanical marvels. Or at least, that's the

impression we've been getting from LEGO Ideas, where practical projects are proving just as popular as ever. Now, Liam Spall is getting in on the action with his working waterfall, which incorporates a mechanism for continuously flowing (LEGO) water.

Blocks: What inspired you to create the Working Waterfall?

Liam: I've always enjoyed building creations that combine aesthetics with functionality, as I like the challenge of integrating complex Technic mechanisms into small, minifigure-

scale models. These include things like a working LEGO ATM that dispenses cash, a playable game of pinball, and a massive race track with four cars that drive around it! This series of working creations has gained millions of views on my YouTube channel, LEGOParadise, which inspired me to think of new ideas for these types of functional builds, including a working waterfall. I have visited many real-life waterfalls in the Lake District and in Thailand, and I thought it would be cool to recreate a LEGO waterfall with a realistic flowing water effect, which actually transports trans-blue 'water' 1x1 studs in a continuous cycle to really capture the motion of a waterfall.

Can you talk us through the design? How does it function?

The Working Waterfall is built into the side of a mountain, which houses a cave system containing the main mechanism. Starting at the top, the water studs begin the cycle by falling out of the river and into the lake at the base of the waterfall. The studs are then guided into the centre of the lake, where they drop on to a moving conveyor belt that carries them back into the mountain. Inside the mountain is a pair of rubber vehicle tracks attached to motors. This part of the mechanism is responsible for transporting the studs vertically, and is fully enclosed to ensure that all the water remains in the system. When the studs come into contact with the tracks, they are scooped up and pushed upwards by the treads of the track, all the way up to the top!

All three of your Ideas submissions have revolved around a mechanical concept, but this is the most successful one yet. What do you think sets it apart from the others?

I believe the main reason is that it's a very unique idea that's unlike any other set the LEGO Group currently produces. It also has a wide appeal, offering something to fans of all ages, because it ticks all the boxes: a large and detailed model, a functional Technic mechanism, lots of play features, and a great display piece that fits perfectly in any layout. For example, it goes with any LEGO theme, whether it's modern, castle, pirates or jungle – all would look great with my Working Waterfall!

What do you think it is that makes functional models appeal to people?

It's fascinating to see what can be made from LEGO, and I think people are especially interested in functional models because it takes this concept to the next level. Every builder has a different interpretation of how to represent something and this is multiplied when building functional models, which can be made using so many different approaches. With an Ideas project, having functionality

simply makes it more exciting and enhances the value of the potential LEGO set, because you get to actually interact and use the model after you have built it. Also, I know that a lot of projects on Ideas are computer-rendered, and while that is not a criticism of those models (there are some really stunning renders), I think people enjoy seeing an Ideas project built out of physical bricks, which functional models usually are.

If the project is approved, are there any compromises or changes you think the LEGO designers might have to make?

Apart from structural supports and reinforcements, I think the biggest change that the LEGO Group might want to make would be to reduce the number of motors used to run the waterfall. At the moment it uses three motors: two for the vertical transporting mechanism, and one for the conveyor belt, but I'm sure the designers can bring that number down using some sort of gearbox. I'd imagine this would help with the cost of the set quite significantly!

What channels have you used to promote your project so far? Which of these do you think has been most successful?

I am very fortunate to have a large fan base on YouTube, which is where I initially promoted my Working Waterfall project. I also used other social media such as Instagram and Twitter, but honestly, so far the biggest influx of supporters has come from my project being visible on the front page of LEGO Ideas, which provides a regular stream of new supporters. I think the key to this is a combination of good presentation, quickly gaining a lot of supporters through other channels like YouTube, as well as having my project featured as a Staff Pick once before.

What kind of feedback have you had from users so far? Are you planning any updates/modifications based on that feedback?

Everyone loves the design, and the only main improvement some people have asked for is to include more studs flowing out from the waterfall. I agree this would produce a better effect, and I do plan on modifying the design to accommodate that (plus a few extra little improvements), so I will post an update when it's ready! ■



ELSEWHERE ON LEGO IDEAS

There are dozens of projects on LEGO Ideas – here are just a couple worth checking out



Ideas ID:
A Fellow Player
Project:
<https://tinyurl.com/sdqnt2l>

■ Untitled Goose Game

Untitled Goose Game became a global phenomenon when it launched last year, presumably because we've all been hiding a secret desire to go about life as nature's biggest jerk. If you're unfamiliar with the premise, you effectively terrorise an idyllic community with nothing more than a well-timed 'HONK!' And if this Ideas project comes to fruition, you'll be able to ruin a tiny plastic gardener's day in just the same way.



Ideas ID:
pacific_bricks
Project:
<https://tinyurl.com/sfjksvy>

■ Rock Raiders Ultimate Collector's Series Loader Dozer

Only a select few LEGO themes have joined Star Wars in being given the UCS treatment, but we can't think of a better way to celebrate the legacy of Rock Raiders. Kids who grew up with the series are now fully-grown adults with their own disposable income, so this wonderfully-constructed hit of nostalgia has the potential to go down brilliantly.

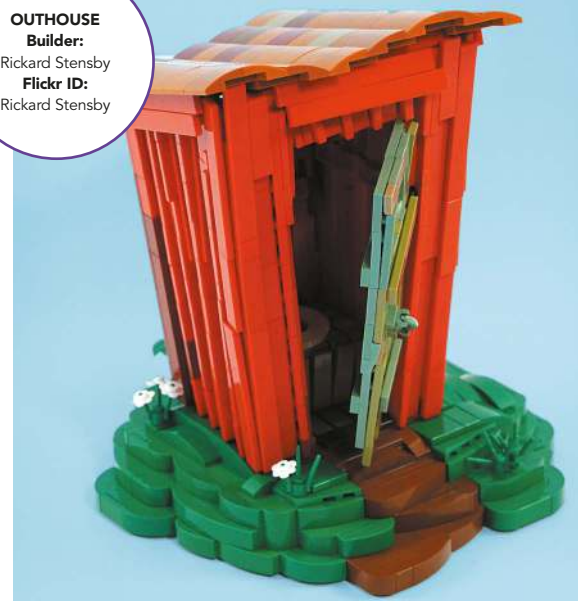
Fancy getting your LEGO Ideas project featured in Blocks? Send it to editor@blocksmag.com with the subject title 'Blocks Ideas [your project name]'.

BLOCKS MOCS /

The latest selection of MOCs that have caught the attention of the Blocks team



STRANGE NEW WORLDS
Builder:
 Steve Marsh
Flickr ID:
 Rubblemaker



OUTHOUSE
Builder:
 Rickard Stensby
Flickr ID:
 Rickard Stensby



DARK SIDE, LIGHT SIDE
Builder:
 Jehan Snyers d'Attenhoven
Flickr ID:
 Veynom



FOURTH DISTRICT
Builder:
 Marco De Bon
Flickr ID:
 Marco De Bon



MICRO LAUNCHPAD TOWER
Builder:
 Pierre-E. Fieschi
Instagram:
 pierrefieschi

MOC IN PICS / Skull Island

The uninviting Skull Island hides a gold mine full of treasure

Words: Graham Hancock, Gaetan Boudard **Pics:** Gaetan Boudard

GAETAN BOUDARD ONLY recently photographed this build, which he created a couple of years ago. He came up with a compelling backstory for the model, imagining that the skull was a mystery – minifigures sailing the seas did not know whether it had been carved, or had come about in some other way...

Despite the use of common bricks, the skull still looks organic thanks to careful sculpting.

Builder:
Gaetan Boudard
Flickr ID:
BobDeQuatre

A variety of plant elements make the rocky side of the build feel natural.

The skull is made of around 600 2x4 white bricks, so it would look more like bones than stone.



The skull hosts a gold mine that's being exploited by pirates.

All of the lamps and the forge light up. An opening at the top of the island allows for access to a removable battery box.

MOC&A / BOULEVARD DES LUMIÈRES

Marcos Garavelli has constructed a Parisian building at an incredible scale

Words: Graham Hancock Pics: Marcos Garavelli

Builder:
Marcos Garavelli
Instagram:
lepralego



Marcos poured plenty of research into his first MOC.

IT'S HARD TO believe that this is Marcos Garavelli's first ever original build. He has used advanced techniques to pack so many textures into a model that dwarfs the official modular buildings, constructing something that has the 'wow' factor when it comes to size but also offers detail inside. Blocks caught up with Marcos to find out the story behind this ambitious build.

Blocks: What is your LEGO story?

Marcos: When I was a kid I used to love building new things with my LEGO bricks. I remember that I was always trying to build big cities in my room and most of the time I had to

stop because I ran out of pieces. One day, as an adult with a stable job and living in another country, I was in a toy shop by chance and when I saw the LEGO boxes on a shelf I felt that old passion, and as an impulse I bought a LEGO set.

What made you tackle such a large building for your first MOC?

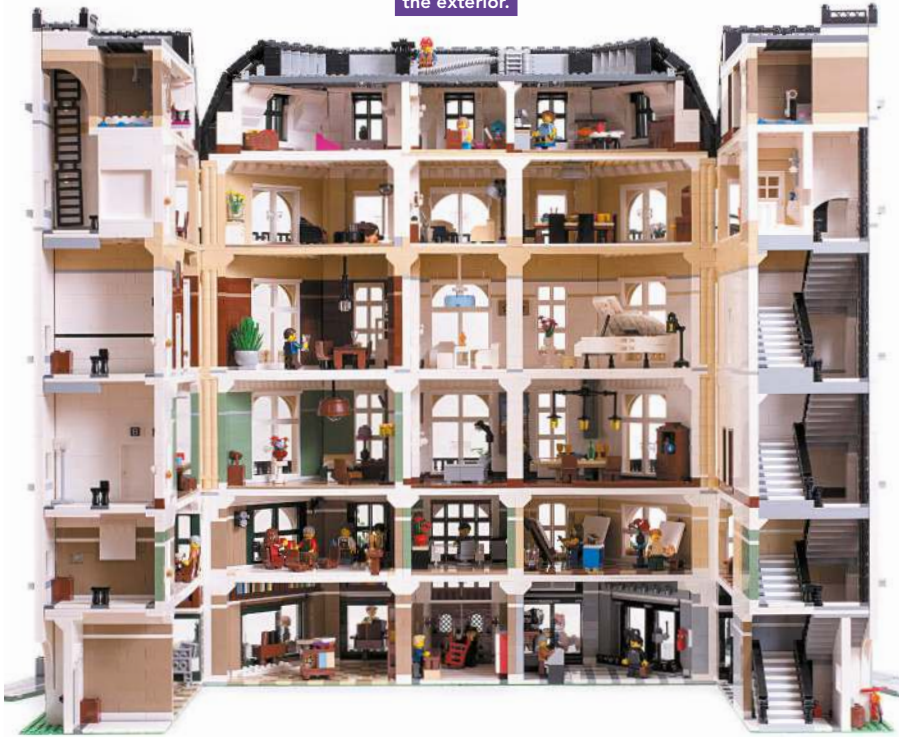
I built many of the Creator Expert modular building sets. I think that the key with some of them is that they are able to incorporate many different architectural styles. Making an exact reproduction of a building with LEGO bricks could become repetitive and boring. At the

same time, the official modular sets have to limit the piece count to be commercial. My idea with Boulevard des Lumières was to create a model that could depict an architectural style without any limitations in the amount of pieces, and could have diversity in the exterior and the interior.

What research did you do?

Before starting the actual construction process, I collected a lot of images of different corners, doors, balconies, roofs and some interiors of actual Parisian buildings. The idea was to create a new fictional building that included details and references from many

The interior is just as detailed as the exterior.



real buildings. The street name is also fictional – there is no Boulevard des Lumières in Paris, but its spirit is highly Parisian. With all of these images in mind I started to sketch some initial ideas of a possible design on paper, making the first decisions.

What influenced the exterior?

I think that each time you visit a city like Paris, unconsciously you are selecting and adding little snapshots to your own idea of the city. Each one of us has their own image of it. I've been in Paris many times and the Haussmann style, which is present in most of central Paris, was the starting point of this project.

How did you decide what to include in the interior?

I always thought of the model as a play model, as well as a display model. I have two kids, aged six and eight years old, Emma and Mateo, and I often ask them what they think about some particular part or room. Often their point of view made me change my mind on some important building decisions.

In addition, the bookshop and photography shop chosen for the ground floor and the art academy on the first floor have a personal connection. My wife is a language teacher and has a literature degree. She loves bookshops and libraries and she used to dream about opening a literary café one day. I'm a professional photographer and I worked for Photoshop many years ago.

What was the most challenging aspect when building the model?

I have to mention three things – keeping the diagonal corners smooth both outside and inside the whole building, including two big hinges to access the interior while keeping the model robust, and finally, achieving the right angles for the roof.

What was the most satisfying thing about building this model?

That it's a model that I would like to have, and I'm proud of that. I think that the final building has the balance between detailed exterior and interior that I was looking for.

Do you have any advice for other people who have never MOC'ed before?

I was like all of them some months ago and as you can see, that's not a problem at all. I think you have to try to put all your efforts into meeting your own expectations and never give up. If that is your real goal, time and money should never be a real problem. I had to unbuild some sets to take pieces for this MOC, make many orders via BrickLink, spend a lot of time thinking, researching and learning about advanced building techniques... when you finally complete your work, you have a wealth of experience, and you'll feel more prepared to start your next projects, as I do. ■

Marcos wanted to create a model without limitations.



The photography studio references Marcos's career.

Builder:
Diego
Maximino Prieto
Álvarez
Flickr ID:
L-DI-EGO

MOC IN PICS / The Child

Better known as Baby Yoda, the Child will steal your heart all over again in LEGO

Words and Pics: Diego Maximino Prieto Álvarez

INTRODUCED AT THE end of Star Wars: The Mandalorian's first episode, the Child became a social media sensation. The adorable character has captured the hearts of fans of the saga. Considering the cuteness factor, to do something simplified or cartoony was a suitable but obvious route. I forced myself to skip that idea – making a detailed face was more challenging, unnecessarily over-complicated and funnier.

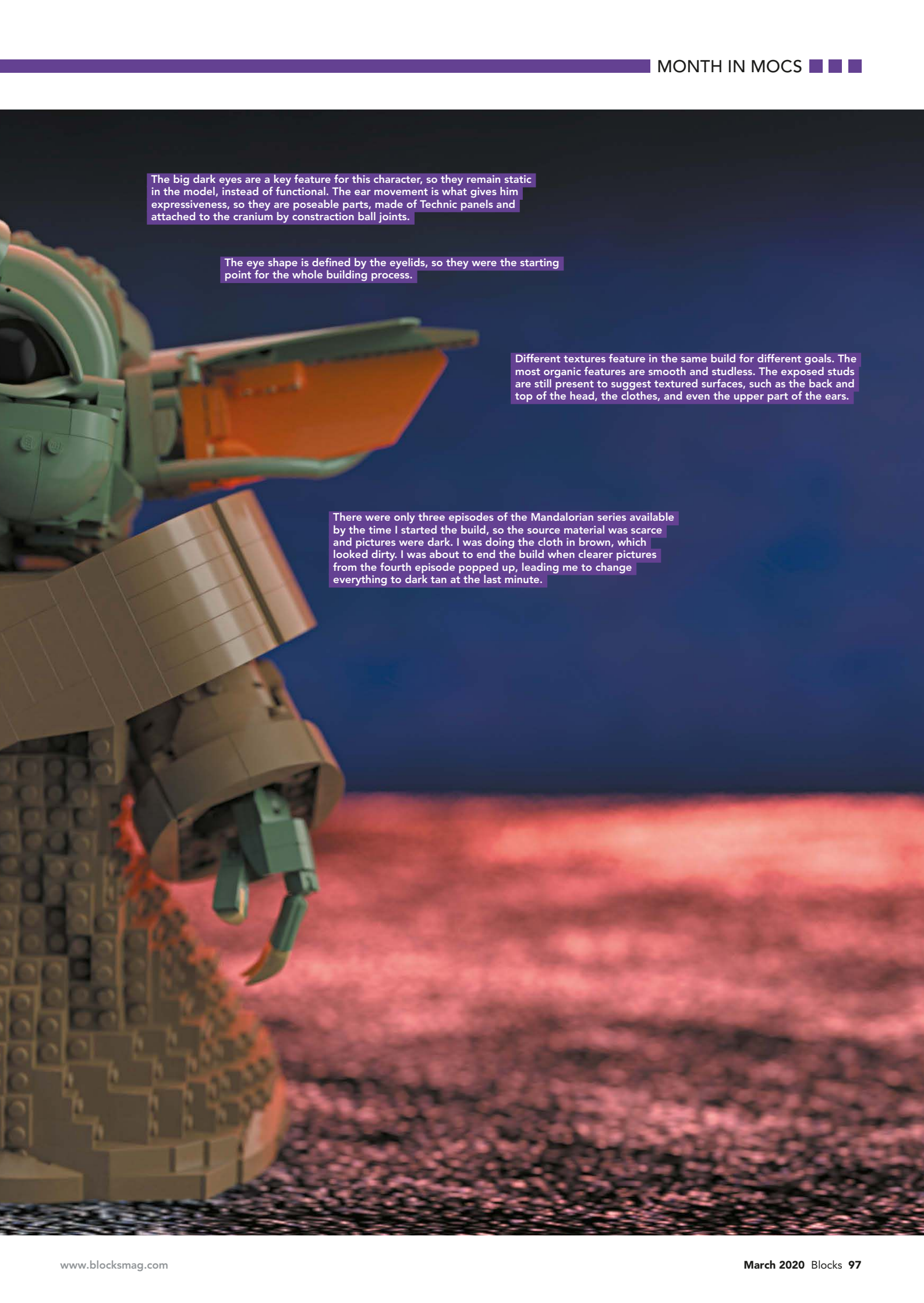
Captain America's Shield in black was a good option for the pupils. They suggest a curved surface for the eye that flat round tiles don't have. Their diameter also fits better with the established scale.

The internal body frame and the nose are the only parts inspired by the official LEGO set 75255 Yoda.

The two halves of the tunic's collar can be hinged so the arms have more degrees of movement.

I was expecting to fail, so I could continue with other work-in-progress MOCs. But things turned out quite differently. My first reaction when I was happy with the face and ears was: 'Why have I started this? Now I must do the entire body.'





The big dark eyes are a key feature for this character, so they remain static in the model, instead of functional. The ear movement is what gives him expressiveness, so they are poseable parts, made of Technic panels and attached to the cranium by construction ball joints.

The eye shape is defined by the eyelids, so they were the starting point for the whole building process.

Different textures feature in the same build for different goals. The most organic features are smooth and studless. The exposed studs are still present to suggest textured surfaces, such as the back and top of the head, the clothes, and even the upper part of the ears.

There were only three episodes of the Mandalorian series available by the time I started the build, so the source material was scarce and pictures were dark. I was doing the cloth in brown, which looked dirty. I was about to end the build when clearer pictures from the fourth episode popped up, leading me to change everything to dark tan at the last minute.

RE-WIND

Don't drop that camera...



PARADISA

What do the LEGO Town residents do in their free time? Ride horses and hit the beach

Words: Graham Hancock Pics: Laurens Parsons

TWO DECADES BEFORE LEGO Friends launched, a range of LEGO sets arrived that was targeted specifically towards girls. Paradisa was a subtheme of Town intended to lure more young girls into the LEGO world, with some rather outdated stereotypes of pink bricks and ponies. This range should not be dismissed though, as the pink colours were subdued and did not overpower the models.

Whatever the shortcomings of the subtheme were in terms of subject matter and target audience, what it brought to Town was a leisure side that the theme was lacking. Beachside cafes and cabanas, along with stables and country clubs, allowed the minifigures – who were otherwise busy fighting fires, stopping crime and scuba diving – some rest and relaxation.

When the theme launched in 1992, it had two clear strands. The first was horse riding, with a series of sets offering stables and other horse-related accessories. The second was vacations, offering a variety of desirable beachside holiday sets.

Thanks to the increased number of female minifigures in the sets, there were plenty of new prints for faces and bodies, and new hairpiece moulds too. Additional animals introduced included the dolphin and the pony, the latter never reappearing outside of these sets.

By the final year of Paradisa in 1997, it was possible to have built out a convincing seaside resort or an entire equestrian community. For those who enjoy the charm of the classic Town sets, this is a section of that world that is well worth exploring.

6414 Dolphin Point features a lighthouse.





MEMORY LANE

"AS A BOY, IT DIDN'T SEEM COOL TO EXPRESS ANY FONDNESS FOR TOYS WITH PINK AND PONIES"

GRAHAM IS NOW MAKING UP FOR NEVER OWNING ANY PARADISA SETS AS A CHILD

Like Daniel, I loved flicking through LEGO catalogues as a child. The wonderful layouts sparked my imagination, and I was always fascinated by the many themes that I did not collect or own anything from.

I remember imagining what my LEGO Town would be, and being curious about the Paradisa sets. Even then, I knew I would want my imaginary layout to have a big leisure component. Because the sets were 'girly', though, I never felt confident enough to actually share this interest with anyone. As a boy, it didn't seem cool to express any fondness for toys with pink and ponies.

As an adult fan, I feel fortunate that those childhood insecurities are long gone. Now I can fulfil those young wishes and pick up these sets, along with the many other Town sets that I had my eye on all those years ago. The gender they were intended for is irrelevant – they are fun sets that belong in my collection.

BREAKING DOWN THE THEME


■ While there are a manageable 18 sets in the LEGO Paradisa theme, many of them command high prices on the secondary market, making it an expensive theme to collect.

■ A palm tree served as the theme's icon and appears throughout the sets.

■ Crabs appeared in the theme years before the moulded element was introduced – here they are printed on circular 2x2 tiles.



MEMORY LANE

"MY POOR SISTER DESPERATELY WANTED PARADISA"

DANIEL RECALLS HIS SISTER'S FONDNESS FOR PARADISA THAT WAS NEVER QUITE FULFILLED

My family did a lot of car travel when I was growing up. In the days before iPads and in-car televisions, our entertainment was a bit more analogue. I would always bring stacks of LEGO magazines on trips, and one of our favourite games was flipping through the pages, picking sets we wanted and then sketching our imaginary town made up of them. My poor sister desperately wanted Paradisa.

While we all played with LEGO together, the sets almost exclusively belonged to me and my brother. For years she pined for one of the big horse sets, like 6418 Country Club or 6419 Rolling Acres Ranch, but only ended up getting 6405 Sunset Stables. However, every single one of her towns sketched on those long car rides was full of Paradisa. I eventually added Rolling Acres Ranch to my own collection as an adult, and sent her a picture. Despite us both being in our 30s, she was still jealous!

BY THE NUMBERS
 Years active:

1992 - 1997

18

THE NUMBER OF PARADISA SETS

27

THE NUMBER OF ANIMALS ACROSS THE SETS

364

PIECES IN 6419 ROLLING ACRES RANCH, THE LARGEST SET

19

PIECES IN 2870 PARADISA BARBEQUE, THE SMALLEST SET

2

SETS CONTAINING THE PONY

■ Year released: 1996 / Aftermarket price: £214 new, £79 used / Minifigures: 5 / Pieces: 280

6418 COUNTRY CLUB

WHILE EQUESTRIAN LIFE may have been a stereotypical product to sell to girls, 6418 Country Club is a great example of how pink colours were used subtly within the Paradisa theme. This set has a predominantly white colour scheme with pink and grey bricks accenting it.

Like so many sets of this era, a decently-sized baseplate offers the starting point. It has space for two distinct structures: first, a small paddock for the horses and the pony, with a covered space for all the riding gear that the characters might need. There are

saddles, riding caps, a brush and even a shovel – stable life is not all glamour.

The main building is the treat in this set though. It offers two storeys, with the top one being an open-air restaurant overlooking the horses below. Flowerpots attached to the railings and a suited waiter minifigure make this seem like a desirable place to go for a meal, capturing the aspirational feel that these sets generate.

While detail can be appealing, like many sets of its era this model keeps things simple. Using the top floor as an example, there

is a table for the minifigures to sit at with a parasol, but also lots of open space for placing characters. Open sides make it easy to place elements and minifigures in this area.

On the bottom floor there is a kitchen for the meals to be prepared and stables for the horses, providing a narrative connection for everything in the model. That sort of attention to detail is well thought out throughout this set, which is why it is so successful. It doesn't feel like part of a story, and offers everything needed to depict horse riding life in a single set.



Everything a horse rider could desire is found in 6418.

Year released: 1992 / **Aftermarket price:** £77 new, £35 used / **Minifigures:** 5 / **Pieces:** 168

6411 SAND DOLLAR CAFÉ

Go for a swim,
then enjoy an
ice cream.



BASEPLATES OFFERED SO much inspiration back when they were commonly included in sets, with this one proving to be a great example. Four different colours depict grass, sand, shallow water and deeper water.

It's the perfect setting for a little beachside café, which is an excellent representation of the open-air small-scale bars found at the beach. With little tools and utensils giving life to the kitchen counter area and a seating area outside, it does the job.

Elsewhere on the beach there is a lifeguard chair, sun lounger and palm tree, all of which add to the vacation feel that this set captures. Another highlight in this medium-sized release is the ice cream trolley, which convincingly captures the frozen treat vendor using just a few parts.

The set is wrapped up by the windsurfer, which uses a great combination of parts with the sail itself to really bring life to this location. Despite this not being the largest model in the theme, there is a lot going on.

Year released: 1992 / **Aftermarket price:** £154 new, £55 used / **Minifigures:** 4 / **Pieces:** 229

6416 POOLSIDE PARADISE

WHILE NOT LOCATED right on the beachfront like 6411 Sand Dollar Café, it is easy to imagine that this set is located just a short stroll away from the seafront. It captures an ideal holiday home – a two-storey house with a pool.

The set uses a moulded baseplate to give it extra height, with a pool at the front, sloped driveway at the side and stepped area at the back. To really relax the residents, the pool is surrounded by a palm tree, flowers, sun lounger and parasol.

One of the great features of this set is the pile of large clear elements used for the house, which makes it great for display. The interior is visible, revealing a dining room at the top and a bird house for the parrot on the ground floor. A kitchen finishes everything off inside.

A lovely little touch in the model is the use of trans-yellow studs clipped to a brick with arch, giving the feel of modern lighting. The coffee machine is another simple but effective little build, demonstrating how the designers could capture detail even with a more limited part palette.

Poolside Paradise is a
dream holiday home.



RE-BUILD

HORSE JUMP

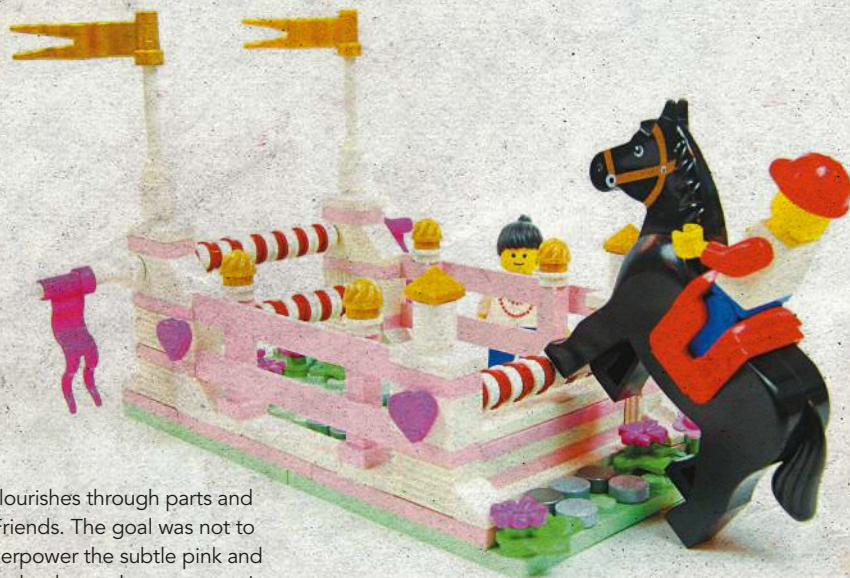
Words and Pics: Daniel Konstanski

WHEN PARADISA ARRIVED on the scene in the 1990s, the distinctive pink and light green elements imparted a very distinctive aesthetic to the models. While they were to the same scale and used the same parts as every other set, they looked completely different.

In many ways Friends is the spiritual successor to Paradisa, so this build aims to maintain the distinctive Paradisa look with

some added flourishes through parts and colours from Friends. The goal was not to completely overpower the subtle pink and white mix from the theme, but to accent it a bit with some of the golds and magentas fans have today.

Given the number of horse-themed sets in Paradisa, it was a natural choice for this build's subject matter.



THE BASE

1



Use the Paradisa standard light green baseplate.

2



Add some classic flowers.

3



As an homage to the time, the first obstacle involves simple stacking.

THIS BUILD AIMS TO MAINTAIN THE DISTINCTIVE PARADISA LOOK WITH SOME ADDED FLOURISHES FROM FRIENDS

THE JUMPING POLES

Use the lightsaber blade and studs with holes.



1

This creates a realistic jumping pole.



2

THE FRONT JUMPING STAND

Stack these bricks and use a pin.



1

Add the decoration.



2

Put two on the base and use the pole.



3

Build the next section as shown.



4

FENCING

The fence can be white rather than pink.



1

Attach the pieces to the base.



2

THE JUMPING STANDS

Stack the bricks and add the heart and pole.



1

Add the flags.



2

The jumping poles will insert into the pins.



3

Add to the base.



4





LEGO EVENTS

Do you run an event that should be listed here? Get in touch with us via graham@blocksmag.com and we'll add it to the list

MARCH 2020

BricksCascade (USA)

When: February 27 – March 1

Where: Oregon Convention Center, 777 NE Martin Luther King Jr Blvd, Portland, OR 97232

What's on: LEGO builds will be on display and a DUPLO build area will allow young guests to play. Shopping opportunities including LEGO sets, books, t-shirts, and jewellery stalls will be available.

Visit: www.brickscascade.com

National Space Centre Brickish Weekend

When: March 14 – 15

What's on: It's the 40th anniversary of Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back, so expect some fan models to celebrate the iconic movie. There will be lots of other space and non-space LEGO exhibits, a huge mosaic and plenty of inspiration for budding LEGO fans. There will also be the Fairy Bricks tombola, play areas and vendors.

Visit: brickish.org/event/nsc-brickish-weekend-2020

Cobblers Brick Show (UK)

When: March 28

Where: Caroline Chisholm School, Wooldale Road, Northampton, NN4 6TP

What's on: LEGO displays and traders will feature at the third edition of the Cobblers Brick Show, held in aid of charity.

Visit: facebook.com/CobblersBrickShow/

Brick Days Omaha (USA)

When: March 27 – 29

Where: Mid-America Center, Council Bluffs, IA 51501

What's on: A family friendly event with 15,000 square feet of LEGO builds – including all-new creations – as well as games, activities and vendors selling the latest swag.

Visit: brickdays.com/brick-days-Omaha-2020/

APRIL 2020

The Brighton Bricks Show (UK)

When: April 11

Where: Brighton Unitarian Church, New Road, Brighton, BN1 1UF

What's on: There will be displays and traders

at this show full of LEGO fun.

Visit: brightonbricks.com/brighton-bricks-events

St Philip's Brick Show (UK)

When: April 25

Where: St. Philip's Church, Cosham, Portsmouth, PO6 2TL

What's on: LEGO displays and family-friendly activities.

Brickworld Milwaukee (USA)

When: April 18 – 19

Where: Wisconsin State Fair, West Allis, Wisconsin 53214

What's on: Kenosha LUG and Wisconsin LUG will fill a 32,000 square foot venue with LEGO displays and activities.

Visit: www.brickworld.com/brickworld-milwaukee

BrickFest Live

When: April 25 – 26

Where: The Greater Philadelphia Expo Center, Oaks, PA 19456

What's on: Activities include a speedway, gaming area, mosaic building, mini golf and plenty of building opportunities. There will also be photo ops and model displays.

Visit: www.brickfestlive.com

MAY 2020

Brickslopes (USA)

When: May 15

Where: Mountain America Expo Center, Sandy, Utah 84070

What's on: LEGO builds to admire, a brick pit to play in, customised cars to race, panel discussions and more.

Visit: www.bricklopes.com

Discovery Brick Show (UK)

When: May 2 – 3

Where: Discovery Museum, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 4JA

What's on: Held by the Brick Alley LEGO User Group, the event takes place at the Discovery Museum. It offers displays of LEGO models, sellers and activities as well as the opportunity to enjoy the museum.

Visit: www.brickalley.co.uk/discovery

JUNE 2020

Brick Express (UK)

When: June 7

Where: Avon Valley Railway, Bitton Station, Bristol, BS30 6HD

What's on: GertLUG is putting on LEGO displays that will cover town, trains and fantasy. There will be hands-on LEGO workshops on an actual train, as well as the opportunity to try driving a miniature train.

Visit: www.avonvalleyrailway.org/events/brick-express

Brickworld Chicago (USA)

When: June 20 – 21

Where: Renaissance Schaumburg Hotel, Schaumburg, Illinois 60173

What's on: Brickworld Chicago covers 100,000 square feet and features creations from 400 artists and engineers from all over the world. There will be activities, shopping opportunities and talks.

Visit: www.brickworld.com/brickworld-chicago

JULY 2020

Bricks-N-Blocks Dalton (USA)

When: July 11 – 12

Where: Dalton Convention Center, Dalton, GA 30720

What's on: Builds on display include the Jurassic Park rollercoaster. Other features include a STEM area, games, fun activities and master builder challenges.

Visit: www.brick-n-blocks.com

OCTOBER 2020

Great Western Brick Show (UK)

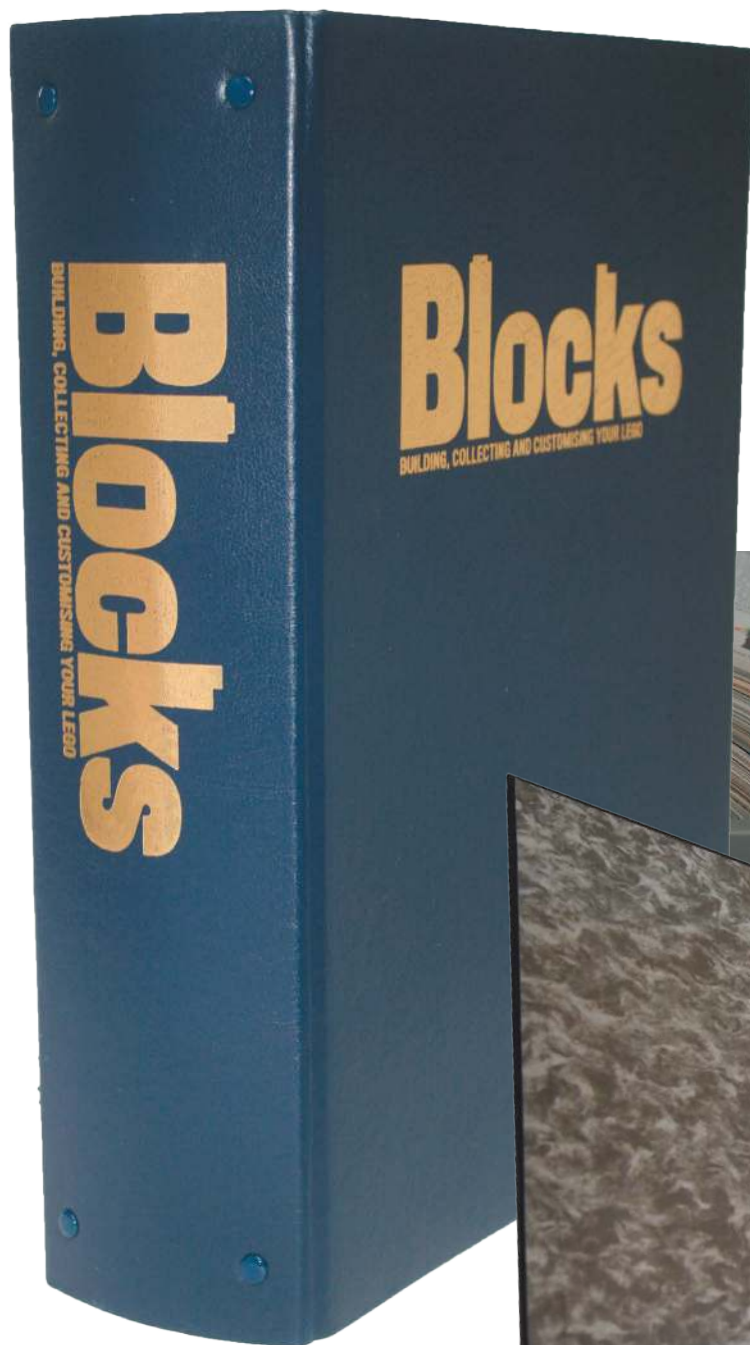
When: October 3 – 4

Where: STEAM, The Museum of GWR, Swindon, SN2 2TA

What's on: At the Brickish Association's long-running show, the LUG presents one of the largest displays of LEGO models in the UK. As well as admire the builds, guests can help create an all-new giant LEGO mosaic, visit the LEGO Shop and other independent traders as well as get building in the brick pits.

Visit: www.greatwesternbrickshow.com

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Blocks

BRICKIONARY

The language of LEGO has a wide, varied and ever-growing vocabulary.
Blocks magazine helps you decode it

A

ABS: Acrylonitrile butadiene styrene. The plastic most LEGO parts are made from.

AFOL: Adult Fan of LEGO.

B

Billund: Town in Denmark where the headquarters and primary design centre of the LEGO Group is situated.

Bley: Bluish grey. Refers to the current LEGO grey, compared to the old version (known as... old grey).

BOLOCS: Build containing many different colours, often uncoordinated.

Brick-built: A build composed of basic LEGO elements rather than specialised elements, i.e. brick-built figures.

Brickset: An online database of LEGO sets.

BURP: Big Ugly Rock Piece. Moulded piece five bricks high with jagged edges.

C

CC: Classic Castle, a LEGO castle fan site.

Cheese Slope: A sloping LEGO part, named after the fact yellow pieces look like a wedge of cheese.

Clone Brands: Construction toys similar and often compatible with LEGO, but cheaper and lower quality. Usually despised by LEGO fans.

Custom: A LEGO creation or individual element that uses non-LEGO parts, modified parts or accessories from third party vendors like BrickArms or BrickForge.

Customiser: A LEGO fan who's not afraid to modify LEGO parts. Customising may include painting, cutting, drilling, melting or adding non-LEGO parts to a creation. Considered heresy to the purist LEGO fan.

D

D2C: Direct to Consumer sets. Generally exclusive to LEGO stores, with high piece counts.

Dark Ages: The period in a LEGO fan's

life when they set aside LEGO in favour of other, non-LEGO pursuits.

Diorama: Usually a large build/scene with a base.

Draft: An activity common at LEGO club meetings in which fans each bring a LEGO set, sort out all the elements and then take turns in picking out the type of part they want. An easy way to obtain parts in large quantities without buying multiple parts of the set yourself.

E

Erling: A 1x1 brick with one stud on its recessed side, named after its designer.

G

Greeble: Pseudo-technical detail added to a LEGO creation to enhance its appearance, often seen in LEGO Space and Mecha creations.

GWP: Gift with purchase. A promotional item or set obtained by spending a minimum amount at LEGO Stores or LEGO.com.

H

Half-Stud Offset: A building technique that allows building without regards to standard alignment of studs on a plate, usually achieved with a jumper plate.

I

Illegal: LEGO building techniques that break the 'rules' for connections between LEGO elements used by official LEGO set designers, particularly connections that stress the LEGO elements.

Inventory: The list of LEGO elements included in an official LEGO set. Several LEGO fan sites host set inventories including Peeron, Brickset and BrickLink.

J

Jumper Plate: A 1x2 or 2x2 LEGO plate with only one stud in the centre. Useful for half-stud offset building.

K

KFOL: Kid Fan of LEGO. The LEGO Group's primary target demographic of between 5-12 years.

L

LDD: LEGO Digital Designer. Free software for PC and Mac that lets you build LEGO models virtually.

Legal: LEGO building techniques that follow guidelines for official LEGO set designers.

LEGOs: Incorrect plural of LEGO.

LUG: LEGO User Group. Local or regional LEGO clubs that meet and interact primarily in an offline 'real-world' context. This is changing as the number of online LUGs grows.

M

MF: Minifigure.

Microfig: Small figures, like those in the LEGO Games series.

Midi Scale: Refers to sets that are between miniature and minifigure scale. They do not include minifigures but are more detailed than mini sets. So far only Star Wars sets have midi versions.

Minifigure Scale: A LEGO creation built for the scale of standard LEGO minifigures.

MOC: My Own Creation. A model designed and built by a LEGO fan without instructions. Often used as a verb, 'MOCing'.

Mod: A modification of an official LEGO set, usually changing part colours or adding to original designs.

P

PAB: Pick-A-Brick. Buying individual bricks in the quantities needed from the LEGO Group's online or physical stores.

PAB Wall: The Pick-A-Brick wall found at official LEGO stores.

POOP: Parts Out Of Other Parts. Huge, ugly pieces that could (and should) have been made from existing smaller



parts rather than moulded in one massive lump of plastic.

Purist: A LEGO fan who only uses official LEGO elements. Can be applied to LEGO creations that only contain official LEGO elements with no modifications or custom parts.

S

S@H or SAH: The LEGO Group's online store, shop.LEGO.com. Used to be called Shop At Home.

SHIP: Seriously Heavy Investment in Parts. A MOC, usually a spaceship, over 100 studs long.

Sigfig: The minifigure version of a LEGO fan that is used in online communities as an avatar or signature minifigure.

SNIR: Studs Not In a Row. A building technique using bricks positioned diagonally.

SNOT: Studs Not On Top. A building technique that places elements on their sides or even upside down to achieve a smooth surface.

SPUA: Special Part Used Again. A brick produced for a specific theme, but used for another.

STAMP. Stickers Across Multiple Pieces.

T

TBB: The Brothers Brick, an online LEGO fan site.

TFOL: Teen Fan of LEGO.

TLG: The LEGO Group, the privately held parent company for all LEGO-related brands and companies worldwide.

TRU: Toys R Us.

U

UCS: Ultimate Collector's Series. A line of large LEGO Star Wars sets designed for older teens and adults.

V

Vignette: A small scene recreated on a square plate, generally 8x8 studs.

W

WIP: Work in progress, usually referring to a MOC.

BASIC BRICKS

Baseplates: The foundation for many projects, be it houses, space bases or castles. They're normally thin plates with no connections underneath so you can only build on top. Some older sets included raised baseplates resembling

rocks, hills and other landscaping.

Bricks: At the core of LEGO is the basic brick. They come in a wide range of sizes, usually denoted by their stud pattern – i.e. 2x2, 2x6 – and in a huge colour palette.

Measurements: LEGO fans usually refer to parts by the number of studs they have. For example, a brick that has two studs on the short side and four studs on the longer side would be called a 2x4 brick.

Plates: Thinner than bricks but not as thin as baseplates. Three plates stacked together equals the height of one standard brick. Can be joined from above or below like standard bricks.

Printed Parts: Can be bricks, plates or tiles. They come with printed designs, often referred to as decorated parts.

Studs: The fundamental joining method of basic LEGO bricks.

Tiles: Thin, like plates but without any studs on top (see SNOT).

■ If you can think of a widely-used LEGO term that's not in the Brickionary, drop us a line at editor@blocksmag.com to get it included.



BRICKLINK BOON OR BUST

What will the LEGO Group's acquisition of BrickLink mean for brick-based investors?

Words: Ed Mack, BrickPicker Pics: BrickLink, The LEGO Group

WITH THE LEGO Group's purchase of BrickLink, the largest independent secondary marketplace for LEGO sets and bricks, the world of the LEGO investor, collector and reseller has drastically changed forever.

When the news first came in, I thought of the classic The Doors song 'The End'. Whatever secondary marketplace practices and experiences we as LEGO fans, collectors and resellers were used to over the past decade or so, it is over and will change – for better or worse. To a veteran of the LEGO secondary market, when 'Big Brother' goes out and acquires the marketplace with the largest collection of LEGO resellers this side of eBay, you have to wonder what its motives are. While representatives say that it's about improving the 'connection' between the company and millions of LEGO fans, my gut tells me there are other reasons that the LEGO Group purchased BrickLink... and some are not necessarily positive for the LEGO secondary markets.

Regardless, it was a brilliant financial move by the LEGO Group. Whatever BrickLink cost the company to obtain it, it was insignificant to its overall bottom line. The acquisition of BrickLink was about data, information, and control – pure and simple. The company likely couldn't care less about making money from the thousands of small independent resellers. What it obtained was years and years of sales data on every LEGO part and set ever produced and resold on a major secondary market site.

While the data is not an exact representation of past and present

prices due to the fact that eBay and Amazon are also large secondary marketplaces, the data still gives the LEGO Group a solid idea of what is popular and valuable, and what is not. This could help with future set designs, and illustrate trends in the industry. It will also give the company an idea of which parts are valued highly, and which sets are prime reissue candidates.

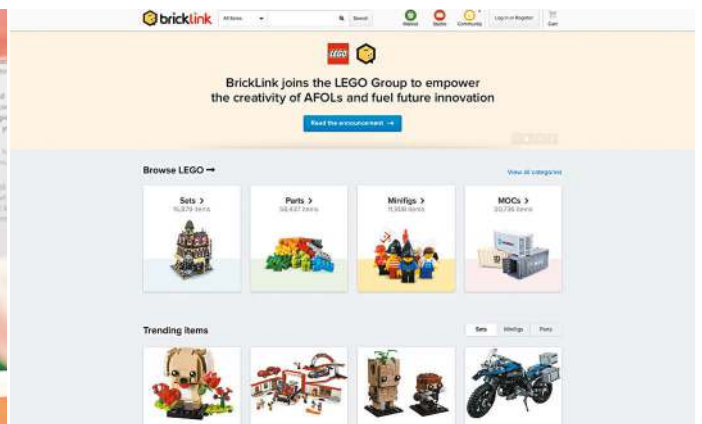
What's more important is that by owning and controlling BrickLink, the LEGO Group now owns a large chunk of the LEGO secondary marketplace. It can improve the site and functionality and embrace the collectors and resellers of the world, or it can slowly dismantle the site, sucking the life out of the secondary LEGO markets. It's about control.

The company has always treated collectors and resellers in a love/hate manner. On one hand, people have been banned from LEGO.com for buying multiple sets to resell.

IT WAS A BRILLIANT FINANCIAL MOVE BY THE LEGO GROUP

At the same time, the LEGO Group has promoted limited and collectable sets, and released numbered rare sets at conventions and other special events. It's also been known to let resellers buy dozens of sets when it needed to clear inventory, so it's very hard to figure out where the company stands on resellers and the collector's market.

Maybe management are trying to figure it out themselves, and the information from BrickLink can guide them to a place where both the primary and secondary marketplaces complement one another and benefit every type of LEGO fan or business. It is my wish that the LEGO Group realises how valuable LEGO sets are as collectables, and promotes this aspect of the iconic toy. This will increase the perceived value of the world's greatest toy, and keep the profits rolling in. ■





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Builder: Chris
Set: 70607 NINJAGO City Chase
Pieces: 233

THE Blocks REBUILD CHALLENGE

Blocks' least adept builders take on the challenge of rebuilding LEGO sets into something – anything – else, all within 15 minutes



The original set. An inspired design, soon to be butchered.

WHAT IS IT?

With NINJAGO City left reeling in the wake of Meowthra's devastating attack, the police department is forced to cobble together vehicles on the fly. Unfortunately, not every LEGO police officer is also a LEGO master builder, and that's how this one has ended up piloting... whatever this is.

Something's pretty fishy about this build.



THE BUILDING

HERE'S A QUESTION for you: how effective are greebles at covering up a sheer lack of design skills? I ask because, as you'll see from the pictures above, it's exactly what I resorted to for this month's Rebuild Challenge. I actually went into this one with a concrete idea, outlined in the pitch above, but as I started I realised that putting that idea into practice was going to be tough.

I've always struggled with realistically adding any kind of height to vehicle builds, and it felt like the elements in 70607 were basically mocking me with how little they did to rectify that situation. I started by throwing a few plates and slopes together, in a sort of ramshackle version of the original tuc-tuc's base, only much less streamlined. I locked on to the idea of wrapping the string around the lamppost pretty early on, but please don't ask me why, because I have no answers for you.

As the clock ticked away, you can sort of see where I just started panicking and slapping bricks on – a phrase which here means, 'Try to ignore the fish.' Small sets beget small pieces, though, so it seemed like a solid strategy for just using as much of the set as possible. I don't think that's the specific aim of the Rebuild Challenge, but given the sheer number of interesting pieces in this set, it's already criminal that I've come up with something only vaguely different to the original model.

I'd like to say this project is improving my building skills, but if anything, I think they're just getting worse. ■

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