

Desert Leathercraft LLC Leather Big Book¹ Cover Tutorials



Leather Selection and Storage

Revised 5-16-2014

Copyright © 2014 by Bob Stelmack, All Rights Reserved

Page

- 1 Basic Design
- 1 Leather Types
- 2 Leather Measurements
- 2 Leather Selection for a Big Book Cover
- 2 What Size/Quantity of Leather to Buy
- 2 Where to Purchase Leather
- 3 Leather Storage
- 4 Inventory Control
- 4 Tips

Basic Design

Found a niche market—custom leather big book covers.

Searching the Internet with the key words “leather big book covers” or searching www.Etsy.com revealed many commercial leather-like, bonded-leather, vinyl or thin-leather covers. When I did find hand-crafted book covers, they all had that same look to them. They were smooth tanned leather with hand carvings on them. Very few had custom crisp text embossed on the leather. And they were all brown colored.

The basic design for my leather book covers comes from early school days when we cut up paper grocery bags, folded them and made a cover to protect the school books. Here is a picture (fig. 1-3) of a sample using a piece of legal sized paper on a portable

¹The “Big Book” is a registered trademark of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.

²Alcoholics Anonymous is a registered trademark of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.

³A.A. is a registered trademark of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.

Fig. 1



Fig. 2

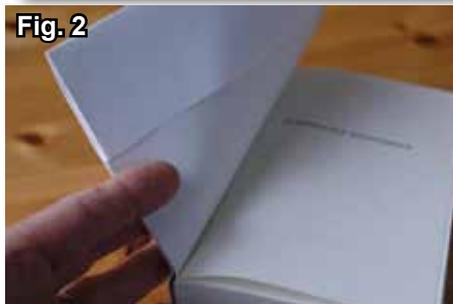


Fig. 3



Alcoholics Anonymous² Big Book¹ and it resembles a “dust cover” found on new hard bound novels.

My initial construction was done before I owned a leather industrial sewing machine. All the construction was done with either leather lacing or hand stitching using the “saddle stitch”.

My tools were limited to:

- Metal 2-foot carpenter’s steel square
- Utility knife
- Lacing needle and thonging chisel for laced edges or Sewing needle

and awl for sewn edges

- Rubber cement, Contact cement or PVA glue

Additionally, I tested and designed dual book covers, large print book covers, pocket book covers, even triple book covers. Also made samples for “As Bill Sees It”, “Daily Reflections”, etc, in fact, samples for most of the AA³ literature.

So, I tried some newer designs using a combination of colored chrome tanned leather and vegetable tanned leather embossed with letterpress moveable lead type.

I started by making covers with whatever was at hand or whatever was on sale to keep the costs down, but I still wanted the ability to carve or emboss lettering and other art work on the cover. So, I decided to use chrome tanned cow hide as the main part of the construction, but sew on an applique (patch) of vegetable tanned leather to do the art work and lettering.

Leather Types

The two main types of leather for making leather book covers are: (1) vegetable tanned and (2) chrome tanned. For a detailed description of the process and other types leather tanning, please see: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leather

Vegetable Tanned

Vegetable tanned (vegtan) leather is produced using tannins from vegetation such as: tree bark, leaves, fruits, roots, etc. The process allows embossing, stamping and carving. This type of leather is used for the applique on the book cover and sometimes used for the entire book cover.

Chrome Tanned

This leather is made with a process using chromium salts to make a more weather



Fig. 4

proof leather. Chrome tanned leather is the main leather for the book cover construction. It is more flexible, wider range of colors, various textures and finishes.

Leather Measurements

Leather is sold by square foot and its thickness is measured (fig. 4) in ounces (one-ounce is equal to 1/64”).

Shown here (fig. 4) is the measurement between 5-ounce and 6-ounce (a little over 2mm, or a little over 5/64-inches) and would be sold as 5-6 ounce leather.

Brettuns Leather Village suggests a simple example of thickness based on US coins:

- A dime = 3 oz
- A penny = 3.5 oz
- A quarter = 4 oz
- A nickel = 4.25 oz

With a handful of coins the following true:

- 6 oz leather is like two dimes stacked one atop the other.
- 8 oz is two quarters stacked together.
- 12 oz is three quarters stacked together.

Leather Selection for a Big Book Cover

All of the leather covers I make are lined. This is done to help the book and its hard covers to slide in the leather book cover when the book is opened and closed. In fact, I suggest that the customer retain or make a dust cover to aid in this important slippage. If the book’s hard cover sticks, it puts a strain on the spine of the book and ultimately separates the hard cover from the spine and the pages begin to detach.

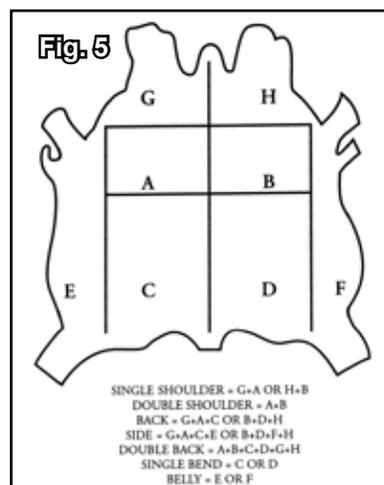
Lining suggestion: If a thick piece of leather is chosen for the outside of the cover, then a thin piece of leather is chosen for the lining. Likewise, if a thin piece of leather is chosen for the outside of the cover, then a thick piece of leather is chosen for the lining.

The total thickness for the standard sized hardcover Big Book should not exceed 9-ounces. This, of course, depends on the “temper” or “hand” of the leather. If the temper is firm, not easily bent then the total thickness must be thinner accordingly. If the leather has a soft hand or temper, then thicker leather can be used because it bends much easier. It seems that most customers prefer the thicker covers. They equate thickness to quality.

What Size/Quantity of Leather to Buy

Chrome Tanned

“Cows aren’t square”. So cutting rectangles out of cow hides (fig. 5) causes wastage.



Generally the leather industry expects approximately 15% waste. In the case of making leather book covers I found the wastage to be as high as 50%. The largest waste comes from the “laced top & bottom” covers since the cover, outside flaps and the inside flaps are all one piece. That means that the largest cover (Duel Large Print Big Book & Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions) would require a single piece of leather about 1-foot by 3-foot in size.

Normally I purchase chrome tanned leather by the side. Buying by the whole hide is too difficult to maneuver on my 2.5-foot by 6-foot cutting table. When I purchase full hides I cut them on the living room floor with a SKIL Multi-Cutter (fig 6). The Multi-Cutter is self sharpening and has a foot that allows the cutter to slide across the rug without cutting the rug.



Fig. 6

A full chrome tanned cow hide is around 40-60 square feet and a side is 20-30 square feet.

I purchase 3-4 ounce or 5-6 ounce for the covers. Also purchase 2-3 ounce or 3-4 ounce for lining.

Vegetable Tanned

Vegtan leather can be purchased by the whole hide, side, back, double back, shoulder, double shoulder and belly.

- Belly: Irregular long shapes (usually too stretchy)
- Single Shoulder, Double Shoulder or Bend: Good cut, but usually more expensive
- Back or Double Back: best for belts and straps

I purchase 3-4 ounce vegtan leather for the appliques and for the covers when the customer wants the cover made completely from vegtan leather.

Where to Purchase Leather

“Google is your friend” Using most any web browsing application you can search for “chrome tanned leather sides” or “vegetable tanned leather sides”. There are a lot of Etsy or eBay sellers and can vary in quality and expectations from descriptions. I prefer to shop on-line from companies that I have dealt with or from suggestions from other leather crafters. Here are the places I shop at (in alphabetical order):

Brettuns Village Leather

Brettuns is a good place to get bargain leathers. They have weekly “Wednesday Deal of the Week” and often have some interesting leather--and the shipping is free! Also, Churchill Barton has an entertaining monthly newsletter, be sure to sign up for it.

If you are a member of Puget Sound Leather Artisans Co-Op (www.pslac.org) then you also get an additional discount.

www.brettunsvillage.com/leather/

Hide House

Hide House is my “go-to” place to get that special leather and color. Get their catalog and their sample swatches. They deliver quick and their shipping costs are reasonable. I use their “motochap” leathers, faux crocodile, faux ostrich and their economy vegetable tanned leathers.

<https://hidehouse.com/products/>

Oregon Leather

Oregon leather is one of the companies that show up at the Pendleton Leather Show in the Fall at Pendleton, Oregon. Since it is only a hour drive I go and get stocked up for the Winter. They have large selection and since Sheridan Leather and Tandy also are at the show, there is some good comparison shopping.

Oregon Leather has a wide selection of leather, leather tools and a highly experienced and trained staff.

<http://www.oregonleatherco.com/>

Sheridan Leather

Sheridan Leather has a wide variety of leather with some kangaroo leathers in multiple colors, some camouflage printed leather and some high quality Herman Oak vegetable tanned leathers. Sheridan Leather participates in four leather trade shows I’ve attended and these shows are place to get really good deals on leather and leather tools and equipment. Information on the dates for the four trade show in Pendleton, OR; Sheridan, WYO; Wichita Falls, TX; and Wickenburg, AZ can be found and other information on Sheridan Leather can be found at:

www.sheridanleather.com/Default.asp

Tandy Leather Factory

Tandy Leather is a long time retail craft store that many first time people get started in leather craft. They have a catalog they will send for no cost. The best thing about Tandy is that you usually have a store, within driving distance in the USA where you can see, feel and ask questions about the products

and leather they have on hand.

I learned most of my leather craft skills from the leather books that Tandy carries written by either Al Stohlman or Peter Main. Those books offer the clearest illustrations and written descriptions of any I’ve run across.

www.tandyleatherfactory.com

Weaver Leather

Weaver Leather is where I purchase the ma-



expensive, but the quality has been good.

www.weaverleathersupply.com/

Leather Storage

Store chrome tanned leather rolled hide side (the finished side) inside the roll and store in shipping boxed (fig. 9) or concrete cardboard forms (fig. 7-8). Find a moderate temperature area that is dry and for vegtan leather the less light the better.

In fact, wrap the vegtan leather in butcher paper and put into shipping boxes (fig. 9). Shipping boxes (Model S-4525 12 x 12 x 48” \$2.36 in bundles of 15) can be found at:





Fig. 10

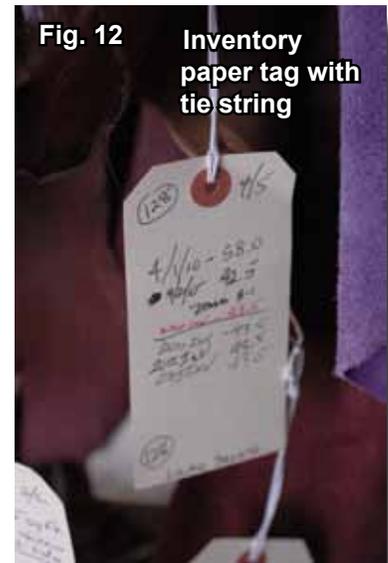


Fig. 12 Inventory paper tag with tie string

www.uline.com

Sunlight, artificial light or some chemicals in the air will darken the vegan leather, but will not be even overall. It will leave light and dark areas that will not go away, even after dyeing the leather.

A unit can be made out of storage boxes and a simple wooden frame and can be expanded as your inventory grows.

- www.pinterest.com and search for: leather, scraps, craft
- Donate to the Scouting organizations

Inventory Control

If you start a business the nightmare of maintaining Cost of Goods Sold (COGS) for the Schedule C of the IRS 1040 can be simplified by simply weighing (fig. 10-11) each purchase of leather when received and record the cost (include shipping) of the leather. At the end of the year you can calculate the cost of the leather used which will include the waste (scraps) by a final weighing.

Tips

1. Ask every leather supplier to send a catalog, price list and sample swatches.
2. Make up a tag (fig. 12) for each side bought with the company, description, cost, thickness, color and any other information to make ordering the same leather again. Also weight the leather for inventory purposes.
3. Scrap leather can be used in several ways:



Fig. 13



Fig. 11



Fig. 15



Fig. 14

- Use for faux quarter or half bound decoration (fig 13-15) on the book covers.
- Use thin leathers and make strips for book marks