

**PROJECT**  
**FOR THE CHILDREN**

Stop throwing away your scraps!  
Jack Hudson shows a way to build  
up a regular supply of children's  
blocks at zero cost

# Toy Building BLOCKS

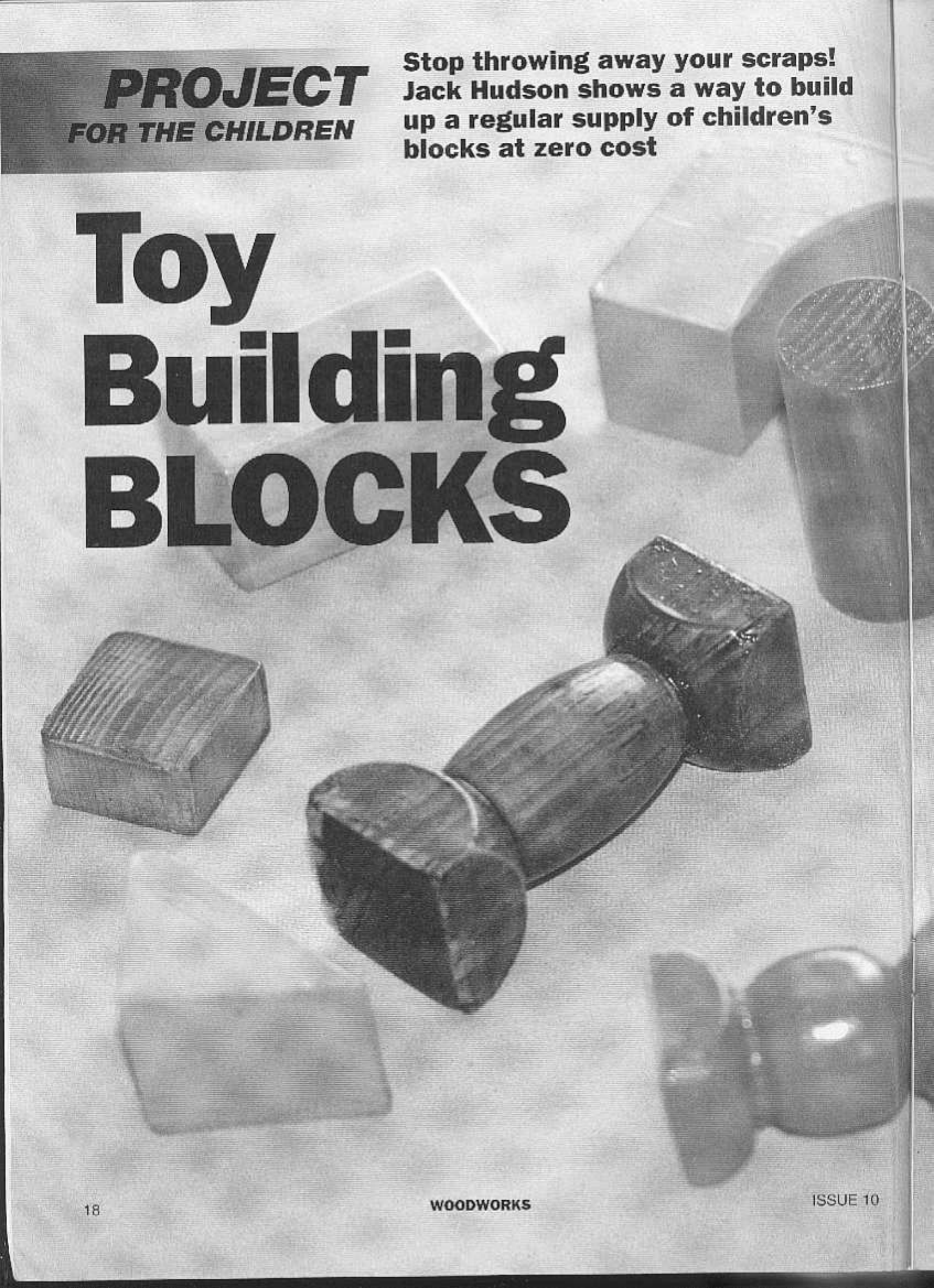
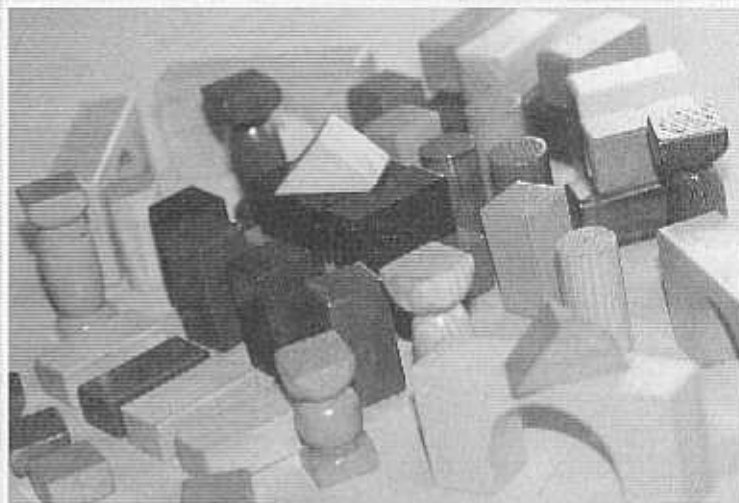


Fig. 2 The whole set



**T**he tipper truck in the last issue, or the trailer from the issue before that of WoodWorks, have a greatly increased play value if there are a few building blocks to load up and tip out.

The size of the common British brick was cleverly thought out and arose directly from the Imperial system of measurement where 12 inches could be halved, quartered or even divided into thirds. The decimal system does not take kindly to fractions! It was 9 inches x 4½ inches x 3 inches, in other words the width was half the length and the thickness one-third of the length. This enabled attractive and strong bonds to be worked out for any type of wall.

For your children's play blocks you must decide upon a module at the outset, and stick to it. 60mm x 30mm x 20mm is excellent. From now on you will throw all your waste scraps into a shed or corner until you are ready to render them down. Then with a tungsten carbide blade you will produce a planer-finish straight from the saw which will only need a bit of sanding to make them ready-to-use.

If you have a radial arm saw so much the better. Set the rip to 30mm and stream everything through, reducing all your lumber to that thickness. Pieces that are big enough to go through both ways will produce square sections. Bricks are processed by setting your rip to 20mm. With experience you will soon find that some scraps lend themselves more to one shape than another. If you have a lathe it is better to make the square sections oversize to turn into cylinders or ornamental columns. Otherwise you might purchase a length of dowelling and cut that up for columns. The arches are cut out with a jigsaw fretsaw or coping saw. (See Figure 1)

Remove all sharp corners by rounding off on a sander and give the blocks a hand finish with sandpaper.

Fig. 1 The eight different shapes: Yellow whole brick, blue half-brick, grey arch, red and green columns, yellow triangle and green small closer.



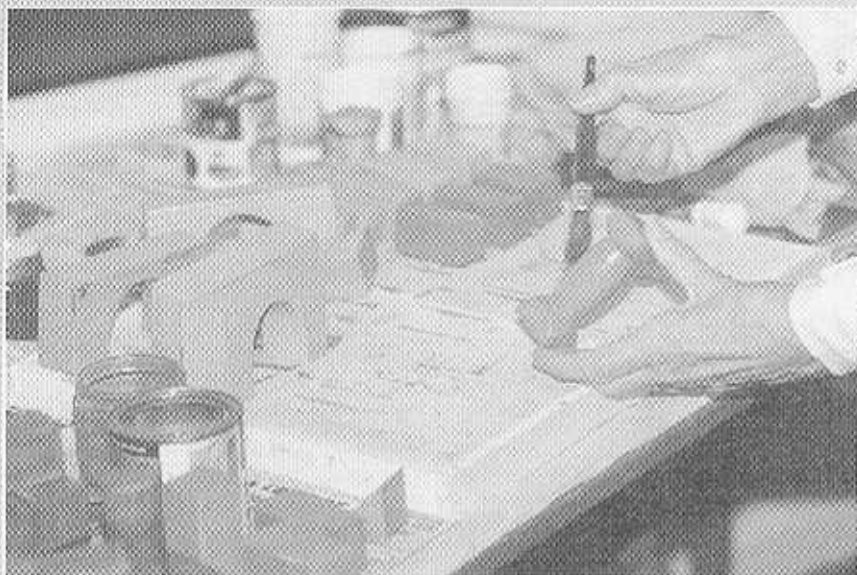


Fig. 3 Colour painting. Note net screen for drying the blocks

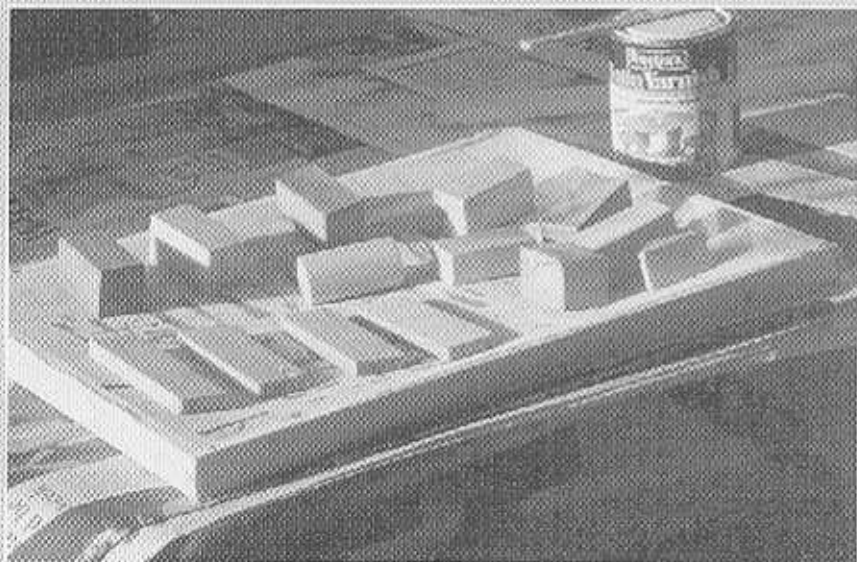


Fig. 4 Natural wood set being varnished



Fig. 5 Children at play

## Finishing

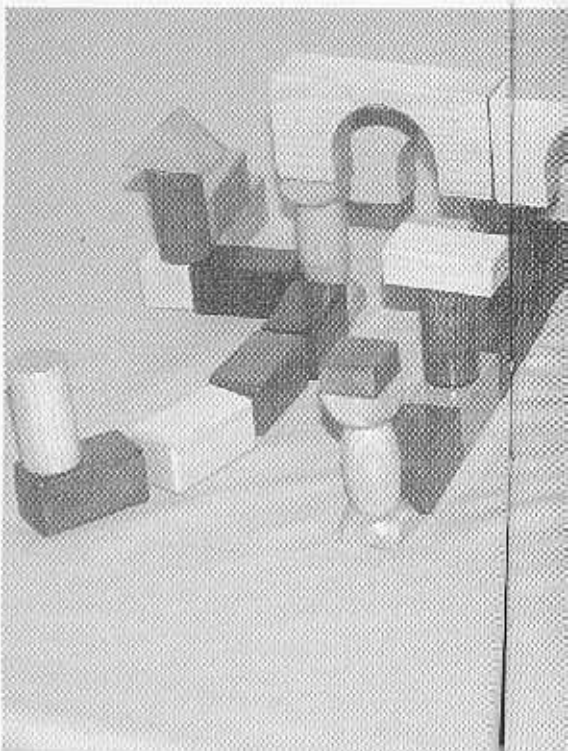
This is essential to an attractive toy. The finishes described here will also be applicable to other wooden toys you might wish to make. Because you are using off-cuts there will be a wide variety of different woods from the woodshed, but that does not matter.

Whatever you do you must be absolutely sure that all finishing materials are completely safe and non-toxic for children.

For attractive colours you might try Rustin's Colourglaze. It is available in the primary colours, plus grey, black and white haze. These satin colours do not obliterate the grain of wood as paint would. The colours are strong but may be reduced to pastel shades with the White Haze or mixed together to form any shade. In the examples shown in the pictures here I lightened the blue with some White Haze and made the red brighter by adding about 10% of yellow. (See Figure 3)

A perfect finish is a desirable objective, but, you are not trying to produce plastic rubbish, so do not worry too much if your work bears the hand-made label. It is a good idea to make a rough wooden frame covered with old nylon net curtain to stand the blocks on as they are coloured.

Paint three sides and put each one to dry on the nylon mesh. When touch dry, turn them over and paint the other three sides. Tedious? you might think so, but in the long run doing a job properly is nearly always the quickest. Two coats will be needed and if you have dark hardwoods it is best to give them a coat of the White Haze before applying the colour.

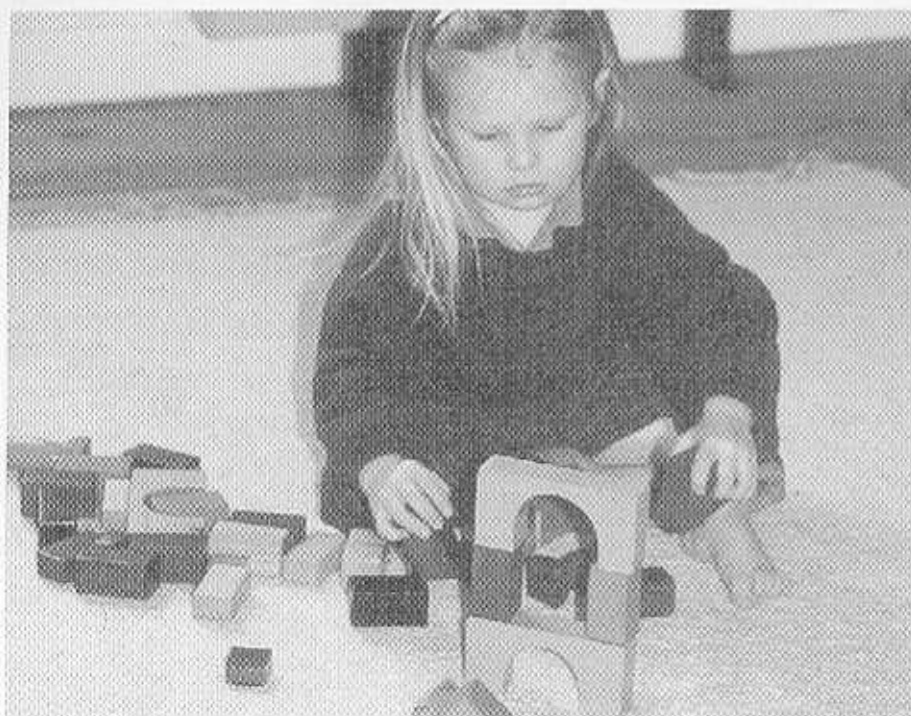


### Schedule of useful sizes (mm)

Type	Length	Width	Thickness
Standard Brick	60	30	30
Closer, half-brick	30	30	20
Square column	60	30	30
Round column (out of)	60	35	35
Arch (out of)	60	30	20
Lintel, or long span	120	30	10

### Tools for the job

- ◆ Cross-cut, rip, or radial arm power saw or hand saws
  - ◆ Rule
  - ◆ Square
  - ◆ Sanding equipment
  - ◆ Paint Brushes
- Suppliers Local hardware stores



When the blocks are coloured to your satisfaction try a finishing coat of Rustin's acrylic clear varnish. This acrylic resin is extremely durable and, like plastic emulsion paint, is water-based drying within the hour.

In fact, depending on the type of off-cuts you normally obtain, you may prefer to keep the natural wood finish and use the varnish only without colours.

Blocks made from natural woods have a very pleasing appearance. (See Figure 4)

The beauty of it all is that you are only using up waste scraps and this is a good place to experiment with different colours and finishes.

### Safety

It is worth adding that these products are recommended with confidence, not only for their ease of use, but because they have been officially tested and given a Certificate of Conformity under the 1989 Toys (Safety) Regulations and confirm with BS.5665. □

