



*This page: Sweet Spot: A Collection of Women's Words about Nature. Donna Thomas. 2020. A collection of six books that demonstrate Peter Thomas' naming system for cut-and-folded single-sheet accordion books. The individually titled books are watercolor on handmade paper and are housed in a clamshell box. Each book is approximately 4.5" x 3". Box: 5.625" x 4" x 1.875".*



*Above: Freedom. Donna Thomas. 2020. 4.5" x 3". 8-panel U book. The text is by Dorothea Lange. One of the six single-sheet books in Sweet Spot: A Collection of Women's Words about Nature.*





This page: **Flashback.** Donna Thomas. 2004. Photographs taken between 1969 and 1974 were color-copied, and the images were cut out and mounted on an H-cut single-sheet accordion. The accordion is housed inside Peter Thomas' childhood Kodak Instamatic 104 camera. 2.5" x 5" x 1.75".

# Cut-and-Folded Single-Sheet Accordion Books

by Peter Thomas

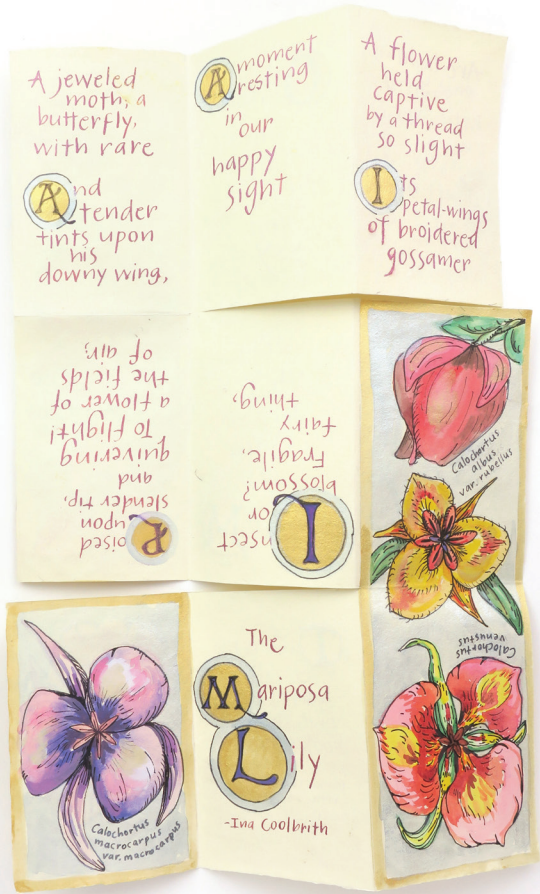
I have advocated for the creation of an aesthetic vocabulary for the book arts ever since I first tried to explain why fine press printing was more than just craftwork back in the 1970s. When working on *1000 Artists' Books* (Quarry Books, 2012), I created a system for classifying artists' books by their structures, dividing them into four categories: codex books (books with pages joined to make a spine), accordion and foldable books (books with multiple-fold pages), single-sheet books (books with pages made from a single sheet of paper), and sculptural books (books made from objects and objects made into books). In this article, I will propose and illustrate a convention for naming the different kinds of accordion books that are cut and folded from a single sheet of paper.

A sheet of paper folded in half, then in half again, is called a *quarto*. A quarto is an example of a single-sheet book. It is the most basic *map-fold book*. But when one of its folds is cut to the center point, and it is folded as an accordion, it then becomes the most basic of the cut-and-folded accordion books that can be made from a single sheet of paper. This sort of book has been given various names: *meander book*, *flip-flop book*, *back-and-forth book*, and *maze book* (and I am sure there are others). But none of those names have become the standard term that book artists use to describe the genre.

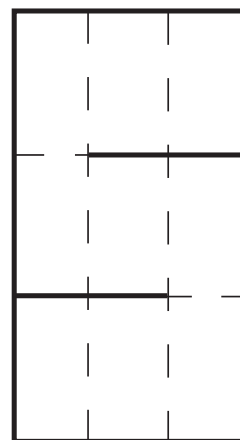
I propose we call these books **cut-and-folded single-sheet accordion books** and that we give each variant its name based on the letter of the alphabet it most closely resembles in a



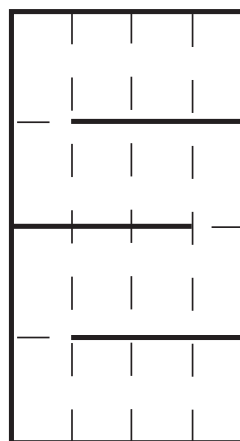




Shown on this page are *The Mariposa Lily* (top left) and *Poem 1755* (bottom left and above), two of the six single-sheet books in *Sweet Spot: A Collection of Women's Words about Nature*. The texts are by Ina Coolbrith and Emily Dickinson, respectively. Both books are 4.5" x 3" and were completed in 2020. They are two variants of another commonly used structure. Some know the form as the boustrophedon or serpentine book from book artist Scott McCarney's workshop instructions. Using my system, the examples shown would be called **S books**.



9-panel S book diagram.



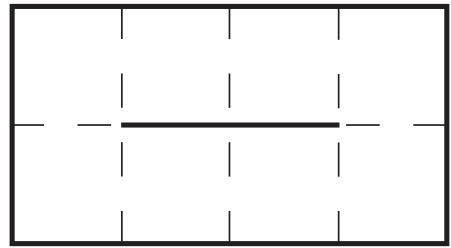
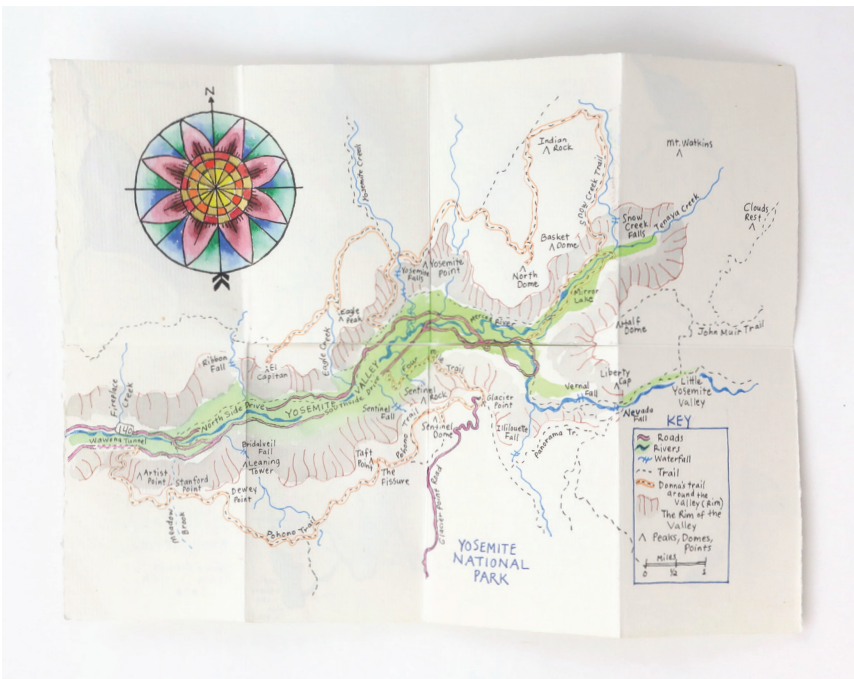
16-panel S book diagram.

diagram showing the cut and fold lines.

For example, take the well-known and often-used structure shown at the top of the opposite page. It has variously been called a *pants book*, an *X book*, and an *octopus book* (among other names). Using my naming convention, it would simply be the **O book** variant. Shown on this page are two variants of another commonly used structure. They have been called by all the names mentioned before, and some know the form as the *boustrophedon* or *serpentine book* from book artist Scott McCarney's workshop instructions. Using my system, the structure would either be called the **N book** or the **S book**. The vertical "N" cuts produce a landscape-format book, while the "S" cuts make one with a portrait format.

Following are diagrams for some of the most basic and useful *cut-and-folded single-sheet accordion books*, with their proposed names. My examples are based on a rectangular piece of paper, in portrait view, folded into 4, 8, 9, 12, or 16 squares. I assigned a letter-name to the simplest structure first, then applied the same letter-name to the more complex structures with the same pattern of cuts and folds.



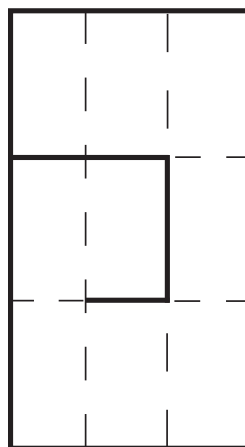


8-panel O book diagram.

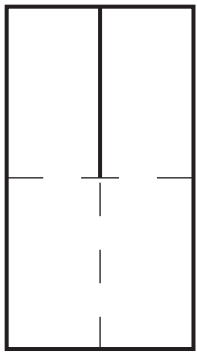
**A Map.** Donna Thomas. 2020. 4.5" x 3". 8-panel O book. This map features a quote by Ellen Malloy ("A map, it is said, organizes wonder.") and notes about Donna and Peter's hiking trips in the area. One of the six single-sheet books in Sweet Spot: A Collection of Women's Words about Nature.



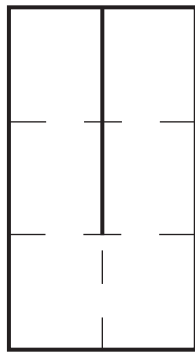
**The Big Tree.** Donna Thomas. 2020. 4.5" x 3". 9-panel G book. The text is taken from Mary Austin. One of the six single-sheet books in Sweet Spot: A Collection of Women's Words about Nature.



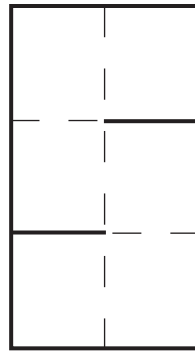
9-panel G book diagram, shown reversed.



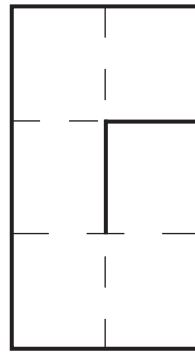
4-panel  
**U**



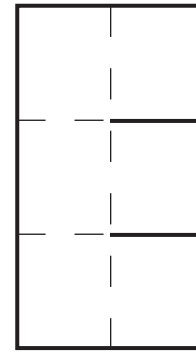
6-panel  
**U**



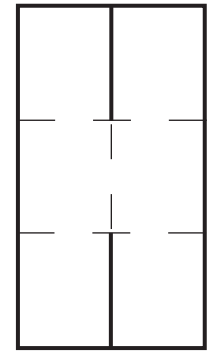
6-panel  
**S**



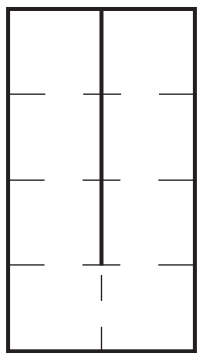
6-panel  
**G**



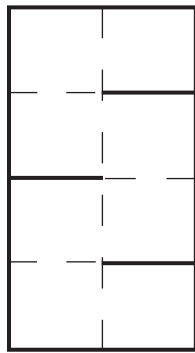
6-panel  
**E**



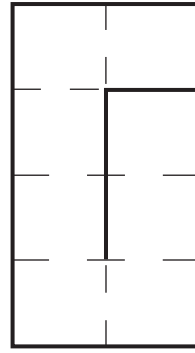
6-panel  
**H**



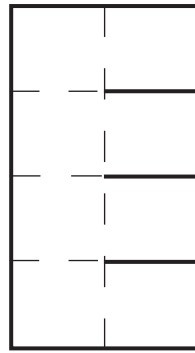
8-panel  
**U**



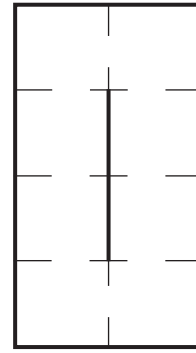
8-panel  
**S**



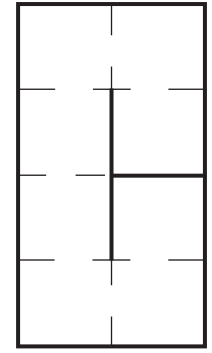
8-panel  
**G**



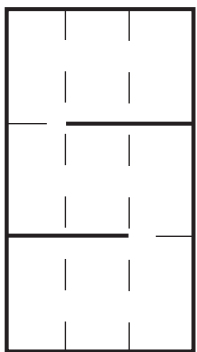
8-panel  
**E**



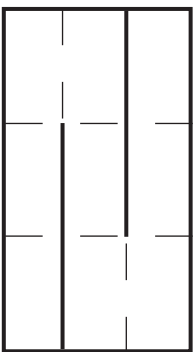
8-panel  
**O**



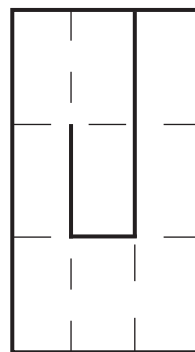
8-panel  
**C**



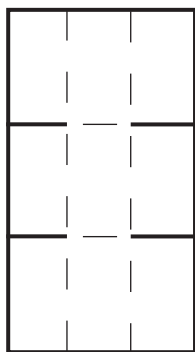
9-panel  
**S**



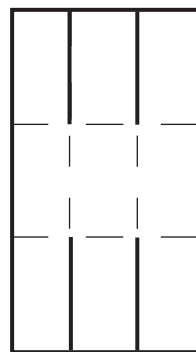
9-panel  
**N**



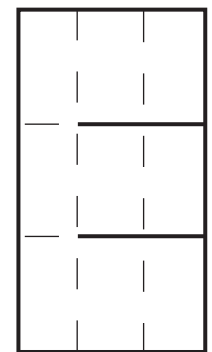
9-panel  
**J**



9-panel  
**I**



9-panel  
**H**



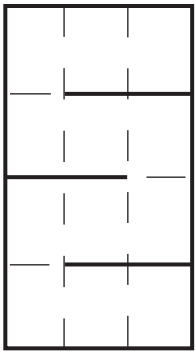
9-panel  
**E**

Why attempt to name or classify book structures? For me, the answer is to make communication easier and to create a way for outsiders to know what we book artists are talking about. Is it necessary? No, but if it promotes understanding and facilitates conversations, then I think it is valuable.

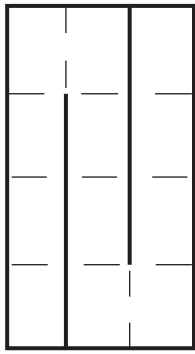
Is the system I am proposing a good one? I believe so, though I have not included structures where a map-fold is required as I place these in a separate genre of books. Nor is this list exhaustive: the more squares, the more complex the possibilities

and the harder it is to give simple letter-names.

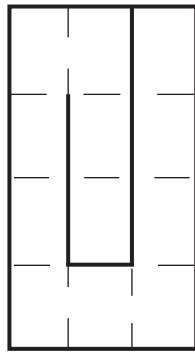
When I was describing my ideas for this naming system to Rob Buchert of Tryst Press, he said, “You know Peter, as soon as I start getting metaphorical, like with your letters, I start having to do lots of explaining to the students in my classes. I would use a system based on a mathematical description of the structure. For example, your **8-panel O book** would be called an (8) 5-8 *book* and your **9-panel S book** would be called a (9) 6-8, 9-11 *book*. (See diagrams on page 36.)



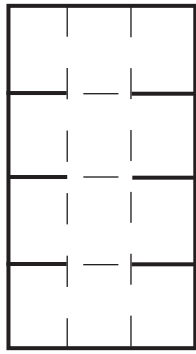
12-panel  
**S**



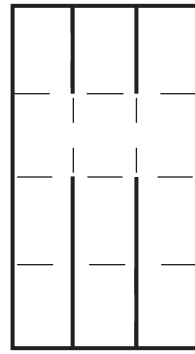
12-panel  
**N**



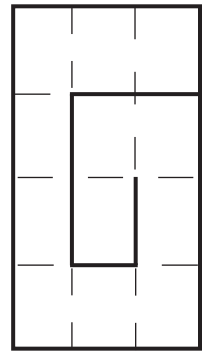
12-panel  
**J**



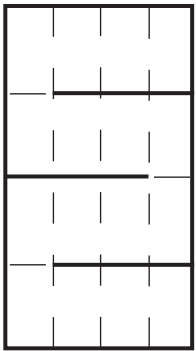
12-panel  
**I**



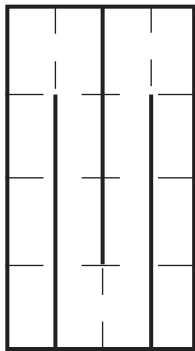
12-panel  
**H**



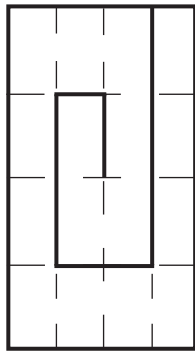
12-panel  
**G**



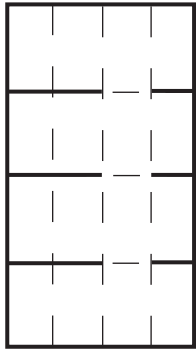
16-panel  
**S**



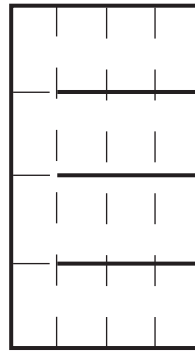
16-panel  
**N**



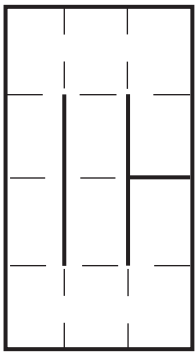
16-panel  
**J**



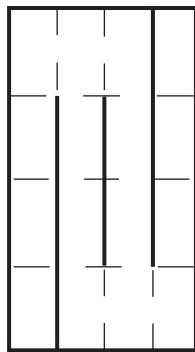
16-panel  
**I**



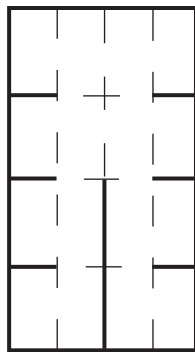
16-panel  
**E**



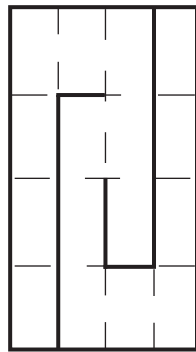
12-panel  
**OC**



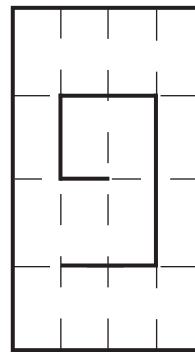
16-panel  
**ON**



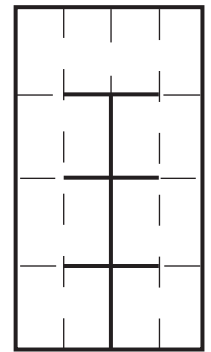
16-panel  
**???**



16-panel  
**???**



16-panel  
**???**



16-panel  
**???**

Rob's system could certainly work well for some of these more complex structures. But then, so would using letters like those from Dr. Seuss's *On Beyond Zebra*, where the narrator, after his young friend learning to spell had gone through the alphabet from "A is for Ape" to "Z is for Zebra", explains what happened next:

When I picked up the chalk and drew one letter more!  
A letter he never had dreamed of before!  
And I said, "You can stop, if you want, with the Z

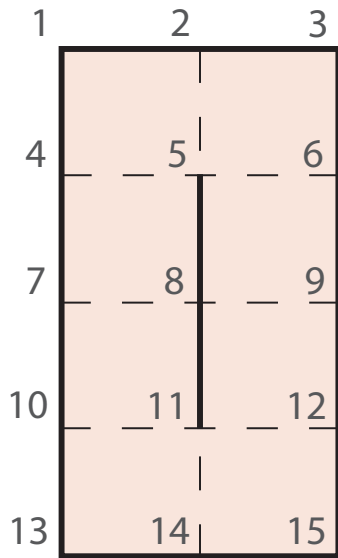
"Because most people stop with the Z  
"But not me!

"In the places I go there are things that I see  
"That I *never* could spell if I stopped with the Z.\*

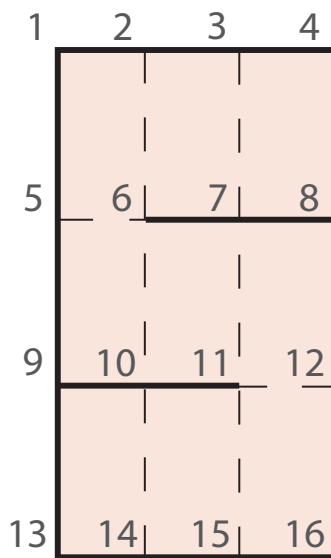
I really want to stop with a Z. It would be so much cleaner, more logical, but I am not at all sure it will be possible looking at the structures outlined in these diagrams.

\**On Beyond Zebra* by Dr. Seuss (Random House, 1955).

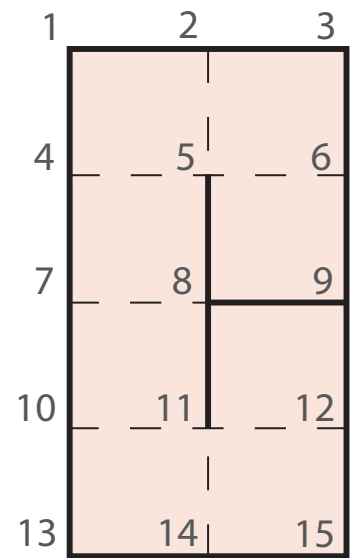




Thomas: 8-panel O book  
 Buchert: (8) 5-11

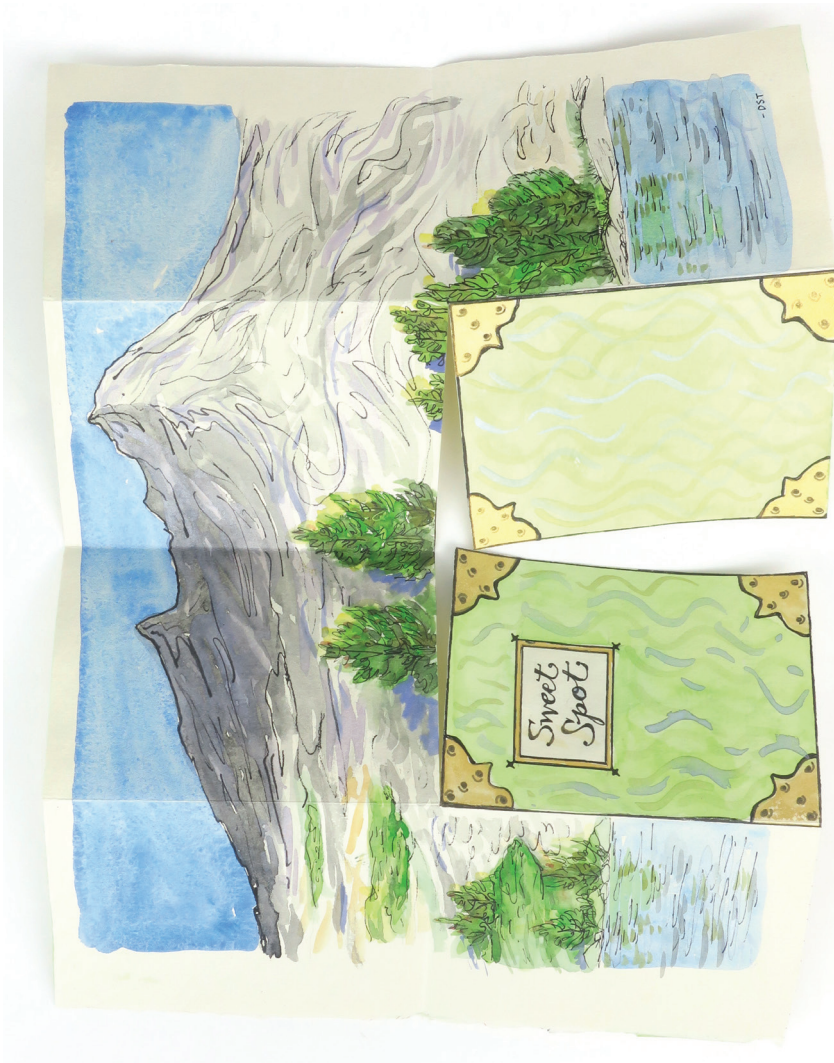


Thomas: 9-panel S book  
 Buchert: (9) 6-8, 9-11



Thomas: 8-panel C book  
 Buchert: (8) 5-11, 8-9

Above: Instead of my letter-based naming system, Rob Buchert suggested a system based on numbers.



**Sweet Spot.** Donna Thomas. 4.25" x 3". 8-panel C book (see diagram at the top of this page). The text is by Donna Thomas. One of the six single-sheet books in Sweet Spot: A Collection of Women's Words about Nature.