

Paper trail of art



by Jeremiah Ware

If all you ever use a sheet of paper for is to jot down your shopping list, you should meet Stephen Watson.

Give him a piece of paper and he'll transform it in minutes into a miniature work of art.

"You don't need expensive tools or materials to do origami, or be an expert — and you can practise it anywhere," said Stephen.

Gallery

Indeed, if you happen to be around Stephen's home town of South Ribble, Lancashire, keep your eyes peeled for his frogs.

"If you see a small, green origami frog staring at you from a window ledge or seat," he said, "chances are I was there 10 minutes ago! It's my green frog experiment."

"When walking around a museum or art gallery, I always have the urge to fold."

"I'll leave an origami frog in a discreet place and sit close by. And, as people pass, it'll always be the children who spot it first and, within 20 minutes, the frog will be gone — carried off by a smiling child, or even an adult!"

"Cafes, restaurants — they're all fair game. If there's a napkin on a table, I'll fold it."

"At one restaurant, when I started folding the napkins, I even had requests from the waitresses and the chef — and we were given a discount!"

"I now take paper with me wherever I go, just in case I get a folding moment!"

Although he works for the charity CARE, Stephen, 45, would love to make a living out of origami. "Unfortunately, there's no money in it," he says.

"Apart from just a handful of professionals, this hobby is a labour of love."

"I'm paid in smiles, and every smile puts a penny in the happy bank!"

Expert

Stephen runs school holiday workshops to pass on his knowledge to others, and has run classes for Brownies, mothers' unions and pensioners.

He keeps his ideas updated on his website, www.south-ribble.co.uk/origami where there are tips to help everyone, from beginners to expert paper folders.

One of Stephen's

most-impressive models is a four-foot dragon, called Mabel.

"I moved on to bigger models by accident," explained Stephen. "At one of the workshops I attended, it would have taken hundreds to fill the space left for my display gap, so I compensated by making the models bigger! Mabel was made out of one sheet of paper."

"The bigger ones are not necessarily the most complex. I find insects require a lot of concentration and attention just to get all those legs, feelers and pointy bits folded properly."

"And, if you're attempting insects life-size, then you'll need a pair of tweezers, and a steady hand!"

"Origami has a therapeutic benefit, too. It can promote a feeling of achievement, and can improve hand-eye co-ordination."

"Best of all, it's fun!"



Stephen reckons he's paid in smiles for his labours of love.

