

ARCHITECTURAL CONSTRUCTION KITS 1890–1990

Plenty to Play With!

An exhibition by DAM – Deutsches Architekturmuseum

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MAK – Press and PR

presse@MAK.at

Press Release

Vienna, 13.8.2026

Press Conference

Tuesday, 6.10.2026, 10 am

Please register at presse@MAK.at

Starting on 7 October, the MAK will present the major interactive exhibition *ARCHITECTURAL CONSTRUCTION KITS 1890–1990*, transforming several of the museum's rooms into an interactive play area for children aged four and up, as well as adults. Around 70 architectural construction kits from the years 1890 to 1990, many presented in the form of fully assembled models, showcase the vast diversity of historical toys. The basis for the exhibition is the private collection of graphic designer Claus Krieger, comprising around 150 items.

Of the once countless toy construction kits—between 1880 and 1960, some 900 companies produced them in the German-speaking world alone—only a few are still manufactured today. While most children today grow up with Lego, there was once a wealth of materials: artificial brick, wood, and metal were used, alongside long-forgotten materials like Galalith and even rubber. Many of these materials can be tried out at eight play stations at the MAK. A major highlight is the cathedral made of 4,000 felt building blocks, on display in the MAK Columned Main Hall.

For the exhibition *ARCHITECTURAL CONSTRUCTION KITS 1890–1990*, Prof. Andreas Kretzer of the Stuttgart Technical University of Applied Sciences (HFT) and his students have recreated the valuable original building blocks from the Ingenius (patented in Vienna), Bâtiss, and Skyline sets at a larger scale, making them easier to play with. In addition, bricks from the Minibrix, Tetek, and Dusyma systems will be available, as well as Plaspi, a set produced in the former GDR. Visitors can also use a VR headset to explore a virtual environment that was designed at the HFT under the supervision of Prof. Philipp Reinfeld.

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The exhibition, conceived by the Deutsches Architekturmuseum (Curator: Oliver Elser), draws attention to three main aspects: architectural styles and history, children, and building instructions.

Architectural Styles and History

The construction kits always showcased the latest architecture of their respective eras. This begins with blocks that responded to the richly decorated buildings of the Gründerzeit era (post-1871). Even architecture that was controversial at the time, such as Modernism in the 1920s, quickly found its way into the playroom. The Ingenius set (1924) by architect Wilhelm Kreis, produced in Vienna, anticipates the “Metropolis as Moloch” theme of the famous silent film *Metropolis* (1927). The construction kits were designed for active play. None were intended for the finished model to simply sit on a shelf. This is a significant difference from today’s Lego models, which often end up as trophies.

Children

Another characteristic aspect is the packaging illustrations, in which the children are often depicted in tense concentration. Playing can be hard work! The instructions are usually highly complex. Are these toys for children or more for adults? Nonetheless, the packaging and instructions are clearly addressed to children. They are treated as miniature adults, encouraged to be “little master builders” or “little architects,” and taught to play patiently. With few exceptions, girls are depicted merely as onlookers, a trend that only gradually began to change in the 1960s.

Instructions

To make things easier for visitors, all the sets at the play tables have been provided with uniformly drawn instructions in the familiar IKEA style. The historical building instructions, on the other hand, are a real challenge. Many sets are completely unsuitable for free play. Without instructions, there is no sense of achievement. This is surprising, because the original building blocks created by reform pedagogue and kindergarten founder Friedrich Fröbel (1782–1852) were designed for experimentation and tactile experience.

Supporting Program

Alongside the exhibition, the MAK is offering a workshop program for students and all visitors who love to build. Miniature architectural competitions will be held, and small teams will create designs based on experimental briefs. Participants can experience the fascination of building with historical construction kits as well as plenty of Lego and Bioblo.

Following its initial run at the Deutsches Architekturmuseum, the exhibition will be on view at the MAK from 7.10.2026–14.3.2027.

The exhibition at the DAM was accompanied by the catalog *111 Architekturbaukästen: Sammlung Claus Krieger*, Berlin: Jovis Verlag, 2025.



In German, 272 pages, 500 illustrations, available in the MAK Design Shop and at MAKdesignshop.at for 38 €.

The conception of the exhibition at the DAM was generously supported by the IKEA Foundation.

Press photos are available for download at MAK.at/en/press.



SELECTION OF SPECIAL CONSTRUCTION KITS

Architecto construction kit, Keller & Sohn, Switzerland, starting in 1944

The modular system of the Architecto construction kit was reproduced at a 3:1 scale by students of the HFT Stuttgart. For the construction of the 3.2-meter-high cathedral, more than 4,000 components made of insulating felt were used. The acquisition of the insulation panels was supported by their manufacturer, Impact Acoustic.

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American Skyline construction kit, Elgo Plastics Inc., USA, 1950s–1960s

The Skyline construction kits from the mid-20th century allow for the construction of American skyscrapers from the 1920s to the 1940s. Unlike the solid construction typically found in construction kits, Skyline relies on a more modern skeleton framework. This results in faster building progress using fewer parts.

“Wir bauen auf!” (“We’re rebuilding!”), Mentor construction kit for large buildings, Hugo Fritzsche KG, Germany (Thuringia), 1950s

The architectural models for this set quickly became outdated. The era of Socialist Classicism lasted only about five years in the former GDR. Following the death of Joseph Stalin, a change of course in the building policy of the Soviet Union—and thus also the GDR—occurred in 1954, moving away from conservatism and toward the industrial prefabrication of buildings.

Plaspi—Der kleine Großblock-Baumeister, VEB Gothaer Kunststoffverarbeitung, Germany (Thuringia), ca. 1980

With the plastic bricks of the large-block construction kits from the former GDR, various buildings in the prefabricated *Plattenbau* style can be constructed. Through its illustrations of widely varying buildings, the set promises a huge diversity of structures—much more varied than those that existed in reality.

Bâtiss construction kit no. 3, Bâtiss, France, 1930s–1940s

The unusual connection system of the wooden blocks with metal rods makes them somewhat unintuitive to assemble. Consequently, the Baticlub variant without metal connectors was later released for younger children.

Anker stone blocks, F. Ad. Richter & Cie., Germany (Thuringia), starting in 1884

Based on the building blocks of Friedrich Fröbel (inventor of the kindergarten), brothers Otto and Gustav Lilienthal developed a construction kit around 1879. The blocks, named after their subsequent manufacturer Anker, consisted of sand, whiting, and linseed oil. The model constructed here is made of new blocks, since they are still being produced today. Otto Lilienthal later became a pioneer of aviation starting in 1891.

Ingenius construction kit (“The New City”), Ingenius Technische- und Handels-GmbH, Austria, 1924 to presumably 1929



The Ingenius construction kit was developed by the architect Wilhelm Kreis in collaboration with Carl August Jüngst. According to the manufacturer, the system was suitable not only for children but also for designing film sets, thus serving as an alternative to the construction of large-scale physical sets. Wilhelm Kreis's monumental architectural designs proved highly adaptable for his later career under National Socialism.

Projektor construction kit, Max Schäffer, Austria, starting in 1930

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The Projektor construction kit is an almost complete imitation of the Ingenius set, but with one crucial difference: instead of a single tongue-and-groove row like the original, this model features two such connecting rows. This modification presumably served to circumvent the Ingenius patent.



Press Conference

Tuesday, 6.10.2026, 10 am

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Opening

Tuesday, 6.10.2026, 7 pm

Free admission to the opening of the exhibition

Exhibition Venue

MAK Columned Main Hall, MAK Works on Paper Room, and DIREKTION FÜR ALLE!

MAK, Stubenring 5, 1010 Vienna

Exhibition Dates

7.10.2026–14.3.2027

Opening Hours

Tue 10 am–9 pm, Wed to Sun 10 am–6 pm

Guest Curator

Oliver Elser, DAM – Deutsches Architekturmuseum

Supporting Program

Full details on the supporting program and registration for individual events are available at

mak.at/en/program/exhibitions/architectural_construction_kits_18901990

MAK Admission

€ 19/18*; reduced € 15.50/14.50*; every Tuesday 6–9 pm:

admission € 9.50/8.50*

Free admission for children and teens under 19

* Online ticket price

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