

The New Bookbinder

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'Myths, Heroes and Legends'

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The Crisscross Binding

Anne Goy

Research, whether technical or aesthetic, has always been a guiding principle of my work. Working with books and bindings offers me many avenues of reflection: the ingenuity that binders have demonstrated over centuries, the evolution of techniques, and the diversity of imagined solutions for preserving and disseminating the written word. Each element that constitutes a book can be re-examined, questioned, and modified.

It was during my early explorations, around 1984, while studying at La Cambre in Brussels, that I became interested in the Japanese binding style. During that time our professor, Micheline de Bellefroid, focussed mainly on teaching the traditional techniques of fine binding. Discovering this ‘easy’ technique however, opened up a world of new creative possibilities and freedom. I was particularly taken by the visual effect of the sewing thread, as it alone seemed to suffice as decoration for the book. It struck a chord with me, as it was what I have always looked out for and loved: simplicity.

The Japanese style works well for sheets of thin and flexible paper, such as used in Asia. I found, however, that if one did not want a wide gutter or to tip on additional tabs, this technique was not suitable for our thicker, more rigid Western papers. So I set out to develop a similar structure that would work well for books sewn in sections.. It was to be as simple and quick in its execution, have that decorative element to it, but would have the advantage of opening well with folded sections inside. My good knowledge of traditional techniques helped, as I was able to determine precisely those elements that I had to re-envisage in order to make this project work.

The binding structure that I then developed, is characterized by its three-part cover (the spine and two sides), and the use of thread to join the separate elements together. The thread also functions as the binding’s hinge. This early structure was first presented at La Cambre’s 1986 exhibition. I continued to make some further variations and presented these at a workshop for experimental

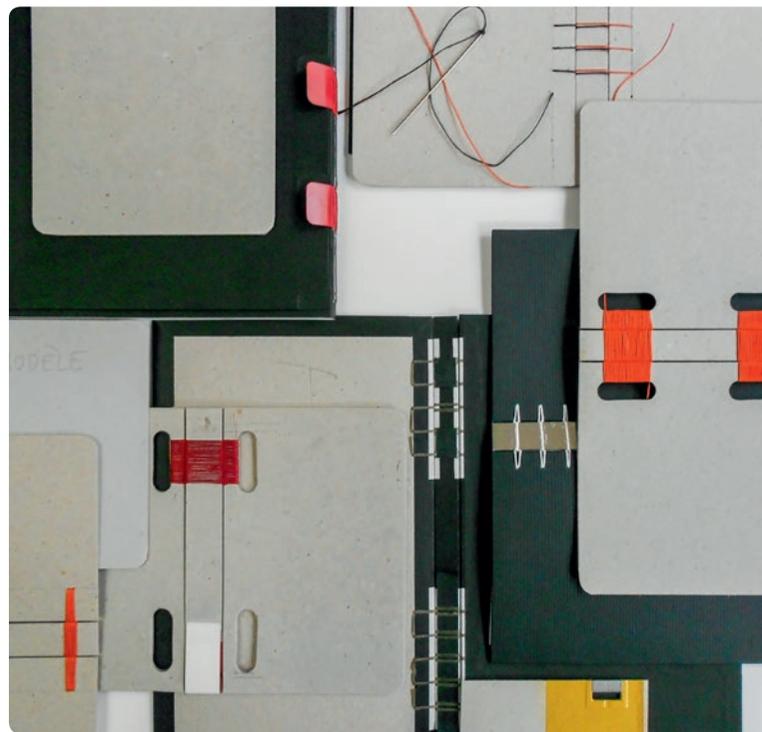


Fig. 1. Exploration and experiments.

bookbinding at L’Atelier du Livre in Mariemont. Then I left it at that and went on to other areas of research.

It was only much later, in 2009, that I came across my structure on the internet. Here it bore the enigmatic name ‘The Secret Belgian Binding’, and was thus described and explained. Was this a mere coincidence or an imitation? Research quickly confirmed that it was indeed my invention that was being circulated. Some commentaries claimed that this technique had come into existence sometime between the 14th and 16th century in a Belgian monastery!

I was thrilled to see that this structure had travelled so far and sparked so much interest all around the world. I renamed the technique Crisscross, a simple reference to the crossing motion of the thread and resumed work on this technique at the point where I had left off earlier. After a while I applied for the research bursary that was offered by L’Atelier du Livre in Mariemont, with the objective to fine-tune details and improve the overall technique. I was fortunate to be awarded the stipend, so that I could dedicate the necessary time to the refinement of the design [Fig. 1]. The final results were written up and illustrated for a manual published by Esperluète Editions in 2013.

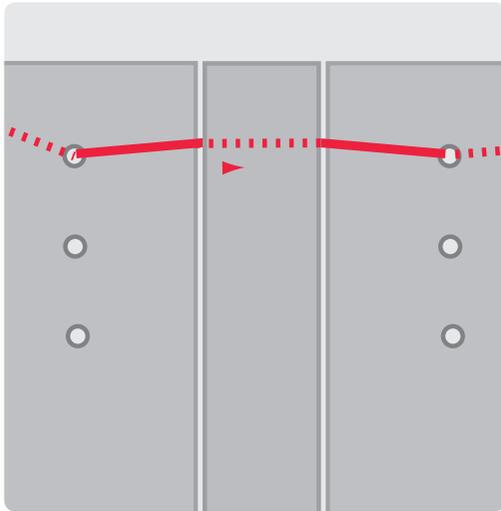


Fig. 2a. Start the sewing from the inside.

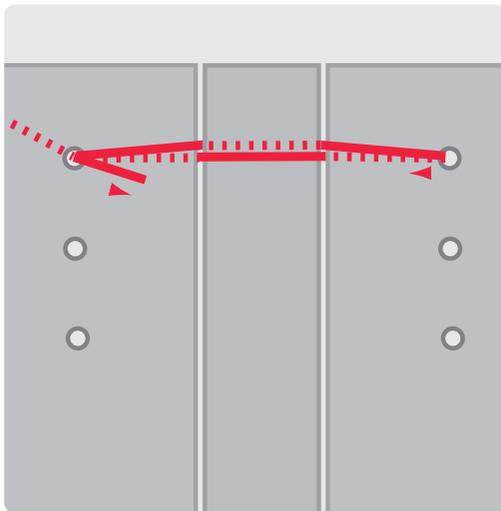


Fig. 2b. Weave your way forwards and backwards. Take care to have an even thread tension throughout.

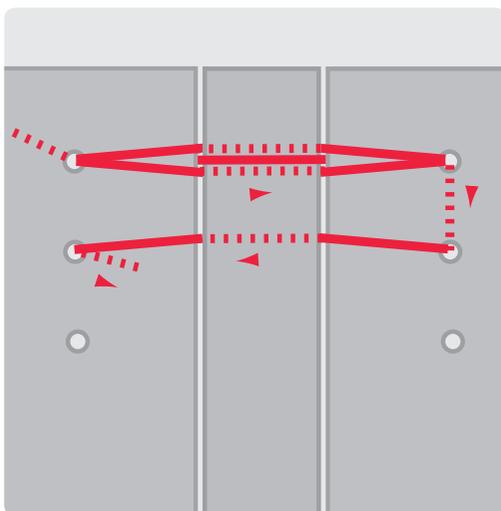


Fig. 2c. Cross down to the next sewing station on the inside of your cover.

CRISSCROSS: THE BASIC TECHNIQUE

The peculiarity of this structure lies in the fact that the three-part cover is made first, and that the sections are sewn in afterwards. The decorative character of the Crisscross structure is due to the choice of thread and the sewing pattern for the cover, and there are many variations to be explored within this. Please be aware that this structure is particularly suitable for thin and light books. The thickness of the text-block should not exceed 12mm. In order to create an elegant appearance I suggest using thin board (1mm) for the spine and side pieces.

Tools:

A cutting mat, ruler, scalpel with a straight blade, and a bonefolder. A hole punch, a straight and curved needle for sewing, and a pencil for marking up.

Materials:

The book in sections, 1mm board for both the boards and spine piece, a thick thread for the outer sewing of the case (this will be visible and part of the design) and a thin thread for sewing the sections into the case. Covering paper (approximately 120gsm), lining paper (approximately 120gsm), PVA.

Basic step-by-step guide:

1. Prepare the sections one by one: fold and trim them to their final size.
2. Cut the front and back boards to size:
 - width = width of sections + 1.5mm square.
 - height = height of sections + (2 x 1.5mm square).
3. Cut the spine piece to size:
 - width = thickness of the stack of sections + add another ¼ of the stack of sections + twice the thickness of the board.
 - height = height of sections + (2 x 1.5mm square).
4. Determine your sewing pattern for the case and mark this out on both of your boards.
5. Punch out the holes and remove any burr with a scalpel.
6. Cover the outside of your boards with the covering paper, take care to have an even turn-in all round. Cover and line the spine. Allow them to dry under a weight.
7. Sew the cover together: crisscross! [Figs 2a–c] It may help to clamp the boards together for this process, in order to give it a bit more stability [Fig. 3].

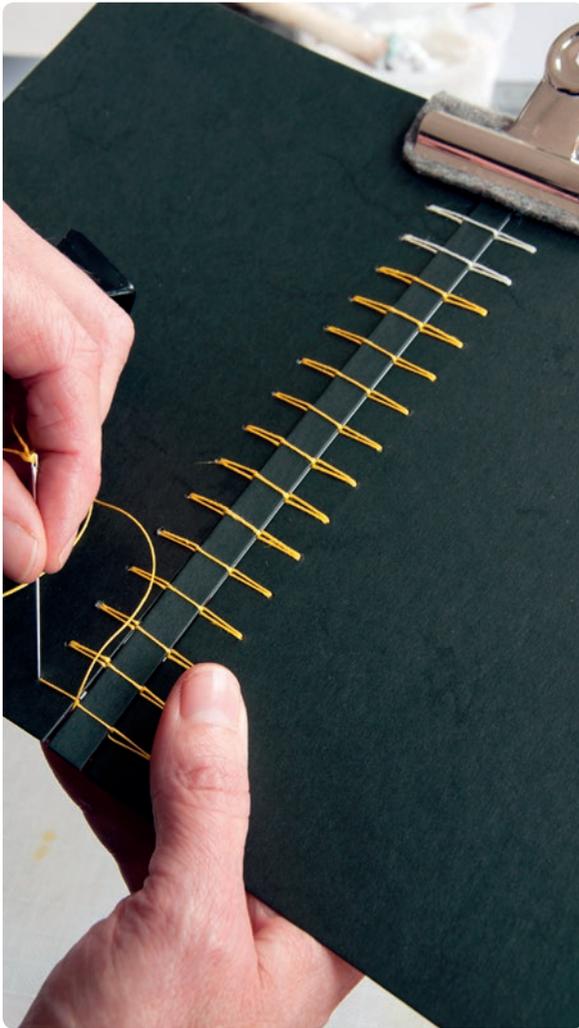


Fig. 3. The case is stabilized by a bulldog clip during sewing.

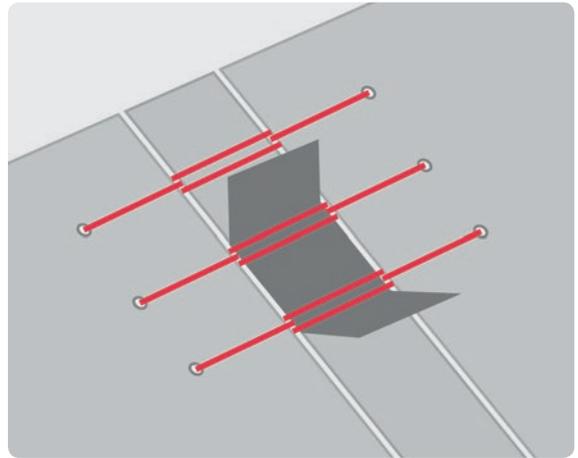


Fig. 4. Gathering together a few threads with a light strip of card to create sewing stations.

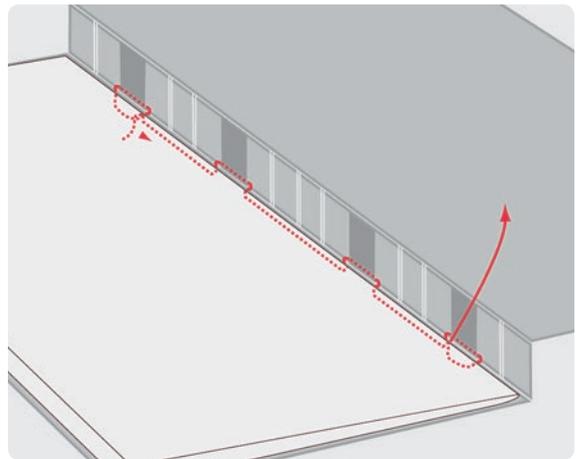


Fig. 5. Sewing the first section into the case. As there is no kettle stitch, you 'tie up' the ends by winding your thread around the respective last sewing station by 360 degrees, and then move up to the next section.

8. Tip the loose ends of your sewing thread down. On the inside of your case, feed a little glue under your threads, so that they adhere to the board. Line the inside of the boards (*bord-à-bord*, or leave a square, as you wish).
9. Place small strips of card strategically on the inside of your spine, gathering together some of the crisscross threads. These will act as sewing stations for your sections [Fig. 4]. Mark out their positions on a piece of card, as if they were tapes and use this as a template to punch the matching holes in your sections. Do not, however, add holes for the kettle stitches as they are not needed in this technique.
10. Sew the sections into the case [Figs 5 & 6]. A curved needle works best for this.

The binding is finished!

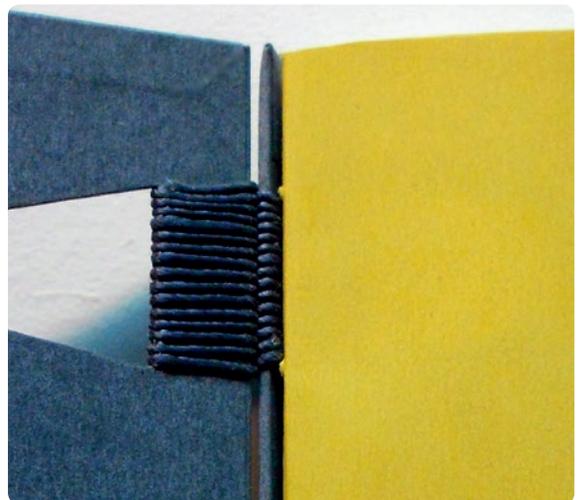
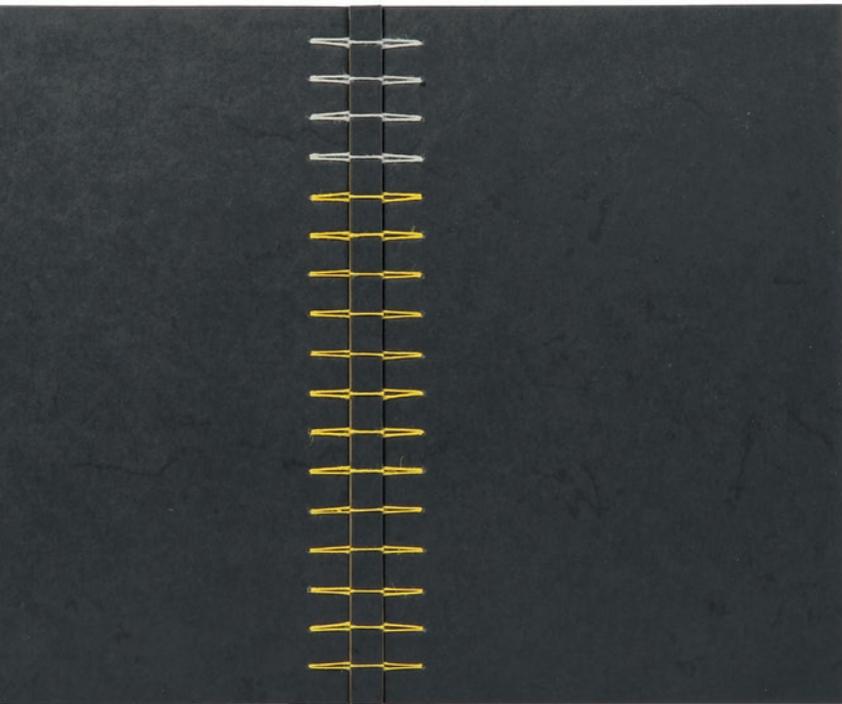


Fig. 6. Close-up of the finished sewn-in book.



Experimenting with the colour of the thread...



the shape of the hole...



the spacing of the thread...



the sheen and thickness of the thread...

EDITORS NOTE:

Anne Goy's manual for the crisscross binding was published by Esperluète Editions. This very comprehensive step-by-step guide is illustrated with great care, and put together with an evident passion and love for the subject. We recommend it highly. *Reliure crisscross/ crisscross Binding* by Anne Goy, fr./ engl. Esperluète Editions, ISBN-13: 978-2359840322

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