



GBW 2024 AWARDS

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Laura S. Young Award 2024

Jeff Altepeter

BRIEN BEIDLER

I'm delighted to be writing the Laura S. Young Award announcement for Jeff Altepeter. On top of his merit as a binder and his dedication to bookbinding education in general, after two decades Jeff continues to embody the qualities represented by this award—sustained service to the Guild and its members—though he'd be the last one who'd want to talk about it. Rather, like a well-cooked wheat starch paste, Jeff Altepeter is an almost invisible but pervasive binding agent whose presence helps strengthen our community, and whose positive influence will hold for years to come.

When scouring the internet for information about Jeff's career, almost any bio you find is modest, almost dismissive. Here's one from the North Bennet Street School's (NBSS) webpage: *Jeff is the head of the Bookbinding Department, a 2003 graduate of the American Academy of Bookbinding, and a graduate of the program. After graduating, Jeff worked at Harcourt Bindery and Harvard University's Tozzer Library. He is a past Chair of the New England Chapter of the Guild Book Workers and has mentored many NBSS graduates as they serve in GBW leadership positions. Jeff operates a bindery in Somerville, MA, and he specializes in traditional leather bindings, metalworking for bookbinding, and bookbinding exhibits.*

While this does highlight the major facts of Jeff's career, it fails to capture what he's meant to so many of us. I'll attempt to provide an example through the context of my own experience interacting with him.

I first met Jeff while attending the Paper and Book Intensive in 2013. At that time, I was early in my journey as a bookbinder and awed to learn that Jeff (who was teaching a class that year) was the head of the Bookbinding Department at NBSS, one of the only traditional hand bookbinding programs in the country. However, having no formal training myself I was desperate for any information, and I decided to chance approaching Jeff. Though originally intimidated by his title and experience in the book world, I was quickly put at ease. In his characteristically laid-back way, he answered my rapid-fire questions about leather working despite the fact that I wasn't in his workshop, and he hadn't even finished his breakfast. I was deeply touched by the fact that Jeff was willing to share his time and hard-earned knowledge with someone who he had no obligation to whatsoever. Not only did this interaction benefit me from a practical standpoint, but his open generosity set an example for the type of community I wanted to be a part of. Though Jeff could have easily been a gatekeeper of bookbinding expertise, he had clearly ripped the gate off its hinges some years ago.

Several years later I joined the GBW Board as Vice President, and while in that capacity I was really able to see how engaged Jeff is with the Guild of Book Workers. Even after his decade-long tenure as the New England Chapter Chair (2002–2012), Jeff continues to invest his skills and passion for mentorship by helping organize initiatives like the Mentor-Protégé events at Standards, fostering a sense of belonging through his work on the GBW Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, and opening the doors and resources of NBSS to the broader Guild community by facilitating workshops, exhibitions, and other book-related events. On top of all this, he even chaired the local host committee for this year's Standards in Providence. And, judging by the number of North Bennet Street School students and alumni that become long-term active, generous, and influential members of the Guild themselves, Jeff is an outstanding and effective ambassador for the organization.

I, like so many other members of the Guild of Book Workers, am profoundly grateful to Jeff for his generous service and approachability. While the Guild would still exist without it, our community definitely wouldn't be the same. Thank you Jeff!

ERIN FLETCHER

Jeff is so deserving of this award because he so generously offers his support and time to the Guild and fellow members. He does not seek affirmations for his work, he simply strives to see the strength of the Guild community flourish.

My own experiences within the Guild would not have happened if not for the encouragement I received at the end of my second year at NBSS from Jeff. He saw the potential in my ability to lead and organize and suggested that I take on the Program Chair position for the New England Chapter. I held this position for 4 years before becoming the Chapter Chair, which I held for 5 years. I'm currently serving on both the Exhibitions and DEI Committee. Nominating Jeff for this award is my way of thanking him for that nudge to become more involved with the Guild—for the Guild has gifted me a beautiful community that has supported my career in numerous ways, and I give back by volunteering whenever possible.

SAM FEINSTEIN

While he's quick to downplay his own impact, there's no denying the amount of work Jeff has done for the Guild. Directly, in his capacity as the New England Chapter Chair, setting up lectures and workshops, contributing to Guild exhibitions, and helping with Standards when it was in Boston. Indirectly, by training the next generations of Guild members and instilling in them the importance of the Guild to our fields, urging them to take positions within the Guild to run it, and in general being

an incredible influence on so many people working within the field and in the Guild. There's really no question that he deserves this award.

GABBY COOKSEY

[Jeff] knew I wanted to make it as a design bookbinder/book artist and never dashed my hopes. Sure, he jested with me, but it was all love. He has helped SO many bookbinders in their craft. He will answer any question, he will help you figure it out and gently nudge you that maybe you should do more conservation work while at Bennet. I still count on him as one of my

teachers even if I have been out of school for 10 years. I visit Bennet every time I go back to Boston to visit family because Jeff is there and he has created such a wonderful space to be in. He encourages all of us to go to Standards to meet other binders and listen to the presentations. Through his encouragement, I went to Standards in D.C. (2013) to talk to Don Glaister about being his apprentice, and all is history after that. Jeff is one of the best people and teachers I know. He deserves this award for all the bookbinders he has helped along the way. Thank you!



Jeff Altepeter, *Laura S. Young Award 2024* winner.
Which one is the real Jeff??

