

The joys of toys

As press visitor to the 2018 Toy Fair, **CS Teitelbaum** was the proverbial kid in a candy store. It was all lights, camera and action! Putty and slime are all the rage, and between the latest kiddo crazes, collectibles and crafts, our intrepid reporter's preview proved to be a delightful browsing experience.

It's a good thing exhibition rules prohibited children from attending. Imagine all the tantrums that would have been thrown plonk in the middle of the aisles of the mammoth Olympia Exhibition Hall?

So here are some of the highlights of 2018's most exciting innovations in the world of toys. Most of them are still in the manufacturing phase and will only hit store shelves mid-2018, but this selection – handpicked from hundreds of toys – are sure to be a hit in your playrooms by the end of the year. Tots, teens and adults will all find something fun...to toy with.

PLAY AND LEARN

Insect breeding

Butterflies-by-mail? Who'd have imagined? This charming product involves a cup of caterpillars sent by mail in a special kit and the family watches it grow in a mesh tent garden, after which it is released into the outside. It's an eye-opening hands-on way to teach your child about the wonders of the Creator and observe this beautiful process up close. Since the caterpillars breed in March, vouchers are sent out year-round but the physical kits are only dispatched in March. Snail mail!

Easy-read clock

Finally, a clock that makes sense...to kids at least. The Easy Read time teacher clock helps kids read the time effortlessly with a simple three-step method. The clock indicates clear numbers, including pointers for each of the sixty minutes, but instead of continuing up from thirty-one through to fifty-nine after thirty minutes (which is where children typically get confused between the digital and analogue clock), the minutes start counting down twenty-nine, twenty-eight, so they can familiarize themselves with telling the time in the form of 'twenty-five to'...like everyone around them. There is also great signage, such as 'to' and 'past' on the relevant clock's side. Sigh of relief.

Available in wall clocks, bedside clocks and wristwatches.

Monster money bank

It was bound to come; the question was just when. Ditch your old clay piggy bank – if it hasn't yet cracked, because it's time for 'change'. This cute electronic Money Monster has been created in collaboration with Santander and is linked to a secure bank account. A pre-paid card is hidden in a rucksack on the monster's back. Family and friends can deposit small amounts through real-time banking, triggering the monster's eyes to light up at the contribution, which is then recalculated and an updated total displayed inside the monster's toothy smile. The child can then take the contactless card and shop coin-free. With kids seeing us tap away at

contactless machines and assuming things are free, they will now learn that money doesn't exactly grow on trees.

TRADITIONAL TABLE TIME

Board game

Cobra paw is a tile-snatching game where quick reflexes and razor sharp recognition skills are your winning streak. Basically, a cobra mind and a nimble paw, to make for great and lively family fun.

Putty board game

Kersplatt! is a cute twist on a traditional board game. Your counters are little mounds of putty. Quash your fellow players by splatting their mounds with the palm of your hand. And of course, race to get home before they utterly putt your own.

Brainteaser puzzles

Rubik's has always loved testing our brain and their new one this year is no different - if not worse! It's a 500-wiggly-piece double-sided puzzle, with a picture of a Rubik's cube on one side and a bunch of Rubik's cubes on the other, making the regular 3x3 cube a breeze to tackle. Comes complete with a sleek Rubik's cube tin. Available through Gibson's, which also boasts other devilishly brain-teasing puzzles like a pile of Pringles, packed in a tube with the iconic peel lid and a bowl of Kellogg's cereal, in a vintage cereal tin, and those orange flakes that one can hardly tell apart!

PLAYROOM PROPS

Giant stuffed animals

Did you always wish you could bring home those stuffed animals in shop windows but just don't have the space to host them? And when you win a whopping stuffed bear at a fair, it's almost bad luck...because you just don't have that space. Introducing Inflate-a-mals, cleverly marketed as 'big friends in little packages' which absolutely blew me away because, not just do you get a huge, plush life-size bear - or giraffe, or donkey – but you also get to keep your space. It's a blow up toy, which means it deflates to the size of the animal's paw!



Play and go bag

The handy Play and Go mat doubles as a play mat and a carry sack. Your kids can construct Clicks, colour their crafts or play cars on this soft comfy mat and then just lift it up into an elasticated bag to transport the whole pile to a different room, to conceal the mess or to gather it for clean-up in a cinch. Choose from the delightful designs such as the doodle mat, whose drawings can be coloured in, or the road map, which serves as a perfect base for car games.

Blackboard paint



Wooden blackboards are traditional toys. They are also clumsy and take up floor space. Yet what's a playroom without one? Enter the innovative Blackboard paint by Magna Muros: slather any wall with the paint and transform the surface into a chalk-friendly, blackboard surface. Comes in a range of pretty muted colours so you don't have to go for stark black on a child's bedroom wall. The brand also does magnetic paint, which can be combined with blackboard paint, as well as whiteboard paint, which sounds almost too fantastic to be true. Don't take my word for it; ask for references at the Microsoft Headquarters in Dublin which has recently installed the latter product across their walls.