

# “HEY, GERRIT, I’VE GOT AN IDEA!”

As a child, Gerrit Braun always wanted to be an engine driver. Today, along with his twin brother he runs the world’s largest model railway. More than 1.4 million visitors flock to Miniature Wonderland in Hamburg every year. In our interview, the 51-year old reveals that his little world and the big one it’s based on actually have a lot in common.

**Gerrit Braun**

**21/12/1967**

Born in Hamburg

**1994**

Owner and manager of the Voilà nightclub in Hamburg

**2001**

Opens Hamburg Miniature Wonderland along with his identical twin brother Frederik and Stephan Hertz

**2006**

Wins Entrepreneur of the Year award

**2010**

Awarded the German Federal Cross of Merit

**Mr Braun, do the railways in your Miniature Wonderland run on time?**

**Gerrit Braun:** Believe it or not, even we sometimes experience delays or cancelled trains. Our technology can go on strike too. The difference is that when our trains don’t run, our visitors still have a great time.

**How do model railways differ from those in the real world?**

Mainly in terms of their size (laughs). Realism is extremely important to us. We don’t want to lose our sense of realism, but we do want to create a world of wonder that all our visitors can lose themselves in.

**Do you sometimes think back to the early days and have to pinch yourself when you see the queues at the entrance?**

Yes, our success story is like a dream. Early on, my brother and I knew we wanted to set up our own company – if we couldn’t be engine drivers. In 2001 Frederik called me and said: “Hey, Gerrit, I’ve got an idea. Let’s build the world’s largest model railway.” Initially, I was quite sceptical but then I started to really come around to the notion. And with a two million euro loan, we just went ahead and did it.

**Behind your love of detail there’s an incredible amount of hard work and professional planning. How important is the quality of the products you use, for example all the cables?**

Around 1.4 million people visit us each year. Their safety is the most important thing for us. That’s why we make sure we only use quality products in all areas, but particularly the cables. A cable fire can start so quickly. We have more than 15 kilometres of track, and we need cables with a cross-section of up to ten square millimetres. If we didn’t use high-quality materials, it would increase the risk.

**What specific requirements do you have for cables?**

They’re similar to the real railway in many ways. They have to insulate as well as being temperature resistant, robust and flexible. We don’t use a 230 Volt power supply for our system. Pretty much all cables are standard commercial products, including the LAPP products we use. For example the UNITRONIC® BUS CAN for communication between the PC and control cards under the system and the UNITRONIC® SENSOR for controlling the switches.

**For many people, one of the attractions of building model railways is that you are never really finished. What are you currently building?**

We’re really moving forward. We are currently working on the famous Monaco racing circuit. When that’s finished, our team will focus on the UK, which will include an extension of our exhibition area in Speicherstadt. And at some stage we want to include France and the Benelux countries. We’re never standing still. Even if some of the trains don’t arrive on time ...





Living the dream:  
Founders Frederik (left)  
and Gerrit Braun

1,499

square metres  
of models created  
over 795,000  
hours of  
construction.

1,040

trains  
running on  
15,400 metres  
of track.

>21

million euro  
in costs  
to date to build  
Miniature  
Wonderland.

Miniature Wonderland  
in Hamburg is open  
365 days a year, at least  
from 9.30 am to 6.00 pm.  
Exact opening times  
and more information  
on tickets can be found  
online.

➔ [www.miniatur-wunderland.com](http://www.miniatur-wunderland.com)