

PAPERCRAFT

A piece of paper is a hidden treasure: it looks simple, but can make almost anything. In this special section, folk singer Phranc turns unwanted cardboard into objects of desire (*page 42*), you can make magazines into beaded jewelry (*page 47*), and computational origami master Robert Lang morphs a few bucks into a priceless blossom (*page 50*). Pop-up can make any day a holiday (*page 55*), and, believe it or not, trash is easily turned into festive gift wrap (*page 58*). And making a flexagon? Now *that's* a magic trick (*page 62*).



The Cardboard Cobbler



Folk singer Phranc surrounds herself with striking clothes and other fun stuff — all of which she's made from cardboard. BY ANNIE BUCKLEY

"I failed sewing three times," Phranc says, laughing. I am talking to the famed folk singer, next to a crowded worktable in her sunny art studio in Santa Monica, Calif., amid strikingly real cardboard renditions of sailor shirts, candy boxes, and a life vest.

That this quintessentially rebellious iconoclast has found the same wry sensibility in paper and paint that's a trademark of her albums — from the best known, *I Enjoy Being a Girl* (1989), to the most recent, *Milkman* (1998) — is something of a feat in itself, and doing it with spurned home-ec skills is somehow apropos. The self-proclaimed all-American Jewish lesbian folk singer punctures entrenched stereotypes with humor and humanity in her music, and her cardboard art is equally reflective, if quieter.

"I've been making stuff out of cardboard since I was a kid," Phranc says, recalling submarines and other "stuff you could crawl into." As a punk rocker in Los Angeles in the 80s, she sold her cardboard wares out of her apartment the day before rent was due. Since then, the work of The Cardboard Cobbler, Phranc's newest moniker, has come a long way. She has been included in several group exhibitions, and her first solo show opens at Cue Art Foundation in New York City in December.

Phranc has a deep respect for the everyday, innocuous little things that make our lives better, like an ice cream bar, a favorite pair of shoes, or the perfect shirt. Her art both celebrates and elevates these objects by preserving them in the simplest of media: paper and paint, cardboard and thread.

When working in paper, she first designs a pattern for her "fabric," sketched carefully in pencil. She eschews exactitude and prefers a handmade line to a ruler-straight one. Paper, Phranc explains,

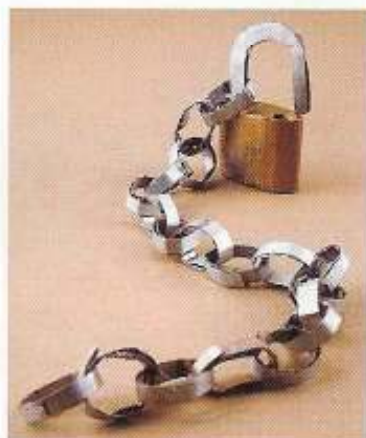
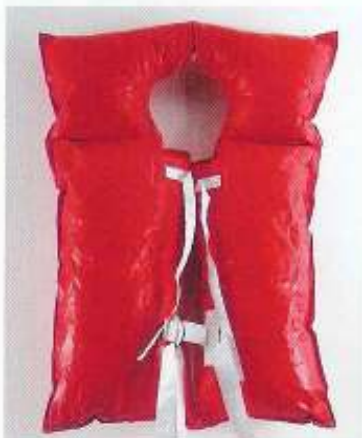
is unforgiving. To give paper added flexibility, she layers it with acrylic or gesso before tracing and painting the pattern. When it's time to cut the pattern and sew, she says with a smile, "you close your eyes, you say a prayer, and you hope it doesn't tear."

Memory and family are intricately connected to Phranc's cardboard work. In 1991, while she was away on tour, her brother was killed. The tragedy prompted her to take time off from music and ensconce herself in her studio, where she focused on paper creations. Her first three-dimensional pieces, realistic replicas of pumps, penny loafers, and her trademark combat boots, inspire smiles and reflection. Phranc's work reinforces a universal connection between objects, memories, and the feelings that weave them together. In her studio, a cardboard KidKraft kitchen inspired in me a visceral memory of being a kid in the 70s.

When Phranc and Lisa, her partner of ten years, started a family, it was again important to her that she not be on the road so much. So she took the beautiful black and gold Singer Featherweight sewing machine she inherited from her grandmother to a friend's house and learned to sew.

Phranc still uses her Nana's machine to make her creations. Each sewn garment includes a hand-painted label adorned with a single palm tree or ocean wave. Her label, Phranc of California, is reminiscent of growing up in California. The garments are made to be exhibited, rather than worn. But as she completes each one, Phranc slips it on just once — the perfect test-run for artwork that celebrates the joy and fragility of the here and now.

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PAPER PACKED: The vibe in Phranc's studio is busy and relaxed at once. Though she's continually folding, cutting, or measuring, her infectious enthusiasm and welcoming smile (not to mention homemade cupcakes) perfectly complement the brightly painted paper creations that line the walls.

How to Make a Fancy Box from Trash

By Phranc & Annie Buckley



There you are, running around the house searching for the right-sized box to package your perfect gift — maybe it's handmade or a thrift store find. Phranc, aka The Cardboard Cobbler, shows us how to turn trash into treasure for a funky, fancy, just-right gift box.

Vary the size and you have a packing box, storage box, or any kind you need. With a virtual treasure trove of great boxes waiting in the garbage, let's get going!

MATERIALS

- » **CARDBOARD BOX** CEREAL BOXES, CORRUGATED BOXES, ANY CARDBOARD WILL DO
- » **X-ACTO KNIFE WITH #11 BLADE**
- » **PENCIL**
- » **YARDSTICK**
- » **SCISSORS**
- » **CUTTING MAT OR SURFACE**
- » **BROWN PACKING TAPE OR CLEAR TAPE**
- » **METAL RULER**
- » **ACETATE (OPTIONAL)** FOR WINDOW BOX
- » **GOLD ELASTIC CORD (OPTIONAL)**
- » **YOUR DREAM BOX** OR OTHER INSPIRATIONAL MATERIAL



Photography by Robyn Twomey (top); Annie Buckley (bottom)

START »

1. GET INSPIRED

The first step for any artist is inspiration, so start by choosing your dream box. Maybe it's a blue Tiffany box, or a red Valentine. Keep it simple! This is the box you'll use as a model, so make sure you like the shape and style.

For more advanced crafters, pick other inspirational material, maybe a pair of shoes longing for a home, or a special necklace that needs a place to rest, and make your box to fit.



2. CRUISE FOR CARDBOARD

Peruse your trash can or recycling bin — any good-lookin' piece of cardboard will do. Cereal and toy boxes are excellent choices, as are packages from medical and feminine hygiene products. Just make sure it will be a large enough box to hold your gift.



3. OPEN AND TRACE

Using your X-Acto, open up all box seams and lay the package facedown. Cut in half. These 2 pieces will be your top and bottom. Place your dream box in the center and trace. For those who like a challenge, lay your inspirational material onto the cardboard and trace an even rectangle around it. Use a ruler to draw the lines. Make each side an equal length.



4. MEASURE THE BOX SIDES

Phranc uses the width of a yardstick as her magical measuring guide for the depth of the box. For a shallow box, use 1 yardstick width. For a deeper box, increase to 2 or 3 widths to achieve the desired box depth. Placing the yardstick against your traced rectangle, use a pencil to outline the sides of the box.



5. CUT AND SCORE

Using the metal ruler and X-Acto, cut along the outside lines. Draw an X in the 4 squares at the corners of this shape. Cut along these corner lines and remove the little squares marked with the X.

Very lightly score along the inner 4 lines, folding and creasing each side toward the center to begin to form your box.



6. TAPE THE BOX CORNERS

Cut a piece of packing tape the same width as the sides of the box. Pinch together each of the 4 box corners, using small pieces of tape to secure them. For a fancier box, use clear cellophane tape, but for an everyday box, brown packing tape is best.



7. MAKE THE BOX TOP

Using the bottom of your box as a guide, turn it upside down and trace. Make sure you outline the box loosely; this will give your top a snug but comfortable fit.

Repeat Steps 3 through 6, except make the sides of the box top a little shorter to show off the bottom of the box. Your nifty gifty box is complete!



8. GET FANCY

For an added touch of glamour, cut out a rectangle from the top and fill from the inside with clear acetate. Feel free to enhance your box with paint, a gold cord, or colorful ribbon.



9. MAKE SOME STORAGE

To make large, industrial-sized boxes, follow the same basic procedure using large pieces of recycled cardboard.

In the land of The Cardboard Cobbler, your boxes and curtains, gifts and shoes, albums and books are all made to order from the same material that made your childhood forts, robots, caves, and dolls' accessories: cardboard.



Now you're a box-making expert. Adjust the dimensions and materials as you please. You'll never be without a handy box again!

Phranc's cardboard creations: phrancthecardboardcobbler.blogspot.com