



# Hypnotic Squiggle Sticks

S staff, buugeng, squiggle sticks, spiral staff; this prop has many names.

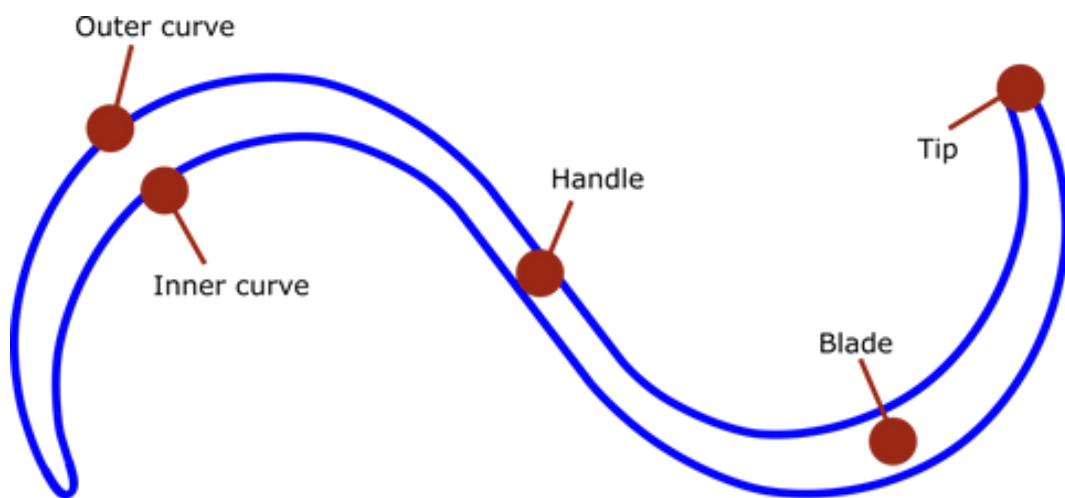
Regardless of what they're known as, they all share that same S shape that makes them look like an ancient samurai weapon, or a boomerang. For ease of this article, and for reasons you'll learn about a little further down, we'll call them S staff.

S staff, as hinted at in the name, are S shaped staffs. Typically, 2 or more staffs are spun, juggled, and manipulated together to create mesmerising optical illusions. S staff borrows techniques from other props, such as double staff, hoop, fans, and even poi, although many flowmies have found the S staff to be particularly challenging due to its unique shape. If you can push through the initial learning curve, S staff are an incredibly stunning and rewarding prop to spin.



## Sizes and Styles

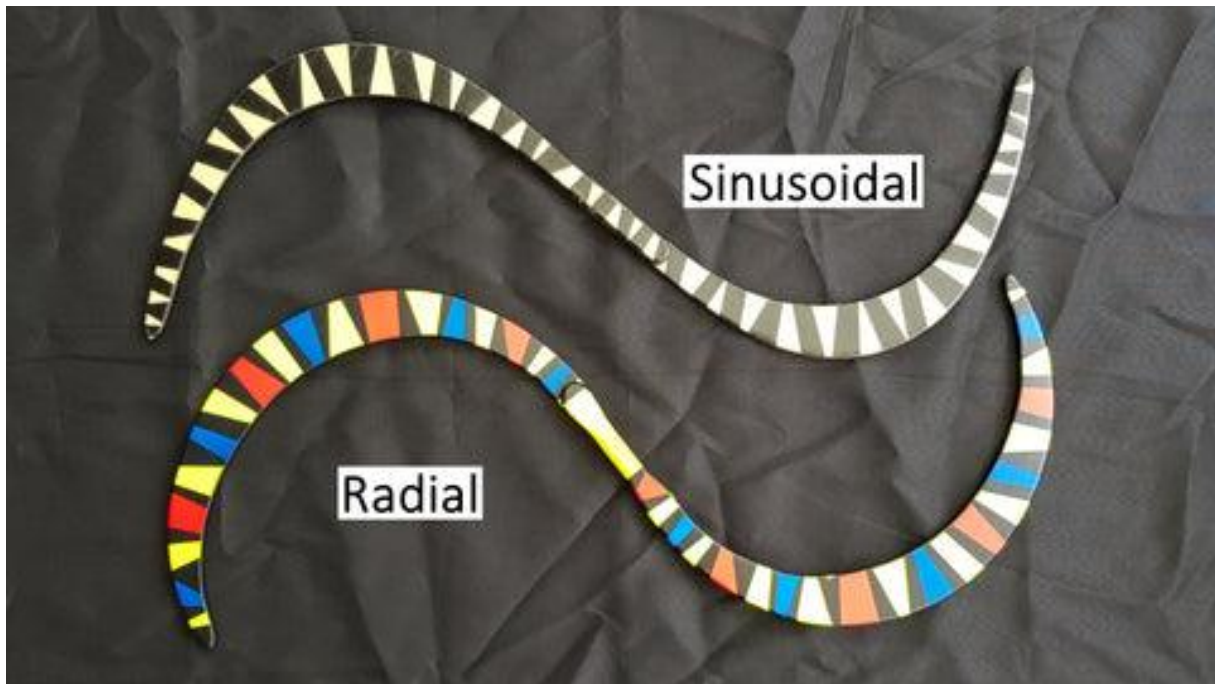
S staff come in a range of sizes designed to fit the area from the handle to the tip (the C shape of the staff) within one's arm length. You can find smaller versions, designed for more petite spinners and kids, and you can also find huge versions, designed as props for villain-esque characters.



As with most props, S staff come in day flow versions (often wood or plastic), LED versions, and of course, fire. Many members of the S staff community actually prefer the LED or day flow versions over the fire versions, as you tend to lose much of the illusion in the flames.

Most S staffs are designed to be collapsible, including a few more recent LED sets (much to the delight of the community). They usually come as a set of 4 C shaped blades, with magnets or slots in the handles to hold the pieces together. 2 C shaped blades are snapped together to create 1 S shaped staff.

One thing you may notice with S staff, is that there are 2 varieties of S shape; one is very rounded, like 2 halves of a perfect circle, and one has slightly more elongated curves. The more rounded shape is known as *radial*, and the longer shape, known as *sinusoidal*, is *curved* like a sine wave. They both look incredible when in motion and can both be manipulated in almost the exact same way, with the radial shape being better suited to contact moves, and many flowmies preferring the sinusoidal shape for quad spinning.



Most people start off with 2 S staff, with some expanding to quads (4 S staff manipulated simultaneously). Quad S staff adds another element of enchantment, along with the added challenge of an extra pair, and it's absolutely fascinating to [watch](#) quads in the hands of a master.

A cousin of the S staff is the [triple buugeng/trigeng/tripleng](#). This prop has 3 C shaped blades, instead of 2 like the S staff, and is usually manipulated in pairs. One of the coolest triple S staff is the [giant tripleng](#), which is manipulated as a single prop due to it being insanely big!

## A Brief History

S staff are very young compared to many other props such as poi and staff. Their story only begins in 1991, with the video ['In motion with Michael Moschen'](#).

Moschen is a world renowned juggler and performance artist who has heavily influenced the circus and flow arts worlds. Many will know him as the hands behind David Bowie's character in the 1986 classic, 'The Labyrinth', among many other achievements. Moschen stood behind Bowie during the crystal ball scenes and performed his tricks 'blind' – which, if you've ever tried contact juggling, is an incredibly impressive feat!

For 'In Motion', Moschen took 2 hoops/circles, cut them in half (into a C shape), rotated the halves and stuck them back together (to create the S shape). The S staff shares many characteristics with the 'double deer horn' of Chinese martial arts, so many people presume this is one of Moschens inspirations for the S staff, although there is no evidence of this.

Fast forward almost 10 years and enter Japanese entertainer, Dai Zaobab.

Zaobab was inspired by Moschens video and began work on adapting and refining what he saw to create a more practical version of Moschen's S staff. And so, buugeng were born. Buugeng is a name derived from the Japanese language; 'buu' meaning martial art, and 'geng' meaning illusion.



Image credit: [@Zaobab](#)

Fast forward another 10 years and the emergence of the Facebook group '[Buugeng and S Staff Laboratory](#)' was a crucial step in the skill sharing and growth of this new and exciting prop. The following year, S staff master Gustavo Ollitta released a [video](#) that went viral and boosted the awareness of S staff tremendously.

Now there are many S staff makers and spinners alike, and the popularity of this uniquely beautiful prop shows no signs of slowing down.

## S Staff/buugeng timeline

1991

- 'In Motion with Michael Moschen' debuts, the first recorded appearance of the S staff

2001

- Dai Zaobab, sees Moschen's video and is inspired

2003

- Zaobab makes his first set of buugeng
- Banyan Gallagher builds first set of fire s-staff (approx. time)

2007

- Zaobab begins producing buugeng
- Zaobab wins a photo contest on Home Of Poi, increasing awareness of buugeng

2009

- Zaobab performs at Temple of Poi's 'Fire Dancing Expo' in San Francisco
- Zaobab teaches at FireDrums, one of the largest and oldest flow festivals in North America
- Zaobab appears in FireGroove's 'Fire All-Stars Vol 1' as the only one to perform without fire

2011

- Buugeng and S Staff Lab is created on Facebook

2012

- Gustavo Ollitta's "FLOW - Manipulação de objetos" video goes viral, bringing buugeng to a wider audience

2014

- Pyroterra (Light Toys) begins retailing led buugeng

2016

- The first annual Buugeng Convergence, a festival for buugeng, S staff, and trigeng, happens in Texas

## Controversy in the Community

There has been much debate over the past decade as to who actually came up with S staff/buugeng, and whether the correct term is S staff, or buugeng.

Most people credit Moschen with the original idea, as he was the first to record a performance with the S shaped staff. In his 2008 [TED talk](#), Moschen can be heard calling them 'S curve'.

However, Moschen only hinted at the possibilities within a box. Zaobab took the idea, adapted and improved it, and opened the box for all to see, all the while giving credit to Moschen for the inspiration.

Zaobab says:

*"I want to say first that I have a lot of respect for Michael Moschen, and actually my inspiration for Buugeng originally came from him. I first saw "Moschen in Motion" in Africa in 2001. When I saw his video, I was inspired by the optical illusion he created. At that time, I didn't remember much of what I had seen. I didn't know exactly what it was or what shape it was. All I remembered was that it was something not-straight."*

Many people believe that because Zaobab coined the term 'buugeng' and has used it for his brand of S staff, no other S shaped staff should be called buugeng. However, for numerous years, many people have used 'buugeng' as a generic term for an S shaped staff, and the name has kind of stuck.

So while it's now impossible to change the use of the term 'buugeng' from all-encompassing to only Zaobab's product, it's important to acknowledge the history of this prop. It's also important to acknowledge the significant contributions from artists across the globe that have played a part in the growth of this incredible art form.