

An Afternoon with the Legendary Florence Temko

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Ever since I received Origami-USA's 2005 Florence Temko award at PCOC, Arizona, I've always had the desire to meet this origami legend in person some day. And it happened last week when I went to San Diego to send off my son to college. I got in touch with Florence the week before and she graciously replied and said that I was most welcome. We had had many warm email exchanges prior to that as well and I was so looking forward to the visit.

As I walked towards her beautiful apartment building by the gorgeous La Jolla beach, she greeted me with a big smile. She had come all the way downstairs to receive me. When we proceeded upstairs towards a row of apartment doors, it was a no-brainer to tell which one was Florence's. Why, of course, it was the one with its door adorned with a big, colorful garland of cranes! As soon as she opened the door I saw that, just as I had anticipated, her apartment was bursting with origami. Right in front, through the balcony door, was this great view of the ocean. The wall on the right was artfully decorated with origami. There were all kinds of origami on the wall but mostly there were these breathtaking geometric abstracts, which she said, were her favorites. They were either framed or neatly mounted on raised boards and the arrangement had an uncanny symmetry about it. On other walls were bookshelves and one entire shelf was full of her mind boggling 50 plus publications!

Florence first made me feel at home while carefully arranging the flowers that I brought her in a vase. Then she wasted no more time and quickly started sharing with me as much of origami as she could in the short time that we had together. She had a huge collection of articles relating science and mathematics to origami. She said that whenever her friends came across any such published article, they made sure they snipped it for her. She showed me a collection of very old and precious origami books some of which were in Japanese. In each Japanese book she meticulously kept an insert, which had an English translation of the title page. There was one that was autographed by Akira Yoshizawa San, which she cherished. She fondly remembered him and Lillian Oppenheimer and told me a little bit about Lillian's brilliant family. We also went through numerous models and she described many of them for me. She had an amazing collection of paper form all over the world and she said that some of the best were purchased in the UK. In the midst of all that, she generously made me a cup of tea. She mentioned that only about a quarter of all of her total closet space had clothes in them and the rest were all occupied with origami! I'm sure most of us origami enthusiasts could understand or relate to that.

Amidst the soothing sonance of the gentle ocean waves and so much origami material to soak myself into, time went by quickly and now I would have to leave. Florence gave me her signature rooster and a couple of other folded models as parting gifts. I asked her how she liked her apartment and she just pointed towards the ocean and remarked, "How could one not like a place like this!" After that we took a short stroll along the so very beautiful coastline. Then we bid goodbye and I left with an elated heart and a sincere feeling that I would visit again soon, really soon. Visiting Florence would be an added attraction to visiting my son for the next four years.



Florence's living room wall adorned mostly with geometric abstracts.



With Florence at the beautiful La Jolla coast.