

Love What You Love Podcast

Episode 57: Legos with Nitesh Aggerwal

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Welcome to *Love What You Love*; I'm Julie Rose. I'm insatiably curious about people and the world around us, and absolutely in love with passion and unselfconscious enthusiasm. Every other week I geek out with someone about the thing that they love, and then I share it with you.

Welcome back! Or, Welcome! Real quick, it would be absolutely amazing if you would take just a few minutes to rate and/or review *Love What You Love* on the podcasting platform(s) of your choice. It really helps the podcast so much, and it helps other folks find us and get more love in their life.

Let's meet this week's guest. Nitesh Aggerwal is an avid gamer, amateur photographer, and Lego builder. He is super passionate about his Lego builds and has been for over 30 years. It was so great to chat with him. His love absolutely shines through. In this episode, we talk engineering job skills, finance ministries, \$10,000 Lego builds, stress relief, Minas Tirith, Lego life lessons, and so much more. So find out why Nitesh loves Legos and why you might learn to love them too.

Julie: Hello, Nitesh! Thank you so much for joining me today.

Nitesh: Hey Julie. Thank you for having me.

Julie: I'm super excited to talk with you because every time I see you on a video call, you've got a Lego build somewhere nearby. [laughs] And when we ask you what you did on vacation, you're like, "Well, I did another Lego build." [laughs] So, I'm super excited to find out, when did you start doing Lego builds, and is that even the right language for what you do?

Nitesh: That is the right language to say what I do. I've been building Legos ever since I can remember; ever since I was a kid. I'm an engineer by education, and that sort of came in because I've always been intrigued by how things work or how things go together, how they break apart and everything. And that sort of kicked off from Legos. When I was a kid, I got my first Lego when my dad got me one, and I've been intrigued with them, been playing with them... initially just building whatever I could think of.

But now these new Legos come out where you can build actual pop culture things, and memorabilia, and all that sort of stuff, it's gotten even more fun. You can build, like, actual buildings, and actual vehicles, and that sort of stuff. So, it's gotten even more fun and more interesting now.

Julie: Yeah, so what was the first thing you built when you were a kid?

Nitesh: A house, pretty much, from open Legos. Just a house with a patio, and a balcony, and a railing, and a fireplace chimney. Because at that point in time there used to be only loose Lego where you can build whatever you can imagine. So I pretty much built a house.

Julie: I love it. I love it! Did your dad encourage you? Did he get you more Lego kits or...?

Nitesh: Just the loose Legos. We were not that well off, so there's only so much of Legos you can buy, so it was pretty much the loose Legos. He didn't get me any of those kits which I buy these days on my own. It was pretty much loose Legos; build whatever you want with those loose Legos, and that's what I played around with.

Julie: So what was, like, the weirdest thing that you built when you were a kid?

Nitesh: The weirdest thing I built was... I had a bunch of miniature dinosaurs and those farm animals; cows and everything. So I built sort of a zoo with Lego walls and everything, which had all the farm animals, and the dinosaurs, and everything. My sister used to tease me about it. "You cannot have cows right next to a tyrannosaurus because they're going to eat it." I said, "No, no. It's my zoo. Everybody's domesticated. They're all friends. Nobody's going to eat each other."

Julie: [laughs] How long have Legos even been around?

Nitesh: I've been playing with them for more than 30 years, so I don't know even... Must be long before that because I've grown up building them. Both of my daughters build them regularly. I'll say, easily, more than 30 years.

Julie: And have you been to Legoland?

Nitesh: Oh yes, we went to Legoland before the pandemic. This was in 2019. Yes, we went to Legoland. It was *fun*. Those enormous Lego scenes, the whole... Big Ben, the Statue of Liberty, and the whole New York skyline with Legos. It was really exciting to see all of that.

Julie: What can you even do at Legoland? I've never been.

Nitesh: It's a theme park. It's sort of a mini-Disneyland where you can go and take rides. You can see all those sculptures they've built out of Legos. It's basically a theme park where you go and take roller coaster rides and do that sort of stuff.

Julie: So you started building kits... What was the first actual kit that you put together?

Nitesh: The first actual kit I put together was... Again, back to... It was from the *Jurassic World* movie. [laughs]

Julie: Oh! So you're all about dinosaurs.

Nitesh: I got dinosaurs. [laughs] So, it's a kit of that whole... if you've seen the *Jurassic World* movie, where they actually breed that white tyrannosaurus rex. It's that habitat where they are breeding that all-white big tyrannosaurus rex, and they've got all those cranes and all those things. That's the first actual kit I bought; me and my daughter built it together.

Julie: Oh, okay. Now, did you buy it for her or did you buy it for you and let her be part of it?

Nitesh: So, technically all the Legos come from my daughter.

Julie: [laughs] Technically.

Nitesh: That's what my wife knows and that's what we tell her. "No, they are for my daughter." But... between my daughter and myself, we just decide on who gets to build what.

Julie: [laughs] So how does that break down? Do you guys, like, flip a coin? Do you say, "I like this one better"? How do you decide who gets to do which one?

Nitesh: Pretty much between both of us, like, "Who's built the last one?" For example, I have a huge Imperial Star Destroyer, a *Star Wars* Imperial Star Destroyer, which I built that's almost four feet big, two feet wide, and everything. The next one we got was the Colosseum. That's a huge piece as well; almost the same size. 9,000+ pieces. My daughter said, "I'm going to take the lead on this one. You can help me out. Because you built the last big one." I said, "Okay." So, since she got to do that, I got to build a

Ferrari. So, we sort of alternate between each other and help each other out. Considering these are big pieces, it takes a while. So if I'm doing it, then she can come in and help me do some of those multiple pieces which have to go the same way, and then I helped her out with the Colosseum as well. So yeah, between both of us, we just alternate.

Julie: And how old is your daughter?

Nitesh: She's going to be 13 in a month or so.

Julie: Oh man. That's such a cool thing to be able to do with each other. So you said 9,000 pieces?

Nitesh: Yes, the Colosseum is a little more than 9,000 pieces. The Imperial Star Destroyer was pretty close to that as well. We got a full-size model of the Hogwarts castle from *Harry Potter*, that's close to 7,000 pieces as well. I got an AT-AT Walker from *Star Wars*... What other big ones do I have... I got the Millennium Falcon from *Star Wars* as well. So yeah, some pretty huge pieces.

Julie: Maybe as an engineer, it's pretty straightforward, but how do you approach doing a big build like that? Do you break it down into steps...? How does that even work?

Nitesh: You break it down into steps. The first thing to do is organize the pieces, like color-code them. All the grays go on one side, all the blacks go on one side, so that it's easier to find. If you need a black piece you know which pile to go in, and if you need a gray piece you know which pile to go in. Otherwise, the pieces range from one centimeter to maybe a couple of inches big, so all sizes. Color code them, separate them out, spread them all across the room, and then slowly look at it and then start building them up.

Julie: Is there, like, a plan that you follow? Or you just look at the picture and say, "Okay, well...?"

Nitesh: No, there is... Considering these ones are big pieces, they do send a plan with that on what steps you should follow and how you can build it. You can do it by looking at the picture and building it yourself as well, but these Lego sets do come with their whole set of plans on, "This is the first thing you should build, and then you should build this," which will make your life easier.

Julie: And have you always followed the plans, or have you ever, kind of, tried to freelance it?

Nitesh: We tried freelancing a bit on some of the initial ones. [laughs] It didn't work out. It did not work out.

Julie: [laughs] Oh my god. So do you have, like, a room dedicated to this so all the pieces stay in place? How does this work?

Nitesh: We've got the whole... My wife doesn't like it but we've got the whole house dedicated to Legos. Every room has a big Lego in it. The biggest ones are in our living room, downstairs in our house, where we have that Imperial Star Destroyer on one side of the room, and then the Colosseum on the other. The Hogwarts castle sits in the big dining room. The cars sit in the family room. I've got a big ship behind my desk. Pretty much every room has a Lego in it. Wherever we find space, we just put it there.

Julie: That's awesome. So when you're putting them together, how long does it take to put a really big project together?

Nitesh: Sometimes a lot of time. Like, for the Colosseum, since we were doing it over the holidays, we had a lot of time on our hands. We were able to get the Colosseum done in less than a week. But the Imperial Star Destroyer, because I was working and she had her school, it took us almost three weeks to build that one. So, it really depends on how much time I have on my hands and how much time my daughter has on her hands too, just to go and work on it.

Julie: Do you, kind of, get into a meditative groove when you're doing these builds?

Nitesh: Oh, it is. It is. When we are at it, we don't want to be disturbed. Like, my wife knows that she's not supposed to disturb me or my daughter. The problem is, we have a little one who's four. She doesn't care.

Julie: [laughs]

Nitesh: When she wants to play, she wants to play, and she'll come in. Right now our biggest challenge is keeping her away from these big pieces because they're so big that a little push or anything can topple them over, break them, and then you have to... So, our biggest challenge right now in the whole house is trying to keep her away from all these pieces and keeping them safe.

Julie: If you're able to... like, the little one is having a nap or something and you're able to work on your piece, is it like a stress reliever for you?

Nitesh: It is a stress reliever because you... Especially for me, because like I said, my whole mindset has been intrigued by how things work, to piece together, and everything. So for me, it is a stress reliever to just sit down, look at it, start building it, and then after spending an hour, half an hour, you do see what you have built from all those tiny pieces taking shape and coming alive. It's a big stress reliever for me.

Julie: And you don't have to report to senior management about it when you're done.

Nitesh: [laughs] The only report we have to do is, "Okay, where are we going to put it?" and "Is this your last one or are you getting any more?"

Julie: [laughs] So, you have these huge pieces... Is there a way to, like, shellac them or something to keep them so they don't break? Or do they put them in cabinets? Or do you not want to do that? Maybe someday you want to take it apart?

Nitesh: No, no. I definitely don't want to take it apart. We spent so much time and effort on it. People showcase them. There are many people... If you look up on Instagram or anywhere, you'll see actual Lego builders who have a massive collection of Legos where they build it, they box them in acrylic cases and display them so they don't get dirty and everything.

We just display them. I make sure I dust them every week so they stay clean. But yeah, people box them. Some of these pieces are pretty rare to find and some of them are even discontinued where you can't even find them and build them anymore. They are unique pieces, which are really expensive, and you can't find them anywhere now.

Julie: So what's the most rare piece that you've made so far?

Nitesh: Um, the most rare piece I have is the Millennium Falcon; that's the big Millennium Falcon, which again, that one is almost four feet in diameter as well. That's one of the

rare ones. The Imperial Star Destroyer, that is part of the Legos Ultimate Collector Series as well. That's pretty rare. The Colosseum is pretty hard to find. Even though it came out fairly recently, it's pretty hard to find.

Julie: What's the most complicated build you guys have done and then how long did it take?

Nitesh: Oh, that was the Imperial Star Destroyer. It's really complicated. The other pieces are... At least they have a base; I can pick them up easily. This Imperial Star Destroyer, considering this is a spaceship, it's a star destroyer... the intricacies which went into the building the skeleton of that was pretty hard. Lifting it and moving it is pretty hard as well because it's so delicate that if I don't lift it from the right space it's literally going to come apart. So that one is right next to a wall where nobody's allowed to go within feet of that. Forget about the little one, I don't even allow my wife... Because it's so delicate I know if you don't lift it properly, if you touch it, it is going to fall apart.

Julie: How much does this stuff cost?

Nitesh: [laughs] Yeah. It depends from piece to piece. But these big pieces, they are part of the Collectors Series which Lego does, which they don't make that many. The Imperial Star Destroyer cost me \$750. The Colosseum was close to \$800.

Julie: Holy cats!!

Nitesh: These are pretty expensive Legos.

Julie: Is there a build that you've done that you thought, "Eh, I don't know if I'm really going to enjoy this" but then you ended up loving it?

Nitesh: No, no. Pretty much all the Legos we have built so far, they have been super fun to build because we pretty much build stuff that we know of. Mainly *Star Wars*, or the Colosseum, or the dinosaurs from *Jurassic Park*, or even the Lego Ninjagos, pretty much everything we have built, we know about it. We've seen those.

And since I have been building Legos for a while and my daughter has been too, we pretty much love any Lego that comes out. The way they design these Legos, they're always fun to build. It's really good attention to detail; so many pieces interlocking together. It's always fun. I've never, ever had a Lego which I've not liked.

Julie: I came across something called Lego Ideas. What is that?

Nitesh: So, there are different types of Legos you can build. There are certain Lego models which are Legos that you build for display. There's a Lego Technic, which are, sort of, engineering sets, Technic sets which are actually... They're not motorized, but they work together. For example, I got a pretty big set of a Bugatti and a big set of Ferrari. Now those, if I, say, were able to play with them even though they're built out of Lego... If I were to roll them, you can see their engine pistons moving. If you turn the steering wheel you can see the front wheels move. Because even though they are Legos, the way they're built is they have all these functioning parts, and levers, and everything. So they actually work.

Lego Ideas is another thing where you can actually build and you can actually motorize as well. You can add an actual motor to it, which is operated by batteries, and then you can even control it from a smartphone as well. So, Legos is not just about building sets and putting them together. You can actually... In fact, my daughter has one. She's got a Lego where... It's a set, it's got a motor with it which can connect through wifi to your

phone. You can build a robot out of it, an excavator, and you can control it from your phone.

Julie: How cool is that. Wow. Are there any of those types that you haven't built yet that you really want to build?

Nitesh: There *is* one. [laughs]

Julie: Of course! How long is your list?

Nitesh: Oh, my list is pretty huge. It all comes down to how much funding we get approved from the finance minister in this house.

Julie: [laughs]

Nitesh: But there is a Lego... Again, it's a pretty massive build as well. I think it's almost three feet wide. It's an excavator where you actually build it and you can control it from your phone. You can make it work and make the excavator go up and down. That's a pretty cool one.

Julie: That is very cool. Can you design your own Lego build as well?

Nitesh: You can. So, apart from these sets, Lego sells a lot of loose sets as well in every different shape and size. So if you can envision it, you can buy those loose pieces and design it. A lot of people do that, and if you just look up Lego Designer, people just buy loose pieces and they build anything and everything they want.

One of the projects me and my daughter sort of started doing is we are trying to build a Lego model of our own house. So pretty much just get a blank Lego board, and then start getting pieces, and build a replica of how our house is inside and out. Build it with Legos. That's going to take a lot of time considering it's not something standard which Lego has, so we have to find the pieces and then build it. That's something we've started doing for the last... I think it's been a couple of months since we started doing it.

Julie: How often do you step barefoot on Lego pieces?

Nitesh: Ooh, yeah. A lot. Especially now more since our younger one has started getting into Legos as well on her own. She plays with loose Legos. But no, a lot.

Julie: What's next on your agenda? I know you've got, like... There's so many you want to do, but what's next?

Nitesh: They released a replica of the *Titanic* a month or so ago. It's almost four feet long; a really nice, detailed replica of the *Titanic* where you can build the actual *Titanic* ship. You can even break it down and see the quarters and everything inside. It's that much detail. That's the biggest set they have released in terms of the pieces. I think it's close to 9,500 pieces. But then it's closer to \$850, so we are still waiting for approval on that one.

Julie: And to have to build on a new part of your house to house the *Titanic*.

Nitesh: That's the other thing as well. Even if you get the approval, the thing is, "Where are you going to put it?"

Julie: Is there, like, a holy grail? Like, "Oh my god, if I could ever do this one, this is what I'd want to do?"

Nitesh: Lego had the Death Star from *Star Wars* that was pretty big as well. I think that was one of their biggest pieces ever. We wanted to get that, but by the time I convinced my wife and she came around to it, Lego stopped making it.

Julie: [laughs] Oh no!

Nitesh: So I'm just waiting for Lego to make another version of it or bring it back. But that's the one which I want to have and have never had it.

Julie: And what is it about the Death Star that appeals to you?

Nitesh: Oh, the Death Star... We are big *Star Wars* fans. My daughter watched her first *Star Wars* movie when she was six and she literally cried at the end of the third movie when Anakin went over to the dark side. She was six!

So, the Death Star... Again, the detail and everything. It's big. It's got so much detail in the sense that you can actually look inside the Death Star and see how all those quarters and all those different rooms are. It's really beautiful.

Julie: Beautiful in the sense of...

Nitesh: The details around it and how closely they have captured how an actual Death Star would look if it was ever built. Definitely the details and obviously the size of it as well. It's not a small piece. The bigger it is, the more details you can see around it.

Julie: Have you learned anything in doing Lego builds that you've been able to apply to your work life?

Nitesh: It does teach you how to structure things and plan things a lot. If you're not structuring... Like I said, the structuring pieces, we have to sort those Lego pieces out by color, and by shape, and everything so that we know if we need a certain one, "this is the pile I have to look at." Otherwise, if everything is all jumbled together, it's going to take forever to find one piece out of those 9,000 pieces. So, it's all about structuring your stuff together, aligning them properly, and then doing it step by step so that everything fits together.

And that's one of the main reasons I got my daughter into it as well, so she learns that aspect of life as well, that you need to plan things out. You need to structure things out and plan things out rather than just jumping headfirst into it and not knowing what to do.

Julie: Is there an artistry to it as well as, like, an engineering approach?

Nitesh: If you have a lot of pieces from the same series or the same genre, then yes you can display them. Like if you have a lot of space to display them, then pretty much all the *Star Wars* ones can go together. You can display them artistically like a *Star Wars* scene is going on. But for that, you definitely need a lot of space as well. But otherwise, it's pretty much just displaying them the way they are. One piece at a time displayed is, itself... looks really beautiful and big.

Julie: Now, is there a small Lego build?

Nitesh: We've got tons of them.

Julie: Do you find those equally fun to do?

Nitesh: It depends on what they are. The smallest one we did... The smallest one I have is a 20 or 30-piece Lego. Those are fun, but not in terms of the build process because they

are so small it just takes five or ten minutes to build them. But it's just the way they look, not in terms of building them. It's a pretty small Lego, it's pretty easy, it's not that fun to build it. It's fun to look at.

Julie: You mentioned that there are people online who are Lego builders. What's the craziest or most impressive thing you've seen somebody build?

Nitesh: *Lord of the Rings*, the Minas Tirith.

Julie: [gasps]

Nitesh: Somebody built that... Again, that's not a standard Lego set, and it's not a small one. When I was looking at it, it was almost four or five feet tall. A pretty detailed set of Minas Tirith is what they built from loose Legos, along with all the details and everything. It was really beautiful. And on his website, he's even selling plans for that. You can purchase Legos on your own, but he's selling the actual plans on what Legos you should go and buy and how to build it.

Julie: Oh, interesting! Do you have any interest in creating plans like that yourself?

Nitesh: No, because for that I need to get a little more artistic and build something like that. Now, his plan itself he's selling for a thousand bucks. When I was looking at it, all the Legos and everything I have to buy to build that big of a set, including the plan and everything, that's easily \$10,000 worth of Legos.

Julie: You're kidding!

Nitesh: [laughs] That's what I try and tell my wife. "We don't spend enough! There are people who spend a lot more on Legos than we do."

Julie: "You've got it pretty good, lady." [laughs]

Nitesh: [laughs]

Julie: Oh my goodness. So, how much does a single Lego piece cost?

Nitesh: Not much. A loose Lego can be a quarter, or even 50 cents, or maybe even a dollar. It depends. But it all comes down to how many Legos you need. When you're building something like a Minas Tirith where you have to put all those Legos and all those details in it, it racks up to a lot of Legos.

Julie: Your little one is doing builds... She just kind of grabs them and does whatever, right? She's not trying to do a plan.

Nitesh: She tries and builds the loose ones, but there are some planned ones for her age as well. She sees us building all these planned ones, so we got a couple of those for her over the holidays. Those are more Disney and princess-themed ones. She built a whole Arendelle castle from *Frozen*, or she built a Mickey Mouse fire station. Those are planned ones. She's starting to like those as well where it actually follows a plan and then, yeah, you've got the whole Arendelle castle with Elsa, and Anna, and Olaf sitting in front of it.

Julie: Has your wife ever been tempted to do these builds with you?

Nitesh: We've asked her. She said no, it's not her cup of tea. [laughs] She said it's too much work. And we're okay with that because if she gets hooked onto this as well, I really don't know what's going to happen to the house then.

Julie: You guys are going to have to start a YouTube channel or something and get monetized. Speaking of, do you watch anybody on YouTube?

Nitesh: Not on YouTube. I follow a couple of guys on Instagram who build Legos and that's where I saw the Minas Tirith build as well. But no, not much on YouTube. On Instagram, I follow two or three guys who do that. There's a guy out of Russia who's even built a Lego museum out of... Like, his own museum where you can buy tickets to go see what all he's built, and he's got a pretty massive collection of Legos he's built.

Julie: If you could design... Maybe not you design it, but what's your wish for somebody to create a plan for? What would be your dream?

Nitesh: Definitely something from *Lord of the Rings*. Definitely the Minas Tirith. If that can... As long as it gets more economical than the \$10,000, I'd definitely... I don't have any *Lord of the Rings* Legos and I don't think Lego makes any *Lord of the Rings* Legos with as much detail as they do for *Star Wars*, and *Harry Potter*, and that sort of stuff. I'm a big *Lord of the Rings* fan. Even from *The Hobbit*. Anything.

Julie: It'd be cool to have, like, an Edoras.

Nitesh: Oh yes. Give me that. Give me a replica of *Hobbit* or the Shire. Anything. But they don't have anything like that.

Julie: That's a bummer. Somebody out there, get on that!

Just to wrap up, if someone wanted to get started putting together Legos, getting into builds, how would you recommend they get started?

Nitesh: All these standard builds, they come with age and expertise ratings. I'd say, pretty much, look at the easy ones to build. Don't go for the expert ones because the expert ones are... Like the Colosseum or the Imperial Star Destroyer, which are pretty intricate where you have to carefully handle them and build them. Start with the smaller ones and then slowly make your way up to the big ones. To be honest, it's a lot of money once you go to the big ones. None of these Legos come cheap, so if you really want to get into it, you need to think about spending a lot to get these big ones.

Julie: Well, Nitesh, thank you so much for sharing your passion with us today. This has been so fun. It's been so cool to learn all about Legos.

Nitesh: Thank you so much, Julie, for having me today.

You can find Nitesh on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) @Nawaab. I'll include links in the show notes as well as links to Nitesh's favorite nonprofits, and mine too. Huge thanks to Nitesh for sharing his passion with us today.

Just a reminder that you can find this podcast on Instagram [@LoveWhatYouLovePod](#), on Twitter, [@WhatYouLovePod](#), and the website is [LoveWhatYouLovePod.com](#).

All of the transcripts for *Love What You Love* are available for everyone on the website. Thanks to Emily White, transcription magician and proprietress of The Wordary. If you need transcripts, reach out to her at Emily@TheWordary.com. The music for *Love What You Love* is called "Inspiring Hope" by Pink-Sounds. A link to that artist is included in the show notes.

As always, thank you so, so much for listening. Let's hang out again soon.

Links:

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