

PAPER WORK

ADIRONDACK ICONS
AS ORIGINAL ORIGAMI

DESIGNS BY JOHN SZINGER



THE ASSORTMENT SHOWN HERE TOOK about a month of experimenting, with final pieces made in one long session. Six-inch-square paper was pleated for the Adirondack chair. "Once the basic shape was established a lot of effort went into making the legs hold together and into the detail on the backrest," says John Szinger.

FOXES HAVE BEEN IN HIS REPERTOIRE for years. Szinger says, "In animals I spend a lot of time on necks and shoulders, as they are very expressive of posture, stance and mood. The cool thing about this model is the color change on the ears and tail and the way the tail kind of has a fluffy appearance."



THE LOON, EVOLVING FROM A CLASSICAL fish pattern, echoes waterfowl bodies like swans and ducks. "Color-change models are always challenging to fold because it means exposing the opposite side of the paper. First I had to consider how to abstract and simplify the loon's complicated plumage and then how to do it by folding. The stripe on the neck turned out to be key. Then once I got going on the body, I found getting the curve of the neck right was another essential feature."



THOUGH WE THINK OF ADIRONDACK GREAT CAMPS AS native north woods creations, Japanese influence appears here in graceful outbuildings, intricate roof lines and even interior décor, with painted paper fans adorning rustic walls or lanterns hanging from porch rafters. So origami, the centuries-old art of folding paper, is not alien to regional interior design. It's quite possible that a lakeside lodge displayed classic cranes or frogs on a mantel, and it's quite likely that those delicate souvenirs ended up as tiny colorful shreds in a winter mouse nest.

This ephemeral but labor-intensive art has fascinated John Szinger, 39, since he was a boy and "cootie catchers" were the playground rage in fortune-telling. Now a software designer and musician living in Westchester, New York, he is drawn to the way a simple leaf of paper can be transformed without glue or scissors into a bear, a chair, a butterfly, a rocket ship. When other artists doodle, Szinger creases. "With an animal, I think about pose and posture," he explains. "Then I experiment." Many designs shown here arise from traditional Japanese patterns, like the kite, a series of triangles. "One idea leads to another. From that bear—and I've encountered many in the Forest Preserve—I worked on an elephant."

The pieces are impressionistic, he continues. "Origami is like cartooning, making choices about what to emphasize, what to leave out," while still casting a recognizable form. Some of the North Country icons shown here came alive quickly, but others were challenging. Making the Adirondack chair sturdy, like a real piece of furniture, required many hours of experimenting. The loon, with its contrasting colors, dictated certain steps to show the white side of the black paper.

"In the past 15 years origami has really taken off," Szinger notes. There are national conventions, like Origami USA, held in Manhattan in June each year, and mathematicians, engineers, package designers and even safety experts study the complexities of folding for everything from air bag installation to launching a collapsible telescope into outer space. Szinger's output, though, is for the joy of the process. This selection is the first he has completed for publication in a mainstream magazine.

Many of the creatures shown here are difficult, requiring large paper. The canoe, however, can be made from a standard six-inch origami sheet, available in crafts shops. Directions for the boat can be found at www.adirondacklife.com. 🌿

—Elizabeth Folwell

WHEN JOHN SZINGER describes his process it sounds deceptively simple. "Think of the thing you're trying to make and then fold the paper to look like that. I visualize in my head before I begin, and start with what I think is a promising approach."

For the canoe, the first piece he made for ADIRONDACK LIFE, he wanted three dimensions; the bow, stern and hull require curves and angles for an authentic shape.

THE MOOSE, MADE FROM ONE 20-inch piece of Wyndstone paper, with dull and coated sides for fur and antlers, was the last beast to capture. "Sometimes there's a fair bit of trial and error and sometimes my first idea turns out to be on the right track," he says. "Rather than do a free body design I fell back on the bird base, borrowed from the fox. I pretty much nailed the model on the first try with not a lot of experimentation and some lucky guesses on the proportions. This base gave me a thick body with lots of layers. It's strong and the legs can support the weight of the antlers, which are the key to the whole model."



"I USUALLY DO A HANDFUL OF 'sketches,' folding quickly out of regular photocopier paper, and once I get to the point where it looks right, I'll fold a few more, with bigger, nicer paper, to work out the details of the final sculpting," Szinger explains. "The bear is folded in the modern style—it doesn't really use a base."

Though the sow came together quickly, "it took a couple of days just to work out the ears! And that changed around the design quite a bit."