

BrickCon Exhibition 2012

*By Katie Walker
Pictures by Katie Walker or their respective owners.*

BrickCon celebrated its tenth anniversary October 4-7 at the Seattle Center Exhibition Hall in Seattle, Washington. As the convention program says, "BrickCon is a convention for Adult LEGO® Hobbyists. Its focus is on building friendships and community through the sharing of time, ideas, building techniques and unique creations. The weekend features workshops, presentations, special events, and intriguing challenges. Every aspect of the LEGO® hobby is available for exploration."

This year BrickCon had 12,100 public visitors and 470 registered builders. The display space was 34,000 sq. ft. and there was 17,000 sq. ft. of convention space. Seven regional LUGs participated in the event: SEALUG, PSLTC, GPLR, VicLUG, VLC, PortLUG, and SMART.

BrickCon has two main parts: the private convention and the public display. Although this was my third time attending BrickCon, it was the first time that I was able to stay for more than a day. This gave me the chance to attend a lot more of the private convention, which included presentations, games, speakers, and other activities. I want to preface the following discussion by saying that what follows is only a tiny glimpse of all the geeky goodness that was on display at BrickCon. There were too many wonderful models, presentations, and people to fit them all into this small article; there were many events that I missed entirely. And of course, the only way to truly appreciate the convention is to attend for oneself. That being said, I'll do my best to share what BrickCon 2012 was like.



Seattle Space Needle, by BrickCon Director Wayne Hussey



BrickCon Private Presentations

BrickCon's private convention had a lot of presentations to attend, many of which were done by highly skilled builders. The first one that I went to was called "Building a Bat Cave" by Carlyle Livingston. Carlyle discussed how he and Wayne Hussey went about building the giant Bat Cave that was on display in the Exhibition Hall (and which has also been featured all over the internet, including on the frontpage of msn.com). It was interesting to see how other people go about building projects, especially large and complicated ones. There was a lot of learning involved. For example, Carlyle talked about how he got better at making rocks as he went along, and he thinks that the rocks on one half of the cave are better than in the other.

Another interesting session that I went to was an AFFOL (Adult Female Fan of LEGO®) Roundtable, hosted by Anu Pehrson and Terri Landers. This was a chance for female LEGO® fans to talk about their experiences in a hobby dominated by males. Attendees talked about how they started to build with LEGO®; in a lot of cases, women started building because of the influence of a husband or boyfriend. We discussed ways to get girls involved in building, and about the effect that the new Friends sets have. There was a debate about whether the Friends sets should be put into the girls' toy aisle in stores (suggesting that non-Friends sets would not appeal to girls) or if they should stay next to the rest of the LEGO® (but where it might not reach the target audience of girls who aren't yet interested in building). It was also suggested that BrickCon should have an official Friends theme next year, just like it has Bionicle, Castle, or Space themes. Friends has been (wrongly) criticized by some people who think that it comes with large, pre-fabricated elements and therefore limits creativity. Perhaps next year's BrickCon attendees would be able to create an entirely original Heartlake City and show that the Friends sets lead to just as much creativity as other LEGO® themes that aren't specifically aimed at girls.

A few of the other presentations I went to included "Manipulating Mosaics" by Mariann Asanuma and "How to Build Rocks" by Alice Finch. A subject that I didn't know much about was discussed in "Play Well: Costuming with LEGO(R)," by Norbert Labuguen. Norbert talked about Cosplay (Costume



Norbert Labuguen

Play) with LEGO and showed some photos of neat costumes made out of LEGO®. He also demonstrated the Skulkin Skeleton Soldier mask and claws that he had made.

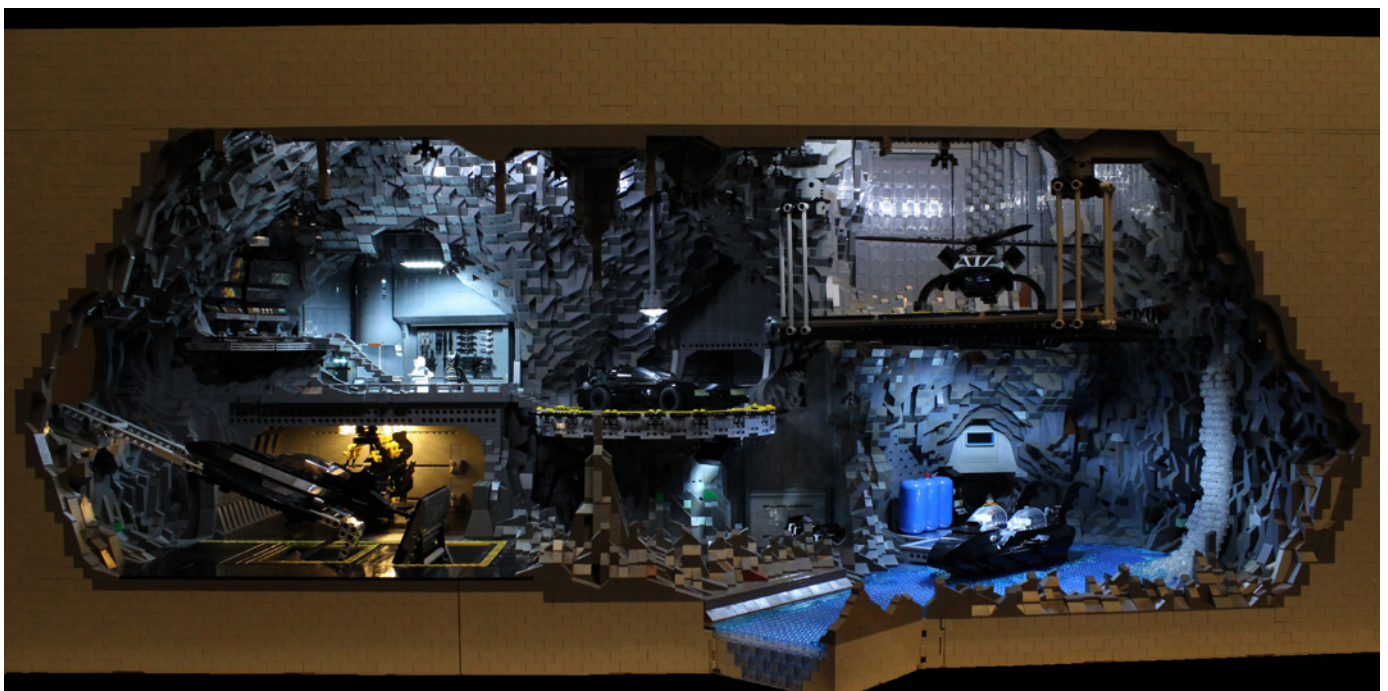
In another session, Brandon Griffith talked about his STUDS Builder Trading Cards. Brandon submitted a project to the crowd-funding website Kickstarter, which was successfully funded. As his

webpage, www.brickstuds.com, says, "STUDS is a trading card set that profiles the people who use LEGO® to build incredible, original sculptures and brings you a close-up view of this fascinating world. Each card has the image of an amazing LEGO® creation on the front and info about the work and artist on the back." I found it especially interesting that Brandon said that he was trying to spread what AFOLs do to the wider world and give building with LEGO® a sense of artistic value.

One final presentation that I want to mention was the one I gave, which was called "Intro to Cheese Slope Patterns and Mosaics." Mostly I just want to say that it was lots of fun to be able to talk about something that I love to an audience of people who seemed to actually be interested. I think that is one of the best things about being able to attend a LEGO® convention: the chance to meet friendly people with similar interests, and to share with each other our creativity and passion.

BrickCon Public Exhibition

The public exhibition at BrickCon was a crowded and chaotic affair. There are many different themes for builders to enter their models into. Some of the themes are pretty standard, such as Castle, Space, and Town/Train. Others are a bit more exotic, such as The Dark Side (which features glow-in-the-dark models under UV lighting), Numereji 2421 (a ship-wrecked space colony), and Bling and Race your AT-AT. There was also



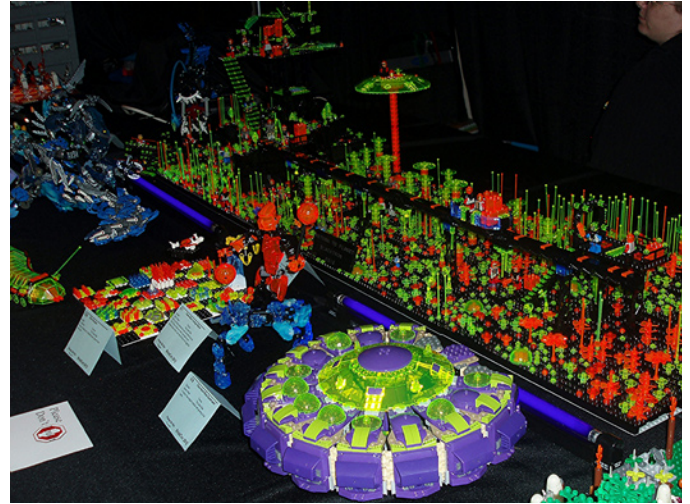
Bat Cave, by Carlyle Livingston and Wayne Hussey (photo courtesy Carlyle Livingston)



a BrickCon Film Festival, which included a winning entry by Paul Hollingsworth featuring harmonizing Wookiees.

As a Castle fan, some of my favorite exhibits were in the Castle theme. It was there that I met David Lines. His builds all had a geometric quality and intensity of detail which I found appealing. His King Leo's Summer Palace is featured in "LEGO® The Calendar 2013," and his Painted Castle is so lovely, I didn't even care that it was not purist.

Alice Finch's massive recreation of Harry Potter's Hogwarts Castle dominated a large portion of the castle section. Hogwarts won both the People's Choice Award (decided by the public) and the Best in Show Award (decided by registered attendees). I asked Alice for a bit of information about her



giant build. It took her about 12 months to build, with 90% of the work being done after her kids went to bed. Alice says that she worked on it "pretty much nonstop" from 9 p.m. to 2 a.m. every night. She was "seriously sleep deprived," but just had to get it done. Since the castle is so big, she isn't sure exactly how many bricks she used, but estimates it to be between 300,000-500,000. If you ask her how much it cost to make, she answers, "Don't know, don't want to know." I understand completely! One of the things that I found most impressive about this castle was how playable it was. There are about 150 minifigs in it, recreating scenes from the different Harry Potter movies. Walls swing open and roofs lift off to allow access to the interior rooms. Alice made special compensations to make it strong enough for her kids to play with, so that an especially vigorous battle would not damage the model. And yes, her kids really do get to play with it.

Paul Hetherington, winner of several previous BrickCon Best in Show awards, never fails to disappoint and this year was



David Lines and his King Leo's Summer Palace



Hogwarts Castle, by Alice Finch

Poseidon, Guardian of Atlantis, by Paul Hetherington
(photo courtesy of Lino Martins)



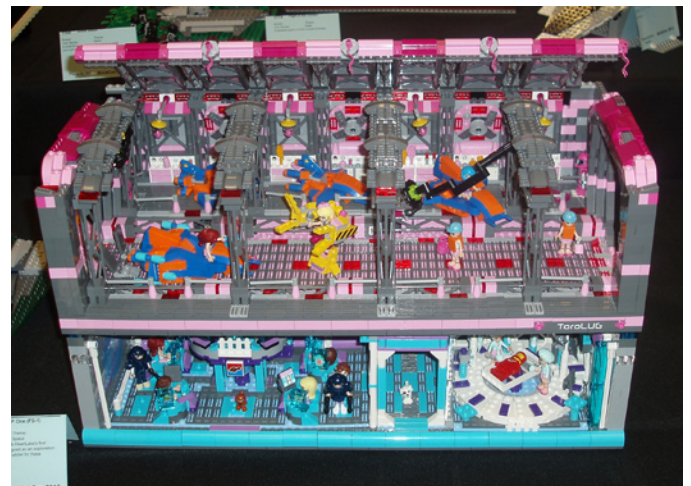
no exception. His Fun Haus, winner of Best in Town, depicted a spooky carnival ride. "A celebration of life... through death. Upon entering, the curtains to the afterlife will be parted. You will face your greatest fears and will come out more alive than ever!"

Paul also brought a giant model of Poseidon, standing guard over the city of Atlantis. The contrast between the giant sculpture and the meticulous details of the scene underneath made for an exciting exhibit. Even more fun is that the model has lots of moving parts. Poseidon moves his head back and forth and waggles his eyebrows; the mermaids swim and wave to and fro; Jack Sparrow makes an appearance, popping up from behind a treasure chest; and a giant clam opens to reveal Sponge Bob Square Pants.

Part of the challenge of bringing models to a LEGO® convention is the difficulty in packing and moving models without them suffering damage. I heard a story of someone who got rear-ended while driving to the convention, which caused lots of damage to his models. But even without car accidents, your creations won't always arrive in one piece. Simon Liu experienced this with Planet HeartLake's first interstellar starship, FriendSHIP One (FS-1). The story of FS-1 has a happy ending, though: Simon got it back together (with only a hundred or so pieces left over) and it won for Best Large Spaceship.

The Heather Memorial Project

One of the most poignant parts of BrickCon was the creation of the Heather Memorial Mosaic. Heather Braaten was a talented AFOL who had been a staple of previous BrickCons, but



Simon's sad: Simon Liu rebuilding FriendSHIP One and FriendSHIP One (mostly) restored.



Robert Frost, Lino Martins, and the Heather Memorial Mosaic (photo courtesy of Lino Martins)

passed away last spring. Lino Martins and Robert Frost wanted a way to remember and honor her, and to give the BrickCon community a chance to say good-bye. They organized the creation of a large mosaic derived from Heather's sig-fig, funded by donations from around the world. BrickCon convention attendees were given the opportunity to put small sections of the mosaic together. At the end of the weekend, the mosaic was presented to Heather's family. Extra funds raised were also given to her family; however, Heather's mom asked for it to be donated to children who can't afford LEGO® sets of their own, because that's what Heather would have wanted. So Robert and Lino got to spend over \$400 on LEGO® which they gave to the Children's Hospital.



Photo courtesy of Robert Frost

One final tribute for Heather was an homage to the "Darlings" characters that she invented. Members of the AFOL community made their own Darlings, and either brought them or sent them to be displayed at BrickCon as part of the Bricks of Character Display.

I never really knew Heather; before this year I had never stayed at the convention long enough to get to know many people. It's a shame that I never will get the chance to know her. But every year that I go to BrickCon I slowly get familiar with more people. I learn more about them, and about what they like to build. I spend more time talking with them, laughing with them, sharing stories and techniques and ideas with them. BrickCon is about much more than just building models; it's about building friendships. I can tell by the tributes to Heather that she had made many great friends during her years at the convention, friends that came together in the tragedy of her passing. As previously mentioned, BrickCon's focus is on "building friendships and community through the sharing of time, ideas, building techniques and unique creations." And, without a doubt, that is exactly what it does.
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Photo courtesy of Lino Martins