

Cardstacker

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MOST COMMON QUESTIONS FOR BRYAN BERG

When did you first become fascinated with card stacking?

My grandfather, a lifelong card player, got me interested in stacking when I was 8. He uses a totally different technique than the one I've come up with and now use, and thinks it's pretty crazy how large my projects have become, but he was definitely my first inspiration.

What was the first thing you built?

I'd spend snow days home from school in Iowa building bigger and bigger towers in my parents' living room. They'd stand there until my mom needed to vacuum or my brother put them through seismic testing by jumping across the floor.

Do you have a special technique, if so what is it?

I've come up with a "grid" technique, which involves making little 4-walled cells that form a waffle or honeycomb kind of pattern. I studied images from nature and the patterns that cells make under a microscope in different kinds of plants, which led me to the technique I use. After trying a lot of different things over the years, I've found that this is the sturdiest way to build something with cards. It also allows your buildings to not only get really tall, but also to take on a variety of interesting shapes and details. I use this method as the basis for all my structures, including domes, bowls, stadiums, and cantilevers.

How do they stay standing?

A few years ago, I tested my card grid technique in a structural engineering lab at Iowa State University. The structure was found to support over 660 pounds per square foot! To demonstrate how strong it is, I often build a platform of cards and stack it with concrete blocks, a wheelbarrow full of bricks, or even people visiting the exhibit. They're always really surprised to see how strong a house of cards really is. People are also surprised to learn that every 7 decks of cards weighs about one pound, so many of my larger buildings weigh hundreds of pounds. This weight actually makes them stronger because of their mass.

Why did you decide to build the world's tallest house of cards?

I set my first record when I was in high school as part of a math project. I had no idea at the time that capturing the world record would eventually lead me to make cardstacking my profession, despite the fact that I was trained as an architect in college. Since then, I've been hired by various special events

and corporations to break the record again and again as a way to get great press coverage for their companies.

How tall was the building?

My first world record was 14 feet 6 inches tall. My current record, set in October 2007 in Dallas, Texas, is 25 feet 9 and 7/16 inches. We had to set up scaffolding around it, just like a real building, and make a hole in the ceiling. If the ceiling had been taller, I really believe could have kept going at least another 10 feet. I hope I get the chance to try someday!

How many cards did you use?

I used about 1,067 decks of cards in the most recent record. I also have a record called "World's Largest House of Cards," where I built Cinderella's castle for Disney World in 2004. That project was only 14 feet high, but the base was 14 feet square as well. It used 3000 decks of cards.

How long did it take?

I worked on the World's Tallest project for five weeks. The tower probably took about 3 weeks, and I spent the rest of the time making other buildings to create a city around it. The World's Largest took a solid month for that one building alone.

Did you have any wobbly moments?

The wobbliest thing is really the scaffolding, and learning to climb around on it carefully while you're building. It's always a tense moment when it's time to take the scaffolding down. Once, a huge 2x12 plank swung out and hit a tower while the scaffolding was being removed. I was amazed to see that the tower totally withstood the impact and didn't even budge. The board did make a really terrible looking dent in the side of the tower which I was able to repair for the most part, thank goodness.

How was the building dismantled and did you do it?

I love to tear down my buildings with a leaf blower. It's my favorite part of the process. I learn more about the structure and its strong points and weak points by how it falls than by how it goes up.? But, in Dallas, after only a couple of minutes and a few cards fluttering off, my leaf blower went up in smoke! I had to take a "Godzilla" approach and tear the building down by hand until the tower collapsed on top of me.

How did it feel?

It was a lot of fun, and made for some incredible photographs to remember the project by. The tower, which weighed 148 pounds, actually knocked me over when it fell. It did not hurt, but I sure felt it.

What is the weirdest thing you have ever built?

I get some interesting requests to build things out of materials other than cards. I've made things

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like Harry Potter's castle out of chocolate and candies, and a giant 25 foot tall honey bear out of the squeeze-able honey bear containers you find in the grocery store.

Is there anything you would like to build?

I've built a lot of famous buildings from US and Canadian cities, as well as some of the most well-known world monuments like the pyramids. I'd really love to do the London House of Parliament. Old European architecture is so intricate and beautiful, and makes for great card projects. I'd also love to someday have a space big enough that I could build an entire room of cards- hallways, walls, furniture, everything, and let people walk through it. The fact that parts of it might get knocked over or destroyed by the visitors would be part of the appeal.

What drives you and how long will you do this?

I always try to keep pushing my limits with every project, trying to make complex new shapes and details, to keep things interesting for myself. I am still learning a great deal about what I do. Most of what I know about cardstacking came by accident: trial and error. I love what I do, and I keep having opportunities to do increasingly interesting and challenging projects. Right now, there's no end in sight. It's a tough job, but someone has to do it.

Do you ever get paper cuts?

No.

Where do you get all the cards?

I get the cheapest cards with the least glossy finish I can find- bad for shuffling and playing, but good for stacking! The two suppliers I usually use are Cartamundi's Ace Brand and the US Playing Card Company's Pla-mor line.

Is stacking cards your job?

Believe it or not, I actually do make my living stacking cards. I'm trained as an architect, with a professional degree from Iowa State and a Masters from Harvard. But, cards were what inspired me to study architecture- not the other way around. They've continued to be both my hobby and my career. Once in a while, I teach architecture at the university level or design and construct an actual building. But, most of my time is truly spent working with the cards.

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