
Sustainable Play: Make a Dollhouse Cafe with Suzy Ultman

Chapter 1 - Sustainable Play: Make a Dollhouse Cafe

Overview

- If you like Tiny Worlds as much as me, you're gonna love this project. Welcome to my tiny cafe. I'm Suzy Ultman. I'm an illustrator, toy maker and storyteller. Ever since I was a tiny girl, I loved making tiny things. I'm so excited to show you how to make a cardboard cafe out of a box that you have in your very own home. You'll cut it, paint it, give it shingles, windows and doors and then with a PDF that I've provided, get to create critters that live and work at the cafe, furniture and all sorts of accessories. I'm gonna give you tons of ideas to modify this box but ultimately, I'd love for you to make it yours. When you're finished, save a cappuccino for me.

Materials

- Here are the materials for your cafe. First, we have the box for your cafe. Any rectangular box will do. It can be a shipping box or a shoe box. We just wanna make sure it's a nice, sturdy, rectangular box, and a few cereal boxes to be used for parts that are inside the cafe and some other accessories along the way. I've got three cutting tools. I have a pair of heavy duty scissors for the corrugated cardboard, a pair of smaller scissors for lighter weight cutting, and an X-Acto blade for some precise corrugated cutting. I like to use a liquid glue, an eraser and pencil. I have two sizes of rulers, a small one and a very big one. A 12-inch ruler will do just fine for the project. Now we've got all of our coloring items. You'll definitely want paint for this project. I have some craft acrylic paint that works really nicely. It's water-based, so it's washable, which I love as well. And a paint palette. I always keep a paper towel on hand for drying my brushes and cleaning up my hands. Water for the brushes, and all my different size brushes will be very helpful along the way. Pens, pencils, whatever you have on hand. Yarn for the accessories that we'll be creating at the end of the class. This tape is very important. This we'll be using when we paint the roof. I have an artist tape that is slightly less sticky than masking tape, but masking tape will work as well. Double-stick tape, and then our PDF, which has a bunch of fun things. We've got characters that we're gonna add to the house, furniture, wallpaper, and much more.

Prepare cardboard box and paint roof

- First, we'll cut the top and bottom flaps off of our box. I'm using my heavy duty scissors, and please be very careful doing this. If you're a kid following along, please ask an adult for help for this part. Just follow the line, the ridge of the box, and cut that flap off. I start from one side I cut, and then I do the same thing on the other side. I'd like you to save this piece of cardboard. We'll use it later to make some furniture for our cafe. Now, do the bottom flap. Remember to save your flap. Okay, lay your box down. And taking your ruler, measure from the top about not quite halfway down from the roof. We might all be working with slightly different size boxes, so find about halfway down where your roof would hit. I'm measuring almost four inches down here. Make some marks, and make some marks on the two sides as well. We're going to create our roof. Now, grab your tape. You wanna get a nice long piece. And keeping this closed, following your marks, you're going to lay down your tape. On your first side, then across to your second side. Then flip it over and see kind of where it hits on this side of the box. Same thing over here. Now, if your tape's too short, grab another piece and extend it the whole way across to the back. I think I need a little more

on this side as well. Now, we're gonna create a triangle roof, which means we want it to go like this. Tear another piece of tape. Stick one end of your tape in this corner and the other up here. You can kind of close your lid like that. Grab another piece of tape. Do the same thing over here. So now you've taped off this nice triangle. We're gonna paint that white. So we need some white paint. Shake that up. You wanna make sure that your tape is pretty flat for painting. Get your big brush. And paint away. Now, feel free to be messy. We've got the masking tape there to protect the edge. When we peel it back, we'll have a nice clean edge so you don't have to worry about going out of the lines. Okay, now, I wanted this to be completely dry. You can let it dry on its own, or if you have a hairdryer at home, you can dry it with that. I'm gonna use a heat gun. All right, next, we're gonna take off the tape, but only on the top part of our triangle. We're gonna leave this piece of tape down. So very carefully, pull your tape back. Look at that nice line. And then do the same on the other side. If you're working with masking tape, you wanna be even more careful because it's stickier, and it might start to pull back your box a little bit. Now, we're gonna add yellow around the rest of the roof. We need a fresh piece of tape about the length of our roof, and we're gonna lay it down to match up against the white line here. Now, when we get to the top, we need to cut it, so it stays inside of the roof line. And then take kinda the back of your fingernail and just gently press the edge down like that. Just along the edge, not the whole piece of tape, but just along the edge. And then do that for your other side. Okay, time for our yellow. And just like we did when we did the white paint, we can put the yellow over the tape and not worry about messing up our line there. And we can even paint all the way around to the side of our building. You wanna fill that entire area in. Continue painting in the front, all the way to the side of the building until everything is filled with yellow. When you're done painting your yellow, you get to take off the tape. And it feels like magic. Look at that. So cool. Remember to go slowly and carefully. There we go, we've got our roof. Now, we're gonna add a scallop trim in bright pink. I'm gonna draw it in first with my pencil. Nice. Then get my most favorite pink color. I'm gonna use my medium brush for the scallop since they're have a little more detail to them. Oops, I almost forgot. Before you start painting, we need to tape off the roof. So grab your tape and measure out about the length of the box, a little bit longer. And we're gonna put our tape across the white roof. There we go. Now we can paint with the pink without worrying about getting onto the white. Okay. And now we get to pull off more tape. Fun. Remember to take it slowly. Now you have your pink roof detail.

Draw and cut windows and doors

- I've moved around to a lot of towns and I've also traveled a lot, and one of my favorite parts of going to a new city or a town is finding the local cafe. And they all have their own special windows and awnings so I've tried to include that in this project. Next, we're gonna draw the windows and awnings. The first thing we're gonna draw is our awning rectangle. Your box size might be a little bit differently than mine but a good rule of thumb is to draw in about a half an inch on each side. I'm gonna get my ruler. This is where the little ruler comes in handy. I'm gonna draw about a half an inch here, and a half an inch here. For my box, I've got about a two and a half inch window. And then I'm gonna make it square, so I'm gonna make it two and a half inches high as well. The awning is about center in this space here. I'm gonna lightly draw my line here, two and a half wide and two and a half high. And then I'll draw it over here, the same place. So we've got our square awning there. The awning gets one more line about another half inch up. We're gonna draw a line here. And this will be the flap for our awning. We also are going to paint stripes onto our awning. Draw some vertical lines, about 9 to 10 of those. Next we're gonna draw our door on this side. Our door frame is going

to come from the top of the awning all the way to the bottom of the box. And I'm just kind of eyeballing it against that to be straight. If you'd like to get more precise, you can measure it and then eyeballing that line there. We want to be equidistant from both sides and kinda eyeballing it here. So sometimes you'll see that with a corrugated cardboard there are bumps in there, so your pencil might bump along the cardboard. We can just go back and erase that. Our doorway gets a frame. It also gets a window at the top, a glass window. A lot of cafes have little windows at the top. We're gonna put a sign in that later on. Okay, now one last thing. We're gonna add some windows, add a window up here. And again, I'm just eyeballing this, a skinny window I've seen in a lot of cafes here. We're gonna mimic that shape over here. And down here again. This area isn't going to be a window. It's gonna be, we're gonna add tiles to it. It can be tiling. You can think of it as a flower box. Awesome. All of our pencil work is complete. We're gonna cut our awning and door. Grab your Exacto blade and be very careful. You're definitely gonna need a ruler for this. The first thing we're gonna do is gently score the top of the awning from corner to corner. This is gonna help when we have to go in and give it a little bit of a bend. I'm gonna go over that twice. That's called scoring. You can see there's a little cut in there. Now this is where things get a little trickier. I've got my finger, kind of on the other side, my thumb over here, holding the panel. And I can sort of see where the edge is of the bottom of my awning. And I'm cutting from edge to edge, but I'm not going the whole way through. I'm letting the tip of the X-Acto blade sort of guide me, because I don't wanna slip and cut myself. So I'm just going very slowly, taking my time. And then I can kind of saw in there as I get deeper into the cardboard. There we go. So we have our first cut. Now I'm gonna do the same thing across the bottom edge. Make sure you do the bottom and not that part. The closer you get cutting to this edge, the harder it is to cut, the box isn't as structurally sound over here. Also, my finger is really close to that cut, so I wanna move it so I don't cut myself when the knife goes through. All right, because my finger's so close I'm actually gonna move this, move my fingers. And now I'm gonna do the rest of the cutting like this, 'cause I already have a pretty good line there. There we go. And then I'm gonna bring those two together. Now I can see that it snaps through. And now for the final cut. Remember just take it slowly. We're going from the top corner down to the bottom. This is probably the hardest one to do. That sound is the knife getting caught on the bumps of the corrugated cardboard. I am gonna remove my ruler, now that I have a line there and just start letting kind of doing it a little free hand. Going very slowly. I'm gonna go back up the other way. It's just about ready to punch through. There's our awning, and since we added the scoring up there, it will flip out nicely. Now this is the fun part. We get to use our scissors and cut the awning shade here. And that will feel very easy after you did all that hard work with the X-Acto blade. So we've just created an awning for our little cafe. Now we're gonna do the door. Grab your X-Acto blade and your ruler. Gonna score the right hand side of the door, just like we did for the awning. Press down your ruler and carefully take your X-Acto blade, and only score to about, I would say a quarter inch to the bottom of your door. And after you've done that, draw another pencil mark here, for your doorstep. Then you're gonna do the same thing that you did for the awning. You're going to cut the other three sides starting with the bottom. Slowly going across, and cutting into the cardboard, to create the first side of your doorway. And then you'll cut this side and this side, and then you'll open your door. When you're done with the cutting, it should look like this.

Add painted details

- We're gonna bring this cafe to life by adding super fun details with paint and markers. Start with the door. Got my big brush. Gonna hold it out a little bit. Create that crease so you've got a line to

follow. Paint your door, and while I'm working with my pink, I'm gonna add the pink to the awning. I'm gonna grab a smaller brush for that. Since the awning stripes are fairly thin and usually awning stripes alternate in color, I'm gonna start with my pink. You're gonna have so much fun creating this awning. I'm creating a random stripe pattern with my colors. The pink is really bright, so I'm gonna add just a few of those as stripes. I know I've got yellow to add and white and I'm also gonna let some of the box color show through. I did not let the paint dry all the way. I'm just kinda, I'm laying the paint really close next to it. If you don't feel comfortable doing that, you wanna let your paint dry. If you feel like making your awning only two colors, you can do that. You can really have fun with the stripes. This is your cafe, so you can give it its own personality. I'm gonna start working on the windows, which are all white. So I do wanna make sure this pink is really dry. I'm gonna hit it with a little bit of heat from my heat gun. I'm gonna start drawing the windows. Now these are smaller detailed spaces that you're painting. It doesn't have to really be super exact. Any little wobbles of your hand will give your cafe personality, that's how I feel. If you look closely at my painting it's not perfect. And we're also gonna be drawing on top of these, we're gonna be adding little window details, so that will add another layer of interest. Again, you might find that with the corrugated cardboard box, your pencil, your X-Acto blade, your brush might wobble when it hits a bump of the corrugated cardboard. So just go with the flow. If you're painting, if it's an X-Acto blade, just take your time. We don't want anybody cutting themselves. Okay, our white is done. Now we're gonna do some drawing, so we need to make sure our white is dry before we draw on top of it. (dryer whirring) Grab all your pens. We're gonna start adding some details to the white. I've created a really simple window design. This goes like this. Then we'll do the same window design over here. Okay, and down here we're gonna do some tile work. I'm gonna pull out a bigger pen for that. First, just draw a grid. I went outside of my grid. That's okay. Mistakes happen. And then you color in your little squares to make it look like tile work. I'm gonna switch to the other side of this marker, which is what, a brush marker. It will allow me to color in a lot faster. And our tiles are complete. We're gonna put the word cafe up in the top window. Now you could name it something. You could call it Susie's Cafe. I'm just gonna put the word cafe with a couple of flowers so that passerbys know that this is a cafe. I'm gonna grab a thicker pen to color that in. You'll notice I have several thicknesses of pens. I've got a super thin pen, a medium, and the brush marker. And they allow me to do different things at different speeds. Now this pen is getting a little bit fussy and my guess is because my white isn't completely dry. Sometimes when you use pens on paint and the paint isn't completely dry, the pens will seem like they're running out of ink, even though they're not. So don't let your pen fool you. It's just not happy that the paint is not completely dry. There we go. I'm gonna draw a face on the roof. You can follow along or you can make up your own face. For the nose and the mouth, we're gonna draw them on one side of that cafe because we can't really draw them in the middle. It's called cheating. We're gonna kinda cheat the face so it's a little off center. And then we're gonna give our house some big old eyes. I am drawing them in pencil first, so if I wanna make any changes, I can. All right. Now I'm gonna draw on the face with my black pen. And here we have the cafe with its face. I like to add a detail to the roof. Gives it a little more texture, just some dots. You could add shingles, you could add straight lines. You could even walk around your town and look at buildings and see what the roofs look like and use that as inspiration. There we go. Look at that cute cafe.

Add cardboard details

- With the scraps of cardboard that you have, we're gonna add some final details to the outside of

the cafe. Grab your scraps. I'm gonna take the small one first. This is so much fun. I'm gonna cut a tiny little doorknob for the door. So I'm going for a circley shape. Sometimes corrugated cardboard doesn't wanna play the way you want it to play, so you just kinda gotta work with it there. All right. I'll trim it a little bit. I'm gonna take my brush pen, and I'm gonna paint the doorknob black. There we go. And I'm gonna grab my glue. I haven't used my glue yet today, so it's, oh, there we go. Sometimes it comes out a little funny on the first try. And then I'm gonna stick that on the door. Okay. Now we're gonna add shingles to finish off the roof. So you'll take one of your flaps that you cut off at the very beginning. We're gonna be putting shingles up here. Gonna cut three rows out of your cardboard. (scissors clicking) And then pile them like this. And cut your shingles. As you can see, these were not done with any precision. I just had fun with that. We want them to look kind of wonky and wobbly. And then, you're just going to glue them on top of your building like so. It's gonna be five across. You can see that when you first put it down, it has some give. You can kinda move it around to see what your measurement's gonna look like. And if one pops off later, you just get a little more glue and stick it back on. And there we have it, our roof has been shingled and it is waterproofed from, you know, pretend rain. Not from real water. (laughing) Next we move on to the inside of our cafe.

Wallpaper and second floor

- We get to pick wallpaper for the cafe and add a second floor. Now that the exterior of the cafe is complete, we're gonna move to the interior. And what would your cafe be without some lovely wallpaper. The PDF that you have has a whole bunch of exciting options. There's some bubble tea wallpaper, stripes, flowers, and polka dots. I'm gonna use the polka dots. First things first, you wanna measure the size of your box. So mine is $7\frac{3}{8}$ th by, you wanna get very exact on this, by 9. I'm gonna move my box over. We are gonna measure our wallpaper. Pencil, 9, 9 by $7\frac{3}{8}$. All right, now you need an X-Acto blade and something to cut on. I'm gonna use a little piece of cardboard. You don't wanna cut on your table, so I'm just using the cardboard to protect the table. Then line up the marks you made and cut. Same thing over here. And you've got your wallpaper to size. Gonna check it. Sometimes it's a little exact, too exact. So mine is. You can see it's very exact. So I need to pull it back out and trim it down just a little bit more. I'm gonna say about an eighth of an inch on two sides. Okay, that's much better. If it still doesn't fit, you might need to adjust it again. It might take a couple of tries. Now I'm gonna grab my double stick tape and put double stick tape around all of the edges and I'm gonna make an X in the middle. Grab your cafe, stick the wallpaper in up to the edges in the box, and you've got wallpaper. Next, we'll add the second floor. For the wallpaper, we had to make a lot of adjustments. And for the floor, I wanna get a more precise measurement. So I'm gonna measure from the bottom from door to door. That looks like it's $7\frac{1}{4}$ and I think that measurement will be closer to what the interior space is and will help us get a better cleaner fit for our floor. Now I'm gonna measure the depth, which is $4\frac{1}{4}$. So I'm actually going to write that down so I don't forget 'cause sometimes I forget these things. I'm gonna write it with just pencil right here. $7\frac{1}{4}$ by $4\frac{1}{4}$. Now I'm using a cereal box. You can also use a cracker box. I'm gonna trim off this, well, maybe I can pull it off, this extra little stuff here because I am going to use this tab and I'm gonna use this tab. I'm gonna cut off this end. I am measuring $7\frac{1}{4}$ from this edge right here. I'm gonna measure $7\frac{1}{4}$ from right here, $7\frac{1}{4}$, and then $7\frac{1}{4}$ from right here. I think I'll do one more, $7\frac{1}{4}$ from right here. And then I'm gonna do $4\frac{1}{4}$ from right here, $4\frac{1}{4}$ from right here, and then $4\frac{1}{4}$ from right here. We have one more measurement from this place right here from this spot. This measurement, I want you to measure a half an inch. Now getting your extra piece of

cardboard that we're using to cut on so that we don't hurt our table, going to cut along these marks, and then we're gonna cut along here. And then right here on this line, I want you to use that scoring technique that we used earlier. So don't cut all the way through, just gently use your X-Acto to cut like that and then you can bend that like that. So this little rectangle you have here where you've scored, you can cut that out. And now you've got a tab here, a tab here and you have a tab over here. This tab is kind of long so we're gonna cut it about the same size as the others. It doesn't have to be exact. And now you have your floor that's ready to insert. I'm going to erase what I wrote. It's not very pretty. All right, I wanna make sure this fits. So this goes into your cafe. You want this to be a tight fit. My floor is a little bit tight, kind of like what happened with the wallpaper. What's interesting is when I hold it up to the floor, so with the box it looks about right, but I'm guessing it needs to come in about an eighth of an inch. So what we're gonna do is re-score it. I'm gonna use my little ruler and I'm gonna bring it in about an eighth of an inch just like we did for the wallpaper. Remember, just gently press with the X-ACTO blade. Now I have a trick that I do when I've got a score that's close to another score is I press my ruler down and I kind of bring it up like that. It's not the prettiest, but you're not gonna see that, so it doesn't matter. You wanna make sure you cut this out right here and fingers crossed that it fits. Let's see. You can also do this with your tabs, which is helpful. There we go. I clipped the edge on an angle so that the tabs folded with more ease. All right. All right, now it fits into our box and we've got our second floor. If you wanna sturdier second floor, you can also add double stick tape to your tabs and that tape will stick to your wallpaper. I placed my floor central in the box and kind of along the line of the roof. I just wanna put it in there and then press it up against the wall. Great job. You've created a cafe and it's ready to serve its first espresso.

Furniture and characters

- This might be my favorite part. Now we get to create the world that lives inside of our cafe, the furniture and the characters. I've provided you with a template to get your world started. There are all sorts of characters and pieces of furniture. Let's look at them. We've got rugs and artwork. Plenty of tables for the cafe downstairs, a bed for our cafe owner upstairs, and their little iPad, a tree for the outside, some mice, cafe patrons, and our bird owner, Le Bird. And I even made a little menu. First, we'll create some artwork. You can cut out the artwork I provided from the PDF, or you can find things from around your house, like old stamps. And this is really easy to do. You're going to make a frame with your extra cardboard. Just cut like so. Take a smaller piece of artwork, then I'll get my glue. Put your glue on your printout and voila. Glue up your other one. Since this stamp is a little special to me, I'm going to use double stick tape so if I ever want to change it out, I can. And you can even decorate your frames if you like to. Sometimes frames are decorated, sometimes they're very simple. Can walk around your own house and see what the frames look like in your house for inspiration. And here I made a little family portrait of the bird as a little teeny chick and the bird's parents. For the carpets, this one, I just put a bunch of paint on there. The other one I used a piece of wallpaper that's part of the PDF and cut it out and added some paint. And I'm going to show you how to make the cafe tables. I've got some precut pieces, which you'll also find that on the template on your PDF. Right here, you've got a table and the table bottoms. You can see here that I've already cut those out. And they're super easy to put together, you just slot them like this with corrugated cardboard, you've got to wiggle it a little bit to get it together like that. And then I have a trick if it's not standing quite the way you want it to, you can go in where you have your slot and cut out just a bit like that, and it'll help it straighten up. I'm going to cut a little bit off of the

other side too. I'm going to add my glue. Stick my table on top. I'm going to hold it down for a couple of seconds. Got a cafe table. Let's do that again. So I pulled these apart. There we go. Add some glue. Holding it for like 30 seconds. I've got another cafe table. Now I'm going to show you how to make cafe patrons. All of the characters work the same way. They've got a base and they'll get slotted into their base like so. You'll see them all on the PDF. We're going to make our bird character. The bird has a top part and a base, so the character part and the base. And these we make out of cereal box cardboard. I like to draw where the bird's hat's going to hit and the head. And then I have my paint colors, pink, yellow, and white. Still sticking with the same colors that I used for the cafe, because the bird is the cafe owner, so, you know, it likes to match its cafe. I'm being a little bit looser with the way I'm painting right now. Not being super exact. It's fun to paint like that sometimes. If you wanted to, you could use markers on the bird, and you don't have to match the cafe. You can have fun with the colors. All right, I'm going to dry it off with the heat so that I can draw the face. Get my black pen and draw in our bird's eye. And then you do the slot into the other slot. The stand for the bird also serves as the bird's wings. And we've got our little cafe owner. And you've just turned a cereal box into a bird and mice and a tree. And we can fill up our cafe with the world that we've created. Let's take a tour of the cafe. We'll start in the bedroom. I have the little painted rug and the bed, and I've hung artwork. I simply use double-stick tape. It works really well against the wallpaper, and I created a special little tapestry using bright-colored yarn. Then we come down to the cafe. I've hung more artwork using my double-stick tape, and I have another rug. And I also created some texture on the floor, like little tiles. There are tables and little cafe menu. I also added an extra awning on the side. This is something that you can do. It's fun to make it your own. You could add a window upstairs for some light in the bedroom. Your bird might want extra light and ask you for that. We've got a few tables outside for a sunny day and our tree to frame the entire scene. Have fun cafe-ing.