



My Ninjago City build as seen at BrickFair Virginia 2022. Completing it took all three days of set-up.



59 Hours, 60 Builders, 1,000,000 LEGO Bricks, 1 New Hashima: Assembling a Massive Collaboration

Article by Daniel Zimmerman

*Photos by Chris Edwards, Jordan Wolfman,
Tyler Newman, and Simon Liu*

After seven years of displaying at fifteen LEGO fan conventions, I consider myself someone with a decent amount of experience setting up a MOC at a LEGO fan convention. I have set up with LUGs to create modular city layouts and I have done a large city based on Ninjago on my own. Both were exciting and challenging tasks in their own right, but nowhere close to the monster that was New Hashima at Brickworld Chicago 2023. I was approached to join the collaborative build at BrickFair Virginia in August of 2022 after Stefan Formentano saw my work on my Ninjago City build. It was also here that I was introduced to the idea of New Hashima and the other collaborators of our growing group. It wasn't long after that we quickly got to planning this massive build we all wanted to see made.

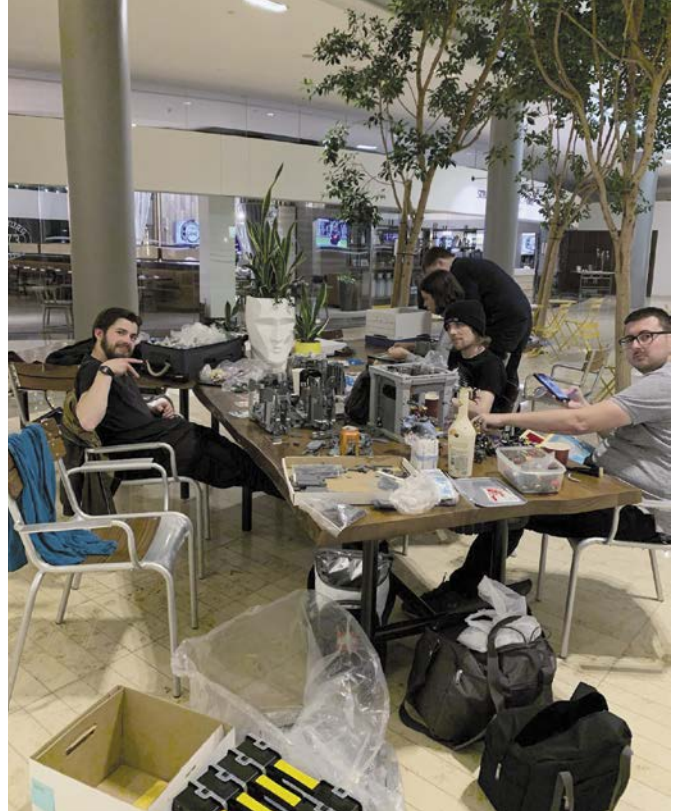
Fast forward to June 2023—60 collaborators from seven different countries pooled into the Renaissance Hotel & Convention Center with approximately one million LEGO bricks in tow, with one goal in mind. We were all extremely excited and expressed it to one another, but I think we were all internally dreading and fearing this final task we had in front of us, which was setting up New Hashima. I think it is safe to say we look upon these 59-plus hours of setting up as a fond and beloved memory, but in the moment it was daunting. Upon my arrival at the Renaissance Hotel on Tuesday night, I was greeted by the amusing sight of a group of AFOLs and boxes of bricks. These were my fellow New Hashima collaborators, and as soon as I checked in and placed my luggage away in my room, I headed back in to join them in our early prep for set-up.

We started by helping each other bring in our towers from our vehicles so that we could set up the following afternoon when the convention hall opened for set-up at

1:00 p.m. Some of us helped by making small assemblies that would be used to tie the city together, such as the many sidewalks with railings. Some of us began reassembling our cubes and towers that were damaged in transport. Others began testing the strength of our builds so we could rest assured that the city would not collapse in on itself. It was a fun start to the long set-up ahead of us—we chatted, ate dinner, drank, laughed, and built LEGO. It doesn't get better than that.

After a good night's rest, we spent the morning unloading and preparing for the convention hall doors to open at 1:00 p.m. When the time came, Stefan pulled his trailer up to one of the rolling doors in the convention hall and we unloaded the custom wooden tables he had constructed for New Hashima. In total, four tables held up the city, each one consisting of multiple parts so it could be broken down for transportation. Once all four tables were assembled, we got to work putting the builds onto them. We kept all four tables separated at the start so the collaborators could walk around each one and assemble without having to reach over other tables. Thanks to the genius of Stefan, Simon, Michael, and Mason, each sector of the city was broken down into sectioned standard builds of cubes and toppers. This simplified the order of set-up for the builds for us eighty different collaborators. We just had to follow the master plan for each sector that was broken down layer by layer, and spots labeled for each collaborator.

My cubes and toppers were located towards the top of Sector 02—The Inner City, meaning there was some time before my contributions would be placed. So I made sure to help Stefan and the other collaborators where I could. It was important that while we assembled each sector, we were feeding wires through each cube so that everyone could turn on their lights. The Inner City was an interesting sector, as unlike the other three square-shaped



The collaborators building in the hotel lounge area. Photo by Simon Liu.



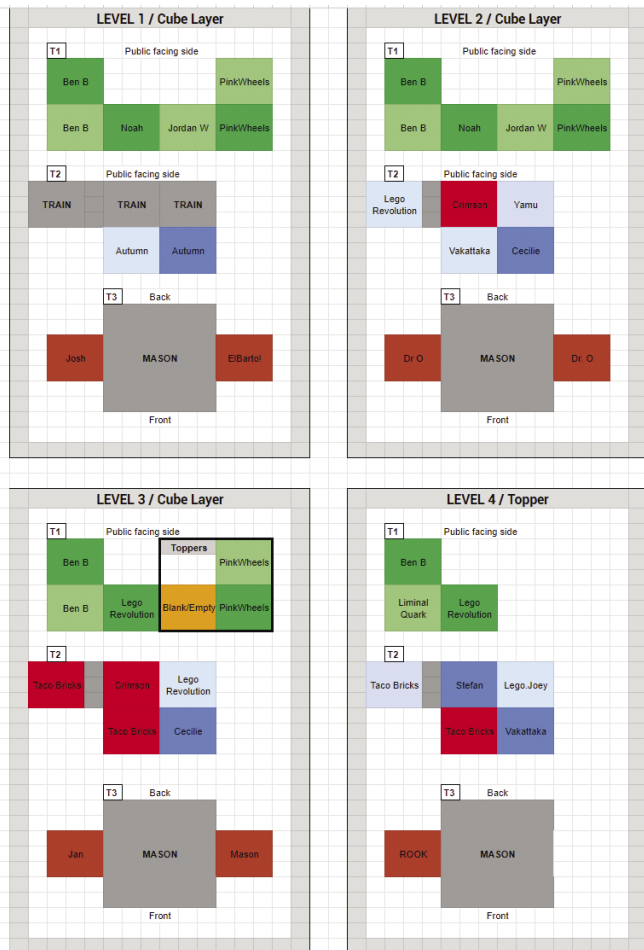
Simon testing the stability of his tower. Photo by Simon Liu.



The collaborators stashing their builds in their hotel rooms. Photos by Simon Liu.



The collaborators setting up the tables. Photos by Simon Liu.



Example of the layer-by-layer breakdown.

sectors, the Inner City is triangular and it has a second table in the middle to add height around the road that encloses the city, as well as provide space for multiple USB hubs that were used for setting up the wiring.

Every now and then I would stop what I was doing and look around me. It was incredible to see the 60 of us who were here all working as one towards one goal. We had a circle of folding tables surrounding the growing New Hashima. The tables eventually spilled out into the nearby food court since there were so many of us working. At each table were groups of collaborators building and working. Some were repairing sections damaged in transport. Some were unpacking models shipped by collaborators who couldn't make it but wanted their builds still in the city, so they had shipped their builds to another collaborator to add.

Once my contributions were placed into the Inner City, I stayed around and helped others place their contributions, built internal supports, and added in detailing. Other collaborators did the same, and it helped to create this really fun sense of teamwork as we all worked together to help each other succeed and achieve the shared goal we had. Everyone was smiling and building LEGO together, a sight I very much enjoyed and think back to often.

We worked diligently and at a steady pace. We had a lot to do and only so much time before the public hours on Saturday. The cubes were quickly being placed into their respective spots with the wiring being fed through. We would drill holes through the wooden tables so that we could feed them out under the tables and into the central hubs under Sector 02. It was interesting seeing Sector 06: The Docks, be assembled. As it was the lowest section of the city, the table was only about four inches off the ground. It quickly rose up as each cube was put onto it. Simon's Si-Tower and Casey's Octan Tower would add substantial height and mass to the entire city, with the Si-Tower just breaking thirteen feet. Sector 04: The Old City, was just as interesting to see assembled, as it was all



The collaborators assembling and repairing their builds. Photo by Simon Liu.

interconnected through a small monorail and its own sidewalk design, unique to its sector. Once The Inner City had all of its cubes and toppers placed, we pushed in the other three tables next to it and connected them all to their respective sides.

From then-on, the collaborators for each Sector spent time fine-tuning little details to blend all their cubes and towers together to keep a consistent flow of design throughout each sector, so that it wouldn't feel like a bunch of mismatched puzzle pieces. Some of us were on ladders to reach where our cubes and toppers were, and to feed the wires through. It quickly became a running joke between all of us that we would never be an OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) friendly work environment. It was fun seeing the lengths we were going to, to get all these fine details into New Hashima. Some would kick their shoes off and actually get onto the tables and into New Hashima itself to add on little touches of detail that we wanted, to put in to breathe life into our city and make it come alive. One of the collaborators, Blake, sat inside The Docks, surrounded by cubes, working on wiring and detailing. Now and then I would see his head stick out of the giant mass of LEGO buildings, and I couldn't help but laugh at the sight.

Once all the cubes and toppers had been placed, everyone worked together to add tiny details and scenes across the city. We spent most of Friday sprinkling in minifigures and small builds and vehicles that made New Hashima feel alive and busy. Some of us were grabbing leftover parts and scraps to add last-minute additions to add more story that the city was telling. We worked and built until we were finally content. When we had finally stopped, it was just after midnight on Saturday morning. We had finished on time and could finally rest. A lot of us, Stefan especially, did not sleep much during set-up. Most of us got about 5-6 hours of rest each night during set-up. I remember never returning to my hotel room until around 1:00 a.m. on each day of set-up. The set-up of New Hashima was long and tedious. It was nothing like I had ever done before. It took a lot out of me physically, but I didn't care one bit; I was having too much fun to stop. I would do it all over again



The collaborators preparing their builds for final placement. Photos by Jordon Wolfman.





During construction of the Docks, Blake Foster builds from within. Photo by Kevin Murney.

if I could. I got to do all of my favorite things throughout the set-up, which is talking about LEGO, laughing, and making friends. Stefan, Simon, Mason, and Michael did an amazing job herding everyone together and keeping us all on track (for the most part). All the other collaborators gave it their all, and did not cut corners in any way. We had set out to create one of the greatest LEGO builds the community had ever seen.

I think it is safe to say we have done just that. The public and community feedback was incredible. Everyone was blown away with what we were able to pull off, and I think inside we were all shocked we managed to pull it off as well. I was in awe—I was finding it hard to believe that I got to be part of what is considered to be one of the greatest builds in the community. The public hours were a blur, and the next thing I knew, we had disassembled New Hashima and we were all headed home. Turns out it is much easier to disassemble New Hashima than it is to assemble it. But as I said before, regardless of how long and tedious it was, I would do it all over again, as it was one of my favorite experiences of my life. YONHO (You Only New Hashima Once)! 📺



Blake Foster works on the growing mass of wires under the table of New Hashima. Photo By Simon Liu.



George placing sections of the Old City. Photo by Jordan Wolfman.



A common sight: collaborators working together. Photo by Jordan Wolfman.

each other during the day, the same pagoda takes on new life during *World of Lights*, where the neon illuminates the surrounding context with ultraviolet lights, and the purple recedes into the shadow.

At the next face of Inner City's triangular plan resides Tower 2—a megalith that connects the city to the huge port system that is Sector 06: Docks. Ten builders' contributions created this multi-tiered shopping area, with fresh imports galore. Tower 2 stands as the Inner City's densest structure, fraught with detail. Vendors line alleyways and corridors, graffiti and gangs roam the claustrophobic lower levels, while large high-class towers fill out the skyline to its fullest.

With a contribution of two cubes and two toppers for Tower 2, Daniel Zimmerman's goal was to push himself as a builder by limiting his color palette and part selection. "I quickly realized it was getting much bigger than I thought it would, so... I stopped once I ran out of transparent light blue 1x2 bricks," Daniel mentioned regarding his sand green tower, with the blue brick serving as glass behind its facade. Light also played an important role in his design choices. Within one of his cubes, *The Factory*, he chose to utilize 2x2 transparent light blue round bricks with EL wire running through their internal cross axle connection to provide an ambient and electrifying glow "giving off power to the factory building behind it."

Daniel also set out to create a "newer" tower, one drawing from curvature in post-modern architecture. With corporation control being synonymous with the world of cyberpunk, Daniel added the overly-sized billboard to do just that; appear as the home of a "menacing" corporation.

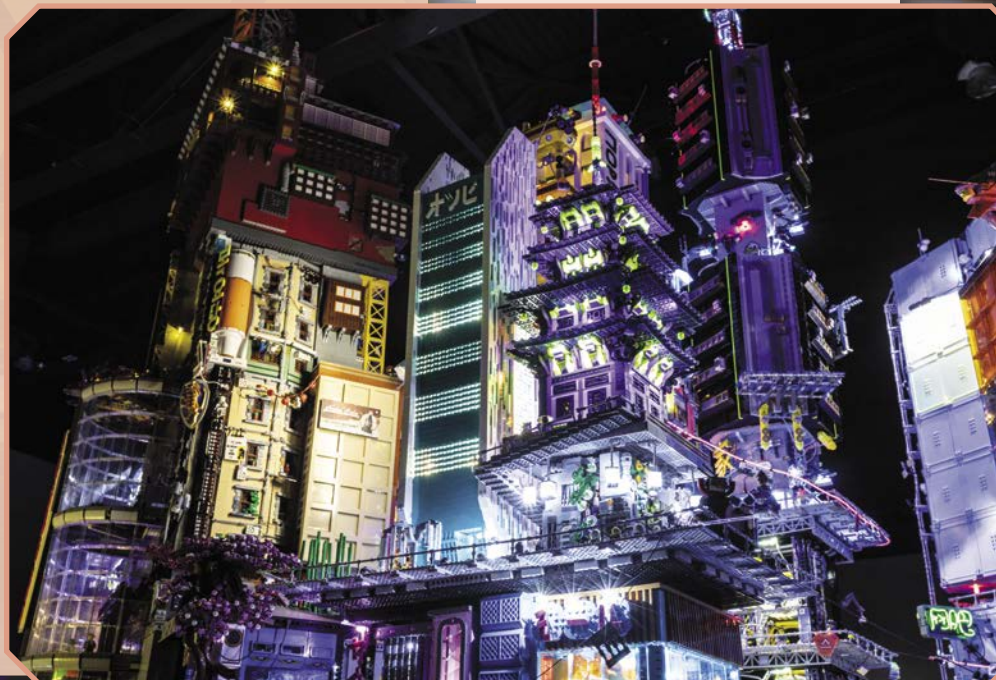
Kevin Murney also contributed a "Cult Cube" to the depths of Tower 2. After all, multiple groups and followings exist within the cyberpunk world, and especially within the seawalls of New Hashima. "Conceptually the large head from the Big Buddha statue in Hong Kong was salvaged and brought to display in New Hashima," shared Kevin. Cybernetic displays, lights, and cabling plug into the Buddha head and run through the entrance of techno-skeleton columns. The Erechtheion (an ancient Greek temple in Athens, notable for sculpted figure columns), and Syd Mead's early *Blade Runner* concept art inspired the use of larger than minifigure-scale LED keychains as columns in front of the cybernetic Buddha head. Kevin shared that "the result is an ominous juxtaposition and joinery between the ancient religion and near-future electronic technology."

Tower 3 serves the Inner City as a place of high stakes and immense relaxation and pleasure with the casino-topped bathhouse. Composed by seven builders, the main structure of a 2x2 cube center is flanked by a single central cube on either opposite face. The lower levels of the tower's base consisted solely of the casino, featuring a double-tiered aquarium, nightclub, peaceful ornamental garden, speeder bike refueling, nightclub, and shopping venues specializing in modular furniture. The grand casino towers over the lower slums of the Old City in Sector 04. However, towards the courtyard of the Inner City, Tower 3 consisted of dense apartment housing for the melting pot of culture that has found its way to the Inner City.

A particularly colorful side of Tower 1 with multiple cubes and toppers designed by Meredith Bell. Photograph by Casey McCoy.



At night, Meredith Bell's towers take on different shades with the use of UV dot lights. Photograph by Casey McCoy.





Led and largely contributed to by Mason Ricks, and the help of Riley Moreau's aquarium and nightclub cubes, Tower 3 occupied the space of a 2x2 cube footprint within its central structure, flanked by one cube stacks at either side, inset from the front and rear facades of the central core by half-cube distances. With this tower being contributed to by fewer individuals, the freedom of the center could stray from the modular language of the rest of the city, yet starts from the lowest level within the city. The adjacent stacked cubes tie the design back into the style of the surrounding infrastructure. By breaking up this grid, Mason Ricks was able to establish a unique and cohesive language in a few architectural moves, that all lead up to his bathhouse, sitting eye-level with the surrounding toppers.

At Sector 02's street level, a much different lifestyle exists; one filled with the organized chaos of cyberpunk hustle and bustle, where pockets of peaceful beauty insert themselves. The city's center features park space, and a hologram figure based on Joi from *Blade Runner 2049*. The plaza features a central park and artificial tree created by Ted Andes, utilizing multiple of the Bionicle Vahki jaw elements (part ID 47333), a LEGO element he particularly enjoys

An approach into the Inner City between Tower 2 (left) and Tower 3 (right).
Photograph by Casey McCoy.

Daniel Zimmermans' sand green banking tower sitting atop Tower 2, peaking into Sector 06. Photograph by Casey McCoy.



Kevin Murney's Cybernetic Buddha head, adjacent to a classic modular furniture venue.
Photograph by Casey McCoy.

