

Not Your Grandmother's Gingerbread Projects



by Romy Tittel

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Of course one of the first things that people think about when undertaking a gingerbread project is memories of previous failures. I think that the whole idea behind a project like this should be fun, fun, fun and success. So with this in mind the designs have to fulfill that criterion. It is also important to note that there is no right or wrong way to decorate. Matter of fact, the more hands on the candy layers the better because in the end it all comes together as one.

Secrets to success begin with the Styrofoam base, it is sturdy, especially adhesive to Royal icing and it comes in white to look like snow. I remember my family using aluminum foil over cardboard or wood and as nice as it looked, the icing just slipped along and the walls kept falling down, no fun. The Royal icing recipe courtesy of Martha Stewart's classic recipe is another key ingredient in assuring success.

Royal Icing Recipe

- *1 lb. icing sugar*
- *¼ cup egg white*
- *2 Tbsp. water*

Put icing sugar into blender then add egg whites. Blend and slowly add water one drop at a time. Blend for 2 minutes. Divide icing into small sized Ziploc baggies for each participant. Squeeze out excess air from the baggie then close and cut a small hole in the bottom corner, essentially creating a piping bag.

Gingerbread Recipe

- *7 cups sifted flour*
- *4 tsp. ginger powder*
- *4 tsp. cinnamon*
- *1 cup molasses*
- *1 tsp. baking soda*
- *2 cups soft butter*
- *2 cups slightly packed brown sugar*

Sift dry ingredients together. Cream butter and sugar, blend in molasses. Add dry ingredients to creamed butter mixture. Spread out on an 11" x 17" non-stick cookie sheet. Take your rolling pin and smooth the dough out before baking. Take pattern pieces and cut through the unbaked dough. This will ensure a crisp cut when the dough is baked and the pieces are removed. Bake in 350F oven for 20 minutes. Remove and cool for 5 minutes before removing pieces.

This recipe makes two 11"x17" cookie sheets worth of gingerbread.

Note: The flat side of the gingerbread is considered the back of the piece.

Basic Materials Required

- Offset cake spatula
- Tooth picks
- Styrofoam board/Foam-core (for the 2" board I found that insulation board was the most economical and can be found at any hardware store i.e. Home Depot)
- Metallic paper
- Glue
- Candy
- Sandwich size Ziploc baggies



Project #1 CLE B&B

This was the first project I put together for the three girls; Charlotte, Lauren and Ellen. It was a gingerbread house that was a cottage in the countryside that also was a Bed and Breakfast. The construction of the cottage was vintage gingerbread house design with the pitched roof that had to have a chimney with smoke coming out of it. The yard was decorated welcoming the guests up the walkway to the quaint little cottage. I think it is always important to make room for lots of candies to be nibbled on until the day the whole project is met with the wrecking ball. Another trick is to fill the cavity of the house with candy so on the day of doom; the kids are surprised by all this extra candy.

But since this book is about projects that your Grandmother didn't do, I want you to think outside of the box that is your typical gingerbread house. Some of the projects that follow do indeed use the basic principles of box construction but done in a way that success is assured, no slipping roof panels to ruin a perfectly good afternoon decorating gingerbread. The projects also expand on the very basic idea of gingerbread being used as the structure and allow one to play with broken pieces. You no longer need to worry about cutting the perfect shapes and getting upset about a piece breaking half way through decorating it. This free form use of gingerbread makes the whole project a joy and success is guaranteed. There are no mistakes, merely creative twists. It is a perfect project for kids of all ages. Having done these projects with the girls over these many years, their ages never interfered with their ability to enjoy and complete their projects. Each of their unique and wonderful personalities shone thru.

So enjoy being inspired by what follows, hopefully try a project or two or simply enjoy the pictures.

Project #2 Twin Cities

The second year, the theme of the project was a twin city separated by a river with city skyscrapers and roads. The buildings had names like the “Phantom of the Opera House”, the “Maya OCD Clinic”, “The Charlotte Museum” etc. Again, I had the girls come over and decorate the building pieces. I had already assembled on a large piece of Styrofoam for the bridge, the river and the roadways. However, that evening following the decorating, we were having company coming over, so I put all of the decorated pieces into a laundry basket and the Styrofoam base with the Hershey kisses river and the Oreo cookie crumb roadways into a room in our office area on our old dining table.

The following day I went down to the garbage and at the back door I saw a silver Hershey’s kisses wrapper on the floor and thought how did that get there on the floor. I ran upstairs to the office and saw that most of the river had been removed and apparently eaten. Thankfully the actual building walls were untouched. So now I have to start again with the base which I would have to get more supplies for which meant I would get to it the following week. So I took the base and the pieces and moved them to my studio which I believed to be mouse-free.

During the week while going to feed the horses, I enter the barn and see a whole stash of unwrapped Hershey’s kisses piled against a wall. Again I run upstairs to find that the remaining chocolates were stripped from the river. Our house was overrun with a bunch of chocoholic mice!

Material

- 2”Styrofoam board
- Cardboard
- Cotton for smoke
- Candy, remember to get tree shaped candy for the boulevards
- Oreo Cookie crumbs for roads
- 1 Gingerbread recipe
- Royal Icing
- Hershey’s Kisses and aluminum foil for the river

Making the Base

This project is of a twin city’s downtown. To accomplish this I first made a square base of Styrofoam and cut a river running through it. I then cut another square base to place underneath of the first pieces allowing for the gap that the river has made. Gluing the top

and bottom pieces together with craft glue making sure the edges line up nicely. I then lined the river bed with aluminum foil and glued Hershey's Kisses along the river.

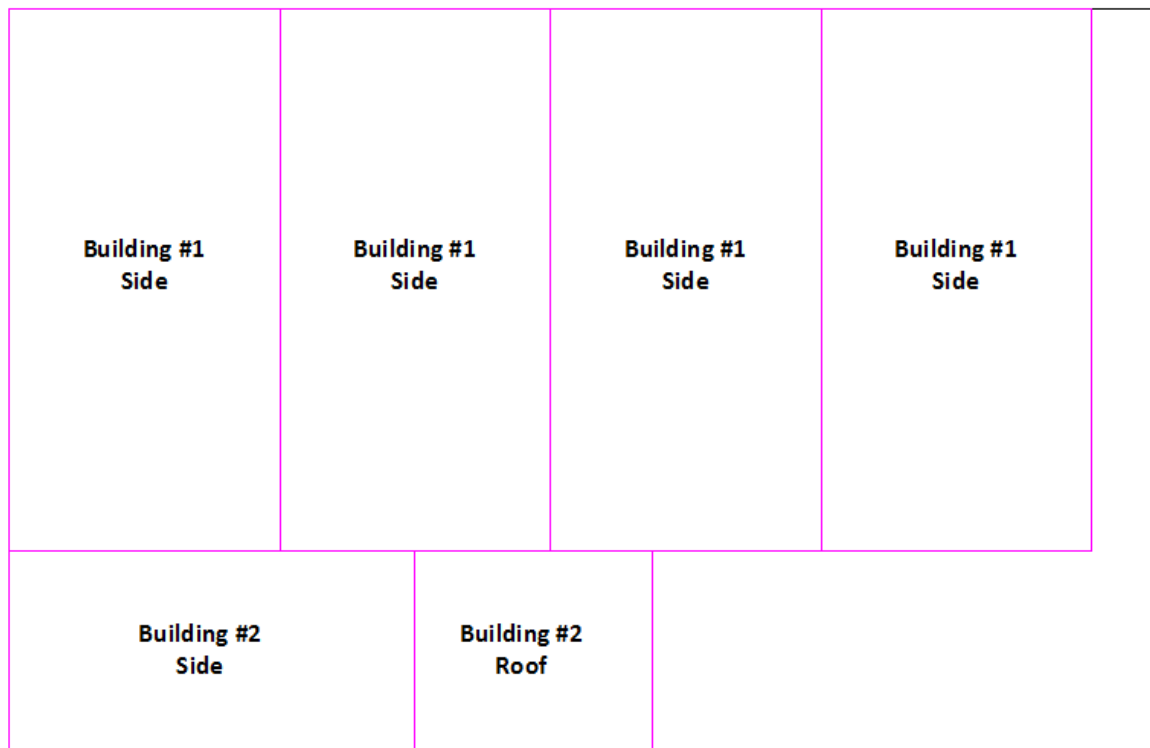
The next step was to mark the roads running through the city and decide where the bridge would cross the river. The bridge was then cut out of cardboard and glued to the base. The roads will be made by applying the royal icing in a thin layer along the roads and sprinkle Oreo cookie crumbs on it while the icing is still moist. Then make the lane markers using a piping bag with a very fine tip.

Then the spaces between the roads will then be filled with the buildings you want to have in your cities. You can then line the streets with your candy trees and any other little touches you may want to add the cityscape.

Making the Gingerbread

The buildings themselves are going to be made from various sizes of rectangles with flat roofs. The following pattern pieces are made from the gingerbread. See pattern cut-out sheet "Twin City".

The following diagram shows the layout of the pattern pieces on the cookie sheet:



Building #3 Side	Building #3 Side	Building #3 Side	Building #3 Side	
Building #1 & #3 Roof	Building #1 & #3 Roof	Building #2 Side	Building #2 Side	Building #2 Side



Making the Gingerbread Buildings

This is where the kids can have free-rein over what kind of candies and how many to put on the sides and roof of their buildings. I found that the kids' buildings all came together when they are put together no matter how different each piece looked.

This process simply involved spreading a layer of royal icing on the rectangular pieces and setting the candy in place. Only spread as much icing as you feel comfortable to fill with candy so it stays moist enough for the candy to stick. Then after completely each of the buildings sections, allow them to dry completely before assembly.

Assembling the Buildings

To put the buildings together, start by making sure you have all four sides and the roof. Lay out a piece of aluminum foil that is large enough to lay the sides out on their backs. Lay the side pieces in the order you want them to be in the finished building and place them candy side down on the foil.

The first step will be to glue the sides together, then to glue this rectangle in its proper place on the city base and the finally glue the roof onto the top.

Step 1

With the sides laid out on the foil, think of the pieces as numbered from 1 – 4. Sides 1 and 3 will have the icing generously buttered along the edges on either side of the flat back surface. Sides 2 and 4 will have the icing placed on the thin side of the gingerbread.

Stand side 1 up and place a small glass on either side to help it stay upright. Then take side 2 and join the two iced seams together. Support this second side with another glass on the outside and move the inner glass into the newly joined corner. Take side 3 and join the two iced seams together, once again placing a glass on the outside to help it stay vertical. Finally take side 4 joining the iced seams together forming a closed rectangle. Place another glass inside and on the outside to support the structure while it dries.

Step 2

Take the now fully glued and dry "building" to its designated spot on the base. Generously ice the bottom edge of the building and glue it to the base. Allow to dry thoroughly before the final step. Continue mounting the rest of the buildings.

Step 3

To apply the roofs, apply a bead of icing along the top rim of the building and also along the back edges of the candied roof. Glue the roof down by giving it a little wiggle to make sure the icing has bonded well together. Once this is dry you can then add a plume of “smoke” with the cotton, using icing to glue it in place.

Step 4

Make signs to be placed at the base of your buildings using cardboard and toothpicks.





Project #3 Hawaii

By this time, the girls wanted to get involved in the theme of this year's project. They decided that after enjoying a trip to Hawaii the year before that this would make a great project. I thought why not so I printed a scale model of the islands, with each of the girls having one or more of them to decorate.

The big island had to have a working volcano, so I managed to find a fat candle that spewed forth its lava (wax) to fit the bill.

Material

- 2" Styrofoam board
- Cardboard
- Blue cellophane
- Candle that spews
- Palm trees, either plastic models or cut out of colored cardboard
- Candy, especially pineapple shaped (think tropical)
- Oreo Cookie crumbs for black sandy beaches
- Raw Sugar for sandy beaches
- ½ Gingerbread recipe
- Royal Icing

Making the Base

This project is a scale model of the Hawaiian Islands, to accomplish this I took a copy of a map and enlarged it to the scale I wanted. I then transferred the enlarged map to plain cardboard and cut out the islands individually. I cut out an abstract shape of foam insulation to then glue these islands onto. But before I glued them on, I covered the foam base with blue cellophane to replicate the ocean surrounding the islands. I also drew the outline of the islands so that I knew where they would be when it came time to glue the finished pieces onto the base.



Making the Islands

The islands themselves were cut out of Styrofoam. The girls were assigned an island or two to decorate, using broken gingerbread and candies to create the landscape.

The Big Island of Hawaii had a volcano in the middle using the candle and was decorated with black sand beaches.

Assembling the Island Chain

To put the islands together I simply glued them with icing to the base that had the outlines drawn onto it to make sure everything was placed correctly. Once the islands had been glued the ocean could be further enhanced with whales, boats and other sea faring objects.



Project #4 Outhouses

Joann had given me a great calendar for that year of outhouses. They were ever so creatively built and decorated and would make for a very good gingerbread form. One of the cutest design elements was Joann coming up with the idea to use mini marshmallows as toilet paper rolls.

This project would include friends and relatives of the girls. At first they were all grossed out about the subject matter, having all had rather unpleasant experiences while camping. But by the end they were all thrilled and they all had a greater appreciation of the lowly little outhouse.

Material

- 2" Styrofoam board
- Candy, especially miniature marshmallows
- 1/2 Gingerbread recipe
- Royal Icing

Making the Base

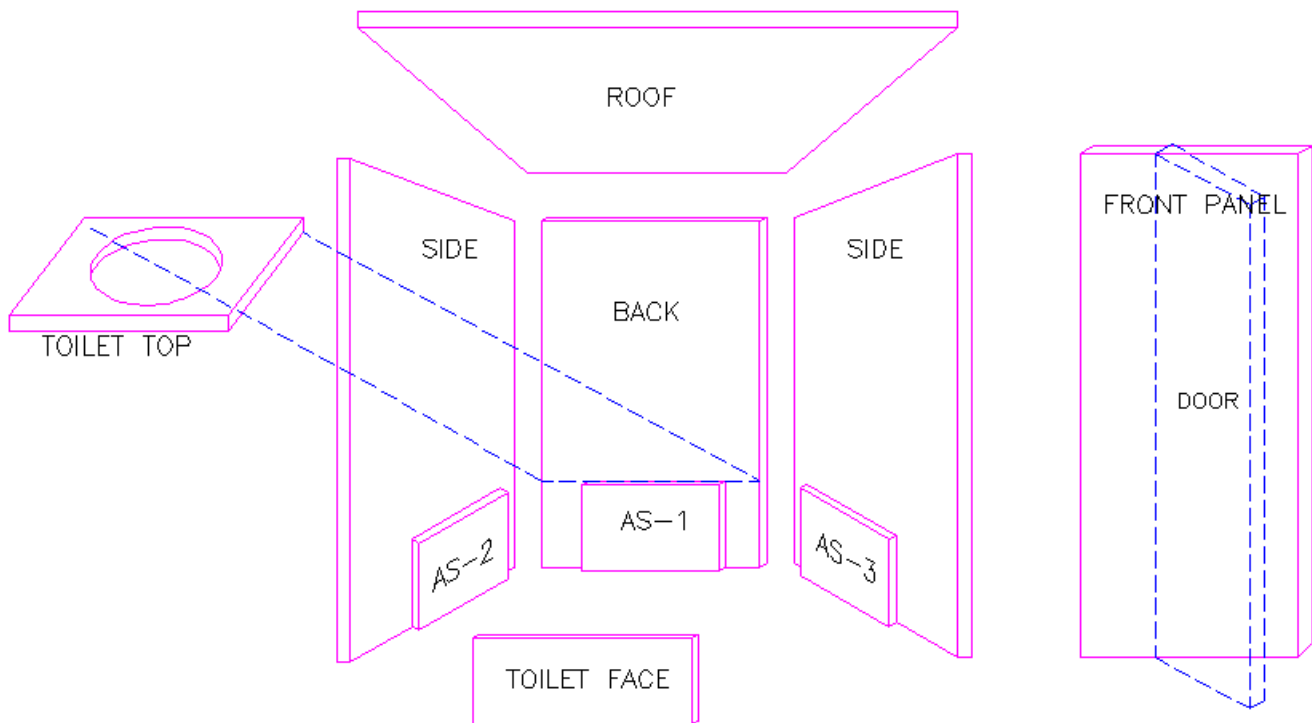
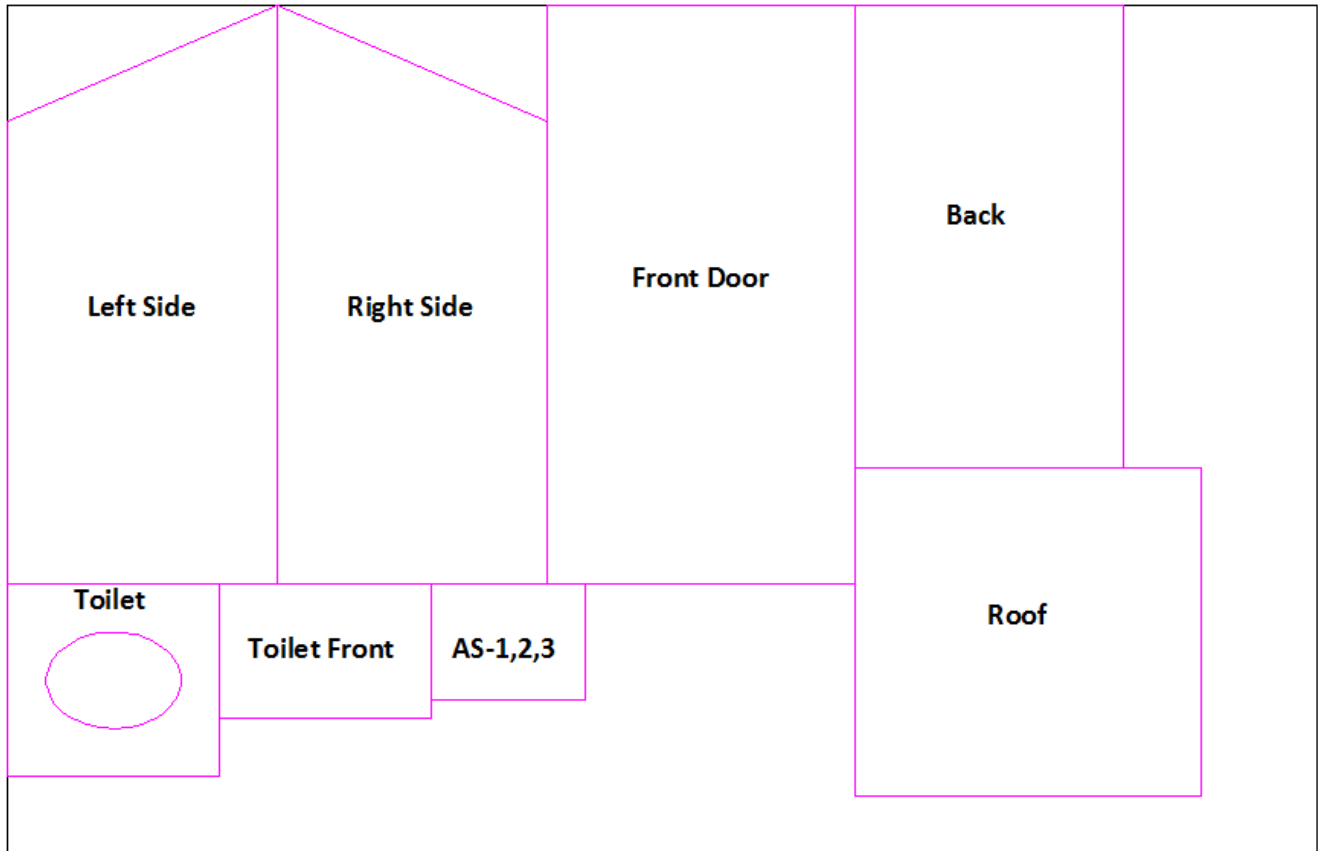
The bases are cut from 2" Styrofoam into 12" squares.

Making the Buildings

The buildings themselves are going to be made from the template labeled "Outhouses". You have three sides, a slanted roof, and a door and inside you have the "crapper" and additional pieces for assembly purposes only.

Making the Gingerbread

The buildings themselves are going to be made from gingerbread using the pattern pieces. The following diagram shows the layout of the pattern pieces on the cookie sheet as well as the assembly instructions:



Once you have your baked pieces of gingerbread, set aside the pieces that are to be used in the assembly phase and place the pieces to be decorated with the correct side up. Then simply spread a layer of royal icing on the pieces and setting the candy in place. Only spread as much icing as you feel comfortable to fill with candy so it stays moist enough for the candy to stick. Then after completely each of the buildings sections, allow them to dry completely before assembly.

Assembling the Buildings

To put the buildings together, start by making sure you have all three sides, the door and the roof. Lay out a piece of aluminum foil that is large enough to lay the sides out on their backs. Lay the side pieces in the correct order (this would be a left side, a back side and a right side) for the finished building and place them candy side down on the foil.

Step 1

On the back side take the assembly pieces noted as “AS-1” and glue it with icing to the bottom of this piece. (See assembly diagram above)

Step 2

Then take assembly piece “AS-2” and glue it to the bottom right side of the left wall. Take assembly piece “AS-3” and glue it to the bottom left corner of the ride wall. (See assembly diagram above)

Step 3

Then take the back side and run a bead of icing along the inside verticals. Stand this piece up using two glasses on either side for support. Then take the right side piece and butter the back edge of this piece with icing and press it into the right side of the back wall. Do the same for the left side. Place additional glasses to help support the structure while it dries.

Step 4

Once the three walls are dry you can then attach the front of the “crapper” against the assembly pieces that were glued into place in Step 1. Before you glue the seat onto the top, fill the void with chocolate, and then glue the seat by running a bead of icing along all four sides. (There is no top or bottom until you mount it.) Allow this to dry before decorating the inside of the outhouse. This is the time to decide where the toilet paper (mini marshmallow) will go and any other decorations you might want.

Step 5

Make sure everything is dry before you move this structure to the base for final gluing. Decide on the location, set it down and mark the outline by gently running a pointed around the sides. Run a generous bead of icing along the inside of this marked line. Then place the gingerbread onto this glue and press down firmly, but gently, giving it a little wiggle to make good contact.

Step 6

Now you can mount the door on either side of the front by running a bead of icing along the vertical edge of the door (think of the hinge side) and a bead along the side wall that it will match with. Run a bead of icing along the bottom sill of the door. You are going to want the door to be ajar, so decide how open you want it, and then press it into the side wall and onto the base. You can use a couple of glasses to hold it vertical until the icing dries.

Step 7

Once the door is fully dry you can mount the roof. Run a bead of icing along the top edge of the three sides of the outhouse. The roof has a slight overhang so when you press it onto the sides allow for this. Hold it until it hardens up, which should only take a few minutes. Once this is fully dry, you can mount a Hershey's kiss to the ceiling as a light fixture.

Now for decorating the space around the outhouse to make sure you have lots of candies to eat.







Project #5 Coral Reef

Another part of the girls trips to Hawaii included scuba diving so the idea of a coral reef was put forward. Things like sponge candy took on a whole new meaning when put into this scene.

Material

- Cardboard Storage Box with lid
- 1/2" Foam board
- Metallic Cardboard
- Fish decals
- Wire for mounting floating objects
- Candy, especially sponge toffee
- Colored sugar
- Toob Undersea figurines for extra decoration (www.safariltd.com)
- ½ Gingerbread recipe
- Royal Icing

Making the Base

The lid is the base for this project, so start by cutting out the ½" foam to fit inside the lid. Then take two sheets of metallic cardboard and fit onto two adjacent sides. Tape together these sides to form the corner of the coral reef.

Cut the Styrofoam to fit into the base of the cardboard lid.



Assembling the Reef

Take a bunch of broken pieces of gingerbread and start to glue them with icing onto the Styrofoam against the inside corner where the metallic cardboard comes together. Once this is positioned and dry, sprinkle the raw sugar around the base so that the decorating can be placed on top.

Take the fish decals and stick them onto the metallic sides to create this wonderful 3-dimensional effect.



Pile the coral reef full of candies, some glued, some can be loose. Take your Toob objects and use the wire to skewer them into the foam base. The same technique can be used to have some of the candy fish appear to be swimming in the water.





Project #6 Beijing Olympics

The girl's Chinese heritage would come to the forefront in this theme and the idea of building pagodas in gingerbread was also quite interesting. Their Father, Dan, drew us the symbol for China and I made a stencil that we sprinkled red sugar over to "sign" the pieces.

Material

- 2" Styrofoam board
- Chinese Flag
- Dried flowers and grasses from the garden
- Candy
- 1/4 Gingerbread recipe
- Royal Icing
- Bamboo skewer

Making the Base

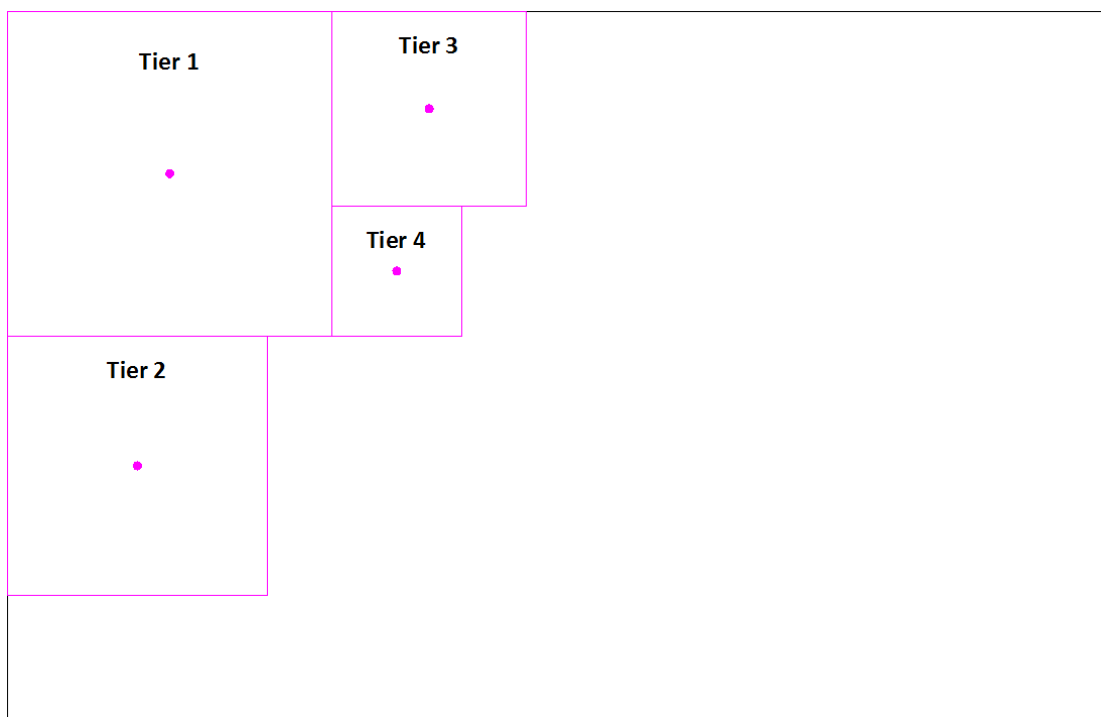
Cut out a 12"x12" square from the 2" foam board.

Making the Pagoda

The pagoda is going to be made from the template labeled "Beijing Olympics".

Making the Gingerbread

The following pattern pieces are made from the gingerbread.



Making the Spacers

The spacers between the layers are made of 2" Styrofoam and not gingerbread and the skewer go through all of the layers to help keep it from tipping over. Cut out three 2" square blocks, pushing a hole through the centre of each with the bamboo skewer.

Assembling the Pagoda

To put the pagoda together start by gluing, with icing, the Styrofoam spacers onto the centre of tiers 1-3 (making sure to line up the centre hole) and keeping the sides parallel. Temporarily insert the bamboo skewer into the gingerbread layer and the Styrofoam spacer during this gluing phase.

Put a layer of icing on the bottom of tier 1 and it locate on the base. Insert the bamboo skewer into this bottom tier making sure it penetrates through the 2" foam base. Decorate this bottom tier before attaching the upper tiers. Decorate the tiers 2-4 before you glue them onto the bottom tier. Simply apply a layer of icing onto the 2" square foam spacer and push the tier through the bamboo skewer, wiggle gently to make sure there is good contact between the tier and the spacer.

Cut the bamboo skewer to the correct height before the final gluing. Tier 4 simply gets glued onto the spacer on tier 3. Once the pagoda is in place, the rest of the base can be decorated as you please. Leave room for the stencil of the symbol for China to sign the piece with. Apply a thin layer of icing to this location and put the stencil over this and sprinkle red sugar. Remove stencil and voila your project is complete.





Project #7 Vancouver Olympics

Not to be outdone by the Beijing Olympics, homage had to be paid to their Canadian side so Vancouver Winter Olympics was on. The mountains and the sea dominated the thematic background for this project.

I also bought various small stickers and objects that were being sold to commemorate these Olympics.

Material

- Aluminum cookie sheet
- Foam core
- ½" thick Styrofoam sheet
- Craft glue
- Spruce cuttings
- Blue cardboard paper
- Cotton batting
- Canadian Flag
- Various Olympic stickers
- Glue
- Candy
- 1/4 Gingerbread recipe
- Royal Icing

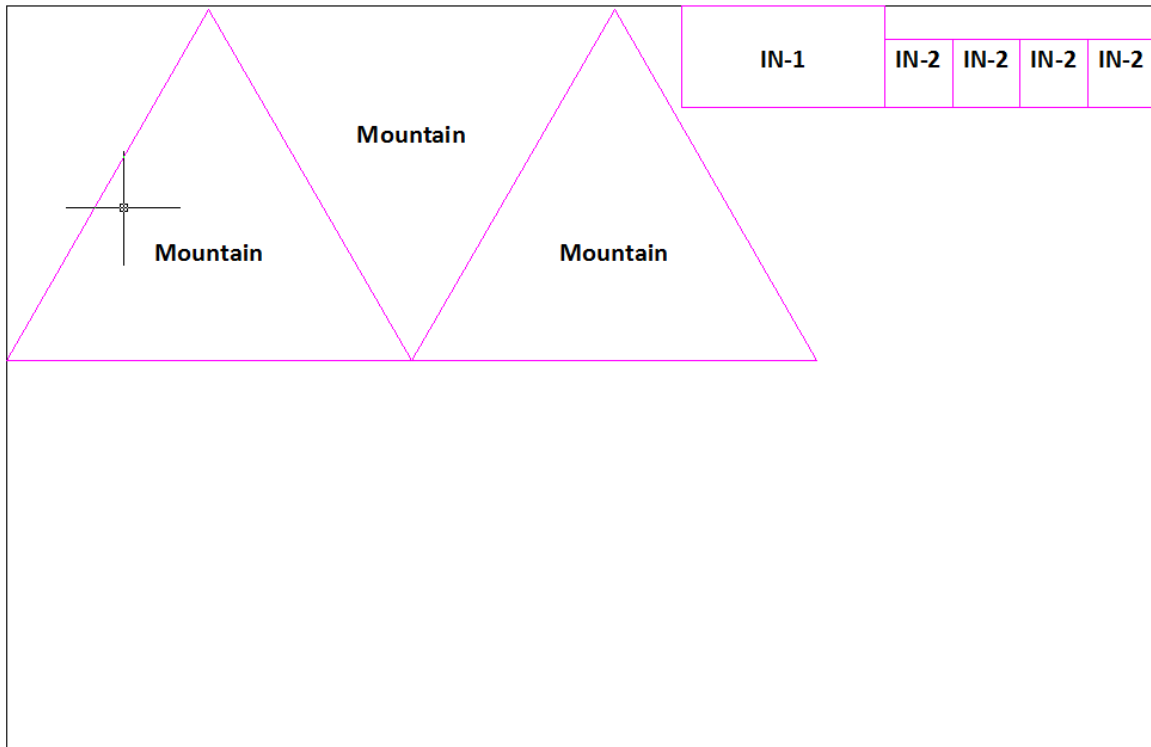
Making the Base

Using the aluminum cookie sheet as your base cut the ½" Styrofoam sheet to fit into this base, cutting out a section that will become your ocean front. Using blue cardboard paper, cut a piece large enough to fit under the Styrofoam, filling in the area designated as ocean and glue to the cookie sheet. Then place the Styrofoam on top and glue this to the base.

Cut out the foam core using the mountain outline design. Cut halfway through the foam core at the folds so that the mountains can be bent and placed on the base. Glue in place using the icing as glue.

Making the Gingerbread

Use the “Vancouver Olympic” pattern to make the gingerbread pieces, laid out as follows:



Assembling the Vancouver Backdrop

Decorate the gingerbread mountain before you glue it onto the base. Once decorated, decide where it will be placed and run a bead of icing along the bottom edge and set it onto the base. Place a couple of glasses on either side while the icing dries.

Then assemble the Inukshuks using the gingerbread pieces IN-1 and IN-2. Glue two IN-2 pieces, with icing, together. Make two sets and then glue, with icing, IN-1 onto the base pieces. Decorate the top layer with candy of your choice. Once fully dry, put icing along the bottom of the side pieces (IN-2) and place on the base.

Continue to decorate the base with candies and spruce tree clippings. Glue the Olympic decals onto the base and don't forget to decorate the ocean with fish.





Project #8 Outer Space

This idea was battled around for a few years so it was time to make the gingerbread go where no other gingerbread has gone before. Maybe my love of the Star Trek TV show (the original, of course) might have helped this one along.

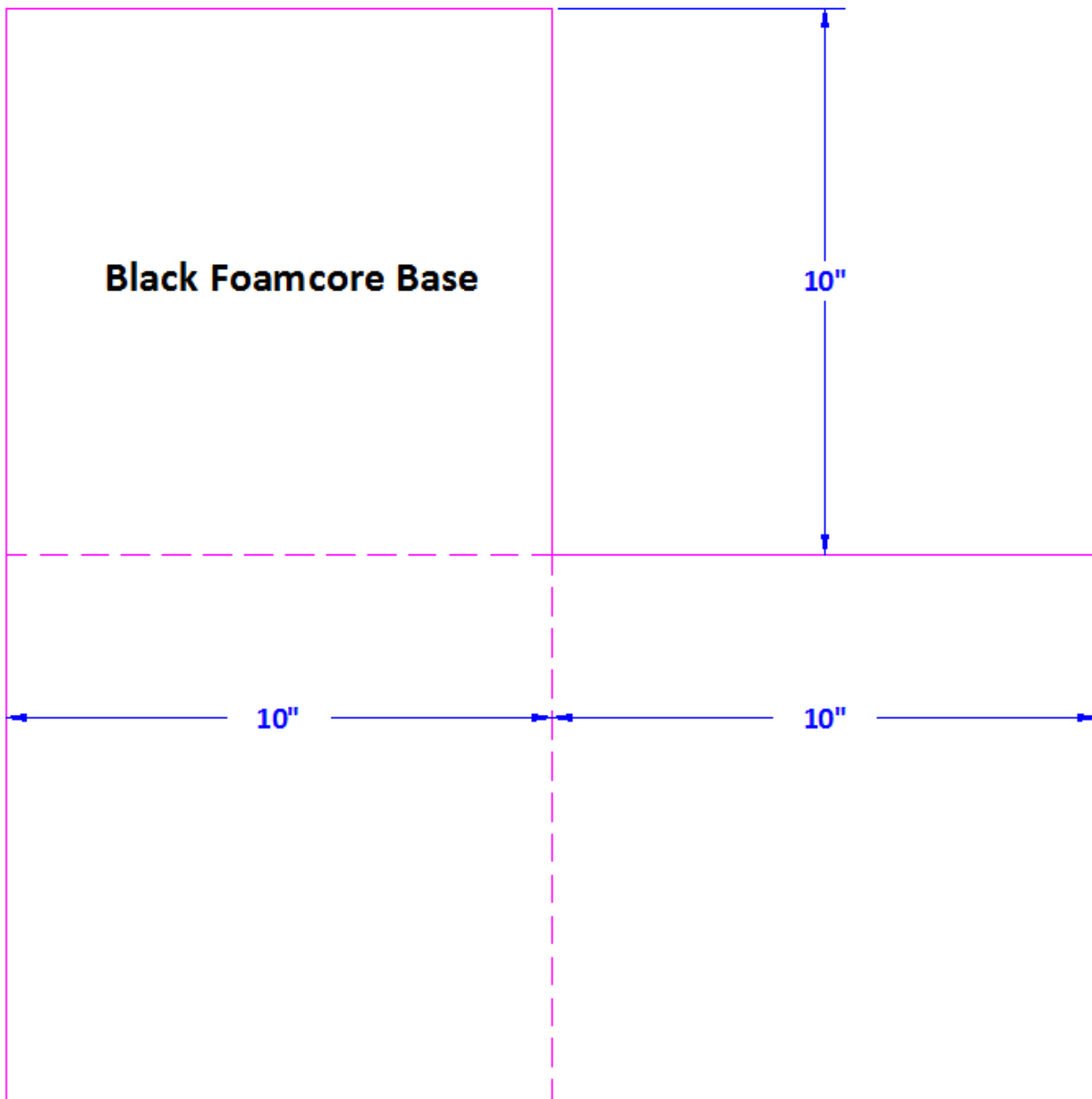
As you can see in the pictures, the girls are growing up, but still enjoying this Christmas pastime no matter if they're here on a break from university.

Material

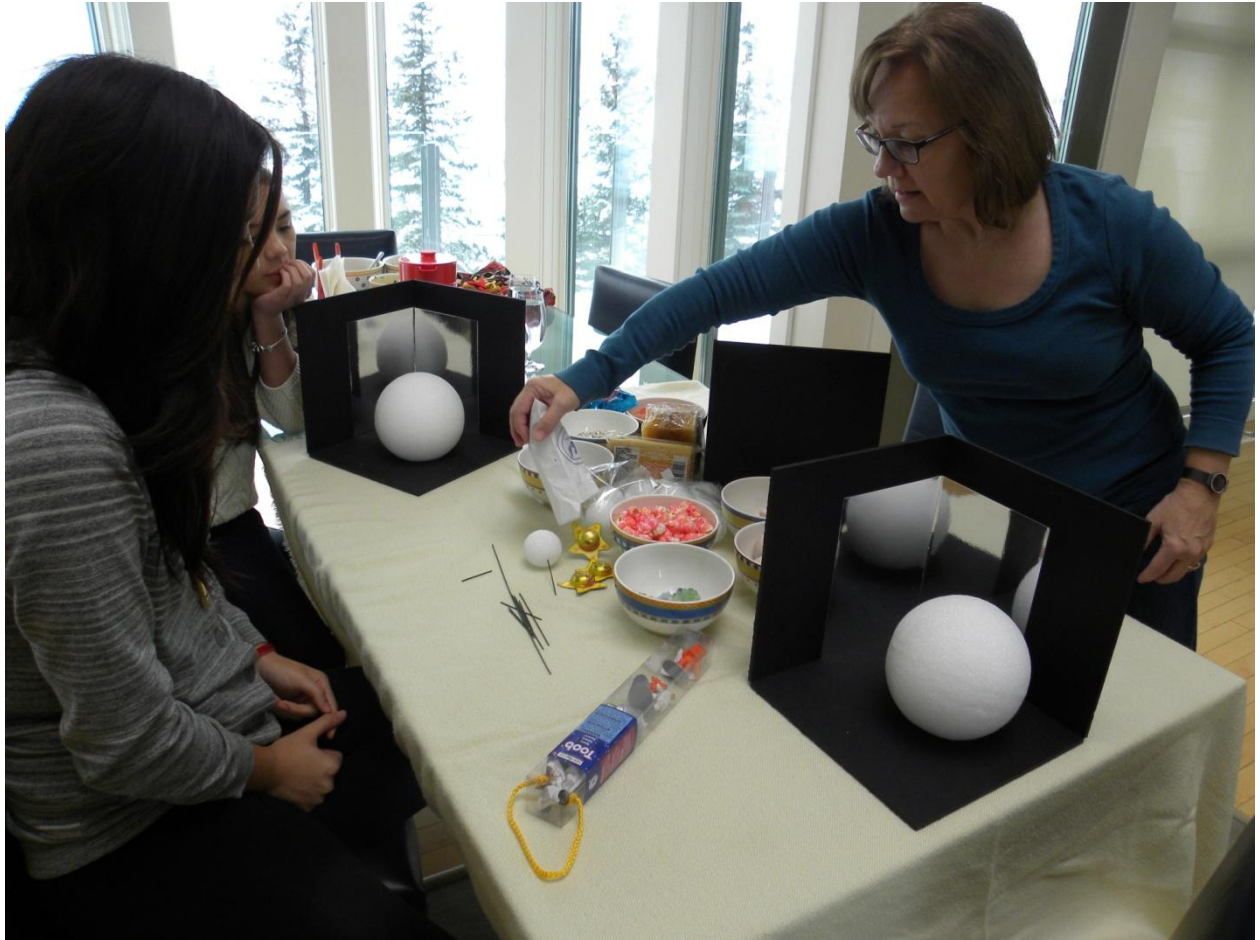
- Black foam core board
- Silver metallic cardboard
- Glue
- Styrofoam balls varying diameters
- Wire for mounting "moons"
- Candy
- Colored sugar
- ½ Gingerbread recipe
- Royal Icing
- Toob Space figurines for extra decoration (www.safariltd.com)

Making the Base

Using one sheet of black foam-core, a two-sided base was cut as per the design below:



Cut half way through the foam core along the dashed lines and bend to create the two-sided box. Tape the upright sides together on the front. Then cut the metallic paper to fit into the inside angle of the box.



Making Outer Space

First determine where you want the main sphere to be positioned on the base before decorating. Once this position has been determined you can proceed to decorate the space around it. Don't forget to decorate the sides with satellites and comets and other stars.

The actual gingerbread should be broken up in various sizes and used as space debris (asteroids), don't forget to add candies to these asteroids.

As for decorating the main sphere, I found that resting it in a rice bowl allowed one to decorate it without any fuss or muss. Cut a slice from the Styrofoam sphere so that it has one flat side. Once fully decorated, glue the sphere with icing to the base. Attach any satellite moons after the main sphere has been fully glued in place. Use tooth picks or wire for this.

Take your Toob objects and attach to the sphere or base as needed. Decorate the base with additional candies.



Dedication and Thanks

I would like to dedicate this book to Charlotte, Lauren and Ellen. I would like to thank Joann for her amazing choices in candies for these projects and her hospitality. I would also like to thank my husband Zaia for his help, especially his skill with an exacto knife.

It has taken 14 years to get to this point; we have gone from film cameras to digital, children to young women and moved into new houses. These are all of the projects done so far, with any luck there will be many more to come. There is no limit to what a gingerbread project can be; maybe the next one should be