

FINISHING WITHOUT FINISHING TOOLS
Friday Night Forum
GBW Standards of Excellence Seminar
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"Bone folder and String Finishing"

Books bound in leather, either wholly or partially, tend to have a dull and unfinished appearance if they lack the board lines, spine lines, and final polish traditionally added by the Finisher. However even without proper finishing tools, their appearance can be easily improved with the addition of the basic lines and polish using a bone folder, a string, and a rub rag.

To add board lines:

1. With a clear plastic ruler and a bone folder, mark out a line or pattern, lightly, on the dry leather. A bone folder can be shaped specifically for this task, with the heel end sanded down to a thin (but not sharp) edge, with a flat profile.
2. Dampen the leather overall with a small sponge.
3. Again with the ruler in place, march the bone folder firmly down the line. step by step, to create a deep impression.
4. To darken the color in the impression, slide the bone folder back and forth in the impression. The friction of the sliding bone folder on the damp leather will provide enough heat to cause the darkening. To avoid darkening, wait until the leather is dry. To increase the darkening, re-dampen the leather and repeat the sliding action.
5. To burnish the impression, again slide - or skid - the bone folder along the impression to raise a shine once the leather is dry.

To add spine lines:

Follow the same steps as listed above using a piece of Mylar instead of a plastic ruler, and a string or heavy sewing thread (#10?) instead of a bone folder. The string is used in a "shoeshine" fashion, back and forth across the spine. Again, put in the line or pattern initially in the dry leather, then dampen the leather to darken and burnish the line.

To polish the surface:

Use a wool rag, or even the flat side of a bone folder. When the leather is dry, work in small circles, gradually increasing the pressure, to raise a shine. To avoid irregular and excessive darkening, do NOT dampen the leather.

Nothing replaces professional finishing with brass tools and a polishing iron, of course. But a few minutes with a bone folder, a string and a rub rag can give a remarkable approximation and greatly improve the appearance.

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