

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



Shut the Box

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.



Niek Neuwahl

It was 1979 and Niek Neuwahl, a Dutchman living in Florence, Italy, had just bought the Italian version of R. 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 Niek 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 attempts made of wood. Shown below is his working prototype, nowadays not in the best of condition.

With high expectations and investing his own money, Niek 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, Niek 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 Niek was introduced to the firm MB.

Not having any idea what MB meant—Niek 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 Niek 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 Niek 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*.”

AGPC



*The version of
Shut the Box
manufactured
in plastic.*



*Early wooden
prototype*