

Interview: BriXtar

By HispaBrick Magazine®

Pictures by BriXtar

HispaBrick Magazine®: Can you tell us about yourselves?

BriXtar: I am Martin Krosstedt, father of two, boy and girl, five and nine years old and Jonathan Jehander is father of two boys, six and eight years, and we are the founders of BriXtar. We both live in Sweden, and in 2015 we started BriXtar parallel to our ordinary jobs with a dream to make it possible to work on this full time. Our friendship goes back to 2010 when we met and worked together within the financial service industry in Stockholm. Now, two and a half years after founding the project, we can both dedicate ourselves to BriXtar and focus on our vision and live our dream.

HBM: How big is the BriXtar team?

BX: Actually quite big – maybe 40-50 people. We have worked closely for the last year and a half with many people from the Swedish AFOL community and even from abroad to help us build BriXtar. So of course we see them as a part of the BriXtar team. But if you look at fully employed staff and advisors we count nine people.



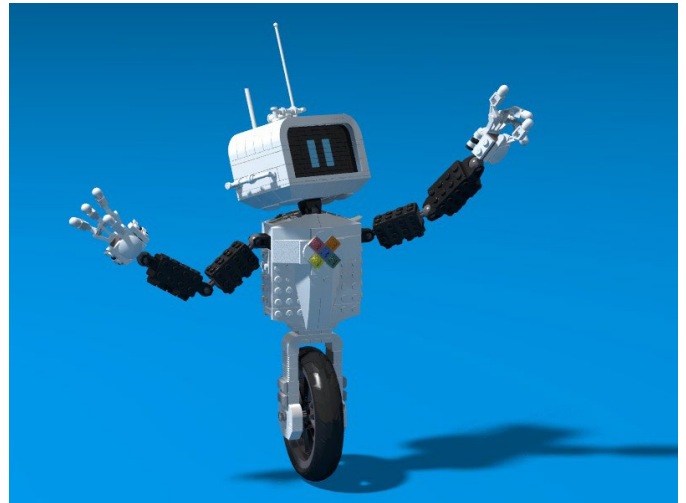
The BriXtar team

HBM: What is BriXtar?

BX: BriXtar is a social network, an app, created for LEGO® lovers by LEGO® lovers and a tool that helps you get the most of your bricks and thereby contribute to a climate-friendly building experience.

On BriXtar we don't primarily consider the brick to be a tool for playing in the traditional sense. We rather see the brick as a tool for creating art.

There are so many talented AFOLs all around the world, using the brick to create the most awesome MOCs. That is impressive and amazing and we want to give them the credibility that they truly deserve. We want to put their MOCs into the spotlight and show their awesomeness and make them available for the next generation. We want kids and dedicated parents to get the chance to be inspired by the art created by AFOLs and learn from them to become better builders themselves.



On BriXtar you can share the instructions for your MOCs with our 3D manual so that other users can build them, and we already have several MOCs on BriXtar that have been very popular with a wider audience. Imagine the feeling when somebody loves the MOCs you made so much that they actually spend their time building them! That is a great feeling and we have built this deeper feedback into the app. Besides sharing your MOCs you can create your digital library of bricks on BriXtar in order to match your bricks to those required for MOCs posted in the app. We have also developed a challenge mode where you can make tailor-made challenges and invite friends and other BriXtar members to compete, and we also arrange different building competitions where we challenge your building skills and imagination. In all this we work closely with the community which gives us great input, and several new features will be launched early next year. We don't want to reveal too much at this point but I can tell you that there will be a lot of awesome stuff.

HBM: Can you tell us little more about BriXtar 3D?

BX: BriXtar 3D is our own 3D instruction renderer that generates a manual from an LDR file to be uploaded together with the MOC. The 3D manual enhances the building experience for those who build and saves time for those who make the digital MOC since they don't have to make instructions. With BriXtar 3D on your smartphone or tablet you can play the whole manual from the first to last brick. Build step by step, rotate the the MOC, zoom in and out and easily see where the bricks attach. With the 3D manual you can learn new building techniques by studying the MOCs from different angles. It's a totally new experience.



HBM: Can you tell us the background story about BriXtar?

BX: As with many other AFOLs, we can thank our children for bringing us back to LEGO®. Our dream started some years back when we saw how the pile of LEGO® we had gathered constantly grew. We saw the potential that existed in all these bricks – everything we could build if only we had the skills and the imagination. Huge changes had taken place in the world of LEGO® since we were kids. More variations of bricks had increased the number of options for what we could build. At that time we first came in contact with the AFOL community at an exhibition and we were astonished by what they created with LEGO® as their toolbox. We saw a new generation grasping this opportunity with their hands and minds, and we asked ourselves what if we could create a community for people who share the same passion – regardless of gender and age.



HBM: Are you planning any collaborations with current AFOL communities?

BX: There are many great platforms today where AFOLs gather, and we see possibilities where we can collaborate to enhance the experience for our members and vice versa. As we speak, we are actually announcing a collaboration with Brickset.

HBM: What does this collaboration mean?

BX: We start out with BriXtar and Brickset now having a synchronized updated set and parts list. BriXtar members will also get access to all LEGO® set data from Brickset direct in the app and all Brickset members can easily import their digital library of bricks into the BriXtar app to see what they can build.

HBM: The app is for all LEGO® lovers. Do you see any problems addressing such a wide range?

BX: We see people of all ages using BriXtar and we have had great feedback from users regarding the user experience and members decide who they want to follow. But the most important thing for us is to make BriXtar safe for children, which we have done with a special child account for children under 13 years. Our next goal is to attract more female AFOLs to BriXtar – there are so many talented female builders out there.



Release Party in November

HBM: You mentioned accounts for children. How does that work?

BX: We think of BriXtar as an inspirational source that unites all people who share the passion for colourful plastic bricks. We, the founders of BriXtar, are dedicated parents. We want our kids to be inspired by all incredibly talented AFOLs and the MOCs they create. Our kids love LEGO® and hopefully we will be able to keep their interest in the brick for many years further.

But we cannot be clear enough about how important our kids' safety is for us. We want parents to feel secure and safe when their kids are using BriXtar. The child account is connected to a head account for which the parent is in charge. As long as the child is under 13 years of age it is up to the parent to decide what functionalities the child is ready for. BriXtar is a social platform but as default all possibilities of being 'social' on the platform are turned off. We have also decided to remove some functionalities that we don't consider suitable for children. They are not allowed to participate in challenges with voting systems for example. All of this is to achieve maximal security. We also made sure that BriXtar is compliant with all relevant guidelines and legislations, such as the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA).

HBM: How do you distinguish yourself from other platforms?

BX: There are so many good platforms for AFOLs out there, but the feedback we have received from AFOLs we have been talking to is that these platforms haven't really satisfied their needs. Many AFOLs are posting their MOCs on Flickr and Instagram but there is not that much more to do on these platforms beyond posting pictures. On BriXtar we are focusing on developing features which are adapted to suit AFOLs and LEGO® enthusiasts. When we released BriXtar globally in November we got the feedback that we are onto something really unique. But we have just started our journey and we still have a lot of work to do. We realize that we need to do things ten times better to attract people to BriXtar, and we are working close to our community in order to achieve that. As said, we have a lot of features going on that we believe can truly make life better for the global AFOL community. The positive feedback we get every day from our users gives us the energy and will to succeed.

HBM: What are your future plans?

BX: We want to make BriXtar available for everyone, and launched the app globally at the beginning of November on App Store and Google Play. Apart from spreading the awareness of BriXtar, we have a lot of interesting features coming up for 2018. One is to encourage our members to develop their building skills through gamification, so stay tuned.

HBM: Since you are a company, how will this affect the users?

BX: Being a company enables us to invest in creating value for the users. It is not enough to be a little bit better than current solutions, we have to be ten times better to validate our existence. We do it by continuously developing new features with our community.

HBM: In November you announced that Swedish former Olympic gold medalist in High jump Stefan Holm invested in BriXtar. How did this come about?

BX: We approached Stefan Holm early this summer through a common friend and worked together during our soft launch at 'Klossfestivalen' in Örebro, Sweden. We found a common ground and one thing led to another resulting in Stefan now being a part of BriXtar. Stefan is a perfect partner for us. He shares our passion for the LEGO® brick as a tool for creativity, and our values concerning dedicated parenthood, sustainability and the willingness to bring more into our community of children and AFOLs. For all who want to see Stefan's creativity, you can find him on BriXtar under his username @scholm.



Klossfestivalen in July



Klossfestivalen in July

HBM: Who builds most, what do you prefer building, and what are two tips for new BriXtar members?

BX (Martin): I would say Jonathan builds the most of us two. I like the challenge in building alternative models from sets and there is a lot of inspiration for alternative builds on BriXtar. I also get great satisfaction building other users' MOCs with 3D instructions where I have 50-70% of the bricks. This challenges me to find other solutions, and when I'm done it's very satisfying.

One tip is to take the time to register your sets in the app. The more sets you register, the more buildable MOCs you can find. If you have your set inventory on Brickset then you can easily import this into BriXtar and see everything you can actually build.

BX (Jonathan): There are so many MOCs on BriXtar that I would like to build – MOCs that are not only visibly beautiful but which also include a lot of challenging building techniques which are rarely seen in original sets. My best tip is to use BriXtar as a source of inspiration to enhance your own building skills. I build a lot today, but I am still a rookie compared to many of our users. With the 3D instructions I am able to observe how other MOCs are constructed which has enabled me to become a much more skilled builder myself.



MOCs by Nkubate to the BriXbox

HBM: Is there any special moment you remember from the last two and a half years?

BX (Martin): Yes, right at the beginning. We wanted to see how difficult it was and how long it would take to sort out 600 bricks from a pile of LEGO® bricks. We decided to take my daughter's Dolphin Cruiser (41015-1) and tear it apart, mix it with a pile of bricks, sort it out and rebuild. We had not been building for let's say 20 years so we were a little bit rusty. We started at 11pm (which I don't recommend) when I sneaked into my daughter's room and took the Dolphin Cruiser. After tearing it apart we had seven hours to sort out the bricks and rebuild it. It had to be finished and put back in the same place before she woke up. We managed it in just three hours, but we don't recommend starting at 11pm. ☺

BX (Jonathan): I have so many memories from the last two and a half years but I'd have to say that my strongest ones are all the new friends I have received as a result of BriXtar. In this time I have had the honor of getting to know a large part of the AFOL community in Sweden, and more and more AFOLs even outside Sweden. They are humble, nice people who have offered so much from themselves to help BriXtar as a company, and also me as AFOL and individual. For that I am deeply grateful.

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