

Traveling in a Sea of Marvels

One-of-a-kind aquarium celebrates steampunk fiction

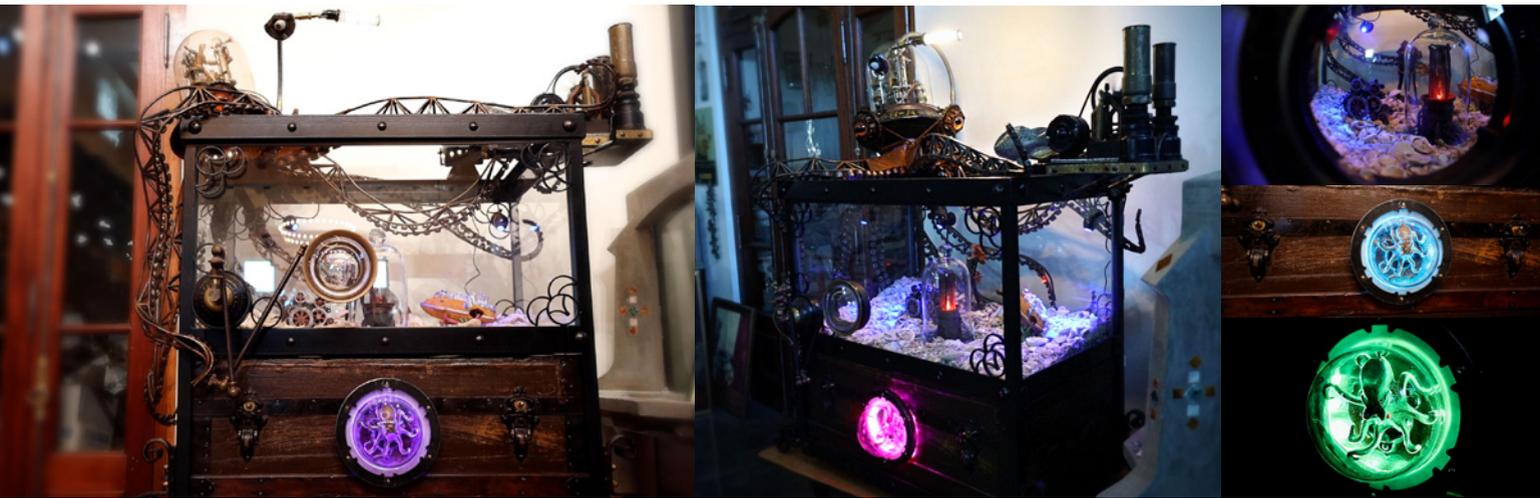
Matthew Jaster, Senior Editor

“So let me tell you that you will not regret the time spent on board my vessel. You are going to travel through a wonderland. Astonishment and stupefaction will probably be your normal state of mind. You will not easily become blasé about the sights continually offered to your eyes. I am going to embark on a new underwater tour of the world.”

—Capt. Nemo, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*

In this classic science fiction tale, the protagonist has his futuristic electricity-powered submarine almost destroyed by a giant squid. What if Capt. Nemo created a mechanical “octopus” Kraken that he could pilot to attack and defeat his actual, biological nemesis?

This is the premise upon which Bruce Rosenbaum, Steampunk reimagineer, at Modvic—in collaboration with Jon Bander, a metal artist located in Franklin County, Mass.—ran with when they were commissioned by an Italian collector of aquarium antiques for an original steampunk sculpture celebrating the novel.



Bander was responsible for creating the Kraken’s body and aquarium structure and stand, while Rosenbaum collaborated with Gary Bagnall, executive director of the Museum of Aquarium & Pet History in San Luis Obispo, Calif. on the rest of the project.

“Gary is an expert in antique aquariums,” Rosenbaum said. “It was fantastic to work with him creatively and have his guidance on the challenges of making it all come together.” Collaboration is the key to every Steampunk project, according to Rosenbaum. “I know my limits and the need to also focus on marketing, branding and project management to keep the constant flow of projects moving forward so I can make a living as an artist and designer. Working with left/right brain artists, engineers, metal and woodworkers, lighting and electronics professionals gives me the ability to pull the talent together needed to do large, kinetic, performance-based art installations.”

To create the Steampunk aesthetic, beautiful artifacts from the past such as period steam related objects, water tank components from vintage aquariums, antique chocolate molds, and additional repurposed period items were used in the design. The art piece also includes a working antique piston water pump that creates kinetic movement. The entire project took four months to design, engineer and fabricate.

For artistic flair, an underwater LED flame inside domed glass as well as other LED lighting were added to the

submerged landscape. A magnifying glass for close-up viewing of fish and aquatic life was also incorporated into the tank’s forward facing glass panel. “Understanding how the different elements would interact with the water in the aquarium and making sure anything we did would help the lives of the pet fish and not harm them was a challenging aspect to the project. Also creating an environment for easy cleaning, maintenance and repair if needed,” Rosenbaum said.

For Rosenbaum it’s a constant challenge to continually add complexity, interactivity and to integrate analog/mechanical pieces with digital elements as part of making “functional” and engaging Steampunk artwork.

“We can do anything—but the budget must reflect the mission. To create maximum flexibility—I present the project in modular parts (as in when buying a car and you can add the ‘extras’), so the client can take the basic or the full bells and whistles model,” Rosenbaum said.

Next up for Rosenbaum is a Time Machine-inspired interactive art installation that uses water—flow, direction and speed controlled by visitors—to run turbines and generators to produce electricity to power cell phone batteries, lighting, and electrical devices.

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