

## Holiday block party: Lego enthusiasts share passion for building

BayLUG's annual holiday show on exhibit at the Museum of American Heritage



The BayLUG holiday show features towns and trains all made from Lego. Photo by Emily Margaretten.

The planning and building took more than a thousand hours; the pieces number in the tens of thousands, but it all came together with a satisfying snap, as Adam Williams, vice president of the Bay Area Lego Users Group (BayLUG), introduced the group's latest creation, a Día de los Muertos display made entirely of Legos.

“Almost everything here doesn't have instructions for it. People come up with an idea and then build it from their heads,” Williams said, explaining the creative process of constructing this year's holiday display. The show, in its 18th year at the Museum of American Heritage (MOAH) in Palo Alto, includes a new featured display each year — for 2022, it's Día de los Muertos — along with Lego streetscapes and a holiday village.

Inspired by the Disney and Pixar film, “Coco,” the Día de los Muertos display is a mixture of Mexican culture and playful fantasy, showcasing intricate and imaginative scenes; a marigold bridge that connects the city of the dead to the town of the living; figurines placing food, flowers and candles on tombstones with tiny family portraits. And

near the show's exit stands a full-size ofrenda — an altar to the deceased — with real-life photographs and Lego marigolds and skulls.



A Dia de los Muertos display, new for 2022, took inspiration from the film “Coco.” Photo by Emily Margaretten.

Attention to detail has always been a source of pride for the group, and this year's show takes it to a higher level with its emphasis on representation. “We were very conscious of ethnicity,” BayLUG member Lia VonDamm said, explaining that the prefabricated Lego figurines did not capture the identities of Latinx members.

To address this issue, a BayLUG member of Mexican heritage designed a template of faces, which another member printed on the Lego heads. They did the same with decorative tiles, sourcing Mexican patterns and printing them onto Lego pieces.

Along with its celebration of Día de los Muertos, the holiday show includes other elaborate landscapes. BayLUG merged with the Bay Area L-Gauge Train Club years ago, Williams said, pointing to the electric trains and tracks wrapping around hillsides and snow capped villages. The two groups now largely function as one network of Lego enthusiasts, welcoming members of all ages and interests.

BayLUG members setting up Lego display at Museum of American Heritage on Oct. 30. Photo by Emily Margaretten.

This year's display, assembled by 30 BayLUG members over a weekend, is the culmination of two years of planning, with most of the construction occurring in people's homes. When asked about challenges of their builds, BayLUG member Autumn Victor said it was finding enough space. "I'm constantly asking myself, where can I expand and where can I store my Legos more efficiently?" Victor laughed.

Williams resolved this perennial problem by converting his garage into a workshop, which he did with the blessing of his wife, also a BayLUG member. The couple joined BayLUG after attending one of the holiday shows at MOAH. "We came here and were like, oh my goodness, there's a huge community of people who like building, not per the instructions but they build these custom things. And that inspired us to join," Williams said.

With about 200 members in total, BayLUG family builds are a common occurrence, as seen by Chris Castagnetto's family. Castagnetto used to host regular game nights with friends, but this abruptly ended when the pandemic hit. BayLUG became the outlet for his family to have fun together and share their builds with other members through monthly Zoom meetings.

Nicholas Castagnetto, 6, and Abigail Castagnetto, 9, echoed their father's sentiments that Lego building was a lot of fun. "My favorite thing is playing with them," Nicholas said, while Abigail added that she liked to make up stories with her Lego creations.

*BayLUG's annual holiday show at MOAH, located at 351 Homer Ave., Palo Alto, is on display from 11 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. on weekends Dec. 3-Jan. 8. Reservations are required between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. and admission is \$4 per person, cash only. [baylug.org/holiday-show](http://baylug.org/holiday-show). For information about joining BayLUG, visit [baylug.org](http://baylug.org).*

