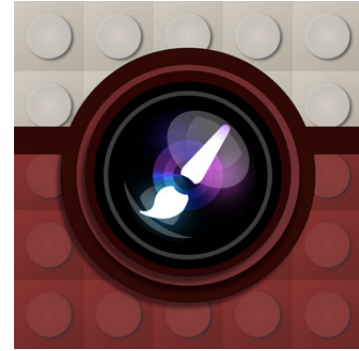


Photobricks

By car_mp



A few months ago HispaBrick Magazine® was invited to try a new software for making mosaics, available for iPhone/iPod through the official app store. Since we have found the application to be interesting and considering that it is free, we have decided to tell you a little about it in case you are interested.

The application is called Photobricks and has been developed by Andrés González. There is a Mac version that can also be downloaded from the Apple App Store, and according to the developer it is more powerful and complete, but we will test the mobile version. Tests have been performed with V1.2 on an iPhone 4 and an iPad 2.

After downloading the application, the program offers the option of working from a photo from our library or to take a photo with the camera. After selecting the photo, we can choose the mosaic size from 10x10 to 200x200 studs. This

shows that its use is limited to domestic mosaics. Large scale mosaics for events or exhibitions require the use of other programs, or if we are patient, we could divide the photo and transform it in parts.

Having chosen the size, you can select the part of the photo we want to transform in a mosaic using a frame with a grid inside that helps you to select the area of interest. Once you press OK you can see the result of the transformation.

In this new screen, you can choose from a series of tools to make changes in the mosaic. The first allows you to select again the size and the work area. The second allows you to locate the plates. Double-clicking on each piece gives you row, column, color and type of the plate that you are selecting. The third allows you to manually change the color of the plates that you deem necessary. While using these three tools you can zoom in on the mosaic with the typical finger gesture for the iPhone.

The fourth and final tool takes you to an information screen where you can see the colors the program is using and the inventory of plates required for the mosaic, along with more general information (name, date, ...). All the changes in the colors are automatically reflected in the mosaic.

Inside the inventory of plates, you can able to export the list of parts required in various formats, among which is one that is compatible with Bricklink ...

Once you are done, you return to the initial screen where your mosaic will now appear ready to be shared on social networks or exported as a photograph.



Finally we should indicate that in Settings/Photobricks, you can select the initial settings of the application, for example, the colors, sizes of plates you want to use or the mosaic size by default, etc ...

These settings are very useful if you want to limit the palette to the easiest to find, or to the colors you have available. It also allows you to limit the parts to 1x1 plates or allow larger plates, which allows you to economize on parts.

Personal opinion

The application is simple to use and configure, and the results are good considering the hardware you are working with: it is just a mobile device.

I miss a "black and white" mode. Right now you have to manually remove all the colors but white, black and different grays from the color selection to get it.

The program transforms some colors, when you are working with shades and dark tones, into colors that do not seem to correspond exactly with the original colors, but the visual result is still good.

Despite this small criticisms we must note that this is a fun and useful tool for mosaics, and a free high quality software that is free of advertising (at least so far) and we recommend it without reservation.

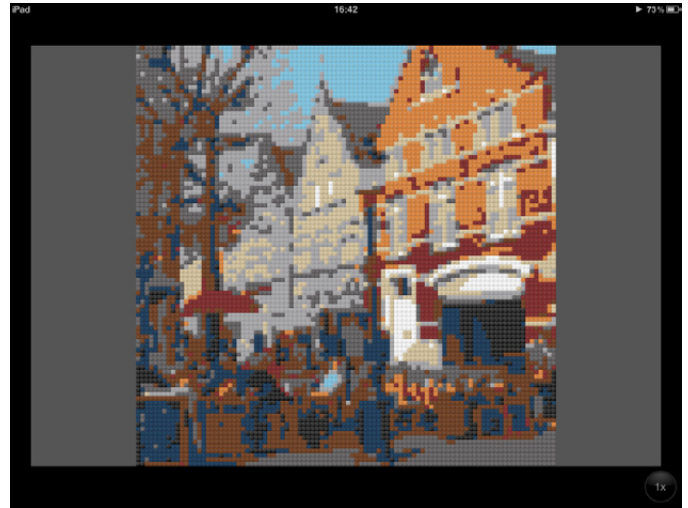
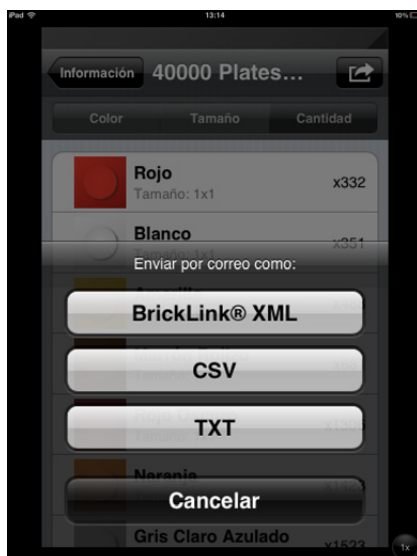
The creative team has been kind enough to answer some quick questions to give you a little more information about the application.

HBM: How did the idea of the application come up?

PB: The Potobricks team consists of individuals who are passionate about art and great fans of LEGO®, if we add their interest and experience in programming, Photobricks has been the natural and inevitable result of these interests.

HBM: How many people and hours have been dedicated to its development?

PB: The development of Photobricks had several stages. Initially we drew the interface with pencil and paper. Then we



made a computer version of it using illustration software. After creating the interface and discuss the logistics of it, Andrés Gonzalez was in charge of all the technical details, including doing extensive research on LEGO colors and reading up on color theory. Paula Gonzalez worked together with Andrew to create the splendid icons that fit perfectly into the Photobrick interface (both Mac OS X and iOS). Once the application was finished, we already had German and French translators, and while Jacqueline Nasser took care of the Spanish translation, Andrew did the translation into Japanese. In total, it took 9 months of part-time work, but during the last 2 months before release, Paula and Andrés both worked full time including several sleepless nights necessary to adjust the algorithms, fix unexpected bugs and to find the right tone in the colors of the icons for the interface.

HBM: Have you thought of versions for other platforms (Android, Windows, ...)?

PB: Yes, we have that in mind. We would love to reach as many people as possible. However, our current jobs and economic budget do not allow us to create new platforms for Photobricks in the near future.

HBM: In this new business of the mobile applications, why free?

PB: This is a tough one to explain and I can only say that before we started with the application we thought a lot about this issue. Ultimately, we decided that instead of possibly making some € 5000 for a period of time by charging € 1 for every download, it was better to allow access to as many people as possible to what we believe is an ideal application. This was and remains our philosophy and this thought was further strengthened when we got in touch with several of the developers at Apple's App Store and found that the proportion of paid downloads to free download is much smaller than 1/10 for typical applications.

HBM: What improvements can we expect in future updates?

PB: We have planned many improvements, most of which were suggested by our users. In future versions, we are planning the addition of many interesting features such as support for vertical mosaics, more LEGO colors that are hard to find, synchronization between multiple devices and an improved print function with a design that shows how to create the mosaic.

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