

Our Guy in England



A classic optical illusion

For more than half a century, Mick Guy has been a well-known member of the origami community worldwide. He was one of the founders of the British Origami Society becoming General Secretary for 17 years. In this interview, he reveals his routines as a paperfolder and reflects on the future of origami in a globalized world.



ABOVE. Penguin Colony



ABOVE RIGHT. Loving Butterflies. This started as a heart tessellation for Valentines Day and developed into the butterfly, sunflower and other flowers.

RIGHT. Sunflower



by Laura Rozenberg

This interview is taking place via email, but let's imagine that I have traveled to visit you at your home in the UK.

What kind of landscape would I see from the bus while approaching your hometown? What does your home look like from the outside?

We live about four miles from the center of Birmingham, the largest city in the UK outside London. It is located in the West Midlands area of England. When approaching our home, you would see what you would expect from living in a city. But the nearer you got you would see lots of trees as we live by Warley Woods comprising 100 acres that are looked after by a community trust. Our house is nearly 100 years old and similar to others built at the same time.

Once I am in your house, would you let me see where you do paperfolding? What does the room look like? Is it the same room where you keep all your boxes (assuming you keep boxes with foldings) and papers and letters?

Many of my designs are on display in the room where I work, and you would be welcome to view them and explore the 40 binders which house the notes about my designs and those of others I admire.

There is an essay written by your wife which was published first in the 70's in the BOS magazine and then again in The Paper (issue #120). It is one of the most lovely pieces ever written about the life of (and sharing a life with) a paperfolder. One thing I remember is the description of you being messy and controlling about what to keep and what to trash. Have you changed over the years? Sadly not (for my wife)!

How do you feel when you are alone folding?
Mostly I am working on a new design so I am locked into problem solving the moves necessary to achieving the shape I want. Many of my designs are puzzles and so they have to be robust to prevent them from falling apart. There are usually some real challenges in there, but who said origami was easy?



ABOVE. Mick Guy teaching his granddaughter, Bethany, how to play with the checkerboard puzzle where parts have to be fitted together to make squares.

LEFT. Sudoku Puzzle Cube



ABOVE. Calendar Cube which is widely available in wood and plastic. It uses cubes designed by Paul Jackson and the red cube can be unfolded and refolded to show all twelve months

Q & A WITH BOS'S MICK GUY

During the early times, who became your paperfolding friends? Who was the first one?

The folks that started the Society were well bonded. Many, of course, like Robert Harbin, Eric Kenneway, David Lister, John Smith, and Iris Walker are no longer with us, but I have fond memories of them all. I guess my best buddies are Ray Bolt and Dave Venables who joined later, but lived locally, were of similar ages, and had a common desire to make the BOS what it is

today. Michael Shall and Fred Rohm were also special friends.

What did you fold when you were a little kid, and how was your interest transformed when you joined the BOS?

My mother taught me the traditional paper hat and boat when I was five. Later my uncle showed me the Snapper, but it was Harbin's TV series that opened my eyes when I was a teenager. I was enthralled by the work of Elias, Rohm, and George Rhoads.



Seven coloured square puzzle



Black Hole using 30/45/100 triangles



A tessellation tribute to MC Escher

Looking back over the golden years, how do you see the current state of the art?

Origami survives because there is always something new to explore and experience. Yes, there are the classics, but some new genre comes along and, technically, it is as good as ever. Now and again a brilliant simple model comes along and that makes my day. But origami is as much about people as it is about paper. Whilst the Internet has opened the floodgates for the amount of material available, nothing is more exciting than sharing your passion with another paperfolder. Those who fold in isolation do not know what they are missing. Societies, therefore, are vital in the way they bring folders together.

Fact Sheet

Name: Michael Guy but known in the origami world as Mick

Age: 71

Married to: Susan but known as Sue

Children: Two boys and six grandchildren

Home town: living in Smethwick, near Birmingham for 47 years.

Occupation: I am a retired mechanical engineer specializing in fastenings. Much of my work involved project management, technical support, and problem solving.

Your role with BOS over the years: When the BOS was formed, I became General Secretary, a post I held for 17 years. I have also been President, Chair, and am presently a Vice President.

Conventions outside the UK that you visited: It may surprise you to know that I have not been able to attend any.

Your favorite folding technique: Finding effective ways of locking flaps together.

Models that you created: Most are puzzles and optical illusions, but I am most proud of those that others want to fold. But the model is only part of it. For me the sequence of steps is just as important as I want the student to enjoy the folding experience. Eric Kenneway described it as like composing a symphony. So sometimes there is as much work involved in finding the best way in which to fold it as there is designing it in the first place.

Recently the BOS celebrated its 50th anniversary and you've been one of its first members. How do you envision it in the next 50 years?

When we began, the consensus of the public was that origami was just a pastime for children. To an extent, this still exists, but the contribution we are making to mankind will continue to build. Origami will still remain a minority hobby, but more and more people will have a respect for it. Whilst there is money to be made from origami, hopefully it will not take over and cause rifts between paperfolders to occur.

What's important to achieve in the world of origami?

Origami is a wonderful hobby in which to explore your creativity. There are so many areas other than making designs, like helping with the magazine, conventions, and guiding the future of our societies that really develop your potential. But a warning! Never lose sight, as I did once, of what brought you to origami in the first place; the joy of just folding paper. 🏠