

# Sinfo

Stories from Slovenia

**IN FOCUS**

Ten Faces of Slovenia

**I FEEL  
SLOVENIA**



**I FEEL  
SLOVENIA**

**Sinfo**

**SLOVENIAN INFORMATION**

**www.slovenia.si**  
**www.ukom.gov.si**

**Published by**  
Government Communication Office

**Editor-in-Chief**  
Nataša Bušljeta, M.Sc.

**Executive Editor**  
Vesna Žarkovič

**Editorial Board**  
Danila Golob, Brigita Juhart, Irena Kogoj,  
Uroš Mahkovec, Danila Mašić, Polona  
Prešeren, Livija Kovač Kostantinovič

**Design**  
Irena Kogoj

**Photo Editor**  
Bojan Pernek

**Photo on the front page**  
Mostphotos

**Translation**  
Secretariat-General of the Government of  
the Republic of Slovenia, Translation and  
Interpretation Division, PSD d.o.o.

**Language editing**  
Amidas

**Copy writer editing**  
Marcus Ferrar

**Print**  
Collegium Graphicum d.o.o., Slovenia

**Number of copies**  
3000

**ISSN**  
1854-0805



Photo: Mateja Jurdovič Potočnik


## ON TOP OF THE WORLD

With a clear vision, steadfast persistence and boldness, ten Slovenians went beyond the boundaries of mediocrity and broke through with their creativity: by designing the most prestigious brands, producing exhaust pipes for the most advanced motorcycles and high-performance sports cars around the world, inventions with a lasting impact on the world, archaeological finds which shifted the boundaries of science, visually perfected films and the most creative artistic projects. They succeeded because, despite their initial problems, they did not give up but simply persisted. And believed that one day they would succeed and be on top of the world.

We feature the TOM company, which the employees raised from the ashes. When one of the largest producers of upholstered furniture in Slovenia went bankrupt in 2010, ten of the workers decided to continue making sofas. They combined their energy, knowledge and skills, collected the money they had saved up and established a new company, MTOM.

Slovenians are known for their close connection with the soil, and in recent times, home-grown food or organic gardening have been gaining popularity. Some of the experts who develop organic, natural and homeopathic products for plant care and environment protection against pests are particularly interesting.

Bread has always been important: as food, part of our cultural heritage and a ritual symbol. It is the material understanding of abundance, an attitude to the harvest, a tangible metaphor for a new-born child. Our love for bread is deep and abiding.

  
**Vesna Žarkovič**, Executive Editor



- 8 DR IVAN ŠPRAJC  
The Slovenian Indiana Jones for the Mayan civilisation
- 12 IGOR AKRAPOVIČ  
Making exhaust systems for the world's cars and motor-cycles
- 16 ANDREJ MERCINA  
A Slovenian architect for the world
- 22 GREGOR KRESAL  
Alpinist, architect and David Lynch Foundation grantee
- 26 ROK ŽGALIN KOBE  
Designer for the Danish Company LEGO
- 30 MIKI MUSTER  
Funny bunnies preparing Slovene children for bed
- 34 PETER FLORJANČIČ  
Inventor extraordinary, backed by royalty
- 42 LARA BOHINC  
Creating an elite global brand
- 54 LJUBLJANA FASHION WEEK  
"I feel SLOVEnia.Green.Active.Healthy."
- 59 HOMEOGARDEN  
Everything you need for organic gardening
- 74 SLOVENIAN'S LOVE FOR BREAD  
The best bread is always made at home
- 78 JANEZ VAJKARD VALVASOR  
The most distinguished Slovene of the 17th century
- 80 THE MYSTERIOUS AND MIRACULOUS LAKE CERKNICA  
No rules for the movement







# SinfO

in your hands, on your computers and tablets.  
Share with us: [sinfomagazine.ukom@gov.si](mailto:sinfomagazine.ukom@gov.si)

## TEN FACES OF SLOVENIA

We present ten Slovenians who have achieved global breakthroughs. With a strong vision, steadfast persistence and boldness, they rose above average. Their names are synonymous with global trademarks or inseparably linked with the biggest brand names. They succeeded because they did not let their problems stop them, and they believed in themselves and their work. This edition focuses on their stories.





DR IVAN ŠPRAJC

# The Slovenian Indiana Jones for the Mayan civilisation

VESNA ŽARKOVIČ

News last year of newly discovered Mayan archaeological sites in Mexico put the spotlight on Slovenian archaeologist Dr Ivan Šprajc and the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU).

Šprajc played a leading role in the discoveries, which attracted attention around the world.

Šprajc, a sixty-year old expert in Mayan archaeology, together with an international team of archaeologists, has been discovering the ruins of ancient Mayan cities for several years in Mexico, on the barely passable terrain of Calakmul on the Yucatan peninsula. The discoveries have shed important light on both the early and late periods of the Mayan civilisation.

Based on the discovery of these archaeological sites in recent years during field research by Ivan Šprajc, UNESCO placed the southern part of the Calakmul biosphere on the World Heritage List as a natural and cultural site.

## HE HAS BEEN CONNECTED WITH MEXICO FOR A LONG TIME

In addition to working at Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and History, he received his master's degree and doctorate there. The Institute where he was employed offered funding for archaeological research in less researched areas. He submitted a project proposal that was approved and funded, and two seasons passed working thereon. He further intensified his knowledge of the Mayan civilisation to such an extent that he decided to continue this cooperation after returning to Ljubljana.

He considers the Mayans to be utterly fascinating. He also deals with archaeoastronomy and the Mayas were certainly the best astronomers in pre-Columbian America in general.

"As to the essence of man, there is no difference between modern and ancient man: the urge to prevail has always been present, and therefore wars were fought in the past and wars are still fought today".



Structure 20 on the Chicanná site.  
Photo: Dušan Arzenšek



In the expedition, classical aerial photographs intended for photogrammetric purposes are used. "With the stereoscope, three-dimensional photos are viewed and therefore we see the configuration of the grounds and thus are able to notice "suspicious" elements jutting from the landscape, sometimes even squares and buildings, although everything is overgrown with tropical forests. And this provides a basis for our work," explains Šprajc.

### The ruins of the newly discovered Mayan cities are located in a barely passable area.

"It takes a lot of time to review the aerial photographs, as there are several hundred for the entire area; then it is necessary to review the existing bibliography and the register of Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and History, where a catalogue of all sites is maintained." After that, the project proposal is submitted to possible sponsors and patrons, and when the funds have been raised, permission from Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and History is required, as each project needs to be approved by its Board of Anthropology. If funding allows it, Šprajc hopes to continue with work in the wider region. This requires more systematic research with excavations.

It is hard but romantic work. In the impassable jungles Šprajc has already come across a jaguar and puma, but more dangerous were his encounters with venomous snakes and insects. However, the risks and efforts all seem worth it when a new Mayan settlement is discovered.

In 2008, a documentary film about Šprajc entitled "Mysteries of Yucatan – The Kings' Wall" was made. A film about a real-life Indiana Jones.





IGOR AKRAPOVIČ

# Making exhaust systems for the world's cars and motor-cycles

UROŠ MAHKOVEC, PHOTO: DANIEL NOVAKOVIĆ/STA

Akrapovič, d. d. is one of Slovenia's most recognised and appreciated global brands. The company produces high-quality exhaust systems for motorcycles and cars, as well as of carbon fibre parts. Its products are used in the most prestigious vehicles all over the world.

**Akrapovič built itself into a global brand in less than 25 years. What triggered such rapid growth – a passion for racing, a desire to win, or ...?**

Instrumental in building our own brand was our presence in international competitions. We began at the Pro Superbike race in Germany in 1993, and by 1996 our products had already been adopted by Kawasaki. We currently sponsor more than 80 teams. The brand is expanding thanks to its visibility at international racing events, well organised marketing and the development of our own designs. We have recently established our own creative agency which prepares catalogues and brochures, creates our website, organises our participation at trade fairs, etc. We don't leave anything to chance.

**From motorcycles you have moved to cars. Was this a planned and considered decision, or more of a chance development and new challenge? Or perhaps a desire to experiment and succeed in a new field?**

It was a well-considered strategic decision. I firmly believe that a company must stand on several pillars. The car and motorcycle segments are the two crucial ones, but we also have our own foundry for composite materials, which have huge development possibilities. Entering the car industry was not easy, and it took us several years to have positive results. The investment was huge. We invested almost all profits from the motorcycles segment in the development of car exhausts and the visibility of the brand on the car market, where the majority of customers were not yet familiar with our products. The beginnings were tough; however, cooperation with Audi and Aston Martin in Le Mans, and with BMW in DTM steadily increased our visibility, as did also the record set by Renault at Nürburgring.

Currently the car exhaust segment represents 30% of our production, but I am confident that in three or four years sales in this segment will overtake that of motorcycles. To give you an example, last year's 20% growth was mostly due to the car segment. The motorcycles market is limited, and although last year the situation slightly improved, it cannot be compared to the potential of the car segment.

**You succeeded in wiping out the competition in the two-wheeler market; your reputation in the car market is growing – what is your advantage over your competitors?**

I consider that our main advantage is our product – the development effort behind it and the brand. We are especially known for delivering motorcycle or car exhaust systems that are often exactly the same as those used by racing teams, and in any event made of the same materials and in the exact same way.

Several of our competitors are capable of making racing team-quality exhausts, but are selling products of a considerably lower level, perhaps manufactured in Asia, where the cost of labour is lower, but the quality of the product is also correspondingly lower.

**"We keep our quality at the highest levels also by not using hardly any outsourcing. Everything is manufactured in-house, from the pipes on up, except for the springs and labels, of course."**

**Is the (attempted) copying of your products by the competition still the greatest compliment?**

It is at the beginning, but when this causes problems with sales, and in particular with warranty claims concerning counterfeit products, it is no longer a laughing matter. When you receive a guarantee claim for an exhaust bearing "your mark" and you find out the product is a counterfeit, it is very difficult to explain to the customer that he has bought a counterfeit. In this era of internet connectivity, one can generate quite a lot of negative publicity if you do not act on the customer's claim, as often the customer simply will not accept that the purchased product is a counterfeit.

The manner in which such inconveniences are resolved is of utmost importance. For this reason, we have intensified our activities concerning copyright protection and carry out systematic monitoring of the sector. We found out years ago that often our competitors simply buy our exhausts and then copy them. In order to avoid this practice, we sometimes put our exhaust systems on the market at the very last moment, just before the motorcycle is also released. We wait so as not to allow copycats enough time to copy our product before the motorcycle is out. However, counterfeiting is a global problem and we need to tackle it.

**In your company, the magic material is titanium, you say the future lies therein ... why are there no real competitors in this field?**

Mainly because this is a field where we closely cooperate with two Japanese manufacturers, Kobe Steel and Nippon Steel; they are developing high-temperature-resistant materials, special titanium alloys. Each company has a particular patented alloy, and together we carry out experiments and develop these materials, so we are at the top. Still, we must order the material at least a year and half in advance, so that the whole process of manufacturing from the raw material to sheet plates can be completed, as we are practically the only buyer of these high-temperature-resistant materials in the world. Others do not buy them at all, or only in very limited quantities, so in reality this is our competitive advantage.

**In motorcycle racing the first goal is to win, improving parts to achieve better performance comes second, but you are also expanding your product lines to target those users for whom the design and sound are a top priority.**

Sound, design, weight, brand, visibility ... all these are key factors that



affect sales. Car and motor enthusiasts are always keen to modify their vehicles, and exhausts, in particular regarding motorcycles, are the first element to be tackled. So this is a relatively large market with extremely rapid growth, in particular in the car segment.

**For the time being, you are marketing your products only within the relatively restricted circle of racing motorsports and among luxury car manufactures. Will this suffice to ensure the company's continued success, or are you considering expanding the circle of potential customers?**

In the area of motorcycles customization, such as offered by Harley Davidson, there are ample possibilities. Considering the extent of the market the opportunities are huge, however, we will need a completely new market approach. In some segments of the sports motorcycles sector, our competitors have a much larger market share than we do. To give an example, the market share of our competitor Ducati used to be 70%, while we only had 2%. But since we have been cooperating with Ducati regarding its GP Team, our share has rapidly increased. The market is constantly changing and requires daily adaptations; yet it is still true that a company may gain a larger piece of the pie by being more innovative and by working better.

If we look at the rising markets, such as Malaysia and Indonesia, the increase in the competitiveness of their economies results in a higher standard of living. Initially, in such regions there were only scooters and mopeds, while now we are already selling many of 400 cc and 600 cc cycles. Their purchasing power is expected to rise in the long-term, and due to climatic and traffic circumstances, there will be more and more motorcycles. So we need to focus on these markets.

**“We must constantly behave proactively, monitor global developments and act accordingly.”**


We currently employ 600 people, and we have recently opened new facilities in Črnomelj, where a rapid increase in both output and number of staff is planned.

Akrapovič, d. d., a business from Slovenia, is a manufacturer of high-quality exhaust systems for motorcycles and cars, as well as of carbon fibre parts. It is one of Slovenia's most recognised and valued global brands. Its products are used in the most prestigious motorcycles and sports cars all over the world.

In 2002, Akrapovič began to supply MotoGP teams with exhaust systems. In 2010, the company launched the production of car exhaust systems, and today they manufacture exhaust systems for most sports cars, including Audi, Ford, Mini, VW, Mercedes and BMW. In 2014, the Akrapovič Evolution Line exhaust system for the Ducati 1199 Panigale also won over the jury at the Red Dot competition.







ANDREJ MERCINA

## A Slovenian architect for the world

POLONA PREŠEREN

The Karl Lagerfeld store on the corner of the Champs-Élysées and rue Marbeuf.

The interior design of a mosque in Kuwait. The Dob Prison in Slovenia. The urban renewal of Ljubljana's Trnovski Pristan city centre. Private homes all over the world. The Lolita pastry cafe in the middle of Ljubljana.

The chain of Lagerfeld stores in Russia. All this and much more bear the signature of architect Andrej Mercina.

We sit in the garden in front of his Trije arhitekti architectural office in Ljubljana and bask in the warm spring sun. Andrej Mercina tells me that he spent his childhood in this garden, which now serves him as an inspiration and a small oasis in the middle of the city. Just before our meeting, he booked a plane ticket to Dubai, where he will meet with representatives of a local branding & fit-out company, their future partners in what is going to become *Trije arhitekti* Dubai office. But he still takes the time for our meeting, calmly and in no hurry.

### TRIJE ARHITEKTI

Architect Andrej Mercina possesses a truly impressive portfolio. His projects are so diverse there is no chance of him falling into a pattern. "Creativity does not follow a pattern. However, it is true that when you do something day after day, you do not see it as something fascinating at all. We are an excellent team," he tells me. He considers the concept of a team extremely important. He had it in mind when he conceived his architectural bureau.

The Trije arhitekti have never been just "three architects" as the name suggests.

**"I wanted a name that would be Slovenian and tell us something. Which is, that architecture is team work," explains Mercina.**

"Three is the smallest number you can have as a team. It is a common number in folklore, occurring everywhere and triggering positive associations. I am also the third generation of architects in our family and my grandfather said: 'Of course, this means us three.' So. Everyone can interpret the name in their own way."

In its years of operation the Trije arhitekti bureau has gone through some good and bad times, marked by the crisis. "You woke up one morning and there simply was no work. Everything stopped. Projects, the circulation of money. Your reaction to something like that gives you life experience."

**"You can learn a lot from a crisis and discover your faults. This is the key in a creative profession," remembers Mercina.**

"In such a situation it is important to think things through and examine oneself, and particularly to be careful where you put your energy." He decided to put his into achieving the goal of breaking out of the local sphere.

Today, he takes on very diverse projects and he enjoys drifting among them. This gives him the necessary distance. "It forces you to shift between different criteria and cultural environments. You ask yourself, what is still solid. And through the years you form your own common thread."

He has never wished his common thread to be something formal or to follow a specific style. Even in his relationship to the environment his thread is not permanent. In different parts of the world people have different relationships to the environment and they are all legitimate. And that is the basis. First, you have to grant legitimacy to all information (input) you receive, then you have to connect everything into a story, give it a character. "In this way unique stories are created. You can never do a thing in the same way," he says.

**"Designing is the easiest part of our profession. The hardest is to understand why you are designing something, to what purpose, ... and to find a focus."**

### SENSITIVITY IS THE KEY

"If I had sat in this garden, I probably would never have decided to go to Kuwait and start designing the interior of a mosque. There is always a background, a path leading you to the final result," he explains, while birds sing in the background.

**"The important thing is sensitivity. Which is not written in the Koran or in Karl Lagerfeld's catalogue, but in personal relations. It is important to listen, provoke, enable reactions which make you step out of the mould. Then things happen."**

You design something and it is logical to you within this world. Later you find, for example, that it is completely in accordance with the background of the sacred book. And it wasn't you or your client who did that. It is written somewhere in their way of thinking."

The key element in the Kuwait project was the trust they built with the Mersu family. This is one of the most respected families in Kuwait and is in the real estate business. When that trust is built, you add professional competence and before you accept a project you ask yourself a lot of questions. The Kuwait project is almost finished



now. Mercina always tries to use Slovenian products and details for interior furnishings. Thus the Kuwait mosque will have chandeliers made by a Slovenian maker in Hrastnik hanging from the ceilings.

#### LAGERFELD

Of course, we cannot finish our chat without devoting a few words to the collaboration with the cult designer Karl Lagerfeld. Mercina would have certainly corrected me and said: with his team. I learn that they first cooperated with the famed fashion designer when they were designing the interior of the store at an exclusive location in the centre of Paris. "They saw it as a sort of experiment and that is why we could get in," says Mercina. They started with small steps and a great thing was created. In this project they had to think of every detail, for a store in the centre of Paris cannot be closed for several months due to renovations. They had to make careful plans, deliberate over every detail and carry out the renovation in five days. The furnishings in the store on the corner of the Champs-Élysées and rue Marbeuf include Slovenian wooden and metal parts. There is another reason for this project to happen in the described way. And it is again a teamwork, based on collaboration with Mr. Frank Remih, Slovenian born businessman living in Düsseldorf and his daughter Julija Remih, collaboration which ended up this year in our new common venture Novello, branding design & build company.

Paris was a most valuable experience. "You have to learn to understand what exactly a brand is," explains Mercina. Today, Trije arhitekti collaborates with several brands. "There is very little brand culture in Slovenia. A brand is like a person – it has its life, its character, which is quite fascinating. This person somehow runs around the world and charms and amazes people. This was the first thing we had to understand. And put it in the financial framework. We had to take into account the identity of the brand." The collaboration with Lagerfeld was enhanced with the interior design of franchise Lagerfeld stores in Russia.

#### MENTORING YOUNG PEOPLE

Andrej Mercina also shares his experience with young people who are just entering the world of adults within PKP – šola za lajf. And what does he tell them? Something different each time, but conveying the same message: dare to think about things, ask yourselves what really interests them, as there are so many views of life. "Sometimes it is enough to hear that there are other aspects of life. And when you face a problem you can attack it in a different way."

**"Mistakes are a part of life and it is normal to sometimes lose a job. A new one will come. This is the diversity, the richness of life."**

#### WHAT DELIGHTS HIM ABOUT SLOVENIA?

"A wonderful description of Slovenia is 'on the crossroads' – when different truths collide, it is your chance to do something unique. Sometimes it looks like being a small nation we have slight problem with identity but this can only be a good thing for creative professions. Everybody's interest is aroused when you tell them that we carry in us a mixture of Germanic rationality and Mediterranean spirit. This is not far from the truth in my profession. It works in many situations. We are halfway between Venice and Vienna. It is great to be in the middle and take the best from each," he says, describing Slovenia wonderfully.

Mercina shared his view in an interview for a Slovenian media outlet by saying:

**"The ideal is to live in Slovenia, because it is wonderful to live here, and to work wherever there is a need for our knowledge and competence."**

This is a great ideal which we perhaps do not recognise and sometimes fear to think about. Mercina also tells me that although he gained his experience in architectural offices around Europe, he never had a wish to move. He sees his living environment as excellent for self-examination. The living conditions are outstanding and very high on a global scale. "I think that a person's life cannot ignore such things. This is a healthy environment. We do not have luxury five-star hotels but if somebody comes here and is open to other values, such as nature, than this is it."

"I am delighted that on Saturday I can put on hiking boots and go to the mountains to have a grilled sausage for lunch, on Sunday go to the seaside for a coffee, on Monday morning get dressed and be creative and on Tuesday have a meeting in Kuwait with gentlemen that are familiar with a different kind of luxury. You can really capture the broadness of life here. I try to live and work that way and I enjoy it immensely."



Karl Lagerfeld store in Paris.  
Photo: Jagoda Jejčič





The interior of Lolita pastry cafe downtown Ljubljana.  
Photo: Miran Kambič



GREGOR KRESAL

# Alpinist, architect and David Lynch Foundation grantee

VESNA ŽARKOVIČ, PHOTO: PERSONAL ARCHIVES



An architect by profession and an alpinist at heart, Gregor Kresal was first introduced to the world of film art in 2003. The latest result of his passion was *Sfinga* (The Sphinx), one of the most internationally awarded Slovenian films. He is currently finishing his master's degree at the film academy run by the legendary Hollywood director David Lynch. Now he is on to a new film, which is still in production, is dedicated to the memory of one of the greatest alpinists of all time, Pavle Kozjek.

## EIGHT AND A HALF CIRCLES

The new film is going to be a real psycho-drama, as it depicts an alpinist's reflections on Dante's *Inferno*. During his 25 years as an alpinist, Kresal lost 25 friends to the mountains. "The longer one turns a blind eye to certain problems, the stronger it will sooner or later return. If one has the ability to exit this unpredictable spiral, one can move forward, otherwise..." The new film, called *Eight and a Half Circles*, shows these facts through Kresal's last and very tragic expedition to the Himalayas in 2008, more precisely to the Muztagh Tower mountain in Pakistan, which turned his life and awareness of himself upside down and after which nothing was the same as before for him.

"Subconscious impulses regarding some key decisions that must often be made by alpinists on the spur of the moment are mainly very clear, but are nevertheless difficult to grasp. And one does not really even want to know what prompted them to take such decisions at that given moment.

**"Through regular and proper meditation, I can now entirely and instantly understand many decisions I made in the past. I could have avoided many troubles in my career as an alpinist if I had started meditating sooner."**

"I spoke a lot about this with Tomaž Humar after the Muztagh Tower accident. He arrived at similar conclusions by using a slightly different approach."

## A DAVID LYNCH FOUNDATION GRANTEE

The university he attends covers part of the costs of his stay in the USA, so he does not receive a full grant. Only 14 grantees were selected out of 150 candidates from all over the world. His successful candidacy was a big surprise for him. The first criterion for selection was the quality of an up to ten-minute film submitted by the applicant. In the second round, the main criterion was the preparation of a flawless project to be developed and realised in the course of the study programme. The technically and substantively most sophisticated films and the most creative projects with a strong vision were then selected. David Lynch is the main mentor and evaluator of the film programme. The course of study is also coordinated by many successful filmmakers and managers, who mainly come from Los Angeles or work in circles closely associated with Hollywood.

Fairfield, Iowa, the site of the Maharishi University of Management (MUM), which the David Lynch MA in Film programme is also a part of, is a small Midwest town that has nothing in common with large cities like Chicago or New York. "Three quarters of the 10,000 local residents are engaged in transcendental meditation (TM), which is also practised at MUM. Fairfield has an almost zero crime rate. There is silence everywhere, a feature not commonly found in urban environments. The University is situated on the outskirts of the town. The surrounding area is teeming with deer, foxes, raccoons, squirrels and rabbits and gives the impression of being a natural reserve.

**"All that peacefulness, nature and the highly creative individuals I associate with present a superb environment for creativity."**

"I would dare to say that no European university provides at least approximately similar study conditions."

**Studies at MUM are based on raising one's creative intelligence.**

There is a single subject on schedule each month, which is wonderfully complemented by visiting lecturers and practical exercises and workshops. Each course is followed by a few days break, which is used for additional meditation. David Lynch has been active in TM for more than 40 years. The entire second half of the study course is exclusively intended for the production of films developed by students in the first half. I had brought with me my semi-finished project so that I could give it the final touches.

The study programme is so intense that Kresal could not afford to take a single day off. In recent months, as director of photography, he shot four study films by his colleagues, including his first feature film. "It was more than everything I had done in the previous five years together... MUM is the most international university in the US: this year, its students come from 84 countries from around the world and it is surprising how many of them know Slovenia or have already heard of wonderful Ljubljana.

## COLLECTING DONATIONS FOR THE FILM

He is collecting donations for the 40-minute film *Eight and a Half Circles* on the Indiegogo platform. "Our 40-day deadline on the Indiegogo film platform is just about to expire. Despite receiving huge moral support from the alpinism-oriented public, mountain





film lovers, alpinists and mountain climbers, who are the target audience of this film, only 12% of the needed funds for its production has thus far been raised. Many eagerly await this film since our previous film, Sfing (The Sphinx), was a great success, winning more than 20 awards at festivals all over the world. However, I realise that Slovenia is not yet ready to provide such support and assistance to projects. All funds raised in such manner must be channelled directly into production, there is no room for fees. Although each donor in the end receives at least a signed copy of the film on DVD, and they can also choose from among a host of other “rewards” depending on their respective donations, the response has been unusually poor. People are not even familiar with PayPal, they do not trust online credit card transactions, etc., although, like Kickstarter, this fundraising platform operates in accordance with the highest standards. On the other hand, there is almost no event, project or action in the US that is not at least partially funded through mass fundraising. We will now try to find funds in some other manner,” says the author.

**DOES HE HAVE ANY UNFULFILLED MOUNTAINEERING GOALS?**

At all events, even when he talks about large-scale projects, his thoughts keep returning to the Slovenian Julian Alps. The majestic wall of Loška Stena includes the little known Votli Vrh peak. Its northern wall is the wildest precipice in Slovenia and beyond. Access to it is awkward and dangerous as the lower half of the wall is extremely crumbly and steep and there are hardly any handholds in the rock. It is a truly difficult combination. “My ultimate wish of all time will probably be to climb this route as directly as possible. It is quite clear what drove Ante Mahkota, the first one to climb up the face of the Sphinx, to keep returning there and why no expedition to the world’s highest peaks meant as much to him as climbing up the Sphinx.



ROK ŽGALIN KOBE

# Designer for the Danish Company LEGO

DANILO GOLOB

Photo: Personal archives

The Slovenian architect, designer and doctor of architecture Rok Žgalin Kobe has worked since 2011 as a designer and technical assistant for LEGO, the largest toy manufacturer in the world. He designs models of globally famous buildings and landmarks for LEGO Architecture, a series devoted to the past, present and future of architecture. And the results of his work have thrilled all generations.

Rok Žgalin Kobe is the second "architectural artist" whose name is featured on the boxes of LEGO bricks. London's Big Ben, Tokyo's Imperial Hotel, the United Nations Headquarters in New York, Singapore's Marina Bay Sands complex and Rome's Fontana di Trevi are among the fascinating models designed by the Slovenian architect.

## THE BEGINNINGS OF A SUCCESSFUL WORKING RELATIONSHIP

When LEGO published an open international competition for architects to participate in the development of the LEGO Architecture line, this big fan of LEGO bricks – indeed they were his favourite childhood distraction – applied and got the job: "It was my know-

how, hard work, passion and a bit of luck that got me there," says Rok Žgalin Kobe. As a professional/scientific collaborator, he took an active part in the development of the LEGO Architecture Studio set, an ambitious product that combines brick play with serious designing and architectural reflections. The set is targeted at actual as well as aspiring architects.

Žgalin Kobe is presently in charge of research into other buildings and landmarks in terms of their suitability for LEGO design. He then develops the selected models through to the final stage, a process that has to meet many tough internal criteria, which is reflected in the final high-quality product.

**The Slovenian architect is proud of the fact that several of his own ideas have been realised by such a big company.**



Photo: LEGO

Rok Žgalin Kobe took an active part in the development of the LEGO Architecture Studio set, an ambitious product that combines brick play with serious designing and architectural reflections.



His works include the United Nations Headquarters model, whose unveiling on 20 September 2013 was a major event: it was indeed UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon himself who placed the final brick on the LEGO replica, an enlarged official LEGO United Nations set. Architect Žgalin Kobe explains that this project, one of the many proposed by him, was at first rejected. But as he was particularly enthusiastic about the idea, he made a model himself and presented it in the company. And that's when it was accepted! "The model required only minimum corrections before production, so I am proud to say that the design was fully my own," says Žgalin Kobe. Another proof of his success is that the architecture series has remained in the annual portfolio of LEGO lines, which are otherwise changed pretty frequently.

#### PLAYING WITH BRICKS

And what are his current plans for the LEGO Architecture series? "Future products are, of course, a closely guarded secret, as are the selection criteria," says Žgalin Kobe. But a particular personal challenge revolves around buildings whose architectural design seems difficult to transfer to LEGO bricks: "These would include Singapore's Marina Bay Sands and the Eiffel Tower. And I would be happy to transfer Slovenian buildings, too," the architect points out. Does he have a personal favourite in the collection of models of buildings and landmarks that he has created? "The one I cherish most is Rome's Fontana di Trevi; not only does it represent a certain evolution in the design of the line, but the original fountain and Rome have played a significant part in my personal life, too. Expecting our child, my wife and I were inspired to name our son after Remus, one of the brothers from Rome's foundation myth. And the idea of transferring the fountain to LEGO form was materialised only a year later," relates Žgalin Kobe.

LEGO bricks are present not only in his work environment, but also at home, as he and his older son spend many an hour creating with them: "Through him, I revive my own memories, as we play with the models I got when I was a child myself. And there are still many years of play ahead, as my younger son will soon be joining in, too," says the Slovenian designer with pride.

#### LIVING BETWEEN SLOVENIA AND DENMARK

Although architect Žgalin Kobe does most of his work for LEGO from Slovenia, he frequently visits Denmark. But his family home has remained in Slovenia. And what does he like best about Slovenia?

**"It offers a high quality of life that may actually exceed that in countries with theoretically higher standards. Slovenia offers a high level of education and is a very safe country. Its greatest advantage, though, is its excellent geographical position – the relative proximity of extremely diverse landscapes from the Alps to the Adriatic."**

This allows for quality and diverse free-time activities," concludes successful architect Žgalin Kobe. We are certain that he is already planning new landmark models to be transformed into tiny bricks. So who knows – maybe these will someday include Plečnik's Triple Bridge, too?

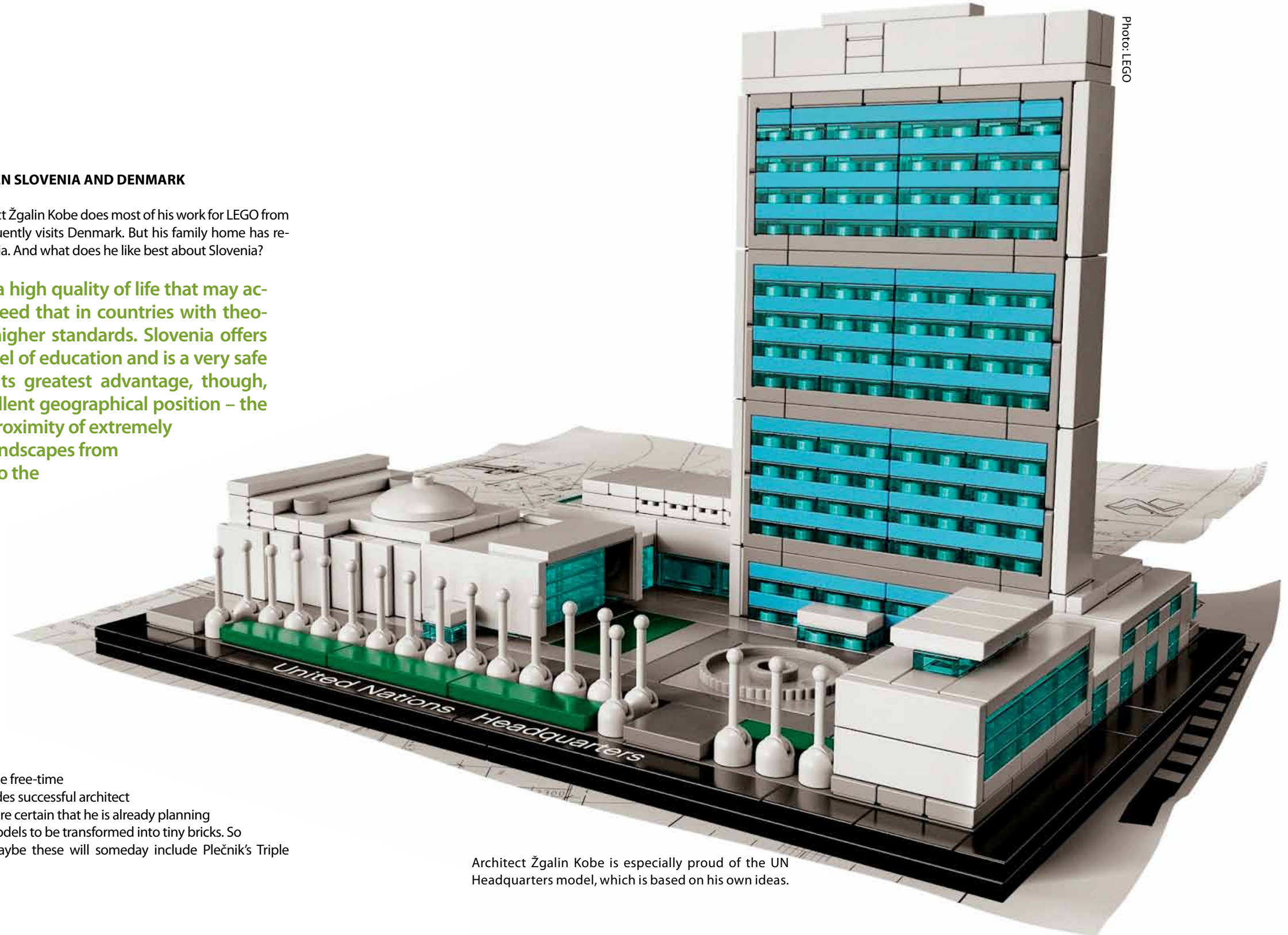


Photo: LEGO

Architect Žgalin Kobe is especially proud of the UN Headquarters model, which is based on his own ideas.



MIKI MUSTER

# Funny bunnies preparing Slovene children for bed

DANIŁA MAŠIĆ,  
Photo: STA

An animated »cikcak« series featuring bunnies was for many years a children's favourite on Slovenia's evening television. The animated bunnies invited the children to watch the cartoon that followed. Afterwards, the bunnies brushed their teeth and went to bed, signalling to the children that it was their bedtime too.

When Miki Muster created the cik cak bunnies, his heart was laughing. He knew that what seemed funny to him would probably be funny to other people too.

Though his real name is Miklavž, he has always been known as Miki. So Miki Muster, the pioneer of Slovenian comics, animator, illustrator, comics writer and film director, recipient of the Silver Order of the Republic of Slovenia for Services for his excellent pioneering work in the field of animated film, a Prešeren Prize and a Victor Award for lifetime achievement, and a seniors world champion in 800 m swimming, has been engaged in creative work for some 60 years.

As a child he dreamed of entertaining others, and on receiving his Prešeren Prize, he expressed the hope that the wishes of everybody present could come true in the same way as his had been fulfilled.

The recognition for his achievements came with a delay as if the impression made on an individual by animated figures needed to mature.

## HIS FIRST MUSE WAS SNOW WHITE

While still at school, Miki Muster decided to make cartoons for children when he grew up. When he first saw Snow White at the cinema, his dream was to finish school as quickly as possible in order to be able to go to America to learn his trade with Walt Disney. But his dreams were thwarted by World War II.

Then after the war the borders were closed, and he remained in Slovenia to pioneer the creation of comic book characters in Europe. It took him decades to find out how to make comics series. The shortage of funds after the war forced him to rationalise his work. Animated cartoons were his dream and the study of sculpture his real-

ity. After compulsory military service, he graduated in sculpture from the Academy of Fine Arts, where he also met his future wife.

## THE DESIRE FOR UNRESTRICTED CREATION LED HIM ABROAD

Back as a student he had often drawn and tried to create cartoon stories, but the art of comics was not well accepted by society in the post-war Yugoslavia.

He was snowed under with work but earned only a meagre income due to the prevailing norms for remuneration and high taxation, which forced him to leave the country to find work abroad. Thus he found himself in Germany, where he stayed for 17 years, his wife remaining in Ljubljana, though they visited each other regularly. During his career he worked with famous Argentinian Guillermo Mordillo. He also worked for Ljubljana Television throughout his stay in Germany. In 1990, he sold his property in Germany and returned home.

## SOCIAL INVOLVEMENT THROUGH CARICATURE

Political caricature often causes resentment among politicians, as it focuses on their most conspicuous visual characteristic. In Yugoslavia, the caricatured person always had to be shown as nicer than he really was!

This is one reason why Muster was particularly saddened by the recent events in Paris, when terrorists attacked the premises of the French magazine Charlie Hebdo, killing twelve of its journalists: it evoked painful memories of a time when he too often feared repression.



HE CREATED ZVITOREPEC (SLYBOOTS) AFTER HIMSELF

**Miki Muster, a gentle and humorous person, liked to create stories with no violence. In these stories, the good always defeated the evil without resorting to violence.**

One of his best known works is the strip Slyboots, which was published continuously for 23 years. It featured three main characters: Slyboots, Hungerpot and Thickhead, who were later joined by Joe Peelskin. They all liked to be surrounded by beautiful women and had no regular jobs. Slyboots, a fox and the first cartoon character created by Muster, was the slyest and the smartest of the three. He has an adventurous spirit who fought on the side of justice and the good. The author created this character after himself, giving him the majority of his own human characteristics.

Hungerpot, a wolf, was created by Muster shortly after Slyboots. He was a negative character in the early cartoon series, but became very popular with readers. He was not very clever, and he regularly found himself in trouble. His supernatural power allowed him to communicate with animals. He has mastered some judo grips and was always ready to fight. He lived in an old cottage, the roof of which often collapsed!

Thickhead was the third and final protagonist. He was a tortoise; the oldest and the cleverest of all the characters, he was both stubborn and adaptable.

Joe Peelskin was a small frog wielding a sword which was the fright of the entire world. It was a negative character created after Hungerpot became a positive hero. Joe Peelskin appeared in only five strips; negative characters in other strips were casual characters.

AS IF ONE TALENT ALONE DID NOT SUFFICE

Miki Muster competed in swimming until he was 23, though he did not even learn to swim until he was 16, this at a children's summer camp in the Pohorje hills. He then abandoned swimming until he returned from abroad at the age of 65. To start with, he just swam a lot at the seaside, but feeling no fatigue when swimming long distances, he decided to try competing again. So in 2000, at the age of 75, he took part in the world championships in Munich, where he was the winner in the marathon distance, repeating his success the following year at the European championships in France. He ranked second or third in short distance swimming, as leaps and turns which he had never practised before prevented him from performing better.





A close-up portrait of Peter Florjančič, an elderly man with white hair and a slight smile, wearing a light blue shirt and a yellow jacket. The background is blurred.

PETER FLORJANČIČ

## Inventor extraordinary, backed by royalty

VESNA ŽARKOVIČ,  
Photo: MATEJA JORDOVIČ POTOČNIK

An inventor must have imagination and the audacity of God, says 96-year old Peter Florjančič. He has registered over 400 patents so far, and despite his age, he is still inventing. He has invented a frame for slide photographs, a perfume atomiser, a Monomat injection moulding machine (on display in the Deutsches Museum in Munich) and ski bindings, which are shown in the Davos Museum of Winter Sports. His life has evolved like a movie, and film-maker F. R. Dorin made a documentary about him some years ago.

He was born into a wealthy hotelier family in Bled, which enabled him to meet influential people very early in his life. While growing up, he had the opportunity to meet the entire Yugoslav royal family of Karađorđević. He graduated from a textile vocational school in Kranj and started working in the Jugočeška Company. "I soon discovered how profitable textile weaving was, so I decided to weave on my own. I designed and made a hand loom which was almost as quick as the mechanical one. I opened a weaving shop and became the youngest textile master in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Then I designed my first invention for sale. I made a scarf for the queen and became the supplier to the court," he explains.

He was unaware that the loom he had constructed was something new, an innovation, which later saved him from a prisoner-of-war camp, because he made insulation plates from corn leaves, which were used on the Russian Front. In 1943, he was presumed to have died in an avalanche and thus saved his relatives from reprisals. But in reality, he sought refuge in neutral Switzerland.

### BEING AN INVENTOR CONSUMED HIM LIKE A DRUG

Being an inventor is truly a disease, Florjančič asserts. The possibility of becoming rich is much smaller here than being a gangster, of whom at least half are never caught.

**At the same time, being an inventor is the most dangerous profession, followed by gambling in casinos, trading in shares, and only then come Mafia deals.**

"You are constantly at risk of financial failure. I was lucky to be in the right place at the right time; my backers, the King Farouk of Egypt and Pasha Ilhami, paid for my mistakes while I was learning and inventing new things in Monte Carlo for twelve years. For example, the perfume atomiser consists of eighteen parts and it took two and a half years before it started working properly. The inventors' club was also established in Monte Carlo. Every fortnight, one of us would bring something. The Prince of Monaco visited us and said that he did not have enough knowledge; then he called specialists and we started working on the invention right away the following day. Some of the largest companies, like L'Oreal or Lancaster, were established in this way. Quite a significant section of the perfume industry."

The elite Monte Carlo society, in the circles of which he moved since 1948 and well into the 1950s, was quite a motley crew. It consisted of royals, heirs to thrones without thrones, various fading aristocrats, rising Hollywood stars, European artists, and Arab moguls. "After World War II, the world needed new ideas to overcome the tragedy. Monte Carlo was a haven for smart and hard-working people with ideas. Everything was possible in that atmosphere, which encouraged people to literally scratch off the hotel bathroom walls on which Salvador Dalí had painted for fun. People supported each other and got excited. Inventors were prepared to cooperate and help one another."

### HE EVEN PLAYED ALONGSIDE MARLENE DIETRICH IN *THE MONTE CARLO STORY*

That was a rather comic encounter. He accidentally stepped on her train and she almost choked, and when he had to act to seduce her,



he couldn't stop laughing. The filming was stopped and he stuck to inventing.

His most lucrative invention was the closing system he developed for the plastic injection moulding machine. He sold it to the Babcock Company for one and a half million German marks in 1976. The design of an electronic system for a weaving machine which he could not get to work properly is considered his greatest financial failure.

In 1957, he patented air bags for cars, but did not envisage them only in the passenger cabin, but also on the roof and bumpers. "I read in the newspaper that many cars in the Netherlands had to be pulled from canals, which is why they even taught rescuing from cars which fell into the water. I anticipated air bags on the roof so that the car would not sink, and also on the front and back bumpers against collisions. By the way: the Japanese started making air bags on bumpers. I patented the air bags, and also did some tests, none of which were successful. There was simply no suitable technology at the time to produce them." The plastic zipper was a similar invention. "I designed a nice system of hooks which closed up, everything worked nicely; except that the zipper would not open after ironing, because there was no heat-resistant plastic.

**"I forgot about the zipper and later learned that Otmar Winterhalter made so much money from zippers that he went insane and ended up in a psychiatric hospital. Too much money can drive you mad."**

**ONE OF THE MORE EXOTIC INVENTIONS IS THE INFINITY SKI TRAIL**

"When I was still in Davos, I made a small model for an infinity ski trail. After World War II, the American actor, Gene Kelly, opened the

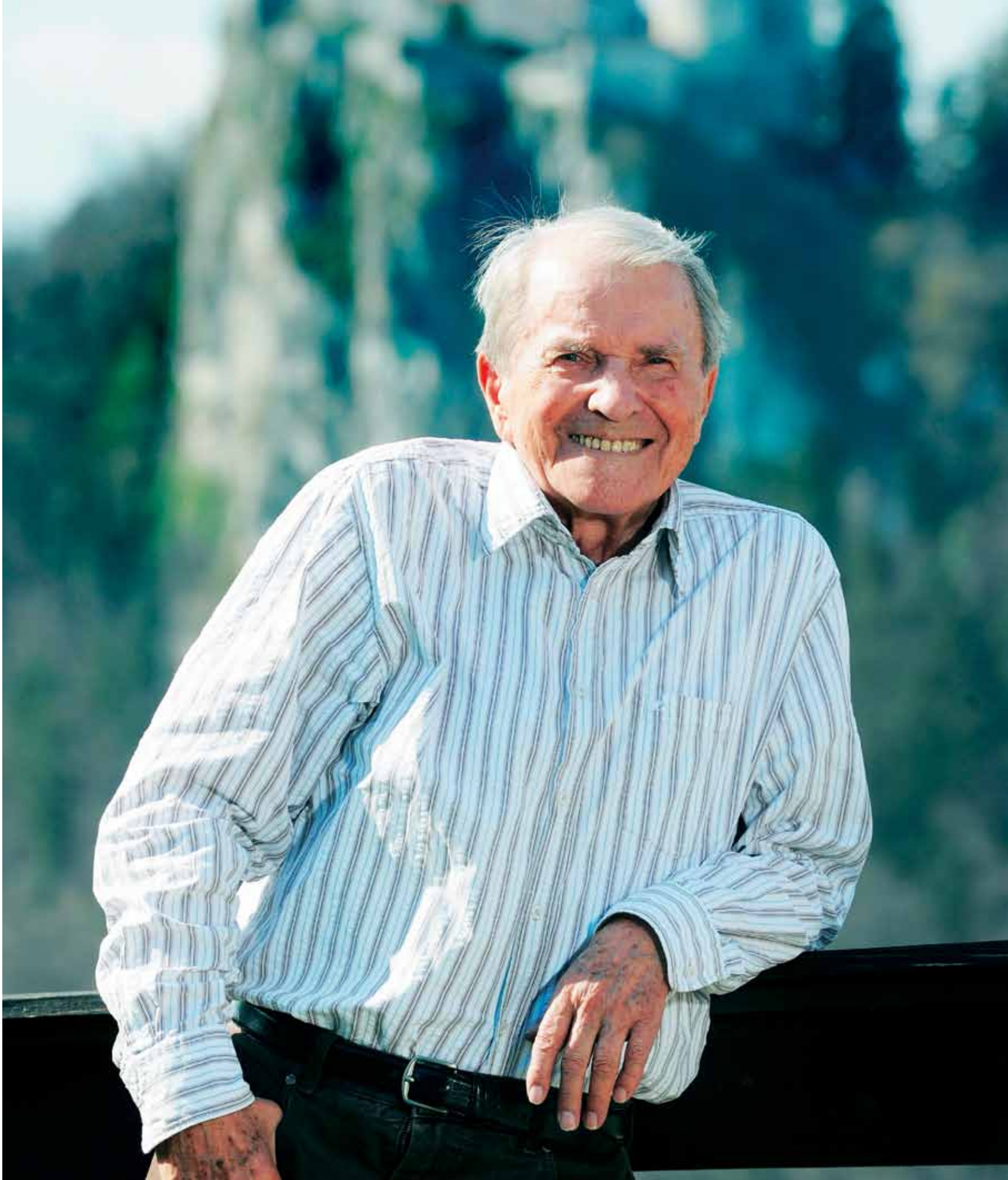
first American bowling alley in Davos. He brought a friend with him who was thrilled about the ski trail and asked me to sell it to him at Café Schneider, where the best cream cakes in Davos are served. As a joke, I set the price at 25,000 dollars and was paid immediately. I really have been lucky in life. I was lucky, because nothing can happen without luck. But speed was the most important."

**IS IT DIFFICULT TO SELL AN INVENTION?**

"Of course. You can only sell an invention once. Before you decide to sell it, it has to be fully completed and working perfectly. You cannot approach a buyer and say, well, it doesn't work yet; I have to fix this and that, and then I'll visit you again. It doesn't work that way. You can only visit them once. A while ago, a young man visited me with a finished underwater gun and asked me for advice. I told him to make a film to show how the gun works. The film was so detailed that I've watched it several times with pleasure. I directed him to the largest Italian company which produces such equipment and told him to be reserved in his communication: put the product on the table, show the film and don't talk much. And he sealed the deal."

**His advice to inventors starting their carriers is to be stubborn and not listen to their mothers and aunts, because they would soon give up.**

Over 400 young people with their ideas came to his office at Kompas Hotel last year, but only three of the ones he helped with advice really made it. Most of them come with dreams about what they want to do. Or they stick to an idea which is not marketable. The invention he would still like to complete involves water, which will soon become more expensive than oil. He has an invention which will enable the re-use of sanitary water, so it would be possible to wash with the same water three times. "People have to start behaving more ecologically, or we'll perish," he concludes.





ROBERT LEŠNIK

## Mercedes Designer

LIVIJA KOVAČ KOSTANTINOVICH,  
Photo: PERSONAL ARCHIVES

Robert Lešnik, a Slovenian from Limbuš near Maribor, lives the dream of many designers. His 'signature' as the chief exterior designer of the automobile giant Mercedes-Benz adorns cars from the new A-Class, the revamped GLK-Class, the new S-Class, the S Coupe, the GLA-Class ... and others.

After several unsuccessful attempts to study at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Ljubljana, Lešnik made his designing breakthrough in Germany. Despite his poor knowledge of German, he enrolled in the design school in Pforzheim and soon started practical work at Volkswagen. From there on, the story of designer Robert Lešnik is one success after another.

**After starting his designing career in Volkswagen and then spending a short period in Kia, he is now an important member of the design team at Mercedes-Benz.**

He is the chief exterior designer of production cars.

### THE PASSION FOR DESIGNING CARS CAME WITH HIS DRIVING LICENCE

It is interesting that Lešnik was not interested in cars until he got his driving licence. He also did not know as a child what he wanted to do when he grew up. He was interested in electrotechnics and engineering. He chose the latter and soon discovered his creative

side – drawing cars. He worked for the company EM, Emil Mlakar, in Slovenska Bistrica for a short time, about a year, where he became acquainted with design in the automobile industry, Citroën XM, and found his passion for designing cars. Getting his driving licence and first car, a Yugo made by Zastava, a very common model at the time, provided additional encouragement.

The desire to create and design new things brought him to Ljubljana, where he wanted to study design. Unfortunately, he failed the entrance examination. What separated Lešnik from many others who also failed was that he did not give up.

### INTERNATIONAL SUCCESS

A clear business goal took him to Germany, where he showed his design ideas to renowned German automobile manufacturers such as Mercedes, Volkswagen, BMW and Opel. Volkswagen was the first to reply. And then all the others, thus ensuring his career in the industry.

**Lešnik's name soon appeared in professional circles and the media as the name of the designer who had left a significant mark on Volkswagen's Passat.**

He also greatly contributed to the form and appearance of other Volkswagen vehicles in his nine years there.

Lešnik then found new challenges in Kia and Mercedes cars. "So far in my career, I've encountered two extremes. The oldest company, which owns many icons, including car design, and a company which was insignificant five years ago." He is really successful in the international field of design, where the competition is fierce. He succeeded because he is talented and refused to give up even after many rejections.

"Cars have never had only a useful and practical value; they also represent the status of the person driving it. And the exterior undoubtedly contributes the most to this status." Many vehicles bearing the Mercedes name carry the 'signature' of the Slovenian designer Robert Lešnik. "The appearance of the car from a distance is the most important to me."

In 2006, Lešnik received the Designer of the Year award during the Month of Design.



ROK PREDIN

## Author of The Rolling Stones video most viewed on YouTube

NATAŠA BUŠLJETA, PHOTO: PERSONAL ARCHIVES

The Doom&Gloom lyric video that is the most viewed Rolling Stones video on YouTube was made in just five days by Slovenian Rok Predin. Creativity is written into Predin's genes, as his father Zoran is a successful musician while he himself was drawn towards painting. His childhood experience growing up with a musician father and his desire to paint have come together in his talent for creating animations.

Rok Predin lives and works in London. He is a member of the team at Trunk Animations Production Company, which includes nine directors from all around the world, creating animations for all formats and platforms, from commercials and advertising spots, to short films and digital content. Six years ago, he set out for London as a freelancer. He did not just wait for an opportunity to come, but continued with his production projects and made a number of short films. In the first two months of his stay, every day he sent out fifty emails offering his services. The first order for a short animation came from the team of Jerry Seinfeld. Then, one day, he received an invitation for an interview from the Trunk Animations Production Company, and that first meeting marked the beginning of excellent cooperation.

### HIS WORK INSTANTLY CONVINCED KEITH URBAN, ELTON JOHN AND OTHER PROMINENT MUSICIANS

The cooperation with Trunk Animations has opened many doors. His first project was a concert animation for Put You in a Song by Keith Urban. Keith Urban wanted a more personalised animation dedicated to his romantic relationship with Nicole Kidman and their child. The animation was presented at the National Country Awards ceremony. Rok's version was selected and the final product received rave reviews. This opened the door to cooperation with Elton John and with the bands Madness, Take That, etc.

Predin made a short animated film for Elton John's piece "The Yellow Brick Road", which was used as part of the spectacular Million Dollar Piano Show in Las Vegas. In Predin's own words, he felt like Alice in Wonderland. He had access to all of Elton's photographs, particularly to a warehouse in North London, where Elton's accessories are stored: his costumes, star glasses, models of the coloured domes of Moscow's Church of St. Basil the Blessed, cages with birds suspended from a tree, a three-storey wedding cake topped by two male figures, a spotted white horse, a red rose larger than the piano and Elton himself, a bottle of champagne with an octopus, etc. Rok's visualisation has been written about in the media, such as in Billboard and the Washington Post. Elton John's response was positive too: he sent the production company a case of French champagne with a handwritten thank-you note.

### It is the customer's satisfaction that counts the most for the artistic creator.

The next successful project followed on the occasion of Queen Elizabeth II's 60th Coronation Anniversary. Predin produced an animation for the song "Our House" performed by Madness at a concert on the roof of the Buckingham Palace.

### COOPERATION WITH THE ROLLING STONES

Before a record company decides to invest a lot of money in a video, it puts a song onto YouTube with minimal visual effects – a lyric

video. Rok Predin made such a video for the Rolling Stones' album GRRR! Doom&Gloom, issued to celebrate the band's fiftieth anniversary, within five days of the band approving the trial version. The Doom&Gloom lyric video, directed by Predin and illustrated by Sara Šavelj, exceeded all expectations of both the record company and the Rolling Stones. Even Mick Jagger tweeted his excitement, inviting everyone to view the video, which is still their most watched video on YouTube.

The next project was completed only recently with Predin's lyric video spot for the acoustic version of the Rolling Stones' hit "Wild Horses". On 25 May, the Rolling Stones will reissue their "Sticky Fingers" album, which was first released in 1971. The album will include hitherto unpublished material and remakes of some of their greatest hits. Predin's lyric video animation follows the graphic design of the first album, which iconographically linked the band to the lips logo and the zipper. The zipper, a motif created by Andy Warhol for the first release of the album, recurs throughout the video and reveals and hides the text of the song.

### HIS OWN ARTISTIC PRODUCTION

Rok Predin has always been fond of cartoons. In the 1980s, when Slovenia was still a part of Yugoslavia and the Eastern Bloc, children watched high quality animations produced by studios in Eastern Bloc countries. These animations also impressed Predin, who first discovered Zagreb Film and watched "Surogat", an animated film created by Dušan Vukotić in 1961 and the first non-American Oscar-winning animated film (1962). Predin was particularly enthusiastic about the Russian animator Yuri Norstein, whose creations are poetry in images. He is known as the Golden Snail, as he produces a film every twenty years on average. But they are worth the wait. "The Tale of Tales" from 1979 has been selected the best animated film of all time at many festivals.

### The subject of Predin's first serious animation was his musician father.

He produced an animated video for his father's song "Pod srečno zvezdo" (Under A Lucky Star) (Zoran Predin & The Gipsy Swing Band), which is a Chagall-like collage of flying, fragile images: a paper chimney sweeper who gets hold of a star, catches a girl and flies with her towards the sky.

Predin has won international recognition for many works. In March 2011, the front page of the British magazine Design Week featured a scene from "Zimska pesem" (Winter Song), Predin's animated film about a partisan soldier who wanders through the woods where he sees phantoms and demons, and highlighted "Predin's original and fresh visual style full of magic and folklore". "Winter Song" combines rich visuals with bizarre, dark forces, even voodoo, Nordic mythology and John Masefield's children's fantasy story *Box of Delights*, wrote Gary Webster.





LARA BOHINC

# Creating an elite global brand

LIVIJA KOVAČ KOSTANTINOVICH, Photo: PERSONAL ARCHIVES

Lara Bohinc is more than a name. It is a luxury brand of women’s jewellery, shoes, bags, sunglasses and home accessories. Bohinc says that she does not design for men, because she does not understand them.

Lara Bohinc is a young Slovenian and an industrial designer by profession. However, the jewellery and other design products that bear her name, and her design style, are anything but industrial. The Lara Bohinc brand is with a byword for prestigious and high-quality products.

### JOURNEY TO THE TOP

Bohinc’s journey to the world of fashion design started in Slovenia some 20 years ago. After graduating in industrial design in Ljubljana, her desire to design jewellery took her to London. She studied at Central Saint Martins and continued at the Royal College of Art. Her innovativeness and creativity were soon recognised by the esteemed fashion magazine, Vogue, and featured Bohinc’s headwear, a pair of sterling silver headphones, designed as an accessory for a fashion show. Her steep path to the top of the fashion world began there. Nevertheless, fame and reputation in the fashion business, where only the best survive in the long run, did not come at once.



Bohinc does not like to talk about herself; she prefers her products speak for her. “I’m a private person and my exposure in the media is carefully considered,” she says in an interview.



**“No, that didn’t happen immediately. It went really slowly. With a lot of hard work. Very slowly.”**

Bohinc has gained reputation with jewellery. Her collection for women was gradually upgraded with other fashionable accessories and footwear. At the 2014 London Design Festival she presented home accessories for the first time. “There’s no difference for me when I design jewellery, bags or anything else. It’s all design. It’s not even a jump from one line of products to another,” says Bohinc in an interview for MMC.





**THE LARA BOHINC BRAND**

Before establishing her own company, Bohinc worked for renowned fashion designers such as Lanvin, Gucci and Julien Macdonald.

She then concentrated on creating her own brand.

**The Lara Bohinc brand is now a luxury trademark. Her company has its headquarters in London.**

The products of the brand are available in a shop in London’s Sloane Street, from her own web shop and known department stores, such as Harrods, Harvey Nichols and Selfridges, and selected stores around the world.

Lara Bohinc products are worn by famous singers, actors and even wives of world leaders, which include Samantha Cameron, wife of the British PM David Cameron, who gave a Laratella bracelet to Michelle Obama, the American First Lady.

**COOPERATION AND PLANS FOR THE FUTURE**

Bohinc is a designer who is not afraid to cooperate with other designers and companies. A few years ago, she cooperated with the Slovenian company, Calypso Crystal, and designed an iPhone case for them.

Bohinc has designed many prestigious useful products for home, such as glasses, candle holders, book stands, bottles, and exquisite accessories such as exclusive cigarette cases. In cooperation with the company Skultuna, Purveyor to the Court of Sweden, she designed home accessories. She has left a distinctive mark as a prestigious jewellery designer on these products. “Jewellery consists of small items for the body, while items for the interior are jewellery for the home,” she explains about designing home accessories.

Her journey through the field of fashion is far from over. She has many plans, which she refuses to reveal.

Solaris kinetic table



Bohinc was awarded an MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire), an honour conferred by the English monarch.



# SLOVENIAN ENTRIES IN *The Guinness Book of Records*



IRENA KOGOJ

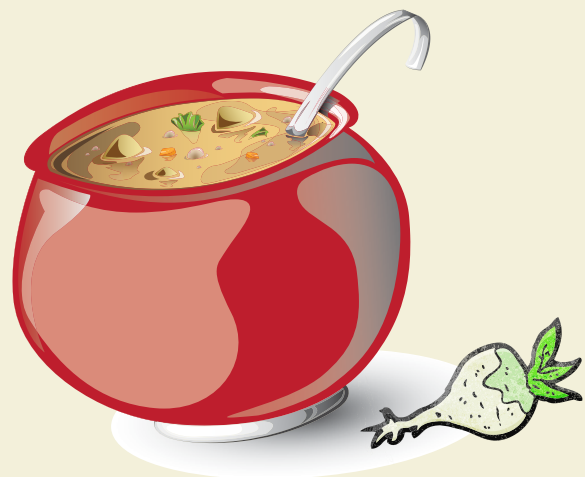
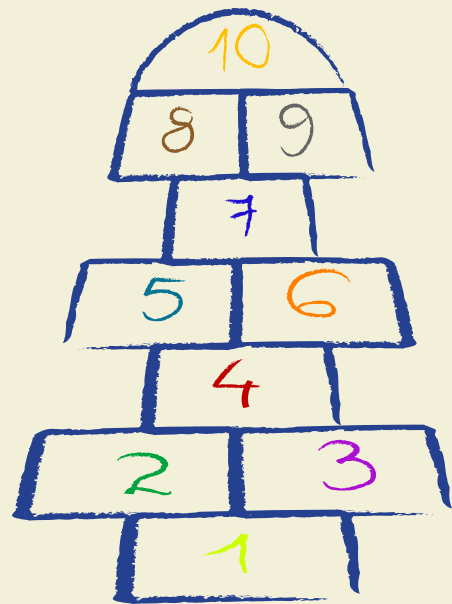


## The tallest bonfire in the world

Members of the society ŠKD Šoštanj built the largest and tallest bonfire in the world. They used some 1,715 cubic metres of wood and it stood no less than 43.33 metres tall.

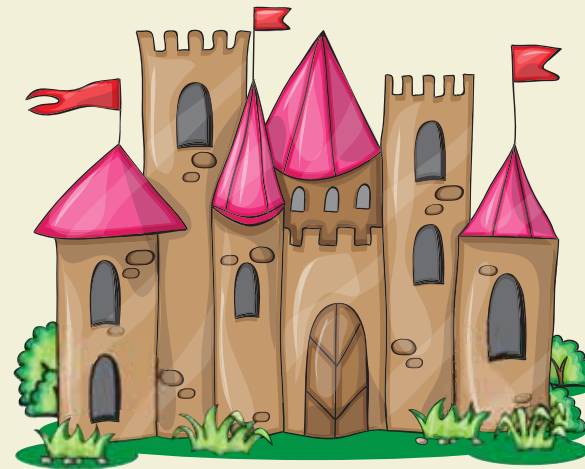
## The longest hopscotch grid

An unusual record, the longest hopscotch grid was created by the Jarše Youth Society and is 5.5 km long.



## The largest sour turnip hotpot

The bujta repa was cooked by the members of the Society for Sport, Tourism, Development and Culture from Velika Polana. They used more than 300 kg of meat and the total weight of the finished dish, from which no fewer than 5,000 portions were distributed, was a massive 1,089.5 kg.

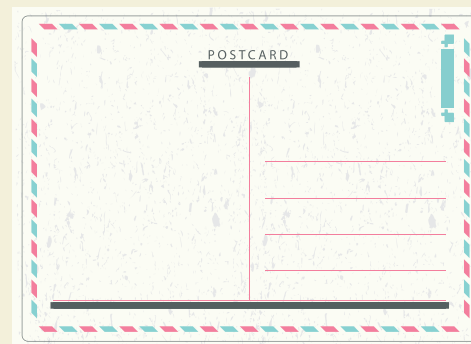


## The largest cave castle in the world

Predjamski Grad, the largest cave castle in the world, was also recognised as a world record. In the opinion of the castle's management, this represents added value to the rich tradition and special nature of the castle and will undoubtedly boost the popularity of one of the jewels of the Slovenian tourist industry.

## The largest cotillion

For several years in a row, The Guinness Book of Records has also featured the Slovenian nationwide cotillion. The Urška dance school is the record holder, with no fewer than 7,244 dancers, and the Dance Association of Slovenia holds the record of the organiser of the largest cotillion at several locations - 33,202 dancers in a single day.



## The largest postcard in the world

Slovenia also holds the record for the largest postcard in the world, which features the town of Nova Gorica. It was designed by Andrej Maver, from Podljubinj, in cooperation with the GIG Agency. Not only is the size of the postcard a massive 9 x 6 metres, but Maver also had to take into account a huge number of guidelines in order to meet the entry criteria! Among others, the postcard had to be officially sent postmarked and received by the recipient.

## The largest gathering of accordions

As many as 1,137 accordion players met at the Panonika Harmonika Festival in 2011, breaking the previous Canadian record.





BORUT GROŠIČAR

## A Slovenian Physicist in Hollywood

NOAH CHARNEY, Photo: PERSONAL ARCHIVES

Branden Garrett may not sound like a particularly Slovenian name, but it belongs to one of Slovenia's most promising actors. Borut Grošičar is new to acting, but has made impressive strides, and a big impression, in just a few film roles – enough to be signed by a Hollywood agency, which now regularly sends him to auditions for international films. Trained as a physicist, he still teaches physics and math, but is following his passion following a striking, mid-life career move.

We met Borut, stage name Branden, at an intriguing moment in his fledgling career. He has an agent. He has a small but memorable part in a new Slovenian gangster film, *Suplje price* (Tall Tales), in which he gets to deliver a perfectly-timed joke: he is obliged to entertain a two-year-old boy and is at a loss, so he offers to show him a gift from his mother, which turns out to be an enormous gun. What happens next is both gruesome and funny, and that scene, however brief, is a standout in the film. Having signed with an American agency, he is currently buried in the mountain of paperwork required for a non-American artist/performer to gain a permit to work in the US. He is on the cusp, and therefore has great insight into life as an actor in Slovenia, and just how a foreigner might break into Hollywood. He certainly looks the part: with long blond hair and a laid-back, southern California vibe, he is someone to keep an eye on.

### When did you realise you wanted to become an actor?

The trigger for everything was my good friend from Germany, who told me "I think you should become an actor." I didn't take that seriously, still working as a physicist at the Jozef Stefan Institute in Ljubljana.

**"This idea of performing was always inside of me, but I was not courageous enough. After going through some changes in my personal life, I became more extroverted, and also started to do things I really love. I felt like I needed to use the other half of my brain."**

### Tell me about your first major role.

My first major role was in my short film, *Hills Like White Elephants*. I was the producer and an actor at the same time. It is a film based on a short story written by Ernest Hemingway. It centres on a couple's verbal duel over whether the girl will abort her partner's child. Hemingway's feat in this story is that he accomplished full, fleshed-

out characterisations of the couple, and a clear and complete exposition of their dilemma, using almost nothing but dialogue. As a method actor, I was trying to be authentic, credible, and real in this film. The filming took place at the main railway station in Ljubljana. It brings to my mind the film, *Suplje price* (Tall Tales), which recently came out at the cinema. In that film, I play the role of a professional burglar.

### What is the lifestyle of an actor in Slovenia like? How does one become a full-time actor, when it seems that there is a very limited number of roles available?

It depends how you look at it. We can be considered very lucky, having two great teachers of method acting, namely Janez and Andrej Vajevec. They both come from Lee Strasberg's school of acting, a method that was established in the previous century in the US and has lately spread worldwide. But, on the other hand, it is not exactly a nice situation, from a financial point of view, since we live in a very small country, which means that we have a very limited market, consequently there are not enough "customers" for films. Most film projects are subsidised by the government. So unless you come from certain circles, the chance of being cast for a role is insignificantly small, even though you may be a trained actor. You can be an extra, and that's it. Yet, one can always be creative and do one's own stuff, one's own indie projects.

### At what point did you decide to pursue an acting career in the US?

After a few years of working as an actor in Slovenia, and having a role in some films and commercials, I had a strong desire to try overseas. There is a much bigger market, many more opportunities.

### How did you get an agent? I understand that this is practically impossible and a major accomplishment.

It was a combination of the right circumstances, and that I was prepared to accept such a position. I went to an agency with my friend. When they saw me and my work, my acting resume, they offered to represent me.



**Tell me about the audition process and your visit to Hollywood.**

There was a nice incident while preparing myself at the famous Stella Adler Academy on Hollywood Boulevard, with the very well-known acting coach, Laura Levya. The last few words in my monologue were “jebat ću ti majku” which means “I will f..k your mother,” which is not very nice, but was certainly in character, as I was playing the role of a Serbian mafia boss. I remember, she told me “that was really substantial, although I didn’t understand a word.”

**What is the process of getting all the paperwork sorted out like, in order to be allowed to work in the US, as a Slovenian actor?**

It is a troublesome process. You have to prove to the State Department people that you have achieved extraordinary things in the arts. So basically, you need a lot of press articles and recommendation letters that prove your excellence.

**How did you choose your American stage name, and how has taking a stage name helped you?**

It took me some time. I checked the book of the names, with the intention to have the same initials as in my original name. When I stumbled upon “Branden Garrett” I liked it immediately. After sleeping on it, I decided to keep it. The fact that many actors and artists use a stage name speaks for itself. I think this is an important aspect that can help you break in. Of course, this is not enough. You certainly have to make a good first impression when meeting key people, and I think this is very important for one’s public persona, as an actor. Anyway, my surname is very difficult to pronounce.

**What other Slovenian actors have achieved success abroad?**

Definitely the most successful actor is Željko Ivanek. He has a very impressive Hollywood acting resume. He has had roles in films like Argo, The Bourne Legacy, Live Free or Die Hard, Hannibal, etc. After him comes Katarina Čas, with films like The Guard, The Wolf of Wall Street, and Danny Collins.

**Why do you think it is that Slovenians particularly long to succeed abroad – as if success in Slovenia were not enough?**

I think it is because, in our psyche as well as in fact, people become better recognised in Slovenia after gaining recognition abroad. It happens in the fields of science, art, and design. Let me mention a few examples, such as the designer Robert Lešnik, or the businessman and owner of Pipistrel, Ivo Boscarol, and the aforementioned Katarina Čas.

**What is actor training like in Slovenia, I mean the way acting is taught?**

Shelley Winters, a widely respected actress who won two Oscars, once said that, in Europe, we are too burdened by ideas, philosophy, and theoretical knowledge. Consequently, it is difficult to create an organic experience that is credible and authentic. Actors here seem to imitate their objective too much through facial expressions. The first thing that they taught me in Hollywood is to not pretend, but to live.

*Noah Charney found his new home in Slovenia. He teaches writing workshops at the Filozofska Fakulteta in Ljubljana, in English. This year he will also teach a workshop on writing and directing for stage and screen, co-taught by the famous actor and director, Branko Djuric-Djuro. For more information, visit [www.noahcharney.com](http://www.noahcharney.com).*





# LJFW

## LJUBLJANA FASHION WEEK

### LJUBLJANA FASHION WEEK

**“I feel SLOVEEnia.Green.Active.Healthy.”**

POLONA PREŠEREN, Photo: DAMJAN KONČAR

More than twenty designers and brands showed their autumn/winter 2015–2016 collections at the April fashion shows organised under the auspices of Ljubljana Fashion Week (LJFW). The home country’s “I feel SLOVEEnia” brand was presented, along with the creations of the most prominent Slovenian fashion designers and guests from neighbouring countries.

The LJFW featured collections by the following Slovenian designers and brands: Akultura, Almirasadar, Ana Jelinič, Draž, EBER krznarstvo, JSP, MAJA FERME FASHION, maja štamol, MÉHLĚ, Miro Misljen, PRINCIP, Tanja Zorn, SENS, Sofia Nogard, Squat (Dajana Ljubičič, Ivan Rocco, Natasa Persuh, Petja Zorec) and Young@Squat. They were joined by designers from the countries of the Balkan Peninsula.

The Government Communication Office of the Republic of Slovenia, the administrator of the “I feel SLOVEEnia” brand, made the first presentation of the uniforms to be worn by the staff attending the Slovenian pavilion at Milan Expo 2015 (1 May to 31 October 2015). Designer Sonja Šterman created a full uniform collection that won her victory in the open competition for the design and production of the uniform. The clothes were sewn by Moda Mi&Lan d. o. o., while airy lace accessories were made by the students and staff at the University of Maribor, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, Department of Textile Materials and Design.

**The design concept rests on the main theme of Milan Expo 2015 “Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life” and on Slovenia’s presentation concept expressed through the slogan “I feel SLOVEEnia.Green.Active.Healthy.”**

The collection features medium to dark grey top garments (dress, blazer, trousers, jacket), green T-shirts and light grey shirts. The accompanying unique fashion accessories are made from stitching on a water-soluble fabric. Those intended for women take the shape of Slovenia, while those for men are designed as ribbons resembling neckties. The rhomboid asymmetry of the “I feel SLO-

VEEnia” logo was used as a model for designing the lines appearing on the clothing reinforced with decorative green stitching. Linked with the main Expo theme – food – the line intersections represent arable lands. The “I feel SLOVEEnia” logo appears on the left side of the uniforms.

The uniforms are garnished with green lace, a fashion accessory in keeping with the visual identity of the “I feel SLOVEEnia” national brand. Each piece of lace is unique; 18 students and 5 teachers were engaged in their creation at the Laboratory of Clothing Engineering, Physiology and Construction of Garments of the Department of Textile Materials and Design. The creation of a single piece of lace required as much as 40 hours of needlework.

And there is one more story that brings Ljubljana Fashion Week and “I feel SLOVEEnia” together. The best post-graduate student who presented designs at the student fashion show within Ljubljana Fashion Week was awarded the opportunity to present her collection at the Slovenian pavilion at the Milan Expo by the Government Communication Office.

The professional jury, in which the “I feel SLOVEEnia” representative Nataša Bušljeta participated, awarded the prize to Maja Leskovšek, a graduate from the Department of Textile and Fashion Design, Faculty of Natural Sciences and Engineering, University of Ljubljana. Leskovšek graduated in 2013 and then completed a three-month preparatory training programme with the fashion designer Michael van der Ham in London, where she was involved in the preparation of his spring/summer 2014 collection. In autumn 2014 she enrolled in a Bologna Process master’s degree programme at the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Engineering. She completed part of her studies at Designskolen Kolding, Denmark. She has been a Squat and Young@Squat group member since autumn 2014 and



has regularly presented her work under the group's sponsorship at fashion weeks at home and abroad.

Prihodnost Zdaj//Future Now: The Future Overcomes Numbness Collection, which Maja Leskovšek is to present at Milan Expo, is part of her postgraduate project based on exploring design fiction as a method of developing a concept in the creation of clothing collections..

**The importance of design fiction lies in the emancipation of design from the dictates of the industry, market requirements, economic and political circumstances, and existing technological capacities. Design fiction directs reflection towards new problems and questions, towards critical evaluation of social conditions and stimulates provocative design.**

#### **And how is the national brand linked with fashion?**

"I feel SLOVEnia" is a national brand. It mirrors who we are: diligent and creative, pushing the limits, and paving new paths. For that reason, "I feel SLOVEnia" supports Slovenian fashion designers who tell unique stories about us and to us. The Government Communication Office decided to participate in choosing the best young designers because it supports the creativity of young people; the presented award enables them to escape the limits.





PRESTIGIOUS INTERNATIONAL AWARDS

# Velenje Car Park and Planica Ski Jumps win Architizer A+ Awards

VESNA ŽARKOVIČ, Photo: MIRAN KAMBIČ

Two projects by Slovenian architects have received the prestigious international Architizer A+ Award. The Promenada Car Park in Velenje by Enota architects is the “Jury Winner” in the category of parking structures, and Planica Ski Jumps by Abiro and landscape architects from Studio AKKA are the “Public Winner” among recreational structures.

Announced on the architecture website Architizer, they are among the winners of the 3rd annual A+ Awards for the best new building designs from around the world. This year’s awards cover more than 90 categories, including everything from residential and commercial properties to cultural architecture such as museums and religious buildings.

A collection of 300 judges, industry leaders including Yves Béhar, Paola Antonelli, Liz Diller, Joseph Altuzarra, David Rockwell, Rem D. Koolhaas and Ian Schrager, selected the five finalists in each category. They have also selected one winner from these for their “Jury” prize. There is also a “Popular Choice” winner in each category, which is determined by the public through online voting.

It was a challenge given how many incredible developments won awards this year. Comprising diverse and innovative global projects from starchitects to emerging firms, this year’s winners represent the best new architecture, interiors and products. The A+ Awards Gala ceremony was held in New York on 14 May.

## PLANICA SKI JUMPS, RATEČE, SLOVENIA

The main aspect of design is based on the profound relationship between construction, constructed site, and natural site. As Planica lies on the forefoot of the largest protected environment in Slovenia, and as one of most exciting entry points to the Triglav National Park, the large sport facilities should evoke its own position. The precise planning of topography, the systematic selection and reduction of material, bold shapes and forms, all with the exciting silhouette of the mountains and the calmness of the pine and beech forest. The project works on many levels and directions: solid versus soft, resistant versus ephemeral, cold versus warm, monumental versus intimate. Ski jumps are normally designed to facilitate large competitions with enormous infrastructure and logistics.



**When more than 15,000 people come to this fragile valley, the form of the architecture seizes to exist, as its operational function holds the crucial role.**

But in everyday situations, when a few of the young ski jumpers would come to train in solitude, its simplicity, respect for the site and robustness are awakened again.

#### VELENJE CAR PARK, VELENJE, SLOVENIA

Velenje was designed in the fifties as a modernist garden city and as such, it had a lot of unoccupied ground-level surfaces. Gradually these surfaces began to turn into parking areas. The car park on this site was also intended to expand to the surrounding green surfaces due to insufficient capacity. Instead the choice was made to partially dig in and cover the parking area, doubling the capacity in a simple way.

**Accordingly, the new car park is not designed as a classical parking garage but features a double entrance leading to two car parks laid on top of each other.**

This makes for highly rational use of the space, as there is no surface lost to inner circulation.

The slight branching out in the floor area design reflects the siting of the building among the existing trees, which had all been left intact. The front facade features a very restrained design and references the original town architecture. The remaining circumference of the car park seeks a connection with the surrounding natural environment instead. Individual facade panels are parabolically bent out of the building plane. Apart from its interesting shape, one result is great static strength, which obviates the need for any additional support. The repetition and careful arrangement of these lightweight facade elements produces a constant play of light and shadow, giving the building a soft appearance among the surrounding trees.





NEUE  
SLOWENISCHE  
KUNST

NSK  
from  
*Kapital*  
to  
Capital

POLONA PREŠEREN,  
Photo: NEBOJŠA TEJIĆ/STA



Moderna galerija / Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana is hosting its first exhibition by Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK), representing twelve of the most productive years of the collective (from 1980 to 1992).

Zdenka Badovinac, the curator and director of the Moderna galerija / Museum of Modern Art, and her team have been preparing the exhibition for 18 months; it is open until 16 August. This is the first NSK retrospective exhibition in Slovenia. "It was high time that the Museum of Modern Art as a national institution tackled this task," said Badovinac before the opening.

**The NSK differed notably from the liberal critique of socialism, emphasise the authors of the exhibition.**

Rather than employing the standard forms of artistic critique or irony, the NSK based its approach on subversive affirmation and over-identification, articulating, among other things, the kind of society the collective envisioned after the collapse of socialism. Thus the NSK State in Time was founded in 1992.

The exhibition, NSK from Kapital to Capital, covers a period that marked the final decade of Yugoslavia, highlighting the fact that NSK was no less a critic of coming global capitalism than of the failed socialism that was ending. The exhibition reveals many individual events and the duration of the various concepts at work in chronological order. The pivotal decade presented in the exhibi-

The exhibition is at the Museum of Modern Art until 16 August. In 2016, the exhibition will be hosted in Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven and in the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art in Moscow. Visitors can take guided tours of the exhibition with members of the NSK collective. Further information is available at [mg-lj.si/en](http://mg-lj.si/en).

tion was marked by a series of key political events leading up to the dissolution of the state and the bloodshed in the 1990s. With each concert, exhibition, theatre performance or other public appearance, NSK triggered processes that have not run their course to this day.

#### WHO ARE NSK?

NSK countered the post-modern art of the 1980s, applying a retro method to reveal ideological manipulation through imagery. NSK means New Slovenian Art, alluding to both "Junge Slowenische Kunst", the title of a special issue of the German avant-garde journal Der Sturm in 1929 featuring young Slovenian art, as well as to the trauma caused by German political and cultural hegemony over the small Slovenian nation.

The NSK art collective was founded in 1984 by the multimedia group Laibach, the visual arts group IRWIN, and the theatre group Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre. On the same day, the design department, New Collectivism, was also founded. Later, NSK also established the Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy, Retrovision, Film, and Builders.

What lesson might be gleaned from NSK that could be of use to us today?

**On the one hand, we are witnessing a process of complete symbolic depletion, and on the other, the reactivation of symbols. Today, this game of symbols is becoming similarly dangerous to that of the 1980s, making the NSK tradition more topical than ever.**

The exhibition is at the Museum of Modern Art until 16 August. In 2016, the exhibition will be hosted in Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven and in the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art in Moscow. Visitors can take guided tours of the exhibition with members of the NSK collective. Further information is available at [mg-lj.si/en](http://mg-lj.si/en).



# TOP SLOVENIAN SPORTS COACHES

## Sought after by athletes in Slovenia and abroad

NATAŠA BUŠLJETA

Slovenian athletes Anže Kopitar, Goran Dragič and Samir Handanovič are amongst the world's top athletes, and they all started their professional careers under the watchful eyes of their Slovenian coaches. The professional knowledge and experience of the coaches helped lay the foundations for their success. These Slovenian coaches also enjoy great success and respect with foreign clubs and national teams. Even though their names usually remain in the background, they have achieved great success with their charges. We would like to present five coaches who with their extensive knowledge and experience train successful athletes in different parts of the world.

### Silvan Poberaj, the coach of longest standing

After finishing his sports career as kayaker, Poberaj began his hand as a coach in Slovenia by training the national team, particularly Marjan Štrukelj. At the World Championships in 1991 Štrukelj won a silver medal, while at the Barcelona Olympic Games he achieved sixth place under Poberaj's coaching. In 1994, Poberaj went to America and took over the American national kayaking team; he has coached the team ever since. **The London Olympic Games were the sixth Games in which he has taken part through his protégés.** Under coach Poberaj, Rebecca Giddens achieved her greatest accomplishment in kayaking, winning the silver medal at the Athens Olympics in 2004.



### Bine Norčič and Vasja Bajc watch over ski jumpers in North America

After finishing his sports career as kayaker, Poberaj began his hand as a coach in Slovenia. It is no secret that Slovenia has many good ski jumping coaches. When the Americans were looking for a deputy head coach, Alan Johnson, USA Ski Jumping Athletic Director, said: "We really conducted a world-wide search to fill this position. We have found a person who is a great fit for the job. Bine has a terrific combination of skills. His expertise will enable us to offer our athletes the best possible coaching."

The Americans also welcomed Vasja Bajc, who took over the women's ski jumping team, whereas Norčič is in charge of the men's ski jumping team. **Another Slovenian, or more precisely a restaurant, supports the operations of the national men's team of the USA, namely Hram Gorjan Pizzeria from Gora pri Komendi.** "It is true, I help as much as I can", says Tomaž Hrovat, the 46-year-old sports enthusiast who owns and manages the pizzeria. Norčič's team needed ski-jumping suits and Tomaž, a pizza baker, paid for one of them.



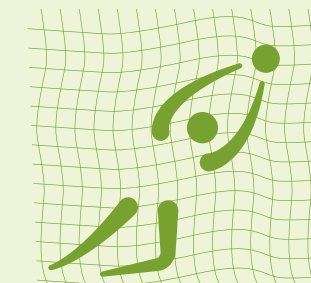
### Ranko Mandič has won national competitions in three countries

Mandič started his career as a coach of Slovenian basketball clubs and national teams. His career abroad began in Portugal and he subsequently moved on to Asia and Africa, where he has been coaching for nine seasons. During this time, the teams that he coached in Bahrain, Syria, and Morocco were national champions, while the teams in the latter two countries were also cup winners. He has also been a head coach in Jordan and has trained clubs in Saudi Arabia.

**Under his coaching, the Tunisian team Union Sportive Monastir qualified for the Africa Clubs Champions Cup, playing in the toughest qualifying group, in December 2014 in Tunisia.** "Before leaving for the competition, the president of the club told us not to lose too often. But we made it – for the first time in history, we were among the 12 best clubs in Africa, which is a remarkable success", says Mandič. In the end they achieved fifth place. "My results are my best agent, the results show the most. One doesn't last in this corner of the world without a good identity card", points out Mandič, who has also been flirting with relocating to the United States, where he has been invited.

### Niko Marković winning in China

He was the coach of the Slovenian national handball team and then, like Mandič, spent most of his time in Persian Gulf countries in the last decade, where he established a good name and reputation. Under his coaching, Kuwait was twice Asian Champion and was also the winner of the prestigious Asian Games. He is currently thrilling handball fans in China. In 2014, he accepted a challenge and went to the country with the largest population in the world and became coach of the Shandong Province team. Already in the first season, after just two months of cooperation with the club, his team became the national champions of China. In the finals, Shandong Province defeated Jiangsu Province, 34:33, a team that had been dominating handball in China for the previous several years. **The success also impressed the Chinese Handball Association, which wants to see Marković on the bench of the national handball team.**



### Gorazd Vecko, a father figure to British Paralympic athletes

A table tennis expert trains Paralympic athletes. In 2004, his protégée Mateja Pintar won an Olympic gold medal in Athens for Slovenia. Then he was invited to Great Britain. **After introducing drastic changes at the national team, British Paralympic athletes won four medals in London in 2012, while prior to that they had not won any in Beijing.**

Following his arrival in Sheffield, Gorazd Vecko cut the size of the British national team and focused on training those with real medal potential. In an even more unconventional move, he invited some of the players to share a house with him. He was working with a young team and by creating a family environment he wished to promote the athletic development of his protégés. Evidence that he has succeeded is not lacking.



M TOM

## A company that has risen from the ashes – thanks to its employees

DANILA GOLOB, Photo: M TOM Archives



When the TOM company, once the largest manufacturer of upholstered furniture in Slovenia, went bankrupt at the end of 2010, ten of its laid-off workers decided that they would continue to manufacture sofas on their own. By combining their efforts, knowledge and skills, and scraping together their remaining money, they established a new company, M TOM.

Seamstresses, upholsterers and workers from the research and technology division of the former TOM company had the will, knowledge and skills to continue production, since the company did not fail due to a lack of orders but because of mismanagement and financial manipulation. The employees rented part of the premises of the failed TOM company in Mokronog from the trustee in bankruptcy, provided the urgently needed funds from their own savings and loans and continued to produce the already well-known and high-quality sofas.

### PURCHASE OF PREMISES

Four years have passed since the establishment of the new M TOM company and they have been very difficult for the employees. They have had to put up with very low wages because they were saving money for the purchase but, as they say, they persisted because they had a goal in sight. By joining forces and making great sacrifices, they managed to collect the money and purchased a 4,000 m<sup>2</sup> production facility at the former factory from the Bank Assets Management Company (BAMC) after negotiating the deal for half a year. The employees became owners of the M TOM company.

Gregor Povše, who participated from the outset in the employee buyout and in the purchase of the production facilities as an upholsterer and employee, says that they purchased the production facility to ensure proper working conditions, adding: "We will work hard for a year or two to refurbish the premises and to continue to develop in the industry in which we operate." Damjan Burger, Director of M TOM, is well aware that the path leading to the present was difficult:

**"There are no easy paths in the business world. It is a struggle in which you fight against the competition for customers, like in sports."**

"The same is true regarding investments. When you believe in something, you must pursue your goal to achieve it. A heavy burden was lifted off our chests with the purchase of the production facility. Of course there are new concerns on the horizon, but new challenges drive us towards new victories."

Today, the company employs 16 people, of whom 12 are former employees of the old company. "The new employees are trained and they are already part of our company, breathing with us."

**"It is crucial that they have adopted our manner of work and our philosophy, which is that we cannot survive without each other and that we develop the business together," says Director Burger.**



At M TOM, the work is performed according to the system all-for-all, and the Director is paid the same as others. It is important for them to grow together and to attain the specific goals that they have set.

**TIME FOR DEVELOPMENT**

Following the purchase of the production premises, the company will now further strengthen its focus on the development of products and expand their intended use: "Improving existing forms with appropriate accessories, ergonomic seating and everything that contributes to comfortable seating. Our objective is to sell a comfortable, relaxing experience, which is provided by the proper sofa design. The ultimate goal is an *M TOM in every home*," explains Director Burger.

The full range of products is the fruit of local knowledge. All products are manufactured in Slovenia and are the result of the handicraft skills of the employees, so that practically every item is unique.

In 2013, the company introduced Prime, a completely new line of sofas. These are next generation sofas designed such that they can be adapted to any living environment. The Prime product has also garnered attention in the international arena, namely at the 100% Design festival in London in 2013, while at the Ambient trade fair the sofa received the international committee's TOP 10 international award. "Each award boosts self-esteem, indicating that we have increasingly surpassed the average. Unfortunately, this is in fact just one piece in the mosaic of a product's market success. At that stage, the award that we received was all that we gained because we were not successful in marketing the product. There are several reasons

for this, the main one being that we have not found the right sales channel for this type of product on the world market, such that would enable its viability," explains Director Burger.

At M TOM, they are also proud of their Tomy chair – an ergonomic product designed for working with laptops and tablet computers. They are aware that the product is truly innovative and that it can be further improved. The primary goal is the mass production of the Tomy chair – an ergonomic computer chair with an integrated Playstation console. "The chair is designed for the global market and is multifunctional. The focus is on the support it offers to one's lumbar spine when sitting and its role as a piece of furniture featuring integration with consumer electronics, video games, compatibility with Apple devices, speakers for video effects or listening to music, wireless connectivity, and as a decorative element in the home. It is

an "all in one", taking up little space in an apartment or in airports, waiting rooms, etc.," explains Director Burger, sharing the company's plans with us, being well-aware that today's world requires innovation in all areas.

**They will continue to be development-oriented, while preserving the local handicraft tradition.**

Employees of the company are confident that they can become a role model for those workers who seek to rebuild their activities from the ashes of their former parent companies. M TOM is proof that a company can succeed if its employees join together, find the right motivation and firmly believe in their knowledge and skills.



The Prime series consists of next generation sofas designed to be adaptable to any living environment.



Sustainable, green food production in harmony with nature is a rising trend, and the Slovenian company HomeOgarden is among the leaders in this field. The company entered the market with simple, natural, safe and effective products to help plants grow. They feature a group of natural, organic and sustainable products which contain no agrochemical preparations.

HOMEOGARDEN

Everything you need for organic gardening

POLONA PREŠEREN, Photo: THE HOMEOGARDEN ARCHIVES

GREEN IDEA

It sounds almost unbelievable that someone would produce organic and homeopathic preparations for gardening. But today, people are more than ever becoming aware of the importance of food that ends up on their plates. More and more people are growing vegetables at home because they wish to eat food that contains no pesticides. They also want to know how their food is produced. The need for organic products for comprehensive plant care was noted some years ago by Aleš Pfeifer, the director of the company, and Marko Hočevar, the development director and agricultural engineer, who joined forces in the company HomeOgarden and developed ranges of completely natural and organic products for complete plant care and protection from rodents. Their green idea was recognised at the 2013 Start:up of the year competition, which placed them in the finals.

HomeOgarden is a comprehensive system of sustainable organic gardening without use of agrochemicals or artificial fertilisers.

The range includes a selection of products for the organic preparation of soil: organic soil, organic fertilising and organic additional fertilising. "All substances are natural and organic, of high quality, with natural growth improvers such as mycorrhizal fungi and mineral leonardite. The pharmacy for plants is based on homeopathic complexes for plants and natural substances which strengthen plants and increase their immunity to diseases, pests and negative impacts of the environment," says Hočevar, the development manager and conceptual creator of the programme.

Pfeifer added that both had been involved in gardening for over 15 years. "During this time, we paid attention to all new environment-friendly solutions for home and garden, and so a few years ago we came across homeopathy for plants. After a thorough analysis of literature, we contacted two pioneers and authors of the first expert books on homeopathy for plants when we started development," explains Pfeifer. During their in-depth study, they discovered many positive responses to the use of homeopathy for plants.

THE RIGHT PATH

The company decided that this was the right path and that they had to persevere. Today, it seems that they have significantly exceeded



their initial boundaries. "In addition to the Slovenian market, our products are also available in Austria and Croatia, where we work with the largest traders. We are negotiating further expansion in the region, and plan to enter the German and Italian markets next year," says Pfeifer.

They plan to become the leading provider of natural and environment-friendly solutions for home and garden in the region. Their key markets are particularly the developed ones in the region, such as Austria, Germany, Switzerland and northern Italy. They found that an efficient offer is significantly lacking in these markets. They also noticed the high awareness of Europeans who want a safe and healthy environment to grow plants without the use of chemical preparations or artificial fertilisers. Such thinking is the result of legislation and European policies.

**INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS**

"Our company's mission is to offer consumers simple solutions for organic and sustainable gardening, which is reflected in our motto, 'Creating a natural environment,'" explains Pfeifer. "After a two-year presence in the market, I can say that we've received an acknowledgement: we took the right direction and our customers have recognised the additional value of our innovative solutions."

Their products are suitable for organic production because they have all the necessary certificates: all their products are 100% organic. Their product range is divided into an organic section for plants and homeopathic pharmacy for plants. An important advantage of their products is that they are easy to apply and significantly improve user experience.

"An illustrative example is our patented innovation, Organic soil, 50l, which we are convinced will change the European substrate market in the coming years," says Pfeifer. In addition to simple purchase, handling, transport and, finally, use, the business operations of trading partners are also being improved. The key advantage of this soil is that you prepare it yourself and do not have to carry heavy packaging. The biggest component of soil is usually water, which is not always clean or free of chemicals.

**In the case of HomeOgarden soil, you add the water yourself and thus know exactly what you've added. This is essential in organic gardening.**

The range includes a selection of products for the organic preparation of soil: organic soil, organic fertilisers

**THE FUTURE IS IN ORGANIC GARDENING**

Slovenians are known for their connection with the land, and the idea of self-efficiency or producing your own food has been gaining increasing support in recent times. When speaking to Pfeifer, I wondered if their products derive from the Slovenians' attachment to soil and amateur cultivation of one's own little plot of land.

**"The fact is that Slovenia is one of the most developed markets for gardening in the world. Not only is there the people's attachment to the land or the fact that many people are gardening, but there are also many companies in Slovenia which develop and manufacture products for home and garden," says Pfeifer.**

Therefore the competition in the market is quite severe.

Gardening has become one of the most popular hobbies in Slovenia, and it is still growing, particularly due to consumer opposition to chemical products and growing distrust in providers of fresh fruit and vegetables. HomeOgarden products are aimed at sustainable development, which may change the approach to gardening. If you are sceptical about homeopathic and completely natural preparations for plant care, we urge you to test them. Don't forget: the motto is forward with nature.

HomeOgarden d.o.o. is a team of experienced experts dedicated to nature who develop products for plant care at home and in the garden and protection against pests. Their basic activity is the development of organic, natural, homeopathic and innovative products for plant care and the protection of the environment against pests. They follow European guidelines on organic farming.

**Since their establishment two and a half years ago, they have developed over 35 innovative products for home and garden. Their products are notable because they are all 100% natural, have no negative impact on people or the environment and are user friendly.**





BUSINESS LEADERS OF SE EUROPE AT SUMMIT100 IN PORTOROŽ

## Joint ventures in the most important business sectors

EDITA KRAJNOVIĆ, MEDIADE  
Photo: MOSTPHOTOS

The possibilities of regional cooperation on energy, tourism, transport, infrastructure and finance will be the main topics of this year's meeting of business leaders of Southeast Europe, Summit100, which will be held on 1 and 2 June in Portorož. The event will be attended by 150 of the most influential business leaders and presidents of the countries in the region.

At the fourth meeting of the most notable entrepreneurs, business people and political leaders from the countries of Southeast Europe, the discussion will focus on possible joint ventures in the six leading business sectors: energy, tourism, transport and infrastructure, digital economy, the food and beverage sector and the knowledge-based economy, according to the statement of the Managers' Association of Slovenia which is organising the event.

The working groups will be organised according to business sectors in which participants will discuss obstacles and cooperation possibilities in the region. The ideas on enhancing cooperation in the region will be presented on a panel of presidents of South-Eastern European countries. In addition to Borut Pahor, the President of the Republic of Slovenia, the presidents of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia will also be participating in the panel discussions.

According to Iztok Seljak, the President of the Board of Summit100, the discussion will also consider how the region may utilise the development cycle, worth EUR 300 billion, presented by the European Commission, and alternative ways of financing regional projects. "The results will be presented to prime ministers in the region with the objective of transferring creativity into the reality and future of our region," explains Seljak, who believes that the time has come for the adopted revitalisation and integration principles to be expressed in concrete projects which have results in the outlined direction of competitiveness, starting with the transport network.

**Special attention will be paid to smart towns in the region, which can become a driving force for inclusive and sustainable growth.**

The mayors of larger cities have recognised Summit100 as the ideal foundation for cooperation and will sign a declaration at the meeting which commits them to the solutions and development of smart towns and the exchange of experience and knowledge.

The Summit100 of business leaders is a joint initiative of the Managers' Association of Slovenia, the Serbian Association of Managers and the Croatian Employers' Association, which were later joined by the Atlas Foundation from Montenegro.

The first Summit100 was held in 2011 in Serbia, the second in Montenegro and the third in Croatia. All the meetings were held under the patronage of the president of the host country, as it will be this year when the Summit100 will be hosted by the Slovenian President Borut Pahor. The President already hosted the members of the Board of Summit100 at the end of March and assessed that the meeting was an important initiative for the modernisation of the region.





SLOVENIAN'S LOVE FOR BREAD

# The best bread is always made at home

POLONA PREŠEREN,  
Photo: MOSTPHOTOS

“For Slovenians, bread denoted food, cultural heritage and a symbol, and it still does” says ethnologist, Dr Janez Bogataj. Slovenians consider it a basic food indispensable to our daily diet. We eat it for breakfast, lunch and dinner, in snacks, with a soup or with a salad.

Shelves filled with various types of bread demonstrate the exceptional importance Slovenians attribute to this basic food. Many old proverbs testify to its significance: good as bread; going abroad to earn bread; hasty statements that have to be retracted are 'bitter bread to be swallowed'; if a person travels half the world, the best bread is always made at home.

Although in Slovenia, possibly due to modern dietary trends, bread sales are falling, we still eat some 65 kilos of bread per capita a year, according to research by Valicon at the beginning of this year. We are thus still considered great consumers of bread and other bakery products.

**As many as 78 per cent of respondents define bread as an important part of their everyday diet.**

We rarely throw it away, and we have interesting ways of using it even when it is no longer fresh. It is an important asset of Slovenians, which we not only enjoy purchasing, but also enjoy making at home.

The consumption of bread with different spreads is very popular. It found its place as a traditional Slovenian foodstuff also in a campaign conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Environment, 'Traditional Slovenian Breakfast', which educates children in kindergartens and primary schools about the tradition and importance of breakfast. In addition to bread, the Traditional Slovenian Breakfast also includes butter, honey, milk and an apple.

## THE TRADITIONAL ROLE OF BREAD FOR SLOVENIANS

**“The symbolic significance of bread for Slovenians is very interesting, since it is associated with rituals.”**

“Many, not only Christian, but also pagan celebrations and traditions were connected with bread, which in this regard was not merely food but a ritual symbol, the material understanding of abundance, an attitude to the harvest, a tangible metaphor for a newborn, and all things divine etc.” explains Bogataj.





There is an emotional connection between bread and Slovenians. Bread was also an important gift in various rituals, and in this role it represents an ancient form of charity. In this regard, white bread was particularly important, because it was not served every day, but only on special occasions.

**AND WHAT IS TYPICAL SLOVENIAN BREAD?**

Different types of bread are made in the 24 different gastronomic regions. A Leški loaf (buckwheat bread with walnuts) can be tasted in the Gorenjska region, bige (white milky bread) is popular in the Primorska region, sour rye bread in the Koroška region, bread mixed with potato in the Dolenjska region, excellent pogača (flat-bread) is made in the Bela Krajina region, etc.

“It is difficult to decide which bread is the most Slovenian. Every gastronomic region in Slovenia has not only one, but several types of bread. We must also make a distinction between everyday and festive breads. Bread made from different cereal mixtures, so-called bread mixtures, is very frequent. There were several types of these mixtures; one of the popular was soržica, i.e. a mixture of wheat and rye. One of our most typical desserts, potica, which is known today in over 100 sweet and savoury variants (as per its filling), was

initially a type of bread for festive occasions which had different additions, such as herbs, pork crackling, raisins, eggs, etc. In 1689, the polymath Janez Vajkard Valvasor wrote that buckwheat bread was as black as soil. Rye flour was more frequently used for bread than buckwheat, which was more popular in other dishes.”

**BREAD IN THE PAST AND NOW**

“Slovenian cultural heritage includes a range of bread varieties, which vary in their preparation and function. As far as preparation is concerned, I have to mention the many cereals from which bread was made. But not only cereals, also other produce: beans, herbs, and even cooked potato was used from the 19th century onward to make bread when harvests were poor or there was a general shortage among poor social groups. With changing attitudes to eating habits in modern times, the bread of the poor again became interesting and particularly delicious,” explains Bogataj.

In the past, bread and other dishes were made in bread ovens. The preparation of bread is very different today. But small boutique bakeries are returning to traditional baking. Consumers have also become more demanding and require higher quality.

We are re-examining our cultural heritage; we do not want to copy it, but it serves as a starting point for new creative experiments in baking which are oriented towards healthy eating. Sour dough has become popular again. This was formerly made with wine lees. A vast array of bread with different herbs, dried fruit, nuts etc. is available on the market. The range of bread with no additives or baked in the traditional style and similar is most notable.

The offer of seasonal bread is becoming more prominent. “I am pleased that suitable types of bread are being prepared according to individual seasons, every day or holiday, i.e. in accordance with everything that we produce with our knowledge, together with nature and with what is available in a certain season,” adds Bogataj.

**Tradition thus lives on in a modern form and with delicious flavours for all bread lovers. As for Slovenians and bread, we can certainly say that this love is great.**





# JANEZ VAJKARD VALVASOR

## The most distinguished Slovene of the 17th century

VESNA ŽARKOVIČ

If anyone learns about Slovenia, they should also learn about Valvasor. Janez Vajkard Valvasor (1641–1693): polymath, member of the Royal Society in London, a scholar of history, archaeology, mathematics, magic and alchemy, a world traveller, soldier and commander, explorer and collector, geographer, ethnologist, topographer, cartographer, natural scientist and technician, researcher of Lake Cerknica and the owner of an extensive library at Bogenšperk Castle.

After three years of correspondence, he was made a Fellow of the Royal Society in London in 1688, the only Slovene to be admitted. He was thus accepted by the European intellectual elite, and put Slovenia on the scientific map of Europe with his research work. The mysterious emergence and disappearance of the lake and other related stories inspired him to study Lake Cerknica. Five letters remain from the total of eight which Valvasor exchanged with the Royal Society on the topic of the lake.

His work, *The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola*, was printed in 1689 in Nuremberg in 15 volumes, and is a priceless source for studying the history of Slovene places and an important foundation of Slovene identity. Due to his research, Valvasor is the most eminent Slovene of the 17th century and will undoubtedly remain a legendary figure in the history of Slovenes.

### COMPREHENSIVE COLLECTION OF KNOWLEDGE

From today's standpoint, *The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola* could be viewed as a good encyclopaedia. It stands out due to its detailed descriptions, because Valvasor not only surveyed but also researched. The stories of witches and elves living in mines are entertaining for all lovers of mysteries. The descriptions of flowers, past events, traditions, customs, the mercury mine in Idrija and the entire survey of all the literary works of Carniolan authors are also interesting. All the

quotations and individual Slovene terms are valuable for linguists studying the history of the Slovene language. These expressions are usually in the Dolenjska dialect, which Valvasor also spoke. *The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola* still serves as a reference for many studies. All data derive from his own field research.

### EXTRACT FROM THE DISCUSSION ON LAKE CERKNICA

During his thorough research of Lake Cerknica, Valvasor also studied the story of the notorious Slivnica Hill, a 1,114-metre hill north of Cerknica Field, which is now a popular hiking destination that offers exceptional views of the lake and surrounding area. Some 50 metres below the hilltop is the Witches' Cave, from which mist rises in the morning. People used to believe that witches cooked up bad weather and other evil things in the cave. "There is a hole in Slivnica where storms are made. Witches, bats and monsters dance and meet on the top of the hill. They look like small flying lights. In general, there are many witches in this region, which is why they are quite often burnt. Sometimes more witches are sent to the stake here than there have sat on woodpiles in the entire country since ancient times and turned into dust and ash. For which reason, they hide carefully. This vermin is impossible to get rid of entirely; beneath the great pile of ash some sparks remain which may quite possibly ignite a woodpile here and there," wrote Valvasor in *The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola*.

### Donation of Iconotheca Valvasoriana to the University Library of Salzburg

The Janez Vajkard Valvasor Foundation of the Slovenian Academy of Science and Arts has donated a facsimile edition of the Valvasor graphics collection, Iconotheca Valvasoriana, which was handed over on behalf of the Foundation by the Vice-President of the Slovenian Academy of Science and Arts, Dr Jože Krašovec, and the Slovenian ambassador, Dr Andrej Rahten. This is an exceptional cultural and historical monument connecting Land Salzburg with Slovenia. Many historical facts testify to the connection: the Archbishopric of Salzburg had a vital influence on the religious and political development of a large part of the present Slovenian territory for many centuries. The less known fact that Janez Krstnik Prešeren of Radovljica was entrusted to establish and arrange the first Salzburg royal library by the then Archbishop of Land Salzburg also denotes the reciprocity of this relationship. Janez Vajkard Valvasor was also connected with Salzburg, because his books were printed there.



You may easily find yourself standing in the lake without even knowing it. The water disappears into sinkholes and reappears in another karst field or a river or remains in one of the many underground caves.

**When water is abundant, the lake extends over more than ten kilometres in length and almost five in width and exceeds thirty square kilometres.**

When this happens, Lake Cerknica becomes the largest lake in Slovenia. But the surface and volume change constantly, on a daily basis, from year to year; no rules govern the movement of the water's surface. The quantity of precipitation affects it the most. Water runs into Lake Cerknica from karst springs in the northern part of the Cerknica Field. Its only surface tributary is the Cerkniščica Stream. On the other hand, water runs from the lake through sinkholes.

**Lake Cerknica is one of the most picturesque karst phenomena, surrounded on the south-western side by the Javorniki Hills and Slivnica Hill on the opposite side.**

Cerknica, the lovely town from which the lake takes its name and which is famous for its large carnival, is situated in the foothills of Slivnica Hill, which is a popular hiking destination offering exceptional views of the lake and surrounding area. Some 50 metres below the hilltop is the Witches' Cave, from which mist rises in the morning. People used to believe that witches cooked up bad weather and other bad things in the cave.

Miha Jernejčič from TIC Cerknica explains that Slivnica Hill used to be bare; no trees grew on it and cattle grazed the hill. During stormy weather, the cattle grew agitated because of the thunder and scattered around the hill to find shelter. The shepherds then went to look for them with lanterns. Because Slivnica Hill can be seen far away, people in the valley saw 'lights flying' around the hill and heard screaming. These were the shepherds calling their cattle. People attributed these phenomena to witches, and their belief was further strengthened by the mist rising from the Witches' Cave. This is actually the result of condensation in the cave. Today, the witches are among the favourite characters at the traditional carnival.

# THE MYSTERIOUS AND MIRACULOUS LAKE CERKNICA

## No rules for the movement

POLONA PREŠEREN

At the centre of Slovenia's Notranjska region, you can find Lake Cerknica, where the world of the karst reveals all its beauties. It can be found? Well, if you can. For some six months, it is filled with water, and during the other half of the year, it is dry and you can walk on the bottom of the lake. But the mysteries of Lake Cerknica are much deeper, reaching deep into the karst underground and a history which also includes stories of witches.



The village of Otok is another interesting site in Lake Cerknica: it is situated in the middle of the lake, and when the water is really high, it becomes the largest Slovenian island (Slovenian: otok). The village embankment was constructed some one hundred years ago; before that, residents used boats for transportation which were up to 16 metres long. They transported everything in the boats: wood, produce, hay and even cattle.

### STANDING ON THE LAKE

Since there is plenty of water in the spring which has been collecting over the winter, I decided to explore the lake somewhat differently. I stepped on a SUP (Stand Up Paddle) board, and explored the lake standing up while keeping my balance and admiring the surroundings.

I had never been on a SUP before. The experienced stand-up paddler and windsurfer Žiga Hrček from the Standupaddler.si team reassured me. "Don't worry. You don't need any previous experience for SUP. You will get a feeling for the movement in a few minutes and everything will be fine. No one has ever fallen into the water. Well, maybe a few went for a swim," joked Žiga, but he was convincing enough for me to step on the board. After a few wobbly metres, my uncertainty disappeared. The closer I was to the first high grasses growing from the lake, the more confident I became.

The water's surface gives a feeling of incredible serenity. It is disturbed only by a horse-drawn carriage on its way from one village to another. The birds are on the lookout for fish. Migratory birds have already returned with the spring. The lake is a haven for bird-watching in the warmer months. Over 200 species can be found here.

The wind is also frequent in this region. And our journey turns into the wind. It isn't easy. Žiga encourages us and promises us that the best part is still to come. We make a short stop in the foothills of the Javorniki Hills, where a fallen tree prevents us from looking into the cave. The Karst is truly full of surprises and mysteries. We are about halfway and everybody agrees that this is a very pleasant way to explore natural beauties. You can also discover other parts of Slovenia on a SUP; the Ljubljanica and the Krka rivers and some other lakes.

Lake Cerknica is a wonderful place, where impressions and images change by the minute. The local people are incredibly friendly. They will be happy to chat with you and share some of the many stories and legends about the lake and surrounding hills which have been passed from generation to generation. Exploring the lake while standing on the board was one the most pleasurable experiences of this spring, and I promised myself I would explore the lake in other seasons.



Lake Cerknica is increasingly popular as a recreational area, ideal for fishing, bird-watching, hiking, nature excursions (caving), wind-surfing, swimming, and ice-skating, depending on the season and the water level. The constantly changing landscape makes it worth a visit in any season.



## SLOVENIA'S ISLANDS

## Don't look for them in the sea!

DANILA GOLOB

Islands have a certain something about them. Perhaps this is because they are surrounded by water, which shapes, changes and creates them anew every day. A boat trip, a walk across a bridge and you are on an island, where a whole new world opens up to you.

Otočec Castle is situated on one of the islands in the river Krka not far from Novo mesto.  
Photo: Terme Krka Archives

Slovenia has no coastal islands, but it does have several interesting ones elsewhere. It has an island in a lake, islands in rivers, an island with a castle, and an underground island in the depths of a cave. On one island there is even a town – the smallest and only one of its kind in Slovenia.

**THE ISLAND OF LOVE**

In the village of Ižakovci, the river Mura has created a natural island, named by the locals as the Island of Love. Perhaps this was because of the romantic surroundings, which have always attracted lovers, or because the island was the spot where the countess Maria Zichy from Beltinci Castle used to secretly meet with her lover. At that time, the countess had her own bathing area on the island, which was also a venue for dances and other gatherings. Today, the island caters for many different activities that attract day trippers, tourists and random visitors. One of the most interesting events is The Days Of Būjraši (*būjranje* - consolidation, damming up of the riverbed or riverbank of the Mura), a festival dedicated to the lives and work of the *būjraši*, the people who used to live alongside the Mura.

**On the Island of Love, there is also a floating mill – the only one of its kind in Slovenia, which was reconstructed in 1999 from the original plans of one of the former mills on the river Mura.**

The wooden mill is built entirely on water, together with a huge mill wheel and a miller's room, where buckwheat, wheat, spelt and maize flour is ground. Visitors can also take a ferry in Ižakovci, which is one of the four remaining ferries on the river Mura. The ferry is made up of two shallow boats linked with a platform. The platform with its enclosure is attached to a steel riverside rope that carries the pulley with the hanging rope. The ferry moves on the river with the help of the river's current.

The island is known for its beauty and unspoilt nature, and the river Mura, the symbol and soul of the Prekmurje region, makes it even more attractive.

**THE UNDERGROUND ISLAND**

Over 8 km long Križna Cave in the Notranjska region is one of the world's famous and most beautiful water karst caves. Its special feature is 22 underground lakes separated by calcareous sinter barriers (formed as a result of the sedimentation of calcium carbonate in the water) where crystal clear water flows. The emerald green lakes, silence and fabulous stalactites and stalagmites provide an unforgettable experience for visitors.

**Križna Cave also has another characteristic – an underground island in the middle of the 13th lake. It lies approximately 100 metres underground and is the largest underground island in Slovenia.**



It was formed as a result of the collapse of large rocks and is mostly made of mud and rocky debris, shaped in a form slightly reminiscent of a star.

Križna Cave is also one of the largest sites of cave bear bones in this part of Europe and one of the most biodiverse karst caves in the world when it comes to the variety of animal life.

THE SMALL ISLAND IN A LAKE

In the middle of Lake Bled, formed by glaciers tens of thousands of years ago, lies the island of Bled, which has been shaped over centuries by human hand. The island, which covers 0.82 hectares, is located in the western part of the lake and rises 18 metres above the lake level. It looks like a small floating town in the middle of the lake. The magical view of the island invites visitors to take a trip across the lake to the island in the traditional Pletna boat, climb up the 99 stone stairs and ring the 'bell of wishes'. The island is covered in green vegetation and has several buildings, the main one being the Pilgrimage Church of the Assumption of Mary, a medieval church rebuilt in Baroque style, with its majestic tower. The island of Bled is also an important archaeological site, as in the place where the church now stands, archaeologists have found traces of prehistoric and Slavic settlement. Today, the island is a popular tourist attraction with daily trips to the island by Pletna boats.

THE TOWN ON AN ISLAND

Kostanjevica na Krki, the only Slovenian town situated on an island, is the smallest and one of the oldest Slovenian towns and the oldest one in the Dolenjska region. The town was formed on the artificial island set in the meander of the river Krka, in the vicinity of Landestrost Castle, a former Spanheim border fortress. Kostanjevica na Krki was first mentioned in 1220 as the seat of the parish and gained town rights in 1252. The old town structure with two parallel streets that meet in the northwest and southeast has remained the same until the present day. There are two larger wood bridges intended for traffic leading to the small island that is 500 meters long and 200 meters wide, and the third bridge, which is for pedestrians only. At the north side of the island, there is the St. Jacob's church, which was built in the 13th century as part of the fortification system by the northern bridge. Another valuable religious monument – the Church of St. Nicholas – stands at the southern end of the island, while the town also has several other elements of religious heritage.

**Kostanjevica na Krki, rich in natural and cultural attractions, was proclaimed a first class cultural monument and is thus under complete cultural protection.**

Its rich history, architecture, beauty and lively atmosphere, contributed to by local inhabitants, attract large numbers of visitors from far and wide.

THE CASTLE ISLAND

Otočec Castle, built on one of the islands in the river Krka, is the only castle surrounded by water in Slovenia. The castle dates from the mid-13th century and its image has changed over the centuries. The building was extended in the mid-14th century and acquired an L-shaped floor plan. The archival sources also bear witness to a castle rampart, while the security of the castle was further increased by the excavation of a new southern channel for the river Krka, which cut off the natural river meander. This transformed the former riverside post into an island, which was joined to the mainland by a wooden bridge. Today, the castle has been converted into Otočec Castle Hotel, one of the most attractive locations in Slovenia for weddings and other ceremonial events.

One of the island's distinctive features is also the castle park, designed in the English landscape style. The oldest trees in the park are a good century old, but the majority were planted after the renovation of the castle the 1950's. The park also contains examples of exotic tree species, such as swamp cypress, tulip tree, cigar tree, thorny locust and others. During spring months, if you take a walk along the castle park, you will see large flocks of beautiful white swans on the green river Krka.

THE MARIBOR ISLAND

The Maribor Island is a natural river island in the river Drava ahead of Maribor. The island was created by alluvial deposits at the end of the last ice age. The interesting fact is that the island's former size was around a quarter larger. In 1946, during the construction of the nearby hydroelectric power plant, part of the island was reclaimed by the rising water. A concrete pier with bank protection was subsequently built at the western side in the direction of the power plant to prevent further erosion from flood waters. In 1951, the Maribor Island was protected as a natural attraction, and today it is also protected as a geomorphological and botanical natural monument. The eastern part of the island is covered by bushes and oak and pine trees, while beech and common hornbeam prevail in the western part of the island. The island provides an important habitat for animal species, birds in particular. Forest bird species are the most typical of the area, while in winter the island provides refuge for wetland birds. Since 1927, the island has had a swimming pool, much to the joy of the locals and foreign visitors during summer months.



The beautiful bird's eye view of Kostanjevica na Krki.  
Photo: Archives of the Municipality of Kostanjevica na Krki



MUNICIPALITY OF ŠENTRUPERT

# Dynamic, energy self-sufficient and “Land of Hayracks”

BRIGITA JUHART, Photo: ALENKA LAMOVŠEK

We frequently say to an eight-year old child: only a baby yesterday, and so grown up today. You could say the same of the small Municipality of Šentrupert in the Dolenjska region, which became an independent municipality only eight years ago, but has become an example to other local communities in Slovenia with its many innovative projects.

In particular, the Municipality of Šentrupert has made huge strides forward in energy self-sufficiency. In 2014, it received the label of a 100% RES (Renewable Energy Sources) community at the International Forum, “100% RES - Yes, we can! Regions in Germany, Europe and the world show 100% RES is reality today” in Kassel in Germany.

In spring 2015, the municipality received the 2015 Golden Stone award in the Slovenian selection for the municipality making the greatest development breakthroughs. The citation said: “It deserves the award for the persistence and consistency with which it develops its energy self-sufficiency model...”

**“The energy of Šentrupert is the energy of the vision of municipal policy and its residents.”**

## DEVELOPMENT MODEL INTERTWINED WITH A STORY OF WOOD

This young municipality is well aware of its advantages, and builds its development potential on the knowledge of its residents. Since its establishment in 2007, the municipality has been led by its mayor, Rupert Gole, who as a visionary sees Šentrupert as a community which can offer a well-maintained and pleasant living environment.

**The municipality is known for tourism and events based on customs and tradition, culture and the beautiful landscape. It promotes handicrafts, small companies, organic farming and supplementary activities.**

Development plans up to 2025 highlight the use of wood. It all began with the construction of a wooden, low-energy prefabricated kindergarten with a boiler room running on wood chips and a charging station for electric vehicles. It was selected as the most energy-efficient project of 2011 and promoted the construction of similar kindergartens in Slovenia. The boiler room was designed to heat an entire school complex, and thus ended the use of fossil fuels.





While the kindergarten demonstrates the current and modern use of wood in the construction of facilities, the next project designed by the Municipality of Šentrupert is particularly a witness to the past and tradition.

**THE LAND OF HAYRACKS PLACED ŠENTRUPERT ON THE MAP OF TOURISM**

This is an open-air museum which features over 19 hay-drying devices, of which 17 are hayracks, including all types known in Slovenia. The exhibition aims to present the development of the hayrack and its significance in Slovenia. The museum includes one of the oldest surviving double hayracks in the world, which was built in 1795.

The Land of Hayracks has contributed substantially to the recognisability of the municipality and serves as a driving force in tourism.

**One of the biggest broadcast networks in the world, CNN, presented the Land of Hayracks in Šentrupert as one of the reasons for visiting Slovenia.**

The numbers confirm that this unique open-air museum is an attractive location: more than 30,000 visitors from 42 countries visited it in the year and a half since its establishment.

The Land of Hayracks is also an innovative project, since it connects the all-round value of the heritage of hayracks with modern forms of tourism and business.

**The first gourmet and fun festival, IZBOR, will take place on 20 June 2015: 20 selected chefs and 40 best wine producers from the wider Alps and Adriatic region will be presented. Visitors to the event will have opportunity to taste food made by Michelin-starred chefs.**

**CIRCULAR WOOD ROUTE**

Šentrupert is being developed as the first energy self-sufficient municipality in Slovenia. A public corporation, Energetika Šentrupert, was established and built a boiler room to heat the entire complex of prisons in Dob with wood chips. Gradually, remote heating of the entire municipality will be ensured.

The Šentrupert wood-processing centre was constructed in former barracks, thus closing the circle of self-efficiency: wood from local forests is being processed there and the waste is used for energy production and heating. Thanks to energy savings, the municipality will be able to promote dynamic development in other fields.

In the eight years of its establishment, the Municipality of Šentrupert has made a name for itself based on the advanced sustainable development model of the local community and numerous positive effects. Money circulates in the local community environment due to local energy projects and the utilisation of local wood biomass and enables the realisation of new visionary projects.

Hayracks are a special feature of Slovenia, and are found almost everywhere in rural and urban environments. However, they no longer serve their primary function of drying hay and cereals, which is the result of change and development in agricultural technology.







The Expo World Exhibition opened in Milan on 1 May and will run until 31 October. More than 140 countries are presenting themselves at the Expo, with Slovenia being one of the 50 countries with its own pavilion. The Slovenian pavilion was designed by the company Sono arhitekti and installed by Lumar. It is in the form of a pyramid built from natural materials, mostly wood, the aim being to draw attention on the country's national bounty, its forests. Around 4,000 people visit the Slovenian pavilion each day.