

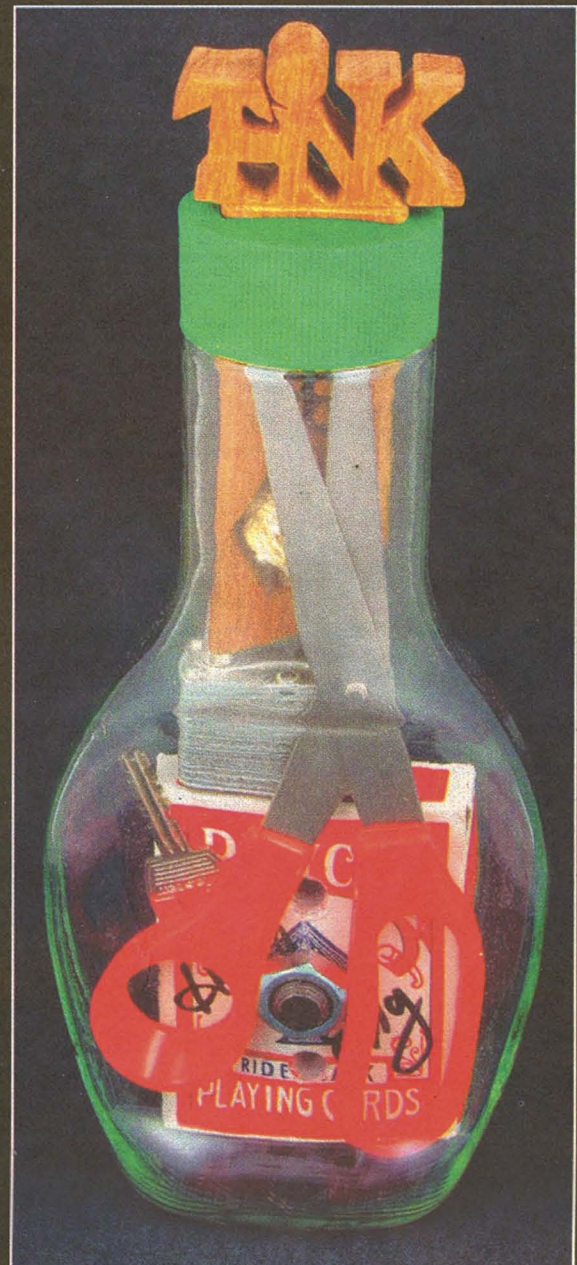
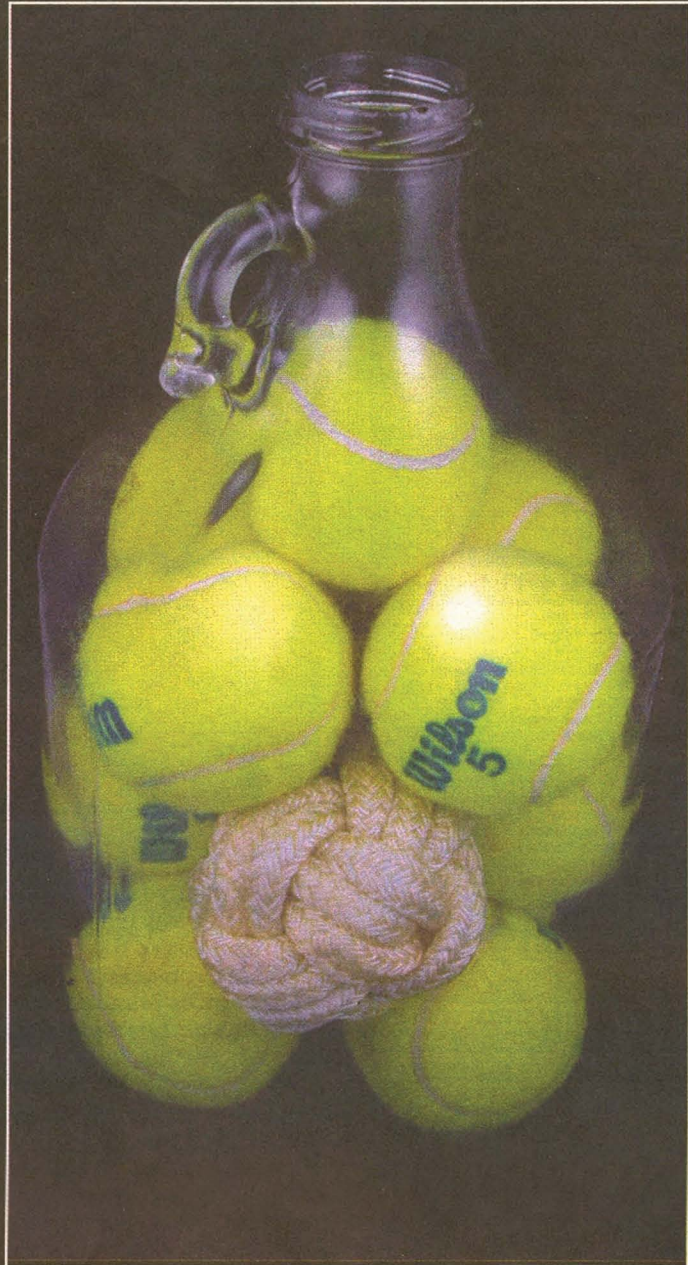
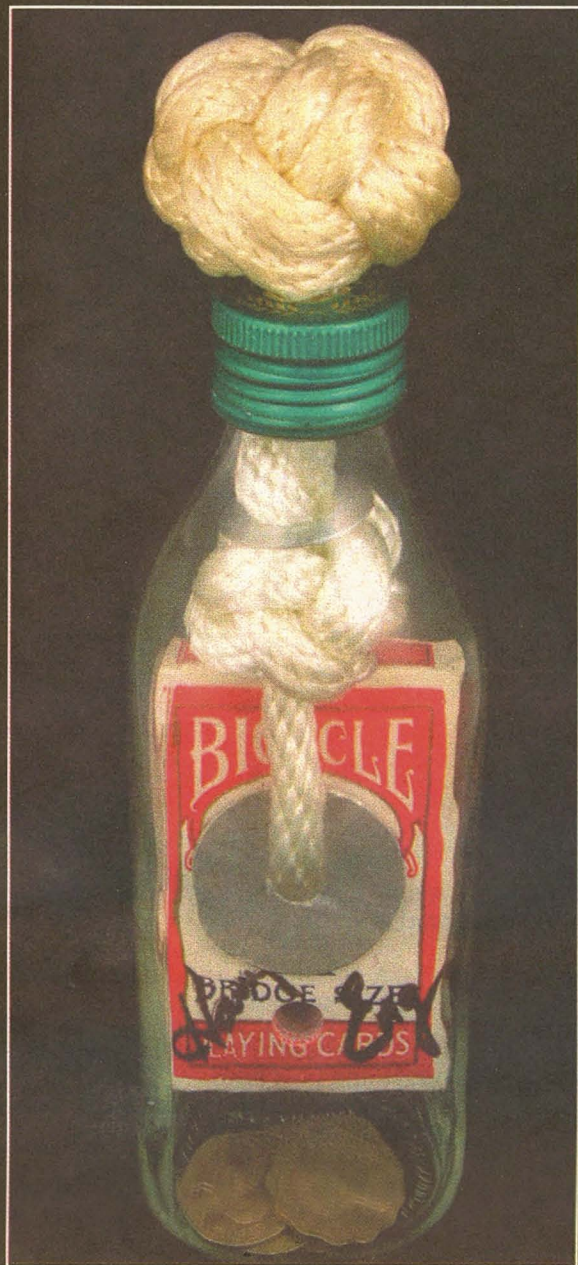
Magician Harry Eng wanted people to think. So he created these...

PUZZLING BOTTLES

IF you think getting ketchup out of some bottles is difficult, just look at some of the things Mr Harry Eng has managed to squeeze into them.

The late US magician is renowned for putting all sorts of objects – such as decks of cards, scissors, padlocks, packs of cigarettes, tennis balls, baseballs, books, and pairs of shoes – into bottles with openings seemingly too small fit them in.

And even though Mr Eng died in 1996 at the age of 64, his art of the “Impossible Bottle” is being kept alive today by magicians such as Mr Jeff Scanlon.



Can you figure it out?: The only clue Mr Eng gave was that he used a rubber band and a pencil, along with other tools to get objects like tennis balls and shoes into bottles with openings seemingly impossibly small for them.

pictures | **john rausch**

"Harry's signature was always putting a knot of rope in each bottle," Mr Scanlon, who is based in Chicago and creates his own Impossible Bottles, told The New Paper on Sunday in an e-mail interview.

"Sometimes a big knot, sometimes a small knot, but the knot was usually larger than the bottle opening."

Based in La Mesa, California, Mr Eng wore several hats as an elementary school teacher, educational consultant, inventor, musician, and minister, and had a passion for encouraging others to think.

That's why he loved creating puzzles, origami, and wowing his audience with his amazing memory.

"He made books where he memorised thousands of words or the order of 10,000 numbers," said Mr Scanlon.

"Many times he would have someone turn to any page of one of these books and he could and would

recite the contents without ever having to look at the page."

Mr Eng was also a gifted magician and fan of magic.

"He didn't read many books on magic, but the magic he performed was original," said Mr Scanlon.

"In fact, many times at magic conventions, magicians would approach Harry and show him a magic trick.

"Amazingly, Harry would have an insight on a better way of performing the piece.

HUMBLE HARRY

"He always did this in a very humble way. Harry never made people feel that he was any better or smarter than they were."

But what Mr Eng will be remembered for most is his Impossible Bottles.

He is said to have started making them in the mid-'80s after suffering from a heart attack and being given only two months to live by his doctors.



AT PUZZLE AND MAGIC CONVENTIONS, HARRY WOULD ALWAYS BRING SOME OF HIS BOTTLES, WHERE THEY WOULD ALWAYS SELL OUT. COLLECTORS HAVE PAID THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS FOR JUST ONE OF HIS BOTTLES.

— Magician Jeff Scanlon, who is keeping Mr Harry Eng's (above) art of the Impossible Bottle alive.

But he proved them wrong, living about a decade longer than they predicted.

And in that time, he is said to have made between 600 and 700 bottles, which have become sought after by collectors from all over the world.

"At puzzle and magic conventions, Harry would always bring some of his bottles, where they would always sell out," said Mr Scanlon.

"Collectors have paid thousands of dollars for just one of his bottles."

Collectors have long pondered over how Mr Eng gets such large items into the bottles without having to break the bottle or cut the items into smaller pieces before rejoining them inside.

While Mr Eng never revealed his secret, he once let on that the tools he used included a pencil and rubber bands.

So how does he get them into the bottles?

Think hard about it. Mr Eng will be pleased that you did.