



PHOTO CREDIT: KIERAN WRIGHT

LA FEATURE

Model Citizen: Meet The Man Making Miniatures Of LA's Iconic Restaurants

"I consider each miniature to be a love letter to Los Angeles," Kieran Wright says of his tiny odes to LA's landmarks.

KAT HONG
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SAVE

We're not sure who would create such a superlative, but if there were ever an award for "Most Productive Use Of Time In Quarantine," none of us would even stand a chance - that title belongs to Kieran Wright.

After losing his job in airline marketing back in March, the 28-year-old New Zealand native was searching for new ways to fill his time. But instead of turning to things like [baking](#), [binge-watching](#), or, you know, [general existential despair](#), Wright focused his energy on something a bit more unexpected: immortalizing iconic LA architecture through detailed miniature models.



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"I was sitting in Rae's Restaurant, getting lunch with a friend, and was just like 'Hey, I really like this building - I want to make a little miniature of it, just to have at home,'" he laughs. "It turns out, I'm pretty good at it."

Which is a bit understatement. With no prior experience in architecture, model-making, or even arts and crafts - but with plenty of time to watch YouTube tutorials - Wright began cranking out incredible (and incredibly detailed) 1/24th-scale models of LA landmarks like the [Rae's](#), [Tiki Ti](#), the [New Beverly Cinema](#), [Tail o' the Pup](#), and [Morgan Camera Shop](#), a Hollywood fixture opened in the early 1930s.

"Every spare second I have, I'm out, driving around, going to LA County, Orange County, all over the place, just looking for interesting things," he explains. "For anything to be a contender, it has to be an important landmark or icon, or is a part of LA's unique architecture that wouldn't be found anywhere else. I consider each little miniature to be a love letter to Los Angeles."



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Case in point: His most recent miniature is a 1/24th-scale model of [Fugetsu-Do](#), a family-run Japanese confectionery in Little Tokyo that's been around since 1903. Made with a mix of foam, plastic, and plaster, from the replica rock wall exterior to the tiny sign hanging inside a window (which was made from a textured print Wright created himself), his eye for detail is evident - as is his appreciation for the shop's history. To him, this is more than a great place to get mochi.

"I saw Fugetsu-Do while browsing the [LA Conservancy website](#). And while I loved the cool, '50s rock work, I think that the real story is that they've experienced so many challenges - threats of gentrification, the Japanese internment camps of World War II, the Great Depression, and the current global pandemic - throughout 117 years of operation. It's crazy that Fugetsu-Do has continued to be out here, serving their community, and I wanted to pay homage through my work. I like the idea of bringing something to life, and bringing more awareness to it."



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And while many would be satisfied with the internet fame Wright's received through a mix of Instagram posts, features in local publications, and, yes, even [Reddit](#) ("When I share these things, they get like, 5,000 upvotes and the only positive comments on that site," he laughs), it was also important for the first-time builder to give back to the businesses he'd spent hours studying. In a [recent Instagram post](#), he announced that he would be raffling off his Fugetsu-Do miniature to anyone who's donated \$20 or more to [Little Tokyo's Small Business Relief Fund](#).

"It comes back to the reason I do this," he says. "It's because I love these businesses and these places. And it's more important than ever to support them."

Which is true. As scores of legendary restaurants are forced to [close permanently](#), or [scramble for survival](#), and with LA institutions like [Taix French Restaurant](#) set to be demolished (and repurposed as [housing and retail complexes](#)), the pressure is on to not only [highlight our city's](#) unique, historic architecture, but to put a real emphasis on its importance and value, too.

"It was definitely something that I thought when I started to make these minis, this idea that these buildings are at a high risk for being taken away," Wright says. "Who knows what the future holds - but if something terrible does happen, there's at least a little 1/24th-scale version of [it] that can still exist, in real, physical form, even if it's not the actual building."

If you want to want to own one of those small-scale models, you still have time -Wright's Fugetsu-Do giveaway closes on Friday, October 9th at 11:59pm PT. [Click here for more information.](#)



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