



Interview with Jamie Berard

Senior Designer/Design Lead for LEGO® Direct

By Hispabrick Magazine

Picture by Jamie Berard

In this issue we have the opportunity to interview one of the designers of the new modular building you have just read about. We hope it will clarify all your doubts about the modular building design

Name: Jamie Berard

Age: 34

Position: Senior Designer/Design Lead for LEGO® Direct

HM: Was designing a mall on a corner the first idea?

JB: We were very open to possibilities with the design of this new building. Because it was going to be a corner, we wanted to explore options which would not be possible in a middle section. Municipal buildings and larger types of buildings were tops on our brainstorming list. The department store offered a perfect opportunity for an expandable layout with some very different and fun detailing, so that's pretty much why we went in that direction.

HM: How did you face the challenge of a modular building after the high level of the other ones?

JB: It is a fun challenge to always try and better ourselves. I have to admit it's much more difficult now to impress and surprise fans considering how many hundreds/thousands of beautiful modular creations they have made over the past few years.

The best way to keep ahead of the curve is for us to continue to push the boundaries of what our bricks can do. Playful curiosity can create some marvellous results. My desk has a whole host of half-built assemblies which highlight unusual relationships between elements, funky geometric patterns and numerous little odds and ends that were built for other models but which just didn't quite fit in. It's the desk of misfit toys. However, I'm a firm believer that no idea is ever a lost effort. It sometimes just needs the right time to work out.

HM: What kind of restrictions were in the design?

JB: Like most all LEGO models, we had the usual restrictions of cost and time. We also limited design explorations by very early on deciding that this model would be a corner building to take the place of the Café Corner.

We have some internal guidelines which we established at the onset of the modular building series. The connection points and sidewalks are the first and probably most important constraints. Our minifigures all have the classic smiley face. (Market Street is the only exception because it was developed through LEGO Factory who chose more expressive faces). We intentionally avoid using stickers. If it can be built, we build it. This helps explain the many ways we've explored writing letters and numbers in brick.

We also have a limited number of elements which we can make into other colors or print on. Developing new elements is also not an option for us. We try to leave as much money as possible for the bricks in each set. We want you guys to get a great building experience plus a reasonable value for your money.

HM: Where did you take the inspiration to design the building from?

JB: The building is mostly inspired by large department stores in New York, Boston and London.

HM: How do you decide the internal decoration and which level of detail can you apply?

JB: The level of detail for the interior is very much determined by the remaining budget for bricks after the exterior is built. This can probably best be seen in the Green Grocer. The first floor doubled in cost after we added the interior. Had we offered the same level of detailing on the upper floors, the model would have had to go up in price.

We love using rare and unique elements in the modular buildings. However, these bricks tend to be very expensive. We need to think smart about other parts of the buildings in order to help afford strategic 'gems' which we know you guys will love!

The Grand Emporium includes almost double the minifigures of any previous building. It also has old Model Team windshields, strings, transparent elements and built escalators. These all add up, so it's really important for us to be a bit more modest with other parts of the model.

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