

Reading & Writing Accessories

A Study of Paper-Knives, Paper Folders,
Letter Openers and Mythical Page Turners

By
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Paper-knives

Folders

Letter openers

Page turners

Foreword by Marc Allum,
'frequent specialist on the Antiques Roadshow'

Alternative uses

A search for letter openers or envelope openers in the literature very quickly shows that they were popular items in crime fiction. On many occasions a letter opener is the tool of choice for breaking open the lock on a set of desk drawers. In crime novels, it seems that letter openers are also a popular weapon – be it for defence or for dastardly deeds.

Another way of looking at alternative uses is to think of blades that could be used to open sealed letters but whose primary purpose was something else. Such blades have included table knives, scissors, pocket knives, knitting needles, and razor blades. More seriously, a classic design must surely be the US Army P-38 can opener. Made in the USA, the P-38 was conceived and designed in 1942. They are still being made, and some commentators list more than 40 other uses for this can opener – including letter opener. More recently in this the digital age, calculators are now being made which also include a paper holder, clock display and letter opener. These are offered by several electronic companies, including Fuzhou Oeast Electronic Co.

Beyond the straight and narrow: modern designs

Given the number of innovative new designs, there can be no doubt that letter openers are not about to become extinct. Who would think that the basic design of the humble letter opener be improved? What shape is there for a letter opener other than a simple, thin, dagger-like shape? Has it been possible to think beyond the straight and narrow? It certainly has.

Possibly the most recent innovative and beautiful designs for letter openers (envelope openers) include those shown in fig. 5.19. The 'BIRDIE' letter opener, designed by Yohei Oki, stands out as being simplistic yet very attractive desk accessory. An extraordinary shape for a letter opener is 'Shaman's Triangle' by Hannah Martin (London). Who would have ever thought of a triangle shape for a letter opener? Perhaps the most striking is the 'Zeus' letter opener from design company Greece is for Lovers, designed in 2007. It has two blades so it is for ambidextrous use – an unusual feature for a letter opener. In the designer's words, this is a letter opener to rip through hate-mail with the stealth and fury of Zeus, the bolt-throwing ruler of Olympus.



Fig. 5.19. Modern, innovative designs for letter openers. From left: 'BIRDIE paper knife' (technically a letter opener), by Yohei Oki (brand: +d by h concept Co.); 'Zeus' letter opener by Greece is for Lovers (diagonally 12 inches, 30.5 cm); Egg letter opener and paper weight, fun-xional product 'Shaman's Triangle' letter opener by Hannah Martin (London).