

# Designer Report

## Tom Karen

### Contents

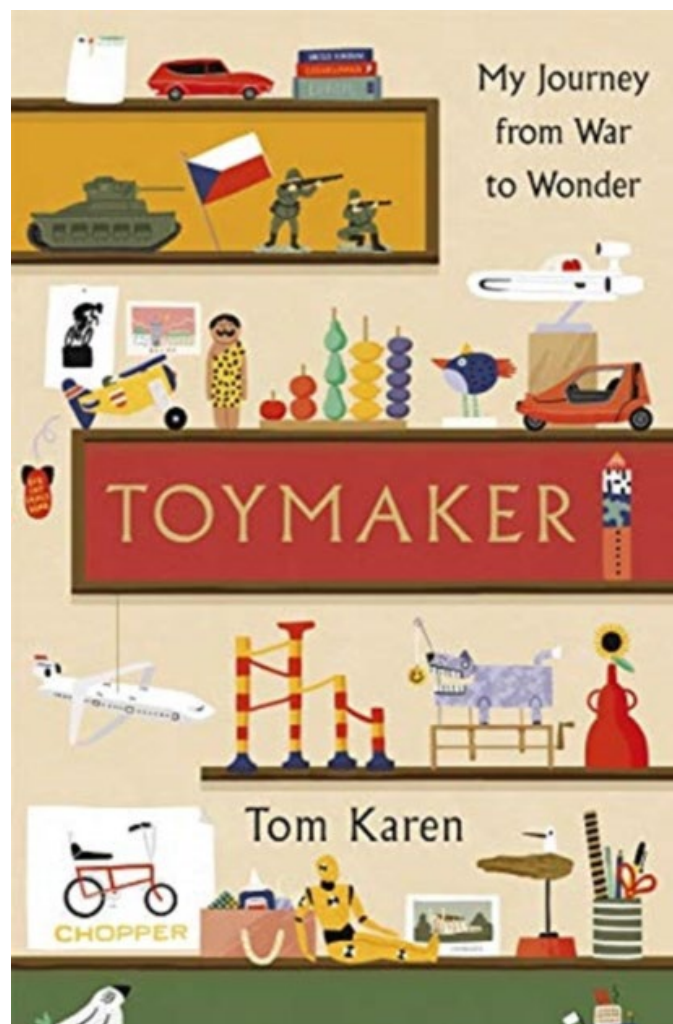
1. Introduction to Tom Karen
2. Methodology and Philosophy
3. Product and Manufacturing
4. How Tom Karen's work relates to my project



## Introduction to Tom Karen

British industrial designer Tom Karen OBE was the managing Director and Chief Designer of Ogle Design. He studied aeronautical engineering at Loughborough College, sparking his fascination with aviation, and then enrolled at London's Central School of Arts and Crafts. His design focus progressed from automobiles and aviation to toys with an identifiable theme of colour and playfulness.

Karen once stated that 'I find it hugely rewarding to know that millions of children round the world have derived endless pleasure playing with my marble run'. His fascination with playthings continued during his retirement until his death on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2022.



Karen's autobiography, 'Toymaker' (2020)

## Methodology and Philosophy

Karen's design philosophy involved experimenting with colour and form, prioritising the playing child over the paying adult. The iconic Raleigh Chopper is a colourfully cartoonish bicycle Karen designed with a large back wheel to imitate that of a dragster. He noted that he 'always met people who either had a Chopper or badly wanted one'.

Karen also took inspiration from observing his children and grandchildren interacting with games. Seeing the enjoyment his children derived from a fixed wooden marble game motivated him to design the renowned Marble Run game that can be disassembled and reassembled. He used brightly coloured plastic to create satisfying noises and visuals. However, Karen stated that 'I would love toys, whether or not I had children and grandchildren' as a way of keeping young at heart.



Tom Karen with his Raleigh Chopper Bicycle designed in 1969

## Product and Manufacturing

Marble Run is a series of three-dimensional, coloured, plastic (typically pigmented BPA) maze tracks that are injection or blow moulded. This simplifies mass production for the different shaped pieces.

They are connected by a slotting mechanism that allows pieces to 'snap' together. This enables the child to construct and disassemble various structural forms with minimal effort and no equipment. It also encourages creativity and develops the child's visual tracking, hand-eye co-ordination, and comprehension of gravity. Furthermore, it makes the game more physically interactive and engaging. The plastic pieces have some flexibility to compensate for a child's rough-handedness and avoid breaking. They also create a satisfying sound to maximise sensory satisfaction.



Different Marble Run pieces with slotting mechanisms

## How Tom Karen's Work Relates to My Project

The Marble Run, Karen's self-proclaimed 'most inspired creation' shares similar aspects with my marble puzzle maze. Both games are very interactive by enabling the user to control the marble's path, educating children about motion, speed, and direction. Similarly, I have incorporated acrylic into my design to replicate the satisfying sound the marble makes when rolling. I will also use colour to make the design aesthetically interesting and thematic. The ability to disassemble and reassemble Marble Run also compares to my game's puzzle piece design which enables endless possibilities to prevent repetitive gameplay.



Kiddicraft Marble Run