

# THE NEW BOOK OF BOXES

A STUNNING  
COLLECTION OF  
ELEGANT GIFT BOXES

- 15 new designs and patterns
- Easy-to-assemble press-out forms
- On durable, Japanese-style paper
- Suitable for any occasion



Shunichi Ekiguchi



Photographs by Akihiko Tokue  
Line drawings by Takuo Mimoto  
Schematics by Tadamitsu Omori

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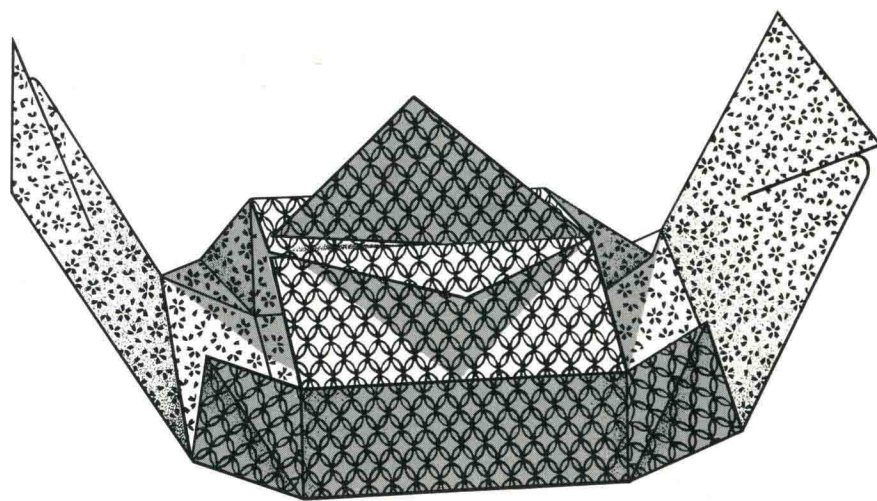
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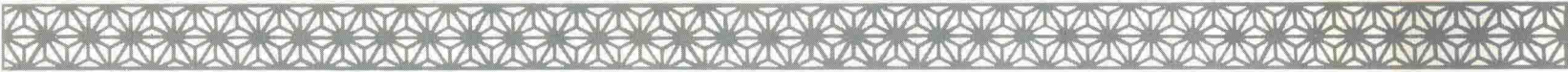
# THE NEW BOOK OF BOXES



Kunio Ekiguchi

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# INTRODUCTION



To the Japanese, boxes are more than simple containers. The ability to wrap items in a beautiful, unique way is viewed as a valuable skill and, more importantly, as a sign that one understands the importance of respect for objects and the people whose lives they touch.

In Japan, cherished belongings have never just been crammed in a drawer as-is, but have traditionally been wrapped in layer upon layer of paper or placed in specially made boxes of wood, then covered again in cloth or sturdy paper. Many classical dramas recount the travels and travails of precious items placed in boxes. Even today, fine stationery stores stock any number of beautiful and unusual boxes, some a good deal more striking than the gifts they will enclose.

Japan has spent centuries refining its tradition of origami, or the creation of three-dimensional shapes by folding, overlapping and inserting into one another the various edges and planes of a single sheet of paper. These techniques may be used to form elegant, strong boxes from paper that require no reinforcement with glue or tape. *The New Book of Boxes* presents 15 patterns with which anyone can easily make beautiful boxes.

This second book in our series turns its focus from the pastel tones popular during the Heian period (794–1185 A.D.) and presented in our earlier *The Book of Boxes*, to the ideal of “urban chic” that arose in Japan’s cities in the Edo period (1603–1867).

Each new period in any country’s history brings radical changes not only to social structure and individual lifestyle, but to aesthetic preference—in color, pattern and design—as well. In Japan, the simple colors and rough-hewn patterns of the ancient tumulus period gave way, upon cultural exchange with China and Korea in the eighth century, to a taste for vivid, resplendent primary colors. In the Heian period, the aristocracy modified the fashions imported from the Asian mainland to suit Japanese tastes more closely, emphasizing such sumptuous pastels and finely detailed patterns as presented in the original *Book of Boxes*. Bold, unadulterated reds and blacks found favor with the samurai who took power in the medieval period. But in the Edo period, with the emergence of cities and the rise of a middle class with unprecedented economic power, the “common people” became the arbiters of fashion trends for the first time. It’s to their sense of style that we’ve devoted this book.

The world of the kabuki theater was perhaps the main source of Edo fashion trends. New phrases coined to describe the latest

colors and patterns tended to include actors’ names: “Danjuro buff brown,” “Kikugoro grid pattern,” and “Hanshiro dapples” are a few examples. People set out to style themselves after the beautiful women and striking kabuki actors portrayed in the woodblock prints then seen everywhere. Color preferences ranged widely, but the public was agreed that nothing beat an outfit that managed to combine understatement with flamboyance. Edo-period cities saw the birth of a whole new aesthetic revolving around this new ideal of sophistication.

Many of the sources of inspiration were specific to city life; kimono, for instance, soon appropriated the combination of black, green, and yellowish brown used in theater curtains. Colors were obtained from natural dyes and often appeared quite muted. Patterns too were combined so as not to draw overt attention. The trick was to add some intriguing or witty element. One popular approach was to enliven a quietly rich ensemble with a single note of vibrant color in a jacket’s lining or around a hemline. This same aesthetic was applied not only to clothing but to household furnishings and appointments (and of course boxes). The townspeople expressed this sense of style in every nook and cranny of their houses and, by extension, their lives.

We had our work cut out for us, trying to represent fairly all the different elements of Edo tastes. In the designs, patterns, choices of colors, and shapes of the 15 boxes that follow we hope that we have conveyed something of the rich, witty, and sophisticated sensibility of this era.

In closing, I would like to thank some of the people whose cooperation was invaluable to the completion of this book: at Kodansha International, Shigeo Katakura and Kazuhiko Miki of the design department and Michiko Uchiyama and Barry Lancet of the editorial department; translator Elizabeth Wood; artist Takuo Mimoto, who so cheerfully drew and redrew all the illustrations; and my own assistants Masao Katoh and Noriko Dohi, whose creativity and patience were invaluable.

Kunio Ekiguchi





GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

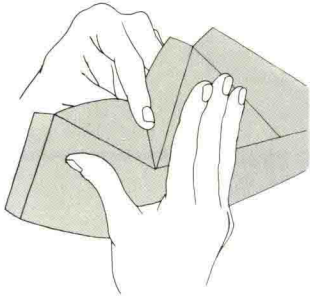
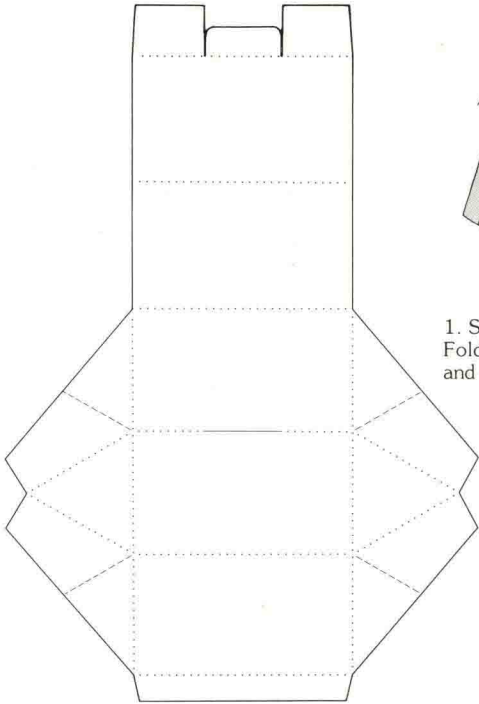
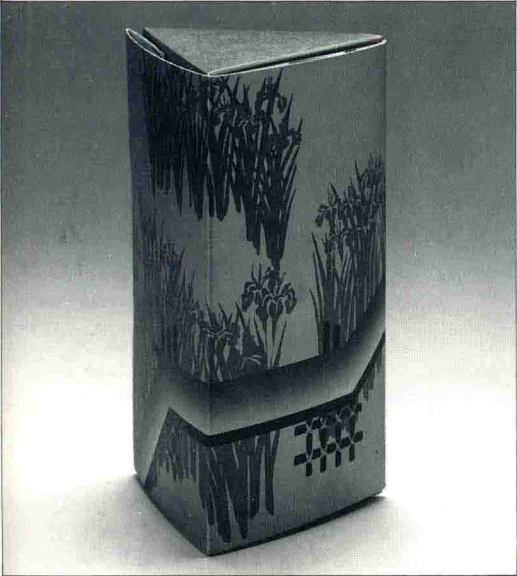
Just two folds are basic to creating a traditional Japanese box: mountain and valley folds. The mountain fold is convex, and the valley concave. In other words, for valley folds, bend the paper forward; for mountain folds, bend it back. In the drawings that follow, broken lines----- represent mountain folds and dotted lines.....valley folds. Shaded areas indicate the outside of the box.

Use an Exacto knife or a razor blade to cut out the drawings, and then make the mountains and valleys shown in the diagrams. Make all of either kind of fold first. A delicate but firm touch is best. Make each fold as long as the drawings indicate, but no longer.

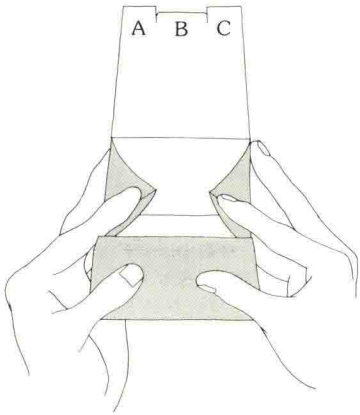
IRIS BOX

This box is printed with a stylized version of a renowned folding screen in color and gold leaf by Ogata Korin (1658–1716). His *Eight-Plank Bridge* was considered very modern in the Edo period and in fact still looks quite fresh and stylized even today. The interior design, of plovers flying over the ocean, is frequently used in kimono.

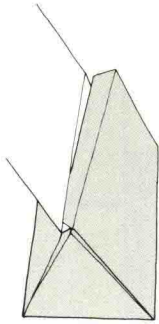
Use this box to gift-wrap a few fine chocolates or, perhaps, a single hand-painted Easter egg. Or open it up and write a letter directly on the inside, for a unique, three-dimensional card.



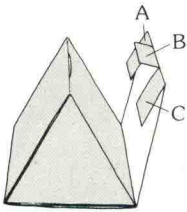
1. Start with the plover pattern facing up. Fold the mountains and valleys carefully and firmly.



2. Hold the form in both hands, placing a finger in each of the gold curves formed on either side. Push the curves inward gently, so that the edges of the form come together.



3. Insert the narrow folded edge shown in the foreground of step 2 into the two slits (one on each side) just above it. Start to fold the form upward.

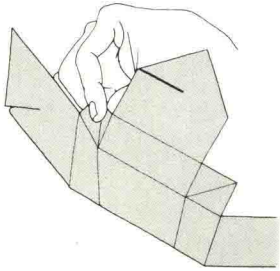
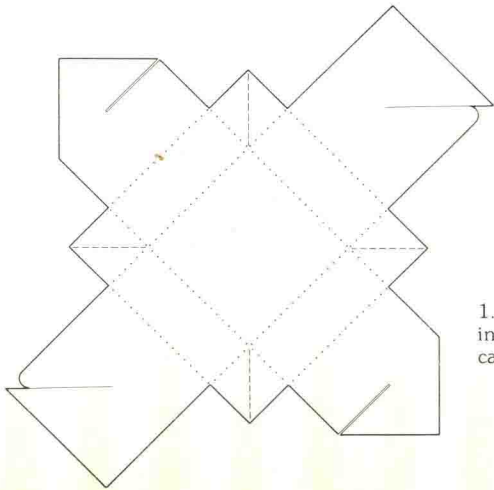
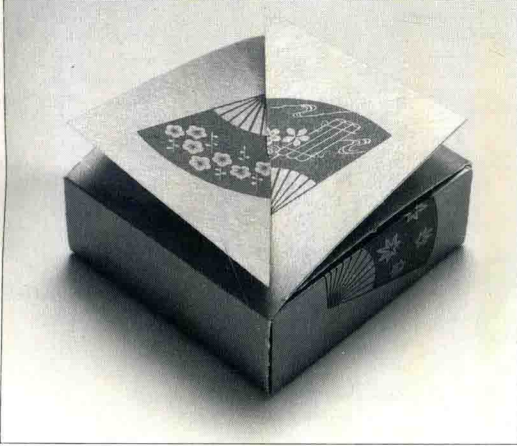


4. Fold down tabs A and C, then insert tab B into the slit.

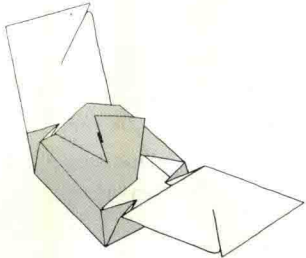
FAN BOX

The outside of this box is covered with a fan design. In Japan, the shape of the fan lends itself to associations with “endless possibility,” or prosperity.

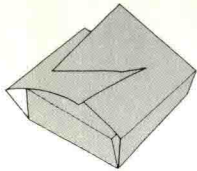
The box is closed by inserting the diagonal notches at the top into one another. When opened, it reveals another pair of notches fitted together on the opposite diagonal, making the box sturdy, and good for holding small precious items like rings or cuff links.



1. Start with the blue and white pattern facing up. Fold the mountains and valleys carefully and firmly.



2. Fit the inner pair of diagonal slits together.



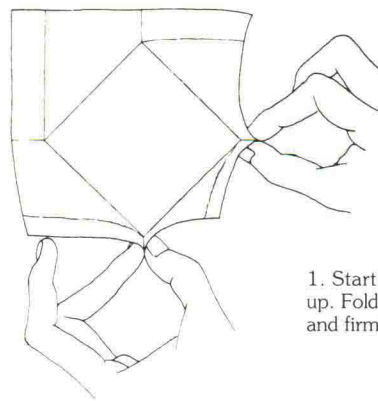
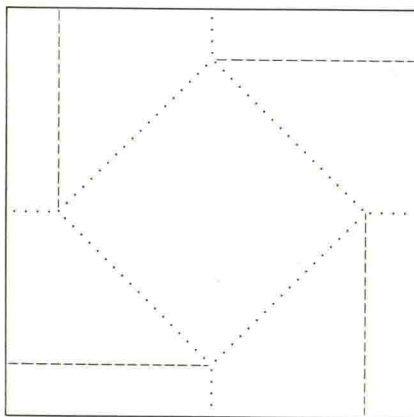
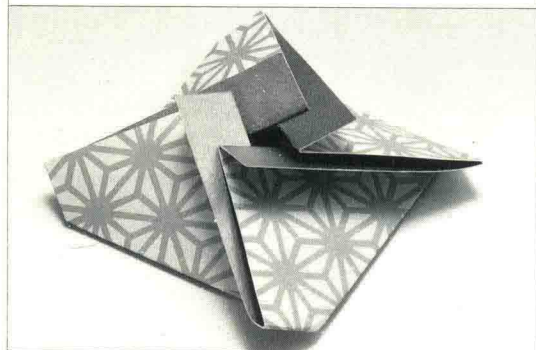
3. Fit the outer pair of diagonal slits together.



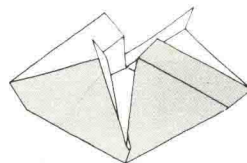
## FLAX LEAF TRAY

The outside of this box is decorated with a flax leaf pattern. The flax leaf, which grows very quickly, is traditionally associated with prayers for children's rapid growth and continuing good health. When opened, the box reveals a charming picture of a comb and an ornamental hairpin.

This box has a precious quality about it. Try using it for a lock of hair from your baby's first cut wrapped in a small piece of cloth beforehand, or for some equally valuable keepsake.



1. Start with the comb and hairpin facing up. Fold the mountains and valleys carefully and firmly.

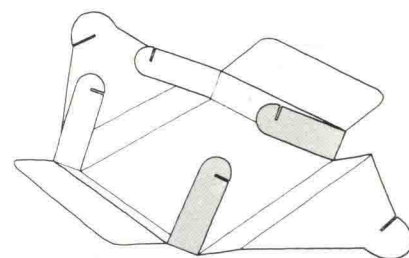
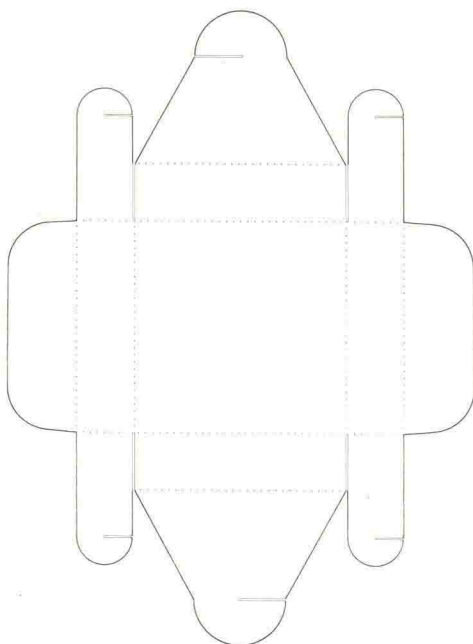
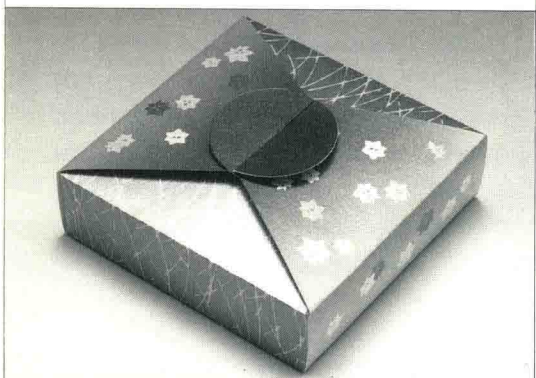


2. Hold the form in both hands. Press in gently on all four sides so that the four edges begin to come together and lie under one another. Reinforce the folds.

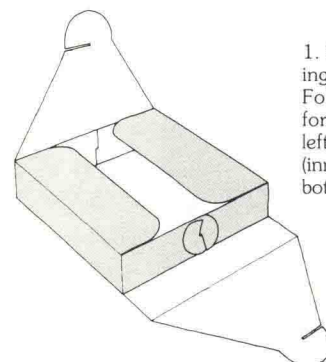
## AUTUMN FIELDS

This box features a luxurious pattern in gold and purple—a field of Japanese pampas and a profusion of autumn flowers. This kind of pattern, in which a horizontal bar in a contrasting design cuts across the background, was often seen in the kimonos worn by samurai. The box is lined with a pattern of paulownia flowers on a checked background.

Perfect for lightweight gifts. Try filling it with an assortment of chocolates for those long autumn nights, or several pieces of pastry or even homemade bread wrapped in silver foil and set into a bed of soft tissue.



1. Start with the blue and white checks facing up. This box requires only valley folds. Fold these carefully and firmly. Hold the form in both hands and bring the right and left sides together. Fit the two pairs of long (inner) slits together. This will complete the bottom structure of the box.

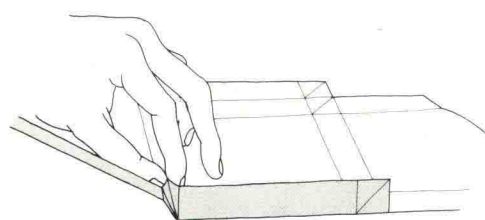
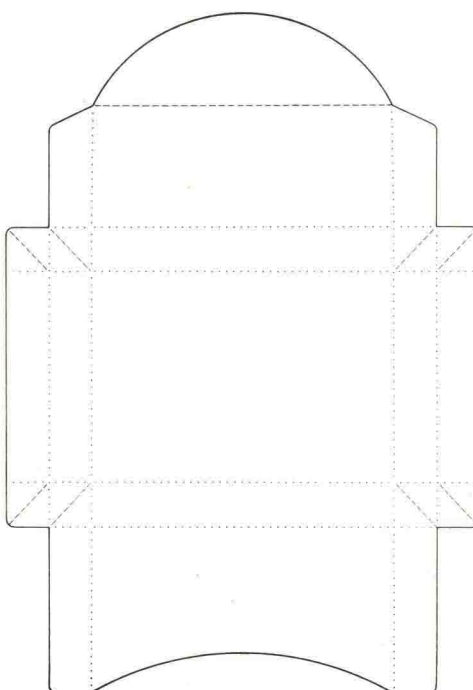
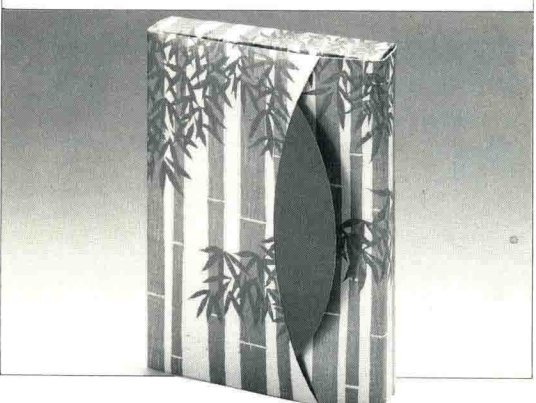


2. Complete the top of the box by fitting together the rounded top slits.

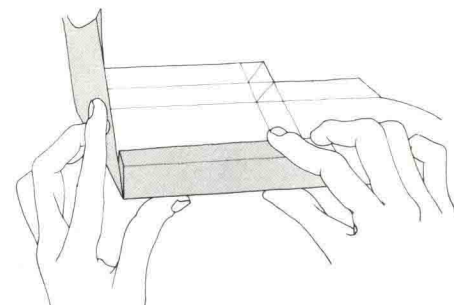
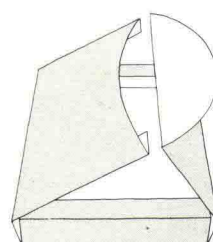
## BAMBOO BOX

In Japan, bamboo is often associated with purity and humility, because of its refreshing light green color and the way it grows so straight and tall. Together with the pine and plum, it's one of the three "lucky plants" displayed on celebratory occasions. Inside, the box features pictures of sparrows, a particularly beloved bird.

This box tucks shut in an unusual, elegant way. A blue half-moon emerges from the fold on the front. For further embellishment, attach a thin strip of dark green velvet and a silver ribbon you've twined together.



1. Start with the blue side facing up. Fold the mountains and valleys carefully and firmly.



2. Using both hands, work on one corner at a time to shape the box.

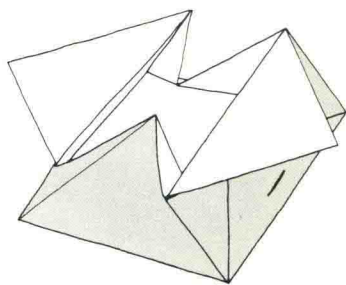
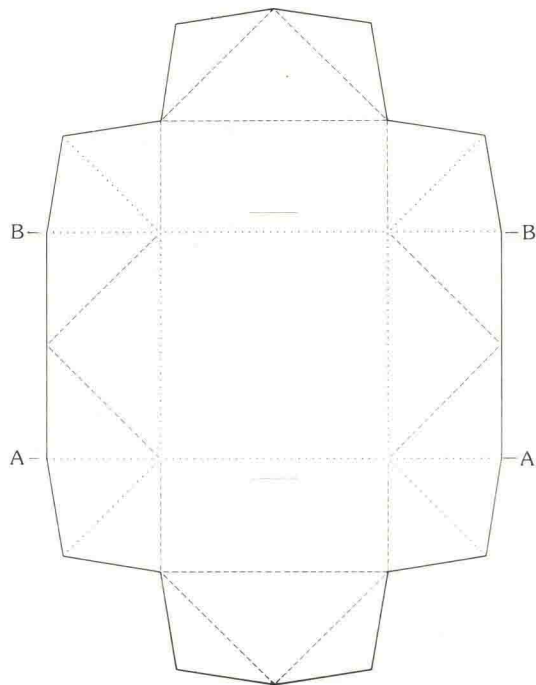
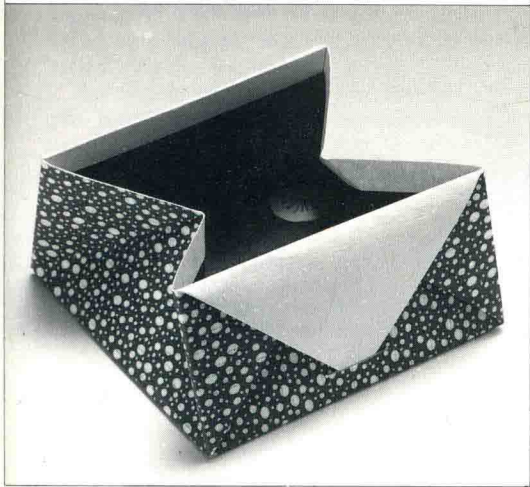
3. Insert the large mountain-folded flap on your right into the two slits formed at the left.



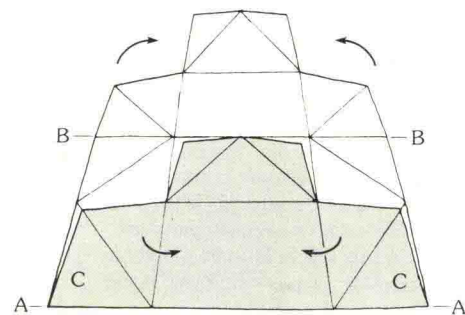
## NIGHT PLUMS

This box is identical in shape to one used in the tea ceremony. When you've finished folding it, the lovely pattern of snow on a blue background will cover the outside. The inside features the moon edging through the branches of a plum tree—a stylized rendering of Ogata Korin's *Night Plums*.

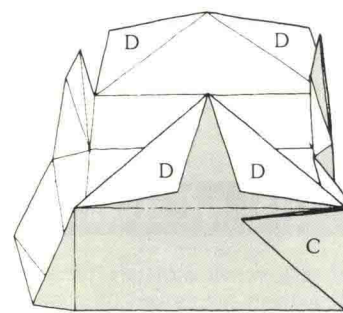
Placed on a desk, this half-open box makes a perfect container for holding paper clips and other small stationery items.



3. Arrange folds A and B on each side so that they are beneath the top and bottom triangles. Taking care not to make any visible creases in the paper, insert the top and bottom triangles into their slits.



1. Start with the plum tree and moon facing up. Fold the mountains and valleys carefully and firmly. Press folds A and B again, then make flap C and fold over around the side of the box as shown in step 2. Do the side closest to you first, then repeat with the flaps at the back of the box along fold B.

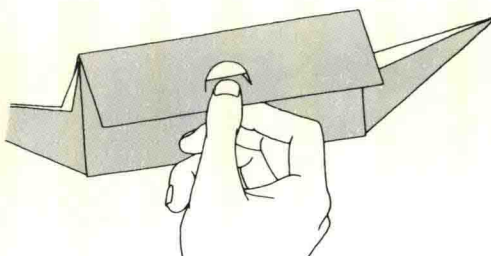
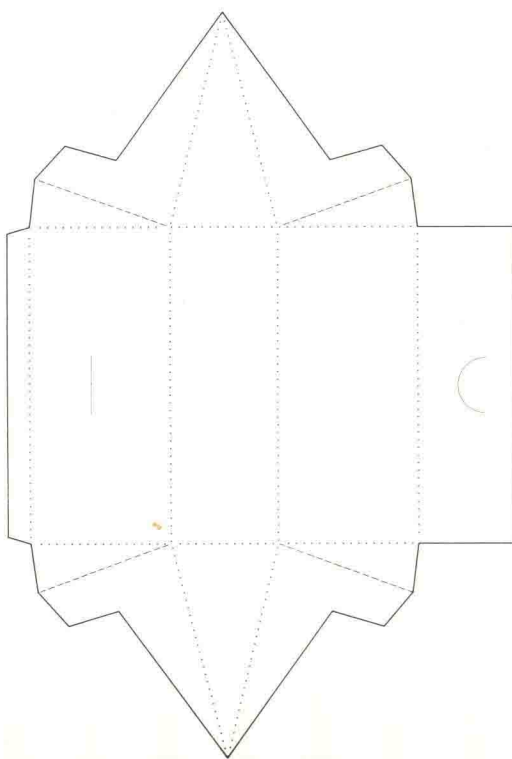
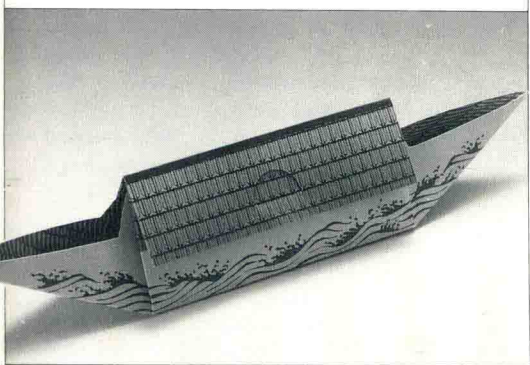


2. Fold flaps D forward as shown.

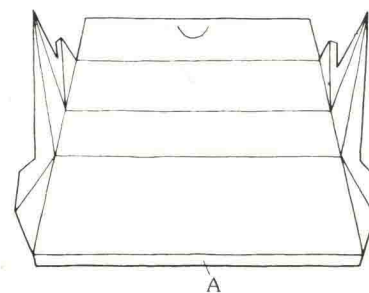
## DRIFTING BOAT

The design of this box recalls the themes of Edo-period nature poems that describe the pleasures of lounging about in a boat in summertime, watching fireworks, or looking at the moon. It opens onto a reproduction of the *ukiyo-e* painting "Amusement on a River" framed by a pattern of waves.

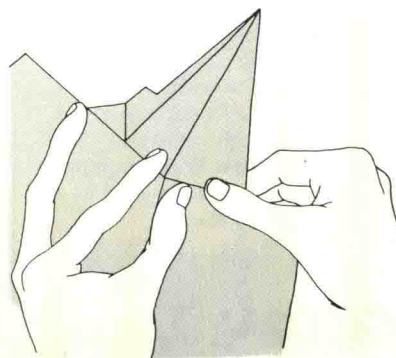
Place a knickknack in the box and bring them, together with a bottle of wine, as a gift to the host of a party held in the heat of summer. Or lay a single long-stemmed iris in the boat's hull.



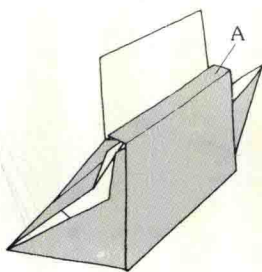
4. Fold the roof down and insert the round tab upward into its slit.



1. Start with the two women in the boat facing up. Fold the mountains and valleys carefully and firmly.



2. Hold the form with both hands. Place a finger in each of the creases which are to form the hull of the boat. Press these creases inward to form the bottom structure of the box.



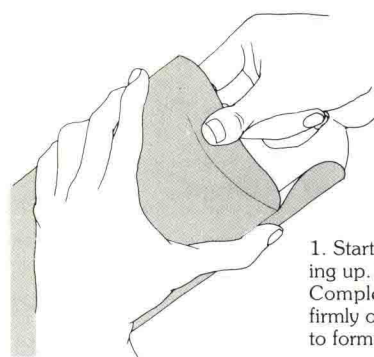
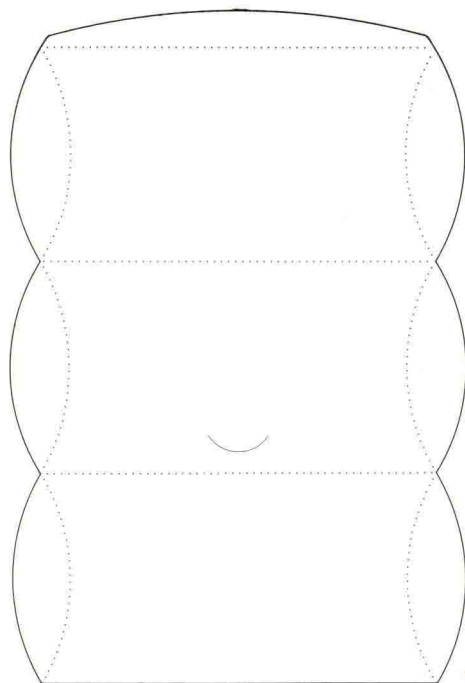
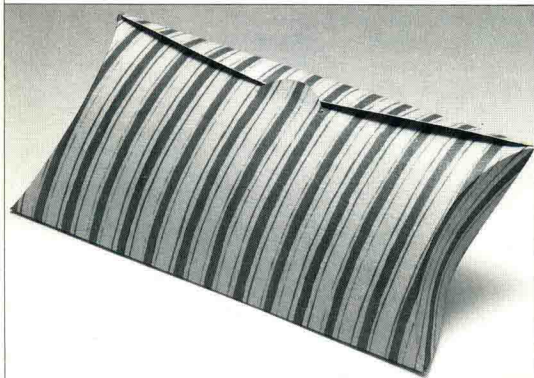
3. Bring the narrow edge ("A" in step 1) straight across the inside of the boat, and insert it into the far slits.



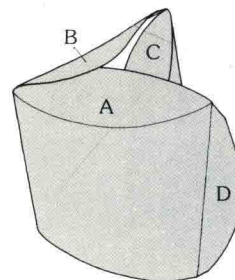
## UTAMARO ENVELOPE

The outside of this box is patterned with bold brushwork stripes of varying thickness. The predominance of blue on the outside makes the vivid color scheme of the courtesan's portrait inside that much more striking. These colors weren't quite so intense in the original woodblock print by Utamaro (1753–1806): we've altered them with computer graphics.

This versatile box will hold most gift accessories: scarf, necktie, or pair of gloves. A cassette tape or wallet will also fit nicely.



1. Start with the portrait of the woman facing up. This box requires only valley folds. Complete these, then press carefully and firmly on the curved valley folds, which are to form the edges of the box.

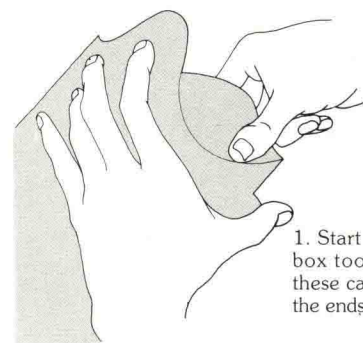
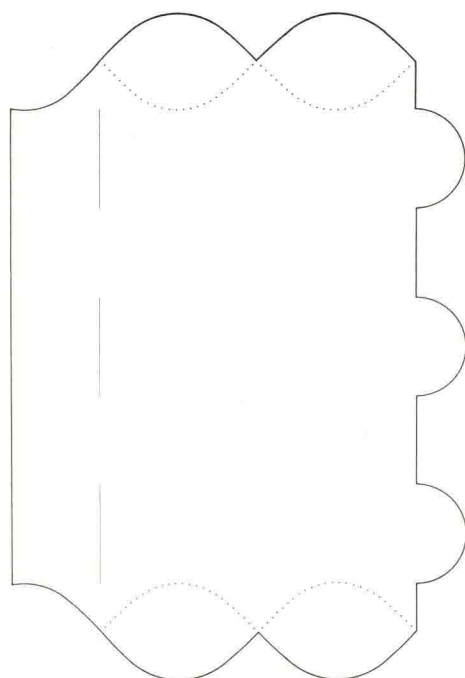
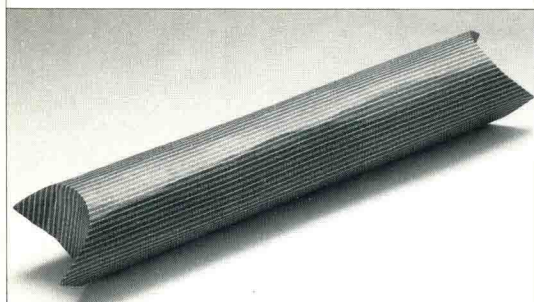


2. Holding the form in both hands, bring up flaps C (top and bottom) so that they are inmost, then bring down flaps A and insert them between flaps C and B. Fold D over and insert it so that it stays inside the rounded slit.

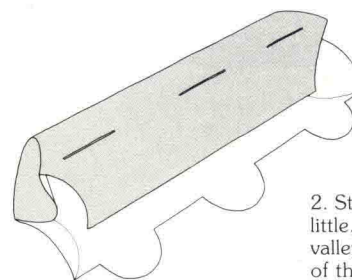
## HARUNOBU SCROLL

The outside of this scroll consists of a subdued striped pattern but opens onto a brightly-colored *ukiyo-e* woodblock print by Harunobu (1725–70). The figures here are of a courtesan and her customer. He is eagerly reading a letter she has written him. The poem above discusses the folly of believing anything a woman writes in a love letter.

Gift-wrap a belt, small calendar, or poster. This form is perfect for a stocking stuffer. Or use it as an envelope, scrolling up your letter and placing it inside. For an added touch, finish off your gift with a brightly-colored ribbon.



1. Start with the pink side facing up. This box too requires only valley folds. Fold these carefully and firmly. These will form the ends of the cylinder.

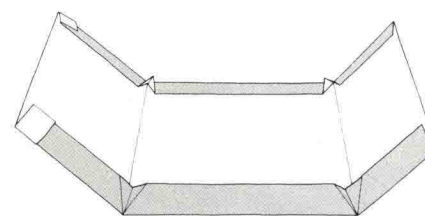
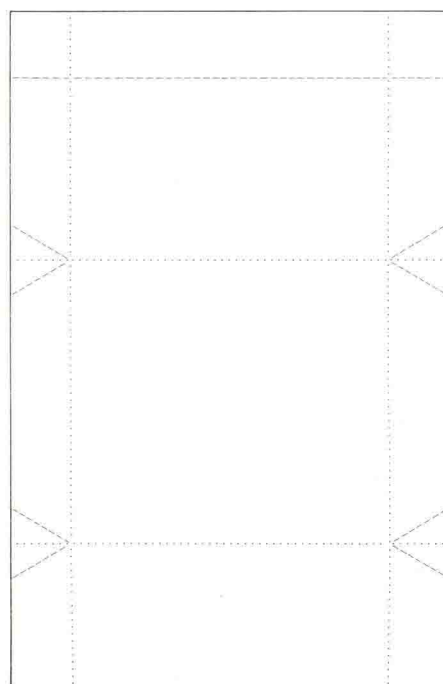
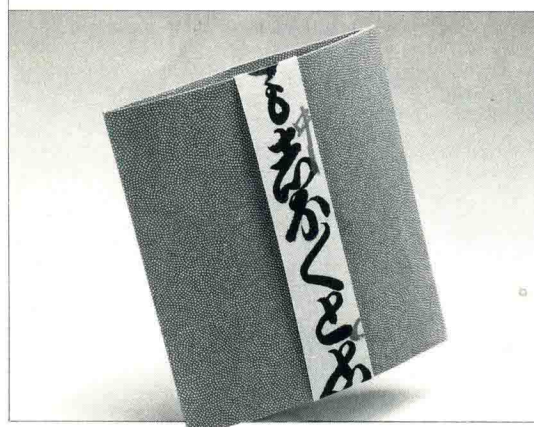


2. Start to curve the paper around, little by little, into a cylindrical shape. Overlay the valley folds at either side to form the ends of the cylinder. Insert the three side tabs into their slits.

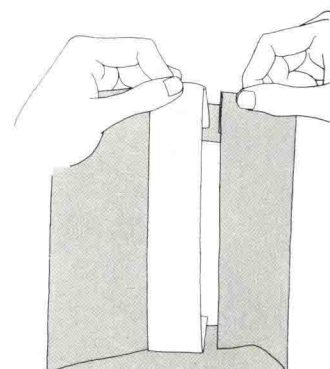
## KABUKI ENVELOPE

Here the tension between understated and bold elements epitomizes the Edo sense of flair. The Japanese script is an excerpt from the libretto of the well-known kabuki play "Oshun Denbei," a tragedy on the double suicide of a pair of lovers. The calligraphy itself is quite striking. The dotted field of red and white mimics a shark's rough, gritty skin.

Hide away a favorite letter or photograph. Or present a friend with a delicate scarf in a contrasting color like bright blue.



1. Start with the Japanese script facing up. Complete all the folds and gradually shape the box.



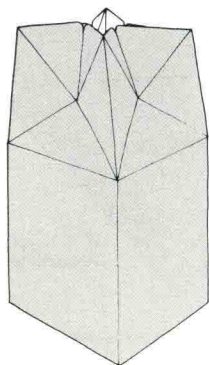
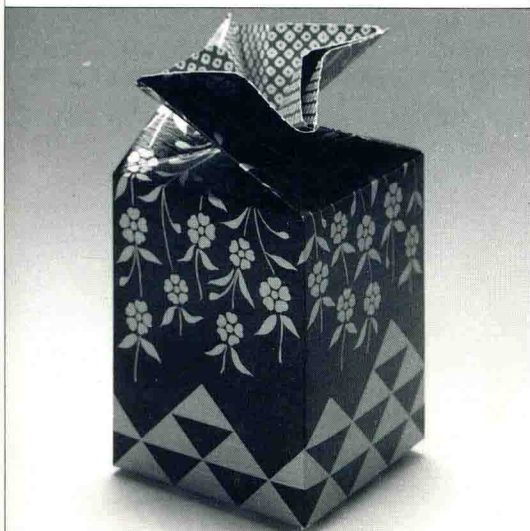
2. Insert the right-hand edge into the two slits at left.



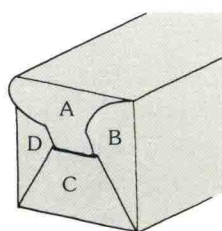
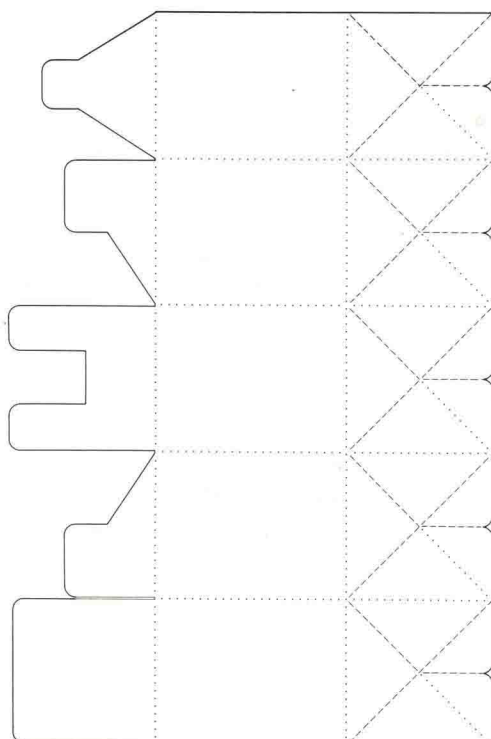
## NIGHT CHERRY VIEWING

A twist of the wrist shuts this box. The red-and-white dappled pattern that emerges at the top from inside adds a whimsical touch. The design on the outside is from the best-loved of all kabuki plays, "Dojoji." The heroine of this play—a woman spurned—appears throughout in kimono of various colors, all patterned with this weeping cherry. The dapples on the inside are reminiscent of the markings of a fawn, and the pattern reproduced here was painstakingly produced by hand during the Edo period.

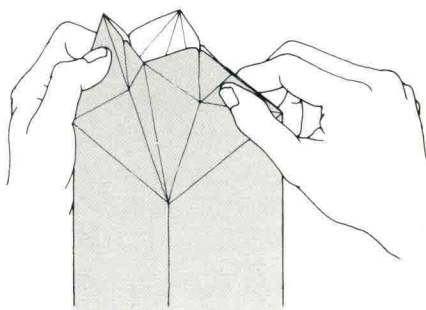
An elegant way to wrap any number of gifts: a small piece of pottery, a bottle of perfume, a bracelet or necklace. With its decorative top, this box can easily be presented as it is, without ribbons or other decoration.



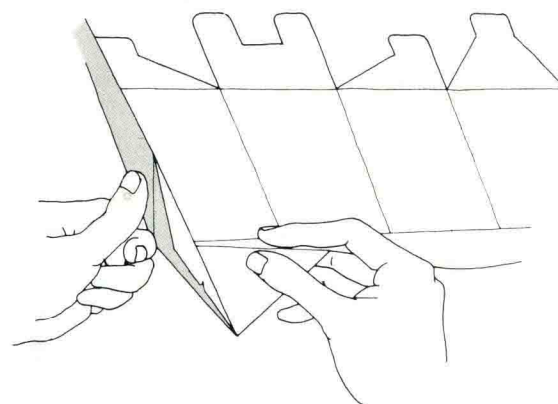
4. Stand the box upright, and hold the folds at each top corner firmly.



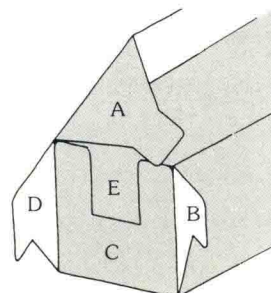
3. Insert flap A into the slit that is formed, to secure the bottom.



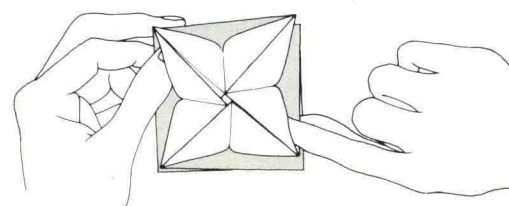
5. Twist these folds gently but firmly in a counterclockwise direction.



1. Start with the red and white pattern facing up. Fold the mountains and valleys carefully and firmly.



2. Assemble the bottom of the box (the side with the various flaps). Fold the larger flap E first, then bring down flap C, and bring the smaller tabs B and D across C.

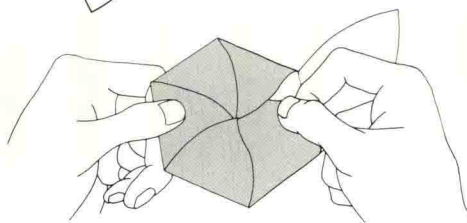
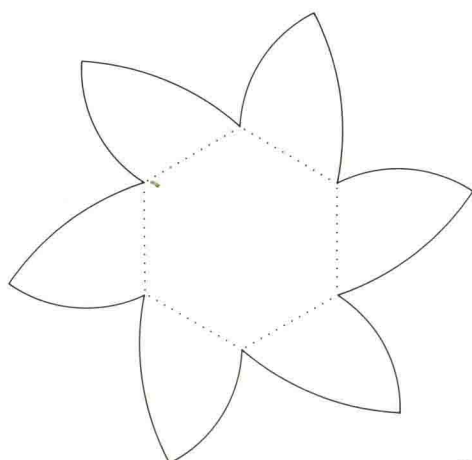
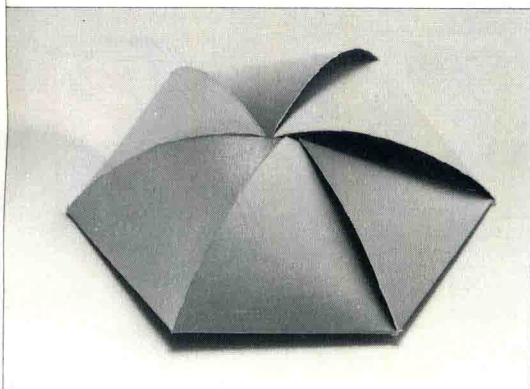


6. The top should appear to be rotating on its axis. Reinforce any folds at the top as necessary.

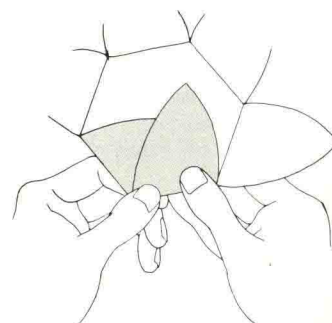
## SIX-PETAL FLOWER

This box is made simply by folding the six petals into one another. The flower design will be hidden inside the finished box. The stylized white chrysanthemum on a gold ground represents a family crest. Family crests were individualized "signatures" that prominent households used to decorate everything from their kimonos and swords to tables or sliding-doors.

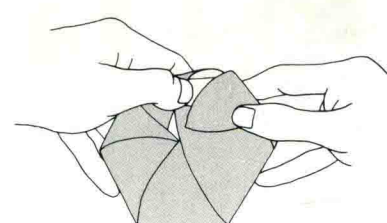
This small box is pretty placed on a shelf near a grouping of houseplants. Or use it to gift-wrap a large pair of hoop earrings, or a coiled necklace of silver or gold.



2. Pile up five of the six petals left to right. When you get to about the fourth, you will need to tuck its tip under the edge of the first petal.



1. Start with the gold flower facing up. This box requires only valley folds. Fold these carefully and firmly.



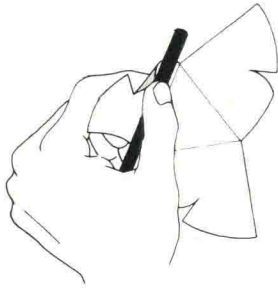
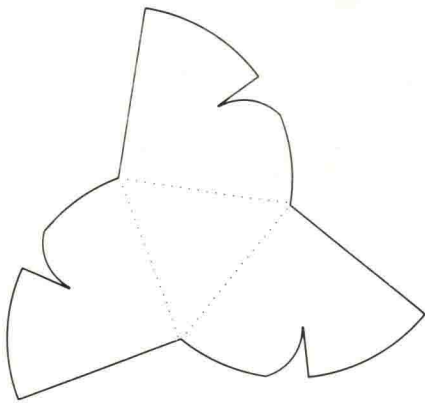
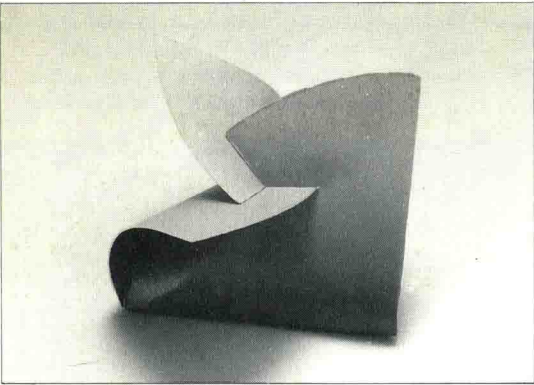
3. Tuck the edge of the sixth petal beneath the first.



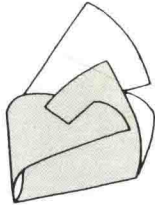
# THREE-PETAL FLOWER

This tiny three-petaled envelope is lovely in its simplicity. The family crest inside shows a plum blossom.

Use this box to wrap a small pair of earrings or a ring. It's also very nice pinned to the wall as it is.



1. Start with the gold flower facing up. Use a pencil to "round" the edges of the petals so that they will curve around one another.

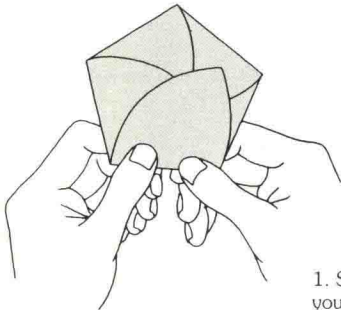
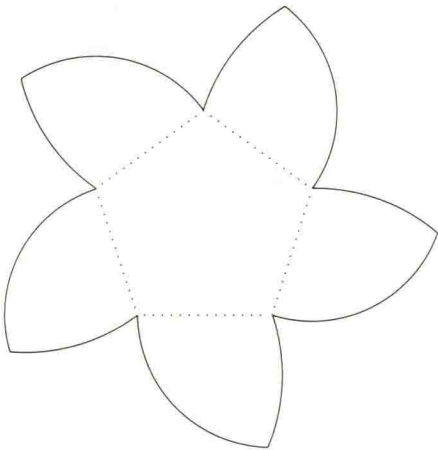
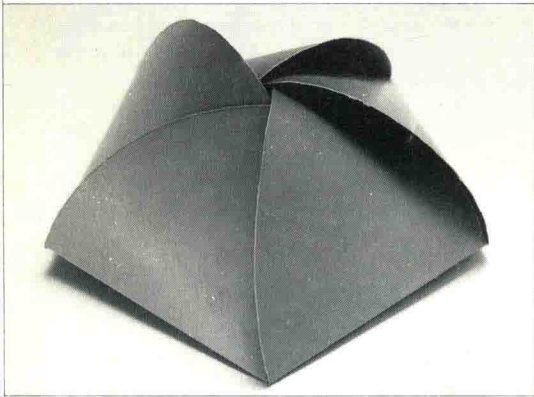


2. Fit any two adjacent petal slits together, and then slot the third petal into the vortex of the first two petals.

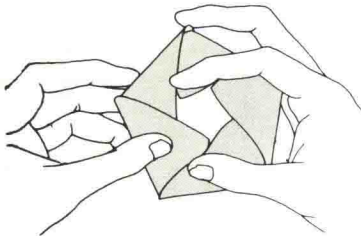
# FIVE-PETAL FLOWER

This five-petaled envelope is a classic shape. Raised petals give added dimension to its attractive form. It opens to reveal a cherry blossom crest.

Place it on the table at a luncheon to hold sugar cubes or tea bags. Or gift-wrap a small piece of jewelry.



1. Start with the gold flower facing up. Fold your valleys carefully and firmly. Pile up the first four petals left to right.

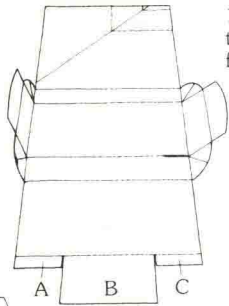
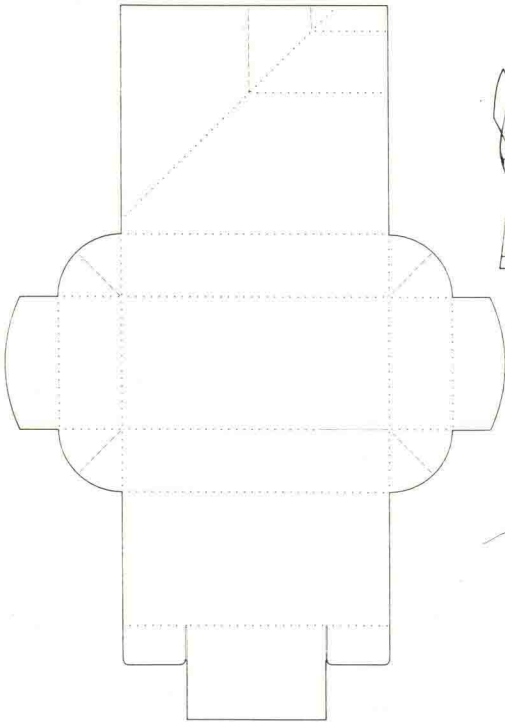
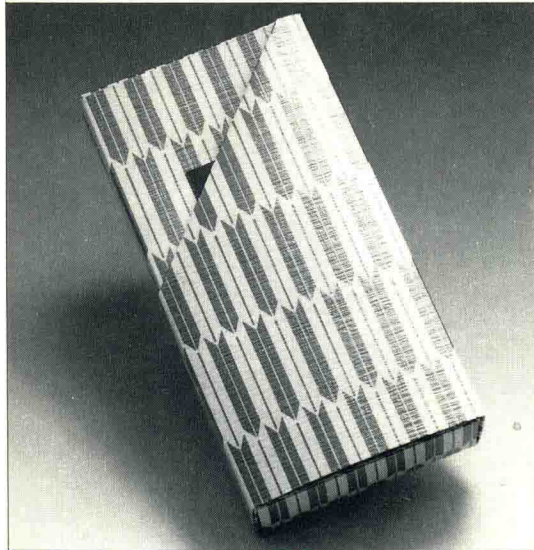


2. Tuck the edge of the fifth petal just beneath the first.

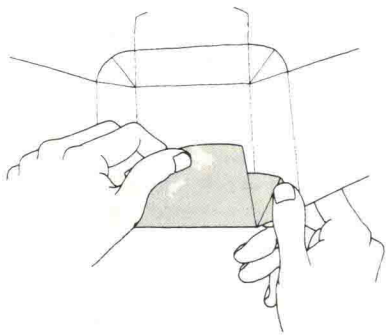
# FOX GIFT-BOX

A sprightly design in silver and deep red. The pattern on the outside is of arrow feathers, a design that was very popular among young women of the Edo period. The box unfolds to a humorous representation of "The Fox Bridal Procession." (The bride is understood to be riding off to her new home in the palanquin at left.) In the original design, the foxes were made with tough Japanese paper which was twisted into strings.

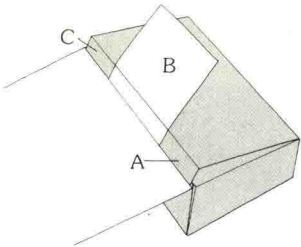
Place a note or small gift inside to use as a memorable wedding card.



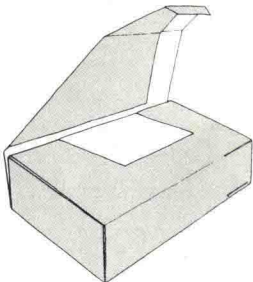
1. Start with the red motif facing up. Fold the mountains and valleys carefully and firmly.



2. Using both hands, work on one corner at a time to shape the box.



3. Fold tabs A and C forward, and tab B back. Pull the right-hand side over and insert tabs A and C into the slits at left.



4. Make the diagonal fold as shown. Then pull it across the face of the box and insert the newly-formed tab into the slit.



