Pam Sussman

"The Secret Slipcase: Pockets on Every Edge"
The Secret Slipcase: Pockets on Every Edge

by Pam Sussman

Books with secret compartments and wonderful little niches to tuck “paper treats” have always been intriguing. This clever little project can’t decide if it is a book cover or a slipcase, as it functions equally well for both purposes. Make a number of these in various sizes and you’ll also be amazed at the versatility of the pattern.

Based on an idea from a fun origami book called Paper Creations: Easy to Make Origami Projects by Gay Merrill Gross, this derivation of Humiaki Huzita’s Card Case was designed by my associate and friend Gayle Burkins. We needed a travel case to hold an artist passport, artistamps and other documents for a class we were teaching at The Creative Block in Cleveland. Gayle came up with this larger version which was perfect for the intended purpose. As we played with the design and papers, we found dozens of ideas for additional uses.

The Secret Slipcase has an incredible eight pockets; two on the front cover, four on the inside, and one on each side between the cover and inside layers. In addition, it can also have a slim spine, making it ideal as a book cover with pockets, for sewn or unsewn bindings. Anything from a simple pamphlet or running stitch to a decorative sewn spine can be accommodated for

Suggested Papers for the Slipcase

Printed Kraft papers
70# or 80# text weight stocks from commercial mills
Flexible papers with plant inclusions
Chiri
Tairei
Tatien (heavy)
Momi (also duplex Momi)
Uzu
Origami papers (especially two sided)
Do not use coated stocks or vellums, or cover weights.
Avoid papers with large plant inclusions on small scale projects.
Secret Slipcase Directions

Start with a piece of paper 15" x 19".

Place the paper so that the longer edge is at the top and the bottom. Bring the right side to the left side, fold and crease in the middle. Unfold.

Bring the right edge to the center fold line, fold and crease. Unfold. Repeat on the left.

Fold the right edge to meet the closest fold line. Fold and crease. Repeat on the left side.

Fold down the upper right corner so that the edge meets the paper's edge to form a triangle. Fold and crease. Repeat on the left side.

The paper will look like this.

Fold the right side inward, on the existing fold line. Repeat on the left.

Flip the paper to the opposite side and turn it 180°, so the top is now the bottom and the front is now the back. Fold up the bottom to the point where a perfect triangle is formed on the corners. Fold and crease. Your paper will now look like this.

Bring the top edge down to the bottom edge, fold and crease. Tuck the corners into the triangular pockets on the right and left sides.

To form the spine, fold the left side over to the right, stopping about ⅛" short of the edge. Fold and crease. Open and repeat on the opposite side, taking the right side to the left and stopping about ⅛" short of the edge.
Hidden pockets between the inside and outside layers can be used to hold secret messages. Make a fabulous finished product, if they are not too thick. (Duplex Momi, the Japanese wrinkled paper, makes a dramatic slipcase.) Also, try two sided origami paper with different patterns or solid colors printed on each side of the paper.

A special finish, applied to the paper, can change its texture to a leather-like surface. Fold the project according to the directions, and then unfold it back to a flat piece of paper. Apply a coat of Matte Medium (found in art supply stores in the acrylic paint section) to one side. Let it dry thoroughly. Repeat on the other side. Once the paper has completely dried, refold it according to directions using the creases you have already made on the first folding. Matte Medium will darken the surface and alter the color of your paper, but it will also impart a wonderful texture that will make the finished project more interesting both visually and tactically.

This slipcase design works well in many sizes. The original card case was made from an 8¼" x 11" sheet of paper which, when folded, is the perfect size to accommodate standard 2" x 3½" business cards. The pattern here was made from paper size 15" x 19", which translates into a finished case of 6¾" tall by 4¾" wide when closed, with a ¾" spine. The easiest way to adjust the pattern to another size, larger or smaller, is to use a proportion wheel (available from art or graphic arts supply stores).

If you haven't tried many origami projects, I think you'll be surprised at how quickly and easily this one comes together. A great way to practice this pattern is to grab a stack of 8½" x 11" copier or printer paper and start folding. Once you begin making these little gems, you won't want to stop. I made a whole stack of them in

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A proportion wheel is two circles with numbers on them. The inner circle is the size you have, the outer circle is the size you want. The window indicates the percentage difference. This wheel is set at 75%.
assorted papers and sizes before I even realized it. Their production is downright seductive! But not to fear, you'll find dozens of uses for your practice extras. Use them to hold order forms and checks for supplies purchased by mail, to send business cards to new or prospective clients, to share photographs, and to make quick little trip journals, just to name a few options.

Both the outside cover and the inside can be embellished with rubber stamps, collage material, calligraphy or other media. I have also created a template in a software program so that I can have custom printed slipcases inside and out. Text printed on the corners and pockets are a great way to make the reader aware that surprises await in the hidden pockets. If you are planning to produce a large edition incorporating the slipcase, this is the most efficient way to proceed.

The Secret Slipcase has become a staple in our project portfolio, and you may find it adds a new dimension to your own bookbinding repertoire.

About the Author

Pam Sussman is a graphic designer by profession and a book artist by choice. She has studied bookbinding with Shereen LaPlantz and others, and teaches classes in binding and typography. She is also the web designer for Tabellae Ansata.

Scary Stuff by Pam Sussman, fabric covered cover and fabric "slipcase" bag.

Einstein's Shirts by Pam Sussman, origami shirts with mechanical pull down messages.

Two books by Gayle Burkins: From Ghoulies... corrugated paper with cut out window and Plexiglas covered image and The Dressed Books, metallic and embossed papers.