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TREASURE 1997



FINE ART
PRINTER 1998

EDEN WORKSHOPS

A BOOKBINDERS RESOURCE



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For nearly 20 years my wife Margaret & I ran a system of craft workshops devoted to the exploration of the Book Arts.

During that time we worked in almost total isolation and seclusion in the grounds of a very private monastery in rural England. We developed four book related skills; hand book binding, paper marbling and book edge marbling, printing & box making and took those skills to high levels of excellence.

In 1997 after nearly 20 years running the Eden Workshops we were voted a National Living Treasure by Country Life magazine for our contribution to the Book Arts.



In 2004 we decided to close our workshops and move out here to Southern France, I now concern myself with mentoring those with aspirations to become bookbinders and have the time to concentrate on aspects of the book arts that interest me.

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How to form cloth and leather corners.

I have put together this tutorial after being asked many times to explain how to form leather corners when binding a book. In fact knowing how to form the corners of a humble cloth case binding is just as important.

I am going to show how to form;

Cloth corners full buckram binding

Thin leather corners half leather binding.

Thin leather corners full leather binding.

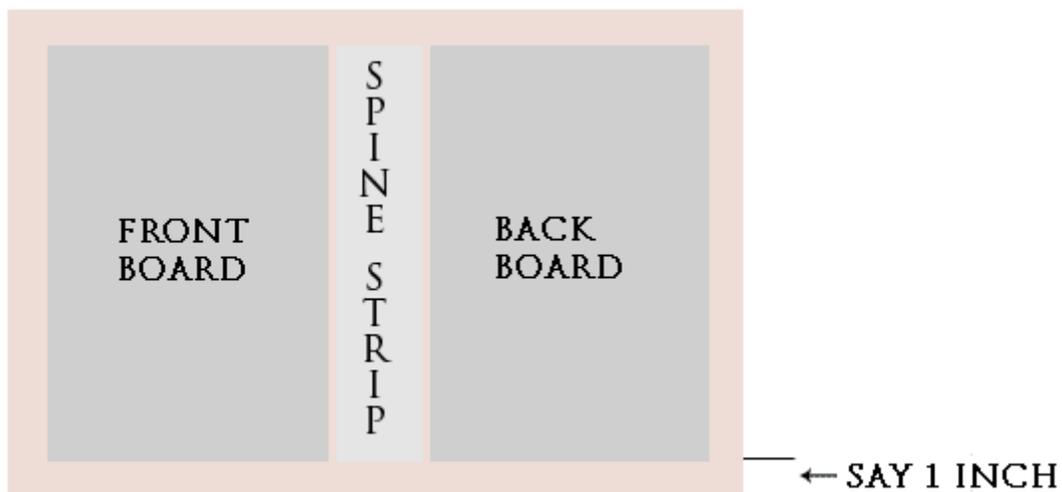
Full thickness leather half leather binding.

Full thickness leather full leather binding.

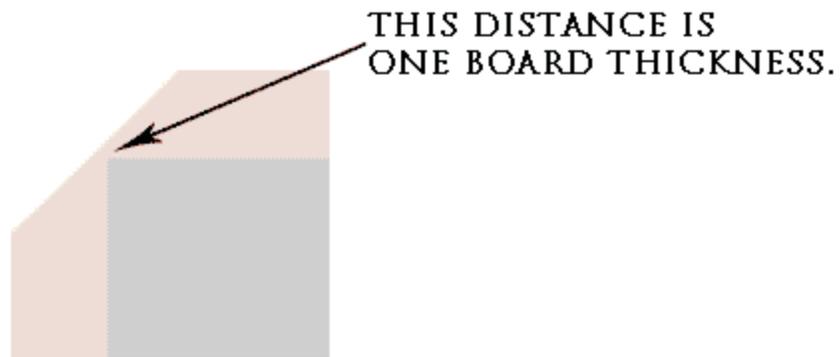
Some of the methods I show are the same for different styles of binding, so I may repeat myself, I do this so as to make each tutorial complete unto itself.

CLOTH CORNERS FULL BUCKRAM BINDING.

After gluing out the cover, and positioning the boards and spine strip your cover should look like this.



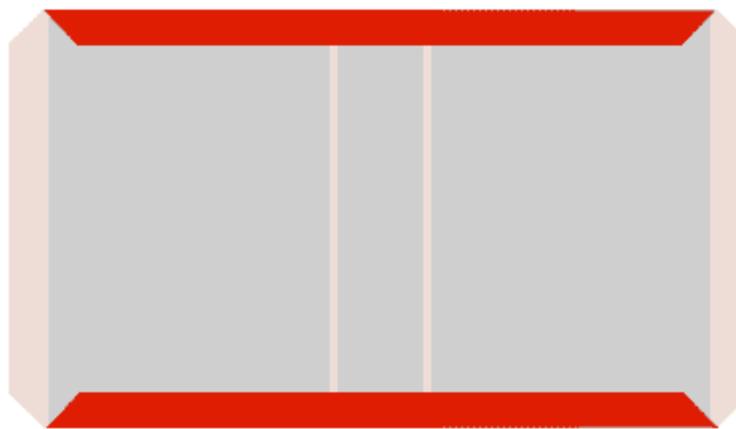
Now cut each corner at an angle of 45 degrees as shown here.



After cutting the corners we are ready to turn in the edges of the buckram, known as "doing the turn in's".

You always do the head & tail (top & bottom) turn in's first. Use your bone folder to get under the edge of the buckram, then using your folder and fingers, push or pull the buckram up over the edge, we do not want pockets of air trapped under the buckram.

Here you can see the result of turning in the top and bottom edges.



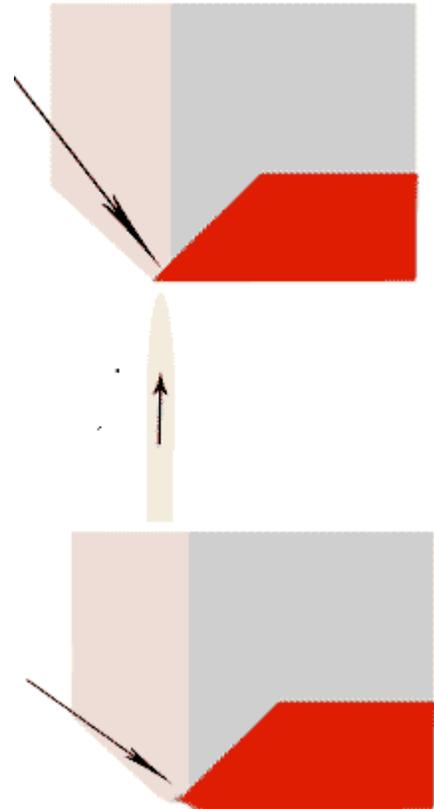
Now we come to a very important element. The little red flap of buckram shown in the illustration on the right, has to be squashed flat and pushed away from you.

This is done with your bone folder and is simple when you know how to do it. So in one motion we squash and push away from us.

Doing this will ensure that the corners are neat and will protect them from wear and tear.

The corner should look something like the illustration on the right.

When you have done all four corners you are ready to complete the other two turn in's.



When you have got to this stage, rub down the front and back of the cover, as well as the turn in's.

Rub down the edges with your bone folder to get a crisp edge.

Ok so we have made the cover, more properly called the case, now we would proceed with "casing in", or gluing the book into it's cover.

Ok that finishes the tutorial on forming cloth corners, now we come to forming corners in leather.

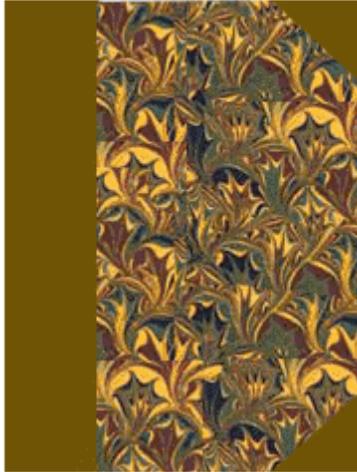
I make a distinction between forming corners with thin leather and full thickness leather. For one thing the corners are formed differently and for another when using full thickness leather it is customary to line the front and back of the board with card in order to compensate for the thickness of the leather. This is not needed when using a thin leather.

So let us start with forming the corners of a half leather style of binding using thin leather.

THIN LEATHER CORNERS HALF LEATHER BINDING.

What size and proportion the corners should take depends upon the width of the book being bound.

1.5 INCH 3 INCH 1.5 INCH



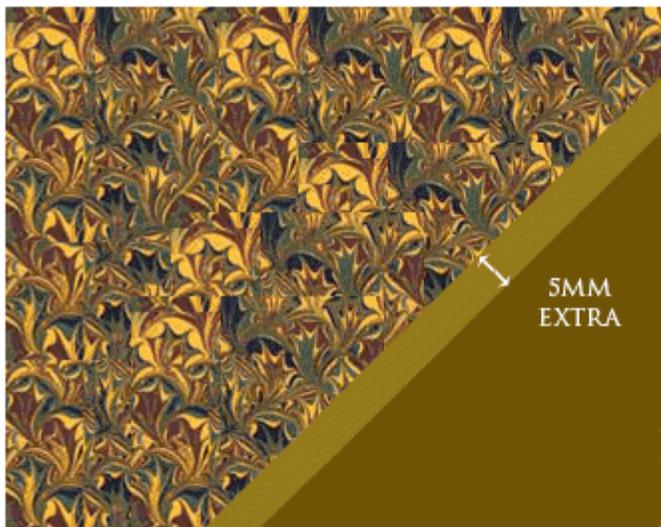
Traditionally to arrive at the correct size for the spine leather and corners, you divide the books width into four equal parts, as you can see in the illustration on the left.

You must remember that the dimensions shown refer to the covered book; in fact your corners will be a little larger as the marbled paper "siding" overlaps the leather a little.

How much larger?

I would allow 5mm plus 1 board thickness.

See the illustration below.



BOARD THICKNESS
THAT IS THE
THICKNESS OF THE
BOARD YOU ARE
USING

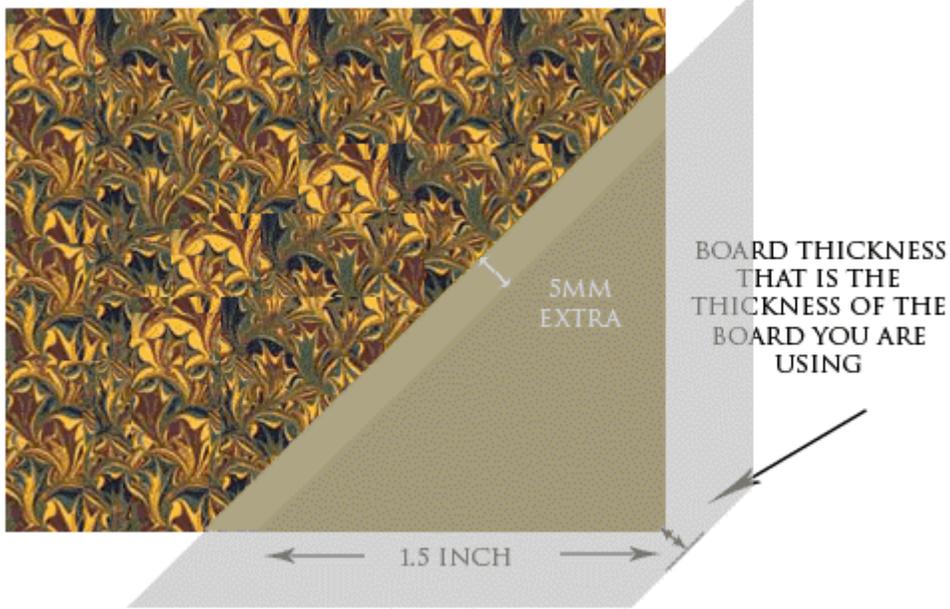
Ok, that has given you a good idea of how to arrive at the size of your leather corners and how to allow extra for the marbled paper to overlap.

And also to allow one board thickness which will be needed when we come to form the tips of the corners.

Now let's make a cardboard template which we can use to cut out our corners.

Remember we have arrived at the size of the corners by dividing the book into four, we have also allowed extra for overlap, and the board thickness needed to form the tips of the corners.

We have mentioned "turn in's" this refers to the amount of leather we leave to fold over onto the back of the board. I would suggest between 15mm & 20mm.



This illustration shows the template super imposed.

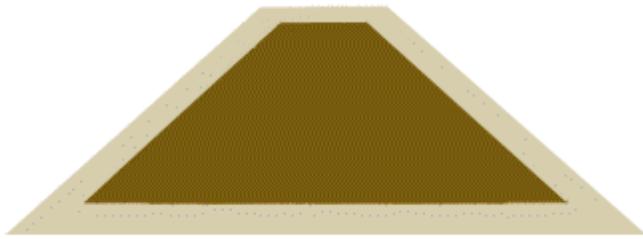
So here you can see how we arrived at the dimensions of the template.

Bearing in mind in this example we are using a light weight sheepskin skiver, you will not need to do much paring, I feel you could do all the paring with a sharp craft knife, or better still a scalpel using a 10a blade.

Right, so you have cut out all your corners, now you want to pare the three longest edges of the corner down to nothing, starting at about 3/4mm in from

each edge. You will have to get your scalpel or craft knife down low to slice through the leather. You can do this on a piece of waste board or on a sheet of glass.

How much we pare down the shortest edge will depend on the thickness of the board we are using, if we use a 2mm board then we would need to start the cut 2mm from the very tip.



Viewed from the flesh side of the leather your corner should look something like this.

We are now ready for covering the corners of the book.

Get your corners and sponge the hair side of the leather with water; you want the leather damp but not saturated, leave the corners covered with a damp cloth

to prevent evaporation for say an hour.

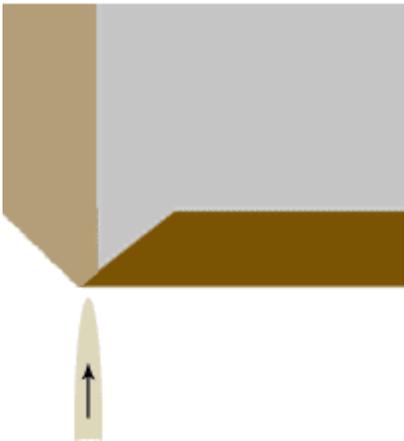
I would suggest using a 50/50 mix of PVA and Paste, the paste contains more water which will help keep the leather damp while you are working on it.

Take one of your corners and glue it out with the PVA/Paste adhesive and place the corner in the position shown in this illustration.



Note that on the short edge, the board is one board's thickness away from the edge of the leather, and that the leather has been pared back one boards thickness.

Now fold over the bottom edge of the leather, remembering that in all cases the top and bottom edge (the head and tail) are turned in first, followed by the side edges (foredges).



You will be faced with a flap of leather which is very thin.

Some things you have to do to gain experience, when covering with buckram, this flap is quite stiff, but when covering with thin leather which has been damped and glued out with PVA/Paste, as well as having been pared, it should be expected that it is very malleable and thin.

Gently squash the flap and push it forward.



The corner will look something like this.

You can then turn in the foredges, the leather will still be quite damp and this will give you the opportunity to go over each corner, molding and shaping them.

The turn in's if correctly cut will overlap one another, you can move the leather with your fingers to facilitate this.

When using a thin leather it is normal to lay the marbled paper or cloth directly over the leather which has been pared, if the leather has been correctly pared, the leather will not make an unsightly ridge.

THIN LEATHER CORNERS FULL LEATHER BINDING.

You will find that different binders have different methods when it comes to dealing with the corners of a full leather binding. This method was taught to me when I first started bookbinding and it works very well.

First cut out your leather, the size of the leather is going to depend on the size of the boards and the width of the spine strip.



Ok so you have your leather cut out, now using a wet sponge, damp the hair side of the leather, the hair side is the front of the leather, the flesh side is the back, good to know these terms, helps prevent confusion.

Damp the leather well, not saturated but moist all the way through.

I would suggest using two types of adhesive, a 50/50 PVA & Paste mix, and a pot of plain paste.

The leather can dry out if you work slowly and I find that by applying paste to the edges the leather

ABOUT 20MM

stays moist.

Glue out the back of the cover using the PVA/Paste mix and then gently position the boards and spine strip.

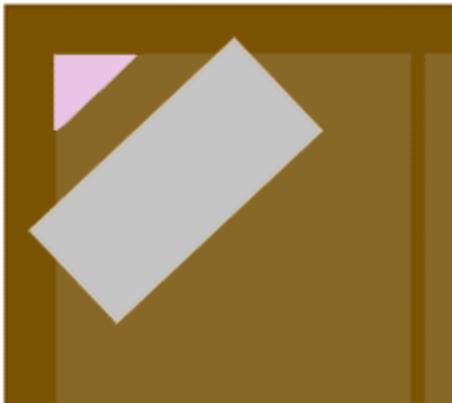
Now, put down some newspaper and gently turn the leather cover over. I have shown the boards of the book to aid understanding.



Ok so we have the leather cover turned over.

Now get a piece of greyboard about 4 inches by seven inches, also have ready a scalpel or very sharp craft knife.

At this point you can rub down the spine strip, and in general around the center of the cover, but do not rub down the corner areas, we are going to lift the leather here.

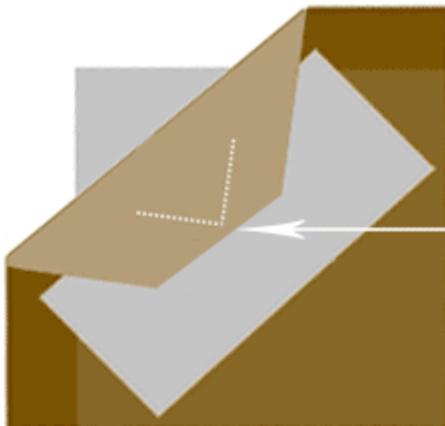


Press down in the pink area shown in the illustration.

In particular press down on the tip and edges.

Place your piece of board as shown in the illustration.

Now peel back the leather as shown below.



You will clearly see the outline of the board edges and tip in the leather.

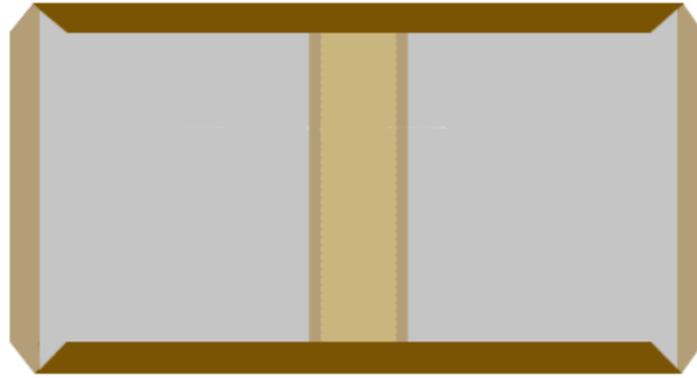
Cut the leather at a 45 degree angle, one board thickness away from the tip, as shown here.

Now using your knife, starting at the tip, pare through the leather at a shallow angle.

Work your way around the cover dealing with each corner in the same way.

When you have done all your corners you may give the cover a good rub down, but be aware that thin leather can stretch, check your corners have not moved out of alignment.

Now turn in the leather at the head and tail of the cover as shown in the illustration below.



Using the same technique as for the cloth corners, gently push the flap forwards and down with your bone folder.



This is the sort of effect you are trying to achieve.

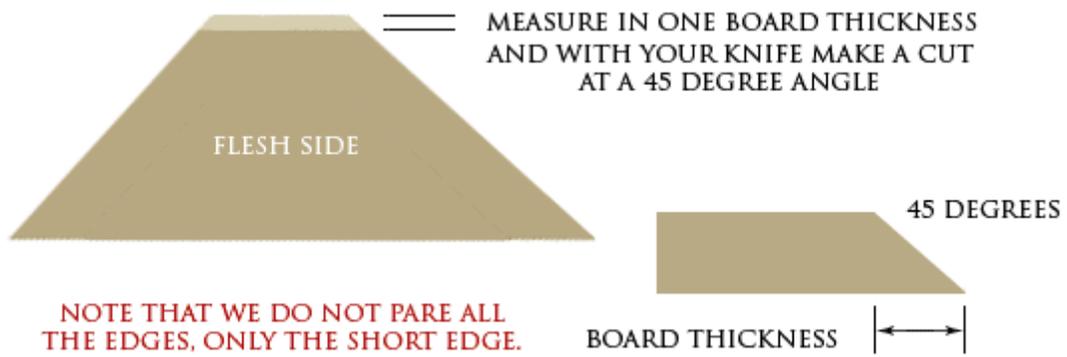
After dealing with all four corners you would be ready to turn in the foredges.

FULL THICKNESS LEATHER HALF LEATHER BINDING.

Full thickness calf or goatskin for bookbinders can be 2mm thick or more, and a different method of forming the corners is needed over that used for forming corners with thin leather.

You know how we determine the size of the corners from the first tutorial on leather corners.

Once again we have to make a template and cut out your four corners.



Make sure you damp the leather well, use a wet sponge and apply generously to the hair side, or grain side of the leather, then do the same to the flesh side of the leather.

Apply a generous coating of paste to the flesh side then place the two pairs of corners glued side to glued side and let the paste soak into the leather, a good idea to cover the corners with a damp cloth.

Now place your corner in position, as shown below.



What we are aiming to do is to make a neat mitered joint where the bottom and foreedge overlap after turning in.



This is a profile of the leather, after turning in the tail edge the leather will look like this.



The 45 degree cut has to be pressed down onto the board, use your bone folder.

Try to keep the angle of the leather at 45 degrees.



Now we come to turning in the foredge. What we are trying to do is marry up the 45 degree cut in the foredge with the 45 degree cut in the tail edge.



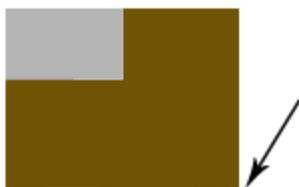
Turn in the foredge and bear in mind that we are trying to marry up the two cut edges of the leather.

The one should overlap the other and be flat.

This can be achieved with your fingers as you slide the two cut edges together, and also with your bone folder.



Here is a profile of the leather again, it shows what we are aiming for, which is for the two cut edges to marry up with one another and be flat.



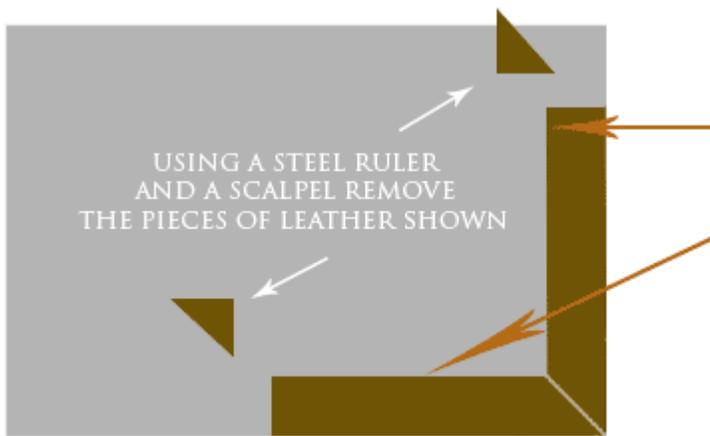
Right at the tip of the leather where the two cut edges first meet a point will form, this point will be soft and damp.

You should mold the leather tip with your bone folder by gently pressing it down onto the board to get an invisible joint. It may take some practice; it is something that has to be done by experience.

The leather should still be very moist, so you can take a little time doing these corners.

So now you can let your corners dry, during drying you should check the mitered joint where the two edges of the leather meet, to make sure that shrinkage doesn't cause the joint to open, the leather will be damp for some time.

Now you should tidy up the corners in preparation for the next stage of the binding.



It will probably be the case that the leather

Here

and

here will need trimming in order to make them straight, as shown in the illustration.

The next stage of the process of lining the inside and outside of the boards with sufficient linings to bring the board of the book up to the height of the leather, but to all intents and purposes this concludes how to form leather corners from full thickness leather.

FULL THICKNESS LEATHER FULL LEATHER BINDING.

Normally when using a full thickness bookbinding leather you would use a quite complicated book structure, designed in part to cope with the way full thickness leather shrinks as it dries.

However for the purposes of illustration I am going to show a simple case binding, the corners would be treated in the same way whatever the style of binding.

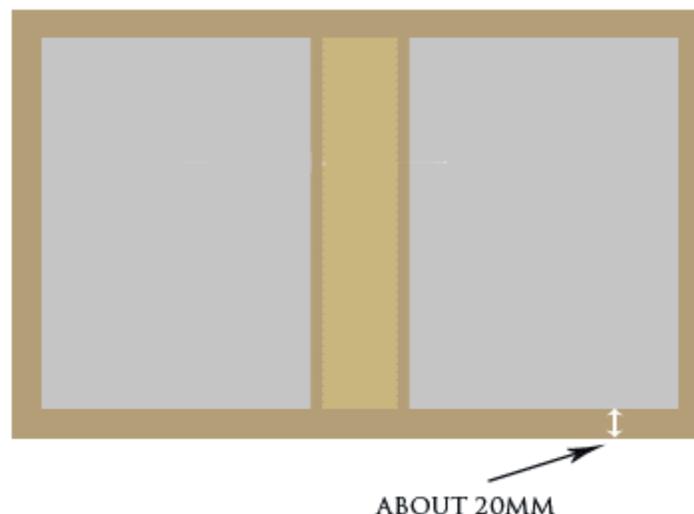
First cut out your leather allowing 20mm for the turn in's, then damp the hair side of the leather with a water soaked sponge, then do the same to the flesh side of the leather, and allow half an hour for the water to soak into the leather, we want it moist not saturated.

Regarding what adhesive to use, I would use paste, using paste on it's own will give you plenty of time to work with the leather as it contains water and will help keep your leather moist.

Apply a generous coating of paste to the flesh side of the leather, and then fold the leather in two so that the two pasted surfaces come together.

Place a damp cloth over the leather and allow 15 minutes for the paste to soak into the leather.

After this position the boards and spine strip as shown in the illustration below.

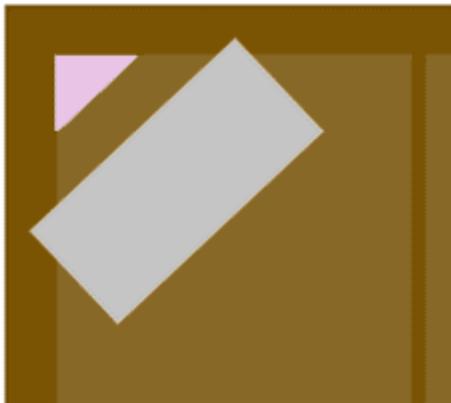


Rub down the spine strip and the central areas of the boards to make them stick, but do not rub down the corner areas as we will be lifting the leather in these parts later.

Lay down some newspaper and gently turn the cover over, I have shown the boards and spine strip as an aid to understanding.



Now get a piece of greyboard about 4 inches by seven inches, also have ready a scalpel or a sharp craft knife.

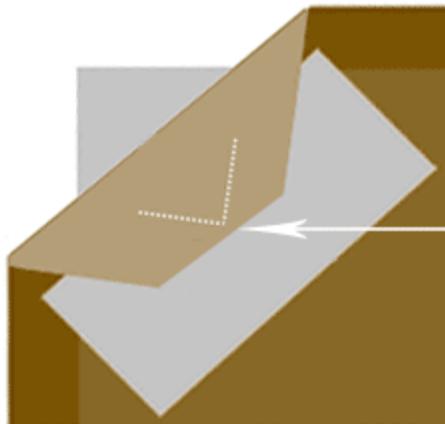


Press down in the pink area shown in the illustration.

In particular press down on the tip and edges.

Place your piece of board as shown in the illustration.

Now peel back the leather as shown below.



You will clearly see the outline of the board edges and tip in the leather.

Cut the leather at a 45 degree angle, one board thickness away from the tip, as shown here.

Now using your knife, starting at the tip, pare through the leather at a shallow angle.

Work your way around the cover dealing with each corner in the same way.



After doing all the corners turn the cover over and check the position of the cut corners are correct.

You should have plenty of time to work with the leather as it will still be soft and moist.

What we are aiming to do is to create a neat mitered joint where the two cut edges of the leather overlap.



This is a profile of the leather, after turning in the tail edge the leather will look like this.



The 45 degree cut has to be pressed down onto the board, use your bone folder.

Try to keep the angle of the leather at 45 degrees.



Now we come to turning in the foreedge. What we are trying to do is marry up the 45 degree cut in the foreedge with the 45 degree cut in the tail edge.



Turn in the foredge and bear in mind that we are trying to marry up the two cut edges of the leather.

The one should overlap the other and be flat.

This can be achieved with your fingers as you slide the two cut edges together, and also with your bone folder.



Here is a profile of the leather again, it shows what we are aiming for, which is for the two cut edges to marry up with one another and be flat.



Right at the tip of the leather where the two cut edges first meet a point will form, this point will be soft and damp.

You should mold the leather tip with your bone folder by gently pressing it down onto the board to get an invisible join. It may take some practice; it is something that has to be done by experience.

Check the mitered joints as the leather dries, shrinkage may cause the joint to open, but there will be sufficient moisture in the leather for you to work with it for a considerable time.

When the leather is dry it would have linings applied to the inside of the board to bring the board up level with the leather.

FINISH

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