

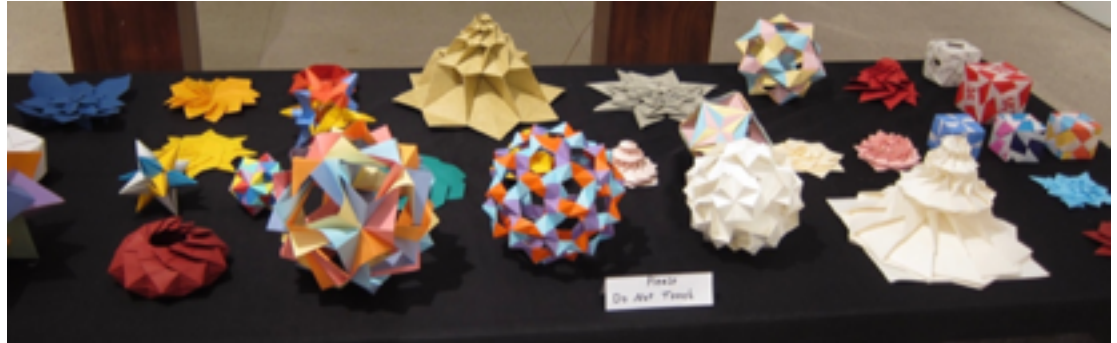
# Origami

by Vedder Wright

*I just checked into my room* at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) dorm in NYC for my first ever “Origami USA Convention” in late June of 1994.

My assigned roommate hadn’t arrived yet. I was just dozing off, when suddenly the darkness was broken as the steel door opened to the glare of hall lights and an eager young voice asked, “Hi there, do you want to go to an origami party?” I was a total newbie, but I said “Sure!” and grabbed my clothes. Walking briskly down the echoing hall, we arrived at the room of Joseph Wu, who greeted us with a smile. Sitting among the guests, I watched in amazement as Joseph proceeded to unpack a large plastic box filled with amazing creations: dragons, birds, bugs, fish, all designed by him. Watching the blur of the deft, obsessed hands of the guests shaping a butterfly wing, I was clearly too green to keep up, but I watched with amazed interest.

My first origami spark was kindled in the early ‘70s in the Berkeley Transcendental Meditation (TM) Center, when a



friend taught me the classic flap-ping bird. Living in Boston area

years later, obsessed with geometry and art (having degrees in both), I enjoyed several art and math conferences at SUNY, Albany. After joining local origami groups in Cambridge, it dawned on me that geometry was an important tool of origami design. Then, life-changing news of the New York “Origami USA Convention” (OUSA) swept me away on a train.

Originally a small-town guy from

*A table full of models I folded and used for a presentation.*

Davis, I was definitely nervous about visiting the “Big Apple,” but years of living in Boston exposed me to the excitement and advantages of a big city. Thus in late June, 1994, after four and a half hours on Amtrak from Boston’s South Station, I found myself pulling into Penn Station, NYC. It was an easy walk along Seventh Avenue to FIT. At that time, I could rent a room for the convention for only about \$35 for a night in Manhattan, so the price was right!

Origami, a Japanese term from the words Oru (to fold) and kami (paper), is the art of folding an astonishing range of objects from a simple uncut square of paper. At the OUSA convention each year, hundreds of enthusiasts, beginners to experts from all over the world converge to teach/learn, socialize, amidst a mind-boggling range of classes and events.

Shortly after I arrived, I swam into the long line to register and get



*The Great Hall at FIT, awash with fellow folders, June, 2011*

my attendance kit, including course information, folding paper, yearly T shirt, and the all-important course badges. I saw some fellow folders from Cambridge area from the MIT folding group “OrigamiMIT.” I was blown away by the cordial excited energy of so many people assembled together and impressed by the efficiency with which this was managed. To a first timer, it was definitely over the top.

Later, in a large common space called the Great Hall, swarms of chatting people were seated at tables, some demonstrating, others folding along with questions. Some models were

simple, others more challenging, still others were fiendishly complex. If you were the slightest bit interested in origami, you would be

sucked into a maelstrom of folding fellowship. If you had no immediate friends, you would soon make some.

One of the most exciting things about the convention is the wide variety of people of all ages and abilities. Like other artists, some folders are cool and calculating, some are wild and passionate. Regardless of your skill level or interest, you could find an engaging challenge somewhere.

There are some amazing “rock stars” in the origami world, such as full-time designer Robert Lang, a TED talk presenter, who uses mathematics as a tool for creating new

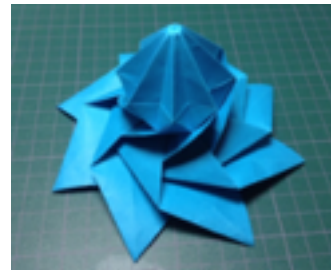
designs. I am in awe of his role as a modern-day artist/scientist. A folder since the age of 8, he’s a former NASA engineer with numerous degrees, patents, and honors. See his website at langorigami.com.

I also met and have studied privately with Chris K. Palmer, a geometrical origami designer whose work I felt strongly drawn to. To this day, I repeat many of his creations, after crafting my own set of instructions, as he did not supply many written hints, just demonstrated the steps. Like the other advanced folders, he had a table exhibit in a large gymnasi-

Especially as a long-time mediator, I noticed in myself and others an intense focus during folding, “getting into the zone,” totally forgetting everything else, sometimes for hours at a time. It’s a wonderful melding of hand/eye/mind coordination. There may be certain junctures where there is a mental/manual impasse, handling the paper in ways you have never done before or even thought possible. The company of an advanced folder is always helpful. Origami has social, cognitive, therapeutic, creative, educational, even industrial benefits. It requires no special tools,

can be practiced anywhere and it’s cheap.

Passing on this infectious fun, I found myself proselytizing. I remember airplane



*Three models designed by Chris Palmer and folded by me.*

um-size display area, where a sea of black-covered tables paraded the year’s crop of new designs. Three of his models shown above, folded by me from one sheet, no cuts, no glue. Notice the geometrical, symmetric nature, one of my passions.

In addition to classes and socializing, conference fun has included an origami fashion show, oversize folding using 10-foot squares of paper by teams, origami story-telling, and paper airplane contests. The origami movement sparks challenges such as “Minimalist Origami Alphabet,” by Jeannine Mosely (YouTube must-see), or “Origami Insects” (particularly by Robert Lang).

flights where the passenger sitting next to me got off at his/her destination with a lapful of simple folded models I taught to make the journey go pleasantly. I have taught origami in Boston area and in Fairfield, Iowa. ♦



**Vedder Wright**, a true man for all seasons, studied: Art at the CA College of Arts & Crafts; Chemistry and English Lit at UC Davis, Spatial Design Geometry at University of Montreal. He is a retired teacher of Transcendental Meditation and lives in Davis, CA.

## ***Resources***

The origami movement has been spreading worldwide in many countries, with local groups forming. Internet resources include video tutorials, diagrams, articles, mailing lists, origami folding paper. For tutorials, try googling for your interest, including YouTube. Definitely see the Origami USA website at <https://origamiusa.org> which sells books and papers, gives information, newsletters, convention news. Be sure to see the striking photos of past conventions.

I strongly recommend the user-friendly tutorials by Sara Adams, a tireless volunteer teacher who has been making videos for over 10 years at <https://www.happyfolding.com>. The site currently features hundreds of videos, from simple to complex, plus links to resources. I have enjoyed many viewings of the early ground-breaking documentary film on origami by Vanessa Gould: “Between the Folds,” which has been translated into over 10 languages and broadcast in doz-

ens of countries. Vanessa dropped out of a lucrative wall street job to make this.

Origami is finding practical real-world applications in medicine, the space program, biology, auto airbag design, architecture, robotics, aircraft design, takeout boxes, and much more. See the Nova special “The Origami Revolution” (full video currently online for free) for the much bigger picture of applications for this transformative way of thinking. ♦



*MIT logo by Brian Chan, from a single uncut sheet. For time lapse video, search YouTube for “The Making of Mens et Manus, In Origami.”*



*Oversize folding team at Origami USA, 2015*