

THE LEGO MOVIE

By HispaBrick Magazine®



One of the most important milestones this year has undoubtedly been the premiere of The LEGO® Movie. I must say that I was all skepticism at first. There have been previous attempts, by other toy companies, of making movies in which their products were the protagonists, most of them directly intended for release on DVD and cartoon television channels. When you think about toys and movies you cannot avoid thinking about Toy Story, a leader in animated films, in which LEGO bricks already appeared in some scenes. But in the beginning everything made me think that it would be far from this type of film. As more and more details were known, the interest in the project grew. The release of the first trailer was highlighted on all websites related to LEGO bricks and gave birth to hope in the hearts of AFOLS.

The waits are always long, the difference in release dates between different countries did not help. The lucky ones who attended premieres or previews in selected countries flooded

blogs and forums with comments and reviews of the movie. Also the first collection figures and specialized reviews made us think that LEGO seemed to have a new success.

After seeing the movie one can only confirm that everything that has been said about it is true. Any child will enjoy the film, any LEGO fan will enjoy it twice. Everyone will find something to love, its argument, the nods to our world... but seeing the end product as a whole, the film is fresh, original, it is spectacularly done... in short, it's awesome.

Here we present an interview with **Matthew Ashton**, Vice President of Design The LEGO Group and Executive Producer, and then the fantastic models from **Imagine Rigney**, an example of how the AFOL world has been inspired by the film.
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Interview with Matthew Ashton, Vice President of Design, The LEGO® Group & Executive Producer

Pictures courtesy of The LEGO® Group

HBM: What was the collaboration with the writers/directors of the movie like?

MA: It has been a whole heap of fun. Phil and Chris (Lord and Miller) and the Hageman Brothers are hilarious! When we first signed up to do this project, we gave the writers complete creative freedom to write the most exciting, heartfelt story they could. We knew the key to the success of this movie would be the story itself. There have been several 'toy-based' movies that have been released in the past that have not connected with the audiences well. We wanted to make sure we had a dramatic rollercoaster adventure with characters that the audience would deeply care about. We reviewed the treatment, the scripts and the animatics throughout the process to ensure that the story championed an underlying message of creativity, and that it tied in with our LEGO® brand values.

HBM: Have you been involved in making the movie in addition to designing the models?

MA: Yes. I have been involved in the development of the movie for three years now, as well as the development of the products associated with it. In fact, all the movie stuff came on top of my regular 'day-job', as I also oversee the development of many of our other product lines including LEGO City, LEGO® Star Wars™, LEGO Minifigures, LEGO® Teenage Ninja Mutant Turtles™, and LEGO Super Heroes, etc. It has been a very busy couple of years!

HBM: How many people have participated in designing the models and scenes that appear in the movie? How much time have you invested in the project?

MA: The number of designers involved has varied through the different stages of the project. I have been working together with Michael Fuller (Senior Designer) on the project day to day since the beginning. Michael has been an absolute star. He designed a large percentage of the models seen in the movie. At certain points we arranged 'Design Boosts' where we pulled together a team of maybe 50 designers to brainstorm and flush out a load of different ideas for the movie. The team that finalized the models (which ultimately became the toys) consisted of around 8 designers.

HBM: When the models for the movie were designed, were they conceived with idea of launching them as sets?

MA: This varied from model to model. Once we had a pretty final script locked down, I ran through the story and highlighted the assets that I felt would make great toys. Every aspect of the LEGO Movie is made from LEGO Bricks, and some of the content was very similar to some of our existing lines. Bricksburg was an interpretation of LEGO City and the modular buildings we already produce, and Middle Zealand reflects a Castle kingdom – so we chose to produce the items that were new, and different and distinct from all our other product lines. We also made sure that we selected the vehicles from the most memorable action sequences, as we knew the kids would want to rebuild these sets and play out the scenes that they remember from the movie. Once we had the shortlist of models, we put full focus on those, collaborating with the directors and animators to make sure that they would work well

Matthew Ashton and Unikitty



in the movie and also make great toys.

HBM: Was it difficult to convert the virtual models from the film to actual sets made with bricks?

MA: As it was such a collaborative process, both the virtual and physical models were designed simultaneously – so the majority of the sets they are a 100% representation of what you see in the movie. There are one or two sets that are more of an 'interpretation' of what you see in the Movie: for Lord Business' Lair, for example, we obviously couldn't create an entire office tower, so we picked the most iconic components and combined them into one super fun play set. The movie version of Emmet's Construct-O-Mech was actually designed first by the animators and we then scaled it down and refined



Lord Business' Evil Lair



Matthew Ashton with concept designer Matteo Oliverio (left)

it to make the toy. Metal Beard's Sea Cow, on the other hand, was designed the opposite way round: we actually designed the toy first, and then it was scaled up and reworked into the Movie version long after the toy had been designed. This was one of the sets that we knew from the beginning would have its challenges, simply because of the scale of the model (the movie version needed to be colossal – much bigger than any toy we could produce). We were super happy how they both turned out. The movie version is absolutely breath-taking on screen, while the toy version is jam-packed with exciting details, building techniques and functions.

HBM: What kind of information did you have for the set design?

MA: It varied from model to model. In some instances, the directors had very clear vision of exactly what they wanted, and provided us with sketches or inspiration material. In other instances they came to us and asked us to run with our ideas and then we would refine them together afterwards.

Take Unikitty for example. Cloud Cuckoo Land had already been conceptualized fairly early on in the story development, but it had been quite difficult to nail down the character who should rule over this Kingdom. We had all tried several attempts and none of them were really working, so we decided to wipe the slate clean and start from scratch. By this point we knew that we needed to balance the gang out with someone who was much more emotional, and we could really do with someone 'cute' too. We hopped on a call with the directors and had a brainstorm of what the most adorable things in the



Unikitty sketches



Unikitty colour tests

world were.... We boiled it down to two favorites: kittens and unicorns. So to make our character super-special we decided to mix the two together! After a couple of concept sketches that didn't really nail it, Unikitty was handed over to me to design and turn her into the adorable, brick-built bundle of bubblyness she is today!

HBM: Did you have any limitation in colors or parts that you could use so to get the desired on-screen results?

MA: As the film is built digitally, the animators pretty much had free reign to build with bricks in whichever colors they wanted from our color palette. Of course this isn't something we could do in real life, as our factories would go into complete meltdown if we had to produce all those bricks in every imaginable color ;)

HBM: Did you have to make many changes in the designs during production to adapt them to the script?

MA: Not too many, luckily! The one model that was really complicated to deal with was Wyldstyle's Super Cycle. You see it in the movie being built from parts of a Bricksburg back-alley, so it took a lot of work to get it right both for the animation sequence and the final end result of the movie model and the toy. This model changed color several times throughout the movie development, and was actually blue up until the last minute. However, as it was quite dark on screen, we made the last minute decision to switch it to orange so it would 'pop' better in the chase sequence.

HBM: Are there any scenes in the film that haven't been turned into sets that you would have liked to design?

MA: We all have our favorites. I love 'The Dog' from Cloud Cuckoo Land, and I have already seen that some fans have recreated that. The mis-matched submarine is also hilarious. I adore the paddling, pink, snorkeling teddy that Unikitty built for the front section. Of course we can't recreate everything as an official set, but we hope that the movie itself inspires fans to get creative and dive into their buckets of LEGO® bricks to recreate what they have seen and much more.



The Super Cycle



Matthew Ashton and Senior Designer Michael Fuller

Senior Designer Michael Fuller



HBM: What are the main differences between designing a set for the LEGO Movie and designing a set for any of the licensed movies?

MA: Every LEGO set is different and fun to design. I cannot get into the details of the main differences but loved how designing the sets for the LEGO Movie was remarkably collaborative, as we were working on them together with both the film makers and lots of LEGO designers from other project teams.

HBM: What has been the best and the worst of working on this particular project?

MA: There have been so many positives it is impossible to list them all. We are so proud of the end result and are so thankful that everyone who has been involved in this process has thrown themselves whole-heartedly into the making this movie. For me personally I feel so blessed to have been involved in this. It has been an amazing experience, and I have met some truly inspiring, talented, creative people along the way, and that means everything to me. If I did have to highlight a negative, it would probably be having to deal with the different time zones; we were working in Billund, Denmark, the directors were mainly based in LA, and production/animation was based in Sydney, Australia – so there were plenty of late night calls, sleepless nights, delayed flights and lost baggage to be dealt with along the way. But despite all of that, everything turned out AWESOME in the end and we have carved a brand new milestone into LEGO history, so it has all been well worth it!
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HBM: What is easier to design: a theme as varied as LEGO® Movie, with elements from City, Castle, Pirates, Western, etc, or a theme with line with a single theme?

MA: I wouldn't say it was easier, it was definitely very exciting! It was so funny seeing some people's reactions to the movie products before they had seen any scenes from the movie. The line-up is so obscure, quirky and weird that many people thought we had gone completely ga-ga!

HBM: Some of the sets allow you to build a secondary model. How were these alternatives designed? Was the main set designed with the secondary set in mind or has the alternative design been a later process based on the available parts?

MA: They were designed with both models in mind from the get-go and refined as we went along. We wanted to make a series of vehicles that would fit seamlessly into a LEGO City environment for all our more purist fans, while at the same time creating something cool (and completely bonkers) for everyone to have a laugh and a lot of fun with.



Ice Cream Truck

Matthew Ashton & Senior Designer Michael Fuller





Imagine Rigney

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/imaginebrickzone/with/13098262345/>

