

## HOW PEZ EVOLVED FROM AN ANTI-SMOKING TOOL TO A BELOVED COLLECTOR'S ITEM

When it comes to stocking stuffers, one product hits a perfect harmony: the PEZ dispenser. Part character, part candy, and all collectible, the trinket has delighted kids and collectors around the world for decades. And yet when Austrian confectioner Eduard Haas III invented PEZ, he set out to corner an entirely different market.

An anti-smoking advocate, Haas wanted to create a tablet that would not only refresh one's breath but could also help consumers who were anxious to cut down on smoking or overeating.

Strong peppermint flavoring seemed like just the trick, but peppermint oil was expensive. So, Haas developed a tablet manufacturing process. PEZ tablets are made by compressing confectionary sugar and flavoring with thousands of pounds of force until each brick holds together. The candies didn't originally come in dispensers but were instead packaged in metal tins or foil-paper wrapping.

Before he could sell the new product, he took the first, middle and last letters from the German word for peppermint, *pfefferminz*, and created PEZ.

The first PEZ candies, called PEZ Drops, were marketed as a luxury item for adults. PEZ tablets spent more than 20 years without a handy carrying container and in 1949, the first PEZ dispensers were sold at the Vienna Trade Fair. The contraptions look more like cigarette lighters than PEZ dispensers that we'd recognize today.

The first PEZ dispensers were such a success in Europe that the Haas Company needed to construct a second factory in Austria to keep up with demand. Ads showed off the convenience of a one-handed dispenser

that was easy to use while driving and easy to share with others. Haas turned his attention to the American market. But there, PEZ's meteoric rise came to a screeching halt. There just wasn't much interest in smoking abatement, and PEZ needed to pivot fast.

The company's solution: change the tablets' flavor from minty to fruity and begin marketing to kids. In 1955, PEZ introduced its first character-shaped dispensers—a robot and Santa Claus. Today, Santa Claus is PEZ's best-selling design.

PEZ adjusted again and created a new toy-like dispenser that struck a balance between the original regulars and the character designs: a character head on top, and a rectangular body that held the candy underneath. The first PEZ dispenser with this anatomy was a witch introduced at Halloween in 1957. The next year, the company struck gold with its first licensing deal for a Popeye dispenser.

In 1973, PEZ built a candy factory and warehouse in Orange, Connecticut, to better reach American consumers. The factory now manufactures all PEZ candies for the U.S. and Canada—about 12 million tablets per day, five days per week. The campus includes a Visitor Center where anyone can see the world's largest PEZ dispenser and learn how PEZ candies are made.