

The Doll's House Museum Basle is presenting:

„Ancient and ultra-modern“; a special exhibition of the famous Anker stone building sets

(Short text/about 4000 characters)

The Doll's House Museum Basle will be presenting from 2nd November 2002 to 25th May 2003 an extraordinary exhibition of „Anker stone building blocks“. Invented at the end of the nineteenth century, they were the first toys suitable also for adults and have enjoyed ever increasing popularity since their invention. They created a real boom in sales worldwide.

An Elementary Toy

Building blocks like dolls are considered to be elementary toys. Therefore the history of building blocks stretches right back in time. They have always been greatly appreciated as important educational tools. Friedrich Fröbel, the founder of the first kindergarten, believed that a child acquires two abilities by playing with building blocks: to re-create a three-dimensional model from a two-dimensional design and to arrange irregularly-formed three-dimensional objects on a two-dimensional base.

By about 1850 wooden building kits, which were almost perfect, had been developed from the original rudimentary blocks. However the dimensions of any possible building were limited by the light weight, smooth surface and natural imperfection of the wood.

Ingenious Invention

Gustav Lilienthal had the idea of producing synthetic stone blocks as an alternative to wooden building blocks. As these blocks have a rougher surface and a heavier specific weight, it is possible to make buildings which are more stable. He developed the stone blocks together with his brother, the aviation pioneer Otto Lilienthal, by mixing sand, pulverised chalk and colouring agent and using linseed oil varnish as a binding agent.

Although they were inventive engineers, their methods of marketing their stone building sets were not successful. Due to their large debts they had to sell their invention in 1880 to Friedrich Adolf Richter, who in the same year patented the process of producing the stone blocks in Germany and America.

Success Story

Friedrich Ad. Richter quickly obtained capital returns from his investment. He marketed the building sets, which were to become known worldwide, under his firm's logo of an anchor.

In 1884 he offered a new series of stone building sets for sale, the largest of which consisted of 881 stone blocks and weighed 20 kilos. In the spring of 1886 there already existed a catalogue, published in 13 languages, offering 238 different kits. The colour of the Anker stone blocks were warm tones of red, yellow and blue-green. In order to prepare the building plans he hired famous artists, illustrators and architects. The designs and display models in the catalogue were produced as buildings for hobby architects. Richter had recognised the

importance of the adult hobby market. He was also the first toy manufacturer, who offered his products exclusively to this market segment. In the end there were 400 different kits available with 1200 different forms of stone blocks.

Abrupt End

In 1953 the Anker Steinbaukasten firm, in former East Germany, was turned into a state-owned company and in 1963 the government decided to close it down.

According to the records in the model books, one can assume that up to 5 billion stone blocks were sold. At the time of Richter's death in 1910 his firm's headquarters were in Rudolstadt with branch offices in Berlin, Konstein (Bavaria) Leipzig, New York, Nürnberg, Olten, Prague, Rotterdam, St. Petersburg, Vienna and in Japan.

Well-earned Revival

The basic sets made by the Modellbausteinspiele GmbH firm in Rudolstadt are on sale since 1995, which are true to Richter's manufacturing guidelines and marketed under the old trade mark.

The special exhibition in the Doll's House Museum Basle has been made possible through collaboration with two collectors:

- Mr. Tobias Mey from Baden-Baden, who has made a part of his collection of Anker stone building sets available to the museum and has set up some of the large and small display items in our exhibition.
- Mr. Ernst Born from Basle is one of the Anker hobby building experts. He built a model of the Basle town hall in our museum using 2840 stone blocks in 105 different forms. He builds all his Anker stone building projects with a specifically-developed computer program. Based on the floor plans of the object, the program calculates which stone blocks and how many will be needed. Interactive stations are available in the exhibition so that visitors can see a short film explaining the various processes.

Inspired by the games which Friedrich Ad. Richter brought onto the market at the end of the nineteenth century to test one's patience and skills, we have set up some puzzles to test the skills of our visitors. These puzzles can also be bought in the museum shop.

Opening Hours

Museum/Shop: Daily from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Thursdays until 8 p.m.
Café: Daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Thursdays until 9 p.m.

Entry: Fr. 7.-/Fr. 5.-, Children up to 16 years are admitted free of charge, and only if accompanied by an adult.

The whole building is accessible to wheelchairs.

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