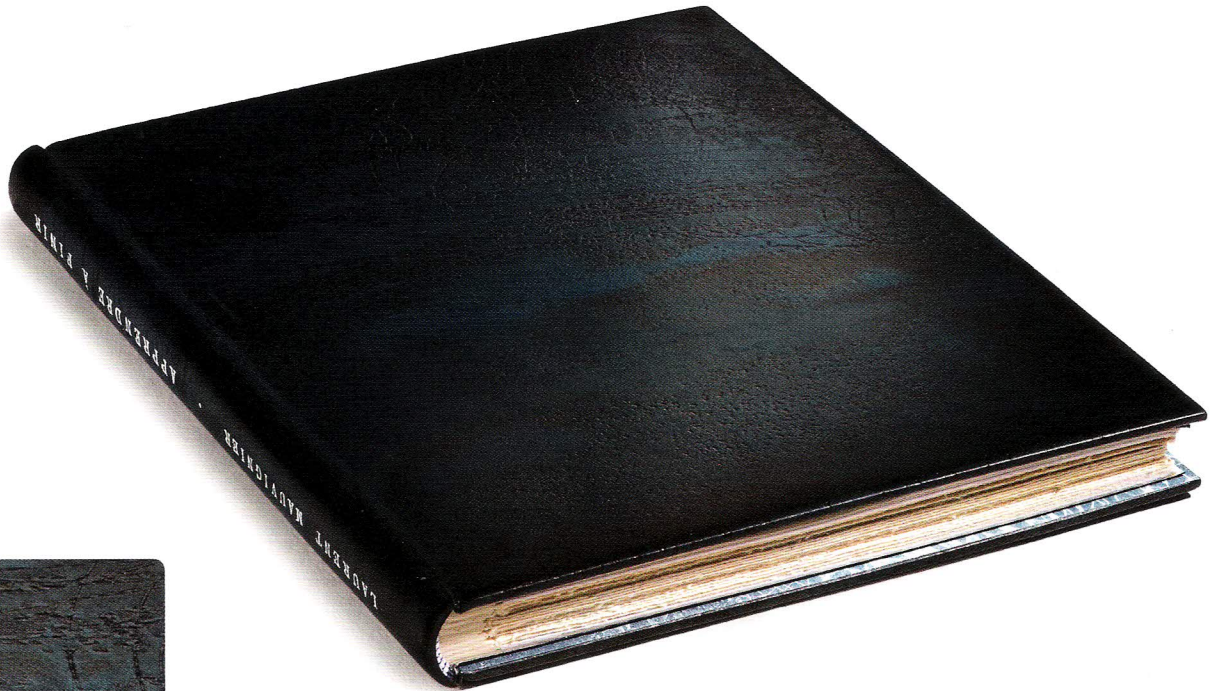


Translation by Ronan Healy



Apprendre à finir by Laurent Mauvignier, Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 2000. Bound 2014.

As with many trades, there are several different ways to be a bookbinder. As soon as I came into contact with this trade, I knew I wanted to work in design bookbinding. And within this small niche, I chose to focus on the continuation of the tradition of the classic full leather binding rather than developing new structures. This doesn't mean that I am opposed to technical innovation, or uninterested in the research carried out on bindings for conservation; it is just that I have always felt quite moved by the structure of a laced-on full leather binding. I am fascinated by its mechanical complexity and aesthetic refinement, as well as by the fact that countless generations of binders have toiled to make it ever more functional and precise. It is in the continuity of this approach that I situate my work.

In Belgium they actually call the full leather binding *passé carton* (laced-on-boards) and in France *reliure cinq ficelles* (binding on five cords). Both leave the choice of material up to the binder. So once the text-block lies on the bench, looking pretty in itself with a nicely lined up spine and bevelled boards, the question that arises is what should it be covered in? Like many others I favour

the use of leather, as it is supple yet resilient, and allows for taut edges and beautiful headcaps. It is virtually impossible to obtain a satisfactory result with parchment or paper on this structure.

Leather is a sumptuous material. Depending on the animal it originates from and how it is tanned, the texture and appearance can vary immensely. Grained hides such as *maroquin* (Morocco), buffalo or *chagrin* (shagreen) are 'leather' to the extreme. Despite beautifully arranged shapes and colours, the natural texture becomes a distinct imposed element and the binding seems to shout out, 'I am covered by an animal skin.' It is for this reason that I rarely use these skins in my work.

The chrome-tanned box calf leather, with its very fine grain and its smooth appearance, distances itself from this connotation. That said, I have always found that the tanning tends to render it inert, not to mention the occasions when the surface looks as if it has been coated in varnish or when it seems more like plastic than leather. I am exaggerating of course, and there are some beautifully sleek skins whose deep colours look like stained glass, and the variations of these colours are enhanced by the dye

