

Bricks & Books.

A LEGO® library

The life of an AFOL is not only building LEGO: there are always some initiatives to expand our collection - and reduce the space we have for it - with other 'stars' of the LEGO universe. The recent launch of the spectacular catalogue 'LEGO Collector' is a good reason to do a review of books related to LEGO. Most of them are in English, but some titles can also be found in Spanish to start a library to complete, in words, our passion.

Text & Image: Antonio José Fernández

LEGO® has long ceased to be a simple toy and become a broad and diverse passion. There is a multitude of initiatives that revolve around the bricks, developed or licensed by the company, or by fans. So around the LEGO universe communities emerged, commercial sites and information on the Internet, clothes and objects, and short films, artwork and dozens of publications in the form of magazines or books. And this copy of Hispabrick Magazine is a good proof of that.

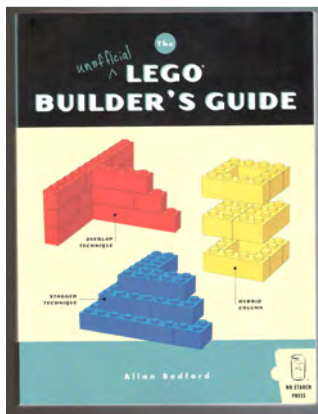
The shelves, at least those of the virtual-bookstores are full of titles and intentions of various genres, from tales of adventures by minifigs and other characters, to the recently appeared exhaustive catalogue of all sets created by the Danish company, instruction books, robotics, principles of construction and, of course, LEGO's own history, of the company and their creators.

All this without forgetting that in these first 50 years of LEGO, the influence of these bricks has grown so much, that it is increasingly mentioned in novels and, of course, in essays on design, and the simplicity of the principles and foundations of the LEGO toy is now subject of study for anyone who wants to develop his career in the world of industrial design. I am not trying to make an exhaustive catalogue in printed works related to LEGO, but publishers and authors have published materials in three major

areas: books **of** LEGO, with instructions, patterns and techniques of construction published by the company or by amateurs; books **about** LEGO, essays and stories about the company or the toy; and, finally, works **with** LEGO, those of fiction in which the bricks occupy a significant part of the plot or the argument.

Ideas and suggestions

Almost since the company began manufacturing bricks it included books in its catalogue with suggestions, ideas and instructions for new models since the first one was published in 1960. Without the duplicates -the same book but with different references-, there are more than 20 books of these suggestions, some of them frankly extraordinary, as in Technic ideas 8891 or 7777 that collects ideas and railway layouts. The arrival of Internet -yes, my friends, the web has not always existed: Peeron or Brickshelf appeared in 1998 and Bricklink in 2000 - ended the books of suggestions from LEGO. The last of the official books so far appeared in 1997 with the reference 697. It is A4 and horizontal, has 44 pages including an index, the detailed instructions for ten models, a sheet with stickers and 16 pages of photographic suggestions. For DACTA, being a more professional line, LEGO has published a dozen books for educators; a line that began in 1972, with



Upper left: LEGO published four books of suggestions of Technic and one of railway ideas.

Up: The four books of instructions and suggestions that were commercialized in Spain.

Left: The most complete guide of construction techniques

'Thinking with LEGO®' (16,197).

In the Spanish market, usually poorly stocked, both 697 and references 221 (1974), 222 (1976) and 260, which also included a sheet with stickers to further customize our models, which appeared in 1990, could be found.

But the explosion -what we might call the Big Brick- of the universe of LEGO® comes with the start of the century, enabling supporters to develop and write their own books, which in just 10 years are on track to exceed one hundred titles in various genres, especially programming guides and Mindstorms NXT, with about thirty works, including a 'Mindstorms for dummies'. Among the ideas for books published outside the company, there are several in English, good for their quality and thematic.

A classic for builders is the 'Unofficial LEGO Builder's Guide' by Allan Bedford. Published in 2005, which is a comprehensive guide on building techniques, scales and suggestions. The book includes several templates and designs for working-level and a very useful brickopedia.

The second of those titles is essential in my view: 'Getting Started with LEGO Trains' by Jacob H. McKee. Although the models and ideas are of American railways, suggestions of construction, the foundations and the general considerations are well worth a look. The same thought applies to 'Virtual

LEGO' by Tim Courtney, Steve Bliss and Ahui Herrera, an excellent guide for beginners including a cd-rom on LDRAW and the rest of the programs to build from the computer.

The last book of suggestions which I recommend is also the most fun. It is 'Forbidden LEGO' by Ulrik Pilegaard and Mike Dooley. The subtitle explains everything: build the models your parents warned you against! This is a collection of tricks, techniques and tips for building Technic models a step beyond the cars or the bulldozers, cutting and manipulating the bricks. The book includes detailed instructions for making five models, from an innocent aircraft launcher until a cannon for ping pong balls or a tiles gun.

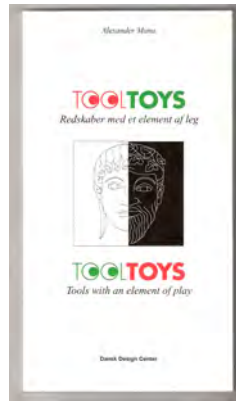
Essays and guides

Since LEGO left wood and metal to switch to plastic, their successful formula and design elements of the bricks as a game of infinite possibilities has not failed to appear in textbooks and essays about design and ergonomics. The first was, of course, in schools in industrial design from Denmark, where it is a case study. An example of this consideration we find in 'Tool Toys', a 1995 book by Alexander Manu that investigates the relationship between design, tools and games.

But in 1987, Donald Norman, one of the founders of



The books of suggestions published by fans are usually very specialized, like these of trains and prohibited assemblies



The design manuals, like this Danish, use as case of study the LEGO products



in this essay on functional tools and designs, the LEGO bricks are used in experiments on ergonomics

ergonomics, the science that studies how to build more functional devices or mechanisms, explained in his book 'The psychology of everyday objects', how the LEGO® bricks were a model of intuition and ease of use even without instructions. Norman used a Minifigs scale motorcycle of 13 parts in an experiment, to prove that if a structure is well designed, anybody can build something without instructions, only with the enough cultural references to know what a motorcycle is, for example. Out the manuals and design texts, there are several books with the company and its products as protagonists. The first, and now sold out, is 'El mundo de los juegos LEGO' ('The world of LEGO games'), published in Spanish by Editorial Everest in 1981. This guide "explains how the factory works from the moment the plastic arrives until it comes out in a box full of bricks. It is very interesting and educational," as Lluís, the LEGO ambassador in Spain, tell us. The second, also published in Spanish, is The Big Book of LEGO by Ediciones B ('Ultimate LEGO Book' by D&K). Although it was a 2000 book, it is still possible to find a copy of this big and spectacular book, full of photographs and very useful to show what you can do with LEGO. In English, the major reference work is Henry Wienczek's 'The World of LEGO Toys', published in 1987. Wienczek makes a wide and interesting tour of the LEGO world that begins with a phrase that any AFOL could subscribe: "If one of the powers of magic is the power to transform, then it is hard not to put LEGO bricks into the category of things touched by magic. [...] A few bricks can become almost

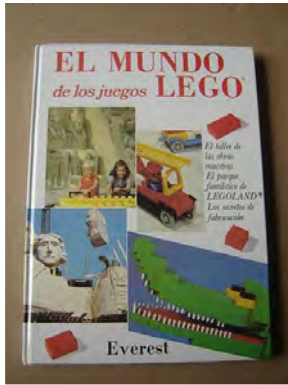
anything." The book also includes instructions for building seven models.

I do not want to close this category without mentioning the small park's Travel Guide to LEGOLand Billund, the essential travel guide to travel around the park and, after returning home, to remember it.

LEGO fiction: a new genre

If there is a work that demonstrates the influence and the role that LEGO occupies in our society it is the novel Microserfs, by the American author Douglas Coupland. Originally published in 1995, it is the bedside book of the first generation of Internet inhabitants and survivors of the technology bubble of the late twentieth century and also the amusing story of a group of geeks or fans of technology, and their adventures as creators and shareholders of a company based on the Internet, after leaving their jobs at a large corporation called 'Microserf' easily identifiably.

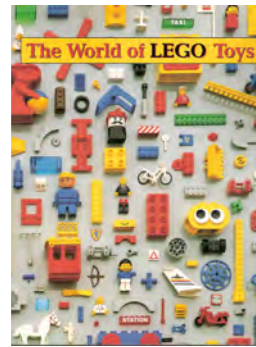
And what is the link between LEGO and the dotcom companies? Well, one could be how the money is spent to decorate their offices, but let Coupland explained: "[...] on the front of us... the most enclosing sculpture that I have seen in my life, a whole world of LEGO: hundreds of 50 x 50 studs grey plates placed on the floor and walls, all covered by tiny brass screws. On the plates, skyscrapers, animals, mazes and railways had been built, standing on the walls, folding the corners, going through holes. The colours were striking: pure LEGO®. [...] The universe that was built was the



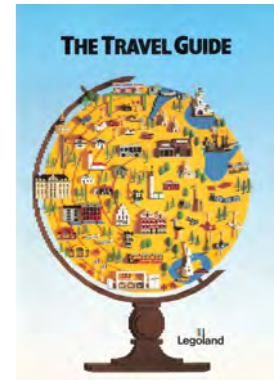
This is the first book about LEGO published in Spain and today out of print



Of this guide of the LEGO world and its parks still copies can be found



One of the best studies about LEGO world



In the LEGO Park of Billund (Denmark) it was possible to purchase this small but useful guide about the facilities at the end of the last century

merger of a Guggenheim and a Toys-R-Us."

Apart from the more serious literature, bricks, minifigs, Bionicle characters in various adventures are published in various formats. In English we can highlight the adventures of Jim Minifig Spaceborn 'The unknown galaxy' and 'The kidnappers of the marshy planet', both of 1987 and with an attractive tintinesque look. LEGO has also published books of stickers and puzzles, games with Duplo, with characters from the series Fabuland, Rock Riders, Exo Force and Castle. There are books available devoted to Star Wars, Batman, Indiana Jones and the unclassifiable Brick Testament, based on a holy book of Jews and Christians, but narrated in LEGO bricks.

And it is precisely those children's books that are most abundant in Spanish. The list was led by the 9 titles in the collection of Bionicle Adventure Editorial Nowtilus and they are easily available. Planeta also has 3 books 'Learn with LEGO Duplo'. Unfortunately, all the six titles of the collection Labyrinths which Ediciones B published in 1999 and allowed to build a huge city joining all the books, are sold out.

Books without readers

What is the acceptance of these ideas books among the fans? Without wishing to make a thorough survey and at least among the Spaniards, the fact is that there is not much interest in LEGO form, beyond curiosity. Even the bigger collectors, as Rick, or Lluís don't have more than half a dozen titles. Although there are also those who, like Car_mp, confess their "weakness for the old ideas books", a sentiment he

shared with the author of these lines. Despite the general indifference, this year, there are few AFOLs who have resisted the publication of LEGO Collector regarded as an indispensable tool.

But in terms of books, there are those who recognize they value "a lot more the plastic of the bricks than the cold cellulose", as our colleague Manticore. The truth is that the Web has become the key source of inspiration, as explained Legotron: "If I want to admire new designs, I find the Internet as the great book of resources I always wanted to have". The Arvo brothers also recognize the role the web occupies in their inspiration: "With the web, the ideas no longer seem to be printed."

The definitive catalogue?

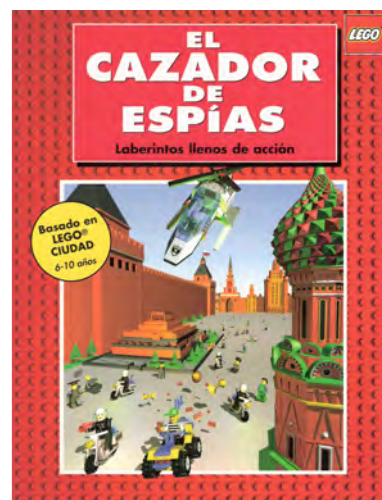
Finally, I can not finish this article without commenting this monumental 'LEGO Collector', which emerged after months of rumours and some delays. During the summer, the German publisher Fantasia put up for sale this book in two editions: a special, numbered one with a brick and a memorial Minifig, and a plain one. This catalogue has been made in collaboration with the company and to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the appearance of the toy. It consists of 800 pages in English and German to qualify for full consideration of all references developed by LEGO in recent years, and most of them with their corresponding image. The book is organized by year and every set is accompanied by a card with the most relevant data: name, number of parts, markets and years in which it was distributed and any uniqueness. The tab



The LEGO bricks arrive at Literature with this novel of the American Douglas Coupland



The Bionicles are the protagonists of a collection of nine brief novels for young readers

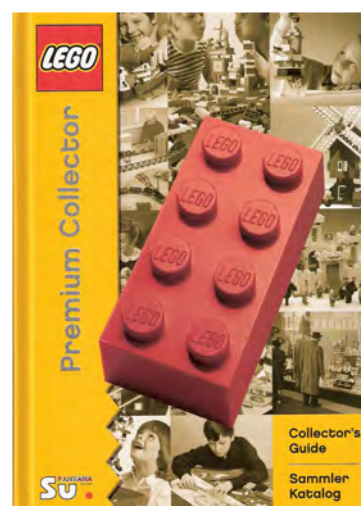


The books of this collection of six titles, today out of print, allowed to construct a great city to develop games with figures



Besides DUPLO books for smallest readers, LEGO has published coloring books

The most complete and exhaustive catalogue of LEGO products, that does appeared a few weeks ago, is already an essential classic one



includes a valuation based on the rarity of the set, established without doubt based on the number of copies that arrived on the market. It also includes a numerical index that tracks a particular product for their reference and also a complete catalogue of boxes with extra pieces. You can also find in its pages sheets with all key chains minifigs marketed by LEGO®.

This book strives to be essential and with high quality in either of its two versions, but has few details beyond comprehension, especially in the photographs. Missing some images sets of forty years ago is perfectly understandable, but, frankly, it is hard to believe that LEGO does not have an image of a box of 2007 -for example, 66221, page 689-

distributed in North America. Nor it is clear to me why the key chains are included but other merchandising are excluded such as these officers and interesting.■