

Steiff & The Toy Shoppe collaborate on limited edition exclusive teddy

The exclusive limited edition Steiff teddy from The Toy Shoppe is a collaboration piece that celebrates Steiff's history and brings out the joy and happiness in collecting fine teddy bears

BY LAUREN C. NIELSEN



It's impossible to be in the world of fine teddy bears without having Steiff as the centre of gravity," says Danny Shapiro, owner of The Toy Shoppe in North Chesterfield, Virginia.

The Toy Shoppe opened in 1975 as a shop for speciality toys, focusing on fine stuffed animals, teddy bears and dolls. Danny and Barrie Shapiro felt that dolls and teddy bears were essential to opening up a speciality toy store – after all, these were 'living objects,' the kinds of toys that brought human and animal contact to children and adults alike.

When opening their shop, the first box they received was from none other than Steiff. And so began a 40-some year relationship between The Toy Shoppe and Steiff.

Due to its strength and perseverance, Steiff has survived two World Wars, unstable economies and the changing times throughout its more than 100 years of existence. Because of its enduring place in the industry, Steiff and The Toy Shoppe were able to build and develop their long-standing relationship.

"Part of Steiff's allure," Danny says, "is its history. And the fact that a company has survived this long making an object that exists to bring joy, love, companionship to people's lives."

"It is so important to what we are doing today," he explains. "People want to feel happy today and these objects do that."

In the early 2000s, The Toy Shoppe began to immerse itself even more with Steiff. They began doing limited editions, such as Maximilian and his family of bears. Maximilian is the largest teddy bear that Steiff has ever made. The Toy Shoppe gained recognition with Steiff through their collaborations on limited edition pieces – they realised The Toy Shoppe's great love of creating quality, fine teddy bears and working within this industry.

While building this strong relationship through collaborative projects several years ago, The Toy Shoppe was able to visit Steiff in Germany. "Many years ago," Danny recalls, "we were allowed to visit the archives at Steiff. Very few people or businesses get to do so. We were able to go look at the archived pieces to see old Steiff bears and get inspiration.

"Fast forward to today and we're still wanting to bring joy and happiness to people with any object we bring to them through Steiff."

Part of The Toy Shoppe's current collaborative project with Steiff derives from Danny's own childhood memories: "The little chest tag has always been fascinating to me. I suppose it began when I was a child. I'm a baby boomer and a lot of collectors today are baby boomers."

During Danny's childhood, he was always interested in European items, as opposed to mass-marketed toys. Whenever he had the opportunity to

visit a department store, he ended up looking for the speciality items displayed behind beautiful glass cases.

"The centre of beautiful and great toys in the world were found in department stores," Danny reminisces. "If you can, imagine a child going into a department store and seeing these beautiful toys out of the boxes and displayed behind glass. That is where I discovered Steiff.

"They were of special fascination," he continues. "They had taken the innovative step of doing small animals and special airbrushing to make the animals look realistic. And what was on each Steiff bear? It was that little cardboard chest tag on each piece."

Each original Steiff chest tag had a little yellow face of a teddy bear. The tag with a bear was first presented in 1928 and slightly changed in 1950 to the tag that Danny first remembers – the circular red Steiff tag with the head of a bright yellow bear at the bottom.

This tag was used from 1950 until 1972 when the tag was changed yet again. But Danny still associates Steiff with this brightly coloured tag and little yellow bear: "Whenever you saw that tag," he says, "you knew that you were in safe hands. You knew that it was a Steiff. And it just made you happy. Why did they choose the colour yellow? I

see it as a colour of happiness, optimism, sunshine, positivity. I have no idea why they chose that colour but they did."

This tag has become the inspiration for The Toy Shoppe's latest exclusive limited edition Steiff bear. The Toy Shoppe chose the colour yellow, matching the colour from the tag, for the new bear's colouring.

"A lot of famous and valuable bears have been yellow," Danny explains of the colour choice, "And mainly, there's the rarity factor. A yellow bear – it's an oddity, it's different, it's unique."

"Nobody has done a yellow bear with the rich yellow colour we're choosing," he continues. "We are using that sunshine yellow from the tag and have worked with Steiff on a custom-made mohair."

The Toy Shoppe knew exactly the colour they were looking for. Steiff made a prototype of the mohair and The Toy Shoppe okayed it for creation.

This beautiful yellow mohair will be used on a classic 1920s Steiff bear. This era of bear design was chosen because the original tag they are basing their colours off of began in the 1920s, and "We wanted to bring all of these decades of celebration to the forefront," Danny tells us.

With the yellow bear, The Toy Shoppe, "hopes to make people feel more optimistic about everything,"

The second part of this exclusive Steiff's bear creation, is something that The Toy Shoppe has wanted to do for years – create a personalised Steiff bear.

"We could never really come up with what we would consider a significant, wonderful way of personalising a bear," Danny shares. But with this inspired bear, they finally came up with an idea: "Why not use a commemorative chest tag medallion and personalise it with whatever the collector wanted?"

And so, each of these exclusive bears will come with a metal chest tag medallion that is the exact reproduction of the original 1928 chest tag. Each tag can be personalised to say whatever the buyer would like. "We want



people to take this joyful object and use it to celebrate any event in their lives that they want."

The personalised chest tags will also be able to be customised in different languages to ensure that collectors from all over the world can truly personalise their bear.

In addition to its vibrant yellow colour and personalised chest tag, there will be an outline of the bear put onto one of the paw pads and stitched into the feet. The bear will have a paper tag on its chest and a metal tag medallion on a cord around the teddy bear's neck.

Teddy, the Commemorative Chest Tag Bear, will be available this fall, released just in time for Christmas. As a limited edition, there will be 1,975 bears available. Why that number? Because that's the year The Toy Shoppe opened.

"When we do a special edition, we want it to be special. There's a lot of thought and meaning put into it on both a personal and a macro level," Danny explains. "A particular bear or symbol from Steiff's history is meaningful for collectors all over the world and has never been done before."

"It's totally unique, meaningful, special and beautiful. While it's nice to have something only you are selling, that doesn't mean anything unless the object itself is special. That's what has always been important to us."



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