

THE ORIGAMI CUSHION by Janet Phillips



On a recent visit to the Lake District, I visited 'Blackwell'. This house was designed by Baillie Scott around 1900 and has been recently restored to its original exquisite beauty. By chance there was an exhibition of traditional and contemporary Japanese textiles showing. The many 'window seats' overlooking Lake Windermere in the house were strewn with cushions, with fabrics recently woven by modern Japanese hand weavers. Most were simple weaves with ikat dyed patterning, and very beautiful. What intrigued me most though was that they were nearly all woven as narrow pieces of fabric and by folding them in a very simple manner good-sized cushions could be made.

Once home I experimented with some cloth and made a couple of cushions in plain weave chenille.

I discovered that it was necessary to weave a cloth, which was four times longer than its width. An additional 2 inches were needed to allow for hems. Therefore if one wove a finished cloth 12 inches wide, one needed to weave a length of 50 inches finished. This amount of material would make a cushion approximately 17 inches square.

A finished cloth 10 inches wide by 42 inches long made a cushion approximately 14 inches square.

In order to make up the cushion follow the diagram below. It is best to practise with a strip of paper first to understand the simple folding sequence.

1. Weave your length of fabric.

2. Take the bottom left hand corner across to the right hand edge to form a diagonal fold line.
3. Take the remaining long length of cloth and fold it across to the right so that it aligns with the newly formed horizontal edge and forms a point on the left hand side.
4. Turn the whole folded cloth over.
5. The long length of unfolded cloth is now on the bottom right hand side and this needs to be folded vertically to meet with the vertical edge already made.
6. The whole thing needs to be turned over again. The shape now looks a little like an open envelope.
7. Take the 'flap of the envelope' and fold it inwards to meet the other edges.

It is then necessary to hand slip-stitch all the loose selvedged edges together. I found it easier to use the extra 2 inches in length to make hems at the beginning and ends of the cloth before starting to fold and sew the cushion.

I left the final hemmed edges un-sewn in order to leave an opening for the cushion pad to be inserted and then sewed buttons on to make the necessary fastening.

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