

Special Effects: Little Mermaid Characters Come to Life with Classic Storytelling and Innovative Technology

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. – Under the Sea ~ Journey of the Little Mermaid debuts this fall at Magic Kingdom, advancing the great tradition of the “dark ride” – a theme park classic that transports riders in guided vehicles through specially lit scenes often featuring animation sound, music, and special effects.

That said, the Little Mermaid attraction incorporates advanced technology and special effects to make guests feel as if they’ve been taken underwater as they encounter characters from “The Little Mermaid” in amazing three-dimensional forms.

Technical and design highlights begin with the building housing the attraction. The architecture itself was designed using new digital 3-D modeling technology and the façade, in its finished form, features Prince Eric’s castle from the film. Guests will arrive at the sandy beach line and descend into the caverns below Prince Eric’s castle to board their clam shell and journey under the sea with Ariel.

The painstaking attention to detail that is a hallmark of Walt Disney Imagineering is evident in an “underwater” grotto that appears to be a room inside the prince’s castle, with a beautiful domed ceiling, light penetrating from the sky above water to reveal artifacts of Prince Eric’s world.

In Ariel’s world, where sea creatures talk and sing, mischievous little crabs engage guests in games of “trash or treasure” to help the crabs fill their treasure chests. This is the latest example of how Imagineers use technology to create interactive queues that allow the fun to start almost immediately.

Guests ride through the attraction on board an Omnimover system familiar to fans of the Haunted Mansion. The Omnimover vehicles, which are designed to move and turn so they can direct riders’ attention to particular views and scenes, have been informally known as “clamshells” for years. In The Little Mermaid attraction, they actually *are* clamshells.

Although Disney theme park attractions often make ingenious use of modern special effects technology, it is never an end in itself. For Walt Disney Imagineers, technology serves to enhance the magic and fun of the attraction’s story:

- Special lighting and projections are used to create the illusion of gradual submersion as guests travel “under the sea” for Ariel’s adventure.
- Special “skin technology” is used in the creation of Ariel, King Triton and Ursula, because they have so much skin exposed. (Imagineers were especially challenged to replicate the unblemished youthful smoothness of Ariel’s skin.)
- Under the Sea ~ Journey of the Little Mermaid features more than 180 *Audio-Animatronics* figures, ranging from simple to extremely complex.
- Among the more complex characters: Ursula the Sea Witch. She is the largest *Audio-Animatronics* character in the show – 12 feet wide and seven-and-a-half feet tall. She has been fitted with a torso that can stretch and squash as she sings “Poor Unfortunate Souls,” just as Ursula’s body does in the motion picture.
- Keep your eye on the eyes. Sebastian the crab, Ariel’s would-be guardian, is particularly expressive thanks to

digital technology used to animate his eye movements.

About Walt Disney World Resort

Walt Disney World Resort is a contiguous, nearly 40-square-mile, world-class entertainment and recreation destination featuring four theme parks (Magic Kingdom, Epcot, Disney's Hollywood Studios and Disney's Animal Kingdom); two water adventure parks (Blizzard Beach and Typhoon Lagoon); 35 resort hotels (25 owned and operated by Walt Disney World, includes seven Disney Vacation Club resort properties); 81 holes of golf on five courses; two full-service spas; Disney's Wedding Pavilion; ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex; and Downtown Disney, an entertainment-shopping-dining complex. Walt Disney World Resort is also included in vacation packages of Disney Cruise Line. Located at Lake Buena Vista, Fla., 20 miles southwest of Orlando, Walt Disney World Resort opened Oct. 1, 1971. Open daily, year-round.

###

MERMAIDINNOVATION/rev:11-5-12:kb