

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

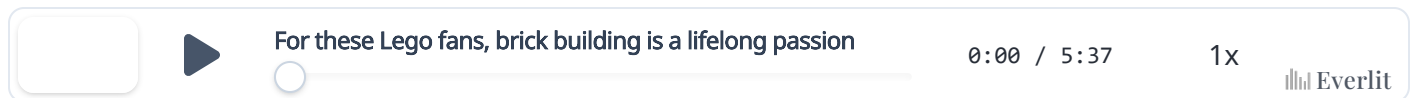
# For these Lego fans, brick building is a lifelong passion

By [Zara Irshad](#), Staff writer

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Colleen and Dan Kees work on their Halloween display in the Lego lab in their San Jose garage on Oct. 27.  
Scott Strazzante/The Chronicle



The inside of Dan and Colleen Kees' San Jose garage is packed with thousands of tiny plastic bricks. But they're far from just clutter.

Crucial components of the couple's self-proclaimed "Lego lab," the bricks are stored and organized in floor-to-ceiling drawers that line the space and surround a huge worktable where the two piece together both store-bought Lego sets and their own creations.

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Through a door leading into their home is a row of staggered shelves showcasing some of their favorite sets, including pirate ships, London Bridge and a rocket ship. There's even a custom Lego portrait of their dog, Ghirardelli, who recently passed away.

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Dan may be 51 and Colleen 54, but they both love Lego. The pair are part of a large and thriving community of adult fans of Lego — also known as AFOLs — who appreciate constructing the small plastic bricks as an art form.



Dan Kees works on a Halloween Lego display.  
Scott Strazzante/The Chronicle

In 2021, a group of Bay Area artists collaborated with Washington-based Theatre Battery to develop a Lego stop-motion animated web series, “[Lego Harry Potter and the Transgender Witch](#),” and even Grammy-winning musician Pharell Williams is in on the action, sharing his appreciation for the bricks with his 2024 Lego documentary “[Piece by Piece](#).”

Eager to connect with other AFOLs in their community, the Keeses joined [Bay Lego User Group](#), a meetup community that organizes gatherings and events for builders in the Bay Area.



Russell Clark, 49, founded the group after meeting fellow Lego fans in Golden Gate Park during the Danish toy company's 25th anniversary tour in the late 1990s.

"It's all about the friendships," he said.



Dan Kees in his Lego lab.  
Scott Strazzante/The Chronicle

Now Clark's group has turned 26 years old and boasts roughly 250 members. It's a buzzing community that allows builders of all generations to connect.

"We're mentors to the next generation of little hands," Clark said with pride.

Though the group does have events geared specifically toward adult members, its open embrace is something that many, like the Keeses, have come to value.

"I think that's nice specifically about BayLUG," Colleen said. "They grasp the whole age gap from children to adults."

Not all AFOLs, though, are members of large groups. Sacramento's Nick Micheels, 32, is a skilled builder who has managed to get one of his creations developed into an official Lego set.

Indulging in the romance fantasy series "Twilight" with his wife during the pandemic sparked an idea: a 2010s nostalgia-filled "Twilight" Lego set.



He submitted his design, which was based on Edward Cullen's vampire family's home, to [Lego Ideas](#) in February 2023. The global contest, which started in 2008, allows people to create and enter their own sets and have fans vote on their favorites. His creation was one of two sets that have been greenlit for production, picked from a record-breaking pool of 71 finalists that were reviewed by Lego experts.

"It's so many dreams coming true all at once," Micheels told the Chronicle. "Ever since I was a kid, I was always fascinated by people who can make something out of nothing or make something out of really abstract pieces."

Micheels has two young stepchildren, but he admits neither of them enjoy Lego as much as he does.

"I don't get as much sleep as I should," he said. "I often work on Lego projects at night — ironically, when the kids go to bed."





Sacramento resident Nick Micheels' Lego "Twilight" creation is set to hit shelves in 2025.  
Courtesy of Nick Micheels.

Much like the Keeses, Micheels has been a fan of Lego since childhood, and has slowly gotten his wife, Laura, into building. She said they've even started spending time making Lego creations as a family now.

"It's very fun and it's just brought us kinda closer," she said.

Though the Keeses don't have any children, they've found their own way to connect with younger generations through their passion for Lego.

"The kids in the neighborhood know that we're the Lego house," Colleen said, and every October she and Dan put together a "Legoween" display in their garage building space and open it to the public.



Judges Jamie Berard, left, and Amy Corbett with host Will Arnett and “Lego Masters” contestants in the “Bricks & All (Clip Show)” episode.

Fox

The growing numbers of AFOLs prompted the Lego Group to license Fox’s competition show “Lego Masters.” Currently in its fifth season, the show provides adult builders with a platform to showcase their skills. Hosted by actor Will Arnett, the movie voice of Lego Batman in the “Lego Movie” franchise, each episode challenges contestants with a task such as building wearable Lego hats, re-creating scenes from the Marvel Cinematic Universe or designing cat houses.

#### More Information

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“**Lego Masters**” (TV-PG) airs 6 p.m. Wednesdays on Fox.



“We found, even in very early days of casting, there was this vibrant community of Lego artists that took their craft very seriously. They were intellectuals, they were comedic ... they were very cerebral in their approach to building with Lego bricks,” said “Lego Masters” executive producer Michael Heyerman. “The amazing stories they were able to tell with the bricks absolutely blew our minds.”

Throughout the fall, the Keeses have been busy working on designs for BayLUG’s annual holiday show, carving out extra building time into their schedules.



Nick Micheels has been a fan of Lego since childhood.  
Courtesy of John Micheels

Meanwhile, Micheels is experiencing what it's like to work for Lego firsthand, as he continues to work with the company's designers to get his "Twilight" creation ready for consumers.

It takes roughly a year from when a design is selected to be developed to when it hits shelves, and Micheels is coming up on that milestone in early 2025.

"The Lego Group to me is kind of like working at Willy Wonka's factory," Micheels said with a laugh. "It's like this magical place where I'm like, 'Don't even pay me, just let me live there!'"

***Correction:*** An earlier version of this story misstated Nick Micheels' age. He is 32.

Reach Zara Irshad: [zara.irshad@sfchronicle.com](mailto:zara.irshad@sfchronicle.com)

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**Zara Irshad**

STAFF WRITER