



made in wood

Terry Burling Toymaker

An unsuccessful search for his grandchild's fifth birthday present has sparked a new hobby-business for Terry Burling.

"My grandson's fifth birthday was coming up and the shops didn't have anything I wanted to buy him, so I decided I'd have to make him something."

That something turned out to be a Thomas the Tank Engine toy box and it became the first of many wood-working projects.

"I really loved making it and then when I saw his reaction to it, that just added to the enjoyment," he says.

What started out as a hobby a little under a year ago has taken on a life of its own with people around Terry's hometown of Paraparaumu admiring his work and commissioning him to create pieces for their own children and grandchildren.

"It's amazing how word spreads. I've just done a ride-on Thomas toy for a chiropractor who bought it for his waiting room."

So far, Terry's repertoire runs to a host of different toy boxes, including Bob the Builder characters and a princess carriage, some ride-on style wooden toys and car beds. He's also working up to a kid's castle, but he says safety is paramount and the turrets are causing some problems.



Although he creates the toy boxes and toys using the same basic templates, Terry says he tries to make each piece unique in the way they're decorated. Resene paints are the main differentiating tool – blues, reds, yellows and metallic paints for the cars and carriages – and he's also begun experimenting with large stick-ons.

"I put a princess in the window of one of the carriages the other day," he points out.

The templates themselves owe a lot to his creative talents, garnered in his original career as a cutter and pattern-designer for clothing.

"It's really like what I did when I was cutting clothes. I would look at pictures and then make my own designs to suit."

Terry's latest love-affair with woodworking children's toys is not the first time he's fallen for it. In the 1960s, he used to take part in an annual IHC competition to create wooden toys for the children, but he hadn't rekindled the talent for close to four decades.

"I can remember coming third in New Zealand one year, which was great, but then I sort of forgot about it for a long time. I always loved muddling about with wood, and fixing houses and that sort of thing, but it wasn't until now that I have really devoted myself to it."

Despite being taken by surprise at how popular his work has been, Terry says he is always keen to take on different projects and try new things.

"That's part of the fun – figuring out how you're going to make it and whether you can improve something the next time around."

For the kids' toy boxes, for instance, he located a special hinge that allows the box lid to stay in place and stops it falling back down on small hands reaching inside for treasures.

Terry spends at least two to three hours in his garage workshop every weekday, before his nightshift at the local supermarket, and even more time on the weekends. Luckily, his wife is supportive of his growing passion, especially as a couple of the pieces have crept into the house. At the moment, their lounge is playing host to two large toy boxes – a Thomas the Tank Engine and a Princess Carriage – about to be whisked off to surprise two more children.

Asked to pick a favourite from all his pieces, Terry says he has loved making them all, but he has a special soft spot for the first box.

"Seeing it completed and seeing how happy my grandson was, made it something very special."

Regardless of all the hours that go into each piece, he says he is never reluctant to let them go.

"The fun of it is in seeing or hearing about how much the kids love it. I know they're going to a good home and I try to make them as kid-safe and as kid-proof as possible, so they should withstand some tough play."

And what's next on the drawing board? There are a few outstanding family requests to take care of. He's working on a dolls' house for his granddaughter and, to reward his wife's patience and support, he's currently planning a cabinet for her doll collection. **H**

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