



Henry Lim was inspired by Harshbarger's Lego grandfather clock to build another functional object. This working harpsichord contains approximately 100,000 bricks and weighs 150 pounds. The only non-Lego materials it contains are its wire strings. For more information, visit henrylim.org/harpsichord.html. PHOTOS: HELEN LIM

Harshbarger met Henry Lim through LIGNET and allowed him to use a version of his Fixologo program to create giant mosaics. Lim says that Harshbarger's grandfather clock inspired him to build something useful that actually works, so he created a working harpsichord. Harshbarger helped him attach the legs. Lim's harpsichord is six by three feet long and weighs approximately 150 pounds. An estimated 100,000 Lego bricks were used, and aside from the wire strings, the instrument was constructed entirely from Lego parts. It took him two years to design the piece and then to collect the thousands and thousands of parts. It took another year to actually build it. Then, says Lim, "it took forever to tune."

Lehman says that Lim's harpsichord is probably the most impressive Lego piece he has ever seen. Lim is a classically trained musician and can actually play the instrument. "It's just something that nobody else in the world has ever done before," Lehman marvels. "It's absolutely insanely cool."

Another of Lim's impressive projects is a 14-foot-long stegosaurus. At its tallest point, the stegosaurus rises more than six feet; at its widest, it spans about three feet. Needless to say, thousands of Lego bricks were used during its seven-month construction process.

J.P. Brown is another Lego hobbyist; his specialty is robots. He has created robots that can solve Rubik's Cube and has even made a robotic dog that can fetch a ball. He was inspired when he discovered Lego Mindstorm sets, which allow users to make simple robots. He took that concept and developed more complex models.

Brown says he is familiar with Harshbarger's work, and he's delighted to see someone making a living building with Lego products. He confirms that the Lego corporation has been very encouraging toward builders—he's been contacted himself by the company several times. "Huge kudos to Lego that they didn't stomp all over the hobbyists," he says. "Otherwise it would have just stayed a child's toy, not an adult hobby." When Brown does work for the folks at Lego, they pay him—in Lego products.

Sean Kenney has been building with Lego bricks his whole life, but over the

past four years, his hobby has been evolving into a full-fledged profession. His interest in Lego construction actually stemmed from an interest in architecture. While living in New York City, he began to create model skyscrapers, and the hobby took off from there.

He says he likes to build with Lego blocks because they're a lot of fun and very challenging to build with. He also finds the process to be quite rewarding. "Whenever someone sees something out of Lego [bricks] it just makes them smile," he remarks. "It just inspires. Someone sees my sculpture, and they are inspired to create something of their own."

Kenney has met many fellow Lego builders, including Harshbarger. The first piece of Harshbarger's that he saw was a replica of the *Mona Lisa*, and he says he was amazed at the magnitude of the project. He is hoping to follow in Harshbarger's steps by earning a living through his Lego hobby. In fact, he was commissioned by *New York* magazine to build a Lego city for its cover. Unfortunately, the plan was scrapped due to management changes at the magazine. He says it's not uncommon to be contacted by the media about his projects.

Harshbarger has been approached by many inquiring sources as well, but none of those prepared him for the spring of 2003, when Hollywood came calling. The TV show *Ripley's Believe It Or Not!* commissioned him to build a 100-square-foot mosaic of the show's host, Dean Cain, to display on a billboard on Sunset Boulevard. The building process was to be filmed live that summer on site in Los Angeles.

"I kind of laughed at first," he remembers. "I thought, 'This

is so crazy, such a great story. I have to make this happen.'"

The people at *Ripley's* convinced the Lego Group to donate all of the needed parts—nearly 37,000 2x2 blocks and 64 large baseplates upon which to attach them. Harshbarger said the *Ripley's* folks had no concept of how long it would take to build such a large mosaic. They wanted him to build it on site, but it actually took about two weeks for him to build the mosaic at his home. Once it was completed, he shipped it to Los Angeles so the show's technicians could figure out how to mount it on the billboard for the show.

Harshbarger arrived on the set at nine in the morning on August 4 for the filming. He thought he was just going to mount the completed piece to the billboard and perhaps remove and replace a few bricks to make it appear as though he were actually building it on site. However, an hour before he was supposed to start mounting the mosaic, he realized that the first baseplate was missing. He had no extra Lego bricks with him, but he did have the basic plans for the mosaic.

A production assistant went to a toy store and bought several Lego buckets. Unfortunately, the bricks in the buckets were not all 2x2, so Harshbarger had to use all different shapes and sizes to rebuild that first plate.

He says it was difficult to build something so large in the time allotted by the show's directors, and it was just as tough to budget his time

because he was simultaneously building the project and being interviewed. It took six hours to actually mount the mosaic to the billboard, since each of the 64 plates had to be done individually. Filming began around 9 p.m., and Harshbarger placed the final brick for the cameras around midnight.

Harshbarger found himself in the company of other interesting characters on the show, including bodybuilders who broke baseball bats over their thighs, a man who put live scorpions in his mouth, and another man who dubbed himself a "human syringe."

Standing in front of the billboard, with the bat-wielding bodybuilders to his right and the human syringe warming up on the set, Harshbarger had a revelation of sorts: For the first time in many years, his Lego fascination seemed "amazingly normal and well-adjusted." ■

The king of hearts is one of Harshbarger's many mosaics that can be viewed at his Web site.

