



## Interview: Dr. Robert Carney

*By HispaBrick Magazine®*

Dr Robert Carney is known worldwide for his numerous castles made with LEGO® bricks. From 1986 to present he has built more than 140 historical castles from many European countries. Some of them are small keeps or strongholds with a main tower, but many others are massive constructions with several curtain walls, many towers and many kinds of military and civilian buildings.

**HispaBrick Magazine:** Who is Robert Carney?

**Dr Robert Carney:** Hello to you all! I am a 71 year old retired dermatologist, born in Iowa in the midwestern USA. I practiced in downstate Illinois for 37 years before retiring at the end of June 2011.

**HBM:** Dr Carney, What is the origin of your fondness for LEGO castles?

**Dr. RC:** This is a complicated question: In 6th grade in grammar school, I played the part of Hugh the serf in the class play - and my lifelong attachment to things medieval was born. LEGO did not exist anywhere when I was a child,

and not in the USA until I was almost 30 years old with two small sons and a daughter. We bought early LEGO sets for our children, built myriad houses, airplanes, cars, etc. until the children outgrew their LEGO, leaving it at home with Papa, who continued to build a bit now and then...but in 1986 LEGO Group marketed the Black Falcon's Fortress with D-shaped towers guarding the entrance, and suddenly I know I could recreate almost any castle in the world with LEGO!

**HBM:** You have built many castles of several European countries. How do you choose the castles to build?

**Dr RC:** My initial focus was on castles that I thought were particularly attractive and which might be recreated in LEGO. My main source of information and pictures was books about castles in English, which meant they usually favored English castles. But I copied material (pictures and plans - always in black & white - on every castle I could find in a library - all organized alphabetically by country. When my castles appeared on the World Wide Web, suddenly I had feedback, like architectural plans for the renovation of Ballytarsna in County Tipperary, Ireland, and photographs of the courtyard

of Castel Marrecio in Bolzano, Italy from the then curator. The outside interest and assistance has been irresistible -- so I've modelled castles both famous and obscure - but they're all castles that were prepared for war.

**HBM:** In the building process of your castles, Do you make computer designs or any kind of drawings or plans?

**Dr RC:** Very early in my design years, I evaluated LDraw as a possible design tool, but it was too tedious. Thus I've always done my plans and elevations on 1/8" graph paper, taping sheets together for large projects, all done in pencil since I erase a lot.

**HBM:** You have built more than 140 castles. They need a lot of parts, and you dismantle the last castle in order to get pieces for the next one. But, do you have any permanent assembled castle?

**Dr RC:** No castles. It would be too difficult to choose favorites. My Tomb of Nefertari in the Valley of the Queens in Egypt is the only model I'm considering keeping, since it's very educational for both children and adults, and displays the actual ancient Egyptian artwork.

**HBM:** Which is the most challenging castle you have built? Why?

**Dr RC:** Excellent question! Since LEGO is most naturally a square/rectangular medium, any construction in other shapes is a challenge - and many castles were built atop irregular rock formations, making them a challenge to recreate. Other

castles are unusual shapes due to the whim of the owner or architect (e.g. Caerlaverock in Scotland or Thoury in France). Neuschwanstein was a huge challenge in part because it needed to be built in sections so it could be transported long distances.

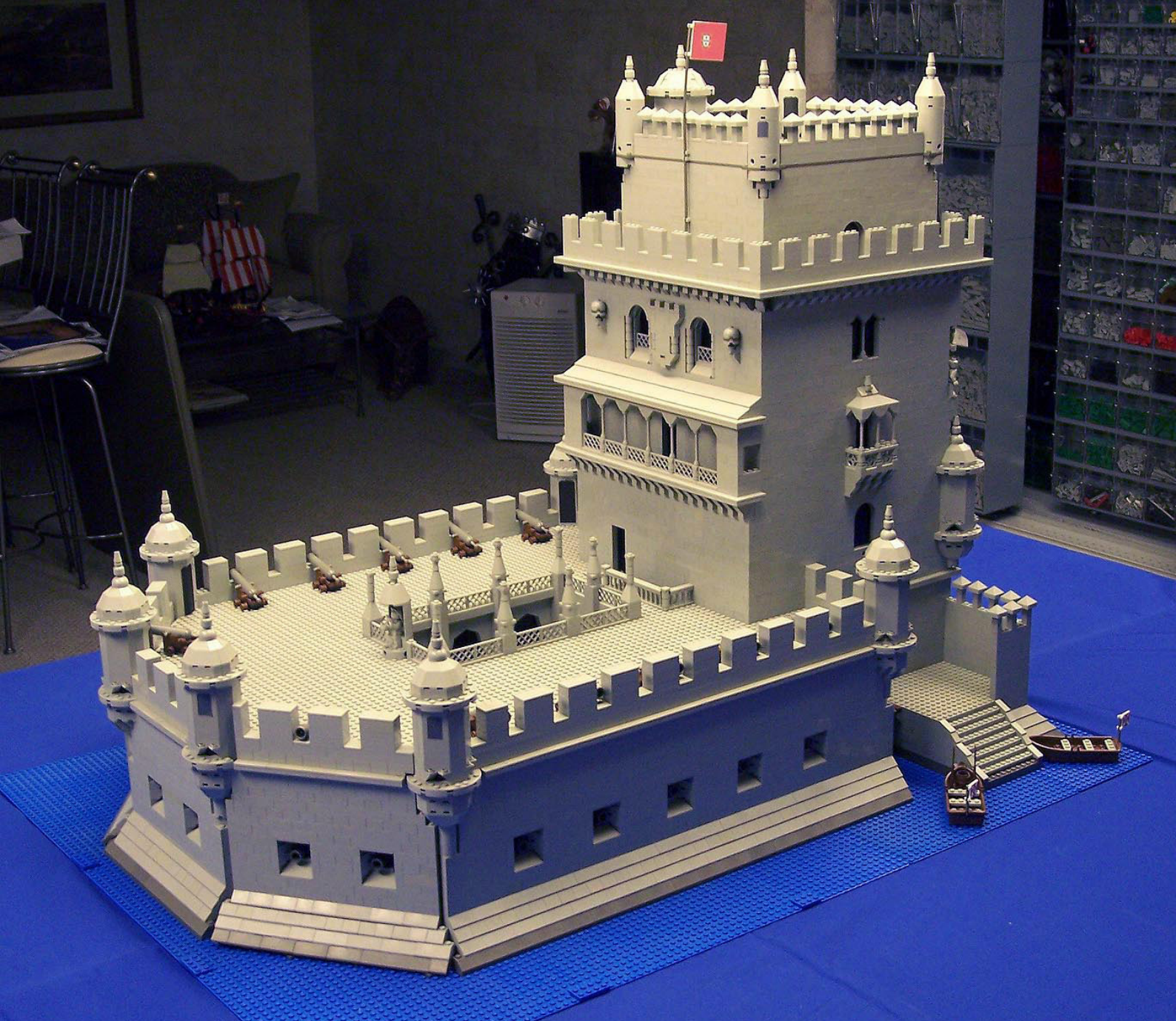
**HBM:** Do you have any favorite castle? And what about your Spanish castles?

**Dr RC:** I would have to say that my two favorites are Schloß Neuschwanstein in Bavaria and the Torre de Belém in Lisboa's harbor. Neither fit my usual pattern of "medieval castle prepared for war". Neuschwanstein being a palace and Belém a cannon fort, but both are so beautiful that they were a joy to design and build. I love the simple majesty of Almourol and long to rebuild Fuensaldaña or other Spanish castles similar to it. And of course La Mota is a flat out awesome castle!

**HBM:** In the last years we have seen a lot of new parts related to castle (new doors, panels, modified bricks, slopes, wedges...), is there any castle you would like to rebuild using the new parts?

**Dr RC:** As you've doubtless noticed, my 141 castles include a number of larger rebuilds. Probably the only one rebuilt to date due to "new LEGO" was Craigievar in Scotland, which I redid using the same plan and elevations as soon as tan [sand yellow] panels became available. More important in rebuilds is owning more LEGO and having better pictures and other information so I can rebuild both larger and better. That said, parts like the 30° 1 x 1 x 2/3 slope have been in huge help in new projects.





**HBM:** Have you ever been required/commissioned to build a castle for a museum or exhibition hall?

**Dr RC:** No. Several people, owners and interested parties, have asked to buy the model, but not only would gluing and shipping be a real chore, there is a limited supply of old light gray LEGO® available since it is no longer made, and I need it for future projects.

**HBM:** Have you ever been involved in collaborative dioramas or projects with your castles?

**Dr RC:** So far as I know, castle collaborations are all done using interchangeable modules and are by nature “fantasy castles” which I do not build. I suppose a collaboration might be possible on a huge castle (e.g. the Alhambra, Malbork in Poland or the Krak des Chevaliers in Syria) but so far as I know no such attempt has been made to date.

**HBM:** Have you ever think about building fictional castles, like those ones shown on movies or TV series (Lord of the Rings, Camelot, Hogwarts...)

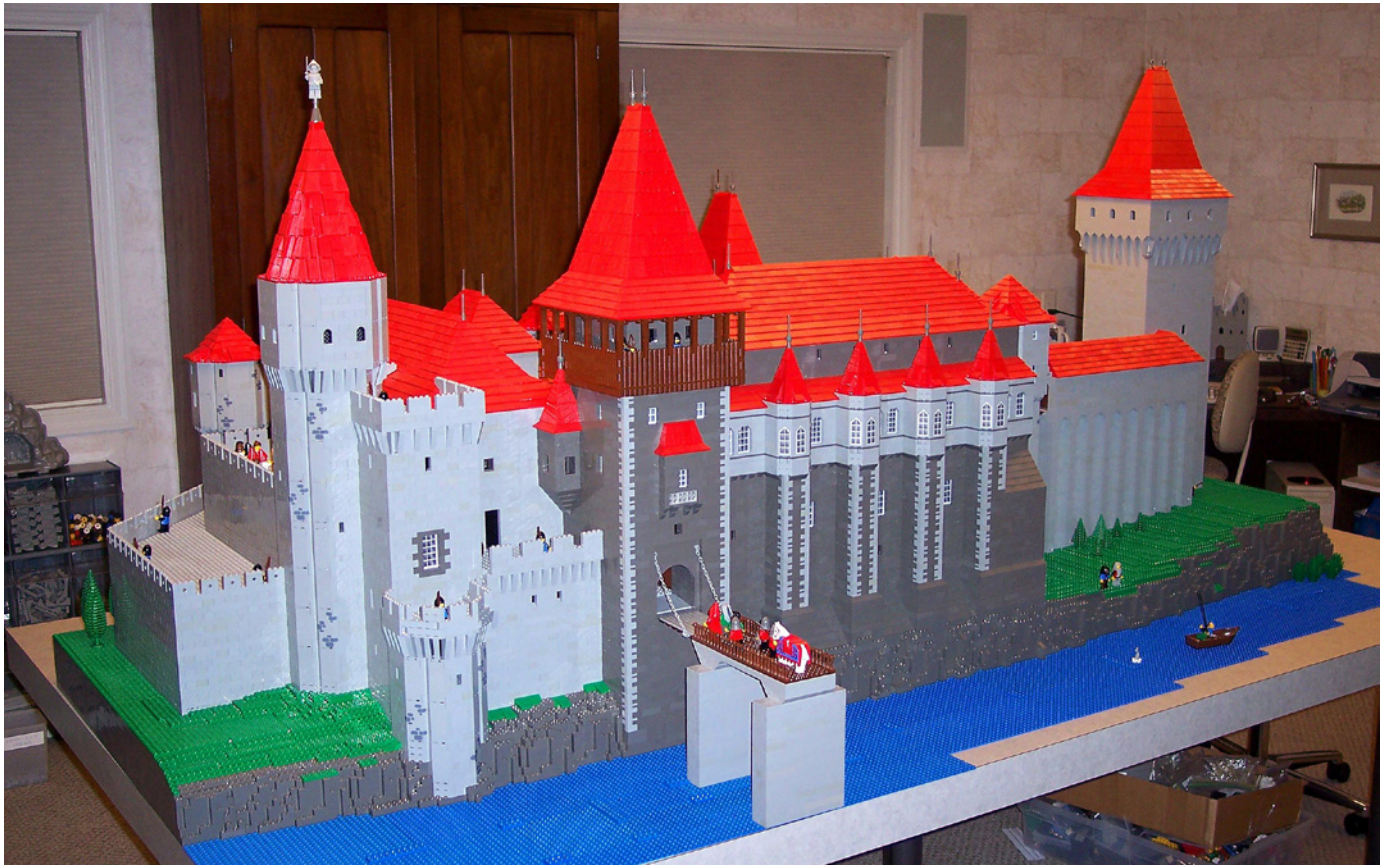
**Dr RC:** Oh, I think about it a lot, but I have more real castles to choose from than I can ever build, so I suspect it will not happen. There are plenty of AFOLs building wonderful fantasy castles.

**HBM:** Do you follow last years castle sets from LEGO? What's your opinion about them?

**Dr RC:** I have always liked the castles that LEGO has offered beginning with the 1978 classic yellow castle, which I bought incidentally. My only real complaint is that the battlements have never protected the minifig guardians very well, and I've always wanted a 5 x 2 arch [for a 3-stud wide arched door]. But we now have two Moorish arches which is a very nice addition.

**HBM:** Apart from castles, what are the LEGO themes you are most interested in?

**Dr RC:** I love my Egyptian tomb and have designed (but not built) others. I have built every car of the 1953 Santa Fe Super Chief passenger train that ran for years between Chicago and Los Angeles, and the entire 9-car train from Toy Story



3. And I assist with the design of the 4H projects of Justin Rice, who just turned 16. He had built beautiful models of the Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel and Eiffel Tower in Paris, the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C., etc. I hope (with some encouragement from me and others) his love of LEGO building will continue into adulthood.

**HBM:** Could you tell us something about your next project?

**Dr RC:** While I expect several castles to be built in the interim,

I am most concentrating at the moment on my castle for BrickWorld 2014 in Chicago, Illinois. I'm designing and hoping to build the Castillo di Torrechiara near Parma, Italy. It is a awesome fortress.

Visit Robert Carney castles at: <http://carneycastle.com/index.htm>  
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