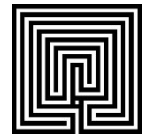


The Renaissance of Mirror Mazes

Adrian Fisher



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Renaissance is not a word to be used lightly. It implies an initial vigorous impetus, followed by a long transient period, and only then a sudden and widespread rebirth, re-invention and discovery. In this spirit, it is accurate to state that the turn of the twenty-first century is proving the renaissance of the mirror maze.

The world's first mirror mazes were built in the late 1880s, and within a few years examples were created on both sides of the Atlantic - in the Czech Republic, Switzerland, Canada and the United States. Mirror mazes featured at a number of world fairs and expositions in North America, including the 1901 World Fair at Buffalo, New York State and the 1904 St. Louis World Fair, which had a *Temple of Mirth* (also called the *Crystal Maze*) that included over 150 French plate curved mirrors, which gave absurd, grotesque reflections. The 1939 New York World Fair in Corona Park, Long Island, also featured a mirror maze; today part of its site is occupied by the New York Hall of Science. In 1967, one of the most ambitious parts of EXPO '67 in Montreal, Canada, was its five-storey high *Labyrinthe* pavilion, where 720 visitors at a time moved through three chambers; in the second chamber they moved along walkways set between mirrored glass prisms; it entertained a total of 1,324,560 visitors.

In America, mirror mazes became popular amusement park attractions. In 1923, a mirror maze was created on Venice Pier, Southern California, but was destroyed in 1946 when the pier was damaged by a storm and abandoned. Asbury Park in New Jersey had a Circus Fun House mirror maze, which was taken away in the 1970s when the park relocated. Luna Park on Coney Island opened in 1895, and added a mirror maze in 1941; the Australian Luna Parks in Sydney, Melbourne and Glenelg all had mirror mazes. Dorney Park in Allentown, Pennsylvania, also had a mirror maze.

In the Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen, Denmark, visitors entering the mirror maze found themselves being laughed at by those leaving; only on the way out did they themselves see the giant angled mirror beneath the entrance walkway, revealing tantalising glimpses of ladies' bloomers beneath their skirts.

There were also travelling mirror mazes constructed on purpose-built trailers by specialist manufacturers such as Hakantorp in Europe, and Hollingsworth in America.

Mirror mazes were also kept alive in the public imagination in movies such as Hitchcock's *The Lady from Shanghai* and the James Bond film *The Man with the Golden Gun*.

However, the renaissance of mirror mazes began in 1991, with the opening of the *Magical Mirror Maze* at Wookey Hole Caves in England; not just a new mirror maze, but conceived to a different scope, scale and quality. In the 1990s, 7 mirror mazes were built. Between 2000 and 2005, another 21 were added worldwide, with the rate now increasing every year. There have probably been less than 100 permanent mirror mazes created in the history of the world; more than a third of these have been created in the past 10 years. In terms of numbers, this is certainly a renaissance!

Similarly, there has been re-invention in terms of concept, scope, content and quality. In November 2004 I met John Collins, former World President of the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions. He had come to see our booth at the IAAPA convention in Orlando, and said:

"I remember when my father operated mirror mazes in the 1950s and 1960s. Now I have seen your latest mirror maze product, I did not recognize it as a mirror maze but as a state-of-the-art attraction in our industry. It is a quantum leap forward and is a real pioneering breakthrough. I love your infectious enthusiasm. I don't need to tell you, you are on to such a winner."

The Mirror Maze Experience

The very idea of a mirror maze makes most people curl their toes in anticipation. Lights, sound effects, storyline, action! From the inside, a mirror maze seems up to six times larger than it really is. Impossible reflections trick the eye, and there appear to be choices in all directions; most of them are just that, apparitions! You never know who you are going to meet, or what is going to happen next.

Creating a storyline in visitors' minds before they enter enhances the experience. Once inside they become heroes of their own adventure, whether as "Dream Warriors of the Labyrinth," mermaids beneath the sea or archaeologists exploring an Egyptian temple.

The difficulty in finding your way through a mirror maze is not just in the complicated layout, dead-ends and wrong turns, but in the illusions and deceptions of the mirrors. The eye is tricked and the brain deceived - nothing here is what it seems! Children often wander through a Mirror Maze savouring the illusions, sound and lighting effects in a dreamlike trance. All sense of time is lost.

The Fascination of Reflection

Mirrors and our own reflection have held an uncanny fascination for mankind since the dawn of time. The term 'mirror image' describes a window into a parallel universe, where everything is reversed from right to left. No one's face is perfectly symmetrical; our 'normal' perception of our own face and appearance is what we see in a mirror, so we only think of our own face as normal in terms of its reverse image! By comparison, whenever we see anyone else in a mirror, their face is reversed, different and somehow transformed. Nowadays photography and video provide us with normal images of ourselves as well, so we no longer see ourselves, uniquely, only in reverse. Even so, when we keep encountering the full-height mirror image of ourselves hundreds of times in a few minutes, the cumulative effect is overwhelming.

In the Greek myth, Narcissus fell in love with a reflection of himself seen through the reflective properties of a smooth water surface. Lewis Carroll's famous book *Alice Through the Looking Glass* takes us into a second, parallel world where all previous assumptions of normality are turned inside out. In *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, C.S. Lewis approached a similar parallel world through the act of entering a wardrobe, closing the door to achieve darkness, and then opening a second door to see the new world beyond. Light or the absence of light was central to the magic in both these stories.

The Renaissance of modern Mirror Mazes

Since 1991, Adrian Fisher Mazes Ltd have pioneered the modern mirror maze, with 13 permanent mirror mazes and 3 temporary ones created across England, Scotland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, China, Thailand and the United States. Half the world's new mirror mazes are now devised in the design studios at our 1830s English manor house in Dorset.

The first definitive modern mirror maze was the *Magical Mirror Maze* (1991) at Wookey Hole Caves, England. Its scale was unprecedented; the design, colour scheme and lighting complement the magical 'gags' that appear and disappear from sight; the soundtrack captures the atmosphere of a seaside pier, with seagulls overhead and a brass band's music wafting across in the breeze. It has entertained over 4 million visitors and its appeal continues as strong as ever.

The Labyrinth of Dragons (1994) at Peaugres Safari Park, France, is themed on the Great Labyrinth of Ancient Egypt, complete with live crocodiles, scorpions, pythons and bats, and vertical tanks of aquarium fish that are reflected by the mirrors. It was followed by *A-Maze-N-Mirrors* (1997) in Mackinaw City, Michigan, USA.

King Arthur's Mirror Maze (1998) at Longleat House, England, is another pioneering mirror maze. It is the world's first mirror maze with two episodes, created in exuberant 3-D castings to achieve an enchanted forest and a ruined chapel. To create the effect of an endless forest, the trees appear planted haphazardly, unlike the regular formations of most mirror mazes, and yet every archway and mirror is precisely the same size. In 2005 its soundtrack and lighting system was upgraded to transform and refresh the experience.

Visitors to the *Dream Labyrinth Mirror Maze* (2000) in the Grand Gateway Entertainment Centre, Shanghai, China, re-live a traditional Chinese legend in which the forces of evil so darkened the earth that when men slept, they could not even dream dreams. As Dream Warriors of the Labyrinth, visitors avenge the Dark Shadow by overcoming challenges within its labyrinthine web of deceit to reach the boundary of dreamtime. Finally they find the glistening Dreamstone set under a Golden Egg, and set the Enchanted Dragon free.

*A*mazing Chicago* (2001) at Navy Pier, Chicago, USA, is themed on the city of Chicago and its skyscrapers. It contains two distinct mirror maze experiences - dark underground subway tunnels and distinctive architectural landmarks - to celebrate the character of Chicago. Noah's Ark Water Park in Wisconsin Dells is America's largest water park. *Noah's Ark Mirror Maze* (2004) portrays the character of the main livestock deck of the ark. As the ark settles on Mount Ararat, visitors emerge down a walkway onto dry land, whilst a rainbow appears above them. *The Ripley's Mirror Maze* in Pattaya, Thailand (2004), includes a Space Pod with a walkway through an infinity chamber, and a White Room where the walls are formed of Mitre Tiling shapes, whose pastel colours change and evolve.

The Merlin Entertainment group based in Dorset, England, are installing a mirror maze at each of their Dungeons across Europe. *The Hamburg Dungeon Mirror Maze* (2004) in Germany portrays that city's notorious *House of Corrections*, with its cruel and gruesome punishments. *The Labyrinth of the Lost* (2005) in the London Dungeon, England features a ghostly lady in black, the spirit of a choir mistress said to have haunted All Hallows Church in Barking. Ancient ruins discovered beneath All Hallows, where the spooky inscription "Werhere" - thought to mean "we are here" - was found, provide the theme for the London maze. In the Edinburgh Dungeon (2005), the mirror maze tells the story of a little Drummer boy who was sent in to explore some castle catacombs, and told to keep drumming so that others could always come in and find him; the drumming got fainter and fainter, and finally nothing could be heard. They searched, but the drummer boy was never found.

A spectacular new mirror maze was opened at Louis Tussaud's Waxworks in Blackpool (2006). In the style of a Victorian pier and featuring a variety of traditional British seaside attractions, there's also a history of Punch and Judy Shows through the years within the maze, as well as a family posing panel based on a saucy postcard, distorting mirrors and an old-fashioned bathing tent complete with a giant clam shell seat and coral reef-style pillars.

Our latest installation, the world's first aquarium mirror maze, was unveiled at the National Sea Life Centre in Birmingham in March 2007. Called *Lost City of Atlantis*, the new attraction is a mind-boggling labyrinth with fish displays among its web of mirrors creating the illusion of colourful shoals on all sides. Visitors begin their journey in the mythical lost city before moving out onto a coral reef maze and finally finding themselves at the Temple of Poseidon, guarded by a giant Pacific octopus.

The renaissance of the mirror maze is now firmly underway, with unprecedented innovation. Upon reflection, the world of mazes has just got six times bigger!



Adrian Fisher, Durweston,
Dorset, England; February 2008
Websites: www.mazemaker.com
www.mirrormaze.com

*Adrian Fisher in one
of his mirror mazes*

Permanent Mirror Mazes Open to the Public
(Mirror mazes created by Adrian Fisher shown in italics)

19th Century

Petrin Mirror Maze, Prague, Czech Republic, 1891

Glacier Gardens, Lucerne, Switzerland, 1899

20th Century

Mirror Maze, Trimper's Rides of Ocean City, Maryland, USA

Rockin' Rosie's Fun House & Mirror Maze, Virginia Beach, Virginia, USA

Mirror Maze, Funspot Amusement Park & Zoo, Angola, Indiana, USA

Clownport Glass House, York's Wild Kingdom, York Beach, Maine, USA

House of Oz Mirror Maze, Keansburg Amusement Park, Keansburg, New Jersey, USA

Glass House Maze, Canobie Lake Park, Salem, New Hampshire, USA

Mirror Maze, Frontier Town, Ocean City, Maryland, USA

Big Top Mirror Maze, Casino Pier, Seaside Heights, New Jersey, USA

Mirror Maze Renaissance - 1991 onwards

Magical Mirror Maze, Wookey Hole Caves, Somerset, England, 1991

"Illusionist Labyrinth" Mirror Maze, Liberty Science Center, New Jersey, USA, 1992

Labyrinthe des Dragons, Peaugres Safari Park, Ardeche, France, 1994

Virginia Beach Mirror Maze, Haunted Mansion, Virginia Beach, Virginia, USA, 1995

Mackinaw Mirror Maze, Mackinaw, Michigan, USA, 1997

King Arthur's Mirror Maze, Longleat House, Wiltshire, England, 1998

"Glass Magic" Mirror Maze, Pilkingtons World of Glass, Lancashire, England, 1999

Dream Labyrinth Mirror Maze, Grand Gateway Entertainment Centre, Shanghai, China, 2000

Amazing Chicago, Navy Pier, Chicago, Illinois, USA, 2001

Frankenmuth, Michigan, USA, 2001

Best Western Hotel, Western Ontario, Canada, 2001?

"Amazing Mirrors", Marijka, Black Rock City, Nevada, USA, 2001?

"Impossible" (incorporating "1001 Troubles"), Blackpool Pleasure Beach, Lancashire, England, 2002

Mirror Maze exhibit, Singapore Science Centre, Singapore, 2002

Mirror Maze, Ocean Park, Hong Kong, China, 2003

Rocky Point Haunted House, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA, 2003

Mirror Maze, Scitech, Western Australia, Australia, 2003?

Mirror Maze, Hamburg Dungeon, Hamburg, Germany, 2004

Mirror Maze, Noah's Ark Water Park, Wisconsin Dells, USA, 2004

Wizard Quest, Wisconsin Dells, USA, 2004

Ripleys, Wisconsin, USA, 2004

"Mirror Maze", Oranda Mura, Huis Ten Bosch Holland Village, Nagasaki, Japan, 2004

Mirror Maze, A Maze'n Things, Port Philip Bay, Victoria, Australia, 2004

Ripley's Mirror Maze, Pattaya, Thailand, 2004 (White Room & Space Pod by Adrian Fisher Mazes Ltd)

Mirror Maze, London Dungeon, London, England, 2005

Mirror Maze, Edinburgh Dungeon, Edinburgh, Scotland, 2005

Mirror Maze, Skyline Caverns, Virginia, USA, 2005

Mirror Maze, Amsterdam Dungeon, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2005

Huis Ten Bosch Mirror Maze, Nagasaki, Japan, 2006

Seibu Park Mirror Maze, Tokyo, Japan, 2006

Louis Tussauds Mirror Maze, Blackpool, England, 2006

Tobu Zoo Mirror Maze, Japan, 2007

Lost World of Atlantis Mirror Maze, National Sea Life Centre, Birmingham, England, 2007

Space Adventure Mirror Maze, Imax Theatre, Hyderabad, India (opening soon)

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