

Tiger's Nest Monastery

By Anuradha Pehrson

Greek columns, Roman arches, clay houses, stone palaces, early dwellings made by man to modern structures and buildings, Architecture from around the world, is a subject that fascinates me. I admire works of architects like Palladio, Gaudi, Hunterwasser to name a few. They are people that have pushed the boundaries and thought outside the box.

Building with LEGO® started as a hobby and has turned into a passion. Bringing these two together was only natural.

As I had no formal training in Architecture, building in LEGO was a good way for me to express my own designs & ideas and, since I could build my own designs, I dove deeper and deeper into Architecture as a subject. Each of these interests helped the other grow.

I grew up in India; there wasn't a lot of LEGO available at that time. Around age 7-8 someone gifted me with a LEGO set. It was one of those LEGO system sets that had three different options for building a house. I built all three and then went on to build many more with a few design changes here and there. Having just this one set laid the groundwork for building different things with limited pieces.

My dark ages started around age 12 and lasted 20 years.



I moved to the US (Seattle) in 2001. I had to find my bearings in a new country where the people and the culture were very different. The food was bland and it was raining all the time. One day, walking down the street I saw a FAO Schwarz and in the window there were boxes and boxes of LEGO. I had found something of my old life that I loved, in this strange new land.

I built by myself for a few years not knowing that there is a huge AFOL community worldwide. In 2004 I accidentally came across BrickCon. My first reaction at the show was 'Wow, this is an actual hobby. Adults across the world built with LEGO, I'm not crazy'

At BrickCon I found out about Sealug. The next month I went for my first Sealug meeting and took a small MOC; a house made in the South Indian Architectural style. It had a swing set in the front yard and a small tree with white flowers. Almost everyone at the meeting appreciated this MOC, which was a little surprising to me because these were the same people who had built all the fantastic stuff I had seen at BrickCon. Then I was told that the tree technique had never been done before. I was elated. My first experience being with this group was Great! They were very warm and friendly, and instantly made me feel welcome. This was important to me, especially being female and a foreigner. To me it seemed like I've found my planet, my people, my tribe. :)

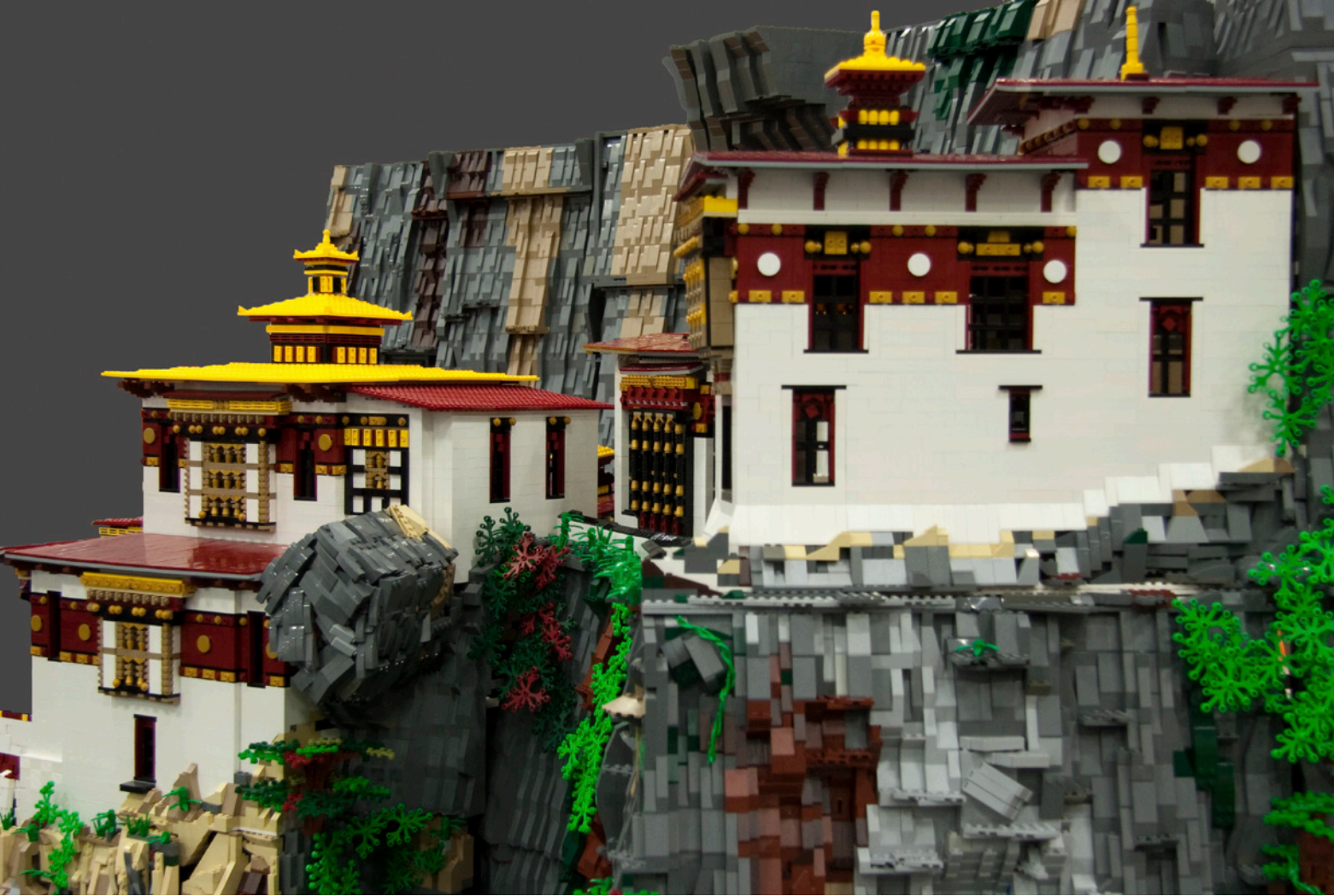
Each project I do has some unique character or challenge that makes it an interesting build. The one thing I always try to do, is use parts in different ways than they were intended. This is both frustrating and satisfying at the same time.

For inspiration, I often look for pictures of architecturally interesting buildings. During one of those quests I came across pictures of Tiger's Nest Monastery, Paro Taktsang. It's a prominent Himalayan Buddhist sacred site and temple complex, located in the cliff-side of the upper Paro Valley in Bhutan. The initial temple complex was built in 1692. The monastery is located 10 kilometers (6.2 mi) to the north of Paro and hangs on a precipitous cliff at 10,240 feet above sea-level, about 3,000 feet above the Paro Valley. The monastery buildings consist of four main temples and residential buildings that are built in harmony with the natural terrain and rocky (granite) ledges.

I decided to build this in LEGO®. I knew it would be very challenging and wasn't even confident that it could be built, but was sure that this was a MOC that would demand innovative use of parts and techniques. I started with the windows of the smallest buildings to establish the scale and then proceeded one building at a time. The thing I noticed was almost each window was elaborately carved and constructed differently. Relatively easy to do with wood, very difficult to do with LEGO, but this gave me the opportunity to push my limits and think differently. For every window, I found myself studying the pictures for hours at a time and then coming up with at least 4 or 5 different iterations till it seemed like the window on my table looks similar to the window in the picture. Sometimes one single window took a week to complete.







Another difficult thing to replicate was this massive rock jutting out. First, building a rock in that shape and making it stable was tough and then actually attaching it to the main structure was an engineering challenge. My husband, who is a great moral support, helped me here.

The next difficult part was the rock work and setting the buildings in a way that it seemed like they were built on the mountainside. This required a lot of technic beams and pins, duplo bricks and finally as time and money became an issue, cardboard boxes and plywood sheets.

The final challenge was to bring it all together and transport it to BrickCon. The table in my house wasn't big enough for it, so the first time it would come together was at the show. When I got to the show I noticed more than expected number of sections had broken. It took me around eight hours to set it up, rebuild and reconnect everything, but the end result was very satisfying to me, personally, and I'm grateful to God for being able to complete and display this MOC.

The dimensions are about 7 feet x 4 feet and 3 feet high. It took almost nine months to complete and there are roughly 150,000 parts in it.

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