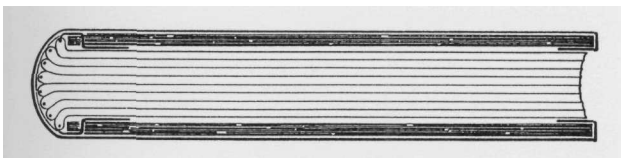


*C o n t e m p o r a r y E u r o p e a n B o o k S t r u c t u r e s*

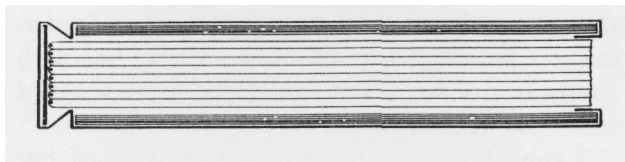
*This article is adapted from an address given at the Designer Bookbinders Conference New Horizons held at Oxford in September 1994.*

The renaissance of bookbinding, which started in the seventies, was not only a pictorial or ornamental change, as during previous centuries, but a fundamental one touching the very roots of the craft. The vanguard of designer bookbinders, pushed forward by the achievements of conservation specialists, began to consider bookbinding as the construction of a container appropriate for each book rather than a standard rectangle used as a support for decorative elements. Many interesting historical book structures were re-discovered, simplified, stripped of their ornamental details and used in libraries as book-friendly conservation bindings. Designer bookbinders' priorities are different, as techniques are chosen in order to express the binders' ideas. In spite of this, conservation practices have slowly sneaked into our minds, and with them many structural elements which in turn tend to influence aesthetics. As a result, many of us have today a new approach to design bindings.

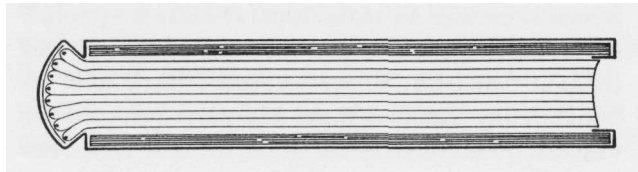
The following diagrams show the cross-section drawing of several sorts of binding structures widely and commonly used in Europe since the 19th century. The first is the traditional or French binding, (considered by many as the only sort deserving the name of binding), sewn on recessed cords, backed, with laced-in boards.



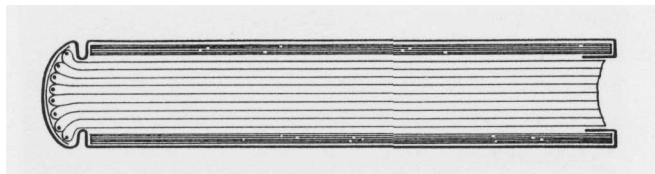
The German style has a flat spine and a stiff card as hollow back which gives a triangular groove;



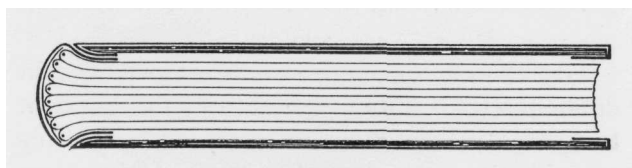
The Swiss style is rounded and very slightly backed and has also a triangular groove;



The French and Northern European version is fully backed, and has a 'u' shaped groove;



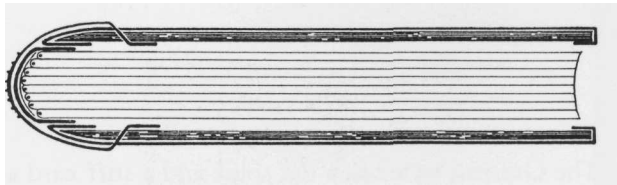
My Simplified Binding also belongs to this group. Its spine is only rounded, not backed, the boards are bevelled inside to the shape of the rounded book block;



Then follow the structures where the boards are not laced in with the sewing support but are attached to the book block with adhesives:

All of these structures exist with many paper, leather-paper and leather-leather versions.

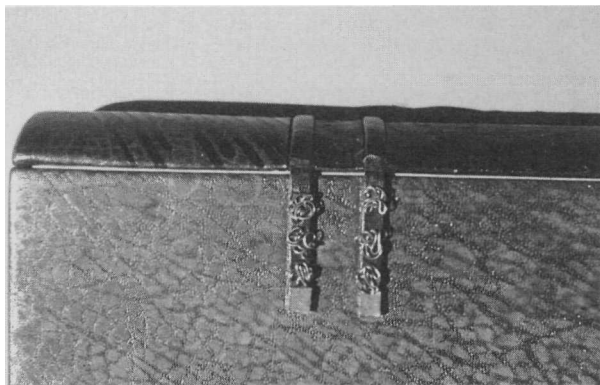
Jean de Gonet's bindings combine the features of the two groups; the spine and the boards are covered separately, then the boards laced in *and* glued on.



Jean de Gonet used exposed sewing on raised bands for most of his early bindings. There is no backswell or backing. The hollow back is in segments lodged in between the raised cords. (His later bindings, built with similar board attachment and as beautifully designed as before, were simply sewn on tapes.)

I consider him to be the first great artist of our time whose talent transcended history and who made a very modern use of an old and excellent sewing technique: sewing on raised cords. The thread does not exert tension on the paper, and this type of sewing is sound enough to make spine adhesives optional. Bookbinders gave it up for decoration purposes and to gain time, but today we come back to it as bookbinding becomes more and more reserved for valuable books or artworks where the time factor has less influence.

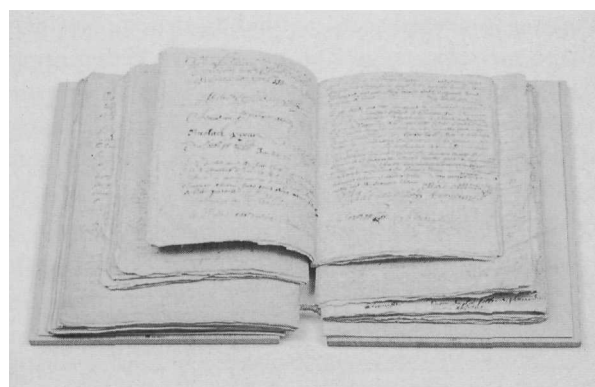
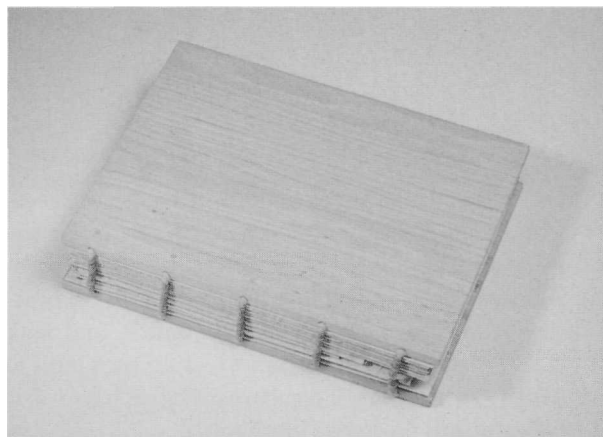
Romilly Saumarez Smith uses the technique of the hollow back in segments, but on a backed book block and with an open joint.



I myself have been using sewing on raised bands in different ways — in its traditional form (using a tight back) for large and heavy books, but with unevenly placed bands, non-traditional leathers and a modern design. Almost inevitably the design takes the raised bands into consideration and becomes oriented towards them. In many other books my sewing on raised cords is hidden, the bulk of the cords being

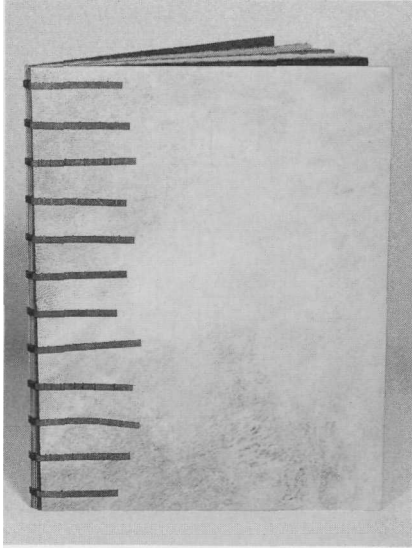
absorbed by several layers of flexible spine lining. Then a hollow back is placed on top. The advantages of this method are that the sewing is sound, the arc of the spine is similar to that of the hollow back (too good an opening at one point of the spine would stress the outer joints), and also the use of leathers, titling, design is not limited by the aspect of the raised bands and the tight back technique.

Having benefited from Jen Lindsay's excellent teaching, I have used her lacing-in method to this minimalist, wooden-board binding covering my village's administrative records dating from the 16th to the 18th century. The books are sewn with packed sewing on goat leather thongs which are laced into oak boards. Every single element of the binding has been chosen in order to solve a technical problem. There is no historical reference as most of the techniques used are prior to the date of the documents.

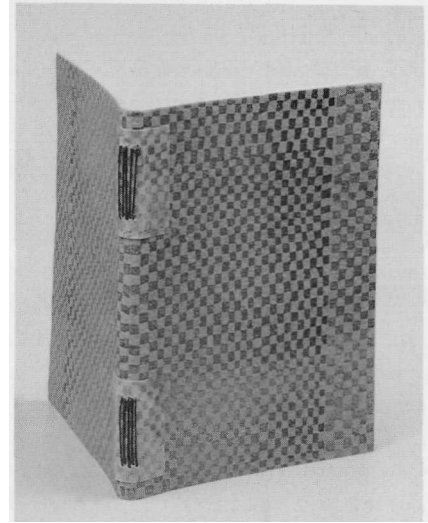


The oak boards, which do not bend, combined with the packed sewing without kettle stitches, allowed me to avoid heavy compensation work on the very unevenly sized signatures. As the volumes are in protective boxes, no covering material was used, and, as a result, no adhesives.

The sewing without kettle stitches made me think of sewing on flat raised bands, i.e. on thongs made of leather and parchment. The thread goes in and out through double sewing holes as for normal sewing on tapes, but it turns around the tapes the same way as for raised cords, avoiding the tension on the paper.

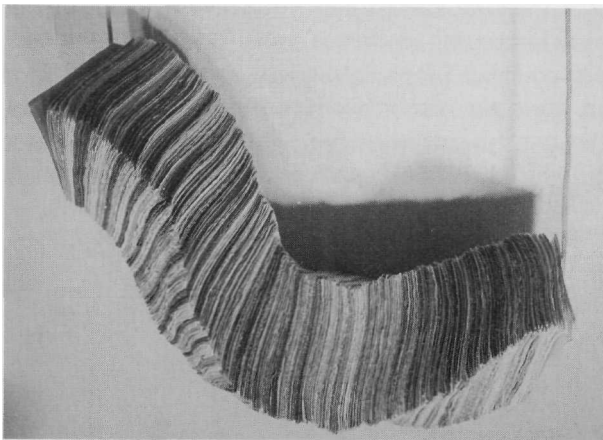


Arregui's long-stitch bindings with a paper cover reinforced by a parchment piece, both roll-printed.

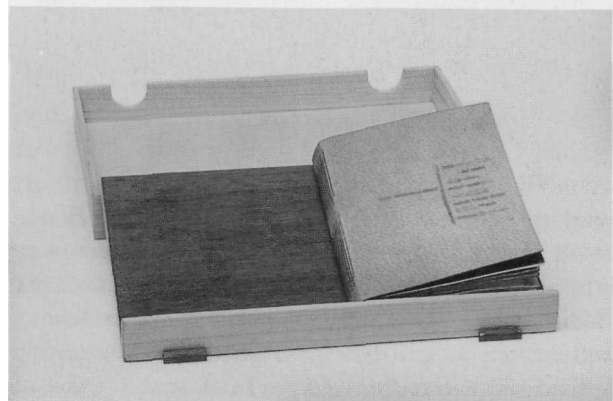
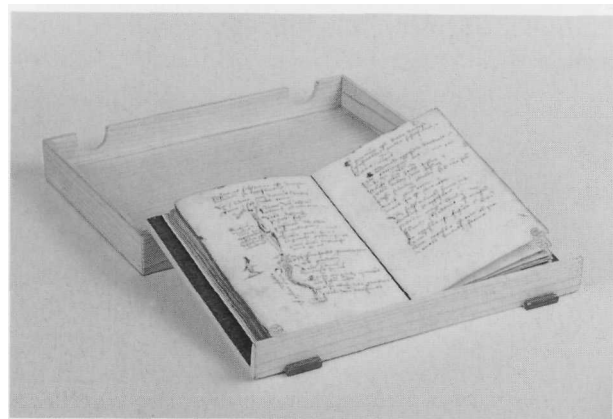


I used it myself on a book bound in dyed and onlaid alum-tawed pigskin, placed in a box which becomes a reading stand when open. *Le Cahier d'étudiant* is an illuminated manuscript of Latin studies by a 16th century Dutch student. Bound in 1992, it is in the collection of the Historical Library of Paris.

The Swedish book artist, Manne Dahlstedt, makes extreme and very free use of the raised cords as a medium. Sometimes he even uses them only as sewing supports, denying their lacing-in function, leaving them free or using them as cords to suspend the book.

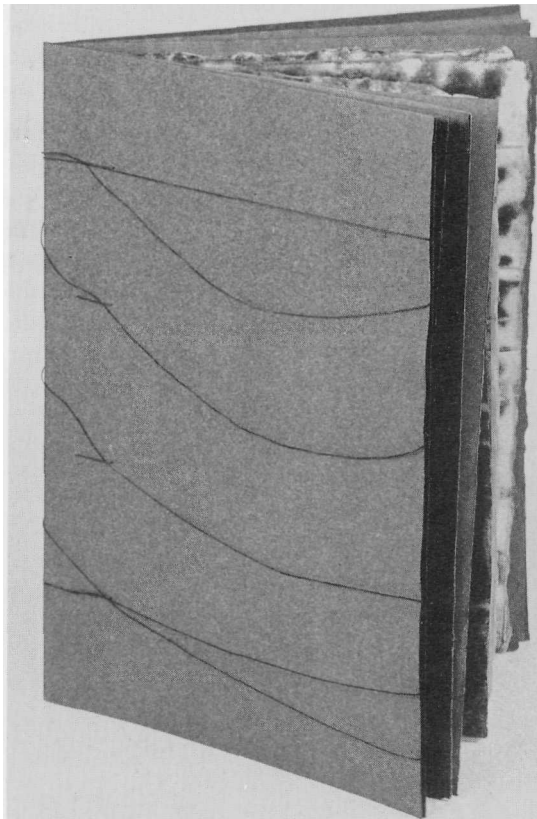


Another ancient method, the long-stitch sewing often used by North Americans, had relatively fewer practitioners in Europe. Here is one of Carmencho



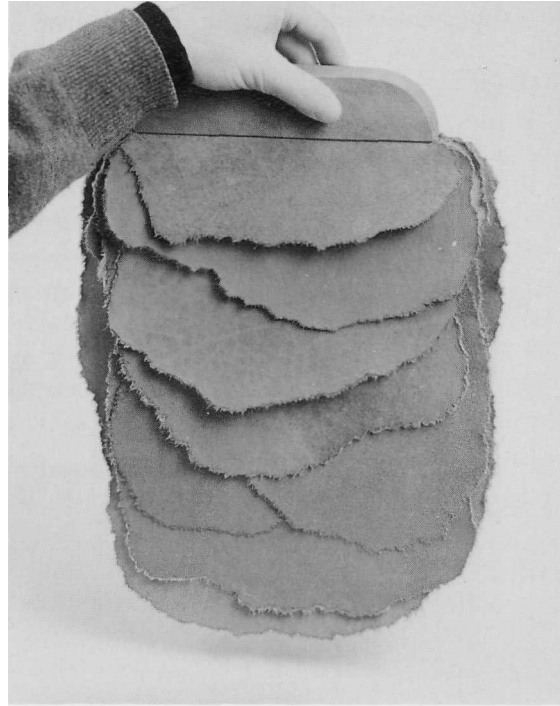
The bound book is permanently attached to its box, the back cover being secured to the bottom of the box by a set of tiny screws going through a wooden strip. The wooden box *is* the binding and the leather cover can be considered as a decorated flyleaf.

Joanne Sonnichsen, like many California bookbinders, grew up on mainly French techniques. She is an honorary European. She is very interested in historical structures, especially the Coptic. Here is one of her versions of a Coptic sewing with folded paper boards. The 'book' inside is an artwork in paper, called *Intragramme*, by the Belgian artist Henri Lambert. This binding was one of the seventeen exhibited in Belgium at the Containers for Intragrammes exhibition of experimental bindings in 1991.



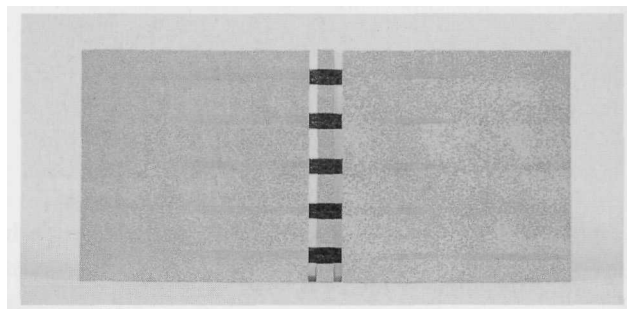
Most of the people who took an interest in oriental binding kept the formal and traditional characteristics of it. Florent Rousseau, who is a young bookbinder working in Paris, took only the essence of oriental binding and adapted the structure to western type books. The structure offers a lot of design possibilities. In the binding I eliminated the oriental exposed sewing and created an artificial spine-side margin by sewing individually each section of the book against a folded

paper; these folds are glued together and covered with leather.



The flexible buffalo leather layers which make up the 'boards' are taken in the 'spine'. On *Claire-voies de Patricia Castex-Menier*, a book designed by Bernard-Gabriel Lafabrie, Paris, 1990. Bound in 1993. Collection of the Bibliotheque Municipale of Riom.

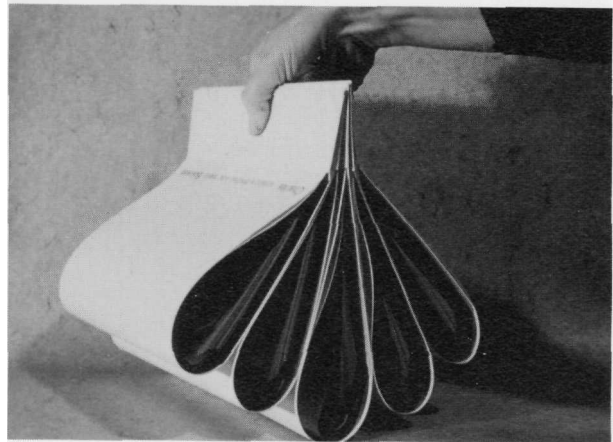
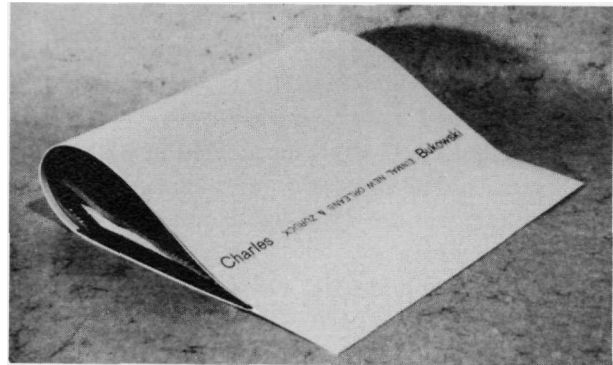
Anne Goy, a Swiss living in Belgium, is one of the most interesting binders of today. This binding of hers was conceived for a lightweight book. The signatures are sewn on leather bands; other leather bands hold the two boards together. The spine piece of the binding is held between the two series of leather bands.



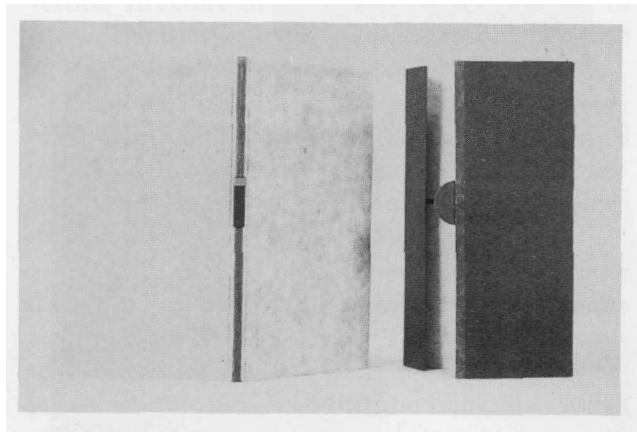
The structures I have shown so far are more or less derived from existing ones. There are many other inventive and brand new ways of linking together signatures and wrapping them with a cover. For example when one wishes to show simultaneously the whole book (or at least most of it) and still sew the book, what is the solution? Here is Manne Dahlstedt's answer: the signatures are sewn to a big accordion fold of thick handmade paper, front and back.



The Dutch bookbinder, Pau Groenendijk, found an interesting and colourful solution for a series of ten edition bindings on books made of single sheets. Each printed page is mounted on a large colour sheet; the colour sheets are then partly glued together, but every sheet is slightly pushed sideways. The whole is folded and kept closed by the fore-edge flap. Several of the volumes held together make a very nice pattern. On Charles Bukowski's *Einmal Nederlands und Zurück*, illustrated by Rotraut Susanna Berner, Maro Verlag, 1990.



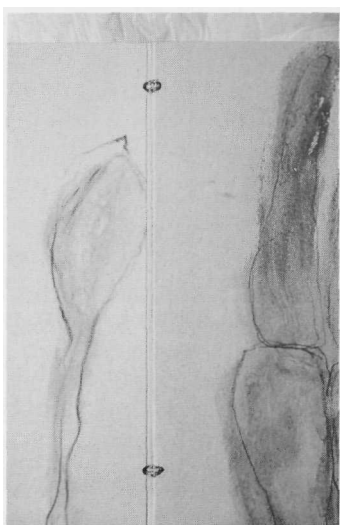
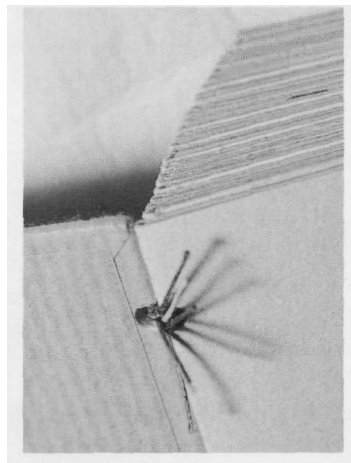
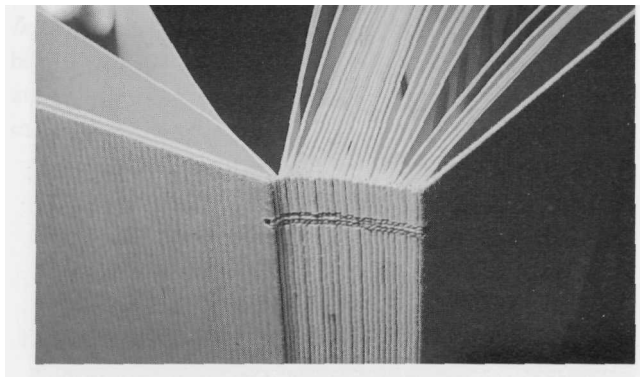
Another beautiful binding from Anne Goy in which each signature is sewn separately, with an extra length of thread extending on head and tail. These threads are secured by a knot over the spine, holding the cover against the signature. In this binding the knots are hidden by a leather and metal piece glued on the spine.



The last three are original and appealing structures but not very practical in everyday use. I found, however, two structures which are not only genuinely new and most interesting, but also perfect for large scale use.

The first is Daniel Kelm's. Even though he is from Massachusetts, and as an American is not eligible to be included in this survey. I found his work so interesting that I must mention it even if I can only give you a quick technical glimpse. His idea is to slide a thin metal rod inside a previously prepared fold, then to stitch together the signatures as one repairs socks: one up, one down.

The result is a simple, solid and good looking binding which opens perfectly.



Shelagh Keeley's *A Space for Breathing*, a book made of original paintings and especially designed and prepared as this type of binding. Granary Books, NY, 1992. 22 copies + two of the artist; this is one of those two. Collection of the Gallery Isabelle Bongard, Paris.

Last but not least, the second genuinely new type of binding is Carmencho Arregui's Crossed-Structure Binding. It has many advantages, one of them is being simple. Indeed, it is so simple that one wonders why nobody has thought of it before — nobody has as far as I know. It seems quite natural to imagine that it could have been invented in the 14th or 15th century, before binders closed their minds to imaginative possibilities. Carmencho's article, published in Volume 14 of *The New Bookbinder*, makes it unnecessary for me to include an explanation in this article. Many different sorts of crossed structure bindings were presented at the Oxford conference through models on blank books and some design bindings made by friends. Since then four more versions have been designed by her, and the structure has been offered to all of us for use and further development as she asked all binders to develop her idea. An exhibition showed the results in June 1996 at Claude Blaizot's bookshop in Paris.

What can one say as a conclusion? That recent evolutions in the field of bookbinding make it more interesting and intriguing than ever. Modern use of ancient techniques, new inventive ideas, all push us to see bookbinding as we see architecture. Form and function are linked together in an ever changing balance. Books and their use change very rapidly in our societies, and bookbinding's chances of survival might lie in its capability to adapt to these transformations.

**Note:** This lecture was one of many held at the New Horizons Conference in Oxford, 1994. Some of those binders whose work should have been included in such a lecture gave a talk themselves at the same Conference. I took, therefore, the decision not to mention their work in my presentation.

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- Liures et reliures de Sun Evrard*. 1995. Exhibition catalogue, Bibliotheque historique de la Ville de Paris, 22 rue Malher, 75004 Paris.
- Plats Dessus, Plats Dessous*. Exhibition of crossed-structure bindings, 1996. Bilingual exhibition catalogue, Librairie Blaizot, 164 rue du Faubourg St Honoré, 75008 Paris.