

# Diamond: Improving on a Known Design

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*This case study describes some known problems with the board game Kensington, and how these inspired me to design a similar game that addresses these problems to provide an arguably superior result. Key steps in the design process are described.*

## 1 Introduction

GAME design is an iterative process of refinement, as the designer hones the rules to produce the best possible playing experience. Games released prematurely – before an optimal rule set is crafted – will typically not fare very well with players, but can provide ideas for other designers to develop. This short paper describes one such case, in which an arguably flawed game inspired the design of an arguably better one.

## 2 Kensington

The board game Kensington, released in 1979, is played on the board shown in Figure 1, according to the rules below [1]. The board design, which shows the semi-regular tessellation 3.4.6.4 [2], was apparently inspired by a pattern in a book of Islamic art, for which the game's two inventors – Brian Taylor and Peter Forbes – aimed to devise a suitable rule set.

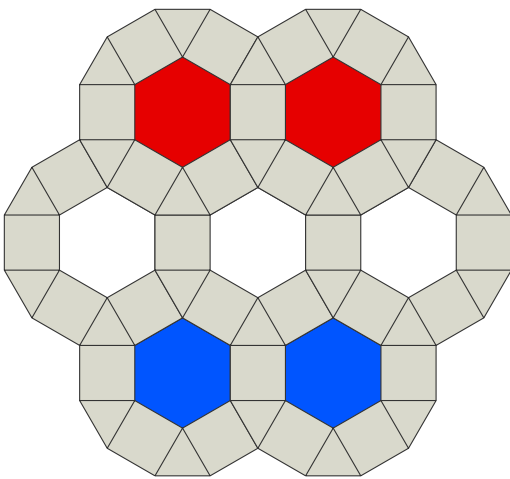


Figure 1. The Kensington board.

**Kensington** is played on the board shown in Figure 1. Two players, Red (dark) and Blue (light), each have 15 pieces of their colour and take turns moving as follows.

1. *Placement phase*: Players add a piece of their colour at an empty point, until all pieces have been placed.
2. *Movement phase*: Players move a piece of their colour to an adjacent empty point.

Occupying the three points of a triangle (a *mill*) entitles the player to move any opponent's piece to any empty point. Occupying the four points of a square (a *double mill*) entitles the player to move any two opponent's pieces to any two empty points.

The game is won by the player who occupies all six points of a white hexagon or a hexagon of their colour.

The following optional rule is also stated:<sup>1</sup>

It is not permitted for a player to rebuild a triangle or a square until another two moves have passed.

Kensington was well marketed, and received considerable public interest on its release, largely due to its attractive and – for the time – innovative board. The game even inspired a strategy book [3]. However, interest among players soon waned and the game is now out of print and more of a curiosity.

### 2.1 The Problem with Kensington

Kensington's decline can be traced to some serious problems inherent in its design, as discussed by players on the BoardGameGeek fora related to the game.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, the game is *too decisive* which ironically also makes it *too drawish* [5].

<sup>1</sup>Note that a 'move' is understood to be a single move by a player, not a round of moves by all players.

<sup>2</sup><https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/2197/kensington>