

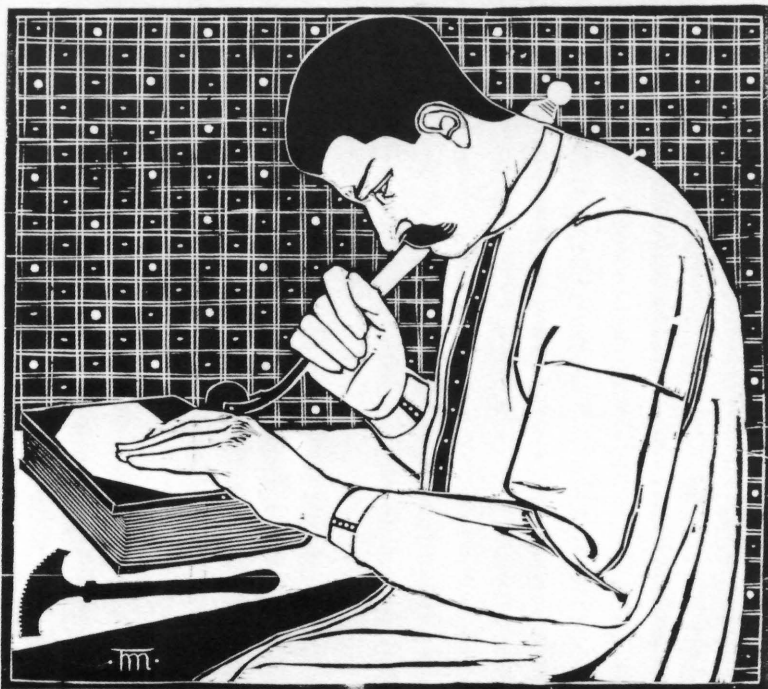
GUILD OF BOOK WORKERS JOURNAL

Volume XXVI

Number 1 and 2
combined issue

1987-1988

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CONTENTS

PAGE

Interview with Don Etherington / <i>Monique Lallier</i>	1
Fine Binding with James Brockman: A report on the Inaugural Program of the Institute of Fine Binding and Book Conservation at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, May and June, 1987 / <i>Mary C. Baughman</i>	12
Interview with Hugo Peller / <i>Marie Trottier</i>	31
Some Thoughts about What <i>Should</i> and <i>Should Not</i> be inflicted on a Book in the Way of Design and Decoration / <i>Selvia Rennie</i>	38

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INTERVIEW WITH DON ETHERINGTON* / *Monique Lallier*

Don Etherington has been in the profession of bookbinding and book conservation for nearly forty years. After all those years he is still enthusiastic about his work, in fact he is now embarking on a new challenge in his career. I am very proud to let you know more about this skilled binder and conservator and how he has devoted his life to raising standards and developing new techniques in his field.



Part One

Don, could you tell us how you started in bookbinding

At thirteen, I started bookbinding at the Central School of Arts and Crafts with George Frewin, Fred Wood and William (Bill) Matthews as teachers. I chose out of one hundred subjects, first bookbinding, second jewelry and third engraving.

*Part One of this article was published in Le Journal de L'Association Des Relieurs Du Québec.

I was then interviewed and chosen for bookbinding. There was no special reason for me to choose bookbinding first, only my instinct, like some other moments later in my life I am happy to have followed it.

What was the Central School of Arts and Crafts?

It was the most important school of arts and crafts in England. We studied and practiced the craft of bookbinding alongside formal academic studies for three years. The emphasis was on perfection of techniques, e.g. "You have to do it again because it is a fraction out or it's not quite in the press totally square, take it out and do it again." This may be repeated for six or seven times before you are allowed to continue to the next step. This type of training really gave you a real sense of not accepting something less than perfect. It was a very good training.

After studying bookbinding in college, were you ready to start work or were you obliged to go through an apprenticeship?

I left the Central School of Arts and Crafts after three years as a finisher, to serve my seven years of apprenticeship which means that I was the guy who will do gold tooling forever. But when I started my apprenticeship at Harrison's & Son, the finisher who was there at that time told me that he would never teach me anything. He was afraid of losing his job. So I started as a forwarder, doing everything up to finishing. They gave me a variety of work to do and working in a mild sweat shop gave you speed in carrying out technical skills which I think is an important attribute.

During those seven years I went one day a week (day and evening) at the London College of Printing to continue my training in design binding and commercial binding with Edgar Mansfield and Ivor Robinson. I also learned different techniques of printing, typography design and how to set type. We learned also machine binding which included setting up folding, stamping, and gluing machines. This mixture of training with the London College of Printing and Harrison's & Son was an invaluable combination that stood me in good stead later on.

Did you have exams to control your apprenticeship?

You can go through your seven years of apprenticeship without exams, it was not a condition of apprenticeship. But if you want to progress in the field, it's preferable to take the exams as teaching positions for example would not be open to people without those paper qualifications.

In England, there was The City and Guilds Institute examination of bookbinding. After three years, you take the intermediate exam which covered an examination in two parts: questions on theory and techniques of bookbinding, and a practical exam. Then, after five years, we were allowed to take the final examination which included completing two books, a design on paper and a design

plaque covered in leather. We had three hours to realize a design on paper, choosing one subject out of two.

In the practical side, the two bindings you had prepared to a certain level; you never knew what they would ask until the morning of the exam for the completion of the two books. Plus the plaque on which you have to complete a design included onlays, inlays, gold lines, blind lines, lettering . . . so they can see that you could do most of these techniques. I was lucky to pass with honors in all three segments.

Do you remember the design you made on paper?

Yes . . . it was the motion of a speeding train drawn abstractly, which was suggested by a long narrow triangle. I used this shape across the boards in different ways to create the effect of movement.

What happened after seven years of apprenticeship and successful completion of these exams?

You come out of your apprenticeship the same way you went in, with a ceremony full of solemnity; let me explain.

Harrison's & Sons belonged to the Worshipful Company of Stationers which is the oldest Guild in the world, established in 1493. It is a very austere and serious ceremony especially when at sixteen, alongside your father and the master of Harrison's & Son, one strides down the center aisle flanked by thirty or forty persons seemingly all seventy years of age. The three of us then stand before the Master of the Guild who is dressed in wig and gown, and swear to uphold the term of the apprenticeship. My father has to swear he will keep me fed and at home for seven years and the master of the company promises to employ me seven years. The indenture also indicated many things that you can't do: get married, fornicate, play dice, etc. . . . it was all very impressive for a young man.

When I finished my apprenticeship I returned with my father and my master and the same men seemingly were still sitting there, we went through a similar ceremony to be released from my apprenticeship.

Because I was apprenticed under the auspices of the Worshipful Company of Stationers, I was given the freedom of the city of London and that allowed me to establish my own company and have my own apprentices in London.

But to do the work that I wanted which was fine bindings, teaching binding seemed to be the only way. So I went to the Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts and met with Dr. Wright who was then the principal and I asked him if I could teach bookbinding. He said, "Young man, I think you should get more experience." I felt very crushed, left his office, resigned from my position at Harrison's Company and began at the BBC in the music library, doing restoration and repairing music manuscripts. It was my first real introduction to restoration.

Has this first exposure into restoration influenced your career?

Certainly as it was the first time I started to repair manuscripts, etc. Shortly after beginning at the BBC I was introduced to Mr. Howard Nixon who was then the keeper of the books at the British Museum and told him I would like to do restoration of books. He suggested that I practice on throwaway books and when he considered my work good enough he would introduce me to a few book dealers. I practiced and got fairly competent doing rebacking, coloring leather and matching endpapers. At the same time I was going to evening school to develop design skills.

Mr. Nixon suggested my name to Roger Powell who then was the most famous book conservator and bookbinder in England. He had asked Mr. Nixon if he knew anybody who would be willing to be his assistant. When I was asked, it was quite a decision to make because he lived in the south of England and it would be a big change of lifestyle for me after living in London. But I left the BBC and moved south to work with Roger Powell.

The very first time I saw Roger, he asked me what type of binding did I do and I answered "everything" . . . He then proceeded in the next few years to prove that I didn't know very much. It was a very humbling experience after ten years of doing bookbinding to realize that my training had been somewhat lacking in many areas of the craft.

Working with Roger was mainly conservation oriented alongside carrying-out new bindings. Looking back on it now, I should say that my meeting with Roger Powell and Peter Waters who was Roger's partner, changed the rest of my life.

While working with Roger it was amazing to hear discussion on, a) the quality of materials, b) the reasoning behind the thickness of the thread, the type of sewing supports that you should use: tapes, cords, thongs and how many of them in relation to that particular book. This may not seem so strange now, but at that time it was quite a revelation because all that evaluation of structure and material qualities was not ever really emphasized in my early training. By going through this process, I really began my career as a conservator.

How long were you with Roger Powell?

For one year, I worked full-time with Roger and Peter. Near the end of the first year Camberwell School of Art called and asked if I would like to do a day's teaching. So I then worked 4 days with Roger and went back to London by train to teach for a day. After three weeks, I was asked if I would give one day and one evening and shortly after that two days and two evenings. It was all very exciting.

So for a couple of years I was teaching two days and two evenings in London and working three days in the South of England.

It was a great time in my life working with Roger and as I expressed before a great influence in my career but in 1960 the Southampton College of Art offered

me the position of full-time instructor in bookbinding, bookbinding design and typography design. So I reorganized the program and taught there for nearly ten years. The course was successful and I was now teaching the students for the same exams I was discussing before. I have good memories of those years at the Southampton College of Art.

Part Two

How did the Florence experience change your career?

In November 1966 the tragic flood of Florence occurred. Roger Powell's partner, Peter Waters, who I had worked with, invited me to become part of the British team to go to Florence to train the Italian workers at the Biblioteca Nazionale. At that time there were few people skilled in book restoration techniques.

I am surprised that there were so few book restorers in '66 in Italy. How do you explain that?

I don't know why that situation was so apparent in Italy, given their acknowledged expertise in leather work. It may have been a result of political difficulties, but other countries throughout the world were asked to send experts to help in the effort.

I went to Florence for two years, going back and forth for various time periods ranging from two weeks to two months, because I was still teaching bookbinding at the Southampton College of Art.

At the Biblioteca there was a staff of approximately one hundred people in the restoration lab. There were five or six binders/restorers, who were under my supervision learning various techniques and different styles of structures. The lab was initially planned so that in the future a center for the study of restoration and conservation could be established. Here I use the term conservation, but prior to 1967 the word restoration was nearly always used. This change of terminology came about at the onset of this training, as we realized that we were still doing traditional restoration techniques that tried to make a book that was damaged look new.

So, we began to do what we now call conservation practices and tried, through the teachings of Roger Powell, Peter Waters and Tony Cains, to use good materials and techniques that were reversible etc., etc. . . . We went to tanneries in Italy, persuaded them to develop good quality leather and vellum, and to papermakers for hand made paper. The enormous amount of repairs and rebinding work determined the need for the best quality materials available.

The use of Japanese paper for mending bookpapers in Florence was an example of this new thinking. It had always been considered correct to match as closely as possible the original, which meant using western paper. Techniques such as

coloring paper using tea or coffee, or using old endpapers for a close match were prevalent at that time. It was a conscious decision to use Japanese paper on western books and try for a sympathetic mend, not a facsimile. So this type of thinking was really articulated throughout the different operations.

One of the most important studies that came out of all this work in Florence was the study of limp vellum bindings. It was noticed that limp vellum bindings seemed to withstand the flood much better, as a group, than the volumes with stiff boards. Chris Clarkson began a study of these bindings and now it has become an important aspect in the repertoire of binders and conservators everywhere. Chris also has been a champion of trying to develop high quality materials and have them available to all of us.

After working in Florence, Peter Waters was asked to set up a program of conservation at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. He asked if I would like to come with him to become the training officer for the new program. There was no conservation program in the States quite like we were planning at that time, though the Newberry Library program under Paul Banks was progressing well. The Library of Congress had a restoration office, mainly doing lamination using tissue and cellulose acetate.

So, in 1970 I moved from England to the States where I helped him establish a program at the Library of Congress. In fact, I was there a year before Peter. This all happened because of the Florence tragedy.

When you came to the United States, was it in your mind to stay a short period of time or forever?

I came twice to visit prior to making a decision. I was completely convinced that, if I came, I would stay for the rest of my life. I was really excited to come to the United States. In fact, as a youngster I had dreamed of coming to the States with no understanding of why or how . . . so I was especially overjoyed, because my work at the college, after ten years, was becoming slightly stale. I felt I had something more to offer. Helping Peter design and develop the program at LC, under the directorship of Fraser Poole, was very exciting for me. The Library was very supportive of the program and we eventually had a staff of thirty-five conservators in paper and books.

After working in Florence and trying to deal with the enormous quantity of material that needed work, as a result of the flood, I developed a serious interest in trying to devise systems and techniques for the mass of library materials needing attention. So the position at LC was a natural progression to pursue these interests.

I originally started as the training officer and went on to become the Assistant Restoration Officer. Most likely I would still be there now if I again had not gotten the ten year itch. Interestingly, my formal training spanned ten years, my teaching experience spanned ten years, and I had now been at the Library of

Congress for ten years. I was feeling that I needed to be my own boss. So when I was approached by Paula Lada-Mocarski, a fellow American binder, who thought I might be interested in setting up a program at the University of Texas at Austin, it was what I was waiting for. So in 1980, after a year of negotiations I agreed to set up a program of conservation. We eventually had a staff of fifteen conservators.

I place Peter Waters as one of the finest craftsmen I have ever known, and his standards were a very strong influence. At the Library of Congress I tried to establish Peter's high standards of workmanship, and at the University of Texas I tried to establish the same standards. Of course, you can't achieve this overnight. You have to train people and allow them the space and environment to achieve that high level of excellence.

Isn't the best way to achieve this excellence by training people in your own methods?

I might want to agree with you, except that I didn't want them to perceive that they were trained in the methods of Don Etherington. I would rather they be trained in the pursuit of high standards. I never wanted to establish a situation where everyone is doing things the same way, with let's say, one philosophy. That is far too narrow. So I tried to establish the idea that the training is very open, and my method is just one method, one idea, one perspective. I continually encouraged them to get other types of training, so that we can compare and evaluate whether one method is better than another.

I know from my own experience, that my first ten years of training was from one perspective, and I can now say that my whole attitude and techniques have taken a complete 180° turn. I feel it is very dangerous to assume that there is only one way. Here, at this moment (in Finland), when you think of the people we have just met in an atmosphere of friendliness, we are discussing different techniques with bookbinders from eleven different countries.

Because I have been a member of the Guild of Book Workers for many years, I know you have been approached to establish standards for the members. Can you talk a little about that?

I was approached by the Guild to try to establish a certification program for the Guild's members. I organized a meeting in Washington, D.C. for an open discussion. After that meeting, I asked for people to respond to various questions on the issue of certification. The responses were mixed, fifty percent for, fifty percent against certification. Many reasons were stated saying why it should be done, or why it shouldn't be done, or whatever.

Some questions kept being asked. What are standards? How do you judge standards? Why would the French standards of binding be more or less better than the English or German? . . . It was a valid group of questions of major

concern. I, myself, felt that it could easily be answered because I don't think there is any one set of standards. There is a standard of quality that cuts through all nationalistic traits. I felt that one could judge standards and I disagreed with pursuing the issue of certification.

Other comments were also voiced at the Washington meeting. For example, there were not many places in the United States to learn. Many young people at the meeting were crying out for help saying, "We want to know how to bind well, but where do we go?"

In the end, we established the standards meeting format to be held once a year. If you can show what those standards are, eventually, at some point, you will know what good quality is, what is well bound with good technique, has good finish with good material. It was established that one person would show the group a particular technique. I remember doing a presentation on the preparation of boards, showing board shaping technique and the preparation of leather with paring technique. Another person gave a demonstration on how to achieve really high quality gold tooling, etc., etc. . . .

For the people who couldn't come to the standards meetings, we produced an exhibition of what we were talking about, with examples of some of the concepts. We hoped, as it traveled around, one could learn from it. So, from this first meeting in 1980 there has been a standard meeting.

I resigned from the chairmanship a few years ago, because I felt it was important that somebody else run the meetings, so that there would be no criticism about national traits and interests. Bill Anthony took on the standards and the meeting in Iowa was fabulous. At the same time was the opening of the *Eighty Years Later* exhibition of the Guild of Book Workers. I can say that the improvement from the 1975 exhibition to the 1980 exhibition was staggering. I couldn't believe it. I spent two or three hours going through the exhibit and kept saying, "I can't believe it," it was so good. It's a tremendous tribute to all the binders, craftsmen, and designers, who produced work for that exhibition. It was a really fine example of what can happen over a few years.

I don't know how long the standards will go on. It has been a remarkable success that every year we have had over one hundred participants.

You are the Assistant Director and Chief Conservation Officer at the University of Texas at Austin. Tell us more about your work.

It's a long title, but in a sense it is important to say at the outset, because it does reflect where the director and the institution put conservation. It is perceived as an important activity at the HRHRC (Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center). The collection is *the* major collection in the world of 19th and 20th century American, French, and English literature. We have most of the original manuscripts of famous authors, writers and poets of this period, such as Hemingway, James Joyce, Scott Fitzgerald. We have nine million manuscripts, four

million photographs, eight hundred thousand rare books. It's quite a unique collection because Harry Ransom collected theater, music, and cinematic material connected with books that were published. There's also an iconography collection of over eighty thousand prints and drawings connected with the field of literature.

With this collection Harry Ransom changed bibliographic history, because prior to the establishment of his collection the first edition was considered the prime collecting piece. Some libraries' reputations were built on the number of first editions they had. So he came along and said: I'm going to collect the original manuscripts, because I think that is the beginning of the creative process, and the first edition is the end of the creative process. Having this bright idea, he went through Europe and bought all the manuscripts that were available, and did the same in America before establishing the center.

But the period from 1850 up through 1950 was the worst period of book production, in respect to material quality, we have seen. Our collection is literally deteriorating day by day, and what we are attempting to do is as to establish ways and means to slow that deterioration down. Hopefully, as time goes on, various techniques, like mass deacidification or mass strengthening techniques might be a factor, and we can treat five or six thousand books in a chamber at a time . . . that's the only salvation that we have. There is no way that any one group of people can treat by hand the large numbers of items. This is only one institution. Libraries throughout the world are facing the same problem.

Can you talk about the new institute that will start in May?

This institute will give an opportunity to colleagues in our profession to come for a short period of time to a master class and work with very respected designers, bookbinders, and conservators. We open in May with James Brockman as instructor for fine binding and Tony Cains in conservation. There has been tremendous response. In fact, fifty people applied for the twelve places available (six for each group). It shows the tremendous interest and development the craft is going through at this moment.

Who are the people, who applied as students?

They are people working in private practice or in institutions who want to develop in fine binding or conservation. They are already design binders and conservators. They are skilled people. Each had to send samples of his/her work, and I examined it to see if it was of high enough quality. I selected six for fine binding and six for conservation. There are some people who wanted to come to both sessions. I can say that half of the applicants were qualified to attend. We could have had thirteen in each class if the space had been available.

One of the reasons I am here (in Finland) is to develop a calendar for the next five years of potential instructors. Then we can establish a schedule, so that the

instructors have plenty of time to prepare. When the dates and instructors are announced people can plan ahead for their applications.

This is our first class and I am very excited about it. I think that the most important part will be for the students to work and concentrate for two months with similar high quality people. When I think of what can come out of that it is quite dramatic. We hope it will be successful and we will be able to expose colleagues from the States to a variety of experts from all over the world.

What are your feelings on the future of bookbinding?

I think, in the United States particularly, that it is a very healthy craft at the moment. The craft has taken tremendous strides in the last twenty years. You just have to see the way the Guild of Book Workers has grown, and how various new chapters are now starting to develop out from the main body in New York. Also, other book arts people, calligraphers and printers, have gotten much closer to the bookbinding fraternity. There is a very nice marriage of various interests that makes for a flourishing book arts scene in the United States.

The book arts take different forms; the designer bookbinder doing very interesting work, the artist using the book form as a medium for expression. Some use different materials such as ceramics. There is also an interesting twist as book artists are using structural features and the form of the book as a form of artistic expression, such as decorative sewing structures, or the spine exposed . . . seeing how the actual construction of a book can be used to advantage in the design of the book. I don't mean just the decorative part, but actually using structural features as a form of expression.

So, on all fronts, it is going along very well. It is exciting to see all the inter-related connections coming together. It's quite explosive in a sense. It has created an increase in bookbinding exhibitions and a greater selection for training than ever before.

Though you can still say it is difficult for designer bookbinders to make a living only doing fine bindings or design bindings, many are doing other related things. One of the more interesting paths they follow is in the areas of limited editions, because it develops good hands, eyes, and speed. The connection between the art of fine bookbinding and the printing arts has now resulted in some really superb limited edition production. A short time ago, it might be a printer producing a beautiful piece of printing of, say two hundred copies, but it may have been bound in a very ordinary or not so well constructed binding. Now, the binders themselves have developed to such a degree in design and understanding of the techniques of finish, that most limited editions are produced with a sense of quality. That's a real positive development I think.

An example of this phenomena was the limited edition of *Billy Budd Sailor* by Benjamin and Deborah Alterman. These printers invited fifteen binders from

various parts of the United States and Canada to bind this book in their own style for an exhibition first held in New York, and then in different parts of the country. It's a great idea and should be pursued on a more regular basis, as it gives hand binders an added incentive.

Of course, book conservation, which I am in, has been quite a plus for people who are interested in the craft of bookbinding. A career in book conservation allows for a lot of good creative thinking. And then there are those conservators, and I can name quite a few, who also do superb design binding. What a difference from when I finished my initial training and wanted to get into doing more interesting work and the only avenue that I had at the time was going into teaching bookbinding.

Thank you, Don, for this interview which took more time than I thought, and could have taken more time, because you have so much to say about our interesting field.

This interview was conducted in Finland in March, 1987, during The Book-binding Symposium, organized by Hugo Peller and held in the marvelous mansion of Nils and Antonia Grotenfelt, a Finish binder. We were a group of fifteen bookbinders from eleven countries, exchanging our views of the field. Everyone made a presentation of his or her work. There was also an exhibition in Juva, the nearest town to Wehmais where the library/bindery of Antonia Grotenfelt is located.

Monique Lallier

Monique Lallier, Canadian bookbinder, studied with Simone B. Roy in Montreal, Roger Arnoult for gold tooling in Paris, in Ascona with Edwin Heim and with Hugo Peller in Solothurn, Switzerland. She has exhibited extensively in Canada, Europe and the United States. She was president of the Association des Relieurs du Quebec in 1986 and 1987 until she moved to North Carolina where she now lives with her husband, Don Etherington.

FINE BINDING WITH JAMES BROCKMAN: A Report on the Inaugural Program of the Institute of Fine Binding and Book Conservation at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, May and June, 1987 / Mary C. Baughman, with drawings by Mary C. Baughman, and photos by Paula M. Gourley and Karen Pavelka

The Institute of Fine Binding and Book Conservation was conceived by Don Etherington (formerly, Chief Conservation Officer and Assistant Director of the HRHRC) as a place where a small group of experienced binders could devote two uninterrupted months to the pursuit of advanced techniques of hand book binding with a master craftsman. Dr. Decherd Turner (the former Director of HRHRC) was instrumental in obtaining the funding to equip the work space and provide for the teachers. Mr. Etherington's plan was implemented by Frank Yezer, whose administrative talents contributed daily to the success of the Institute.

Don Etherington's belief that professional excellence could be greatly enhanced by the intensity of a concentrated workshop for an extended period of time was confirmed by the quality of the books produced. In the final evaluations, all of the participants commented that the Institute was an extraordinary environment for learning. For some, the experience was a strengthening and an affirmation of their skills which gave them the confidence to begin exhibiting their work. Others found a renewal of the purpose and excitement they had not experienced since their early training years. All agreed that the work they produced was some of their best.¹

In his introduction to the session, James Brockman explained that he expected each of us to produce two fine bindings. He wanted firm control over all the operations on the first book, so we would go through each step as a group. On the second book the same techniques were to be used but we were free to work at our own pace.

Brockman showed us two finished bindings, *The Iliad* and *Poems* by A. E. Coppard. The latter is a metal binding.² He described the process he had gone through to arrive at the final design for *The Iliad*, then showed slides of the book in progress. The steps were as follows: develop the design for the binding; make endpapers with leather hinges; construct and shape the boards; rough gild (or otherwise decorate) the edges of the textblock; sew; round and back; lace on the boards; sew headbands; line the spine and attach a hollow; pare leather and cover; "pull" the boards with a paper lining; put down the leather hinges; fill in the boards; adhere the pastedowns; and decorate the binding.

¹The participants of the first session were: Mary C. Baughman, Paula M. Gourley, Bob Inge, Martha Little, Ann Repp, Don Sanders, Priscilla Spitler, and Carolina Veenstra.

²Brockman later showed an excellent series of slides on the making of the metal binding for *Poems* by A. E. Coppard. The slides and the binding were purchased for the HRHRC collection.



James Brockman at his bench at The Institute of Fine Binding and Book Conservation at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, Photo by Paula M. Gourley

The design, Brockman feels, should be inspired by the book but not be merely a “dust jacket.” The front and back boards and the spine should be harmonious. We talked about the way a viewer’s eye travels across the binding. Our goal was to make a design that would cause the viewer to look and discover, and then look again and discover more.

After a show-and-tell of each binder’s previous work, we discussed the books we had brought to bind at the Institute. Brockman observed that the text must be of the same quality as the fine binding. He discouraged our use of texts which

were damaged by stains and foxing, and texts which were not of high caliber or not appropriate for a modern binding.

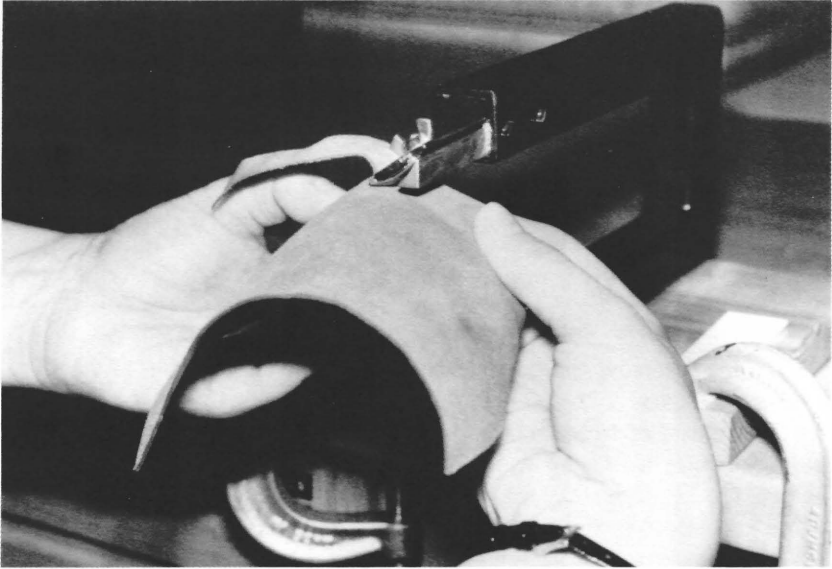
A number of the books brought by participants were diminutive in size. We talked about the challenge of making bindings for the single section texts which are produced by many fine presses. He stressed using slim boards and leathers with a grain pattern that would not overwhelm a small book. Later, we worked through problems encountered in sewing, backing, and covering small books.

Work on the design began with small color sketches scaled to the proportions of the book. We then made full size drawings. Brockman moved around the room and consulted with each of us. He suggested that small scraps of leather, paper, and other materials be used as an aid in the placement of onlays and tooling. He advised us about the covering materials we wished to use; French leathers like *chagrin* would be difficult to mold over sculptural areas on the board, silver kid might wear excessively if used on a board edge or joint. We were likely to encounter problems in the paring of exotic reptile skins.

Once a color scheme for the cover was established, we carefully considered the colors for the endpapers and leather hinge. Then we were free to experiment with decoration techniques. Beautiful handmade papers were embellished with a pastepaper design for Carolina Veenstra's binding of *Paul et Virginie*. Ann Repp, Paula Gourley, and Priscilla Spitler used *pochoir* techniques with strikingly different effects on the endpapers for their bindings of *Dining In* (an artist book), *Granits*, and *Tales of the Mountain Men*. For our second books, Priscilla and I dipped feathers and leaves into gouache pigments to make "printed" endpapers for *The Eagle, the Jaguar, and the Serpent*, and *Japanese Papermaking*.

While we worked on the endpapers, Brockman started to work on three books he had brought with him. These books were *The Cambridge Atlas of Astronomy*, *Crow* and *The Glory of Life*. He finished these books during the class and we were able to learn by his example as well as his guidance over our own efforts. He was receptive to our criticism and our suggestions. The design for *The Cambridge Atlas* did not come as easily as those for the other bindings. Some of the group suggested that he use more gold tooling on the book. He did, and agreed that the design was improved. It was comforting to know that sometimes design does not come easily even for an experienced binder.

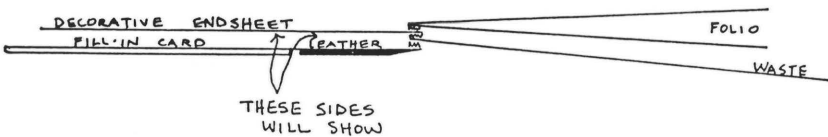
Brockman likes to tinker, and has been known to strip the tires from his son's bicycle in pursuit of the right material for a new invention. By tinkering, he was able to solve problems which came up and he brought along gadgets to circumvent others. When a punch to make tiny leather dots could not be found, Brockman constructed one. The Brockman paring machine was a time saver for the class. The machine quickly reduced leather to the thickness necessary for the hinges; for most of the books, this was roughly equivalent to the thickness of ten-point lig-free card.



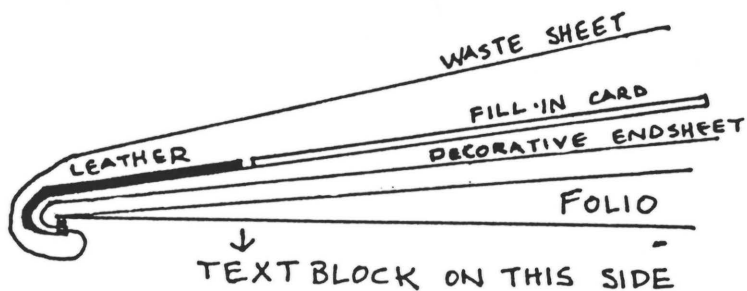
2. The Brockman paring machine. Photo by Karen Pavelka.

The endpaper with a leather hinge was constructed as follows. A folio of paper compatible with the textbook was tipped to a single leaf of the decorated endpaper along the spine edge. A single leaf waste sheet was tipped to the decorative paper. One edge of the leather hinge was pared to a feather edge and adhered to the spine edge of the waste sheet. On the fore edge side of the hinge, a piece of thin card was taped next to the edge of the leather. This card, and the protective pieces of paper on either side prevented the hinge from marking the textblock during rough gliding and subsequent processes. This endpaper is tricky to describe, even with a diagram; but once the orientation of the materials is understood, it is simple to construct, it works well and looks elegant.

Illustration A: Diagram of the construction of the endpaper with leather hinge.



(1) The hinge is constructed as shown and allowed to dry.



(2) The hinge is folded as shown and sewn onto the textblock.

Later, the decorative endpaper can be tipped just to the fore edge of the folio, or adhered all over.

A loose guard of Japanese paper is pasted to the first and last sections of the textblock before the sewing begins. The endpapers are tipped to this guard after sewing. The Japanese paper helps to hide the spine edge of the leather hinge.

The next step was the construction of the boards. A clever technique which Brockman taught us was helpful later in the shaping. A piece of colored paper was placed between the layers of board when they were adhered. As the board was shaped, the paper layer was revealed; this made it easier to check the uniformity of the shaping and the thickness of the edges.

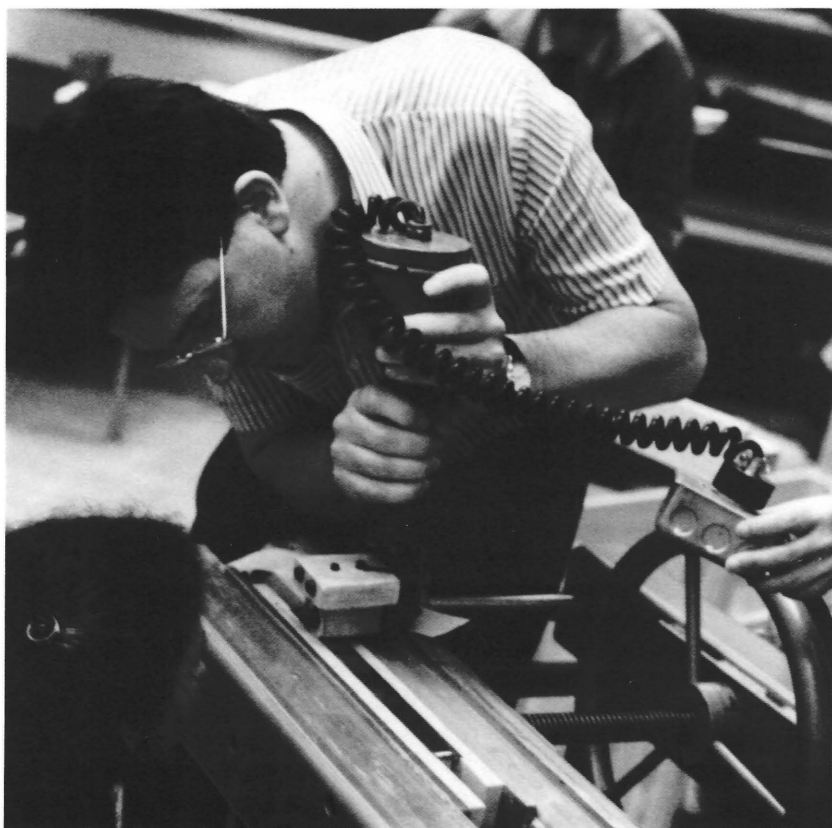
Brockman examined each book and determined the configuration of the boards especially for that book. For an octavo size book the boards might be constructed with two thicknesses of 4-ply mat board, a layer of colored paper and a sheet of 80 pound Perma-life paper. Paste was used to adhere the papers and the mat board. Brockman prefers to make boards with paste because it is more rigid than PVA when it is dry, and tends to "skin" less during sanding.

The boards, papers, and adhesives manufactured by American companies all reacted differently from their English counterparts. We were able to learn from Brockman's experiments to achieve control over the materials by varying the adhesive, the layers of paper for pulling, the grain direction, and the methods of drying. He pointed out that the use of vellum in combination with other skins for covering requires adjustments to the linings for the boards. Brockman insisted that the boards be solid, and stable enough to resist environmental changes. Fortunately, the length of the class gave us the time needed to experiment and maintain the high standards we had set.

The spokeshave and sanding sticks were used to create a gradual bevel on the head, tail, and fore edges of the laminated boards. In general, a little less than one thickness of mat board was left on these edges and the spine edge was only slightly sanded to make it smooth. Bob Inge and Don Sanders used raised shapes on the boards as major design elements for their bindings of *The Art of the*

Bookbinder and Gilder, and *Creative Bookbinding*. These areas required extra care in the final construction of the boards, the paring, and the covering.

The decoration of the edges of the textblock (with the endpapers included) was the next step. Some books were rough gilt using an electric gilding machine which Brockman brought with him. It survived the conversion from English to American electric current, and after some experimentation achieved acceptable results. This machine is described in the Designer Bookbinders publication *The New Bookbinder*³ along with the Teddie machine which Bob Inge brought in for comparison. Gilt edges were used only when appropriate, and not on all of the books. On her second book, *Oz*, Ann Repp combined a single gold section with *pochoir* decoration.



James Brockman using the electric gilding machine. Photo by Paula Gourley.

³*The New Bookbinder* vol. 3, 1983, pp. 72-76.

Next, the books were placed in the lying press and the sewing stations were marked with shallow scalpel cuts. In order to avoid damage to the leather hinge, the endpapers were not marked for sewing with the rest of the textblock.

The books were sewn all along onto slim cotton tapes. We did not use a linked stitch because Brockman maintains that linked sewing causes the sections to resist backing and exerts too much stress on the paper. He uses a linked stitch when a book will not be backed. Thread was carefully selected to achieve just the right amount of swelling. When it was necessary to tie on new thread, Brockman instructed us to make the knot on the outside of the spine next to the sewing station.

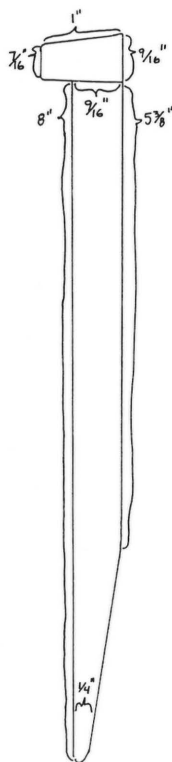


Illustration B: A profile of the "Brockman Parallel, Self Aligning Backing Board."

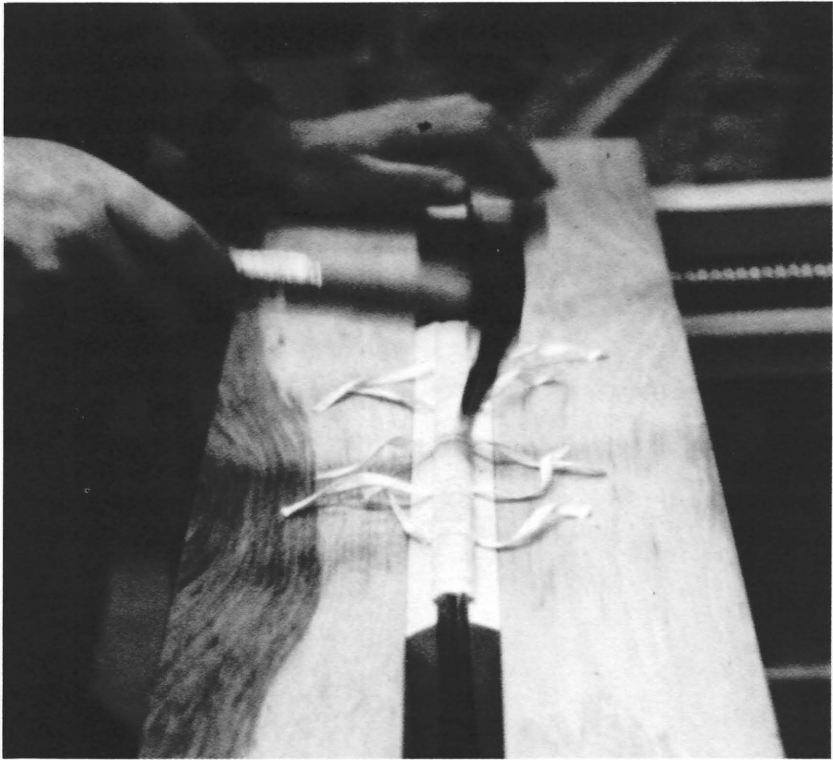
An extra length of thread was left at the beginning and end of the textblock. After carefully pricking the endpapers to avoid making any holes in the leather hinge, the endpapers were tipped to the loose guard, and then sewn on with the extra thread.

Any excess swelling was knocked out by placing the book in the lying press and tapping the spine with an English backing hammer on one side, while holding a knocking down iron against the other side. After tapping, the slack was pulled out of the tapes. Then the book was taken out of the press, the head was knocked up square, and the spine was glued with a light coat of hot glue between the tapes. After a few moments (about fifteen minutes for regular hot glue, one hour for flexible hot glue) the book was rounded using an English backing hammer and manual manipulation.

Frank Yezer had arranged the electric conversion of the gliding machine, he also oversaw the construction of backing boards designed by Brockman. These boards have an angle of approximately five degrees and project out so that they rest on the edges of the lying press.⁴

Brockman demonstrated backing with an English backing hammer, using the claw side. With a gentle bouncing motion he coaxed the sections into a subtle round. The curve is less than that used by the French but slightly more rounded than some English binders use. After backing, another layer of hot glue was rubbed in well over the entire spine, the press was loosened slightly, and the book was left to dry.

⁴These backing boards will soon be manufactured in three sizes, made from plywood and a "composition" called "Tufnol". The "Tufnol" is used for the top edge to prevent its being marked by the backing hammer. The boards and paring machine are available from James Brockman, Ladder Hill, High Ridge, Wheatley, OXON, OX9 1 HY England. Telephone: (8677) 5279. (This is a new address.)



6. James Brockman demonstrates backing using the claw side of an English backing hammer. The Brockman backing boards are not pictured here. Photo by Paula Gourley.

Brockman commented that inexperienced binders often over back their books. The solution for this problem is the correct choice of thread, the proper amount of swelling, and careful rounding and backing. At each step of the binding process we talked about pitfalls to avoid and the importance of keeping control of the operation.

Channels were made in the boards using a wood working chisel and scalpel. Small bits of card were pasted on the spine edge of the boards to ensure the proper amount of room in the hinge area. These bits of card, about one fourth of an inch long and the thickness of 10-ply lig-free board, were placed at the ends and middle of the board edge. The sewing tapes were laced into the channels. At this point the tapes were adhered only on the inside of the board, this allowed for final adjustment of the squares before covering.

Brockman has adapted a Chris Clarkson headband technique for use with fine bindings. The headbands we sewed for the books appear to be the traditional

single core with a front bead, but are in fact a stronger structure sewn on a double core, with a back bead. A backwards twist for the back bead firmly anchors the headband to the spine. These headbands are versatile as well as strong, in that it is easy to add other colors of thread. Brockman advocates the use of polyester rather than silk thread. As he put it, "Silk rots." He did, however, use a silk headband when the polyester proved to be too heavy for a small book. After the headbands were sewn we made protective paper caps for the textblocks.



7. Mary Baughman sews a headband on the book, *Japanese Papermaking*. Photo by Paula Gourley.

The spines of the larger books were lined with lightweight "airplane" linen. Brockman boiled the linen to remove the sizing. This gave the cloth more flexibility and allowed the adhesive to penetrate better. The smaller books were lined with

a very lightweight cotton "typewriter ribbon cloth" which we found locally. In both cases the lining was cut on the bias which gave extra strength as there were then twice as many threads running diagonally across the spine. I found that the boiled cloth molded easily over the spine, and the diagonal cut reduced fraying along the edges.

Next, the spines were lined with 80 lb. Perma-life paper. In England, Brockman uses "Kraft paper", a strong machine made paper with more of a surface than Perma-life. He was not satisfied with the Perma-life which became too soft when it was dampened. Two layers were used for the spine lining; the first layer went between the tapes, and the second covered the entire spine. These linings were allowed to dry completely and in some cases were sanded down a little before adhering the hollow. The hollow was also made of Perma-life. PVA was used to adhere the linings and the hollow.

The number of layers of paper in the hollow were determined by the thickness of the spine, and the type of paper in the textblock. For a large or heavy book, four layers might be adhered to make up the outer part of the hollow in order to prevent its being crushed by the spine leather when the book was opened. Brockman maintains that those layers adhered directly to the textblock affects its "openability". For most of the books one layer was adhered to the spine and two layers made up the outer part of the hollow.

Before cutting the piece of leather to be used for covering we discussed what effect the grain pattern might have on the design, and how to avoid flaws in the skin or at least hide them under a planned onlay. Brockman admitted that he worries about the longterm durability of some leathers, and the tendency for brightly colored leather to fade. The participants complained of the difficulty of buying good skins. We envied Brockman's ability to go to the sources for first pick.

We discussed different tools and techniques for paring leather, and checked our blades for sharpness. If a tool needed work Brockman helped to reshape and sharpen a blade or modify the tool. Some participants bought hacksaw blades, and he supervised the making of small paring knives from these blades.⁵

Brockman showed us some tricks for paring. He began by edge paring with an English paring knife. He marked out the exact turn-ins for a full calfskin binding, then with the paring machine, he shaved a uniform strip from each edge of the calf skin. He reduced the skin very precisely, just up to the lines for the turn-ins. He also used the paring machine to pare sample pieces to be used as gauges for measuring the spine, edge, and cap thicknesses.

⁵Blades for hacksaws are now being manufactured with two types of steel bonded together. The cutting edge is a harder steel than the rest of the blade. These blades are not suitable for making knives. Hacksaw blades made solely of "high speed steel" should be used.

Using C-clamps and a thin board, he clamped a goat skin to the bench along one edge of the skin, and used a spokeshave. He always pared from left to right with the spokeshave, turning the skin and re-clamping as he went. In the spine area he pared across the spine area rather than vertically along the spine. Before Bob Inge pared the alum tawed pigskin for *Fifteen Roses*, Brockman instructed Bob to dampen the skin to reduce "chippyness".

The leather in the spine area was pared less than that at the board edges of the turn-ins. At the caps, for the outer edges of the turn-ins, the skin was reduced gradually to the grain layer. Elsewhere the skin was generally left full thickness for maximum strength.

Before covering, final adjustments to the position of the boards were made. Up to this point the tapes had been partially adhered. With the squares now perfectly determined, the tapes were adhered completely. Inside, the fore edge corners of the boards were marked with a forty-five degree angle to aid in accurate cutting of the leather at the corner turn-ins. Outside back corners for the caps were cut in the boards. The width of this cut is roughly one-half the length. The hollows were split down about one and a half inches along the shoulder to allow the leather to be turned in.

The grain side of the skin was moistened with a sponge. The flesh side was pasted without dampening to make the paste key better. For a few moments the paste was allowed to penetrate. To protect the headbands from bleeding leather dye, Brockman suggested that a piece of Saran wrap be tucked down the hollow and taped to the cap.

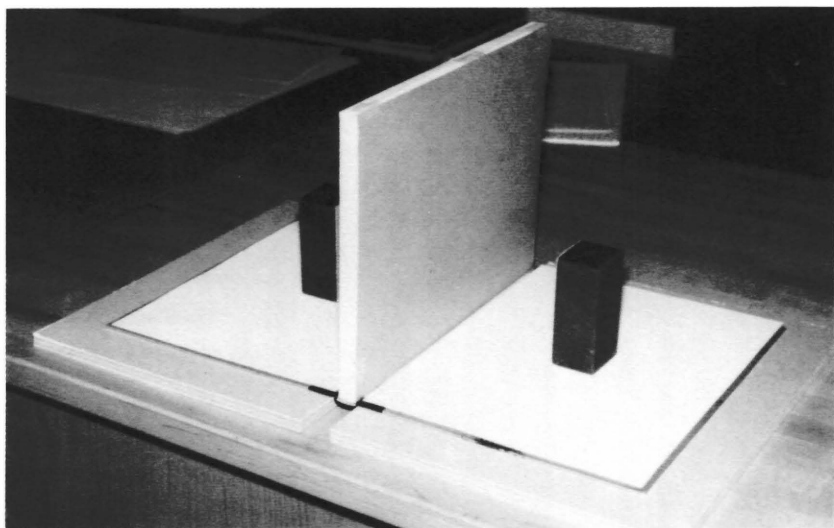
The edges of the skin were repasted, and the book was placed on the skin, centering the spine first. Sculptural areas and other design features were positioned exactly and rubbed down. The turn-in leather was cut to make mitred corners. Using the small paring knife, a tiny scoop was cut to reduce the leather next to the corner of the board. Next, the head and tail turn-ins were tucked over the boards and into the hollow. The corners were re-pasted and, scoops first, turned in.

At this point the leather was rubbed down firmly through paper on the spine, and on the edges and faces of the boards. Sculptured areas were checked again to be certain of adhesion. Then, the boards were opened and the joints were set. To set the joints, a backing board was pushed up against the hinge, and the board was pushed against it while checking that the board was square to the text.

The cap was formed with the fingers and a bone folder. Then, the cap was set using thread with the bone folder to make the corners of the cap. The book was given a final check to be sure that it was square on all edges. After another rub down, each book was left to dry in a silicone release paper, blotter, and board sandwich under a light weight. Silicone release paper was not the ideal material for this operation. It stuck to some of the calf bindings.

Brockman commented that the surface of French leather is less porous than English leather. For this reason, it may take several weeks as opposed to a few days to dry completely. Our books were opened carefully the next day after dampening the joint.

The next step was to “pull” the boards inward. The turn-ins of the covering material were trimmed out squarely and the boards were lined with paper. The books were left to dry overnight with the boards open and supported by pressing boards to compensate for the thickness of the spine. A small weight was placed in the center of each board, and the textblock was left standing with the fore edge up. Most textblocks stood without support; when necessary, a piece of card resting on the weight was used to prop up the textblock. To make the boards draw more, the paper used to fill in the boards can be soaked with water before it is pasted to the boards.



8. Pulling the boards. Photo by Karen Pavelka.

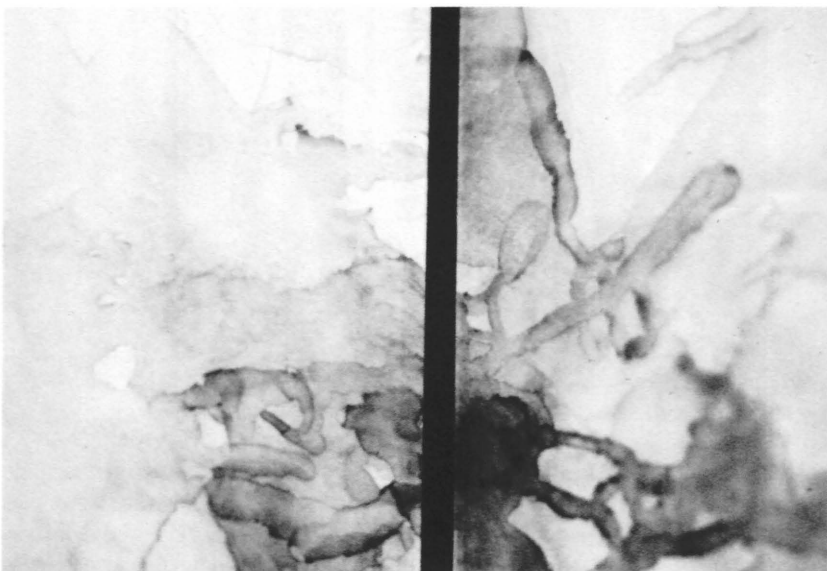
Before attaching the leather hinge the bits of card were removed from the spine edges of the boards, and these edges were made smooth. The waste sheet was torn away from the endpapers, and the hinge was pared to make a mitred corner. When the hinge leather was the same as the turn-in leather, a feathered edge was used to make the overlap virtually invisible. Next, the leather hinge was attached with a 50-50 mixture of paste and PVA.

Brockman noted that this step was often done poorly with the result that the book did not open properly. In a good modern design binding, he feels, the textblock should not be pulled by the opening of the boards. When the book is

resting on a table, the board should open to rest easily on the table. His trick is to close the book onto the joint. Timing is all important.

The hinge should be “stuck—but *just* stuck”. To test the adhesion, start to close the book onto the hinge; if the hinge starts to come up it’s still too early. If you wait too long to close the book, the outside joints sink in. The remedy for sunken joints is dampening the outside leather, inserting a card inside the board and letting the joint dry under a light weight. After this step the books were left to dry standing slightly open on the bottom edges of their boards. The textblock was supported by a piece of card equal to the thickness of the squares.

Many different techniques were used to embellish the bindings produced in the class. We started by dyeing the covering leather or calfskin (before covering). Brockman used an ethanol based dye in the decoration of each of the bindings he brought with him. On *The Illiad*, the dye is splattered on the underside of transparent vellum used on the covers and *doublures*. For *Poems* the dye is splattered on small lozenges of calfskin. Brockman airbrushed the dye over the whole calfskin for *The Glory of Life*. This dye was so popular that it was used on six of the seventeen bindings produced during the Institute.⁶

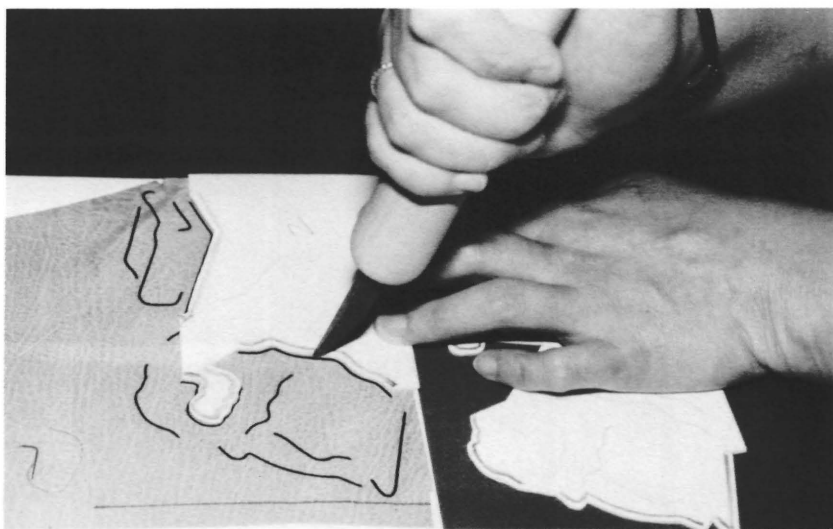


9. The vellum doublures decorated with “spirit dyes” for *The Illiad*, a binding by James Brockman. Photo by Paula Gourley.

⁶The “spirit dyes” are manufactured by Brodie and Middleton Ltd., 68 Drury Lane, London WC2 B5SP. They are aniline dyes, soluble in Ethanol. They are available in 25gms, 1/2 kilo, and 1 kilo packets. It takes only a few grains of the dye to produce a deep color.

Priscilla Spitler used parchment size as a resist on fair calf. She then scratched a design through the size and applied the dye with a sponge. This resulted in a feathery effect which worked well for the onlays on her binding of *The Eagle, the Jaguar, and the Serpent*. Paula Gourley expanded *pochoir* technique using cotton swabs with stencils to apply the dye on calfskin onlays for the covers, and the calfskin *doublures* for *Cawdor*?⁷

Brockman demonstrated a linear onlay technique. A blind line is tooled into the leather and then a slender strip of leather is laid into the impression. Martha Little used this technique to create optical and spatial effects on her binding of *Projective Ornament*. Brockman showed how four-ply card templates can be used to create curves. Instead of using various gauges, an "Ascona tool" or a pallet of the desired thickness can be guided along the edges of the template. Several of us used this technique.

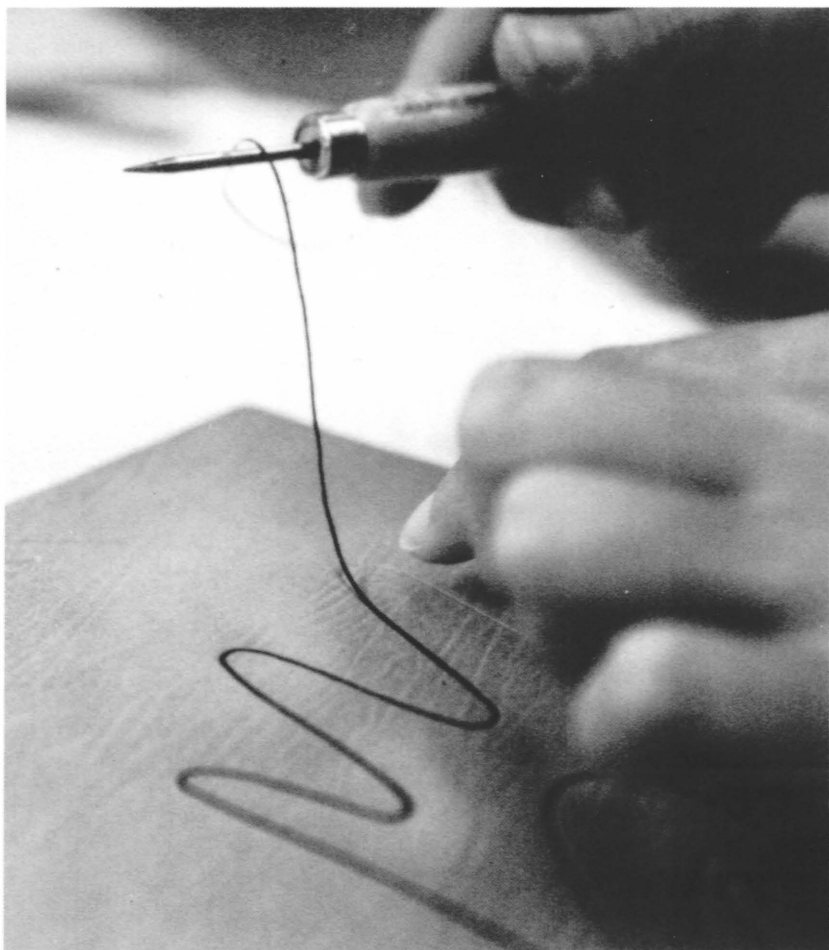


10a. The "Ascona tool" and templates. Photo by Karen Pavelka.

Brockman blinds in the design before tooling with gold leaf. Using a technical pen filled with Roger Powell's B.S. glaire, he glaires in the blind tooling. When the glaire has dried he grazes his hair with the hot tool ("for grease"), picks up the gold leaf with the tool, and sets the gold into the blind impression.

When Brockman had completed his bindings he gave the goat skin areas a very light coat of "Renaissance Wax." For calfskin he used parchment size to

⁷Paula Gourley showed me the kozo plants growing wild just two blocks away from HRHRC. Alabama kozo was identified for her by Richard Flavin when he visited the Tuscaloosa campus.



10b. Priscilla Spitler applies a slim strip of leather for an onlay on her binding of *The Eagle, the Jaguar, and the Serpent*. Photo by Paula Gourley.

seal the surface of the skin and lessen the chance of the calf being marked. This is his usual practice in England.

When all of the books were finished, we held a critique. Brockman made the compliment that our personalities showed in our work. He had been a little worried that he might be too pushy, or we might just opt to imitate his style. We talked about the importance of “ego” in the career of a fine binder. Brockman also stressed that collectors grow tired of repetitious designs and it is good to explore and develop new areas of design.

The books were placed on display in the exhibit area near the Conservation department. Other cases held works of modern design binders from the HRHRC collection of fine bindings. Our work did not look out of place. We had succeeded in our goal of making bindings which merited more than a passing glance; the viewers looked, looked again and discovered more.

After a review session augmented by excellent slides taken by Paula Gourley, the second binding proceeded at a faster pace. Some variation was allowed in the structure of this second book. Bob Inge sewed *Fifteen Roses* on five double cords rather than on tapes. Don Sanders used a mosaic approach to attach the covering leather on *The Whole Art of Bookbinding*. The opportunity to bind a second book immediately after the first increased self confidence, and gave participants the courage to take more risks on the second book.

The Institute did not adhere to a strict schedule, sometimes we worked long after five, and often on weekends. Should a problem arise, Brockman's lunch was delayed. The primary concern was development of skills. We made time for many demonstrations.

Brockman showed off the skills he perfected as a finisher by gold tooling an "extra" spine. In thirty minutes he laid on the gold leaf, tooled in the complex traditional design (which covered the entire spine), lettered the label, and cleaned off the excess gold. The workshop was equipped with only three hand pallets, and the title of the book was long enough that he had to set the type for two of the lines during that half hour. One of the authors of the book was present and Brockman kidded him about the title.⁸

Brockman has used a distinctive set of finishing tools on many of his bindings. He explained how he designed this set of six tools, made up of six irregularly curving lines. Three tools start and finish in a parallel line. Two tools make a right angle turn. The last tool creates a U-turn, "in case you end up in a tight corner." He demonstrated the process for heating the brass sheets, bending them into the desired shape, silver soldering them to a shank, and polishing the face of the tool. He saves old broomsticks which he cuts down to use as handles for the tools.

Brockman showed split board construction, and how to cover a book in full vellum, adhering only some portions of the skin first, and putting down the remaining portions later. He drew up instructional sheets on head banding, *doublures* and plans for a single letter as well as chase typeholders.

The group took a one day excursion to Southern Methodist University in Dallas to view the Bridwell Library collection of fine bindings. The participants enjoyed the opportunity to see and critique the work of other design binders.

⁸The title of the book is: *A Dictionary of Bookbinding and Conservation Terminology*, by Matt T. Roberts and Don Etherington.



11a. James Brockman titling the "extra" spine. Photo by Paula Gourley.

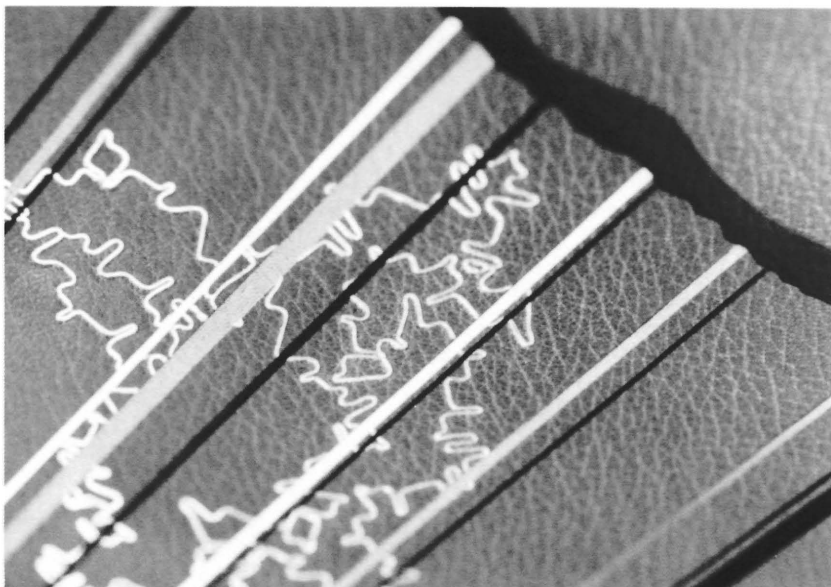
We discussed how much to charge for a fine binding, what kind of insurance to carry, and home studios as opposed to those separate from the home. We talked about ways to establish a reputation as a fine binder.



11. The finished "extra" spine. Photo by Paula Gourley.



12a. James Brockman's finishing tools. Photo by Paula Gourley.



12b. A detail of the design for *Crow* showing the irregular lines created by Brockman's tools. Photo by Paula Gourley.

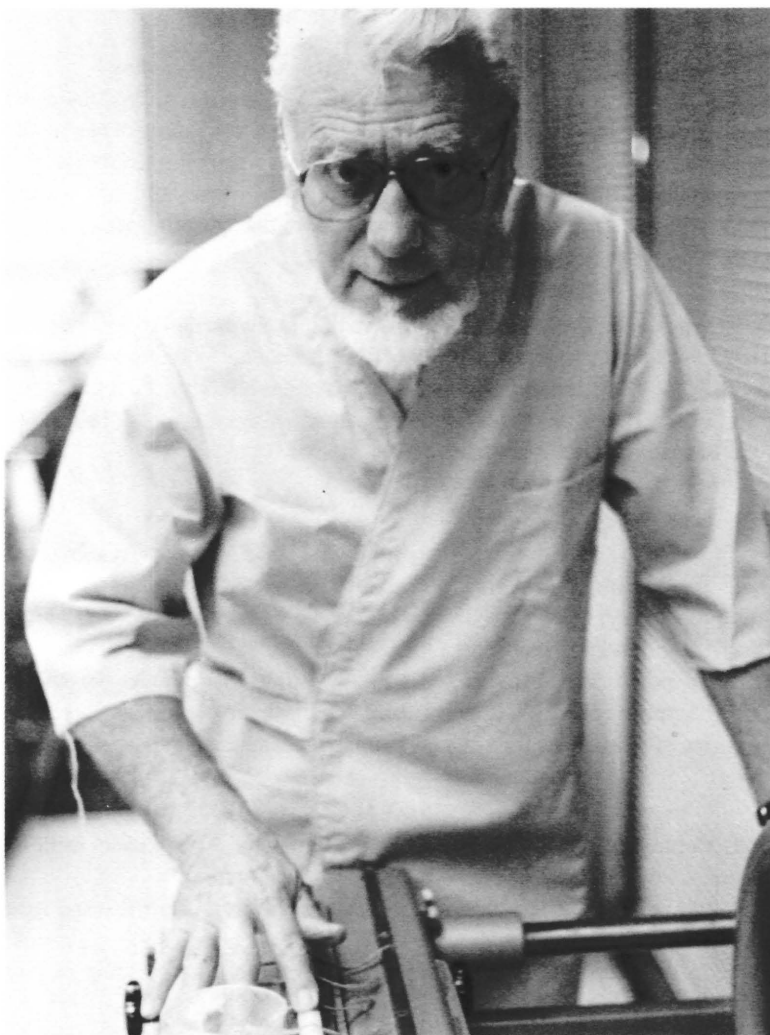
Brockman suggested that we approach fine printers with the idea of doing special bindings for limited editions. He urged us to exhibit whenever possible, and to join Designer Bookbinders though we, as Americans, would not be allowed to enter bindings in their exhibits.

At the outset, all the participants anticipated the opportunity to bind books for two uninterrupted months. The student to teacher ratio promised the benefit of close supervision and enhancement of skills. Our expectations were greatly exceeded by the quality of Brockman's instruction. He is a master of old techniques, an inventor of new techniques, and a willing teacher. Brockman's skill, the HRHRC's facilities and the members of the Institute themselves created an exceptional situation for learning the art of fine binding.

After studying with Hugo Peller in Switzerland with a Kress grant, Mary Baughman has returned to the Book Conservation Department at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center. She has participated in OxBow and the first Institute of Fine Binding and Book Conservation at HRHRC. In addition she continues writing and publishing articles about bookbinding.

INTERVIEW WITH HUGO PELLER / *Marie Trottier**

Last June 19th, Mr. Hugo Peller, Swiss bookbinder of international reputation, was invited to Montreal for a conference at the National Library and a two-day demonstration workshop on the technique of gilding and marbling of edges. His



Hugo Peller at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, June 1987. Photo by Mary Baughman.

*This article was published October 1986 in le Journal de L'Association Des Relieurs Du Québec.

visit here concluded a long series of demonstrations in the U.S.A. Born in Soleure in 1917, Mr. Peller is married, the father of three and grandfather of eight. It is with a renewed passion, energy and curiosity that Hugo Peller has practiced his profession over a period of fifty years. In his words "It is a noble art that keeps the practitioner forever young." We met with him on the eve of his departure for Switzerland.

MT: Mr. Peller, what were your first contacts with bookbinding?

HP: I started bookbinding in 1934 when I was seventeen. My father was a commercial bookbinder. By observation, I felt that something better could be done. I read very much and I thought that the heart of a book, the interior, needed a covering, something to give it nobility from which we could imagine a history of the book. My brother also did binding. Unfortunately, at this time, one could not study the craft in Switzerland.

MT: Was there not a school for bookbinding in Switzerland?

HP: Yes, there certainly was a school but it was not good enough for me. It was not what I was looking for. I had seen French bindings, German bindings, Italian, English . . . the French bindings attracted me the most. The only way for me to really study the art was to go to France.

MT: Why French binding?

HP: One has only to touch a French binding, to close your eyes and there is music. The technique is perfect and the effect is pleasing. I consider German binding too heavy; the boards are too thick and do not allow for delicate work. As for Italian binding, it appears that since the flooding of Florence the Italians have been more oriented towards restoration than to binding. As we saw at the last Paul Bonner competition at Ascona, Italian bindings were not represented. Also, more sophisticated commercial binding is evident, to the detriment of hand binding.

MT: Between 1934 and 1938 you were an apprentice bookbinder with a year of study at Strasbourg, could you tell us about your studies?

HP: I think it was at Strasbourg that I learned the art. After the war I returned to France to continue my studies in Paris at the Estienne School of Professor J. Jeanne. It was here that I learned, in particular, the art of gilding as well as commercial binding.

MT: What was the atmosphere in France at this period?

HP: In 1945 life was very difficult, the people lacked everything. As for bookbinders, they worked in isolation in their shops and it was difficult, if not

impossible, to make contact with a master binder. In Paris, when you seek one you need a lot of tenacity as it is difficult to penetrate their circles to know their secrets. As much as one admires the work of the great masters one does not know how they work. I'll tell you a story: at this time I was fascinated by the bindings of a certain Plummel; I found his work unique, in effect fantastic and I said to myself . . . I absolutely must see how this Plummel works . . . One day I discovered his address and I went there. I rang at his door with a package of coffee under my arm. I should tell you that, at this time in Paris, it was almost impossible to obtain coffee. I was receiving a package each month from Switzerland of rice, cheese and coffee. So I rang and waited . . . Mme Plummel answered. I explained that I was an Estienne student, that I had seen many of her husband's bindings, that I found his work fantastic and I wanted to meet him. She began to tell me that he was not there. I offered her the package of coffee . . . the door opened wider and she presented her husband. From this moment on I had access to his workshop and saw everything, how he worked, his tools, his technique, his little tricks. It was incredible to see how the master worked. I visited Plummel many times and learned a great deal. I think that lectures are good but they do not allow one to master technique. Theory should come second. Today there are too many books on the theory of bookbinding; it is not good to start by reading these books without seeing how things are done in practice.

MT: Is that why you consider demonstrations important?

HP: In effect I think it is the best way to learn the craft. After, one should read a lot. This is the reason why I do so much travelling, to give demonstrations and pass on my science and work techniques to young binders who really want to learn.

MT: What did you do when your studies in France were finished?

HP: I was determined to make a living as a bookbinder. I was very poor. I returned to Switzerland and started to look for clients; I went to bibliophile societies, to exhibitions . . . to groups where there would be serious clients who appreciated a well bound book and were looking for a binder. I had to prove myself.

MT: Was it easy to find work?

HP: I have to say that everything I have today was earned through my trade but it was difficult to earn a living as a bookbinder. I had the chance to work for an editor of books for bibliophiles. He edited books for the best authors, one of whom was Herman Hesse. I bound more than five hundred books for Hesse, by hand. We determined the prices together, full leather: 200 Swiss francs, half leather: 100 Swiss francs, in paper: 50 Swiss francs. We had many orders. It was

an enormous amount of work for me but it gave me the opportunity to perfect my technique and I learned how to work fast and well. From here on I started to get good clients and to do unique bindings.

MT: What does a good client mean to you?

HP: It is a bibliophile who looks for a good book and then a good bookbinder. I have clients with whom I have complete liberty to do the binding. This freedom allows me to be very creative. I am constantly looking for new ideas in the composition of design as well as experimental techniques.

MT: Is bookbinding really important in Switzerland?

HP: Bookbinding is not considered essential in Switzerland. However, if you want to practice the profession it is possible to find clients because there are many lovers of fine books there. You can make a good living as long as you work with style and a good technique otherwise you will lose your clients. The bibliophiles will only pay well if the work is well done.

MT: What can we do to make bookbinding more appreciated?

HP: We have to exhibit. I was often told that it was not worth my effort to do hand binding, that it is too expensive and would never sell; well I'll tell you of the experience that I had, three times. The first time was an exhibition in Germany at the Stanberg Gallery. I showed twenty books in full leather, half leather, in parchment and bindings in half leather and paper and I sold them all. Then I looked for books and did a second exhibition in Stockholm, Sweden. I showed fifteen books and sold them all. I did a third exhibition in Denmark where I again showed fifteen books and sold them all. So I say to you . . . When you do fifteen books, well bound, you have clients. You see, it is important to show what you can do.

MT: What, in your opinion, is a good bookbinder?

HP: Above all it is one with a very good technique, who knows how to sew, cuts leather well, who can style and produce a design not too badly; above all someone who finds pleasure in the profession which, to me, is the greatest in the world.

MT: Why do you say that?

HP: Because it is a profession that keeps you young, always up to date, waiting for new ideas, new discoveries and new materials. Materials come in so many forms of paper, board, wood, parchment, leather, boxes, covers, etc.

MT: How long then does it take to become a good bookbinder?

HP: It takes years, at least five to six years of study and hard work to start with.

MT: In 1955, you became a member of the 'Master Bookbinders' where for ten years you were second president. What is the 'Master Bookbinders'?

HP: It is a German society in which, to be admitted, you present 4 books to a jury. During my mandate as second president we organized workshops in Europe . . . Paris, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Soleure. We founded symposiums, started demonstrations to perfect our joint discoveries. We had binders from all countries not only members of the society. These were marvelous occasions to share our acquired knowledge, to become aware of new tools and techniques that were not widely known. The society is now concentrating on exhibitions but I hope the symposiums will come back.

MT: Did you organize other symposiums after that?

HP: In 1974, I organized and produced an international symposium in Soleure. Bookbinders came from all corners of the world including Donald Etherington who, in my opinion, is one of the best in the United States. He is presently Director of Conservation at Austin.* At Soleure we formed groups, they worked together and gave demonstrations . . . it was very encouraging. A symposium can be held any place, as long as the binders accept the sharing of their discoveries, their ideas, their work.

MT: In your curriculum you mention an exhibition in Sao Paulo in 1972. Are there good bookbinders in Latin America? Do they have a school there?

HP: Yes, there are good binders but they have problems, they are looking for technique. This is a craft that came from tradition that you do not have in Latin America, nor in North America. These are young countries that did not have the royalty and aristocracy who gave most of the work to the bookbinders. Also, the clientele who can appreciate and command good binding is small. Here we still ask what good binding is but in Europe the question does not arise, bookbinding is an integral part of European culture. On the other hand, we have been assisting in the formation of bookbinder associations to promote this noble profession: Dallas, Austin, Boston, and here L'ARQ.**

MT: M. Peller, do you have a binding that you are especially fond of?

HP: There is a work that I like very much: it is a series of eighteen illustrated books, titled 'La Ville'*** I did a design of asymmetrical lines across the spines and covers of the eighteen books. I like design on the spines because, for me, the spine is the face of the book.

*at HRHRC: Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas at Austin

**L'ARQ: L'Association Des Relieurs Du Québec.

Trans: Bookbinders Association of Quebec.

***'La Ville' trans: 'The City'

MT: Tell me about design.

HP: In binding a book the design is the biggest problem. Sometimes it takes me ten minutes to find a design but at times it can take a year. Technique is not a problem but design is different. To begin, I cannot design unless I am inspired, satisfied with my idea and I have to be in the right mood. With me the design begins with a thought, once the idea is fixed in my head I can start it. I have always drawn since I was a child. I like colours, I like form. Once my idea is fixed I decide on the material and the tools I will need.

MT: Do you have any preference in design?

HP: I like everything, everything interests me. Technique changes with the size of the book. I'll design anything that will enhance the value of the book to be bound.

MT: Do you always do a design?

HP: Yes, I did a design for each of the five hundred books for Hermann Hesse. It is important that the bookbinder has the freedom to conceive and produce a design for the books presented to him.

MT: Is there a painter who inspired you through your career?

HP: I like all of the painters but in particular, Hans Erni, with whom I did a lot of research, especially on the technique of gilding with edge design. In 1975, I participated in the Hans Erni exhibition at the Royal Library in Stockholm. Sometimes Mr. Erni does the design and I do the binding.

MT: Is the titling of a book important to you?

HP: When you are looking through a library and you cannot see the title you risk not seeing the book. To me it is very important to be able to identify a book as I reach for it on the shelf. I cannot think of a single book that I did not title. I always find a way to do the title.

MT: So the title can be anywhere?

HP: No, it must always be on the spine. If the book is very thin it can be on the box.

MT: What do you think of livres-objets?

HP: I like to look at them but I cannot make 'livres-objets'. I know full well it is a new idea and I like new ideas but, to me, a binding is a binding and an object is an object. Perhaps it is dangerous, this modern tendency to forget that the book is the point of departure and the binding is the non-object.

MT: Does it ever happen that you refuse to bind certain books?

HP: I sometimes have had to. It happens with books of inferior value belonging

to the nouveaux riche, the uncultured. They wanted to put a very expensive binding on a book of poor quality, that is to say a book of inferior paper. All these people want is to be able to show that they can have books bound by a master without, however, being able to evaluate or appreciate the work themselves.

MT: And if the subject or author of a book does not interest you can you bind it regardless?

HP: As long as the edition is good, with quality paper, good typography, I will bind it. The style will be simple but good and the technique will be perfect.

MT: Describe for us a day in your workshop.

HP: I have breakfast and then take a little walk in the forest. It is important to be with nature, it allows me to gather my thoughts and to put my head in order; it is also a source of inspiration for design. Then I go to my shop and I may stay there until one in the morning if I have an unfinished job. In any event, I cannot sleep on unfinished work. When the weather is fine I may take my pack and spend a day in the mountains. I have a small cabin in the Juras and I sometimes spend a day there with a friend. The mountains appease me, they have a calming influence. In 1959, I went to the Himalayas. It was one of the greatest things in my life because mountains are so important to me.

MT: Could you tell us of other important moments in your life?

HP: The day I chose between binding one hundred books an hour by machine and binding entirely by hand. I never regretted my choice. There is also my visit to Canada.

MT: What advice can a bookbinder with fifty years experience to his credit give to a young binder?

HP: Make a lot of mistakes because it is the only way to learn the craft . . . know how to go slowly.

MT: Have you considered writing a book on bookbinding?

HP: The profession is in a constant state of research and discovery. I still cannot write a book on bookbinding, at this time, because I cannot say what I will discover tomorrow.

MT: M. Peller, thank you for this interview and bon voyage home.

Marie Trottier resides in Canada, has been working as a bookbinder for nine years. She exhibited in the first biennial of bookbinding in Québec at the Musée d'Art de Saint-Laurent. She is the editor for the *Journal de l'association des Relieurs du Québec*.

SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT WHAT *SHOULD* AND *SHOULD NOT* BE
INFLICTED ON A BOOK IN THE WAY OF DESIGN AND
DECORATION / *Silvia Rennie*

Again and again one comes across laws being laid down by various people about what a binding *MUST* and *MUST NOT* do, about what *IS* and *IS NOT* permissible or tolerable on a book cover. I look at what I do to books I am given to bind, and I realize that much of it goes against some of these views. And still I go on binding as before, and still I am given books to bind. So perhaps what I do is not indisputably reprehensible.

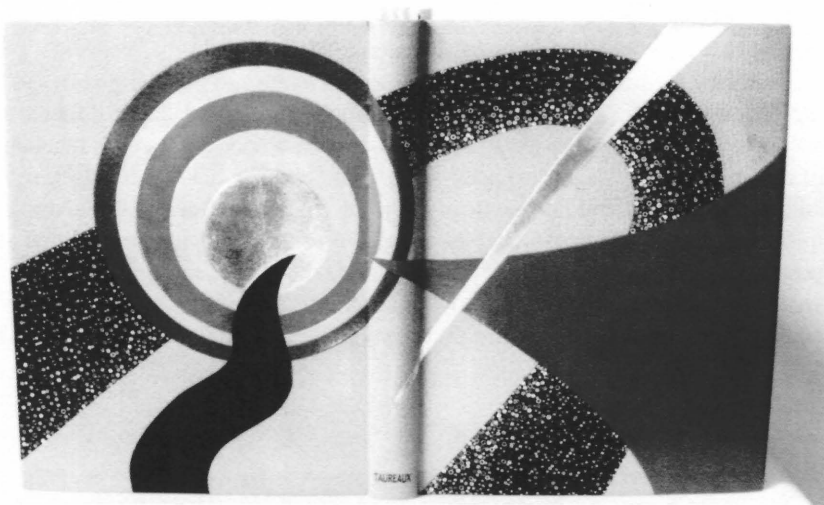
Here are some of the tenets put forth. The binding should protect. Fine. The binding should invite the reader *INTO* the book. Fine also. Then the view becomes more peremptory. The binding should be *SUBSERVIENT* to the general look and spirit of the book. I begin to have difficulties. It should not *DISTRACT* from the contents of the book. That seems a very subjective thing for me. The binding should not *IMPOSE*, or the *BINDER* should not impose his own personality or taste on the book. At this point I wish I were somewhere else. On the other hand, let me explain a different point of view.

I certainly agree that it is a pleasure to see in the decoration something that comes from, and leads back to, the book. I always do something that relates to some aspect of the book. I have seen many highly admired and praised designs that have left me quite cold because I can't begin to feel a connection to the book. The question is very subjective. I have heard musicians say that instinctively certain keys (tonalities) bring particular colors before their eyes. So if a golden painting would seem perfect to illustrate, or accompany, say, Stravinsky's *Firebird* for one person, the next might find gold jarring and wish it had been done in green or blues.

I bound a book about bullfighting in the only colors I could possibly have brought myself to use—ochre for the sand, black for the bull, red for the maddening cloth and the painful blood. But the book was illustrated by Jean Cocteau in stick-like little dashes of the pen, sometimes in pale greens and blues. I had great difficulty coming up with a design because what I felt clashed hopelessly with the illustrations.

Finally I called my client and told him about my predicament. He said, "If you hate the book, don't do it." I said I didn't so much hate it as have strong feelings about it which made it impossible for me to do a design in any way in keeping with the wretchedly "sacred" contents of the book. He said that was fine with him, that I should do what *I* wanted. So I went ahead and proceeded to enjoy myself enormously doing what, as far as I am concerned, was the most "felt" design I have ever done. Later when the book was on exhibition at the Bibliophile Congress in San Francisco a woman came up to me and said, "Oh,

that design is so *PERFECT* for that book!" My client declared himself "ecstatic" when he received the book. Was it right or wrong for me to do what I did? For me, for the woman in San Francisco and the gentleman in Cleveland who owns the book, it was right. No doubt a number of people would disagree strongly.



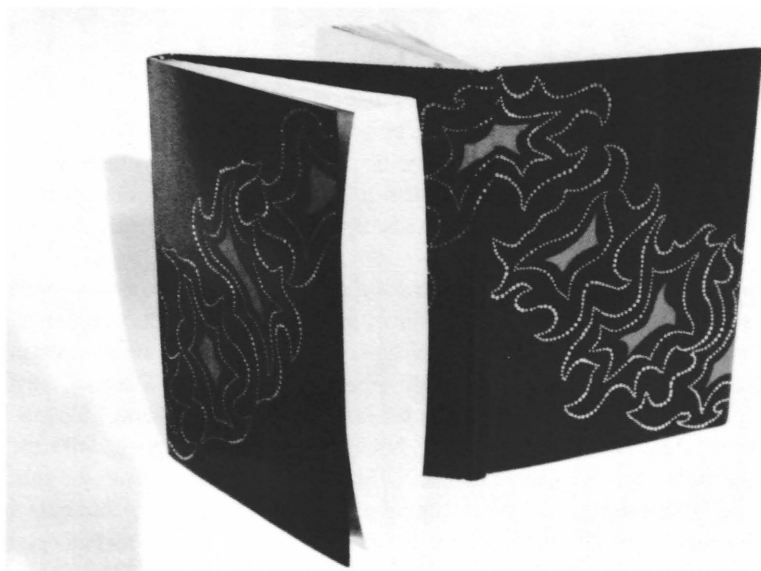
Binding of *Taureaux* by Jean-Marie Magman, illustrated by Jean Cocteau.

I think that by now I have put together a body of work from which an interested collector can form an idea of what I tend to do. Therefore, when a person comes to me I feel free to assume that he wants something other than a squared, centered and symmetrical design, or one that consists of a few discreetly placed lines and dots.

Another example, and problem, was a dos-à-dos binding I was commissioned to do of *Salome* by Oscar Wilde. One volume, in the original French, was printed in a peculiar, maybe "Art Deco" sort of type, and illustrated by André Derain in pastel colors on black paper. The other volume was printed in a normal serif type and illustrated in black and white by the easily recognizable Aubrey Beardsley. How on earth was I going to do a binding that was in keeping with the contents of these books? I really agonized. The only thing I knew from the start was that I'd bind it in black, the one thing that the two books had in common. I started designing and doodling and erasing and wondering. To cut a prolonged story short, I gradually put Derain and Beardsley out of my mind. I decided to use the seven veil theme and organize the veils in such a way that whichever way

the books were opened you would always see seven veils, a trick in itself. Three veils on one cover and four on another would have come to totals of six and eight. Half veils had to be drawn and made to match up with each other precisely from cover to cover. As difficult as it was, this was simpler than doing all the elaborate moon designs I had started out with. The moon is used repeatedly to highlight the atmosphere in Oscar Wilde's play. It is silvery cold, black and ominous, blood red and would lend itself admirably to a continuous "mix and match" set of designs, but then I remembered the prearranged price for the binding and quickly abandoned all this time consuming elaboration.

Beardsley used lots of dots and tiny flowers. Derain had billowing veils. So I did billowing veils entirely with gold-tooled dots, and since I find it difficult to stay completely away from color, and I think red on black is very smart, I thought of making the veils "blood stained" because of Salomé's final bloody deed with an irregular red shape in the middle of each veil. To me, the veils relate the design to the contents of the books, and the execution of the design clashes as little as possible with the two styles of illustration inside the books, so I think the design was right. There could have been loud criticism from the advocates of restrained and self-effacing book decoration. Who would be more right or wrong? I can't say.



Dos-à-dos binding of Oscar Wilde's *Salome*.

I will go one step further. It seems to me that if a collector went, say, to Tini Miura or Michael Wilcox, he would have every right to feel cheated if he got a quiet, restrained binding. Why? Because here are two outstanding designers with outstanding personalities of their own which they couldn't possibly subjugate to anybody else's ideas. They are strong individual artists in their own right and the collector who seeks them out does so because he wants a work of art from them personally, not just discreet protection for his book. So once a binder is considered a design binder and is sought out as such, there is one more tenet for him to obey. "To thine own self be true." That's what his client is paying him, rather than the next binder, for. I know this quotation is not from the bible, but surely, at any rate in bookish circles, Shakespeare comes close!

Silvia Rennie, design bookbinder, resides in Madison, Wisconsin. She was trained principally by the Swiss binder, Hugo Peller, at the Ascona School and privately in his home in Solothurn. Her bindings are exhibited widely and they are in private and institution fine binding collections in the United States and abroad. She regularly lectures and teaches design binding.

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