

His own toy museum

Exhibits worth \$5 million the culmination of a love affair that began when collector was aged six

By KRIST BOO

AFTER six months of delays, a collector's dream of having his own toy museum is finally coming true.

Today 56-year-old Chang Yang Fa will open the doors of his converted shophouse at 26 Seah Street and invite the public to the Mint Museum of Toys to share his 30-year collection of tin-plate buses, golliwogs and Mickey Mouse.

To mark the day, the father of three has rounded up 12 fellow vintage car enthusiasts for a drive from his museum to Orchard Road. Each car in the line-up will sport an ad on the museum's opening.

Insulated and fitted with UV-filtered bulbs and glass shelves, Mint claims to be the world's first purpose-built building for playthings.

The \$2 million premises across from Raffles Hotel comes complete with a glass facade that will be lit up at night, a cafe, shop and a rooftop garden for private functions.

Its treasure chest of exhibits, including mint-condition Steiffs, first-edition comics and rare Disney pieces, is estimated to be worth more than \$5 million.

More Roy Lichtenstein than Barbie in design, the museum's white and glass interior will be filled with designer furniture which will arrive in a few weeks.

Visitors are met at its entrance by a lenticular: a seven-panel holographic display of rare comics dating back to the early 1900s.

Besides a 1949 Popeye, it has a frame showing Superman, Batman, Batgirl and Robin: a gathering of Superheroes on a single page — a rarity in the comic world.

The museum is the culmination of a love affair that began with a Matchbox refiller truck given to Mr Chang as a birthday present when he was just six years old.

Helped by wife Siew Kee — who packs and catalogues the toys — Mr Chang, who heads his own engineering consulting firm by day, has been building up his 50,000-piece collection for the last 30 years, visiting auctions, trawling curio shops during holidays and chasing up tip-offs from dealers. He even took his wife to a junk shop on their second date.



PHOTOS: TERENCE TAN

30-YEAR COLLECTION: Mr Chang spent years trawling auctions and junk shops to put together his 50,000-piece treasure chest.

For the Chang family who put off renovating their 24-year-old house in order to save for this big day, the opening ends a quest that began more than 10 years ago with the search for a suitable site.

After so many years of waiting, the excitement has worn off, said Mrs Chang. "We just want to get it opened."

The delay has cost time, money and lost revenue but not, apparently, Mr Chang's enthusiasm. As late as Thursday, he was asking for some dents in a cabinet steel rim to be fixed.

He is not, he said, prepared to compromise on the issue of quality. "I did not want to rush out and showcase something that is shoddy," he said. "We want to do it right, have something that Singapore can be proud of."

The museum opens daily from 9.30am to 6.30pm. The entrance fee is \$10 for adults and \$5 for children.

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FROM DIFFERENT COUNTRIES: (left) Felix the Cat sports a different look depending on the country where it was made. These came from the United States, Germany and Britain, and date back to the 1920s.

GOLLIWOG: Very popular in Europe, the golliwog (right) was inspired by the children's literary character created by Florence Kate Upton in the late 19th century. Mr Chang's collection has 50 of these dolls, including one female.

