



FAREWELL, JAY

A Tribute to our Museum Facility Manager

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The Mini Time Machine Museum of Miniatures

Tucson, Arizona

As one might imagine, maintaining our displays here at the museum is no small feat. Our exhibit controls operate in unison with sound, video, motion-sensors and lighting cues, requiring expert understanding when troubleshooting a malfunction. Within the dollhouses and roomboxes themselves are hundreds of miniature light bulbs that require constant vigilance, not to mention the occasional picture that falls off of the wall – or any number of random acts of mischief from would-be miniature poltergeists. Since the very beginning, we have been fortunate to have Jay Ferrell as our Facility Manager, a man with a keen understanding of electronics and an extensive knowledge of carpentry and structural integrity. We have relied on him for countless, varied museum projects, from building a transportable exhibit base to fortifying the bark on our Enchanted Tree. Jay has witnessed firsthand the birth and steady growth of this museum from its earliest days, granting him an objective approach to quality facility upkeep alongside his genuine love for the museum and its mission to educate and inspire.

At the end of July, Jay left his post at The Mini Time Machine Museum to complete his teaching certification in Middle School Science. We all knew of this impending departure and had been preparing for over a year in anticipation. He personally trained his replacement, Jesse Wiley, a beloved member of our team who brings his own set of indispensable skills to the position. Over these last few months, we've all taken the time to remind Jay of how valuable he has been and how much his camaraderie will be sorely missed. And, in spite of any lamentations, we are also quite proud and eager to



Jay Ferrell, changing a miniature light bulb in *The Hatchling Apprentice* (Arnell, 1998). Photo by Emily Wolverton.

watch his new adventure unfold. When reflecting on his time here, it becomes apparent that the path that led Jay to miniatures – as for many of us – had a fair share of good luck.

During the initial phases of our museum's development, the Arnells hired Claro Creative Studios¹, a group of independent consultants based in Glendale, California, to design innovative exhibit



Jay Ferrell. Photo by Amy Haskell.

spaces for the collection. Claro put together a team of local experts to work alongside their team, including award-winning artists Lauri Slenning² and Carina Cirrincione³, who began the task of artifact restoration. It was during this restoration process that a formidable challenge began to surface: the energy output for these pieces was going to increase exponentially. "They inevitably started to realize that the artifacts were going to be worked in an entirely different format," Jay recalls. "They would be turned on to an extent that they had never been used before."⁴ Prior to the creation of The Mini Time Machine Museum, the Arnells housed their collection privately, sharing it with fellow enthusiasts and curiosity-seekers on a by-appointment basis. "Originally, Pat⁵ would simply turn on Mini I⁵ when they had a visitor; lights would be on for a few hours, then off again, until the next visitor came along. Now there would be much more energy output, more potential damage from the extra UV light, the cost of the electricity, etc. These little bulbs for dollhouses aren't meant to be on for hours on end, day after day." At the time, Claro began brainstorming their options for creative energy solutions and, as luck would have it, Carina knew just the person for the job. "Carina was a friend of mine and she knew that I had a knack for electrical work, among other things,

and she recommended me to Claro,” says Jay, smiling. Claro commissioned new bulb prototypes that would address the energy concerns and it was Jay’s job to test them and provide feedback for improvement. “I told them things like, the color is too warm for this piece or, this bulb gets too hot too quickly. They would take the feedback and redesign them, and listen to the concepts that I threw out.” His supervision helped to keep production cost down, and allowed for a faster transition from the old building to the new museum.



Jay Ferrell helping a student with her solar powered dollhouse during a museum summer camp program. Photo by Gentry Spronken.

In fact, Jay began this work when the idea of our museum was still in its infancy. “The museum was just a skeleton,” he laughs. “The foundation was laid; there were some exterior walls, but no doors.” A man who had never before worked with miniatures suddenly found himself hunched over exquisite dollhouses, retrofitting tiny LED bulbs. The experience quickly opened up a new appreciation for the art form. “I used to build little models as a kid, from kits,” he admits. “I would get really fanatical, making them look as realistic as possible: for example, using tin foil to make chrome trim on the doors. I can build things, sure, but I think miniaturists have an aesthetic eye that I don’t have. They have a better understanding of things like interior design, and color schemes.” It was hard to believe at the time that he was working on one of the finest miniature collections in the world.



Jay Ferrell assisting with a photo shoot for a museum television commercial. Photo by Amy Haskell.

Gradually, Jay’s role began to go in many different directions, proving himself as a worthwhile consultant across the board. Claro pulled him over to assist with our Snow Village under glass, and then again during the installation of the museum cabinetry. “I just kept getting more involved as time went on, helping wherever I was needed.” It was exactly this willingness to lend assistance that eventually earned him a permanent position on museum staff. He had personally worked with the architects, the construction crews, and the various exhibit teams, running the gamut from

floor to ceiling. Jeff Thom, the head of Claro’s Production & Installation crew, jokingly remarked one day that Jay knew where all the bodies were buried: he had intimate knowledge of the inner workings of this place, a vivid understanding that would make troubleshooting maintenance and repairs seemingly effortless. When the position of Facility Manager emerged, Jay was a natural fit. In spite of his indispensable qualities, Jay remains humbled by the whole experience. “There were a lot of great individuals who wanted the job. I felt very fortunate.” The feeling was mutual, to be sure.



Jesse Wiley, The Mini Time Machine Museum’s new Facility Manager. Photo by Amy Haskell.

Since our museum’s opening in 2009, Jay has kept all systems working beautifully. His sundry duties were cut out for a man with a background in a wide range of components and operations. As Facility Manager, he has been responsible for all aspects of building maintenance, everything from landscaping to cleaning crews, as well as the exhibit show – sound effects, motion-sensors, lighting gels, you name it. Perhaps the most important duty of all, however, has been the first one he was given: repairing, replacing and improving artifact electrical components. This aspect of restoration has in the end proven to be Jay’s greatest challenge as Facility Manager. Often, just sourcing the material is near impossible. “In some of the older pieces, the bulbs have been discontinued, or the style no longer exists. Finding new components that will be the truest to the original is sometimes a very difficult process,” he explains. “Miniature electronics is not a standardized industry. You get a lot of mix and matching, which can cause damage or bad connections, and then when one thing goes out, the whole component may need to be replaced or completely redone. I’ve had to be very creative with power supplies.” It’s not surprising: our collection spans not only the imagination, but time itself, with our oldest piece clocking in at over 270 years old.

When asked which pieces have been on his bench the most frequently, he doesn’t hesitate to answer. “There are several!” he laughs. “*Erte*⁶ and *Yellow Rose*⁷ come to mind. The electrical work in Brooke’s pieces is intricate. Light bulbs go out constantly, and most are very hard to access.” But not all of his gripes are related to hidden components. “Other artifacts are a challenge just to get into, like *Load of Mischief*⁸ and *Greene & Greene*⁹. The cases are just time consuming to open, let alone getting to the parts that need restoration.” His experience over the years has left him with some sound advice for miniaturists looking to install electrical components in

their pieces. “This may seem really basic, but they should consider the ease of access. Things are going to break or need replacing eventually, and you are going to want to get to them quickly and easily.” You don’t want to have to break the lamp to change the bulb, so to speak. He also emphasizes learning the artistry of the electric connections. “Don’t just follow the steps of connecting one thing to another. Be patient; try to understand how it all works.” Seeing things from all sides is just one of Jay’s many talents.

Not all of his work here has been a labor in patience – Jay has his favorites, too. When asked which pieces have resonated most, he became thoughtful.

“Perhaps, the *Violin Shop*¹⁰. It’s so simple, the concept is clever. You can tell that [Tracy] knew how to build a violin, you recognize the expertise. I really believe that work bench – the tools look accurate, everything looks authentic.” The idea of authenticity is a strong pull for Jay. He brought it up again, when describing another favorite, *Dirty Cellar*¹¹. “The cellar reminds me of my grandfather’s house; the feeling is very true, very real. Many miniatures can feel sterile, too perfect. I think that guys like the dirt.” Like each of us, we love that to which we can relate – perhaps no one here can relate to a work bench and sturdy tools like Jay can.

It might be hard to imagine why Jay would want to leave his position here, but for those of us who know him well, the decision is understandable. Jay has so much to offer, paired with eagerness and curiosity – and the doggedness to reach his goals. He describes teaching as “something worthy and lasting,” a profession that allows a person to give back. The desire to teach is an inborn quality; one that Jay has felt tugging within him his whole life. “When I was in my 20s, I wanted to be an environmental biologist, then transition to teaching. Life didn’t work out that way, but the teaching has always been there, in the back of my mind.” He begins his student teaching this month, and already he has a vision of where this road will take him. “I would love to eventually work at a Montessori school. Their teaching philosophy really resonates with me, feels absolutely natural.” I can only imagine how delightful it will be to find oneself in Jay’s Science class, learning from a teacher who revels in hands-on exploration; finding the artistry in the currents, the magic in the gears.

When asked what he will miss most, Jay’s answer comes as no surprise. “The staff. This team. It is very rare to find a group of people that work this well

together, that can feel like a family. It is a very special thing and I’m going to really miss it.” And that is how all of us feel, Jay – like a member of our family is leaving. Know that you carry with you all of our good wishes, fondest memories and most importantly, our gratitude for all you have done to ensure our museum’s success. Best of luck, down your new path, and all the paths that you are yet to find.

Emily Wolverton
The Mini Time Machine
Museum of Miniatures

- 1 www.clarocreativestudios.com
- 2 www.slenningsculpture.com
- 3 www.little-raven.com
- 4 Interview with Jay Ferrell on July 10, 2013.
- Patricia Arnell, one of our Museum Founders.
- 5 “Mini I” is the nickname of the original Mini Time Machine Museum, located on the Arnell’s private property.
- 6 *A Tribue to Erté*. Brooke Tucker, 2004. Exploring the World Gallery.
- 7 *Yellow Rose of Texas*. Brooke Tucker, 1983-1985. Exploring the World Gallery.
- 8 *Load of Mischief Pub*. Pam Throop, 1987-1988. Exploring the World Gallery.
- 9 *Greene and Greene*. Pat & Noel Thomas, 1989. Exploring the World Gallery.
- 10 *18th Century Violin Maker’s Shop*. W. Foster Tracy, 1979. Magic Theater Gallery.
- 11 *Dirty Cellar*. John Goldstern, 1998. Exploring the World Gallery



Jay,

You were our first employee and have been an important part of the museum’s development. We will be forever grateful for your contributions and wish you great success in your new endeavor.

Pat and Walter Arnell
Museum Founders

Jay,
 Congratulations
 on your new career!
 I'm very proud of you and
 I'm glad you completed this
 chapter of your life. May all
 your goals and dreams come true.
 You will be missed and don't be
 a stranger! Joanna

Jay,
 I hope your
 next adventure is
 as a school teacher be
 just as great as it
 was being you here
 and helping me get
 started on my new
 adventure as a faculty
 guy.
 Good luck Jane

Jay,
 You are definitely one
 of the most friendly, knowledg-
 able, and hard-working people I've
 ever gotten to meet. I have had
 so much fun learning and working
 alongside you, and I can't wait
 to see your influence shape
 future generations.
 All the best,
 Ben

Jay,
 I love what we have built
 together, all of us, and your
 amazing role in caring for
 the mini Time Machine
 and all its working
 parts will never
 be matched. I
 will miss see-
 ing you every
 day, but
 I have
 enough
 great
 memories for a
 lifetime, and
 more gratitude
 than I could
 ever express.
 Love, Lina

Hey Jay-Jay,
 all the best to
 you in your
 future endeavours.
 Take care of
 yourself! Jane

Jay,
 Best wishes
 on the next
 chapter of your life.
 Congratulations!
 Megan

Jay -
 Knowing how much you
 enjoy working with the kids
 in summer camp, I'm sure
 you'll love your new career.
 Congratulations and keep
 in touch. We'll all miss
 you! Lisa

Jay,
 I think it's
 awesome that you are
 pursuing your passion!
 I hope it brings you much
 happiness. You will be missed
 around here. Please keep
 in touch!
 @gentrus

Jay,
 I know this
 isn't good bye & I
 don't feel like I need
 to wish you luck - as I
 know you will excel!
 Lots of changes have
 happened & you are in
 a good place to take on
 any challenges. Don't be
 a stranger! Margaret

Congrats on your new
 adventure, Jay! We are all
 going to miss you around
 here... who am I going to
 ask for garden advice! ?
 I know that you will be an
 excellent teacher - very
 proud of you!

