

BOOK REVIEW

Title: Fine Bookbinding a technical guide

Author: Jen Lindsay

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Cost: £35

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The definition and clarity of the title is reflected throughout this work, the stated aim of which is to act as a guide 'through the sequence of operations in making a leather bound book'. A 'fine binding' includes edge gilding and leather doublures. Although not designed with the beginner in mind, he or she, is welcomed, but left in no doubt as to the mental and physical demands that the craft will command.

The book is laid out sequentially, from first concept to covered book (although 'finishing' is not included). Organisation and methodology are central to its purpose. Procedural steps are numbered sequentially at the margin and are easy to find. Each one being broken down into theory (black print) where explanation and justification is given and rhetorical questions answered. This is followed by the practice (red ink), where tools and materials indicated and closely worded instructions are given.

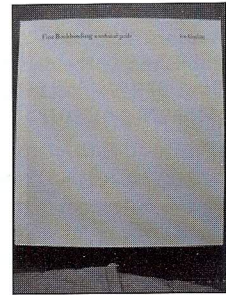
Most striking perhaps is the precision of both the work and of its writing style; it has an almost clinical feel, and carries the air of total conviction. There is no equivocation in Jen's treatment, for instance, of greyboard the staple of many, which to Jen is 'simply inadmissible' in this context. The whole is well laid out and enhanced by some very useful photographs of the writer at work, particularly so where they are in a closely connected sequence, such as covering.

The charm and vitality of bookbinding derives in large measure from the diversity of its practice – no two binders will approach the same task in quite the same way. Here we are given 'one way', not as the author might imply, 'the way'. The reader will not find here any 'wrinkles' or ways to get out of those horrible situations which all binders have at some stage found themselves in, but meticulous planning, preparation and execution.

The author has a wealth of experience, particularly as a tutor, and this is well displayed in this kind of 'high end' binding. The inter face between 'fine binding' and commercial binding is a critical one which is drawn into focus by this book. There will be many who, requiring to provide a living from the craft, may have the highest regard for the techniques displayed here, but simply not have the luxury of time to put them into practice. Pasteboard might well be a superior material for the boards in some circumstances, but who in practice could charge a client for the making time?

The book is designed to be a genuine 'bench resource' and in this it has a huge amount to commend it. The type size might on occasion be a little small for comfort, the red ink too light against the cream paper, and some photographs unduly dark and grainy, but these are relatively minor concerns, set against the value of the whole. The content is well arranged and easy to navigate and there is an innovative appendix on how to approach the appraisal of completed work which is consistent with the writers undoubted desire for practitioners development and growth through achievement, to which end this book is a strong aid. For those working alone and without the advantage of a tutor to hand this book will be all but indispensable. I am determined to clear my workspace to make room for it.

Alan Isaac



A simple cover for a complicated subject.