



# Girls at Work

## Construction Aisle No Longer Boys' Domain

by Loren Moreno

The construction toy aisle is turning pink thanks to a trend to offer more girl-friendly building sets. From the new Lego Friends line—featuring five girl besties—to Mega Bloks' Hello Kitty-branded building sets, girls are better positioned than they've ever been to take advantage of a category of play that has long been considered the domain of boys.

Traditional block sets, with their deep blues and reds and greens, are often a turn-off to girls, says Roger Glazebrook, store manager at Mary Arnold Toys in New York City. Customers have responded well to girl-oriented building sets. By offering blocks in pinks and pastels, such as those from Lego's Duplo line, girls are more apt to build, he says.

"There are people who say you shouldn't be sexist, that all toys are

for all kids," says Glazebrook. But he doesn't agree. "It's a way to draw girls in, by changing the format."

Reeves International, the maker of the magnetic building set Geomag, recently released a pink building set. Bob LaRocca, national sales manager for Reeves, says consumers have been programmed to associate building toys with boys.

"We saw the color change as a way to get consumers thinking differently," says LaRocca. Otherwise, girls are missing out on a category of play that is beneficial for their development.

A 2007 research study by the Seattle Children's Hospital Research Institute, for instance, found that children who played with blocks scored 15 percent higher on language arts tests than kids who didn't.

"Building exposes kids to another way of exploring, thinking, and learning," says LaRocca.

Other companies are taking it a step beyond a color change, though, to get girls interested in the world of building. Girls love to tell stories, says Adrian Roche, vice president of brand licensing and preschool for Mega Brands.

Mega Bloks is reaching preschool-aged girls with its new Little Princess



Little Princess collection, here and bottom left, from Mega Bloks' First Builders line

### At a Glance

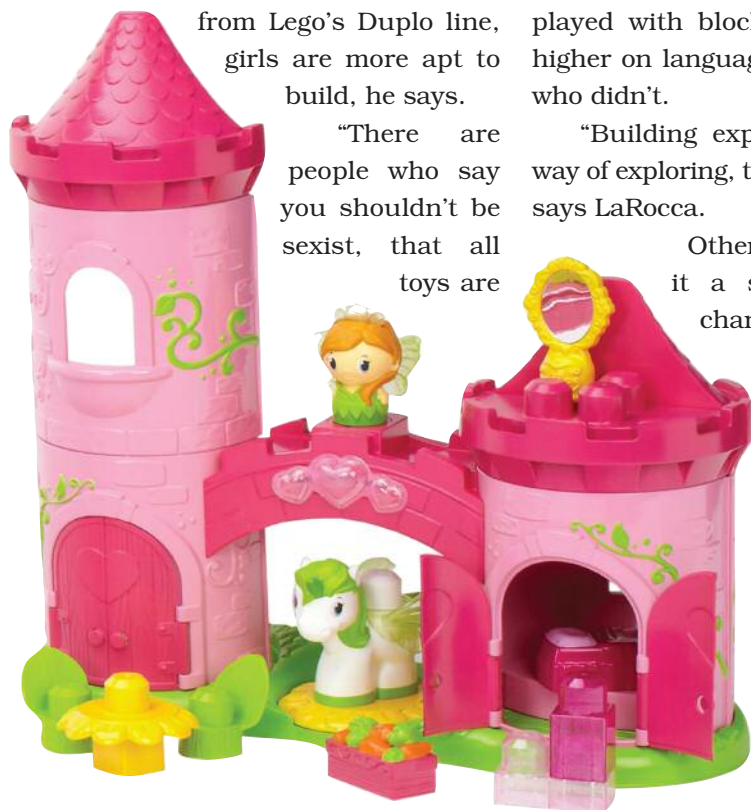
— Nineteen percent of U.S. households purchased building sets in 2011.

— U.S. sales for building sets for the 12 months ending in June were \$1.7 billion, up 21 percent from the previous year.

Source: The NPD Group

collection in its First Builders line. The sets bring fantasy to life with princesses, fairies, ponies, and enchanted castles—all allowing for the type of imaginative play that girls enjoy.

Boys tend to enjoy heavy construction and using all their play time building a structure from start to finish. "Girls, on the other hand, would much rather get to their play time faster," he says. "They love to design and decorate, customize and accessorize. So we made sure to design our girls' play sets in such a way as to offer all these important features."



Mega Bloks has offered building sets for girls since the '80s, and it plans to continue to expand its offerings. Later this year, the company will launch its Mega Bloks Barbie collection. The line will feature Barbie and her friends in a buildable world of fashion and dream locations.

Lego is also reaching out to the girl demographic in a big way. At the end of 2011, 91 percent of Lego sets sold were to boys, a trend that was common for years, says Michael McNally, brand relations director at Lego. The Lego Friends line, after being on shelves for only six months, increased sales to girls. One in four sets sold in the U.S. is now to a girl.

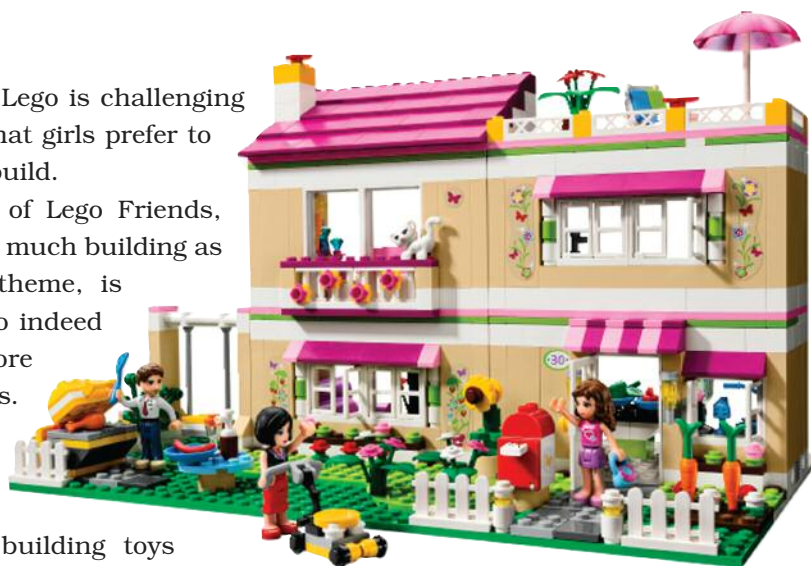
The line features a group of best friends—Mia, Emma, Andrea, Stephanie, and Olivia—and the fictional town of Heartlake. Each character is unique. Mia is a veterinarian and has a green thumb, for instance, and Andrea is a singer-songwriter and a drama queen.

McNally says Lego is challenging the assumption that girls prefer to play rather than build.

"The success of Lego Friends, which provides as much building as any other Lego theme, is proof that girls do indeed like to build before they play," he says. "We see Lego Friends expanding the consumer base for building toys while also punctuating what they love about other dolls and role-play toys."

Retailers say the demand is there. Stephanie Lucy, vice president of toys and sporting goods for Target, said the retailer will offer exclusive girl-directed building toys this holiday season, including Emma's Horse Trailer from the Lego Friends line.

"We learned that expanding our selection of construction-themed toys for



Olivia's House, from the Lego Friends line

girls was important to (our customers), and we've adjusted our assortment accordingly to ensure we have the latest and greatest toys," says Lucy.

One thing many agree on: building toys for girls is more than a fad; it's a category retailers and companies hope to see expand. ■

## Building Toys



Hasbro's Kre-O boldly goes where no one has gone before with its **Star Trek U.S.S. Enterprise** building set. Based on the upcoming Star Trek sequel from Paramount Pictures, the Kre-O Star Trek line, under license from CBS Consumer Products, features a variety of vehicles from the movie, along with fun Kreon figures based on iconic Star Trek characters.