

# The Master of Magic Boxes

Manfred Klaghofer – passionate hunter-gatherer

Text and photos by Hanno Rhomberg

Near Schloss Schönbrunn, attached to the façade of classic Viennese town house, you can find a colourful sign, guiding you to “Zauberkastenmuseum” – the museum of magic boxes.

Nearly every famous magician began with a magic box. But one has to admit, that many children might be overwhelmed by the colourful plastic and carton props. The art of magic often looks so simple, but when you see a magic box as the key to immediate success, you soon will be disappointed. They are merely auxiliary items for creating illusions. The path from buying such a box and actually creating the wonders of the art of magic is a difficult one that challenges children, teenagers and sometimes even adults. It is especially for that reason, that a magic box is a present that challenges one’s apprehension and especially creativity.

But the path to success is one of trial and tribulation. While a professional magician performs for a new audience every night, the young student of the art of magic mainly “tortures” his parents and siblings, who – due to many repetitions and inadequate practice – often see through the illusion and henceforth destroy the magic. This might be one of the reasons why children who actually stick to the art of magic often develop tenacity to some surprising degree and are in many cases somewhat of a loner. This stage is usually followed by a “compulsory break” – caused by education and the temptations of the opposite (or in some cases same) sex – before one turns to the art of magic once again.

The history of magic boxes is a long one – beginning with the first magic kits and boxes 300 years ago, up to the latest models, which contain digital and audio-visual elements. The history of magic boxes is full of surprises. From beautifully lathed wood boxes, fine mechanical metal kits and chemistry sets up to cheap plastic models. For outsiders, a box of useless rubbish – the connoisseur however can use the kit to wow people.

Collectors concerned themselves with magic boxes ever since. But it is thanks to **Manfred Klaghofer**, who, by means of meticulous detail work, established this wonderful Viennese private museum, containing over 3,000 artefacts of the last 300 years. And his collection keeps growing. But be honest: Do you know a passionate collector that ever really finds himself able to stop collecting? I have to mention at this point, that Manfred’s collection even holds a place in the “Guinness Book of Records”.



Something special about Manfred Klaghofer’s collection is the fact, that he “shares” this treasure with the public. There are over 200 artefacts in the permanent exhibition, a special exhibition that changes annually and a quick look in his archives reveals the full extent of his collection.

But how does one create such a massive collection? Let Manfred speak for himself:

*“It was the year 1967; I was just 6 years old, when I got my first magical book. It was at that moment, that my love for the art of magic has been unleashed. It was already at Christmas the following year that the ‘Christkind’ got me my first, eagerly anticipated magic kit: “Der große Zauberer”, by **Martin Michalski** (Ravensburger), a gift I enjoyed to no end. Thank you, Mr. Michalski – and thank you Christkind – in this particular case, my dear Mama.*

*In the following years, my collection grew steadily – up to around 10 magic kits – until I could finally call myself a serious magician. And by that I mean my successful entrance examination with the magic society “Zauberkestl” at the age of 15. It is to “Zauberkestl” that I owe my routine – the essence of the art of magic – as they enabled me to perform in front of an audience on a regular basis and I subsequently was able to celebrate my first accomplishments with various performances in a variety of bigger and smaller venues (kindergartens, beer tents etc.).*

*At the age of 19, I ended my active career as magician for the time being, and dedicated myself to a variety of other interests.*