THE STORY OF
MB
SHUT THE BOX
TRAVEL

Well known in the U.S.,
sold everywhere in the
world—yes, a typical
American product!

But how wrong would
your thinking be!

By Fred Horn

The well-known game “Shut the Box”
can be found in thousands and
thousands of different design
variants all over the world. Where
the game came from is uncertain as well
as when it was invented and/or developed.
But one variant launched the start of a
tremendous career in the world of games.

It was 1979 and Nick Neuwahl, a Dutchman
living in Florence, Italy, had just bought
the Italian version of H. C. Bell’s famous
volume “The Boardgame Book.” It was
in this beautiful book he found, unknown
to him, a game that really intrigued
him. Showing the game
to friends and
recognizing their
interest in the
game, he
decided to
manufacture
it in the
traditional
design found
in the book. He
employed the firm
Chiarugi & Co out
of Florence, a firm
where he was in
charge at that time.

The game sold well and that
gave Nick the idea a modern ‘pocket-
version’ of the game would probably also
be an interesting item for sale. So he
started designing a small version of the
game. He still owns his first attempt
made of wood. Shown below is his
working prototype, nowadays not in
the best of condition.

With high expectations and investing
his own money, Nick started with
the production of 1000 items made
out of plastic.

And then it happens...what so many
hopeful beginning game inventors
realize after some time:

“You can sell some 50 games to
friends and relatives, but what the hell do you
do with the rest? Who wants to buy one,
but more important: Where can I find
the people who want to buy them?”

Knowing nothing about the game
industry, and lacking knowledge and
experience, Nick was at the same point
so many others reach (and still do!):
store what you have in the cellar, garage,
or attic, waiting for an ingloriously
bad end. But then,
“Lady Luck” shined
on him!

He met a person
who said he knew
someone who for
sure would be
interested in this
kind of product, and
Nick was introduced
to the firm MB.

Not having any idea
what MB meant—Nick
had never heard of
Milton Bradley before,
an appointment (during
the now defunct Game Fair in Milan in
1982) was made with Roger Ford, who
at that time was the staff member

responsible for product development at MB.
Ford found it interesting enough to take
an example of the published game with
him back to the U.S. where the idea was
further worked on. Their main modification
was the addition of a score table for 4
players, which skipped the use of pencil
and paper.

In October of that year Nick got a license
contract and the game was published and on
the market in 1984. For MB (and thereafter
for Hasbro when they bought MB) it was
a worldwide hit and a "best-seller" for
more than 10 years.

For Nick it was the start of his illustrious
career as a game inventor. With more than
100 different products, published by 18
firms in 11 countries he has become one
of the leading European game inventors.
And it all started with that bright idea to
make a pocket-version of “Shut the Box.”