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## First ever Tabor Sister City gingerbread house contest brings a big surprise

By Sora O'Doherty



Photo Sora O'Doherty

When the Orinda-Tabor Sister City Foundation decided to celebrate the holiday season with a contest for builders of gingerbread houses, they probably never dreamed that they would get a stunning reproduction of scenes from Alice in Wonderland in the adult division. But that is exactly what hobbyist Russ Rettig has provided. The gingerbread confection, all strictly speaking edible (although according to Rettig, you actually wouldn't want to eat it) has Alice looking in at the wonderful world she found when she fell down the rabbit hole. There is the Mad Hatter's Tea Party in one corner, the Queen of Hearts' Castle, where the roses are being painted red, the White Rabbit, Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee and the Cheshire Cat.

Rettig, who is a general contractor, tries to build his gingerbread constructions as close to life as possible. He builds one every year and has done so for the past 25 years. He doesn't have a website, doesn't build them for contests, but just to amuse his family and friends. Every year, he begins in July, with the goal of finishing just before Thanksgiving, so that the family can reclaim the dining room table.

"It's easier to build a house!" he proclaimed during an interview with Lamorinda Weekly. "It's gotta be exact."

He works on his creative hobby every evening for a few hours, building with gingerbread, of course, and fondant, marzipan and pastillage. All the buildings are supported only with gingerbread. In the end, he has a big crashing party, where family and friends attack the gingerbread house with hammers and reduce it to rubbish.

One year he recreated a village in Alsace with seven different buildings after a visit there inspired him. Another year he built a replica of the three famous "Painted Ladies" Victorian homes in San Francisco.

His was the only entry in the adult category and of course won an Honorable Mention on Dec. 3. Winners in the 0-5 age category were Bennett Gagon (first); Sophie Rogers (second); Aria Soltani (third); Emery Gagon (honorable mention). The 6-10 winners were Eleana and Grayson (first); Timmy Rogers (second); and Jessica and Monica (third).

A short documentary about Rettig and his unusual hobby is on YouTube, and can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/mzsQncqa25w>



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Reach the reporter at: [sora@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:sora@lamorindaweekly.com)

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