

Fun & Play at Mallorca Puzzles

“When customers, at Mallorca Puzzles get to have fun, they laugh and play with time, not against time. “

- Sven Baeck

IMAGES: THEMETAGROBOLOGIST

TheMetagrobologist is excited to present an in-depth interview with
Gülcin and Sven Baeck from Mallorca Puzzles.

In 2018, TheMetagrobologist was fortunate enough to visit the beautiful island of Mallorca (Majorca) and once again visited the terrific puzzle store <https://mallorca-puzzles.com> owned by Gülcin and Sven Baeck.

Gülcin and Sven are enthusiastic collectors of puzzles, who share a passion for play and mechanical puzzles with visitors worldwide. On our 2nd visit to the store, we grabbed an opportunity with both of them to get a behind-the-scenes look at their incredible collection of trick boxes and mechanical puzzles to gather more details on the history of the puzzle store and collecting.

MTG: Sven, we know that you have always had a fascination with mechanical puzzles. What can you tell us about this? When did you start?

Mallorca Puzzles: Since 1879 my family have run and been involved in Roskoth toy shops (the name of my mothers family). They are normal toy shops selling dolls, construction toys such as Barbie and Lego etc. In

2015, my brother (Andreas Baeck) won the award, with his Toy Shop "Frechdachs", for the most beautiful toyshop in Germany. The competition was run across Switzerland, Austria and Germany and his shop won in Germany. He came 2nd place overall.

As a child I was always fascinated by locks and boxes. In my teens, I changed to trick boxes from boxes and from locks to trick locks. These are the main puzzles I collect in my collection. I enjoy both, especially the Poplocks and of course the wonderful DanLock and love Russian and Japanese trick boxes.

MTG: So toys and puzzles are in your family?

Mallorca Puzzles: Yes! (Laughs!) I get this from my mother's side. My Great-Great-Grandfather Heinrich Roskoth I opened the first Toyshop in 1879 in Hattingen and moved after a while to Duisburg. In 1909, my great-grandfather Heinrich II took over the shop. In 1932, my Grandfather Heinrich III opened an

additional Toyshop in Essen. During the second World War our Toy Shop was completely destroyed. After very difficult years, we started again in 1948, in a temporary building.

In the small black and white picture (below) you can see the queue in the morning of the reopening. In 1958, my Grandfather rebuilt the building with eight floors again. My father Benno Baeck ran the shop for about 20 years and after his death my mother Margit Baeck-Roskoth ran it for a further 20 years until she retired in 2002. Since the 1950's Roskoth has been one of the most popular family run Toyshops in West-Germany.

The beautiful Roskoth in Duisburg is still open and now owned by the 5th Generation. Also, my sister met



Puzzles²





**PHOTO
CAPTION**
Inside the
store.

Jean Claude Constantin on a toy fair and now we have families that compete with toys and puzzles. (Laughs!) I don't have the patience for a lot of things, but I do have a lot of patience for 'playing'. I love playing.

MTG: What are your favourite trick boxes. Which designers?

Mallorca Puzzles: Trick boxes by Tatsuo Miyamoto. I especially love the Monkey's Palanquin Japanese Puzzle Box. Simply incredible. It was really expensive, not a big box, but a fabulous puzzle. We also have collect boxes from Yoshiyuki Ninomiya which we find very beautiful.

MTG: Many of these are from the Karakuri Creation Group?

Mallorca Puzzles: Yes. Yes! Many of

them are very nice. We love them. Our biggest one was obtained from our friend William Strijbos who helped Gülcin & myself often over the years.

A very special Russian Box with 5 compartements, 3 of them with a trick for opening. At this stage, Sven and Gülcin provided me with an opportunity to attempt their most special Russian Puzzle Box made from the root of a Siberian Beach Burl with special secret compartments.

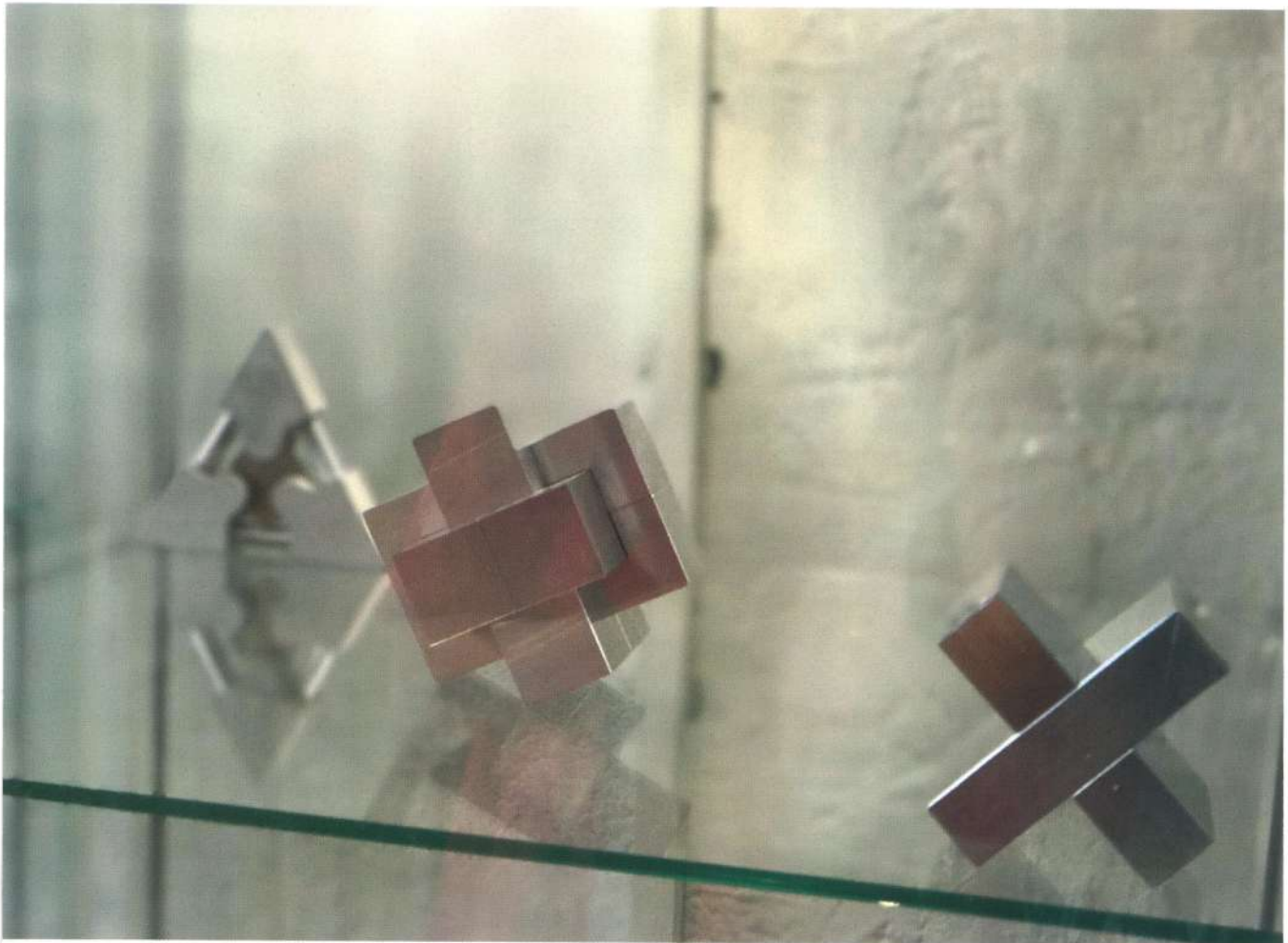
MTG: What can you tell me about this?

Mallorca Puzzles: As collectors we are aware that only a few small towns and individuals can prepare and use this unique Siberian hardwood. For the last five years, these types of puzzles have been getting smaller

and more difficult to obtain as the carpenters are passing away and the younger generation are unable to design the trick boxes with the same craftsmanship. Russian boxes are getting harder to obtain for this reason. This is similar to those that collect Japanese trick boxes from the very best designers.

We used to be able to easily obtain trick boxes from Japan and sadly the number of unique craftsmen who can design them with the talents and skills loved by collectors are now passing away. Consequently, the trick puzzles are not exported or sold in Japan wholesale. If you want the boxes, you have to visit Japan and pay for the puzzle you are interested in, within the actual store.

Demand is getting larger as more



collectors see the beauty of the patterns, designs and fine marquetry. When Will Stribos sold his large Russian Puzzle Box, he had a tear in his eye!

MTG: How many Russian puzzle-box designers are there now?

Mallorca Puzzles: Not many now. Just a few in Siberia that makes trick boxes. There are only a few carpenters left.

MTG: What can you tell me about the shop and its history?

Mallorca Puzzles: In 1996 I started selling puzzles on markets with my sister Anja & Jean-Claude in Oberhausen, Germany and without their help it would be very difficult for me to start this nice business. In 1997,

I started to sell mechanical puzzles in the Eastern areas of the Majorca island, as a backpacker in the small evening markets. This proved to be popular so I gained permission to develop the sale of wooden puzzles further and I was given permission to sell puzzles 7-days a week, from Easter to the end of October.

During the winter, I returned to Germany for the Christmas markets to sell puzzles with Jean-Claude Constantin, who is my brother in law and a famous Puzzle-Designer. At this time, I also constructed the stylish stalls on several Christmas Markets in Europe, from Rom to Milton Keynes (in the north of London).

After two years I started selling mechanical wooden puzzles in day markets also and I was now attending

twenty-six markets a week with six sellers every Wednesday morning and evenings all across the east side of the island with one market stall in Andratx, located in the west.

MTG: Are you still attending markets now in Majorca?

Mallorca Puzzles: No no! We stopped them three or four years ago. Since we obtained the shop, originally on another side street, we don't have time for the markets any more. However, the quality of life was easier with the markets as it was less stressful (no rates etc.)

MTG: In the beginning, what types of puzzles were you selling?

Mallorca Puzzles: We mainly started with Jean-Claude Constantin puzzles





and some Japanese boxes and padlocks.

MTG: When did your terrific Mallorca Puzzles open?

Mallorca Puzzles: Gülçin and I opened the shop in 2007 on another side street to the one we are on as previously stated. It wasn't a main street like the current Mallorca Puzzles. It was very difficult at the start as the side street doesn't get as many customers and visitors.

MTG: What does the Puzzle² mean on your store banner? Maths or the 2nd store?

Mallorca Puzzles: (Laughs!) Many people ask us where is the 1st puzzle shop. The symbol was chosen as many puzzles require a mathematical solution. Sometimes when a puzzle is really, really hard, you

need to understand some form of mathematics.

When we had the shop on the other side street it wasn't very successful, and we knew we had to move. We believed in the puzzles, it was just the location of the shop. The range of mechanical puzzles was great, as were the prices we were offering. We took the decision to change the situation and try again at this site.

Many puzzle designers told us not to open a shop, but we knew we could do it. The first shop was very, very beautiful, but we had to move, even though the rates were higher. We have more pressure here.

MTG: In Europe, there are not many puzzles stores apart from yourself and Village Games that has been trading next to Camden Lock since 1981.

When customers, at Mallorca Puzzles get to have fun, they laugh and play with time, not against time.



PHOTO

CAPTION Sven's original market store.

Mallorca Puzzles: Yes, Ray and Barbara. Ray was my exchange assistant in London 2016 and I was very happy and proud about that.

MTG: In Mallorca Puzzles what puzzles and puzzle categories tend to be the most popular?

Mallorca Puzzles: It vastly depends on the season and also when the visitors and children come. Many people come and buy puzzles for children. In Summer it is very busy, filled with families. In Spring and Autumn, for example from September onwards, we are less busy with not as many customers so we can take longer with individuals, to support and discuss the puzzles they find fascinating. The last two or three years there has been a growing demand again for Rubik's and twisty cubes.

We have over 60 different twisty

mechanical puzzles in different shapes and sizes. We obviously sell a lot of wooden puzzles and metal puzzles as well, however, most of our customers are normal families, not collectors. They come in, make a purchase of a puzzle or game such as tangrams, snake cubes, easy trick boxes etc, and often they come back for more.

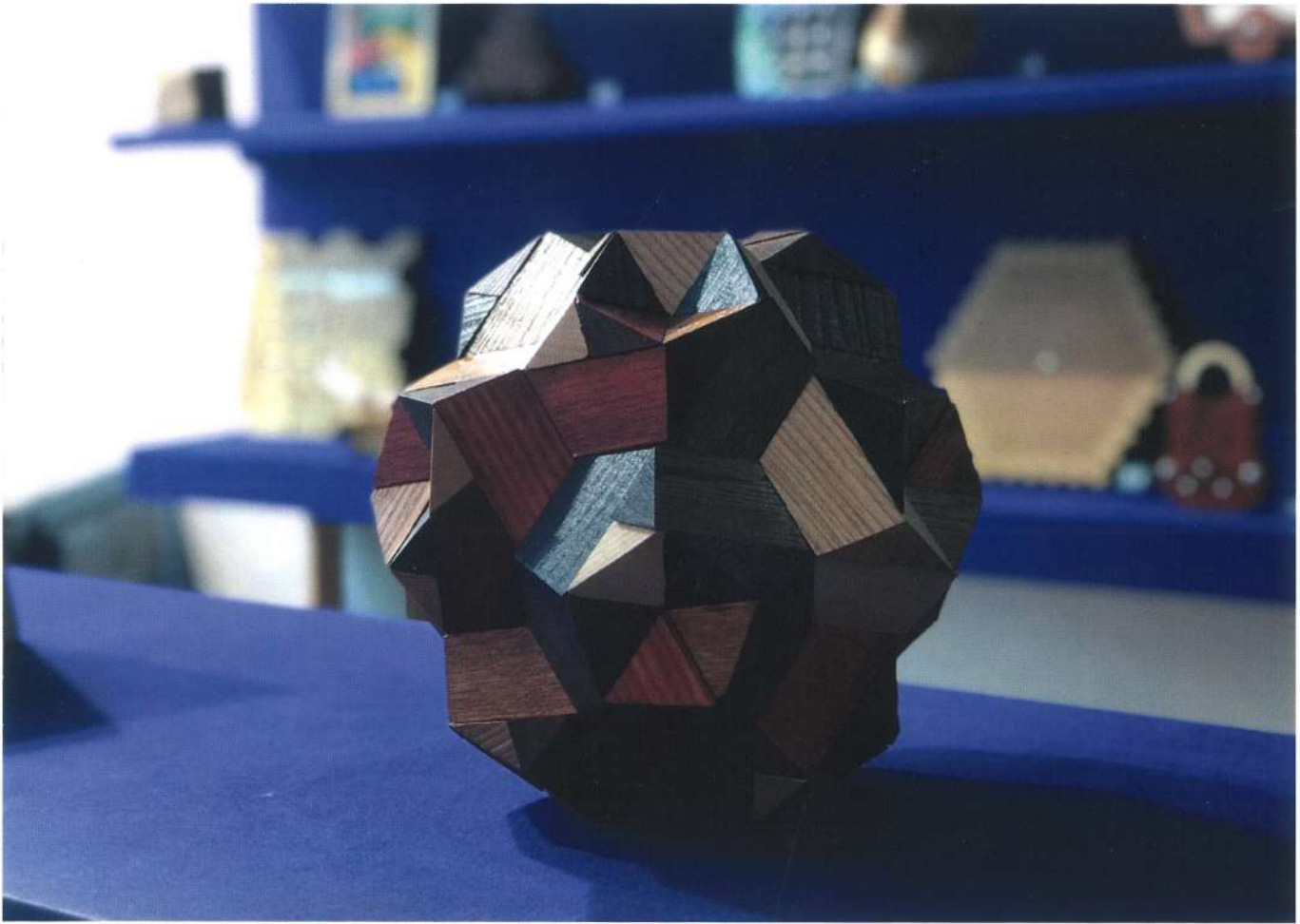
Just as we did when we started collecting. Once they have one or two, they go in the direction they like. They become little collectors and revisit us when they return to the island again. Some come every year to keep themselves busy at the beach. Our main idea here is play! The idea of our shop is not to solve. When you have children, they want to play. They don't want to solve. Our son loves football. If he was given the opportunity to play with Barcelona and Messi, then given the option to play for 90 minutes and lose 15-0

against the team, or play for just 5 minutes and score a penalty and win, he would choose the 90 minutes.

Our philosophy at Mallorca Puzzles is play! When customers come into our shop we often give them a metal ring, a string puzzle or a trick box. At first they tell us they are busy. Two-hours or three hours later, they are still here and find that playing with puzzles is relaxing.

Playing is very relaxing. Puzzles are very similar to reading a really enjoyable book. Everyone enjoys reading a book.

At the end of the book, you often find that you start to read more slowly because you don't want to finish the book. Diving, which I enjoy, is also very similar. When you go into the water, you enjoy it so much you don't want to come out. Children understand this. When we become



adults, maybe because of the stress of everyday things, fear of failure, the focus on time, we change and want to solve it as quickly as possible so we don't have to play for too long. Everything is focussed on time.

MTG: How about staff? Do they love playing?

Mallorca Puzzles: When we get new staff, we tell them not to sell. We don't put employees under pressure to sell. We want them to spread the love of puzzles. Our customers, all our visitors need to go out fascinated and happy they have found us and spent some time with us. If not, I want to know why?

Our customers see this, without the typical pressure of a shop. That is why we also play classical music in the store. We have thousands of customers, who come in enjoy the environment we offer.

That is our concept. Our nature. Our natural way. Mallorca Puzzles is a hobby and a business. We are very fortunate. For more information, please visit our website or our social media page, but don't be disappointed, it is not up-to date. We'd rather spend our time in the shop than at our website. So pop in and check out all of the amazing puzzles we provide. When customers, at Mallorca Puzzles get to have fun, they laugh and play with time, not against time.

MTG: Sven and Gülcin, thank you for the warm and lovely hospitality If you are on the beautiful island of Majorca, ensure you visit the store in Palma, I'm sure you'll leave with one or two new puzzles.

<https://mallorca-puzzles.com>
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Palma de Mallorca.

Sven: P.S. Good news: Today a new puzzle arrived. It seems to be, that our next generation is also puzzle infected. Jules, my nephew, the son of my sister Anja & Jean-Claude Constantin, has invented his first puzzle and of course, it's a trick lock!

