



by Annika Oetken

Have you ever heard of Mildred the Crocklebog?
Or Swampy the marsh Boggle?
You haven't?

Well in that case let me take you into the magical world of BeWILDerwood and tell you how it all began.

As Tom Blofeld walked his family estate, trying to figure out what might be done to make his land profitable, the idea came to him. He should create the imaginary world of his childhood, where little creatures lived in the marsh and the woodland around his family home.

And so BeWILDerwood was born, out of a mixture of desperation and excitement: desperation to make unprofitable, inherited land somehow pay its way, and excitement at the chance to create a truly imaginative and wonderful place for children and their families. Tom went ahead and converted the least productive part of the estate – the bogs and woodland – into an extraordinary adventure park for children.

Since opening in May 2007, BeWILDerwood has seized the imagination of children and adults alike. Set within 50 acres on the edge of the famous Norfolk Broads National Park, BeWILDerwood has become one of the region's most popular family tourist attractions with 150,000 visitors a year.

Land owner and founder Tom Blofeld has been taken aback by the success. Its popularity has exceeded his wildest expectations. "In the first week of opening, I had to go on the radio asking people to stay away because there were so many coming we just couldn't cope!" says Blofeld.

A CURIOUS TREEHOUSE ADVENTURE

•BeWILDerwood

BeWILDerwood is aimed at 4- to 14-year-olds. It's a magical place with amazing treehouses, a sky-high broken bridge, a scary lake, a muddy maze, zip wires and slippery slides. Throughout the forest of pine, fir, sweet chestnut and oak trees there are winding pathways, ladders hewn from logs and swaying aerial walkways. Visitors will find miniature villages high in the trees, which surely have been built by the Twiggles themselves. The cafés and the souvenir shop are housed in handsome log cabins and the rides meld attractively with their woodland surroundings.

The magic of it all is that you feel that the characters are all around you. The woods feel alive with their presence although you never quite get to see them. Children imagine around every corner they might just catch a glimpse of a Twiggle or a Boggle.

And not just that. Driven by his creativity, Blofeld has written an accompanying children's book

depicting these weird and wonderful characters. *A Boggle at BeWILDerwood* has become Norfolk's best selling children's book and is already in its third edition. Children are able to experience the book through the real-life adventure park. It is the complete antidote to today's screen-based society; and families, it seems, just cannot get enough of this back-to-nature adventure. Blofeld says: "BeWILDerwood is a reality adventure for the most bold and daring of children. Children who read the book can follow in the footsteps of lead character Swampy, a marsh boggle with a taste for adventure who stands just two feet high! There is a real buzz about this place, immersed in imaginary fantasy and magic." The success of the first book has now led to two further stories being published. Almost every family who visits BeWILDerwood goes home with at least one of the books, and these are high quality hard-back books, not paperbacks.

Blofeld has not just created a paradise for kids, he has also created an environmentally



Adventure in the trees at BeWILDerwood



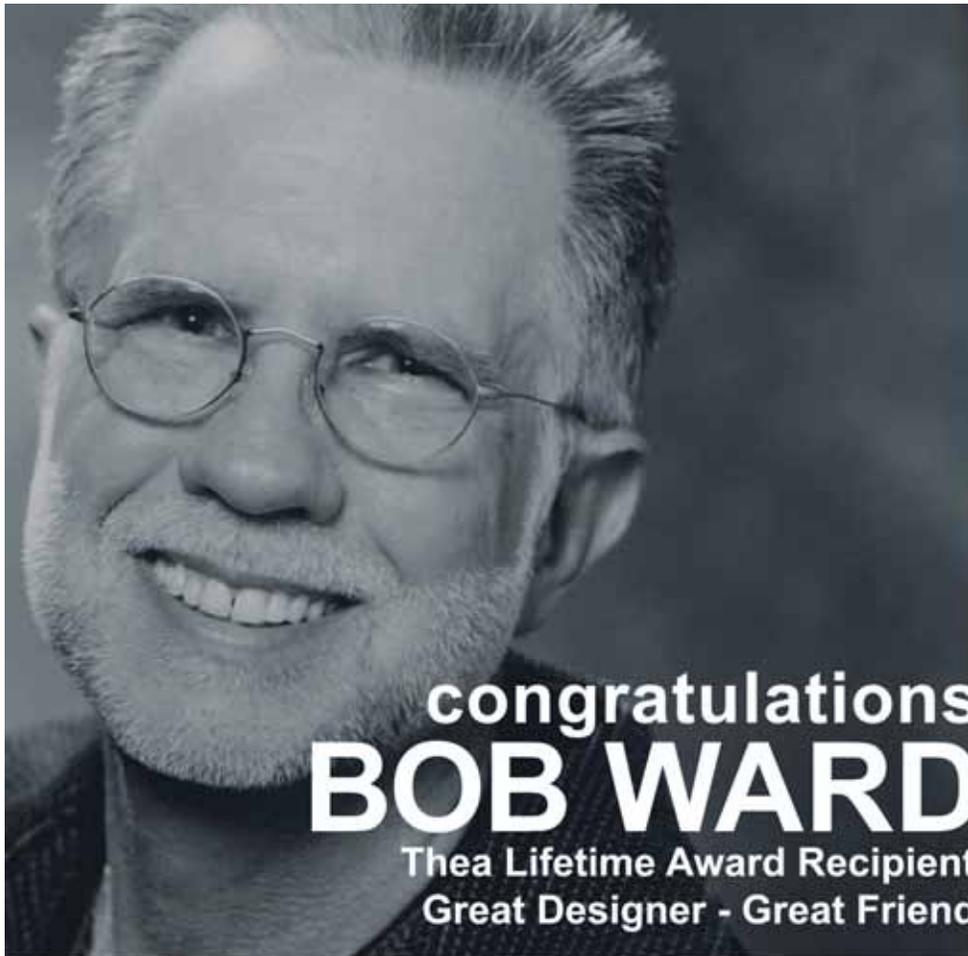
Annika Oetken (annikaoetken@live.de) is a freelance project manager based in Bremen, Germany. After six years in banking and a degree in business administration, she joined the amusement and themed entertainment industry in 2003, working for Space Center Bremen. Over the past four years, she has worked with Phil Hartley (PHA Ltd.) on various projects such as Ice Age Adventure (Movie Park Bottrop), Charlie & the Chocolate Factory (Alton Towers), Hollywood Film Museum (Movie Park Bottrop) and Dream of Battle (Warwick Castle). Currently she is involved in the Ringwerk project (Nuerburgring). She also works part-time for the TEA, supporting the European and Middle Eastern Division.

friendly adventure park. From its very first concept, BeWILDerwood was designed to have a light environmental touch. A "holistic environmentalism" approach was applied throughout – from food sold on-site being sourced within Norfolk, to reclaimed lifeboats converted to electric power, fences made from wood harvested on-site, recycling over 70% of

waste on-site, and upgrading local footpaths, bridle and cycle paths to allow sustainable access. £1.8 million has been spent on creating this fantastic adventure, a very low cost for the number of visitors now being entertained.

"Every other amusement park is trying to be bigger, wilder, stronger, cooler. We aren't like

that at all," says Blofeld. At BeWILDerwood, the quality of entertainment is delightfully old-fashioned. It's all about children playing well together: A welcome return to innocent play with ropes and sticks, and burning off energy in climbing, sliding and simply running through the woods.



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