

The University of Western Ontario

# Western

spring 08

ALUMNI GAZETTE

## Bill Payne toys with success



Bill Payne and a game of Villa Paletti, which won the Spiel des Jahres in Germany, with a crash. The game is for two to four building architects, ages eight and up. Photos by Rachel Lincoln.

## Payne's games pay off with worldwide success

By Kym Wolfe, BA'82

When Bill Payne, BA'93, graduated from Western with a degree in Sociology, London was slowly emerging from an economic recession and jobs were not plentiful. Payne had no idea what kind of career to pursue, but he did have one ultimate goal – to work at something he had a passion for, something that he would want to do for the next 40 years. He looked at his list of options, and decided to become a games inventor.

In 2007 Payne's Polly the Porcupine memory game for children was named Game of the Year in Finland. In 2002 his game Villa Paletti was named the Spiel des Jahres (Game of the Year) in Germany, considered by people in the industry to be the most prestigious award for board and card games. In total, including his third game Naughty Dogs, more than 600,000 of his games have been sold around the world.

Payne's games are marketed for children, from four to eight years and up, but Villa Paletti is also popular among

adults especially in Europe. You can easily find videos of people playing on YouTube and other Internet sites.

It's not easy for Payne to predict which of his inventions will make the journey from idea to prototype to manufacturers' toy fairs, and ultimately to production. He's had hundreds of ideas for games, about 150 of them of sufficient quality that he has developed homemade prototypes for them. "I've always been inventive, and I see things differently than someone else might. But most of the stuff I invent is awful and will never get to market," he says modestly.

From the beginning, Payne's two nephews, now 10 and 14, have been the first to test his homemade prototypes. Once they've been test driven and tweaked, Payne submits new game ideas to his agent in Israel. Even great ideas might be turned down, Payne explains. "It must be extremely unique. If there is anything similar out there, he won't handle it."

Once his agent accepts a game, a professional prototype is developed and exhibited at major toy fairs

around the world. Four of Payne's games are currently at that stage. If a manufacturer decides to license one for mass-production, it will take another two years before it gets to market.

There is no magic formula to determine which kind of toy will catch a manufacturer's eye or strike a game player's fancy. Payne has found the most demand for his games outside of the North American market, particularly in Europe where games based on licensed products or television shows are generally frowned upon.

The London inventor believes that traditional, hands-on games have a greater longevity than computer games, and that good ones never go out of style. While many studies have documented the benefits of playing tactile games with children, for Payne one of the biggest pluses is the personal social contact. "Video games can be very isolating," he says. "I like games that encourage people to interact face to face." ☺