



HIROKO MASUIKE/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Michael Arad experiments with the Playable Art Cube at Dinosaur Hill in the East Village.

Stacked in His Favor

Colorful building blocks can find a home anywhere from a child's playroom to an architect's desk.

SINCE THE COMPLETION of the National September 11 Memorial in 2011, its designer, Michael Arad, has turned his attention back to buildings.

A partner at Handel Architects, Mr. Arad now spends his days dreaming up urban towers — and his building projects don't stop once he leaves the office. As the father of three children from the ages of 1 to 9, he engages in construction of a different sort at home: small-scale structures assembled from a variety of building blocks.

"It's a lot of fun," said Mr. Arad, 43, showing a reporter photos of the imaginary villages he creates with his children. "You get these really dense and diverse assemblies. If you think about cities, they're similar. There's an inherent excitement and drama."

His favorite blocks are usually the simple ones — the ones that are open-ended, and you

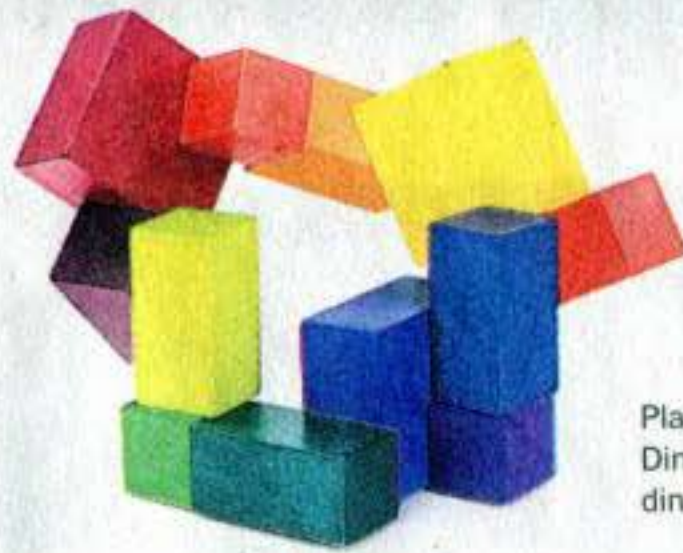
A bonus, he added, is that simpler ones tend to be more aesthetically appealing, so the adults at home don't mind if the blocks are left out for days on end.

At F. A. O. Schwarz, Mr. Arad found several examples in a display of toys from the Museum of Modern Art. One favorite was PlayPlax, a set of colorful transparent polystyrene squares ("a great material with beautiful properties," he said) with slots that allowed them to fit together. "With light coming through, it looks like a stained-glass window," he said.

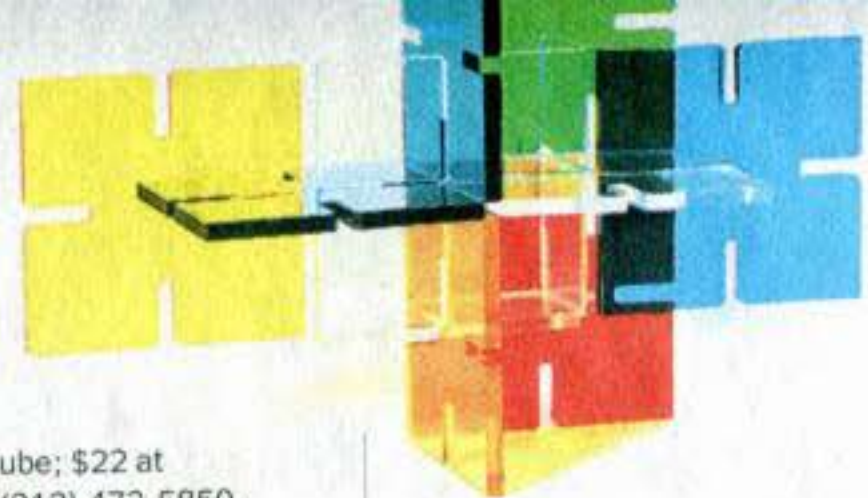
In Chelsea, at Kidding Around, he liked the Tegu Tints Explorer Set, a box of 40 pastel-stained wooden blocks. With its hidden magnet connectors, the set "really gives you the freedom to play," he said, demonstrating by building a structure that he topped with a cantilevered block. "You couldn't do that with regular blocks."

At Dinosaur Hill in the East Village, Mr. Arad picked out the Playable Art Cube, a toy made from 12 colorful blocks held together with an elastic cord. "It's fun in unexpected ways," he said, twisting it into one composition after another.

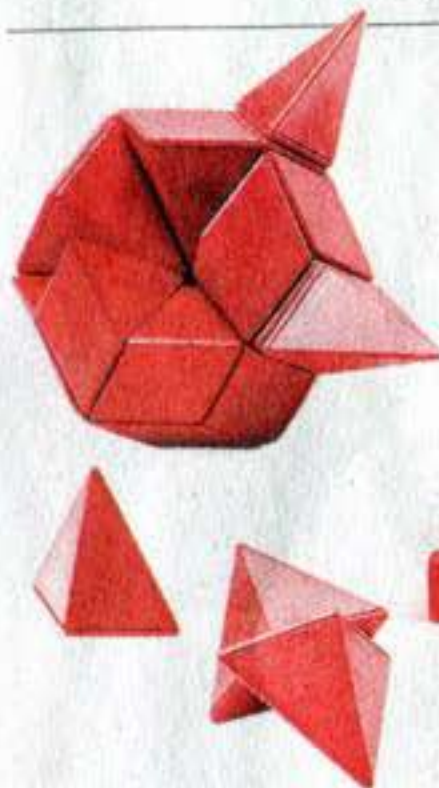
And not just for children, apparently. Perhaps it would also be an ideal desk toy



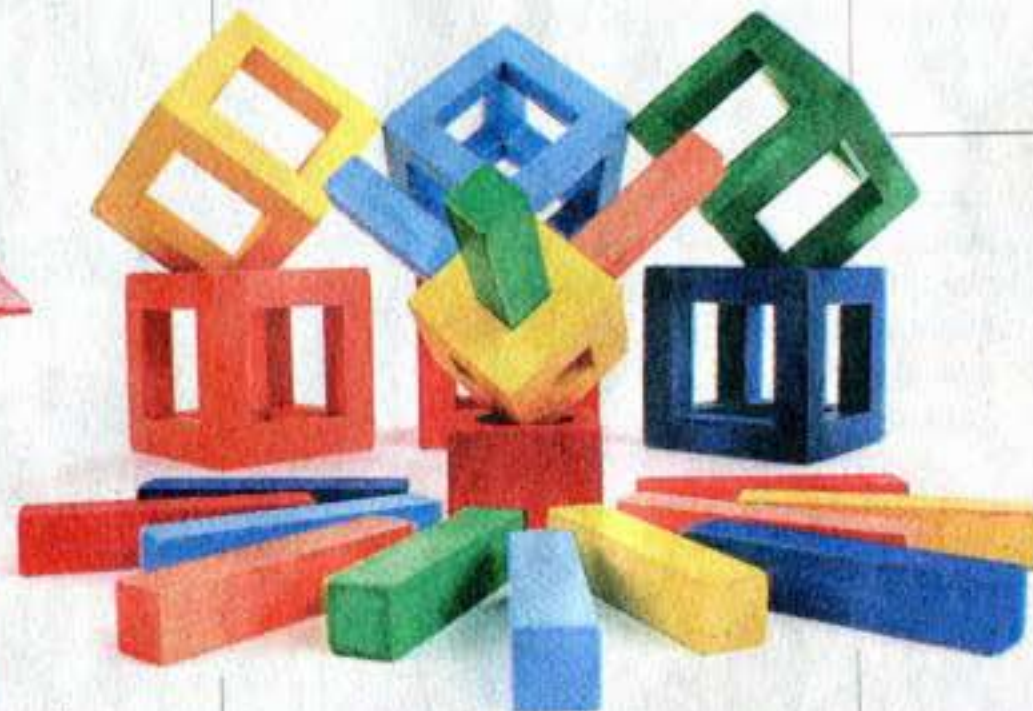
Playable Art Cube; \$22 at Dinosaur Hill, (212) 473-5850, dinosaurhill.com.



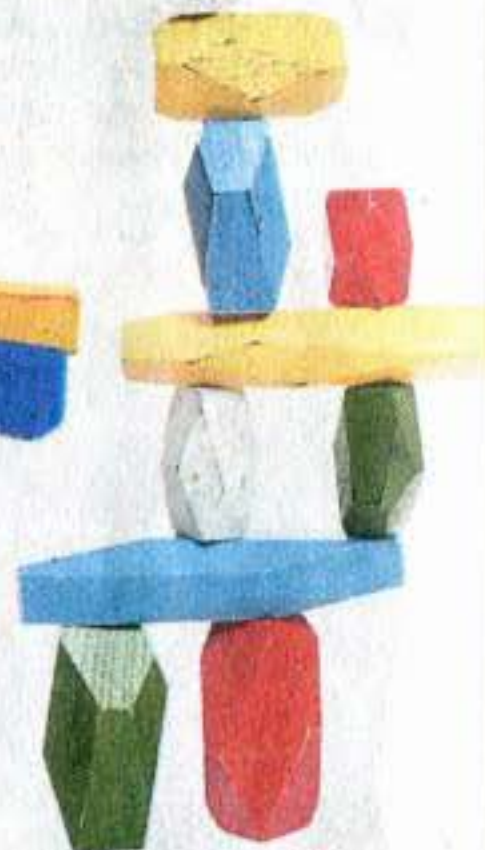
PlayPlax building set; about \$32 at F. A. O. Schwarz, (212) 644-9400, fao.com.



Ball of Whacks; \$35 at MoMA Store, (800) 851-4509, momastore.org.



Twig building block set; about \$50 at Fat Brain Toys, (800) 590-5987, fatbraintoy.com.



Balancing Blocks; \$48 at Areaaware, (800) 783-5683 ext. 21, areaware.com.



Tegu Tints Explorer Set; \$110 at Kidding Around, (212) 645-6337, kiddingaroundtoys.com.



MoMA Topsy Turvy stacking blocks; about \$20 at F. A. O. Schwarz, (212) 644-9400, fao.com.



Kid O Stack and Nest Cups; about \$15 at Dinosaur Hill, (212) 473-5850, dinosaurhill.com.