

50 years of creativity, experimentations, challenges, frustrations and pure joy. My life as a bookbinder.

During this presentation I will show pictures of my work: the challenges and frustrations but also the pure joy of experimenting and creating a design binding that reflects the content of the book.

Different techniques are used depending on the book and the budget of the owner.

Most of my bindings are done in the French technique of laced-in boards and sewn on stubs (montage sur onglets) for a better opening, and covered in leather with leather edge to edge leather doublures and leather, suede or paper fly leaves.

I also like to make flexible bindings, some with craquelé or embossed with an interesting pattern from fabric, place mat, wooden block...etc. This technique allows the book to open flat because the book is attached with the cover only on the spine.

Case bindings are also appropriate on some books and can be adorned with interesting design.

I also use the drop spine binding (a variation on the drum leaf binding) and cross-structure binding depending on the book and...my mood!

TISSUE PAPER

The use of tissue paper and magazine paper mounted on paper or suede and sanded carefully can be very attractive as onlays, inlays or for the cover of a flexible binding, separate boards structure or cross structure binding.

SANDED LEATHER, ALSO KNOWN AS LACUNOSE

Pieces of thin, different colors of leather overlapping each other on two or three layers, creased leather underneath, strips or different shape leather (I made one with all round shape of leather) glued on Japanese paper or similar, mounted on a mylar and pressed before applying the PVA wash. Let dry before sanding with a 220 sand paper or medium grit. You apply PVA wash after each sanding session. You can do three or four sessions until the piece is smooth and you like what you see. The best leather for this process is a leather that is dyed throughout. When choosing a leather you look on the reverse side for the color because that is the one that will show after sanding.

PEWTER

I have used pewter as a design element or as the covering material in two boards structure and for many photo albums where I had a leather spine. For many years I couldn't find thin pewter in the US. Pewter that you can crease in an elegant pattern. Since then, MercArt in Texas developed one that is a fraction heavier than the one in Paris but still malleable. You can also find at MercArt the pewter patina or blackener needed to give it a nice look. After blackening your pewter you polish it with Chromglanz or a silver polisher. You can also find at MercArt a paste to fill-in the embossed image on leather or pewter.

MINIATURE BOOKS

Miniature books are also fun to bind. Not that it's easier or quicker...you feel that you have very big fingers when working on miniature. It is a different scale and therefore a challenge.

MISTAKES

I don't think that you can spend 10 or 50 years doing bindings without making mistakes. Some are small that you repair right away or take the opportunity for design and some big that you remember for ever. And I made one nine years ago...

Friends of ours asked me to bind their book of poetry about "*La Lune*", The Moon. They had bought the book in Paris and all sort of things had happened with this book. They lost it and found it after a long time searching in a place that they had no idea how it could have been there and different other small things that I have forgotten. What I will never forget is what I did.

All my teaching life I told my students that the biggest mistake that a bookbinder can do is to mix the signatures. Well...

When the book was finished and they came to pick it up as we were looking at it, my friend was talking about one of the poems but couldn't remember the author, I said "let's look at the index"...
And I SCREAMED...the index had been sewn upside down...

They thought it was so funny and perfect with the history of this book!!!! They didn't want me to change it, really? Well, sorry friends, not with my signature in this book. They went back empty handed and I had to face my mistake.

I was devastated and didn't want to hear about it. When something like this happens, you NEVER panic. Just let it go, forget it for a couple of days and when you feel it's time, then you work on it.

So after three days I decided to cut the thread and pull the section. I was sure that the last page would stick to the spine lining but it came out clean without a tear as I carefully pulled it apart slowly. The top edge had been treated with graphite so I had to take off the graphite (that was on the bottom of the signature) carefully with a fine grit sandpaper not to take off too much as I had to sand the top part to apply graphite and didn't want the section to be too short.

When this was done I sewed the section and applied PVA on the spine of the section and very little on each side and push it in place with a thin sheet of metal (in the middle of the section) making sure that the sections were aligned, let it dry under weight and VOILÀ! it was done without anybody knowing it if I haven't told the story. It was nine years ago and I remember like it was yesterday.

We are human, not programmed machines. There's always a solution to a problem. It requires calm, patience and creativity.

TWO OR THREE BINDINGS ON THE SAME TITLE

If you do a binding on two or three of the same title you need to have a common denominator in the design like in Don's autobiography there are six elements to the three bindings because there are six specific periods that mark his life and career, London, Southampton, Florence, Washington, Austin and Greensboro. The design of one uses six pictures of his bindings from the specific period, the other one has six pieces of colored vellum and the last one has the cities stamped within a design of six different colored incisions, onlays and inlays.

SIGNING YOUR BINDING

One thing that is really important is to **SIGN** and specifically **DATE** your bindings. I realized the importance of it when I had my retrospective as I hadn't dated my bindings in the early years.

CHRISTMAS BOOKS

Something I have done each year for the last 35 and I encourage you to do it, is a miniature book as a Christmas ornament that you hang on the tree. In the book you write what you have done, where you were, the gifts you gave each other and received from family and friends. If you have a party you ask people to write their comments...
It brings back wonderful memories, things that you may have forgotten...

Some people asked me where I buy my leather. For the high quality goat skins I prefer Harmatan, Hewitt or Siegel, Relma and Julien when in Paris and while in Paris "La Trouvaille" 25 rue Lécuyer, Saint-Ouen, in the famous flea market is a treasure hunting place. They have the leftover leather of very high quality from the famous handbag of Dior, Balmain, Celine etc plus different kinds of unusual leather...

And I am always on the lookout and go in a store that shows leather in their window anywhere I find myself.

Creativity keeps you happy, sane, and healthy.

Happy bookbinding,

Monique Lallier

Standards of Excellence in Hand Bookbinding, 2022