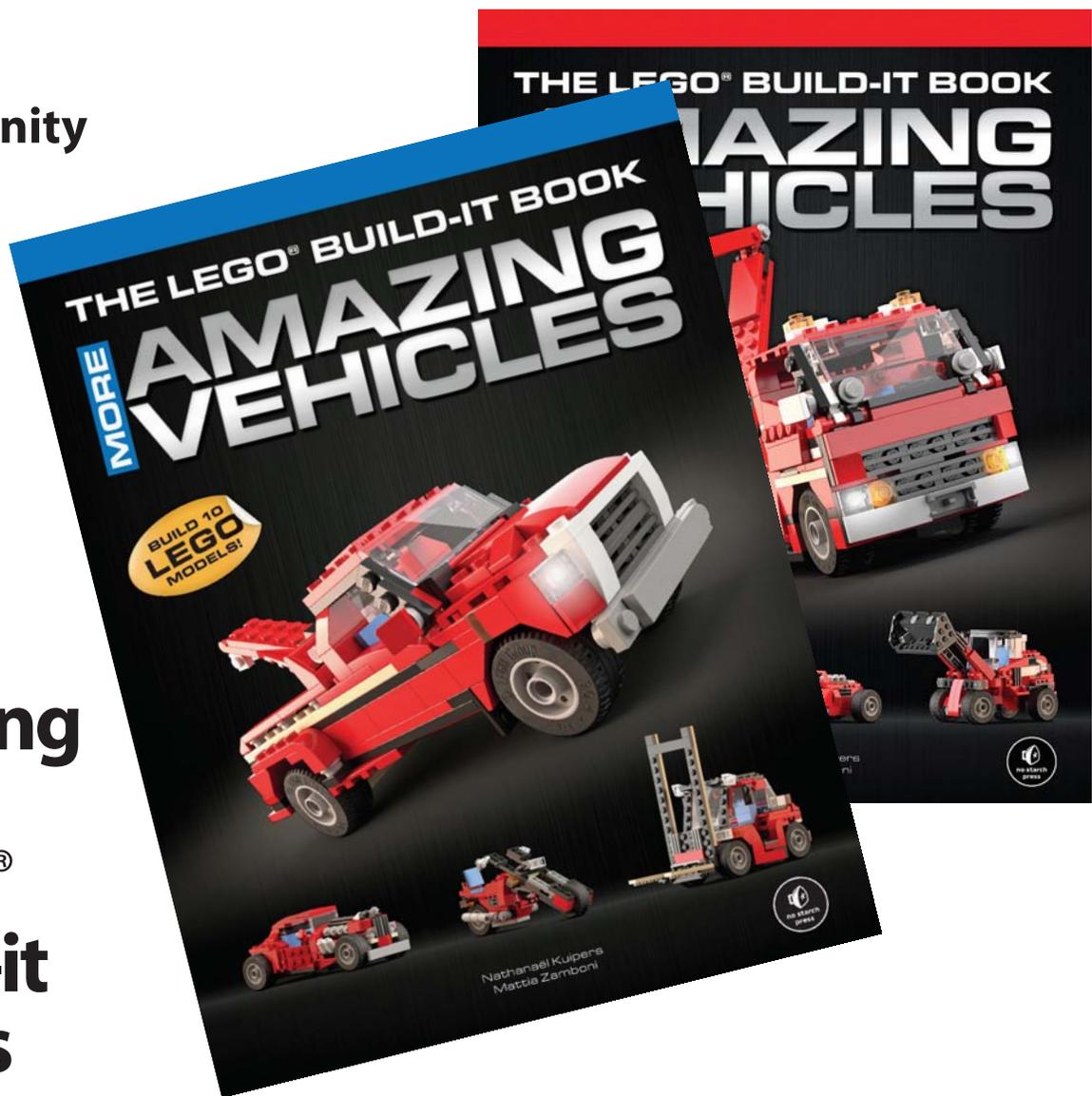


Looking at the LEGO® Build-it Books

Interview by Joe Meno
Photography provided by No Starch Press



Nathanaël Kuipers has been something of a legend in the LEGO® community for building his alternate models. Using a single set, he creates different vehicles from the same pool of parts, using a lot of creative parts use and imagination. He did this initially online (where you can still see his work) and then did a brief stint in *BrickJournal*. From there, he went on to work at the LEGO Group as a set designer in the Technic theme. He has since returned to build alternates, and has authored two books that have been just released by No Starch Press, seen above. Here, he talks to *BrickJournal* about building and authoring the books.

BrickJournal: You have built many alternate models. What got you interested in making these?

Nathanaël Kuipers: As with so many other people, there was a point in my life that I got interested again in those little plastic building blocks after a long break. I considered this a new period in my life, and therefore didn't want to mix my newly obtained sets with the old bricks from my childhood. With just a few new sets to start with, it only made sense to see what else I could build with each one individually. Basically that's how the concept of building alternates started. I really seemed to enjoy the challenge, but over the years also started to see the potential and get a better understanding of the benefits of this whole concept...

When did you meet Mattia? How did you start working with him?

In the past few years I have really tried to push this concept further, coming up with more and more alternates. Still, it seemed like only a few could fully understand and appreciate my motivation behind it. Mattia Zamboni was one of them, and got thrilled when he found my models. Imagining that this could be a great theme for a book, he got very excited. In his enthusiasm he started to reverse engineer a few of the models, put his versions in CAD, and created building instructions for a couple.



A photo spread and an instruction spread from the LEGO Build-It Book: Amazing Vehicles, Vol.I. Here you can see the clarity of the instructions and photography, which makes the book a joy to look through for the LEGO fan!

Meanwhile, several other persons suggested me to create a book about my alternates. Although I was convinced about the idea myself and started to work on it, I felt something was missing that didn't do the models justice. It was exactly then, in March 2012, when Mattia contacted me through email, told me his story, and showed me a preview of what he had done so far. I was highly impressed with the material he showed, recognizing immediately his high standards for graphics, which is lacking a bit in my own skills. While the graphics looked fantastic, the construction of the models themselves was not up to my standard, also considering my background as a former LEGO designer. So to me it made only sense to combine our strengths, something that Mattia agreed on. That's basically when things took off...

How long did it take for you to complete your models and choose what would be in the book?

The selection of the models for the book was a delicate process in which I considered several factors. Most important was a nice collection of iconic, differentiated vehicles covering several interesting techniques, from easy to advanced. Meanwhile I had to make sure that material for the planned 2nd volume would be equally as good, if not better than the 1st. I even had to come up with a few more alternates, as not all the ones I had were useful material. Generally speaking I'm quite pleased with the selection of models and how we distributed them between these 2 books.

How long would it take you to create an alternate model, starting from design to instructions?

Creativity is not something you can force; it comes randomly and naturally. But once I get inspired, it can go really fast. Most of the models in the book I created in a few hours. Sometimes I struggled a little, so then it took me a bit longer. Then for each model I needed about a day to re-create a digital version in CAD. Then another day to generate the instructions layout with all the steps. So in average it would take me about 3 days for one of those alternates, but then we're talking about ideal conditions...

Review:

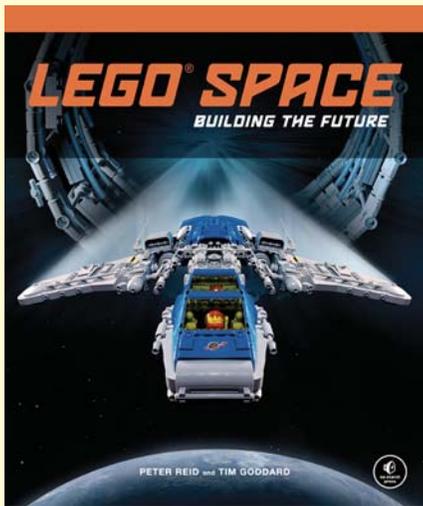
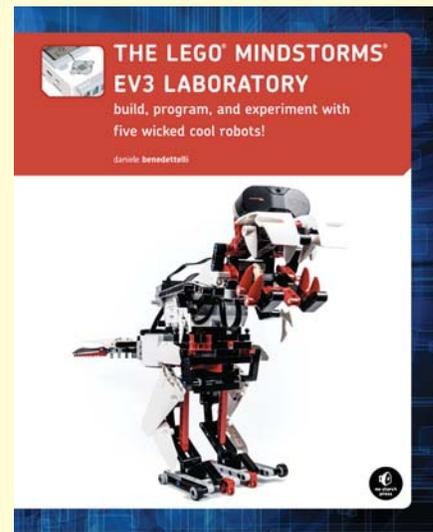
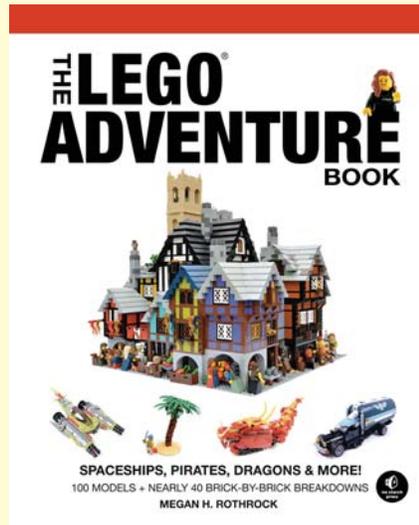
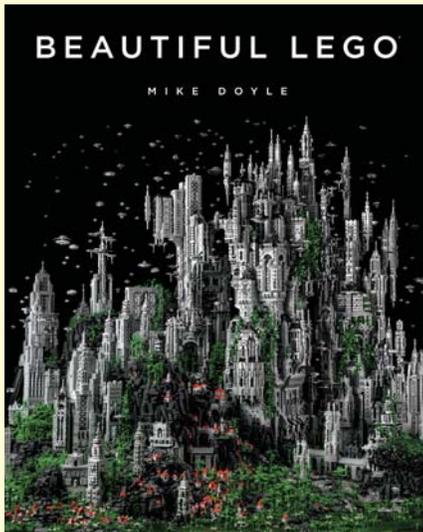
The LEGO Build-it Book: Amazing Vehicles, Vols. 1 and 2
 Authors: Nathanael Kuipers and Matthias Zamboni
 No Starch Press, \$19.95

There have been instruction books before, but nothing as clear as this set of books. Nathanael's previous job experience working at the LEGO Group shows in the clarity of the building steps shown on each page. Nothing is left to the reader to figure out, except the techniques he uses to make his vehicles.

Matthias' work can be seen in all of the graphic work in the book. The presentation of each model is done in pages that are clean and beautiful. They set the stage and the desire to build the model in the following pages.

The only flaw in the book is that the set these models are based on is not easy to find. However, the parts list included in the book will help the new builder.

Overall, an outstanding set of books for the budding builder - so when's Vol. 3 coming out?



More Books by No Starch Press

By press time, No Starch Press will have a few more books for the LEGO fan available. As seen here, the books are diverse, yet are all common in that they spotlight the LEGO community.

For those wanting to build, the second *LEGO Adventure* book (by *BrickJournal* staffer Megan Rothrock) is a book that explores several themes with LEGO builders and constructions. *LEGO Space: Building the Future*, written by Peter Reid and Tim Goddard, can best be described as a science-fiction book using LEGO models to illustrate its text. It also has instructions for some models. Those who are interested in robotics and the new LEGO MINDSTORMS set need to take a look at *The LEGO MINDSTORMS EV3 Laboratory*, written by Daniele Benedettelli. Here, you can learn programming and building by building the five robots included in the book.

Last but certainly not least, *Beautiful LEGO*, by Mike Doyle, is a coffee-table book of LEGO building by some of the best builders in the community. If you want to see some truly astonishing models, this is the book to get!

BrickJournal will have reviews of these books on its website - watch for them!

Sometimes I wasn't so happy with the building process of the model or the structure, so then I had to go back and try to figure out if the model could be designed and built differently. This is particularly tricky with alternates, because you only have a certain parts palette to work with. Therefore, in the end, some models turned out better than others.

Which model in Book 1 are you most proud of?

This I find a very difficult question to answer. What I like is that everybody seems to have his or her favorite(s), which proves to me that all these models meet a similar standard. Furthermore I think that all of them have something unique that makes them interesting. Personally I would say that in general the models got better over time; the more I got familiar with the inventory the easier it became to design a well constructed model. However, to come up with new, interesting models got increasingly tougher, because there are only so many iconic vehicles you can do, especially with limited pieces. Considering this factor, I'm quite pleased with how the rescue truck turned out, because it is rather big and good looking. It's also a nice example how to maximize the surface area, but still have a decent structure underneath.

And what should we expect in Volume 2?

In a nutshell, same concept, different models. Because this volume pretty much closes our story on wheeled vehicles, instead of another section on building tricks, there will be some advice on things to consider when you create your own vehicles. For example what defines the shape, proportions and ultimately character of your designs. But the biggest chunk of the book consists again on how to build 10 different, iconic models with step-by-step instructions. I'm particularly excited about this volume, because I think we've slightly upgraded it compared to volume 1. And besides, this second book contains quite a few of my personal favorites... 