

to pay tribute to Ferran,” said coach Paco Roncero in reference to famed molecular chef Ferran Adrià. “And we also wanted something transparent to show off the scallops.”

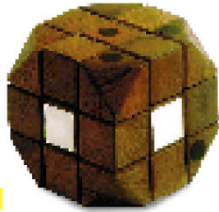
But it doesn't pay to get too far ahead of the jury, a lesson that France and the Scandinavian countries have learned to good effect. “You have to stay in the comfort zone of the judges,” says Roland Henin, the U.S. team's French-born coach. “They can't be tasting or looking at something they don't know, because you'll lose them.” Innovative Copenhagen chef René Redzepi, who served on the jury, was a little regretful about that comfort zone. “I was hoping it wouldn't be luxury item upon luxury item, that they would strip away the pretension,” he says after tasting 12 plates of beef on the first day. “But that wasn't quite the case. Still, the fact that I'm here means the contest is changing.”

The U.S. team certainly hoped for change. Hollingsworth and Guest spent nearly five months training for the Lyons event, motivated, Hollingsworth says, “by the sense that the U.S. is always the underdog. A lot of Europeans still think that American cuisine is hamburgers and hotdogs. That just makes me want to strive harder.” At their kitchen in California, they ran time trials, tinkering with everything from the garnish on their pistachio-crusted cod to the shape of their beef filet (in the end, it went from square to round), and learning to move past each other in a graceful ballet.

In the end, the American team placed sixth, tying its best-ever result from 2003. Norway, Sweden and France—the teams that always do well—maintained their hold. As his girlfriend, Kate Laughlin, waited with tears in her eyes, Hollingsworth said he was proud of his team but had a hunch why they had not placed higher: “What we do is more modern. It's not in the style of Bocuse d'Or. American food is a little more refreshing.” ■

## GAMES

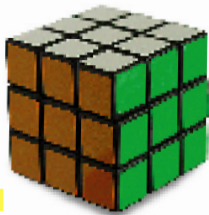
# A Puzzling Success. As the inventor of the Rubik's Cube unveils his latest toy, the original experiences a surprise comeback



1974

### Prototype

*Fascinated by notions of space, Rubik made this wooden puzzle in his spare time and spent several months attempting to solve it*



1975

### The original

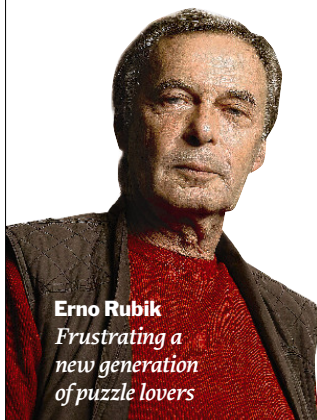
*Rubik's patented Magic Cube was available only in Hungary until 1980, when authorities okayed exports to the West*



2009

### Rubik's 360

*By understanding the axis of rotation of three transparent spheres, players can guide six colored balls into their matching domes*



**Erno Rubik**  
*Frustrating a new generation of puzzle lovers*

BY WILLIAM LEE ADAMS

THERE ARE MANY REASONS for the enduring popularity of the Rubik's Cube, according to its reclusive Hungarian inventor, Erno Rubik. The iconic toy is an intellectual challenge, it's accessible to people from all cultures, and it helps provide a sense of order and stability in an uncertain world. But the fundamental reason 350 million cubes have sold since 1980, Rubik says from his studio in Budapest, is its design: “People like its beauty, simplicity and form. It's really not a puzzle or a toy. It's a piece of art.”

Whatever the magic, it's still working. As toy stores around the world feel the chill of recession, the Rubik's Cube is in the middle of a comeback. Global sales reached 15 million last year, up 3 million over 2007, according to Seven Towns Limited, the British firm that licenses all of Rubik's creations. When New York City toy retailer FAO Schwarz reintroduced the Cube 18 months ago it became one of the store's Top 20 selling toys within weeks; sales have stayed steady despite the economic downturn. In Britain, Cube sales are up 300% over the past two years. “People have gone back to safe brands that have been on the market for a while and that they have confidence in,” says Gary Grant, chairman of Britain's Toy Retailers Association, noting that playtime staples such as Lego and Playmobil are also faring well despite the recession.

The Rubik's Cube certainly makes a good austerity toy: it can take years to solve and it's virtually indestructible—apart from the easily removed colored stickers. (Not that anyone ever cheated by swap-

ping the stickers, of course.) The Cube is also benefiting from nostalgia for the 1980s, when many parents of today's kids first encountered the toy. “In the crazy times that we live in, adults are looking for those things that remind them of happier times,” says David Niggli, FAO Schwarz's president and chief merchandising officer. “I've seen 40-year-olds and 8-year-olds stop by and spend hours trying to figure it out.”

Little wonder that YouTube has some 38,000 videos, including tutorials, that feature the puzzle, or that clubs such as the World Cube Association (WCA) have boomed lately. The WCA organizes international “speedcubing” contests—the next competition takes place in Sweden on Feb. 7. In 2003 it signed up just 89 new members; last year it added 2,200. “It's a puzzle of all times and all ages,” says Ron van Bruchem, 41, the Dutch co-founder of the WCA. Says Rubik: “Not a lot of objects can generate emotions in human beings. The Cube is one of them.”

On Feb. 5, Rubik's latest creation, the Rubik's 360, will debut at the Nuremberg Toy Fair, ahead of its worldwide release in August. The new puzzle is a transparent orb consisting of three spheres and six colored balls that must be maneuvered into color-coded domes. Does it stand up against the original? “If you have many children, the first one is always different because you can only have one child who is the first,” Rubik says. “They have different natures and talents for you to love.” In an industry looking for a boost, a little sibling rivalry will be welcome.

—WITH REPORTING BY THEUNIS BATES/LONDON ■

**Rubik Revealed** Look out for an exclusive video of Erno Rubik showing off his new toy, at [time.com/rubik](http://time.com/rubik)

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