



LEGO MASTERS

Victor

VALBRICK LEGO MASTERS

Interview by Rafa Muriel

LEGO Master images provided by Atresmedia

Images from the Alzira exhibition by Valbrick

Within the community section we wanted to take advantage of the fact that in this year the 1st edition of the Spanish LEGO Masters show took place, and thus be able to chat for a few minutes with the winners. They are both members of a community called Valbrick. Let's get to know more about them in this little interview.

HBM: Hi, Víctor and Stefan, tell us a little about who you are, what you do, and what association you belong to.

VICTOR: I am a "standard" family man, born in the Jedi year 1977 and therefore with 43 moons behind me. I'm married in my first and only

marriage with Belén Cardona, and I'm the father of two children, Lucia, 13 years old, and Martín, 10 years old. We also have two dog daughters that complete the family.

My occupation is the management of a family business that I share with my brother Raúl, who is dedicated to the manufacture of composite components. I always like to say that I dedicate myself to "handicrafts to the beast". I belong to the RLUG Valbrick, and I tend to be quite active and participatory in the association at all levels.

STEFAN: Well, I'm 35 years old, married to my wife Gloria, so the wedding was Stefan and Gloria, and not like the singer Gloria Estefan :), and we

have two little ones Jorge, 6, and Laura, 4. The four of us assemble LEGO at home.

HBM: Do you remember how you started playing and building with bricks?

VICTOR: Unlike Stefan, I have gaps, and I don't remember exactly what my first set was. I do remember that it was the toy that I liked the most by far, and I also remember the last set before my "dark ages", and that was the mythical Technic Chassis.

Of all that first "LEGOLian" phase of my childhood, nothing has remained to my misfortune.

The second "LEGOLian" phase already appears much later, with approximately 33 years, that is to



say 10 years ago. It has been a re-enjoyment, a rediscovery of this beautiful and complete hobby that is building with LEGO.

STEFAN: When I was about 7 years old I started playing LEGO and my first big set was the Metroliner, an iconic 9V train, I think it's the ref #4558 (1991).

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

VICTOR: What work and family obligations allow me. It is a question that many people ask me and it is difficult to answer. I would change the question and formulate it this way: How much time do you dedicate to LEGO?

At my present "Sickly LEGOlarian" level, the time that one dedicates to the hobby is not only for construction. If the question is formulated in this way, other facets of our hobby are included, such as the time dedicated to the association, the organization of events, the planning of new projects, etc. . .

I would say that of all the hours of the day that I am awake, for at least 2 hours my mind or my hands are doing something with LEGO. 365 days a year x 2 hours a day = 730 hours a year at least I dedicate to LEGO, with total security.

STEFAN: Not much lately, since I am fully preparing for a civil service examination that will





surely be called in 2023, but even so, I get a few weekly hours.

HBM: What are your favorite themes?

VICTOR: Without a doubt, Star Wars. But like all fans we love other themes and we are amazed by the creations and techniques that you discover in them. I must be honest and admit that I like each and every one of the themes, current or old.

STEFAN: What I assemble the most is Creator Expert (trains, modulars, etc.) and above all I like MOCs in order to make models on bases with the MILS system.

HBM: Great, you know and use the MILS system! A question that seems difficult for me... if you had to choose a piece, what would it be?

VICTOR: Indeed it is difficult, because depending on the project that one has at hand it can vary, but given my love for Star Wars I could say the Wedge Plate 12x3 (47398 from the right or 47397 from the left) in light gray.

STEFAN: Not counting bricks, which is probably what we have the most in general, I really like tiles, since I don't usually like studs in sight.

HBM: Tell us a bit about Valbrick. When was it born?

VICTOR: I am not a founding member, although my involvement is total and I consider myself part of the association from the first. For me it was a great discovery and a great joy to meet Valbrick, to meet people from my environment with the same hobby.

STEFAN: Well, everything was born from meeting a lot of AFOL people in Valencia and getting to know each other, and then seeing what we could form from a good group of people and if we could do something more than just have a few beers and exchange sets, at which point my wife told me: "you could form an association". The founders Garci, Luis, Isa, Rafa, Toni, Tyr and I spoke about that in person... at that moment Rafa began to lay out paperwork and Garci and I processed it and that is how this was born, which is like another child with shared custody.

HBM: How many members does Valbrick have?

STEFAN: Well, I would say that we have passed the figure of 60 already...

VICTOR: And growing... I would say that the really important thing is not how many we are, but how dynamic and participatory we are. In Valbrick we have a very nice problem... People are so active, so participatory, that sometimes there are problems allowing everyone to exhibit everything they want to exhibit. Holy problem!

HBM: What exhibitions do you usually do each



year as fixed, or which ones do you always have in mind?

STEFAN: We used to have some fixed ones, but with this LEGO Masters thing, Valbrick is experiencing an impressive boom and we're expanding the calendar, so maybe we'll plan on four big annual events and some additional small collaborations, but this is changing. . .

VICTOR: As Stefan says, after LEGO Masters we are seeing a lot of interest. My experience and what I detect is that where we exhibit, people are impressed and grateful. Stefan does not indicate it, but today we could say that we have three fixed expos: Alaquás, Alzira, and Gandía.

HBM: What places do you usually visit?

STEFAN: Regarding LEGO, the horizons are expanding, since we have both been in an exhibition in Paredes de Coura. For my part, I was recently at the LEGO store in Belgium and at Easter we will go to Billund, or so I hope, because due to Covid I have already had to cancel the trip twice two years ago.

VICTOR: What a nice question! The COVID problem of recent times has cut our wings in relation to this issue, but it already seems that things are normalizing, so in which places would I like to move? In all that I can! I would love to take advantage of the LEGO hobby, using the expos in other places as an excuse to travel and meet other fans.

For now, I have several goals:

- Paredes de Coura





- Navarre (Pamplona)
- France (Orléans)

This last objective, if finally fulfilled, will be spectacular. It is a joint construction between three crazy people in the Star Wars Tatooine theme. We know each other from social networks, and we have agreed to get to that expo to assemble together and set a Guinness record. LOL!

HBM: In the end, the common challenges as an association added to your own challenges are what make an exhibition something rich and varied. What objectives do you have during the year as an association in addition to your personal challenges?

STEFAN: The association is very dynamic and tries to satisfy the objectives of all partners, so if someone wants to exhibit something then they have free rein, as long as it is LEGO. . .

VICTOR: As a member of the Board of Directors of Valbrick, I could say that part of my personal challenges are common to those of the association, but if I have to answer the challenges/objectives of the association, among others, I would emphasize achieving "exhibition infrastructure" so that the organization and assembly of the exhibitions is comfortable, simple, fast and with a perfect aesthetic finish.

HBM: Regarding LEGO MASTERS, how long have you been dedicated to this project?

STEFAN: I wanted to sign up two years ago in another country. When they took us in Spain we researched other programs in other countries, but that is something common to all the participants.

VICTOR: I have to say that is fair and necessary. Stefan prepared himself perfectly and extensively. But hey. . . 5 weeks of shooting I would consider it a lot of time spent. . . right?

HBM: How much time did you have for each episode?

STEFAN: As you well know there are short and long tests, so the short ones were recorded on the same day and the long ones more than one day, there was no fixed rule. . .

VICTOR: Regardless of the length of the tests themselves, which were variable, each episode was shot in 3 days. I knew when I was going on set but I didn't know when we would leave the set. . . Marathon sessions!

Not only did the time of the test count, but there were other factors that made the shooting faster or slower. In any case, and seen from a temporary distance, time passed quickly and we were more than entertained. I liked to say that it didn't matter how many hours we spent, it would be worse to spend a single hour "working in the sun".

HBM: Was the program spontaneous or was it subject to a script?

STEFAN: The production people would obviously have a script. We (Stefan and Víctor) did not have a script but we did have an action plan, if such a test comes out, well this. . . obviously there are tests that we could not plan like the one with the motorcycle, since we did not know the type of pieces that would be available.

VICTOR: One is completely ignorant of how this "television" works, and from the outset one may think that everything is more natural and spontaneous. Once inside you realize that there is a script, which obviously in a reality show is very dynamic and variable.

When I say that there is a script, I am not saying that there is a script from beginning to end. That is, I do not mean that who is going to reach the end is scripted. When I say that there is a script, I mean an "on the fly" script, a script that is established as the shooting progresses.

HBM: What feelings do you get from the experience, both positive and negative?

STEFAN: The truth is that it's very hard and you miss your family a lot. In terms of the experience with Víctor, because it's something you'll remember all your life and having won, the feeling is clear, isn't it?

VICTOR: As a positive I highlight several things. The most notable isn't having won. Far from it, I personally consider Dani and Ángeles also winners of LEGO Masters. For me, the most pleasant experience has been the response of people in general.

I had a certain "fear" or restlessness in going public in this way with our healthy hobby. I was "afraid" of how I would come out on screen, how I would be reflected. My decision was to be myself, to be the Víctor that my friends and family know. The result has been infinitely more pleasant than I ever could have imagined. Outside of the "LEGOlian" environment, the affection, the shows of support, being amazed at what we were doing has been brutal. They have really made me proud of myself. Is there anything more positive than feeling accomplished?

As a negative experience, maybe not seeing my dogs for so long.

HBM: Now that you are LEGO Masters, what would you say is necessary to be a LEGO Master?

STEFAN: Víctor and I are still the same, but what I have learned, well I would say we both have learned, is not to depend on a specific piece to find a solution for a certain construction.

VICTOR: To be a LEGO Master on a technical level, you have to force yourself out of your comfortable environment. You must build with what you don't normally build with. You must forget about the immense catalog of parts that we have and build with basic parts. But most importantly, you must enjoy building as a child does.

In addition to the above, to be a LEGO Master you have to marry your teammate. You must know the virtues and capabilities of your partner, and you must give in even if sometimes your idea is different. You must trust your partner, there must be communication, you must know how to forgive. . . You must make the most of the power of four hands and two heads.

HBM: There were people related to other associations and another who lacked that link. Do you think there was any advantage to having that link?

STEFAN: What I noticed most about people who build and are in close contact with LEGO people is having the vocabulary to talk technically: slope, tile, hinge, jumper, panel, etc. . .

VICTOR: Being associated or not, I think, did



not imply an advantage as such. However it is true that those of us who were associated with some LUG, we could see that we had more experience in construction. Surely there are people who are not in any association and build a thousand times better than us.

HBM: You mentioned that for the program you had been asked for photos, videos, and in your case, Stefan with the family building at home, etc. . . How has it been being separated from your families during those weeks in which you have been recording the Program?

STEFAN: I would have preferred it if, as in other countries, when the contestants are presented, a photo or video would have been shown with my family, whether they were building with LEGO, traveling or playing in the park.

VICTOR: Regarding the family environment, I am left with the pleasant feeling that they are very proud of me, and that the experience, regardless of the victory, has been worth it.

HBM: Then behind closed doors, at home, in privacy, you will have had time to savor the experience and be able to recreate yourself at certain times. Would you repeat the experience?

STEFAN: Yes, I would repeat the experience but with other conditions, that is, being able to see the family weekly.

VICTOR: The truth is that behind closed doors I have enjoyed seeing myself. I laughed a lot at the gestures, the phrases. I have remembered

many moments and details that do not appear in the programs. Repeat? The truth is that right now I wouldn't know what to tell you. Perhaps I would say yes, without a doubt, if I could compete with my children.

HBM: Hmmm, funny question, was the money real? Would you have also liked to be able to opt for material in the form of LEGO bricks?

STEFAN: If the money had been real I would have run away with it. . . A trip to the birthplace of LEGO would have been nice. . . Billund.

VICTOR: Joking aside, I think we were all surprised that there was only one cash prize, for only one couple. If before starting the program they had proposed that the two finalists had a prize, for example 70% for the winners and 30% for the other couple, we would have all signed.

And I think we all would have signed too, if it wasn't all a cash prize, but shared with LEGO materials, or a trip to Billund. . .

HBM: Do you think that now you will be able to dedicate yourself to your hobby in a more recognized way? For example, you went to the LEGO Store in Barcelona last January assembling your winning creation, which was part of the prize of the LEGO Masters contest. Do you think that this could be part of a series of collaborations or on the contrary it will not be more than an addition to your personal experience?

STEFAN: Obviously now there are people who associate you with that and didn't even know it

before, although we almost have it tattooed on our forehead "I AM A VERY BIG FAN OF LEGO".

VICTOR: Well, honestly, I think it would have been brutal if the program had been broadcast at the correct time. Unfortunately, it has gone completely unnoticed by the general public.

In my personal case, I live in Alzira, a city of 45,000 inhabitants, so many people have seen it and, without a doubt, they have discovered another way of seeing LEGO.

Recognized? More than recognized in my city. So much so that we are currently fully involved in an exhibition, carried out by Valbrick, which is proving to be a success that no one expected.

HBM: Do you want to thank anyone for being able to live the experience?

STEFAN: Finally, I want to thank you for this interview and I want to thank Víctor for having shared this magnificent experience and also my wife Gloria for having supported me from minute zero.

VICTOR: Of course, I have a lot to be thankful for. To my family, my wife Belén, my brother Raúl, who gladly took care of everything in my absence. Stefan obviously, because even though we are very different, we are united by a passion for LEGO, and we have been able to form that team, that "marriage" that I spoke of before, capable of speaking, capable of yielding.

HBM: My sincere congratulations on that LEGO Masters cup and thanks for your time.