



pixelblocks

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PixelBlocks History

PixelBlocks were originally invented by Jay Simmons, a Los Angeles television engineer. It all began with Simmons' childhood frustration at not having the facility to draw, paint, or sculpt; even though he had a great desire to do these things, he was considered "not artistic." However, Simmons was merely dyslexic, so there was no way for anyone to discern his extremely strong visual abilities because he could find no way to demonstrate them – they remained locked away in his brain.

Many years later in 1983, Simmons found a way! Many of his afternoons were spent at the Los Angeles County Art Museum, where one day Simmons attended a tapestry show which featured works from the 13th Century through the Modern Era. The work which most fascinated him was a photo-realistic tapestry by an artist named Callahan. Her tapestries were enormous in size and her pictures seemed almost real. They made a tremendous impression on the artistically-impaired Simmons.

Later that day, Simmons went to work at his job as a Systems Engineer at a local television station. As he was calibrating one of the video monitors for one of the shows, it ALL came out in a flash! "This television screen is just like a tapestry! It is little rows of dots! If I could print out what each color dot was, I could make my own images. If I make little squares of plastic they could be rearranged over and over and could even make things from television pictures! Or things like stained glass windows and sculptures. I'll make the pieces interlock so they can be used to make ANYTHING!"

Here certainly was a patentable idea and a solution to Simmons' artistic problems, so he plunged right in looking for ways to make these "picture elements." In 1983, personal computers were just becoming available at reasonable prices, so after purchasing an Amiga 1000, he was fortunate to meet Robert McNally (who wrote the original software for the Amiga and re-wrote it as each generation of the Macintosh computer was introduced). By 1993, Simmons was granted a U.S. patent– the first patent on making things from television pictures.

In 2002 Simmons licensed the PixelBlocks intellectual property to Robert McNally, and recruited architect-turned-product designer Aaron Rincover to work with him to turn PixelBlocks into a commercial product. Rincover recognized the tremendous opportunity to make physical pixels. As a young artist and avid computer user, Rincover saw PixelBlocks as a great fusion between the digital and the physical, where somebody could actually play with the pixels they see every day.

While Simmons' initial block design was truly innovative and worked well for his personal use, Rincover wanted to update PixelBlocks for the general public. Some of the changes that went into the making the first production blocks were a simplification of the tooth and groove pattern making them easier to connect, enlarging the blocks to make them easier to hold (which also made them compatible with the leading brick maker), and increasing the number of colors to 20.

Available for the first time at retail in October 2003, PixelBlocks were brought to market not only as a fabulous toy, but as a new medium for artists of all ages to enjoy.



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