



Figure 1:
1997 Year of the Ox
souvenir sheet.

Canada and the Year of the Rabbit

▼ CHARLES J.G. VERGE

On January 8, the most beautiful of the three Canadian Lunar New Year stamps and souvenir sheets will make its appearance. The six-color stamp and souvenir sheet celebrate the Year of the Rabbit. Previous issues were the 1997 Year of the Ox (Scott 1630 and 1630a, Figure 1) and the 1998 Year of the Tiger (Scott 1708 and 1708a, Figure 2).

This is the first time the Lunar New Year stamp in sheet format is different from the one in the souvenir sheet. Not only are they different sizes but they bear different denominations. Each 46¢ stamp in the sheet of 25 pays the domestic first class letter rate and measures 34mm x 35mm. The round (100mm diameter) 95¢ souvenir sheet contains one stamp measuring 40mm x 40.5mm and can be used to pay the international rate.

The new Canadian postal rates, which

went into effect January 1, are the reason behind these differences. In the past, Canada's international rate was twice the domestic first class rate. In 1997 and 1998 this rate structure allowed Canada Post to put two 45¢ domestic rate stamps in each souvenir sheet which resulted in a 90¢ international rate souvenir sheet.

"THE CHALLENGE OF DESIGNING A STAMP FOR THE YEAR OF THE RABBIT WAS TO DEPICT THE SPECIAL QUALITIES OF THE RABBIT WHICH ARE CLEANLINESS, HARMONY AND PEACE, BUT AT THE SAME TIME TO CREATE A SENSE OF EXCITEMENT, CELEBRATION AND FESTIVITY FOR THE LUNAR NEW YEAR." KEN KOO

Contrary to Western calendars, which use the relative positions of the Earth and the Sun, Chinese calendars (the earliest recorded was 3,700 years ago) are calculated by tracking the orbit of the moon. Because the lunar new year is divided into 12 months of 29 1/2 days – each month beginning with the new moon – an extra month is required every 2 1/2 years to keep up with the Western calendars. Again because of the lunar cycle, the lunar new year does not begin on a fixed date. It can fall on any day between January 21, and

February 19. This year, the Year of the Rabbit begins on February 16.

A less commonly known fact is that the 12 animals who rule each of the lunar months also rule the hours of the day. Each 24 hours is divided into blocks of two hours. The rabbit is one of the Earth animals and rules the hours of 5 a.m. to 7 a.m.

Chinese astrology indicates that each of our personality traits and qualities is ruled by those of the animal whose year in which we were born. Lunar New Year celebrations last more than 10 days and are considered to be the most popular holiday in the world.

Each action undertaken by people on New Year's Eve or New Year's Day is believed to have major impact on the individuals' fortunes in the New Year. For example, washing hair, dusting or vacuuming on New Year's Day are not recommended activities because any of these actions might wash away the New Year's wealth and fortune.

Western folklore depicts the man on the moon, while Chinese folklore believes that the rabbit lives on the moon. This is why paper lanterns adorned with rabbits are lit at the Chinese mid-autumn festivals. This is also why Canada's Year of the Rabbit stamp and souvenir sheet are predominantly yellow and the souvenir sheet is in the shape of the full moon. Rabbits signify longevity and are associated with the color white. Their

astrological characteristics are peacefulness, cleanliness, graciousness, kindness, good manners, sound counsel and sensitivity.

The stamp and souvenir sheet were designed by Ken Fung, illustrated by Ken Koo. The calligraphy is by Quint Li. Fung and Koo both come from Hong Kong and reside in Vancouver, British Columbia, while Quint is originally from Shanghai.

Ken Koo is president of Koo Creative Group, Inc., with offices in Vancouver, Toronto and Calgary, and he was in charge of the project. Koo Creative also designed Canada's Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation stamp (Scott 1658). The Canada Post design manager for the issue was Bill Danard. Figures 3-12 review the development of the rabbit stamp design.

When asked about the design of the stamp for the Year of the Rabbit, Koo explained: "We have used a yellow gradation as the background color on the stamp to represent the moon. Showing prominently on the stamp is a brush-stroke rabbit illustration, done in a traditional Chinese folk art drawing style."

"A palette of colors that are often found in Chinese New Year decorations and ornaments – yellow, burgundy and purple – is used in the design to create a sense of celebration and festivity for the Lunar New Year. The names of the 12 Zodiac animals are



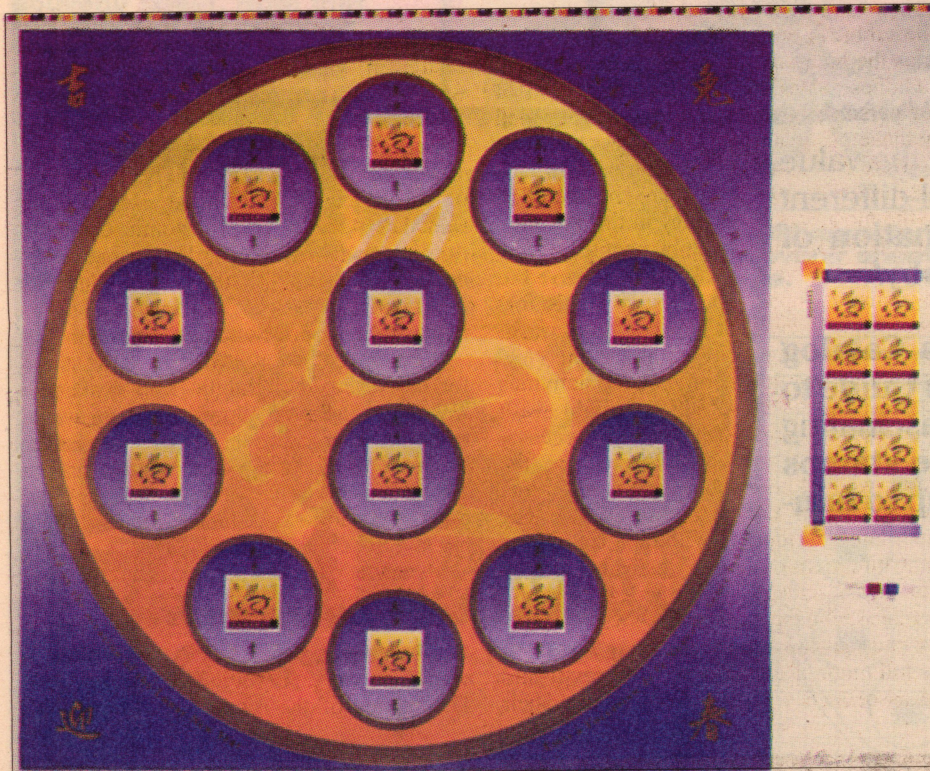
Figure 2:
1998 Year of the Tiger
souvenir sheet.



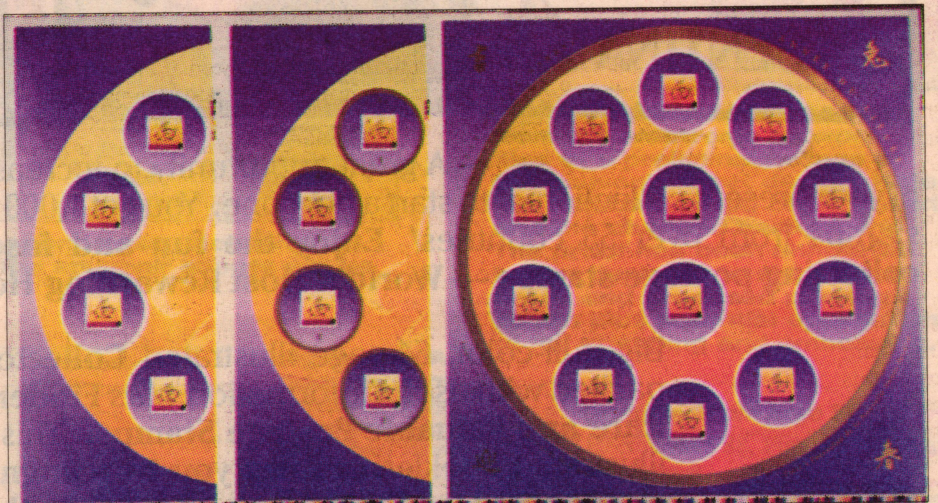
Figures 3: First proving proof sheet. This is where the proof sheet is marked up for color corrections to stamps and souvenir sheets. The stamp is proved on a block of four within the complete pane border.



Figures 4: First proving proof sheet. This sheet shows notations for changes to stamp sizes and spacing to be incorporated in the second proving.



Figures 5: Second proving proof sheet. Here the souvenir sheet is proved in its uncut press sheet format while the stamp, in its new size, still is proved by only a part sheet. The uncut press sheet portion of the proof sheet has had the gold silk screening applied after the lithography printing.



Figures 6: Three wet trap proof sheets. Wet trapping is the term used when inks are applied wet one on top of the other to check their viscosity. The left pane checks the lithography inks. The middle pane checks the metallic inks, the varnish and the tagging. The right pane checks the silk screen printing.

found in the background of the stamp and they are written in a more traditional Chinese style, with the word rabbit being highlighted."

He goes on to say that "the overall simple design generates a feeling of cleanliness, harmony and peace. The illustration of the rabbit has a sense of strength and energy to it. When we set it against the soft background, the illustration style brings more focus to the rabbit itself."

Elements of the design of the souvenir sheet are pertinent to Chinese life, culture and folklore. The circular shape of the souvenir sheet represents unity and cycle with Chinese families getting together to celebrate the new year "unity." The square-shaped stamp framed within a circular-shaped souvenir sheet resembles an ancient Chinese coin that symbolizes wealth. In addition, the icons of the 12 Zodiac animals form a circle around the stamp.

Koo concluded by saying: "The challenge of designing a stamp for the Year of the Rabbit was to depict the special qualities of the rabbit which are cleanliness, harmony and peace, but at the same time to create a sense of excitement, celebration and festivity for the Lunar New Year."

The printing was done by Ashton-Potter Canada using six-color lithography and a gold silkscreen process on paper provided

by Coated Paper (a division of Tullis Russell) with PVA gum. The individual stamps and the stamps in the souvenir sheets are perforated 13 and tagged. Calgary, Alberta, is host to the first day of issue ceremony.

The 46¢ stamp was printed in a quantity of 13,280,000 and is available in sheets of 25 for \$11.50. The 95¢ souvenir sheet (6,720,000 printed) can be obtained individually or in an uncut press sheet (\$24.95 - 30,000 sheets printed).

Single souvenir sheets come from a press run of 20 per printing sheet in four rows of five souvenir sheets. This format makes it easier to die cut the final product. The uncut press sheet is far more elaborate in design and contains only 12 souvenir sheets. All of these items are available from Canada Post beginning January 8.

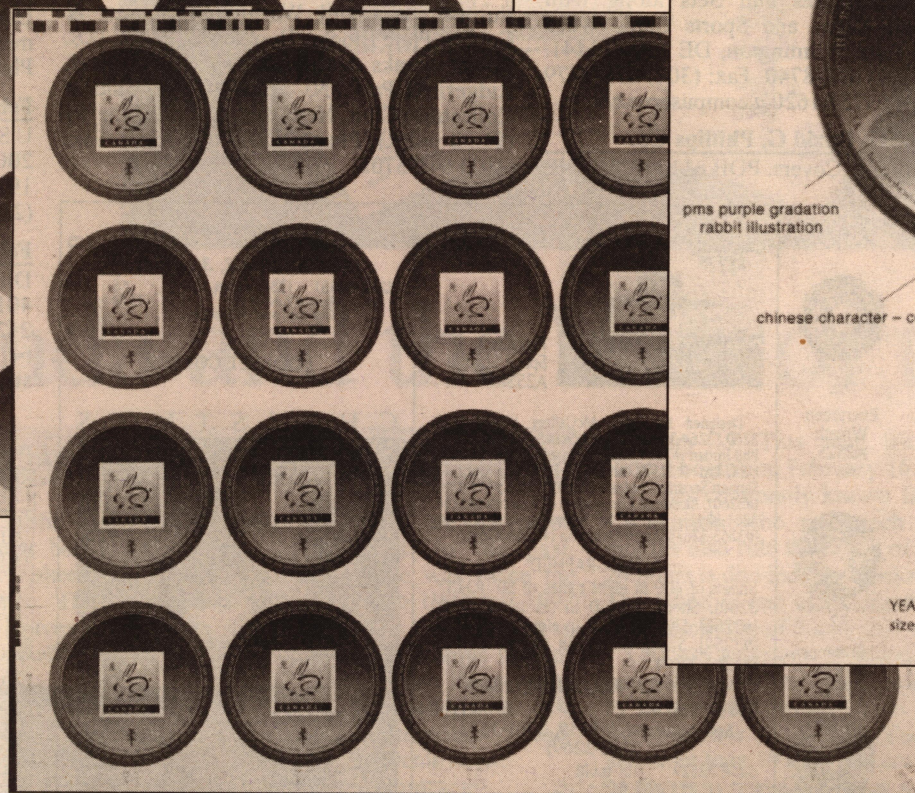
In addition, souvenir sheets will be overprinted with the logo of China '99, the World Philatelic Exhibition to be held in Beijing, China, Aug. 21-30, 1999. The overprinted 95¢ souvenir sheet (425,000 of the original print run) will be available about January 31 in a tri-pack of Lunar New Year stamps from Hong Kong, China and Canada (\$9.95); in a coin and stamp set that con-

Figures 7: Close up of one pane of the "OK to print lithography" press sheet for the sheet version of the stamp. The full press sheet is composed of six panes.

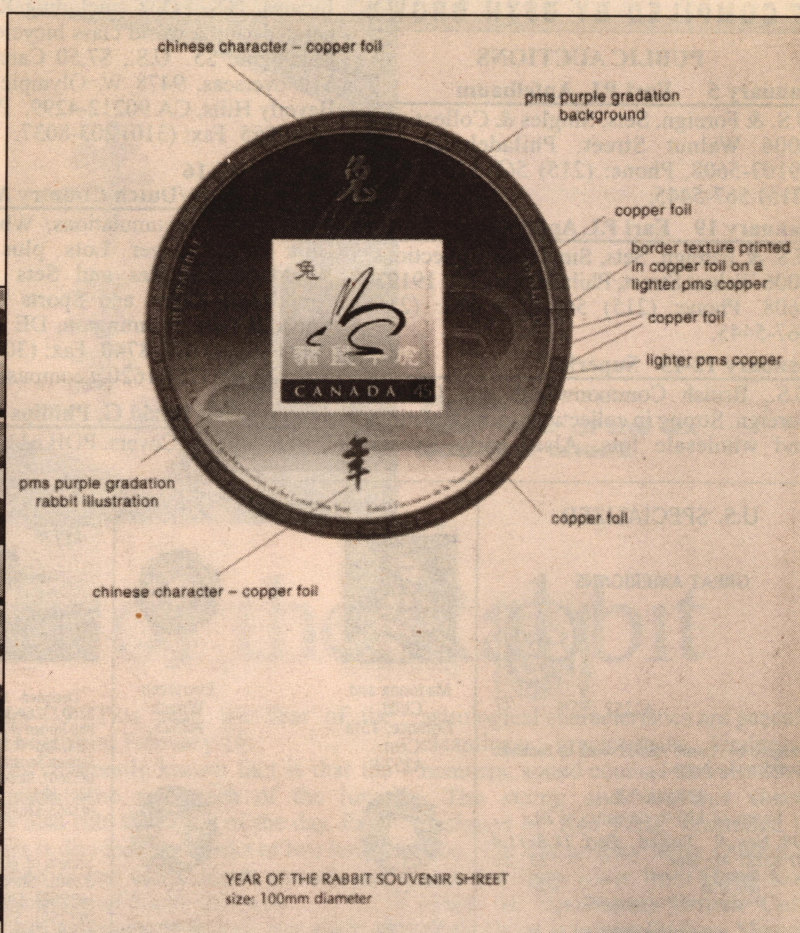




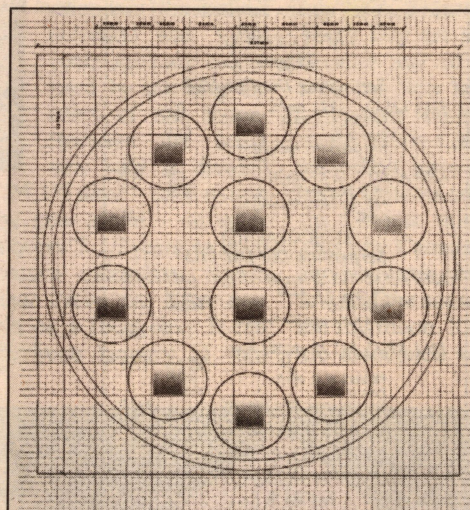
Figures 8: "OK to print lithography" first pass of the souvenir sheet. Note that the sheet of 20 souvenir sheets is different than the uncut press sheets that have a more elaborate design. The souvenir sheets will be diecut for individual sale. This layout is for ease of production, economy of materials and suitability for the printing process, perforating, diecutting and packaging.



Figures 9: "OK to print lithography" second pass (including the metallic inks) of the souvenir sheet. The souvenir sheets will be diecut for individual sale.



Figures 10: A color laser print from the electronic artwork files at a preliminary stage of the souvenir sheet design. Note the different shape of the rabbit and the changed background. The proof has been annotated by the designer to show color break and proposed printing colors plus potential application of foil stamping and embossing.



Figures 11: A grid diagram produced by the designer showing how the layout of the press sheet fits the grid for perforation. This particular layout requires three passes through the perforator to completely perforate all stamps on the press sheet.



Figures 12: Mock configuration of the stamp and souvenir sheet first day covers for the Year of the Rabbit.

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tains a \$15 coin (\$88.88, Figure 13) and at China '99 in August.

The overprinted souvenir sheet and all the other Lunar Year stamps and products can be obtained through the National Philatelic Centre, 75 St. Ninian St., Antigonish, NS, Canada B2G 2R8 or by telephone toll-free anywhere in Canada and the United States at (800) 565-4362. Residents of other countries may call (902) 863-6550. The National Philatelic Centre's Web site is <<http://www.canadapost.ca>>.

Note that all prices are in Canadian dollars. My thanks go to Canada Post's Bill Danard, Jim Phillips and Elia Anioia for their help in preparing this article.



Figure 13: 1997 Lunar New Year coin from the coin and stamp set. The \$15 coin bears the likeness of Queen Elizabeth II on the face and the Lunar New Year Zodiac icons on the reverse. The coin is made of sterling silver with a 24k gold-covered cameo in the center. The 1998 coin will be of the same design but with the rabbit icon in the octagonal centre piece.