

Introduction

The function of an endpaper is simple: it visually and functionally unites the cover of a book with the interior. At its most basic, it consists of a folded sheet of paper, one side of which is pasted down to the front or back cover of the book, the other side being allowed to open freely. Structurally, endpapers connect the block of leaves to the cover and hide the raw edges of the paper or fabric that wraps the cover. They also help transition readers from the exterior design of the book to the text inside, enhancing the theme of the book, providing information such as maps, or serving as an introduction to the illustrative content. They may be plain or patterned; they may contain drawings of the characters, or portraits of the author or his monogram, or even advertisements.

Endpapers are a traditional place for books to be signed by the author, which can add value, either monetary or personal, to a volume. They are also the place we find hand-written dedications or pasted-in book name plates; a child's scrawled signature or a personal note, discovered in an old volume in a secondhand bookstore, can be an evocative reminder of our connections both to humanity and to literature.

Decorative endpapers today are less common than they once were, which is unfortunate because they add character, beauty, and meaning to a volume. We see them now most often in expensive collector's editions, illustrated children's books, and fantasy novels with detailed world maps. They also appear in many decorating and gardening books, where they lend a sense of design authority to the book.

This spread: An endpaper from a special illustrated edition of George Orwell's Animal Farm. This is a subtle use of illustrated endpapers as an introduction to the text: while the inside illustrations of the book are beautifully drawn representations of the characters and scenes of the book, the endpapers evoke the revolutionary theme of the story through an artful, humorous, and brilliant collage of newspaper articles.

Craft

Endpapers need to be strong enough to take the strain of a book opening over and over; in some cases, they are the only thing holding the text block to the cover.

The choice of material (paper, silk, or even, historically, snake-skin) is important. It should be substantial enough in thickness that it does not buckle with the application of wet glue or allow for seepage. The pH should be equal to or higher than the pH of the book leaves. The grain should run parallel to the binding of the book, to prevent unsightly buckling. The copy paper used in this sample would be inadequate for actual use in a book.

Reinforcing strips may be used to strengthen the joints. These used to be fashioned from waste vellum, but are now commonly made of fabric, either linen or muslin.

The ink used in printing and the colorants used in dyeing the papers should be colorfast, so that the wet adhesive used to glue the book together down does not cause the color to run.

Endpapers may consist of only one or many folds; they may be reinforced with fabric or waste vellum or not reinforced at all; they may be tipped in or pasted-down or sewn in. Construction methods have varied over time and with respect to the needs of particular binding styles and those of individual projects.

Endpapers in library bindings must adhere to stricter standards than in other bindings, as library books are more likely than other books to see repeated and intense use. The Library Binding Institute has established standards for weight of the paper, the inclusion of cloth reinforcements, and use of a paste-down. The paper used must also pass tests that measure its tensile strength and tearing strength.

This spread: A nice example of an endpaper with a name plate worked into the design, taken from Lemony Snicket's The Miserable Mill, the fourth book in his series A Series of Unfortunate Events. The nameplate cleverly introduces the characters, whose expressions set the tone for the story. The decorative floral pattern gives the papers a vintage feel.

History

In the days of old-fashioned scrolls, wide sections of unadorned parchment were included at the beginning of the scrolls, to protect the text from dirty fingers. However, the earliest book-forms as we know them had no endpapers—just a rough cover and the bound pages. As books evolved and become more and more available to common men, they began to see more and harder use, and a need arose to protect the pages both from heavy wear and from the binding itself. The covers at the time could be made from very damaging materials, such as hardwood boards, and it was important to protect the valuable manuscript inside.

The first endpapers were crafted from left-over vellum, usually the printed waste from other manuscripts, and were entirely practical. But it wasn't long before decoration began to be applied to the paper.

Patterned papers using woodblocks were in production as early as the late 1500s, and continued to evolve over centuries. One early technique was “pasting”, where instead of ink a colored paste was applied to the paper. The wet paste was smoothed over the entire surface and designs were drawn with fingers or other implements. Other methods of pasting included the use of woodblocks, rollers, sponges and spattering.

The end of sixteenth century saw the introduction of marbling, and starting about 1700 Dutch Gilt paper techniques were developed, remaining popular until the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Starting in the 1830s, detailed patterns were set in letterpress, and these can still be found today. The nineteenth century brought experimentation in beautiful gold tooling, leather inlays, and lining books with watered silk. But it also brought an increase in new and less expensive techniques, such as the rolled moiré papers and brightly glazed papers used in cheaper books.

This spread: A colorfully illustrated endpaper from The Three Musketeers by Alexandre Dumas. This lively street scene features a trio of gaily dressed men representing Athos, Porthos and Aramis.

Marbling

The earliest decorated endpapers were cut from sheets of hand-marbled paper. These beautiful papers were introduced to Europe at the end of the sixteenth century and formed the basis for the historical tradition of fancy endpapers.

In this papermaking technique, colored inks are floated on the surface of water and swirled with a toothpick to create complicated designs. The prepared paper is then carefully laid on top the water and pulled away, allowing the color to transfer to the paper.

In later years marbled papers were made by machine, and often included metallic veining in silver or gold. Even book edges were eventually decorated with marbling, a practice originating with the Dutch in about 1675.

There have historically been many styles of marbled papers: the soft colors and moiré effect of Spanish marbling, the delicate veining of Stormont, created using turpentine, the French Curl, the French Shell, and many more. The most talented artists strove to emulate the thin veins and patterns of actual marble. The techniques for making these elaborate patterns were kept in strictest secrecy by their creators; apprentices were taught only enough to know one part of the process, so they could not sell secrets or open competing shops.

Hand-marbled paper is still used today in the construction of hand-crafted and hand-bound editions, as well as in the production of journals and notebooks found on Etsy and at craft fairs. Machine-made marbled endpapers are occasionally found in newer publications, where they can be used to convey a sense of tradition to a book.

This spread: A contemporary marbled endpaper from a copy of Matchless: A Christmas Story by Gregory Maguire. The two-color design ties in to the illustrations in the book, which are printed in the same black and green ink. I personally do not think the pattern sympathizes well with the illustrations, and I would have chosen a thematic pattern for the endpapers in this book.

Patterns

The earliest printed endpapers were crafted using wood-block printing techniques. They were small in design, and might be striped, geometric, or floral. When multiple colors were desired, successive colored inks were applied to a sheet, with a different printing block used for each color.

Dutch Gilt (or Dutch Flowered) endpapers came into production in about 1700. These papers were characterized by the decoration of patterned paper with gold designs. Sometimes they were embossed, and they frequently made use of hand-coloring or stenciling. Printed using woodblock and metal plates, they sometimes imitated the rich textiles of the age. Patterns ranged widely from florals, hunting scenes and alphabets to oriental and renaissance designs.

The mechanization of bookbinding in the 1830's gave printers more time to spend on the details of a book, and paved the way for a new kind of paper decoration. Repeating patterns were created with letterpress printer's decorations. These were typically printed in one color, and the designs were crisp and lovely.

The creative restrictions of this style of endpapers must have made the process challenging and endlessly fascinating. From the limited descriptions available for the technique, I imagined clever, geometric arrangements of tiny glyphs in black in on softly colored papers, but the few images I could find were much more complex than expected. One online vendor of high end photo albums, Indigo Album Design, is offering contemporary letterpress-printed endpapers, and the patterns they have for sale show larger repeating motifs—florals and feathers and fans in one color or two.

This spread: An endpaper taken from a 1991 edition of Martha Stewart's Gardening. It features a nicely hand-illustrated, idealized garden plan that appeals to a reader's sense of order and possibility. It is a sketch of Martha's actual garden at the time, and therefore grounds readers in the setting and acts as a reference.

Themes & Illustrations

Thematic endpapers that reflected the text in some significant way began to be fashionable in the late 19th century and are still used today. These endpapers represent some of the most fascinating and creative designs, drawing as they do on any number of aspects of a text. The artist designing the papers might choose to portray the characters in the story, introduce the setting, or establish a particular style or mood. He can take wide liberties or show great subtlety in interpreting the text. He might design with a hint of irony or find a clever, unexpected way to introduce the reader to the story. My favorite example of this last strategy is the endpaper from George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, reproduced in the first of these samples.

Illustrated endpapers came into their own around the same time, when children's book illustrators such as Walter Crane turned their attention to endpapers. Crane wished to hint at the contents of the book while avoiding competition with the interior illustrations, likening the endpapers to "a fore-court, or even a garden or grass plot before the door." I like this idea, hinting as it does at a pause or a breath taken before entering a new world.

Other designers used silhouettes, pen and ink drawings, and all manner of illustrated scenes and designs to introduce a reader to the text. These endpapers papers often coordinated with the interior illustrations and the cover, tying the whole book together nicely.

Children's books are still where we most often find decorative endpapers, with many contemporary children's books boasting lovely, colorful designs.

This spread: Thematic endpaper from Erin Morgenstern's The Night Circus. This book has a strong black and white theme throughout, acting as a nice foil for the fact that the two opposing characters are neither good and evil, but presented as two sides of an elaborate game. The elegant stripe also mimics the black and white of the circus tents, and ushers the reader into Morgenstern's magical world as soon as the book is opened.

Maps

Endpapers printed with maps can sometimes be found in geography and natural history books, in travel books, and in novels set in fantasy worlds. These maps are often very useful for reference, as endpapers are an easy place to turn to while reading.

The front and back endpapers of a book may picture the same map or two different ones. Some maps are highly stylized and decorated, others might have come straight from the desk of a professional cartographer. Some are maps of real places; others depict the fantastical worlds that will come to life within the pages. Some are full color, others appear in simple black and white. Many are quite detailed and beautiful.

All manner of fictional worlds have appeared in map form on endpapers, from Oz and Middle Earth to One Hundred Acre Wood and Narnia. For some fantasy enthusiasts, these fictional maps are worthy of serious interest, something to be studied at length.

One major concern with the use of maps on endpapers is that when books must be rebound the endpapers do not survive the process. This can be problematic when the map is integral to the text, effectively crippling the book. It is particularly the case with library editions that take a lot of wear and tear and must eventually be resurfaced.

Related to endpaper maps are those endpapers that illustrate time lines or family trees. An example can be found in a 2001 edition of Isabel Allende's *Portrait in Sepia*, which shows the genealogy of the Del Valle family in a simple and easy to read format. These informational-type endpapers can be especially useful in book that have complex time lines or many characters.

This spread: A pretty map of Europe printed on the endpapers of Quicksilver by Neil Stephenson, volume one of The Baroque Cycle. This map is very detailed and printed in two colors, and orients readers to the setting of the book. It also acts as a reference for readers as they make their way through the text.

Advertising

In the middle nineteenth century, endpapers were sometimes used as space for advertising. They might have promoted a list of books in the series, or suggested upcoming titles from a popular author. They might have been printed with the publisher's initials or logo in a repeating pattern, or detail for readers the printer's range of services.

Some books even had product advertisements printed on their endpapers, sometimes related to the content of the book and sometimes not. An 1892 edition of *Ivanhoe* by Sir Walter Scott featured an ad for snake oil. A 1902 edition of *Mrs Beeton's Cookery Book* by Isabella Mary Beeton promoted "Robinson's Patent Barley with Milk", an early infant formula claiming to help infants digest regular food.

This spread: An endpaper from a very old German book displaying an ad for an encyclopedia set. This book was published in 1893 and the title roughly translates to "Library of Entertainment and Knowledge".

Sources

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