

Baukasten, Naef Spiel, 1956
Entwurf: Kurt Naef
Herstellung: Naef Spiele AG, Zeiningen, CH
Material/Technik: Ahorn, gebeizt
Eigentum: Museum für Gestaltung Zürich / ZHdK



The carpenter and interior designer Kurt Naef (1926–2006) designed a simple building block as an element in a construction system, permitting the creation of new structural forms out of wooden blocks. The so-called Naef block is still produced today by Naef Spiele AG and is considered a classic.

After apprenticing as a carpenter and studying interior design at the Kunstgewerbeschule Basel, Kurt Naef (1926–2006) remained in Basel and opened a furniture and interior design store there. He received so many requests for well-crafted toys that Naef decided to produce and offer a toy of his own design in 1956. Unlike the sculptor Antonio Vitali, whose sculptural wood figures Naef added to his product range in 1958, the carpenter and interior designer took a more pragmatic approach to the material of wood and planned his toys from the outset for machine production. By making diagonal cuts into a wooden cube on two opposite sides, he created a block with multiple connection options. Children could not only stack or line up the uniquely shaped blocks but also wedge them together to build a tower. Structures could be given daringly cantilevered overhangs or could grow broader toward the top.

In principle, Naef used eight saw cuts to make a simple building block into an element of a construction system. This rational approach to toy design appealed to the Swiss Werkbund, which presented the Naef blocks with the “Die gute Form” seal of approval in 1960. In 1967, the Naef company opened a production facility in Zeiningen to manufacture Naef’s toys as well as those by other designers. Trading relations were established, especially with Japan, where since 1971 the popular Swiss toy brand has been distributed exclusively by the Tokyo company Atelier Niki Tiki. While in 2012 production was relocated to southern Germany, management, administration, and development remained in Zofingen, where a small museum was founded. (Renate Menzi)

<https://www.eguide.ch/en/objekt/naef-spiel/>