

# Great creators of the world: Alice Finch

by HispaBrick Magazine®

pictures by Alice Finch



Alice Finch started building with LEGO® again when her kids needed a building companion. She realized that building isn't just for little kids- it's creative, inspiring, and incredibly fun for big kids too. Her first model was Hogwarts Castle, which accidentally grew to be 400,000 bricks big. In her LEGO® room in Seattle, WA, she continues to build models both great and small. She also contributes to collaborative projects since she thinks building has great potential to bring people together. Her work has been published in many books and she is a featured builder in the documentary, A LEGO® Brickumentary. She travels all over the world, giving talks, demonstrating building techniques, and teaching builders of all ages how to use bricks to make the world a better place.

**HispaBrick Magazine®:** Name?

**Alice Finch**

**HBM:** Age?

**AF:** 44

**HBM:** Nationality?

**AF:** American

**HBM:** What do you do normally?

**AF:** Everyday is different and is more like a multi-armed juggling act than a typical 9-5 job. I am heavily involved in volunteering in my kids' schools and community and have, especially these last few years, spent a lot of my time and energy helping in many community projects. On a typical week, I may do all of these: teach an art lesson in my son's classroom, work on the Fine Arts annual showcase event, assist with first year band students, strategize with the gun violence prevention committee, develop social justice curriculum for the middle school or a LEGO® Serious Play workshop for elementary school kids, collaborate on a new social justice awareness project, run an after school LEGO® club, part in a new kit for the shop on my website, plan a workshop for our newly founded Women's Brick Initiative, build a MOC for an ArchLUG collaborative display, experiment with ideas for a new batch of models for my next book, and if I'm lucky, find a few minutes to do personal building. I decided a while ago that I would put my big personal projects on hold as there were so many important issues needing my attention right now – things that I can use my mix of experience as a teacher, builder, and social activist to address. This is why I haven't built a big model in a while – I've been using the brick to try and educate people about the many pressing issues of our time that seem to get more urgent by the day.

**HBM:** When did you first start building with LEGO®?

**AF:** I picked the brick up again as an adult in 2011. I was building with my kids and decided to build a MOC of my own. As soon as I decided to have my own projects, I had so many ideas of what to do that I started a few, some of which I still have tucked away under dust cloths. I was trying to find my building stride and it was good to try a few different things until I found a good fit. I found it with Hogwarts.

**HBM:** When did you start posting your models online?

**AF:** The first model I posted online was my Hogwarts Castle in 2012. A friend of mine, Carlyle Livingston, helped me with the massive task of taking photos, and then my husband helped with cleaning up the backgrounds in photoshop. It was quite an undertaking to try to figure out how to do all of this with such an enormous model with both exterior and interior shots. Once I did post the photos, the internet noticed, and I was completely overwhelmed by the response – I simply couldn't respond to the influx of emails fast enough.



**HBM:** What is the last set you have purchased?

**AF:** Most of the sets I buy these days are for my kids, but the last set I purchased for myself was the new microscale Hogwarts. I was asked to do a review of it so I ran out to the LEGO® store, which fortunately is only about 5 miles away from my house, picked one up and then spent the next couple of days building. At a certain point, we just run out of room to display all the MOCs and sets we've built, so not everything stays built or on display. Seeing as I'm partial to things related to HP, we managed to squeeze it into our display space.

**HBM:** What is your favorite commercial LEGO® building theme?

**AF:** It is hard to choose just one, but now that Harry Potter sets are back on the shelves, I'd have to say HP. It is great to have the diversity of characters available, as this is so key to that world. Diagon Alley is arguably my favorite set of all time as I think it was a significant leap in set design and it is one of the few 'location' sets that was complete – walls and roof, and not just the front side.

**HBM:** What is your favorite theme for building?

**AF:** In general, my favorite theme is architecture, but not in the sense that LEGO® uses it. I'm interested in any and all things architectural, and that includes fantasy. I really enjoy the challenge of building accurately based on a model, but that model can come from a book or a movie as easily as off the street.

**HBM:** What is your favorite LEGO® element and why?

**AF:** The 32028 1x2 plate with rail is easily my favorite part. Architecture is often monochromatic, and any chance I have to add texture or a shadow, this is a go-to way to do it.

**HBM:** What do your family/friends think about your hobby?

**AF:** When I started building as an adult again, my parents did think I was a bit daft to be putting so much energy into building Hogwarts. All it took was them seeing Hogwarts in person to understand what it was all about. My husband and kids build, so they have understood from the beginning that this is what I do, even though I didn't know it until it happened. I also have a fabulous circle of friends who don't think it is even the slightest bit strange. No explanation is necessary to justify my house being in an ever-changing state of chaos due to the piles of bricks, sets, and MOCs in enormous cardboard boxes, and new projects in various stages of completion.



**HBM:** Which part would you like LEGO® to produce?

**AF:** How about interior and exterior corners for plate with rail? I can't think of the number of times I could have used these!

**HBM:** How much time do you spend building with LEGO®?

**AF:** This is a difficult question to answer because it varies widely by day and week. A slightly easier question might be how much time I spend thinking about or working with LEGO® since I am constantly developing workshops and projects using bricks but not necessarily building with them. The answer to that would be all day, every day!

**HBM:** Do you draw or pre-designs before you start building?

**AF:** I pretty much exclusively build with the brick in hand as I find the trial and error process to be key to experimenting and finding the best solution for a particular model. I do lots of studies where I'll build a window 3 different ways and try them all out until I decide which one works or looks best. The one exception to this is when I'm traveling. When I'm on a flight or in a place where I don't have my bricks, I will sometimes take graph paper and draw out some ideas that I don't want to forget. These are usually iterations on a theme or ramblings inspired by what I'm seeing as I travel. For example, when I was working on my book, I drew many different types of window decorations as I traveled in Washington DC to capture the huge variety of windows treatments I saw as I walked through the city.





**HBM:** If you had to choose one among all your creations, which one would you choose and why?

**AF:** Hogwarts was really my first model, and so there is a lot of experimentation and development of my own style and techniques built into it. There wasn't a lot of visual reference material available at the time I was building, since the 'making of' type books weren't really a thing yet. I read all the books again and watched the movies for every detail I could find. I even went to the HP Studio tour in London to see what I could glean from the set models. All this research then had to be converted to brick form, and since I hadn't really done much free building since childhood, I had to reacquaint myself with exactly how to turn my vision of Hogwarts into bricks. A whole lot of them: 400,000 bricks, give or take a few. What started as just the Great Hall, grew a kitchen, then a common room and boat house, and then... at that point I realized that this project might end up being enormous, and well, after a year of building, it did. Building Hogwarts was really the beginning of this LEGO® adventure for me and so it has a lot of meaning not just for me but also for the rest of my family.



Displaying Hogwarts also made me aware of the local and global AFOL community, and how this hobby connects people all over the world. Sadly, it also exposed me to the jealousy of other builders in my own community, the sexism of the broader population, and how this hobby can often tear you down as much as it can inspire. These challenges made me aware of how LEGO® can be so very much more than an art medium or a hobby with a fan club. It can be the starting point for making people aware of prejudice, kindness, injustice, creativity, and a whole lot more.



Rivendell, which I built the next year with my friend, David Frank, was the first major collaboration I'd ever done. I'd found my building groove by then and I was ready to stretch myself again. This time the challenge was finding the right style for the elegant architecture and integrating it into the dramatic and lush landscape. It was a great experience and I think we both inspired each other to grow as builders, but because the project is no longer together, it is also a bit sad. So, to make a long answer short, building Hogwarts changed the trajectory of my life – as a builder, AFOL, parent, and teacher, and it led me into social justice advocacy.

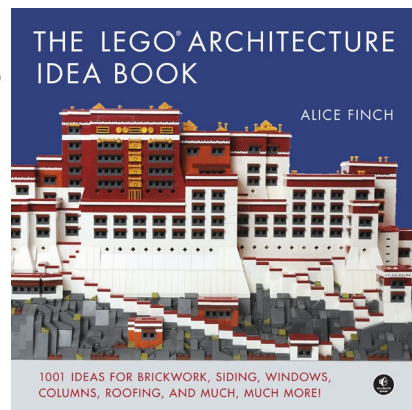
**HBM:** What do you think about the use of unofficial parts (stickers, modified parts, non-LEGO® elements, etc.)?

**AF:** I see the brick like any other art medium and find that I use the potion bottles or printed bacon tiles or battle axes when they work well in a model. The accessories are great as they offer interesting parts for a broader variety of themes beyond what LEGO® makes, and I enjoy the challenge of finding crazy ways to use the unusual parts. I've used third-party claws as grass and gun mounts in windows, but I do tend to avoid clone bricks. They just aren't as good in quality and I don't approve of the clone companies scavenging ideas and producing identical sets, so I give them a wide berth.

**HBM:** So far, you are the author of a few books. Can you tell us what we will find in your last book 'The LEGO® architecture idea book'?

**AF:** As far as I know, this is the first LEGO® reference book of its kind. The goal is to show many different possibilities and for you, the builder, to take the ideas and make them your own, by adjusting the color, shape, parts, scale, or any other aspect to match your needs.

There really are over 1,200 models in the book, and all of them are meant to get you thinking. What about this, or that, or a combination of both. If it isn't clear how a technique is achieved, there is a 'how to'



example. All of the key parts are labeled with part numbers so you can easily look them up.

Throughout the year of building, I was also taking photos, and since you probably all know how hard it is to take good photographs of LEGO®, you can understand how huge the task was for photographing 1,200 models from multiple angles. Somehow, we managed to wrangle all the examples into chapters and sections, and like most things, the effort was worth it, even if it was ten times more work than I thought it would be. This is hopefully the first of many idea books, as I have lists of many more ideas to get people building better. It takes a bit of courage to transition from building with instructions to building what you envision and to step up the level of detail in your MOCs. This book is for those moments when you need a wall, but don't know how to make it interesting. Or when you are pondering what that technique was that you saw but can't remember what it was. It is my hope that this book will provide the support and inspiration for people of all ages and experiences to become more detailed, more creative, more innovative builders.

## Patterned Walls



**HBM:** How do you see the evolution of the FFOL (Female Fan of LEGO®) phenomenon over the last couple of years?

**AF:** I think it is fabulous! I haven't been in this hobby that long, and yet it already has changed dramatically from being a few female builders to quite a few. We still have plenty of room to grow, but it is really fabulous to see women joining in.

**HBM:** The Women's Brick Initiative... can you explain more about this?

**AF:** The Women's Brick Initiative was created by three of us in the LEGO® world as a way of supporting all women who are creative with the brick, whether this be through modeling, photography, minifig collecting, or jewelry design. We realized that even though the numbers of women are growing, we still can use a positive, supportive place, where we can ask questions, find a mentor, and be inspired. This year, we are expanding our outreach by workshops within existing conventions where women and girls can try out something new and meet like-minded women.

One of the things that inspired us was the list of ten characteristics that LEGO® created in 1963 to guide their design process. Second on the list is design toys for 'girls and boys.' We want to bring back the focus on girls and women, and are dedicated to supporting and inspiring them.

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## Curved Walls

