

Rediscovering Legos



By Scott Burt

One of the things I enjoy the most about being a dad is experiencing the world through the eyes of a child. With the holiday season that just passed and a 4-year-old son, let it be very sufficient to say that I am becoming something of an expert on Legos.

I remember playing with Legos as a child myself, but prior to becoming a dad, I hadn't really given Legos much thought in the past, say, 30 years – until my son got hooked on them. For those of you who have not had the pleasure recently, Legos have come a long, long way since we were kids. When my son first started getting into them, I was expecting the same basic set of building blocks and simple yet functional Lego people, cars and trucks to assemble.

Boy, was I wrong. How impressive to see the marketing partnerships Lego has formed with both timeless and contemporary phenomena, such as Star Wars and Harry Potter. Lego is a company that could have gone the way of the dinosaur through sheer failure to adapt. What kid today would want to play with Legos that look like something his dad might have played with 30 years ago?

In playing with the new generation of Legos, I have been impressed with the simple, stylish and hip functionality that they have created for kids. My hat is way off to the Lego marketing department,

and there is a lot to be learned from them by us painting contractors as we try to market something that has been around forever. Legos have sharpened my perception of ergonomics as I go about the business of paint contracting and refining my procurement criteria for new products and equipment that can drive our field processes more efficiently and cost-effectively and make me feel like a kid playing with Legos again.

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Just exactly what do I mean by that? Having earned my stripes in firsthand Lego assembly and also facilitation of a 4-year-old's assembling and destroying Lego creations, here's the deal:

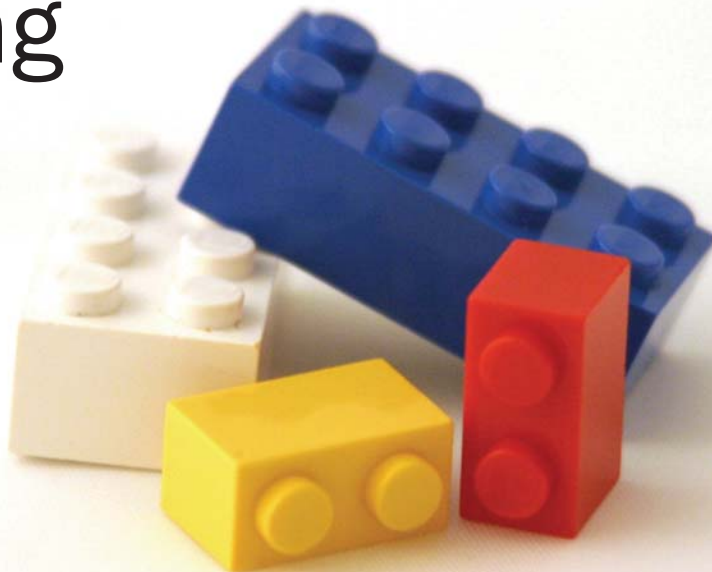
Anything that is put out in any form for

use in any pursuit by human beings of any age in 2011 must meet certain basic criteria in order to succeed. It must:

- Look cool and modern
- Be intuitive in its use
- Have a good visual manual with substantial online backup
- Do exactly what its marketing says it will do, and maybe a bit more
- Have a logical containment system to organize and transport

During the whole holiday season, and for the months prior, we had been reviewing drying rack systems in our shop. If you are anything like me, you have needed to finish parts and pieces here and there and have come up with some rather overengineered and barbaric ways of processing and drying them. For our on-site and off-site prefinishing needs over the years, our self-

designed-and-built system has been OK; except for those unfortunate times when it's been necessary to transport or store them. Translation: Any time they don't have wet product on them, they are cumbersome to own.



Well, needless to say, the paint and wood-working worlds need a better solution to that problem. Honestly, for any kind of quantity, such as when a builder hands you a few hundred feet of something that needs something or when that homeowner tells you that her husband is going to be installing baseboard this Saturday, you need a sturdy rig that is lightweight, easy to transport and professional looking; doesn't eat up much floor space; and is just plain well-designed and functional.

The first one that I have seen that actually intrigued me during the 15 years since I built my first set of racks is the Erecta-Rack System (www.erecta-rack.com). I've seen some that just by looking at them online I could tell would never serve a professional. That's what made this one interesting.

Oh, how I love things that are modular and stackable and have a nice carrying bag. No nails or screws or lag bolts or big wooden footprints. Erecta-Rack hit most of everything I was looking for in the modifications I was planning to make to our dry-rack system this winter for shop use. For me, the shop is the testing ground for feasibility. If it works in the shop, it will most likely work in the field – as long as I can get it there.

So I ordered an Erecta-Rack set, and it arrived in a small package via UPS. And I wondered how a duffle bag could contain a complete-enough drying rack system for what we do with drying racks. But, I knew if it worked, this same duffle bag contained a system that would travel rather nicely in the



My own 15-year-old drying rack system.

backseat of the extra cab, instead of consuming 32 square feet of cargo space in the bed.

The Erecta-Rack is like an adult Lego system. It's that practical. You kind of don't even have to read the instructions, except maybe just to make sure you have the stabilizer bars set properly, and you definitely don't have to be an engineer, or even consult an engineer, to figure out within five minutes how to use the system.

The whole concept of a good rack system is to be able to lay drying products out horizontally and easily add to the rack without collapsing the bars or tripping over an unruly base. What I absolutely love about the Erecta-Rack is that the crossbars are structural. The bars cannot be knocked out of position. They are locked into place within a modular system. You can slide material across them without rolling them off. Further, you build the rack as you go, so it ends up exactly the size of the batch you are working on.

I don't sell well. But I have done enough lineal footage of prefinishing of everything from floors to exterior fascia and soffit that I have found every flaw in our old rack system. I've committed every rack collapse offense possible. You know, that split-second thrill where you hope the entire rack of wet product isn't about to come down. I won't miss that.

Our wooden rack systems have been built, rebuilt, refined and reproduced many times over the years. Every time, I have

appreciated the cost of lumber, lag bolts, conduit and the hours it takes to create this magnum opus. Call me crazy, but if there is something better, I will buy it. By better, I mean mostly easier to live with in terms of square footage that it occupies versus functionality. In these critical categories, Erecta-Rack wins. Different kits ranging in price from \$117.95 to \$251.95 make Erecta-Rack a good-value system that is convenient, portable and professional. I promise you that I've spent more than that when building racks that pleased me less.

For more information on this product, visit www.erecta-rack.com. Also, to see the system in more applications and to catch future updates on this and other products reviewed in this column, visit www.topcoatreview.com. This is a blog I launched last November to serve as an online extension of this column, serving as a venue to provide continuing feedback to the users and manufacturers of reviewed products as we use them further into their life cycles. Your feedback is highly encouraged as well. Manufacturers actually do listen to paint contractors.

By the way, blogging is also a very simple Lego-like endeavor. Give some thought to finding the Lego appeal in all that you do this year, both personally and professionally. **APC**

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Erecta-Rack System