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Bookbinding & Conservation: A Sixty-year Odyssey of Art and Craft by Don Etherington

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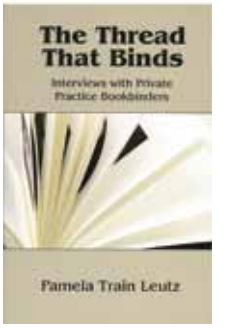
REVIEW

by Louise Hamilton



The Thread That Binds: Interviews with Private Practice Bookbinders
Compiled and with introductions by Pamela Train Leutz
New Castle, DE : Oak Knoll Press, 2010. 352 pages. Paperback: ISBN 978 1 58456 2740
Hardcover: ISBN 978 1 58456 2764

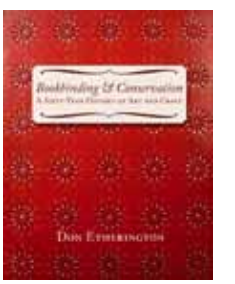
For *The Thread That Binds: Interviews with Private Practice Bookbinders* Pamela Leutz interviewed 21 independent bookbinders and posed some challenging questions: What made them choose private practice? Where do they get clients? What do they dislike about being a bookbinder? What advice would they give to someone interested in becoming a bookbinder? The answers reveal each binder's individuality, but also reiterate common themes, the "threads that bind," to which Leutz's title refers.

The bookbinders interviewed are Catherine Burkhard, Jim Croft, Tim Ely, Gabrielle Fox, Peter Geraty, Don Glaister, Karen Hanmer, Craig Jensen, Scott Kellar, Daniel Kelm, Monique Lallier, Frank Lehmann, William Minter, Tini Miura, Eleanore Ramsey, Don Rash, Sol Rebora, Jan Sobota, Priscilla Spitler, and Cris Clair Takacs. Each chapter comprises one interview, with a special chapter for Don Etherington, a "bookbinding father figure." All areas of private bookbinding practice are represented here: design binding, edition binding, conservation and restoration, box-making, artists' books, and teaching.

Pamela Leutz began bookbinding in 1979. She has studied with Swiss bookbinder Hugo Peller, Czech bookbinders Jan and Jarmila Sobota, and book conservator Sally Key. She lives and works in Colorado Springs, Colorado. •

REVIEW

by Peter D. Verheyen



Bookbinding & Conservation: A Sixty-year Odyssey of Art and Craft
Don Etherington
New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 2010. 180 pages. Hardcover, ISBN 978 1 58456 2771

For those involved with bookbinding, book conservation, or with the Guild of Book Workers, Don Etherington needs no introduction — he has served as a teacher, mentor, and friend. Now, with *Bookbinding & Conservation: A Sixty-year Odyssey of Art and Craft* we can read about how he came to enter this field, was influenced by his teachers and mentors, and how he helped shape the world of bookbinding and conservation.

Bookbinding & Conservation: A Sixty-year Odyssey of Art and Craft contains a foreword by Bernard Middleton, another leader in the field, and one who needs little introduction himself. The book is divided into the five main sections of his life: the first 30 years; Florence; Library of Congress; Ransom Center at the University of Texas; and Greensboro. The book concludes with an extensive "gallery" depicting 52 bindings.

The First 30 Years introduces us to Etherington's childhood in WWII London during the Blitz, his other interests, and his introduction to bookbinding. Like most of his generation — and until the late 1970's — his experience was that of leaving school at an early

age to learn a trade, subsequent journeyman years, and then striking out to blaze his own path. Leaders such as Edgar Mansfield, Ivor Robinson, Howard Nixon, Roger Powell, and Peter Waters, contributed by example to Etherington's professional growth and helped him mentor future generations.

In 1966 he contributed to the salvage efforts in Florence at the invitation of Peter Waters, and began his transition from bookbinder to conservator. Just as this event was transformative for Etherington, so it was for the conservation profession as a whole. The sheer magnitude of the flood and the unprecedented response of conservators throughout the world, created a melting pot of ideas on how best to respond. But these ideas also created challenges and conflicts, something Etherington discusses at length.

Etherington came to the United States in 1970, again at the invitation of Waters, to become the Training Officer in the "Restoration Department" of Library of Congress, where they were also joined by Christopher Clarkson. With practices greatly informed by the experiences of Florence, they began to modernize and professionalize the program, and to transform the library's preservation and conservation profession. Along the way we learn about the introduction of new methods and materials, his role in the Watergate scandal, and some of the larger library disasters during that time. Also discussed are his efforts supporting certification in the field of bookbinding, and the creation of the "Standards of Excellence" seminar series — both for the Guild of Book Workers.

In 1980 Etherington was drawn to the new challenge of establishing a conservation program at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center in Austin, Texas, where he would remain until 1987. This was the sort of challenge most conservators and binders can only dream of: full administrative support, a generous budget, and effectively a free rein to create the "ideal" program. We also learn of his efforts to create an Institute for Fine Binding and Conservation, that brought top-tier binders and conservators to Austin. Through it all, there was a never-ending stream of uniquely challenging projects.

Other significant changes in Etherington's life began in 1987 at a workshop for renowned fine binders hosted by Hugo Peller in Finland. It was there that he met Monique Lallier, and their stories became intertwined. Concurrently, he was invited to establish a for-profit conservation bindery which he continues to lead. We also learn more about projects he encountered, his first use of Japanese paper for binding repairs, his Honorary Membership in the Guild, and winning the first Helen DeGolyer Triennial Competition in 1997 for which he received a commission to bind *The Book of Common Prayer*.

Reading this book, we are in the room with Don Etherington as he is conversing with those circled around — as at the many conferences and workshops we have all attended. While many of the events described will be familiar to those who have been fortunate to know and work with him, they are told in refreshing ways so that we do not tire of hearing them again. The style is informal and draws the reader in to learn about bookbinding and the development of the conservation and preservation fields during his lifetime, but also about many of his personal moments and his great enjoyment of life. What is revealed is the life of a man who, at the right place and time, seized upon the opportunities presented to him to better himself and his chosen field. A bon vivant of tremendous generosity, Don Etherington though "slowly unwinding in the twilight of a long and rewarding career" continues to push forward when most others would be looking back. We are all the better for it. •

Both these books are available as unbound signature sets from Oak Knoll Press **http://www.oakknoll.com**