

## INTERVIEW WITH TOBIAS HAASE, MASTER OF VENETIAN MODEL MAKING

***Venice may be the smallest section of Miniatur Wunderland to date, but it is certainly the result of a great vision. How would you describe this vision?***

Venice has been the first section since we started construction, where we were wholly independent of the rest of the exhibition. Our miniature Venice, just like its full-scale counterpart, was built as an island. This is why we were able to try new ways in terms of design and to get really creative. It was the first time we didn't need to ensure that there are smooth transitions to the neighbouring sections and that there is a harmonious overall impression. There are visual links only with Rome - and we wanted to create the strongest possible contrast to the Italian capital's metropolitan character.

***What does this contrast look like?***

Rome is a lot more hectic and bright, like a big city should be. The streets are busy and the huge train station Roma Termini provides for heavy traffic on the railway tracks. The picturesque city of Venice is very different, both in real life and here at the Wunderland. The city is smaller and the buildings tend to be lower. It feels much calmer on the whole, as there is no car or train traffic. The contrast becomes especially clear at night: While Rome's famous sights are illuminated by spectacular lighting installations, Venice is lit up merely by the street lights. It's a pretty good illustration of what the town looks like after the crowds of day trippers have left. Because the lagoon town that is so crowded during the day can get rather empty at night.

***Does that mean that you get an impression not only of touristy Venice but also of the local residents' "real life"?***

Definitely. We tried very hard to show both aspects and to tell stories from different points of view. Of course there is the crowded Piazza San Marco where Venetian Carnival is in full swing and countless groups of tourists are gathered around their national flags. However, there is also Italian everyday life with all its usual events and problems. So, while various gondolas with kissing couples are passing underneath the Bridge of Sighs on one canal, mail is delivered by boat and waste water disposal is taken care of just a few waterways further on. We want for the visitors to our miniature Venice to feel transported into the city and we'd like anyone who has been to Venice or who maybe even lives there to be able to discover scenes and details that they recognise from their stay in real life Venice.

***Venice is at risk of sinking one day - how did you address this issue?***

The deterioration of this beautiful city due to regular flooding was an important issue for us, during construction. We didn't want to romanticise Venice and to recreate a postcard image. This is why we paid just as much attention to addressing the less attractive areas and the town's troubles, as well. Due to its situation by the water, Venice suffers from so called "acqua alta" on a regular basis. This vital characteristic of the city has been a central theme, especially when creating the model buildings. We needed to find out how to design buildings that showed decay and water damage on their façades.

***How would you describe this process?***

I would describe our method as "trial and error". We looked at thousands of pictures that we analysed and put into practice. Then we looked at the results, compared them to the original and reworked things again. And so on until we were happy with the results.



***Where did you find inspiration for the buildings?***

Luckily there are photos of the most famous buildings shown from every possible angle, on the internet. We dug through countless photographs, aerial views and videos and from all of these pieces we finally created the individual models. Google Street View is really useful too, for going on a virtual stroll along the streets. Most of our template materials were from our own archives, though. A group of our model makers went to Venice and brought back huge amounts of photographic material. Of course, our own spies didn't focus so much on the usual touristy snapshots, but they were more concerned with the city's typical characteristics. These range from the water damage on house façades mentioned before, through to wondering what a Venetian garbage bin looks like.

***What do you think was the greatest challenge when building Venice?***

The challenge when building Venice was in particular of an architectural nature. Building houses is generally more challenging than creating landscapes and there are lots of houses in Venice. In addition to all the famous sights that were a lot of work to build, of course, there are so many smaller palazzi that the city is characterised by and that required plenty of time, patience and fine motor skills. Because each of these buildings is a masterpiece of ornaments, stucco and pillars - this required great attention to detail.

***Speaking of attention to detail: It has been said that you have all become madly obsessed with details.***

***Do you think this is true?***

Of course I have to deny that we are going mad, but I suppose there is no denying the odd hint of obsession. One example of this are the road signs in Venice. Calling them complicated would be an understatement, because the street names follow very particular rules. "Rio" for example is a street. So is "Calle". "Mercerie" on the other hand is a street with shops and "Fansamenta" a street alongside a canal. But that doesn't apply for all canals, because along the Canal Grande there is a street called "Riva". I suppose, one could say that doing this kind of research and putting it into practice when creating the model could be considered a new level of obsession with details. But then I suppose it's something we've always been "accused" of.

