

Counter 19
Decembre 2002

THE ANTONI GAUDÍ TILE GAME

CASA Consultors i Arquitectes SL

2-6 players, 30-45 minutes

designed by Oriol Comas & Jep Ferret

reviewed by Stuart Dagger

Antoni Gaudí was one of the great architects of the last 150 years and he left his mark on Barcelona in the first quarter of the 20th century in much the way that Christopher Wren did on London in the last quarter of the 17th. 2002 is the 150th anniversary of his birth and Spain is celebrating it as "International Gaudí Year". This game, which is based on a tile that he designed for one of his buildings, is one of the results of those celebrations.

The idea behind the tile is that when you look at a single one, all you see is an abstract and somewhat random set of lines, but that when the tiles are placed together, a sea creature in the form of a starfish, a conch or a jellyfish appears at each vertex. The tiles that Gaudí used in his paving were of green nephrite, a mineral with a natural luminosity which enhances the marine effect, but for the purposes of this game they have been coloured green, orange and blue. Some of them are monochrome, some have two colours and some have three. With the particoloured ones the colour boundaries coincide with those of the three diamond shapes into which the graphical components divide the hexagon.

The pictures appear when you place the tiles together so that like is adjacent to like in the graphics. In the game you need to do this, but you also have to match like to like with the colours, so that now the creatures which appear are not just conches, starfish and jellyfish, but orange conches, green starfish, and so on.

At the beginning of the game each player is dealt two cards, one specifying a colour and one a creature. These give you the pictures that you will be trying to form. So, for example, I could have been dealt 'orange' and 'starfish' and that would mean that my points will come from forming any orange animal and any colour of starfish. The creature on both cards – orange starfish in this case – will net me double points. The cards are dealt face down and so at the start of the game you will not know what your opponents' targets are. Deducing them will be something you will need to do as quickly as possible once the tiles start going down if you are to play effectively.

The tessellation is begun by placing, in the middle of the table, a tile showing all three colours. The remainder are shuffled face-down and each player draws three. On your turn you place one, two or three tiles subject to the following rules:

1. Each tile must be adjacent to at least one tile that is already on the table. Touching edges must match in both colour and design.
2. If you play 2 or 3 tiles, they must each touch one of the others. However, if you are playing three, they must not touch both of the others. (That last restriction is to stop you playing a complete creature and picking up a lucky and risk-free point.)
3. If you play 2 tiles, you must complete at least one animal, your own or not. If you play 3 tiles, you must complete two animals.

When you complete an animal that corresponds with one or both of your colour/creature objectives, you place one of your markers on it. If you complete an animal that is not on your list, no marker is placed. At the end of your turn you draw new tiles to make your hand back up to three.

If you are unable to play a legal tile on your turn,

you discard one and draw a replacement, and you keep doing that until you have a tile which you can play.

The game ends when both the draw pile and one of the players have no tiles remaining. You then score one point for each animal that appears on your cards *and* which has been marked with one of your counters. For the animal on both cards you score two points. Completed animals with no marker on them score nothing.

Play is a combination of scoring points for yourself and trying to deny them to others. There are two ways to do the latter. One is to complete the creature that you figure a rival was hoping to complete. This may not score a point for you, but it will deny one to them. The other is to make it harder for a tile to be placed in a gap by increasing the number of matches that would need to be made. When a gap has only two edges that require to be matched, the chances that your opponent will have a tile that will fit are quite high, but if you build round the gap and thereby increase the number of necessary matches to three or even four, they will drop sharply. These "hostile" plays are not purely negative, since they also provide a means of improving your hand by ridding it of tiles that you don't want, thereby making space for new ones that you hope will be better.

These opportunities for scoring points, hand management and intervening in the plans of the other players give you a reasonable amount to think about and mean that this is a "real game". When I first opened the box and read the booklet, my fear was that it would turn out to be one of those things dreamed up by an organizing committee. You know how it goes: someone decides that the Gaudí anniversary should be commemorated and a roomful of people then sit around desperately trying to think of ways in which this could be done. "I know", says one of them, "We have got these famous graphics. Let's do a puzzle or a boardgame with them.". And the two most junior members of the committee are then given the project. That is not what has happened here, as a look at the website will confirm. This is a game designed by games enthusiasts and, while it is not Hall of Fame material, it is worth playing.

We enjoyed it and shall be playing it again. The

play is interesting and not just a matter of hoping that you get lucky and draw the right tiles, though as with all tile laying games, including the likes of Carcassonne, there is a significant element of that involved. You can also be lucky or unlucky in the cards you are dealt at the start. Having a right-hand opponent neither of whose objectives coincide with yours makes for an easier ride than does having one who is aiming for the same things. People who fume about such inequities should take note, but for those who don't mind that these things will sometimes happen, the game is worth considering.

The rules are in Catalan, but also in English, French, German, Japanese and Spanish. You will have no difficulty with them, since – Adlung please note – the translations have been done by native speakers. The components and the packaging are up to the standard that you would get from the top German companies. To find out more, take a look at the website www.gaudipanot.com, where you can find ordering information, the rules and some pictures, which include one showing the designers lying on Gaudí's pavement. Including postage, the cost of the game is €39 in Spain, €44 in the rest of Europe and €49 outside Europe.