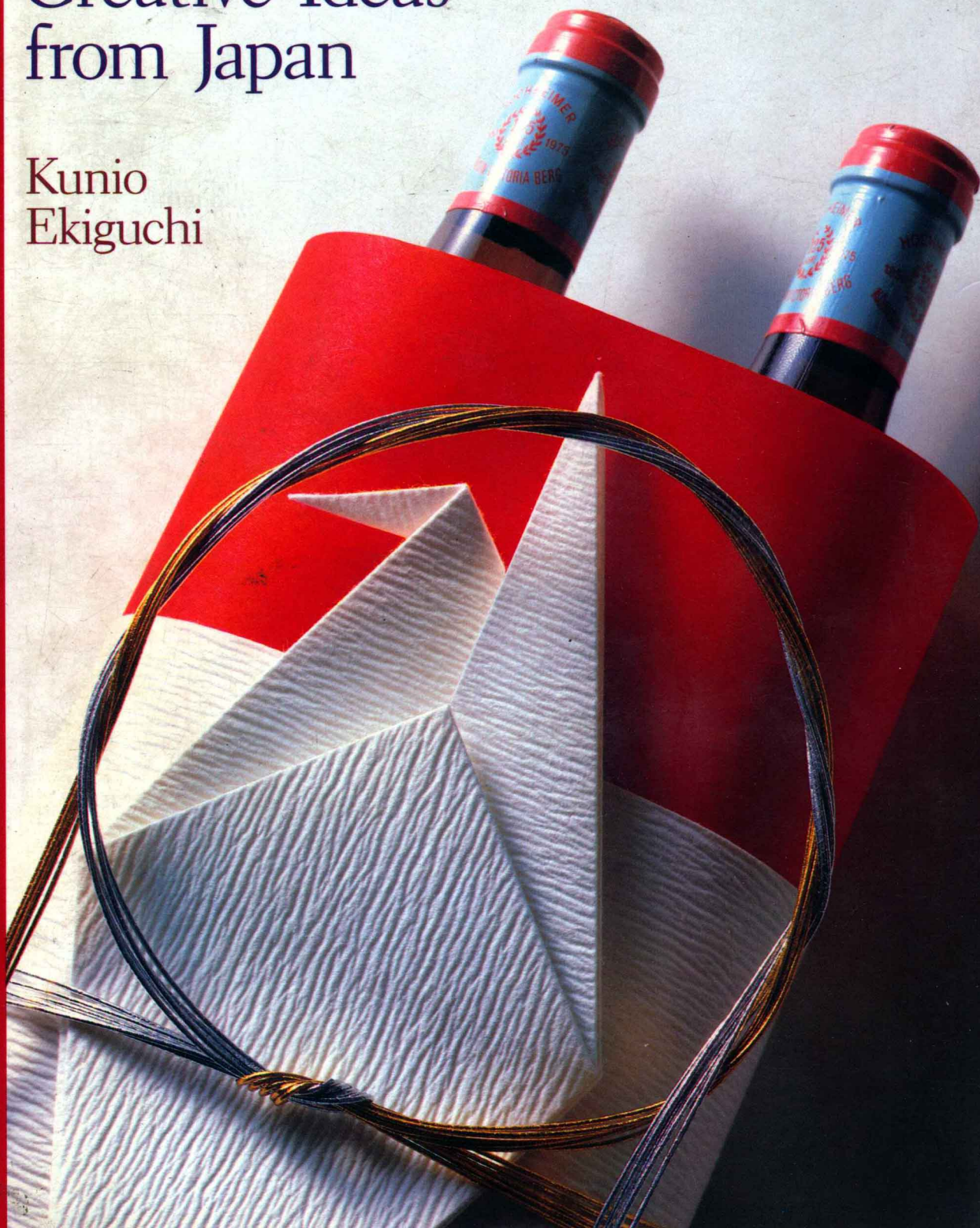


# GIFT WRAPPING

Creative Ideas  
from Japan

Kunio  
Ekiguchi





# WRAPPING

Creative Ideas from Japan

Kunio Ekiguchi

photographed by  
Akihiko Tokue

KODANSHA INTERNATIONAL LTD.  
Tokyo, New York, and San Francisco





The original instructions for each gift wrapping were prepared by Michiko Itō.

The introduction and the sections on Mizuhiki (p. 68), Layering and Color (p. 88), and Furoshiki (p. 113) were translated by Stephen B. Snyder.

Drawings by Eiko Ikeda.

The publisher would like to thank the following for supplying goods: Matsuya Department Store for the wine on the front jacket, the jam on pages 36 and 37 (Gifts 18, 19), the baby shoes on page 89 (Gift 45), the baby clothes on page 89 (Gift 46), the necktie on page 92 (Gift 55), and the gloves on page 92 (Gift 56); Minobe Co., Ltd. for the *furoshiki* on pages 111 (Gift 60) and 112 (Gift 64); and Yamada Heiandō for the lacquer box on page 9 (Gift 3).

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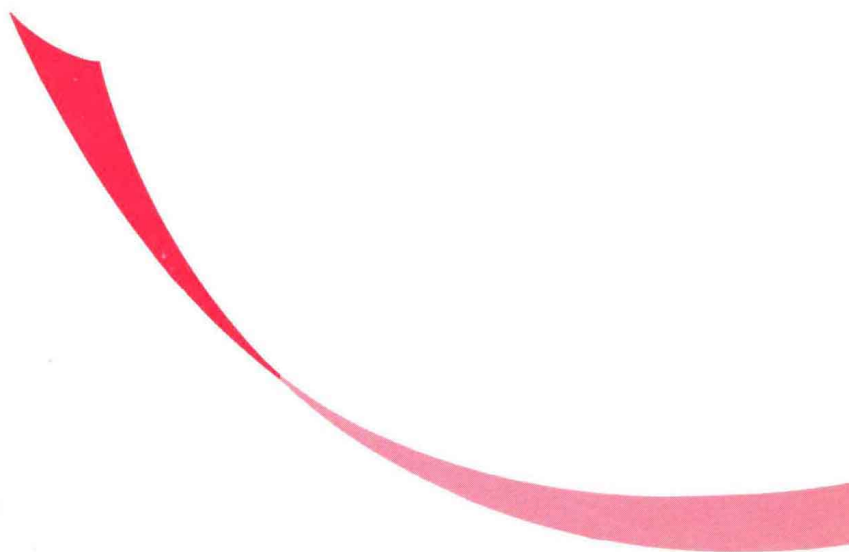
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# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	6
✦ Before You Begin	8
BASIC BOXES AND CYLINDERS	9
Instructions for Gifts 1 to 10	13
✦ More about Paper	32
USING THE SHAPE OF THE OBJECT	33
Instructions for Gifts 11 to 31	41
✦ Mizuhiki	68
FLATLAND	69
Instructions for Gifts 32 to 43	73
✦ Layering and Color	88
SPECIAL OCCASIONS	89
Instructions for Gifts 44 to 57	93
FUROSHIKI	109
Instructions for Gifts 58 to 66	114
Appendix	123

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# GIFT





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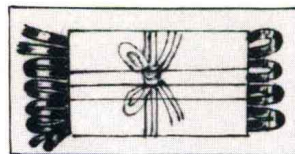
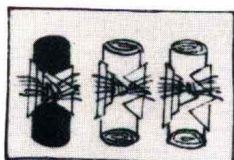


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# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	6
✦ Before You Begin	8
BASIC BOXES AND CYLINDERS	9
Instructions for Gifts 1 to 10	13
✦ More about Paper	32
USING THE SHAPE OF THE OBJECT	33
Instructions for Gifts 11 to 31	41
✦ Mizuhiki	68
FLATLAND	69
Instructions for Gifts 32 to 43	73
✦ Layering and Color	88
SPECIAL OCCASIONS	89
Instructions for Gifts 44 to 57	93
FUROSHIKI	109
Instructions for Gifts 58 to 66	114
Appendix	123

# Introduction



In Japan, the concept of wrapping, *tsutsumi*, is not limited to the function of packaging. It plays a central role in a wide variety of spiritual and cultural aspects of Japanese life. *Tsutsumi* encompasses many areas not included in the Western concept of wrapping. For example, gods or Buddhas are “wrapped” in a household altar containing a hidden image of the god or a portable shrine carried during festivals; gardens are enclosed by a variety of fences; architectural space is defined by translucent *shoji* doors, opaque *fusuma* doors, and bamboo blinds; pictures are rolled up in hanging scrolls and picture scrolls; and food is placed in lacquer containers. The wrapping style illustrated by these examples is not a tight, hermetic seal, but a loose, flexible covering or shading. This style embodies the concept of “gentle concealment,” a central part of the traditional Japanese sense of beauty.

The word *tsutsumi* is thought to come from the verb *tsutsushimu*, “to refrain, to be discreet or moderate.” The Japanese spirit tends to shun things that are direct, blunt, or frank and favors those which are controlled, indirect, and restrained. Restraint has come to be synonymous with refinement, and this value is in turn reflected in all segments of Japanese cultural life; the elegant, minimal—yet expressive—movements of *Nō*; the simplicity of black ink paintings; and the unpainted and unadorned surfaces of Japanese architecture illuminated with the light filtering through *shoji* doors.

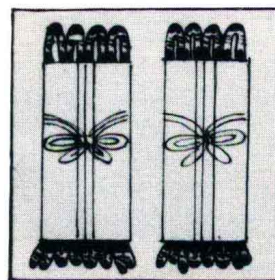
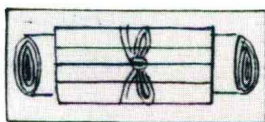
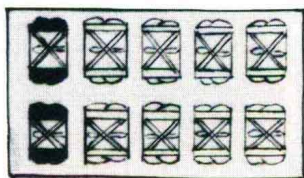
The *tsutsushimu* aesthetic also plays an important role in gift giving. The Japanese have always considered it discourteous simply to pass an unwrapped, unconcealed object from one hand to another. The object was wrapped in white *washi* (Japanese paper), or, if it could not be wrapped, paper was spread over or under it. Wrapping in paper became analogous to a kind of pledge that the contents were protected from all impurities. The fact that *washi*, once creased, will hold the crease forever has also come to symbolize this seal against impurities.

White paper is used because white is the color of the gods and, therefore, is free of all contamination. A newborn baby, for example, is considered to be a god and is dressed in white clothing. When it is seventeen days old, the white robe is changed for a colorful one, and only then is the baby considered a human child. Similarly, a bride is dressed in a white kimono during the wedding ceremony, signifying that she is first a bride of the gods. After the ceremony, she changes to a brilliantly colored kimono to indicate that she has become the bride of a human. In the same way, the bodies of the dead are wrapped in sacred white to prepare them for the return to the gods.

Building on this long and rich tradition of wrapping in white, the art of gift wrapping, *origata*, was developed. *Origata* is governed by a complex set of rules that determine the style of wrapping according to such factors as the recipient of the gift, the gift itself, and the occasion.

There are special terms and special rules for wrapping certain items: *kinsu-zutsumi*, wrapping gifts of money; *fude-zutsumi*, wrapping brushes; *suzuri-zutsumi*, wrapping ink stones; *hashi-tsutsumi*, wrapping chopsticks; *gofuku-tsutsumi*, wrapping kimono; *obi-tsutsumi*, wrapping kimono sashes; *ōgi-tsutsumi*, wrapping fans; *oshiroi-tsutsumi*, wrapping facial powder; *kushi-zutsumi*, wrapping combs; *beni-tsutsumi*, wrapping





rouge; hari-tsutsumi, wrapping needles; kō-zutsumi, wrapping incense—and so on indefinitely.

The style or materials for wrapping vary according to the occasion as well. There are special wrappings for congratulatory gifts, for going-away presents, for presents taken to the sick, for offerings to the gods, and for funeral gifts. In fact, it is difficult to say how many different kinds of origata exist. What is more, within each variety other factors, such as the relationship between the giver and the receiver and the season in which the gift is given also must be taken into consideration when selecting the paper, mizuhiki cords, and style of wrapping. With the exceptions of formal occasions such as funerals and weddings, however, many of the more complex forms of origata have fallen into disuse. Nonetheless, they continue to be practiced even today among people who still value the finer points of courtesy and consideration.

In Japan, it is said that giving a gift is like wrapping one's heart. Just as one helps a friend into a coat carefully and courteously, a gift should be wrapped tenderly and conscientiously. While the wrapping should, of course, protect the contents from breakage or other damage, the same care should be taken with aspects normally thought of as merely decorative—those that reflect the sentiment of the giver—the paper and the way it is wrapped, the ribbon and the way it is tied. This need not entail expensive, ostentatious materials. Innovative and elegant packages can be created using the materials on hand and a few basic Japanese wrapping concepts. In this book I have used paper and cloth as the basic wrapping materials, but tsutsumi also makes use of natural materials such as leaves, leather, bamboo, bamboo grass, straw, and so on. This ingenuity is especially apparent in the packaging of sweets and other foods. One of the secrets of such wrappings is to simply overcome the idea that paper is the only possibility. Creative alternatives should be sought with a flexible, imaginative eye.

In Japan, the changing of the seasons is a particularly central aspect of life, and this too plays a role in tsutsumi aesthetics. There are two major gift-giving seasons in Japan today. One is from late June to early July (o-chūgen) and the other at year's end (o-seibo). The gifts are wrapped to complement the season, with coolness and lightness the theme for the summer gifts and warm motifs for the winter. This seasonal consciousness need not be limited to summer and winter, but can be used to add interest to a gift at any time of the year. In early spring, evoke the scent of the first blossoms by cutting flower petals out of colorful paper and pressing them between thin sheets of translucent wrapping paper. Red and gold leaves tucked under a ribbon capture an autumn mood.

This book is intended to provide a basis from which to invent your own personalized wrappings—ones that express your feelings and creativity. I hope some of the ideas found herein will be helpful.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my assistants Michiko Itō and Kazutoshi Omoda for their patience and diligence and also Michiko Uchiyama and Rowena Wildin, my editors at Kodansha International.



# Before You Begin

## FIRST THINGS FIRST

Gift wrapping is different from paper craft and other creative activities in that the wrapping is not an end—it is the means by which to convey the love and thought that go into the giving of a gift. Therefore, the size, shape, and very nature of the wrapping are determined by the gift itself, the occasion, and the personalities of the people giving and receiving the gift.

The sixty-six gift wrappings in this book have been divided into basic shapes and types to make it easier for you to find the right one for your present. So begin by taking a good look at the shape and size of your gift. Find a similarly shaped wrapping and make it smaller or larger as needed.

Gift wrapping is easy and rewarding, and you will be surprised to find that many of the very elaborate-looking ideas are really very simple. Follow the steps below for perfect-every-time results.

1. Read through the instructions once.
2. Decide what to wrap the gift in. Would a box be better or can the shape of the gift itself be used? Will you use cloth or paper, ribbon, mizuhiki, or something else? Experiment with color and prints.

## PAPER AND OTHER MATERIALS

Gift wrapping paper is available in a wide range of prints, colors, and metallics, and sold in stationery stores, card shops, art supply stores, department stores, and so on. But do not limit yourself to gift wrapping paper: try using the different types of paper around you—pages from magazines, paper doilies, posters, cellophane, crepe paper, etc. Or try washi, handmade Japanese paper. Washi is available in a variety of weights and types. Its durability, flexibility, and soft lustrousness make it a natural for soft, boxless wrappings. Washi is available at oriental import stores and some art stores (see Appendix, page 123). Or forget paper and use cloth—furoshiki—for soft and easy wrappings. Furoshiki can be bought in oriental import stores or you can use bandannas, large handkerchiefs, or scarves, or make your own (see Furoshiki, page 113).

The paper used in this book can be divided into four types.

1. **Lightweight paper.** Cellophane, crepe paper, tissue paper, some washi. Any thin, almost transparent paper.
2. **Medium-weight paper.** Most wrapping paper, typing paper, stationery, pages from magazines, newspapers.
3. **Heavyweight paper.** Thicker paper, including some wrapping paper, paper used for art posters, momi-gami (a type of washi).

## A NOTE ON THE DIAGRAMS

A line of small dots indicates the inside of a fold line.

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Mix papers and textures. And make sure you have scissors, glue, tape, double-faced tape, a compass, wire, string, or whatever other materials may be necessary.

3. Practice with scrap paper or any inexpensive paper of about the same weight as the paper you plan to use. If you still have trouble understanding how to fold the wrapping, try practicing with a sheet of paper about the same size as that given in the instructions.

4. Adjust the size given in the instructions to fit your box. Measurements have been given as exactly as possible to give you an idea of the relationship between gift size and wrapping size. All dimensions are given in inches. For those who are more comfortable working in centimeters, convert inches to centimeters by multiplying the number of inches by 2.5. (To convert centimeters to inches, multiply the number of centimeters by 0.4.)

5. Wrap your gift according to the step-by-step instructions and add any finishing touches like ribbon, mizuhiki, stickers, etc.

4. **Cardboard.** Includes any heavy card stock such as that used for shoe boxes and other commercial packing. Try inserting a sheet of cardboard into a flat wrapping to protect a photograph.

For tips on selecting and sizing paper and problem solving, see *More about Paper* (page 32).

While neither ribbon nor mizuhiki are necessary for some of these wrapping ideas, they can and do add a nice touch to many packages. Ribbon, usually the non-woven craft type, can be bought almost everywhere that gift wrapping is sold. Look into fabric stores for woven ribbon, lace, braid, yarn, cord, or other possibilities. Rough brown package string can give a natural feeling to a gift wrapped in plain brown paper. Mizuhiki are sold in oriental import stores or you can make your own (see Mizuhiki, page 68). But do not stop at ribbon and mizuhiki. Try attaching small decorative items like pinecones, dry flowers, stickers, or flower appliques, or top the wrapping off with a card.

Gift wrapping does not require any special tools or equipment; everything you need can be found in your own home. For most of the wrappings, you will need only a pair of scissors, glue, tape, and a ruler. But check the list of materials before you begin: you may also need double-faced tape, a compass, and ordinary flexible wire or string.

A line of dots and dashes (a broken dotted line) is used to show the outside of a fold line.

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## BASIC BOXES AND CYLINDERS

*Ten imaginative and exciting ideas for  
the most common shapes a gift can take.*

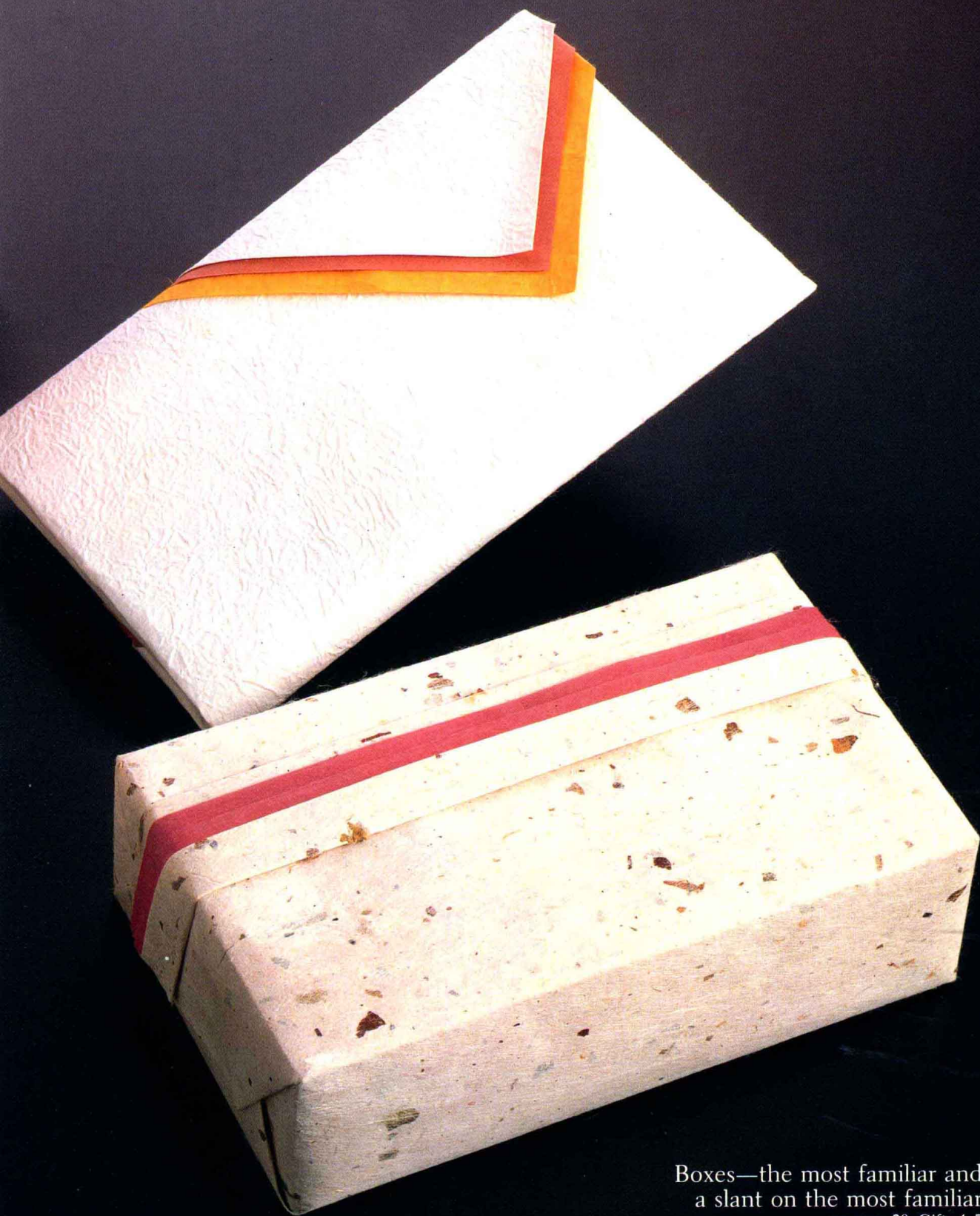


Boxes in the Japanese tradition  
see page 13, Gifts 1-3









Boxes—the most familiar and  
a slant on the most familiar  
see page 20, Gifts 4–7

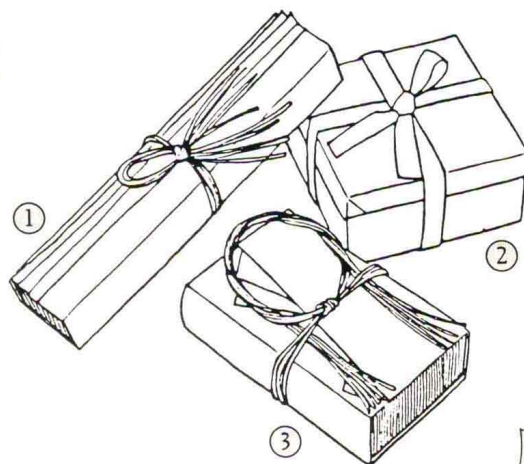




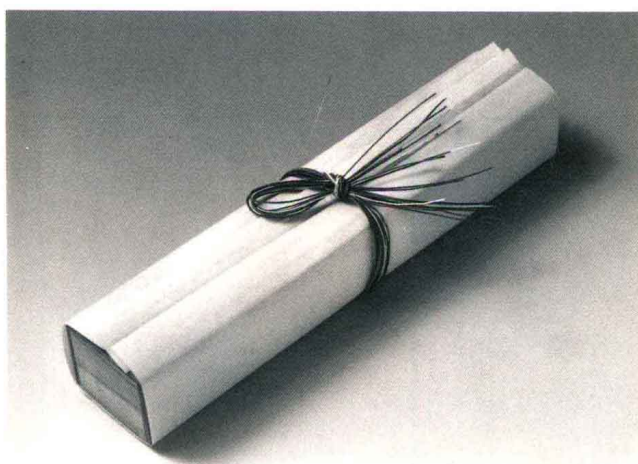
Cylinders—plain and fancy  
see page 27, Gifts 8-10

## Boxes in the Japanese tradition

One of the more traditional ways of wrapping a gift in Japan is to simply place a piece of paper over or around a box without completely covering it. This form of wrapping is not intended to conceal or protect the gift but to signify that it is indeed a present and convey the feelings of the giver. This method is particularly effective when you want to show off a pretty gift box or add a special touch to familiar shapes like boxes of chocolates or jigsaw puzzles.



1



This long, narrow wooden box is wrapped in delicately shaded *washi* with colored *mizuhiki* strands tied around it. The paper has been simply wrapped around the box and folded where the edges meet to make an attractive pattern.

### Materials

#### GIFT

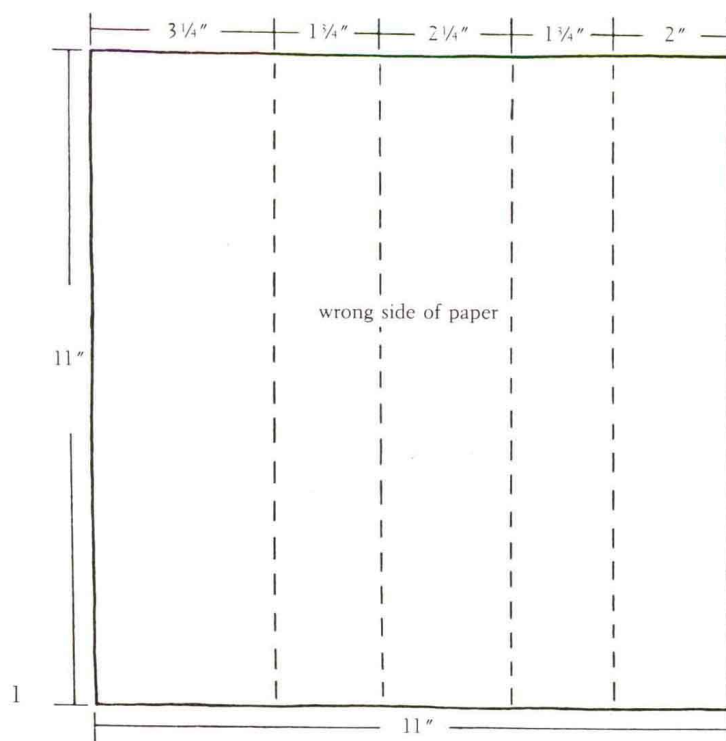
Box:  $1\frac{3}{4}$ " (height)  $\times$   $2\frac{1}{4}$ " (width)  $\times$  11" (length)

#### PAPER

11"  $\times$  11" medium-weight washi

#### OTHER MATERIALS

10 strands of 21" *mizuhiki* (see page 68) in various colors



Mark or score the wrong side of the paper.