

Jessica Farrell – The Inside Story

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Jessica's workspace

When an opportunity presents itself and there is the chance for a nice chat, who could resist? Jessica is from Ireland and you may know some of her well-known MOCs like Her Majesty's Theatre in London, Tomb Raider or Jurassic Brick. Yes, today we are the company of Jessica Farrell, an extremely versatile and talented builder and FFOL (Female Fan of LEGO®).

KOCKICE: Jessica, it's always a pleasure. For our readers, can you reveal something about yourself?

Jessica Farrell: Well, I'm still in my forties, but let's face it: First Generation AFOLs are getting older! (I wonder if TLG will make special Duplo sets for us when we are too old to see and hold system bricks!)

I am a horticulturist by trade and for 20 years I have run the family business, which is a garden nursery. However, over the last two years, my time spent on LEGO®-related activities has increased so much it feels like my hobby is now my profession (or the other way around).

K: Most AFOLs have some story about getting back to LEGO®, maybe you can share yours with us?

JF: I've loved LEGO® since I was four years old but I had a terribly long Dark Age. I didn't start building again until I started getting really jealous of my children's Christmas presents! The passion quickly resurged and by 2014 I was happily building

MOCs, letting my children play with them for a while and then breaking them up again. Then a chance meeting with an AFOL in a UK LEGO® store introduced me to the world of LUGs. I didn't own a computer back then and I had never done a Google search but a helpful LEGO® employee found Brick.ie, the Irish LUG, for me. Once I had gathered up enough courage to show up at a meeting, I was hooked. The members of Brick.ie were so welcoming and encouraging, I felt a sense of belonging straight away. The rest, as they say, is history!

K: Looking at your models, nature is sort of universal and very well captured being a horticulturist, but everything else also has the "How did she do that?" effect.

JF: All the females in my family are artists, spanning four generations. I inherited some of the talent but never found my medium until I started building with LEGO® as an adult. I had been taught an artist's appreciation of colour, form and style in all things, so that sense of beauty must now be in every model I build. I am, of course, inspired by nature since I have worked outside in nature all my life. Most of my work has some organic element to it but I am driven to create beauty beyond the natural form. I want people to see my work as art; to feel something more than just "Hey, that's cool!" and to somehow be enriched, enchanted or inspired by the experience. When I plan a MOC, I never use digital design tools and rarely make drawings beyond quick sketches. For the first few days I look like I'm in a trance



Plant Monster Invasion

because all these mental images and mathematical calculations are going on inside my head. It often feels like I've already built the MOC before I even start it!

K: We already mentioned Her Majesty's Theatre in London (which is now owned by Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber!), Jurassic Brick, and Tomb Raider – plus Fortress of Solitude – such astonishing models and in a wide variety of themes!

JF: Variety is the spice of life; I like my work to be as varied as possible. If what I'm building now is completely different than what I built before, then I'm developing new skills and meeting new challenges. Before I start a build, I do considerable research on the subject, so I end up learning a lot of new things, too. I prefer to be a little scared when I start something new. The thrill and fear (what if I won't be able to pull it off this time?) is a powerful motivator.

K: Those models must demand quite a big collection.

JF: Of course, building such a variety of MOCs means I need to have a massive LEGO® collection! I can't just collect certain colours or types of parts, I need to have lots of everything. My LEGO® room is highly organised and every piece is sorted by colour and type, but all the drawers are overflowing. My dream is to have a studio where I can build without constantly bumping into boxes!

K: Is there a MOC that you can say was the most challenging one?

JF: My most challenging MOC to date was definitely the Sub-Tropical Swimming Paradise, a 2.5m x 1.5m model commissioned by Center Parcs to promote the opening of their new resort in Ireland. I was assisted by my son, Faolán, who is also an avid builder.

We had to work from blueprints and CAD illustrations (the real building wasn't built yet) and getting the shape of the structure correct was a real challenge. It had to be curved around, sloped downwards and slanted outwards. The main wall had to be mostly trans-clear panels and the interior fully viewable so there was no way to hide any support structures. Then there were all the curved and spiralled water slides and, to make it even more difficult, everything had to come apart into easy, transportable sections so we could assemble it all in front of a camera crew in less than 15 minutes! The overall model was way too big for the LEGO® room so we built in sections until the final few weeks when we had to lay it all out on the kitchen floor. That was really stressful because everyone was afraid of falling over it or spilling coffee on it! Even so, looking back it was a great experience. And, of course, as part of our work Center Parcs had to send us to one of their other parks for several days' research...

K: How did you find that experience, collaborating with Faolán? Would you be willing to try and go outside the family for a collab?

JF: The Center Parc commission was the second model Faolán and I worked on together (not including TV). The first was Plant

Monster Invasion, a crazy build filled with action and humour. Collaborating was not easy as we disagreed over a lot of things and our building styles are very different but I sincerely believe the model would not have been as good as it is without the collaborative effort. I don't think I would do a collaborative build outside of the family, though, because if there was disagreement I wouldn't be able to pull the parent card!

K: We have seen you being part of the LEGO® Masters series on Channel 4. It seems that it was a lot of fun. What's your experience with the show? Would you do it again?



Fortress of Solitude



Center Parcs Sub-tropical Swimming Paradise

JF: Being part of LEGO® MASTERS was a fantastic opportunity and a great bonding experience for myself and Faolán. It was not easy; in fact, a lot of it was quite stressful and all was certainly not as it seemed on TV. The best part was the behind-the-scenes camaraderie with the other contestants, some of whom are now good friends. Would we do it again if we could? No, but we are still glad we did it!

K: You mentioned that the hobby is becoming your profession. From hobby to doing commissioned work, how is that? Do you get a lot of enquiries?

JF: Yes, as I mentioned before, my hobby is rapidly turning into a job! That's not a bad thing; I'm used to being self-employed, working with stuff I love. It's not easy and building for a client is a very different experience than building purely for fun. Deadlines are stressful and one has to be very conscious of cost. Eight out of ten enquiries evaporate once a potential client realises just how expensive and time consuming it is to build an impressive model. Regardless, I build my commissioned pieces to the same standard and self-imposed rules as my other MOCs and there must always be beauty in the work. My least favourite part is most commissions have to be glued. That's not fun at all and the rest of my LEGO® collection gets very frightened when it sees the Kragle!

K: AFOLs can meet you on international gatherings. Any favourite event?

JF: Yes, I go to as many international AFOL events as I can. I love them all and it would be impossible to pick a favourite! The international fan community is like one big family and the fan events are like family weddings where we all get to meet, catch up and celebrate!

K: Any inspiring words for getting more females into LEGO® as a hobby? Maybe a few thoughts or a vision of the future LEGO® community.

JF: When I was a child, many people thought it was odd for a girl to like LEGO® so much. It was definitely a boy's toy. It's great to see that view disappearing and, whether you love the minidoll

or hate it, there's no denying that girls are now being drawn into the fold. This is a good thing and I think the next generation of AFOLs will be more evenly balanced between the sexes. As for the future of the AFOL community in general, well, I hope that the international gatherings continue and, on a local level, LUG meetings still take place. Although social media certainly helped get the community to where it is today, I'd hate for social media to replace the real life social event. And seeing a great MOC 'in the brick' is so much better than just seeing it on Flickr! Then there's the Duplo for old AFOLs to look forward to...

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Santiago de Compostela Cathedral