

From 'Steamboat Willie' to Disney's Art of Animation Resort: Animation's Storytelling Power Endures

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. – The story of animation is a tale as old as time — or at least dating to ancient cave graffiti and hieroglyphic friezes. But the storytelling power of cartoon drawings really took off when Walt Disney's first Mickey Mouse animated short feature with sound, "Steamboat Willie," dazzled movie fans in 1928.

More than eight decades after Mickey Mouse whistled his way to stardom at the helm of that river steamboat, animation takes center stage at Disney's Art of Animation Resort, where beloved characters from Disney film classics like "Finding Nemo" and "The Lion King" invite guests to live and breathe their heartwarming stories during a visit to Walt Disney World Resort.

Nemo, Simba and pals are here thanks to a celebrated history that began with The Golden Age of Animation and Walt Disney's first animated film hits. The early antics of Mickey Mouse, Goofy and friends tickled every generation of moviegoer. In 1932, Disney's first of many Academy Awards went to the Silly Symphonies cartoon short "Flowers and Trees," and Walt Disney received a special award for the creation of Mickey Mouse. Other Disney animation highlights:

- 1937 "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" was the first animated feature and the highest-grossing film of its time.
- 1940-60 "Fantasia" broke new ground in 1940, combining a symphonic concert with animated film sequences. For the next two decades, animated films told stories worthy of their status as classics: "Pinocchio" (1940), "Dumbo" (1941), "Bambi" (1942), "Cinderella" (1950), "Peter Pan" (1953), "Lady and the Tramp" (1955) and "Sleeping Beauty" (1959).
- 1989-Today Disney animators created a string of enduring blockbuster films including "The Little Mermaid" (1989), "Beauty and the Beast" (1991), "Aladdin" (1994), "The Lion King (1995) and more. In 1995, with Pixar, Disney released "Toy Story," the first animated feature generated completely on computers. The Disney-Pixar collaboration generated more epic hits with "Toy Story" sequels, "Finding Nemo" and "Cars."

Animation Immerses Resort Guests in the Stories

From Pencil Drawings to Resort Adornments – Behind each animated hit film are talented artists whose sketches come to life as the enduring characters of favorite films. Art of Animation Resort guests are welcomed at the entryway with pencil drawings of Ariel ("The Little Mermaid"), Lightning McQueen ("Cars"), Simba ("The Lion King") and Nemo ("Finding Nemo").

Fun Fact: Walt Disney called his key animators in the 1950s his Nine Old Men, after Franklin D. Roosevelt's nine Old Men on the Supreme Court. The nine included arguably the most famous pair, Ollie Johnston and Frank Thomas, whose works included "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," which premiered in 1937 as the first animated feature film.

Iconic Scenes and Sets – Vivid scenes from classic Disney films make those animated stories all the more memorable. Art of Animation Resort guests encounter Ariel's grotto in an under-the-sea kingdom at Little Mermaid courtyard and a freshly paved road leading to the "Cozy Cone Motel" and the Cozy Cone pool and cabanas in the resort's "Cars" wing. The elephant graveyard from "The Lion King" is a resort play area.

Fun Fact: The 189-foot-tall Cinderella Castle in Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World Resort is recognized worldwide as the iconic castle from the classic Disney film "Cinderella." As they created the castle, which debuted in 1971, teams of designers studied famous European palaces and castles like Fontainebleau and Versailles, as well as original animation designs of the castle for the film.

Crush, Pumbaa and Timon, Oh My! Whether animated characters are headliners or sidekicks, they can't get by on their good looks. It's often their snappy dialogue and relatable personalities that win fans. There's 150-year-old Crush the turtle in "Finding Nemo" and his surfer-dude lingo. And then there are Timon and Pumbaa of "The Lion King" with their Hakuna-Matata laid-back ways. These popular characters debut with their animated contemporaries in various Art of Animation Resort locations, from the Big Blue pool where you can pose for a photo with Crush to the resort room shower curtains festooned with images of Timon and Pumbaa.

Fun Fact: Walt Disney said this about the personality of animated characters: "Until a character becomes a personality it cannot be believed And without personality, a story cannot ring true to the audience."

He also said this about non-human characters: "Cartoon animals, of course, are not and never were replicas of real animals; they are a special breed of creatures out of the world of fable who duplicate human traits and foibles rather than those of the real animal kingdom. Mickey Mouse was never a mouse or anything like a mouse; no more than Donald was ever a duck."

And speaking of Mickey Mouse, it has become a tradition for Disney resort guests to spot "Hidden Mickeys" in places ranging from murals behind hotel check-in counters to landscape shrubbery. Bedspreads, elevators and brick walkways are other potential backdrops for Hidden Mickeys (keep an eye on Disney's Art of Animation Resort carpets!) It all began with a mouse who was "never a mouse" and who paved the path for Nemo, Simba, the mermaid Ariel and even, perhaps, a car that was never a car named "Lightning McQueen" – all stars of Disney's Art of Animation Resort.

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