

There may be other ways of doing onlays; I am thinking in particular of Monique Lallier she does a lot of onlay work, as do other binders.

But I shall pass on the method taught to me at college.

You need really, really thin leather, so thin you can see light through it. The only practical method to obtain such thin leather is with a hand paring machine, they run on disposable razor blades, but they are pricey new and you seldom see them second hand I think a new machine costs about £250.00 (ouch)

You will also need a nipping press.

You need two adhesives, ordinary PVA and a paste made from bread flour. After making the paste to ordinary consistency, you then want to take some and thin it right down with water to make a weak paste. Also you need a couple of paint brushes.

You will also need some cartridge paper, about 100gsm. You need a cartridge paper because it is a hard paper, soft paper is no good.

Ok. You thin down your leather and then using the weak paste you glue the cartridge paper to the **grain** side of the leather, make sure the leather is smooth, then give it a press and allow to dry.

Having decided on your pattern and traced it onto the paper, using a new 10a scalpel blade cut around the pattern, making sure that the blade cuts in at an angle, the reason for doing this is that when you stick the onlay onto the book, you won't have an edge that can get caught, see illustration below.



Having cut out your pattern you apply PVA to the flesh side of the leather and stick the leather in place onto the book, make sure you don't apply too much PVA you only want a thin even film, allow to dry a little, only a little, then move to the nipping press.

Place the book on some clean sheets of cartridge paper, then likewise place several sheets on top, over the onlays, place a smooth faced board on top of that then tighten the press up, you want quite a lot of pressure, but not crazy tight.

Leave overnight, next morning remove the book from the press.

The reason for using the cartridge paper now becomes clear; the onlay has been pushed down into the leather by the thickness of the cartridge paper, so it no longer sits on the surface.

Now using a wet cotton bud, you gently dab water over the surface of the cartridge paper on top of the onlay, work slowly, allow time for the water to penetrate the paper, keep working at it, eventually, because the paste is only very weak, the paper will come away, leaving the onlay.

And that's it.