



5 questions to...

Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen
Owner and Deputy Chairman, LEGO® A/S

I would never have thought that as a start for this new section called "5 Questions to ..", we would begin interviewing the owner of the LEGO® Company, Mr. Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen. It all happened in a slightly strange but exciting manner. I sent him the written interview without much conviction that the questions would reach their destination. A few days later I received an answer that left me puzzled. Not only did he agree to answer Hispabrick Magazine's questions, but he would do it by phone. We arranged a date and time, and after several delays due to problems in Mr Kristiansen schedule, the interview was conducted in a cordial atmosphere.

Here you will read some interesting answers to the questions we asked, that explain some of the reasons that led the company to the success of LEGO in the 80's and 90's and now repeats after the crisis of the beginning of the millennium, and their point of view on one of the most unknown programs by LEGO customers and fans: LEGO Charity.

From Hispabrick Magazine I would like to acknowledge the people who made this interview possible, and especially Mr. Kristiansen for giving me the honor of being able to interview him by telephone. We hope you enjoy the interview.

HM: How was the idea of a system within a system born?

Mr. Kristiansen: It was born in the late 70s. The last years we had been very limited in adding novelties and that was because nobody really felt sure where to go. Following some fantastic early years in the US market, we had over-budgeted and came out much lower than expected, and we also had problems in other markets. I came home to Denmark to take part in Senior Management in 1977 and so for me it was really a question of instilling new belief in the company and in our product idea. I saw the possibilities first of all with the minifigure; that we could put a lot of new life into our assortment with different play themes. So the play themes really started at that time.

I also thought that it was necessary to divide our product program in a clear way so that we could both signal to the consumer that there was a system in the system, meaning that there were different product lines for different age groups and for different interests of our consumers - the children, but also to provide our product developers with clearer directions and more freedom to develop within guidelines for each of the product lines. So in 1979 we then launched for instance DUPLO in its own right as LEGO DUPLO with the rabbit logo, we launched Fabuland, we launched Town, Space and Castle and lots of other products. It was a big year.

HM: How did the appearance of the mini fig influence the company's success?

Mr. Kristiansen: The minifig had and still has a huge effect on our success. It opened up a whole new array of play experiences. The core play experience with our LEGO bricks is of course the satisfaction of building something - whether you have created something yourself or created something according to a building instruction. So what we today call Creator and Bricks & More is of course always the core of our product range, but the minifig added a whole new dimension because there would be more play with what you were building because you added the human touch and the role play element to the LEGO play experience. It gave a lot of possibilities for the company to grow and we really did grow through the 80s based a lot on these play themes with of course Town, which we now call City, but also especially Space, Castle and a few years later Pirates. So it was very important for building up the company and creating new life in our assortment.

HM: Why did the LEGO Group decide to listen to its fans?

Mr. Kristiansen: Well actually, we have always done so, because when we have launched a new product we have listened to the consumers, both to the children, but also talked to parents. But what has been the development, and which is definitely also very much a deciding factor for our present fantastic situation with such nice growth, is the fact that we found out that there were also so many adult fans who would get together and form communities on the Internet and I think that that has been a fantastic development which has given us a lot of opportunities to be in even closer contact with our consumers and specifically within certain areas. The first example where it was really done very thoroughly was with MINDSTORMS where we developed a very

fine cooperation on the NXT, and I think that we have learned from that, also within the train development and within different play themes; that we can gain a lot and get a lot of good ideas from listening to our fans.

HM: What initiatives does the LEGO® Charity promote?

Mr. Kristiansen: I always used the notion that for me LEGO is so much more than a toy. Children learn from playing, playful learning is sort of a very much rooted value in our company and therefore I have always been very happy about the things we do in the educational field. And specifically within LEGO Charity, we look at how we can help children in need, children in poor neighbourhoods and in poor countries who cannot afford our product but who we can help. Not only to have good fun and a happier life with the LEGO experience, but certainly also by giving them a chance to learn and grow from building with our products. So this is really the ideal aim with our LEGO Charity program to donate to a lot of different areas in the world where we know that there are a lot of children who wouldn't be able to afford or get hold of our products if we didn't make a special effort with LEGO Charity.

HM: Finally due to the fact that this is a magazine for Spanish fans. Do you know anything about the Spanish community?

Mr. Kristiansen: Not so much, unfortunately, but I know of course that you are our Spanish LEGO Ambassador and now I have also learned that you have this very active community and this magazine and I can only encourage that and say that I feel grateful that you and a lot of other LEGO fans do a lot really to stimulate the overall interest among so many people, so many children and adults, to have a great LEGO experience.

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