

LEGO 21161: Minecraft–The Crafting Box 3.0

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A bit blocky for conventional LEGO terms, but that's what makes it instantly Minecraft-y.



The alternate model of a house uses almost exactly the same parts as the primary "tower". No leftovers!

Merging hobbies is always an interesting undertaking. Some combinations, like photography and trekking, obviously go hand in hand perfectly. Some are unusual but actually make sense together, like D&D and cartography. Then there are exotic combinations, like juggling while kayaking. And some extreme ones have, let's be frank, been invented for no other reason than to gain clicks on YouTube.

Somewhere among the lot, there is a natural alliance between the fans of LEGO and of Minecraft. Indeed, being an AFOL and an avid Minecraftsman myself, I was certainly among the rather large group of people whom LEGO had targeted with one of their larger Minecraft sets, the 21161 Crafting Box 3.0. As both hobbies focus on (among other things) building worlds using square blocks that sometimes interact with each other, the touching points are so obvious and deep that we could easily consider LEGO and Minecraft a marriage that was simply bound to happen at some point. And so it did, starting carefully in 2013 – and keeping their wedlock still happy and healthy in 2021.

It raises one obvious question: what are the actual benefits (businesspeople would say synergies) in merging Minecraft and LEGO together? Well, there are multiple possible answers, all of which make sense. Obviously, if you are a serious Minecraft fan, you may just want

to show it a bit more by displaying a Minecraft-themed LEGO set, or an own creation, in a prominent place.

Then there is the play value: especially among children who put as much emphasis on playability as they do on the actual building, playing with physical bricks and figures in the world they already are familiar with from their computer could be very interesting, binding digital and plastic adventures together.

Which is not to say that the serious-minded folk is shortchanged. I started by using LEGO as a sketch board to devise a prototype of a building

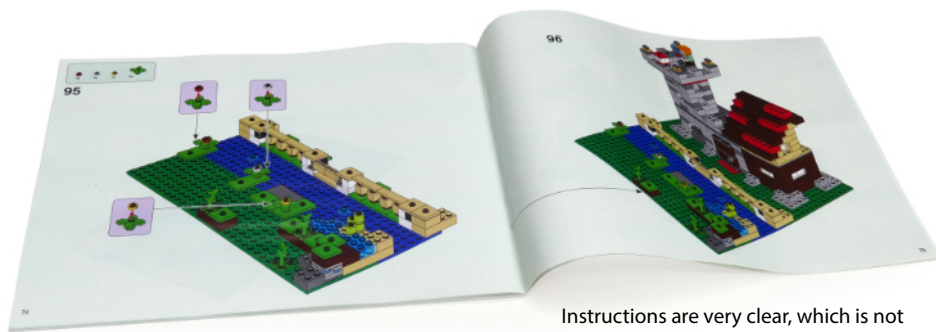
I would build later in Minecraft – and it was really fun: both building it, and copying it over into my Minecraft castle. It works vice versa as well, by using Minecraft to plan an actual MOC, if that's closer to your cup of tea.

As for Minecraft the LEGO theme itself, like most other themes it has already featured all sorts of sets: from very simple polybags featuring only a couple of blocks and figures, up to the massive Mountain Cave with over 2800 parts. As opposed to most of them which show one or more of the "classical" scenes, very familiar to everyone with the most elementary Minecraft experience, this set is actually oriented towards custom builds – just like the game itself.

Sure, it does include



The box emphasizes creativity rather than building according to the instructions: a pile of parts rather than a finished model.



Instructions are very clear, which is not difficult when mostly avoiding fiddly parts

booklets with instructions for a house and for a tiny castle tower as can be seen on the box and in the promo materials – but notably, the main box image emphasizes a pile of various parts. As if it wants to say – here, all the raw materials you need are ready: go ahead and use them!

And since Minecraft is blocky, so are these raw materials: this set consists of lots of standard bricks, plates, and typical auxiliaries, spread in various colors, though leaning a bit more towards the natural and monochromatic colors, prominent in the game as well. This should already give you a hint about its reusability; indeed, if you are looking for a good source of building material in common colors, 21161 will do that job well. Of course, there are some Minecraft-specific parts (especially the minifigs and their nice little tools), but their share is rather low.

Having said that this set aims at freestyle builders, it does hold your hand a couple of first steps if you want. The small, first booklet of the three enclosed focuses just on building elementary Minecraft blocks from LEGO: a grinding stone, a furnace, an anvil and a crafting table, some dynamite, a chest, a bed, torches and a bucket, a door, a piston, two trees, and a couple of other thingies you are sure to encounter sooner rather than later in Minecraft.

In case you are noticing a pattern, you are correct. This set resides mainly in the Overworld surface, especially the items commonly used in the Survival mode. If you're more of a Nether-dweller type of player, or a Creative mode artist, you would probably expect to see more of other types of building blocks. And let's not even begin with the Redstone logicians... (although one cannot help but wonder how would that even work with LEGO.)

Onward to the building experience – and one property of Minecraft sets surfaces right away. Thanks to the constructions largely consisting of standard 2x2 and 2x4 bricks, building goes easily and quickly, much faster than equivalently-sized sets from other themes. One could see it both as a blessing and as a curse, but if you're into using

and reusing blocks for experimentation, there is a bit more weight on the "blessing" side.

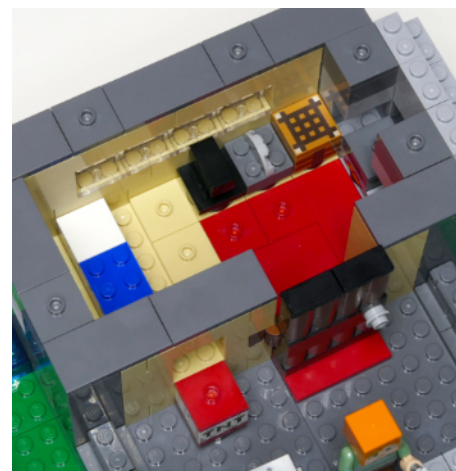
As far as the functions are concerned, they closely follow those seen in the game: the doors and gates open, piston pushes, chest opens, and the TNT fortunately doesn't explode. For a regular set of comparable size, this would be considered a bit skinny, but since we are talking about a reconstruction of a Minecraft world, it is all right.

The design of the two buildings from the booklets is probably a kind wink towards the Minecraft beginners. There is no doubt that most players' homes, if they stick to the game, surpass these two in size, sophistry and aesthetics. But the house and the mini-castle here are exactly the typical first buildings made by the ambitious beginners, once they have completed the simple



The merry gang and their items and trees which serve as elementary "building blocks", used in both main models.

walls and covered them with a semi-sloped roof, and now feel the delight of having a small, but a perfectly proper home, or a defensive tower. Therefore, Minecraft veterans may feel a grain of nostalgia waking up deep in themselves as they catch a glimpse of this set on a shelf. I know I did: this little tower's machicolations very much reminded me of my clumsy first Minecrafty experiments with cobblestone. And the house's crammed interior is almost a guaranteed flashback to the first few hours playing the game.



The house is crammed with furniture and equipment, just like 99% of all players' first Minecraft homes indeed look.

It's not easy to give a simple verdict to a set with such a particular theme and goal – like a car journalist reviewing a quad bike, standard rules don't apply here. The main value of this set depends on your aspect.

And beginning with the youngest, if you are a parent who appreciates Minecraft's depth and positivity, yet would like to encourage their child to spend a bit less time in front of a screen while doing something they are familiar with, 21161 is a great way to accomplish that. (Perhaps it could work vice versa as well, but getting a child in front of a screen is the least of parenting problems nowadays.)

It's just as suitable for experimentation and good ol' playing. It's easy to build and modify, items are simple enough to relocate thanks to the 1-stud plates being everywhere, and the selection of material is well suited for typical Overworld surface ideas.

The further one goes with Minecraft skills, the more would this set transcend into a collector's item or a playground for some real-life fun. The feeling of physically building things you are well accustomed to in the virtual world brings some kind of a subtle satisfaction, like playing a real soccer game after months of playing it on a console.

This is all valid for Minecraft fans, which are the primary audience for this set. LEGO fans outside Minecraft circles could probably just consider these to be rather crude and not overly aesthetically pleasing LEGO buildings with some familiar, and some unfamiliar creatures. But a message to them would be: check out the set contents nevertheless, this could be useful as a parts source.

No no, correction, please. The message to them is: start playing Minecraft.