

my paper 新報

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HOTLINE: 6319-8880

e-mail: myp@sph.com.sg

ON THE WEB: mypaper.sg

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PERSONALLY SPEAKING

WITH 'TOY MAN' DARREN GAN

Plug and play into his imagination

KOH HUI THENG

MR DARREN Gan creates toys for a living. And the creative director of toy design and production company Play Imaginative is banking on small vinyl figurines to rake in big bucks.

While there are no official statistics, Play Imaginative estimated that Singapore's toy market is growing at 10 per cent annually.

Mr Gan's childhood offers ample inspiration for his job. The 29-year-old bachelor said he would customise his toys by removing individual parts and attaching them onto other toys.

But he was not so eager when it came to studying. The self-confessed "lazy student" of Product and Industrial Design at Temasek Polytechnic "procrastinated a lot" each time schoolwork was due.

After obtaining his diploma in 2003, the Xbox addict spent a year doing freelance design for local companies.

He said wryly: "I would play Xbox in the morning and work at night to get instant cash so I could buy more games and accessories to feed my obsession."

His parents were thrilled when their elder son - his 26-year-old brother is in events management - decided to set up Play Imaginative in 2004.

Said Mr Gan: "I guess they thought that anything would be better than playing Xbox."



TOY DESIGNER: Mr Darren Gan, a self-confessed "lazy student" while studying at Temasek Polytechnic, now designs popular toys like the huge range of trexi dolls arrayed behind him. (PHOTO: JAMIE KOH)

And he never imagined that his hobby would become a respectable name in the industry.

Play Imaginative registered almost US\$2 million (S\$2.7 million) turnover last year. Its products are found exclusively at over 150 retail outlets worldwide - a far cry from the early days when Mr Gan and his business partners had to scramble for \$200,000 to fund their start-up.

They eventually secured the funding and created trexi, a platform toy with a revolving head

and moveable limbs. The company has so far sold about 700,000 to 800,000 trexi toys.

Play Imaginative hosted Singapore's first Toy and Comic Convention last month, which was attended by 140,000 people. For next year's event, Mr Gan plans to bring in more big names, including Mr Michael Lau, the godfather of designer toys, LucasFilms and the creators of Hong Kong comic, Dragon Tiger Gate.

Next on the cards are affordable \$10 toys to be sold at 7-Elev-

en and Cheers outlets here next year. And if they turn out to be popular, Mr Gan can say goodbye to his carefree, freelance designer days.

kohht@sph.com.sg

HELPDESK 我的字典

Customise: 定做
ding zuo

Platform toy: 塑体玩具
su ti wan ju

Building DIY structures over drains? Ask PUB first

RACHEL CHAN

NEED more space for your backyard?

An owner of one of the terrace houses along Clementi Road has found a way to solve the problem by building his backyard over an open drain.

Last week, a reader sent *my paper* a picture of what appears to be "an extended backyard".

The concrete floor extends beyond the property's perimeter and over an open drain.

The reader was concerned that water could easily accumulate below the floor, encouraging the breeding of mosquitoes.

However, Mr Tan Nguan Sen, director of catchment and waterways of PUB, the national

water agency, said that the owner of the house has been working with PUB and the National Environment Agency to ensure that the drain is maintained properly.

For example, there are gratings on the extended area, which can be opened to inspect and clean the drain.

Private-estate owners should seek permission from PUB before building such structures over drains, added the spokesman.

To allay the reader's fears, NEA told *my paper* that it conducted a check on the drain yesterday and found no mosquitoes.

The homeowner could not be reached for comment at press time.

rachchan@sph.com.sg



NO MOSQUITOES FOUND HERE: The gratings on the extended area can be opened to inspect and clean the drain.

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