

Robert Tonner Interview

[The Tonner Doll Company](#), established in 1991, is internationally renowned for award-winning dolls. The dolls sculpted at Tonner dolls are known for their attention to detail. This detail includes dedication on behalf of sculptors and designers to ensure an accurate likeness is achieved, and only the finest of materials is used. Tonner Dolls are featured in worldwide doll and toy specialty retailers including FAO Schwarz in New York & Las Vegas, and the famous Harrods Department Store in Knightsbridge, England. Robert Tonner is the founder, sculptor, and designer of Tonner Dolls.

Twilight Lexicon: Can you give us an overview of the effort that goes into making a high end, quality doll? How many people are involved in the creative process and what do they do?

Robert Tonner: Not an easy question! Doll making/figure making is a highly detailed process and to make a professional product, many, many talented and knowledgeable artisans are involved. To start with, you need a concept. At Tonner, that usually comes from me—however, the Twilight series was a little different. One of our licensors approached me with a new movie he was representing. Although it wasn't that long ago, I had never heard of Twilight. This particular agent is very on top of things, so I thought I'd better get up to speed as fast as I could. As soon as I opened my eyes, I realized that Twilight was everywhere. I picked up the books and read them all—and I loved them. The license was for the movie, however, so I started researching it and found there was already a world of information out there. We quickly signed the agreement to be able to produce the characters from the movie. The next step was the sculpting the characters.



We are starting with the Bella and Edward characters. I sculpt and I work with a few very talented sculptors—I then had to decide who would do the face sculpts. Although I would have loved to do it, I felt that the characters would be best handled by another artist. I did sculpt the bodies of the dolls. This process can take from a week to months, depending on a number of variables. The head sculpts for Bella and Edward came together pretty quickly and they were then sent off to the talent for approval. The approval can take anywhere from a few days to

weeks depending on the talent and their agents. In this case, the actors were very quick to respond and we had approvals quickly. The heads are originally made in clay, a mold is made and the likenesses are transferred to wax. The waxes are cleaned up and polished in anticipation of mold making.

In the meantime, we work on the clothing. My design director will work with the studio to pick an appropriate costume for each character. He researches fabrics and gives the materials he picks to one of our patternmakers along with pictures of the movie costume. The patternmaker makes the first sample and we submit it for studio review. Once all is approved, everything is sent to our factory in China. Our factory produces the metal mold for the vinyl head and sends us a sample for approval. We send that head to our face painter. Our face painter is a fine artist who will take pictures of the actors and the vinyl sculpt and make it look as close to the actor as possible. The face paint is then again sent for approval. While all this is taking place, we work on the box that the doll will come in.

Once all the parts are done, the completed doll is submitted to the studio for a final review. We then make any final changes or adjustments and start the production.

Twilight Lexicon: How long does it take to produce the doll from initial concept to packaged product?

Robert Tonner: It's the process that I described above though production usually takes at a minimum, nine months.

Twilight Lexicon: It's our understanding that the Twilight dolls that you are producing will be based upon the actors who are portraying the characters. When your company does a doll based on a real person what goes into the process to ensure the best likeness?

Robert Tonner: The Twilight characters will be based on the actors from the movie. When we do a portrait of an actor, we first get every bit of reference we can—and that's not always easy. The studio usually supplies us what they can, but those pictures are not always the best to sculpt by, so we go on the internet and find any pictures we can. The more reference materials we get, the better.



I then decide which of the sculptors we work with will do the best job on the character. I'm better at women and cartoon characters, and I work with sculptors who are better at men, and a couple are better at women—it depends on the project. I'm a stickler for a good likeness, so I've been know to give the same

likeness to two or three sculptors at the same time to make sure the likeness is the best we can get.

Twilight Lexicon: Which characters can we expect to see in the Twilight line?

Robert Tonner: Of course the first characters out will be Bella and Edward. I'd like to do all of them, depending on how well they do, but probably James and Victoria will be next.

Twilight Lexicon: Of the characters that are being portrayed which was your favorite to work on and why?

Robert Tonner: I don't know if I can pick a favorite. To start with, we're doing two dolls, and I think they were both equally enjoyable to do.

Twilight Lexicon: Did any of the dolls present a unique challenge? If so what was that challenge?

Robert Tonner: A likeness of an actor is always challenging, but these were no more challenging than any others. However, I'd love to figure out a way to do Edward as he looks with the sun on his skin—that would be a challenge!

Twilight Lexicon: How do you decide which outfit a doll has if the character in the movie has several looks? What kinds of materials are used? How difficult is it to replicate on a smaller scale what is seen on the big screen when it comes to clothing and accessories?



Robert Tonner: If I haven't seen the movie, I usually go by the suggestion of the studio. I can say though, usually, the costume that a character is first seen in is usually their iconic outfit and that's the one I would look to do. Joe (my design director) and I have been doing this for so long, that scale usually isn't a problem for us. The clothing can be pretty easy—and in this case

they were. Accessories can be challenging, but in this case there was nothing out of the ordinary.

Twilight Lexicon: Can you give us a hint at some of the details that go into the finished product? Is there any accessory that a given doll has that you think really enhances the end product to makes it really special?

Robert Tonner: Good question. The features on the figures are all hand painted. We use the finest hair fibers available and the hair is styled individually, by hand. The clothing is meticulously made in the correct scale with high quality fabrics. Bella and Edward really don't have special accessories that define their characters (unless they put something different in the movie) so it's the likenesses that will really define them.

Twilight Lexicon: When can we expect to see the first images of the dolls? When will the general public be able to purchase them and where? How much will the dolls cost?

Robert Tonner: We should have images of the dolls out in early November (if we stay on track!). I try not to push an image out—we take our time to make the best figure possible. The production dolls should be out in the first quarter of next year. The dolls will be in the \$150.00 range.

Twilight Lexicon: Is there any other information you would like to add?

Robert Tonner: Just that I've become a huge fan of the books and I can't wait to see the movie—I think it's going to be an unbelievable hit. And, they should start working on the second movie now!

The Twilight Lexicon would like to thank Robert Tonner for taking time out of his schedule to answer our questions and to really explain to fans what will be going into the dolls produced by his company