

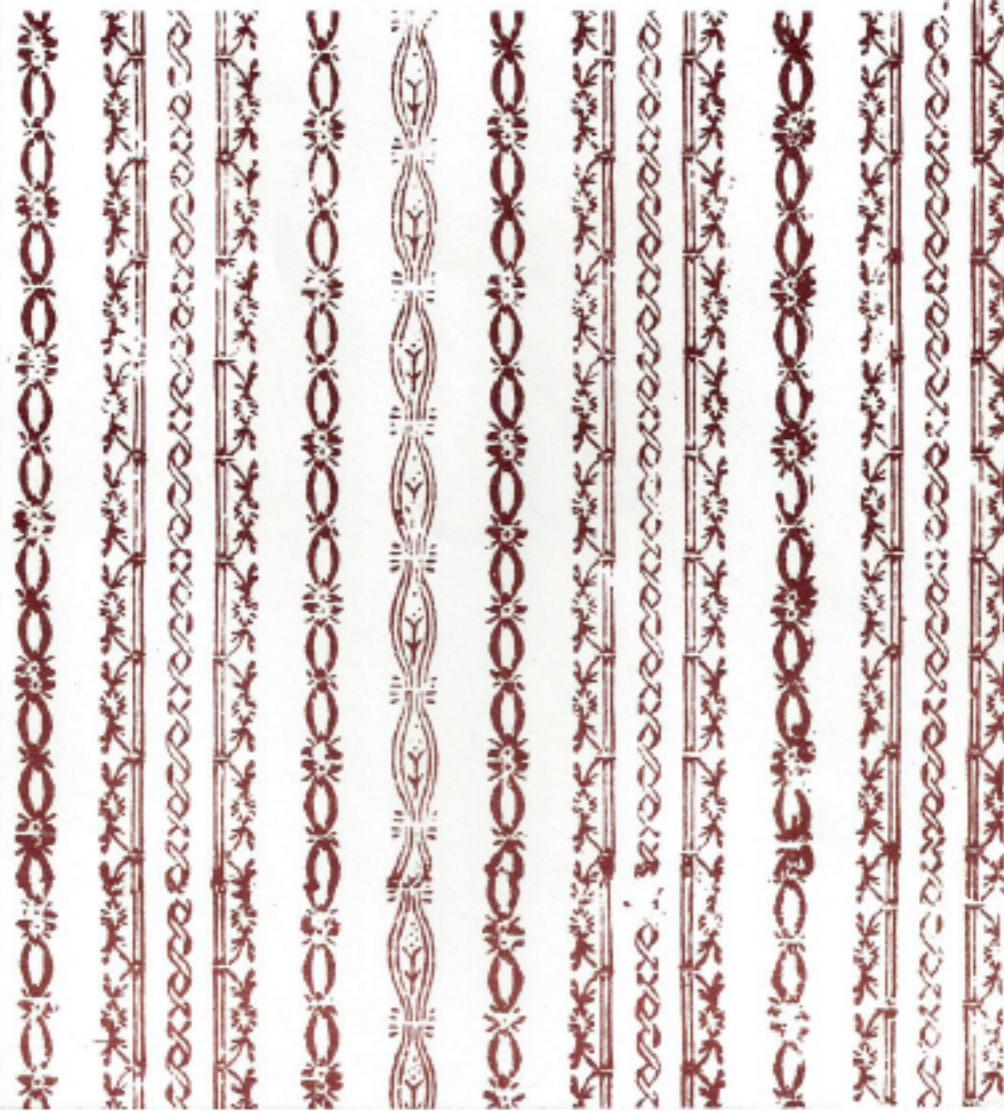
DECORATIVE PAPERS FOR  
THE FINE PRINTER/PUBLISHER

Robert Hauser

As a student of graphic design, my familiarization with decorative papers (marbled, paste, and lithographed) emerged from the dark of lecture rooms where I observed their use as components in works of art on paper. The artist Carl Spitzweg (1808-1885) used them in his collage study *Cherry Marmalade* "on which pictures of the fruit in containers are pasted on light and dark marbled (*marmorierten*) papers, which in Spitzweg's dialect are called 'Marmelpapiere,' leading him very nicely to the verbal association with marmalade."<sup>1</sup> The use of decorative papers were also noted in the collages, assemblages, memory chests and shadow boxes of several artists: Pablo Picasso, *Guitar & Wineglass*, 1913; Kurt Schwitters, *Merz 94*, 1920; Max Ernst, *The Postman Horse*, 1932; Joseph Cornell, *L'Égypte*, 1940; Robert Rauschenberg, *Hymnal*, 1955; and Irwin Kremen, *Beginegan*, 1966, etc. My repeated exposure to fragments of decorative papers in such works of art eventually led to studying them as whole sheets in the daylight of art stores where I found many were named after their makers: Bertini (Italian lithographed papers); Cockerell (English marbled papers); Piazzesi (Italian paste papers); St. Albans (English printed papers); Suminagashi (Japanese marbled papers), etc., all having infinite designs and antecedents only scholars could elucidate.

My collecting of decorative papers has been an eclectic experience, based on aesthetic rather than historical choices, as is evident with my find of an 1880 patented wooden pamphlet and magazine box (fig. 1) containing specimens of a French shell marbled paper. The use of decorative papers for the boxes I construct to preserve book and paper materials for museums and artists has contributed to my knowledge of decorative papers as design solutions (fig. 2).

In 1976, as design associate of the Penmaen Press in Lincoln, Massachusetts, I was asked by publisher/printer Michael McCurdy to assist with binding designs and production functions. My association with



What is it like doing paste paper for hire? Initially it's a challenge which quickly turns into work by rote. Only twice have I been hired by two private presses to design and deliver sheets for special editions. The two jobs totalled over 500 sheets. Both orders were two color with a template used at various intervals. The quick-drying light paste I used allowed production of one sheet at a time. Two major problems in edition work were charging a fair price for labor and trying to overcome the boredom of repeating an endless pattern. I have dealt with the price problem; the boredom has prevented me from accepting very large orders.

Procrastinating on delivery of one large edition saw me spending seven straight days in my apartment, putting in 15 hour days, and stepping on newspapers on my floors to tiptoe between sheets of wet paste paper. My small apartment floors can take seventy medium-sized sheets at a time, and still allow me to get to the refrigerator, kitchen sink, and bathroom. When dry, I used to take each sheet, face down, and go over it with a bond folder to reduce the curl. Having tired of that, I tried ironing them. It worked better, faster, and dried the sheets quicker.

I give clients only samples which I feel comfortable producing. There is nothing worse than repeating a hated pattern. Some people might find consistency of color from batch to batch a slight problem. (In large editions I mix new colors each day.) Though there is some color variation and even pattern variation, it is just those differences I find in paste paper that make it a very special and personal process.<sup>2</sup>

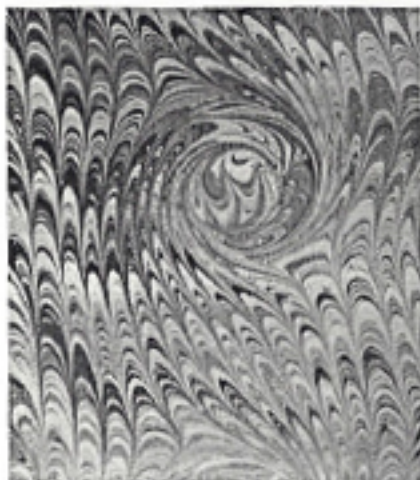


fig. 4. *Pere A Lisbon Disaster*. Half Binding, deluxe edition with black cloth and multi-colored marbled paper by Mitchell & Malik. 11 x 7 inches.



fig. 5. *Pere Upon A Lisbon Disaster*. Half binding, special edition with black cloth and black-silver Bertini decorative paper. 11 x 7 inches.

The second and third use of decorative papers occurred in 1977 for Voltaire's *Pere Upon A Lisbon Disaster*, printed in editions of one hundred deluxe, two hundred special, and two hundred regular. The hand-bound deluxe edition (fig. 4) was covered with a four-color custom-marbled paper, ordered by the Harcourt Bindery, fifty sheets of 19 x 24 inch paper made by Mitchell and Malik, English marblers. The special machine bound edition (fig. 5) used a decorative Italian Bertini

paper, supplied by Andrews/Nelson/Whitehead of Long Island City, New York. The machine bound regular editions were full cloth.

In 1978 three books were printed, one with a decorative paper binding. *Banquet* (fig. 6), five short stories by women authors about women, was printed in editions of two hundred deluxe and five hundred regular. The handbound deluxe editions were covered with a printed paper, titled *Willows*, originally designed in 1874 by William Morris and supplied by the Rampant Lion Press (Will & Sebastian Carter) of Cambridge, England. I learned of the Rampant Lion papers in the spring 1978 GBW *Newsletter*, at the eleventh hour of designing the binding!



fig. 6. *Banquet*. Three quarter binding, deluxe edition with brown cloth and brown-yellow *Willows* paper. 10 x 6.5 inches.

Decorative papers on the 1976 and 1977 publications were used as cloth/paper half bindings, and wear of the paper corners was already evident. A remedy suggested by Sam Ellenport of the Harcourt Bindery, and used on *Banquet*, involved first making full cloth bindings, then applying the decorative paper (*Willows*) with pretrimmed corners, creating a three-quarter binding with cloth corners, without the usual paper depressions along the inner cloth shoulder and corner edges.

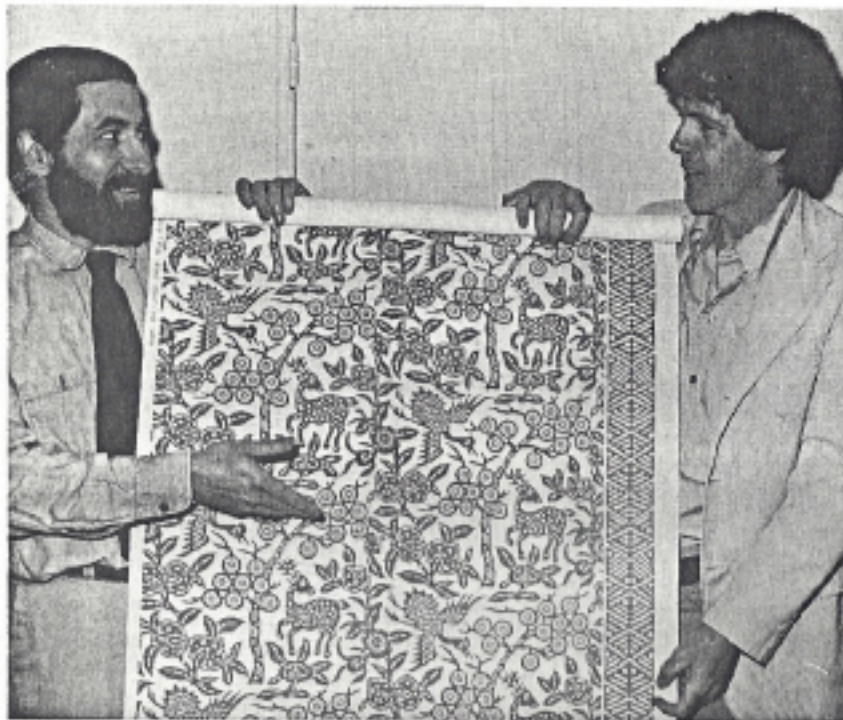


fig. 7. Robert Hauser (left). Michael McCurdy (right). 1979.

The fourth use of a decorative paper appeared with the nine-hundred-year-old stories of *King Harald and the Icelanders* in 1979, machine bound in editions of one hundred special and eight hundred trade. In 1977 I was aware of the publisher's intent to print these stories, and serendipitously, while visiting the Old Stone Mill in Adams, Massachusetts, I found a selection of wallpapers. Among them was a paper titled, *Happiness*, with stylized flora and fauna very reminiscent of images in Icelandic literature.

A design by Brunschwig & Fils of New York, it is a hand-serigraphed wallpaper, printed in a burgundy vat color on a cream-toned paper. The word vat refers to a dye which has a high degree of fastness to light and washing and is therefore highly desirable.<sup>3</sup> Several weeks after this find, I visited the Burlen Bindery in Hingham, Massachusetts and experimented with turning-in, pasting, curl, scoring and abrasion qualities of the paper. It was decided to use the wallpaper, and I convinced the publisher to purchase the remaining six rolls from the Old Stone Mill (fig. 7).



fig. 8. *King Harald and the Icelanders*. Three quarter binding, special edition with cream colored *Elephant Hide* paper and wallpaper *Happiness*. 9.5 x 6 inches.

Handcutting the repeat patterns of reindeer and bird designs, we obtained from the thirty-inch wide rolls four alternating pieces per two feet of wallpaper, providing the necessary two hundred different recto and verso cover designs from fifty feet of wallpaper for the one hundred special copies. The three-quarter binding was covered in full *Elephant Hide* paper (supplied by Process Materials, Carlstadt, New Jersey) with the wallpaper corners pretrimmed and applied (fig. 8).

The binding designs of 19th century English binder, T.J. Cobden-Sanderson, were considered to be based in the design language of the decorative arts, "imitations of certain wallpapers," as one critic wrote.<sup>4</sup> In retrospect, *Happiness* has demonstrated that despite the name, wallpaper needn't be limited to a single decorative purpose. Wallpaper patterns exhibit close design parallels to end papers, "particular wallpaper because they were intended for a flat surface."<sup>5</sup>

As design associate of the Penmaen Press, I will continue to seek ways to improve and use binding methods and materials such as

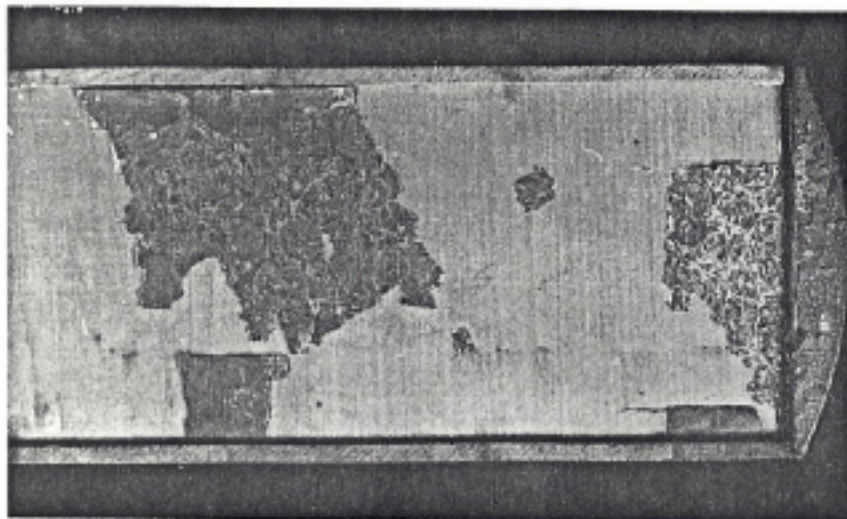


fig. 1. 1880 wooden pamphlet box, top view, 5 x 10 inches.

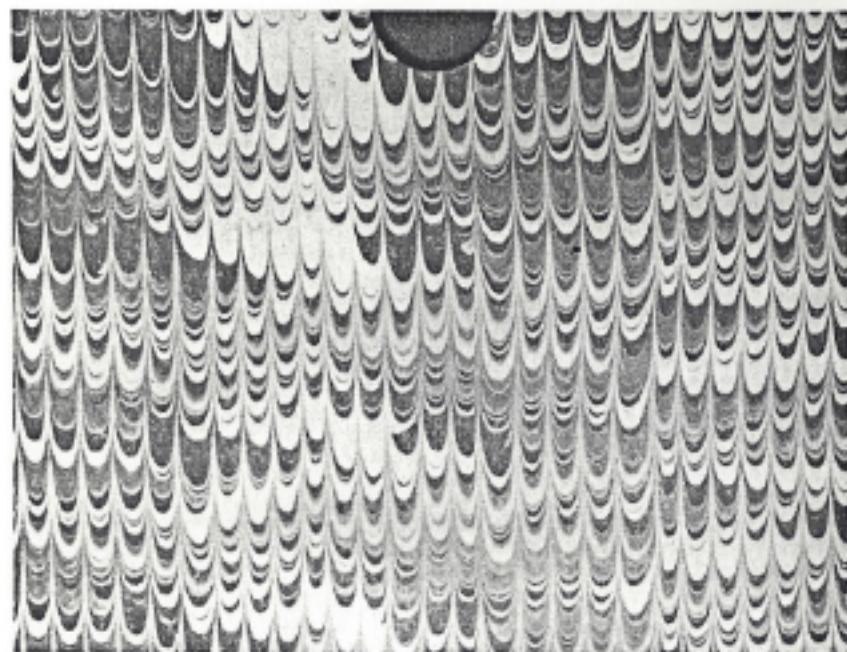


fig. 2. Busyhaus slipcase made with multi-colored combed marbled paper from Harcourt Bindery.

9.5 x 6.5 inches.

this press and previous work in the book arts have allowed me to understand and influence the relationships between bookbinding and graphic design cum binding design, which the remainder of this article further documents.

The Penmaen Press was founded in 1968 as a fine press devoted to the book arts and contemporary literature. Books and broadsides have been printed letterpress and contain original graphics. During the years 1968-1976 only one of nine books published was hand bound, however. It was *The Quaker Queries*, an edition of one hundred, bound by Ivan Ruzicka.

Prior to 1977, the use of decorative papers as binding design solutions had not been considered. From 1977 to 1979, six books were published in four deluxe editions, handbound by the Harcourt Bindery, of Boston, Massachusetts, and two other deluxe editions were machine bound by the Burlen and Horowitz binderies. Three of the deluxe and two of the special editions were bound using a variety of decorative papers.

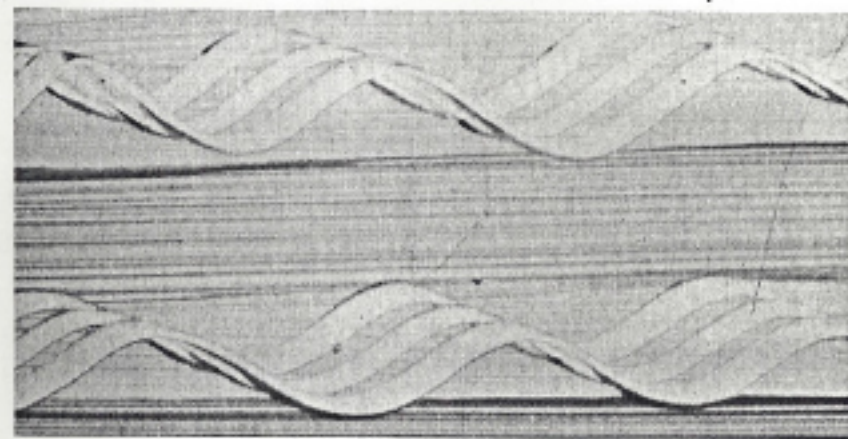


fig. 3. *An Act or Two of Foolish Kindness*. Half binding, deluxe edition with dark blue cloth and maroon-toned paste papers by Carol Blinn. 10 x 6.5 inches.

In 1977, *An Act or Two of Foolish Kindness* by William Saroyan was printed in editions of three hundred deluxe, handbound, and two hundred trade, machine bound. As design associate, I suggested that Carol Blinn, proprietor printer of the Warwick Press located in Easthampton, Massachusetts be commissioned to design and make paste papers for the Saroyan deluxe edition (fig. 3). The making of these paste papers is further explained by Carol Blinn:

archival printing papers, endpapers, adhesives, cloth, etc., and to work with hand binders, collectors, and makers of decorative papers, such as GBW member, Emily Rizzo-Ellenport, who has jointly handbound Penmaen Press books and generously allowed me to study her decorative paper collection of over three hundred designs.

Decorative papers being considered for publications in progress include Laura Ashley wallpapers (New York, Boston, and other US retail outlets); William Morris wallpapers (Arthur Sanderson Ltd., London); and Indian marbled papers by Sri Aurobindo Ashram (Mere Cie, Canoga Park, California). In addition to these, I presently work with an inventory of over one hundred existing decorative papers, trying to provide binding designs that are appropriate to the titles produced. Such endeavors are part of the reasons we love books: because they are books, for their odors, forms, and pages covered with dust, and the pretty word *finis*.<sup>6</sup>

1. Herta Wescher, *COLLAGE* (New York: 1968), p. 14.
2. Letter from Carol J. Blinn to author, 27 June 1979.
3. Letter from Judith Koper, Brunswick & Fils, to author, 22 June 1979.
4. David Chambers, "Recent British Press Books Suitable for Design Binding," *DESIGNER BOOKBINDERS REVIEW*, 12 (Autumn 1978), p. 19.
5. Sue Allen, "Floral-Patterned Endpapers in Nineteenth-Century American Books," *WINTERTHUR PORTFOLIO* 12 (1977), p. 185-6.
6. With apologies to Gustave Flaubert, *BIBLIOMANIA*, Miniature Press edition, (London: Rodale Press, 1954), p. 12.