

LEGO mania

Time for a linguistic lesson: Leg Godt means “play well” in Danish; lego is Latin for “put together.” Strangely, Mr. Ole Kirk Chris-

tensen, back in 1934, wasn't aware of the Latin when he settled on the name for his new toy company. Fifty-four years later the name has become synonymous with fun and creativity.

My own LEGO experience began sometime in the 1970s, when stacks of bricks at my cousin's house were a staple, complete with flat green bases. Through the years, I would see the sets at various stores, but it wasn't until a few years ago that I got the fever. My current love of the little bricks wasn't based so much on my perpetual desire to be a kid, but more my love of watching my son Miles' eyes light up once he built something. Now, I flat-out love the things, even if it takes an inordinate amount of time to build a big set (try more than eight hours for a giant Star Wars Trade Federation MTT) and it thins my wallet.

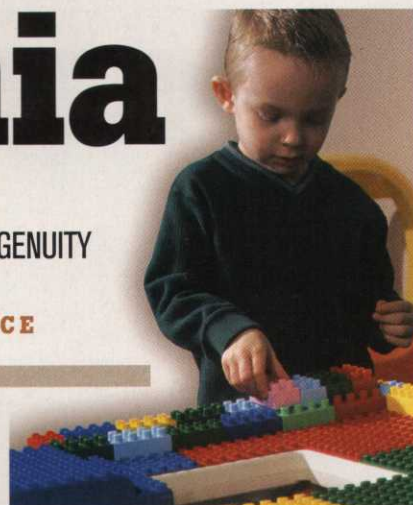
Miles started with Duplos, the toddler-sized big blocks, and immediately showed an uncanny ability for symmetry, whether making a parking garage for countless Matchbox cars (another story entirely) or color-coordinated high towers plum for crashing down onto said cars. What followed were the

THE SETS HAVE CHANGED, BUT THE INGENUITY REMAINS THE SAME **BY MARK LUCE**

basic tubs of bricks and simple things, including boats, mini-cars and rudimentary space ships. It wasn't until the first set — a little fire truck complete with string hoses and that most kid-friendly part of LEGOs, the mini-figure — that I realized I was enjoying the sets as much as my son.

This past holiday may have well been called a LEGOMAS, for in the span of four days, I, with the help of my assistants, put together no fewer than nine LEGO sets of various sizes and complexities. From the zoom-zoom of a Formula 1 garage to the evil-idiot lair of Plankton's Chum Bucket, from Darth Maul's wicked Sith Infiltrator to the newest LEGO craze Indiana Jones' Lost Tomb, I seemingly breathed multi-colored bricks.

At some level, the instructions for these kits remain quite simple, but a small oversight can cause serious misfortune later. But what continually strikes me is the sheer elegance of the engineering. It's not enough to build a garage for Formula 1 cars, it's the little things: a peg for extra helmets, the storage cases for wrenches, drills and the like. Over time, I have come to



appreciate the artistry of the set design as much as I appreciate watching my sons play.

Over these last few years, I have poked around the company in hopes of buying stock. However, it's privately held, so forget it. But I have learned that the molding process of making the bricks is amazingly precise — within .002 millimeters. And every year a select group of folks pay \$1,700 for a two-and-a-half day tour of the Billund, Denmark, factory, the equivalent of Willie Wonka's Golden Ticket.

While the price isn't right for a trans-Atlantic LEGO blowout, we're thinking about vacationing in Southern California at the end of the summer — ostensibly to see old friends, but, really, to take the kids to that other place where dreams are made: LEGOLAND.

Happy building.

Mark Luce lives in Kansas City, Mo., where he's ready to challenge any comers in a LEGO speed-building contest.

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