

(palette)

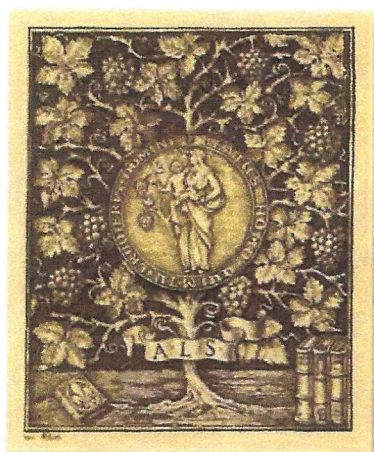


Fig. 1



Fig. 2

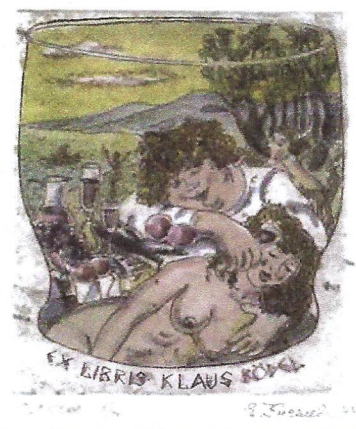


Fig. 3

BOOKPLATES WITH WINE MOTIFS

Dr Erik Skovenborg explains how to commission,
use, collect, and love bookplates

"How grateful I am to have still with me, on my shelves, so many old friends, the books which I have been collecting all my life. There are, I know, many bibliophiles who have a far greater number of books than I have, but I cannot imagine anybody having assembled a more representative collection of books of wine interest, not only books dealing exclusively with viticulture and winemaking, but others in which wine is considered from the moral, social, economic, and medical angles. Thus, although the Bible cannot be called a 'wine book,' I did not hesitate to buy, when I had the chance to do so, a beautiful folio of Gutenberg's Bible, printed at Mainz between 1450 and 1455, with Isaiah's description of the planting of a vineyard."

André L Simon clearly cared deeply for his wine books and did not hesitate to commission a bookplate for his beloved collection (Fig 1). The artist is unknown, but the motif is right and proper for a "bibulous bibliophile": an old vine with clusters of grapes, a badge with a Latin inscription (Psalms 94:12, "Blessed is the man whom thou shalt instruct"), and a few folios in the corner. The design has one flaw, though: The owner's name is represented by initials only. Since the prime function of a bookplate is to assist the proper return of the book to its rightful owner, any kind of guesswork involving initials or picture puzzles is not recommended.

Rule 1: A bookplate should display the full name of the owner loud and clear.

Sibi et amicis

Bookplates would not exist, or at least would not have appeared so early, had it not been for Johannes Gutenberg's stroke of genius in 1440. His great innovation, of course, was the printing press. With movable type, an oil-based ink, and a wine press, Gutenberg turned a machine used for pressing grapes into a new machine for pressing letters on to paper. The Gutenberg Bible, one of whose beautiful folios André Simon had the good fortune to purchase, was the earliest book printed from movable type, completed around 1455.

Since grape growing and wine drinking are essential parts of German culture, it is small wonder that one of the early German bookplates—the woodcut by Albrecht Dürer done in 1502 for his friend Willibald Pirckheimer—is a coat of arms decorated with cornucopias of grapes and vines (Fig 2). At that time, artists were learned people well trained in Latin and Greek, with a thorough knowledge of history and symbolism. Dürer was no exception, and he has taken the chance to show off some of his language skills. Pirckheimer's Latin motto—*Sibi et amicis liber Bilibaldi Pirckheimer*—affirms that Willibald's books were not only for himself but also for his friends. Bookplates should not be a mark of meanness or possessiveness, but a passport to friendship completely in harmony with the ancient toast: "May we never want a friend, nor a bottle to share with him." Sharing great books, like sharing great wines, should lead to great and enduring friendships.

Images courtesy of Dr Erik Skovenborg

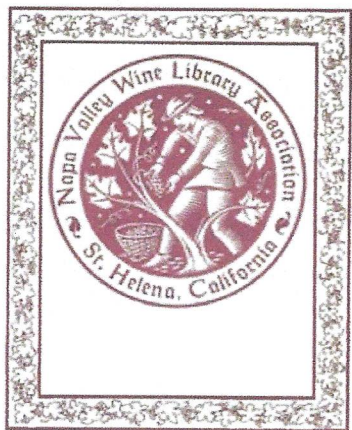


Fig. 2

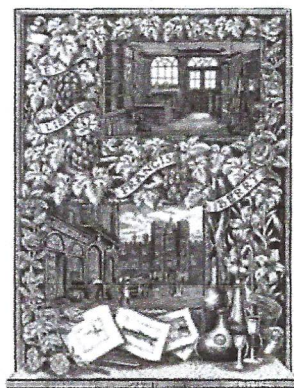


Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Liber means book, and Dürer's plate clearly indicates that the book belongs to Bilibaldi. The same message is more often rendered by the words *Ex Libris*, meaning "of books," but implying "the owner" of the books. On bookplates, the term should always be written as two words with no hyphen (though when writing about bookplates as a concept, "ex libris" may be written with no capital letters and sometimes with a hyphen). Nowadays, the corresponding English phrase might be "NN's book," "Her book," "Belongs to," "From the library of," "From the books of," and so on.

Rule 2: *In bookplate design, the words "Ex Libris" should be written as two words with initial capitals and no hyphen.*

A thing of beauty

Most wine districts boast beautiful countryside with idyllic hamlets inhabited by friendly people—like the two reveling youths placed in bucolic Greek scenery by Jelena Kisseljowa for the Danish bookplate collector Klaus Rödel (Fig. 3). The optimistic and positive culture of wine has often influenced the art of a region, the architecture of castles and patrician homes, the design of decanters and drinking cups, the local dishes—in short, many of the good things in life.

In the center of Napa Valley, a fine example of this hedonic tradition, is St Helena. One of its main attractions for a book lover is the Wine Library run by the Napa Valley Wine Library Association. When most libraries have succumbed to practical methods of identification like ugly stamps or ubiquitous barcodes, it is a pleasant surprise to find hundreds of wine books decorated with the superb bookplate designed by Mallette Dean (Fig. 4). The serene motif, of a vintner picking grapes, has been printed in the medium-ruby color that characterizes a mature bottle of Napa Cabernet. So among the many lessons to be learned in the Wine Library of St Helena is this one: Bibulous book collectors should prioritize beauty over practicality, using bookplates rather than barcodes.

Rule 3: *"A bookplate should be a thing of beauty and a joy forever, so the first cost need not or should not be a matter of much consideration" (Walter Hamilton, 1894).*

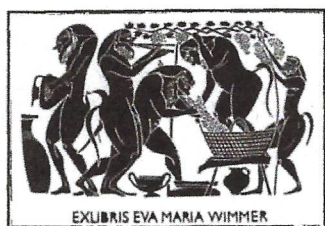
Avoid the art of boring

When cost is not a consideration, an expensive technique like copper engraving is possible. In the intricate engraved collage created for the English wine merchant Francis L. Berry (1876–1936), some of the detail is lost in even the best modern reproduction (Fig. 3). But it is still clear that the artist, Lord Badely, spared no pains in depicting the wine merchant's home ground. According to James Wilson, an English antiquarian bookseller and bookplate expert, Francis Berry joined the family firm of Berry Bros & Rudd around 1894, after which he greatly increased its export business and strengthened relationships with its suppliers, being for many years a senior partner. His Wimbledon home was filled with the fruits of his collecting and connoisseurship, and his circle of friends included distinguished artists. The motif of the bookplate attempts to convey both the life and work of Francis Berry. At the top is the interior of the wine shop, whose origins as a grocery store date back to the late 17th century. Below is the famous facade of the wine shop in St James's Street. The composition also includes floral and vine motifs, scenic prints, wine goblets, and wine bottles. The artist has put his name and the year of his engraving—"J.F. Badely 26"—on a ribbon at the bottom right.

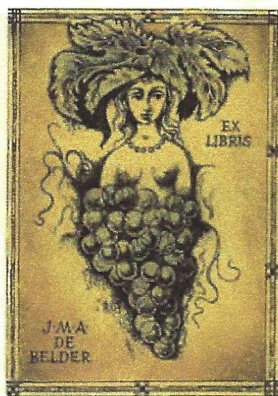
All of this is very interesting, but it is something of an honorable exception, because generally speaking, the art of boring is trying to tell it all. Do not make the task of the artist impossible by asking for a design with a picture of your home, a reference to your kids, full pictorial representation of your many hobbies, some old books, a wise owl, and maybe your star sign just to finish it all off. Eventually, you and your friends would be bored stiff by the messy design, and any sensible artist would resist such an approach. Moreover, bear in mind that you can have different bookplates for different kinds of books: one for professional books, another for wine books, another for detective stories. I have more than 50 of my own *ex libris*.

Rule 4: *Keep the bookplate's motif neat and simple.*

(palette)



63/100
A. Frederiks



Bohumil Kratky



Zbigniew Dolatowski

A cooper for Mr Kuiper

The working cooper is a good example of a neat and pretty bookplate motif (Fig 6). The Dutch artist A. Frederiks also managed to work a pictorial pun into the motif for L. Kuiper: such bookplates are called *redende ex libris* or *ex libris parlantes*. The use of pictorial puns is quite common in bookplate art as well as in heraldry. The noble Scottish Bowes-Lyon family (of which Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother was a scion), for example, bears a shield quartered with bows and lions, a "canting coat of arms." Because of its other qualities, we will let Kuiper's owl pass without much comment, but generally speaking, conventional academic symbols like the owl (the bird of wisdom), the laurel wreath (the art of poetry), oil lamps and piles of books (education and knowledge), have become hackneyed by repetition and should therefore be avoided.

A discriminating bibulous bibliophile would never resort to such trivial bookplate themes. Just imagine the abundance of eminently suitable motifs in the wine world: the vine, the vineyard, the grape harvest, the wine press, the fermentation and maturation vessels, the bottling and cellaring, and last but not least, the decanting, drinking, and sharing. The laborious satyrs cut in wood by Estonian artist Lembit Lõhmus for Eva Maria Wimmer is another fine example of a black-and-white wine motif (Fig 7).

Indeed, there is much to be said in favor of black-and-white bookplates, which are less demanding for the artist, cheaper to print, and suitable for most books. Moreover, the risk of becoming bored of the motif over the years is thought to be considerably reduced by a plain black-and-white design.

Bookplates in color can also have plain and pretty motifs, of course—like the lithograph of a young lady clad in grapes created for J. M. A. de Belder by Czech artist Bohumil Kratky (Fig 8). On the whole, though, color versions are more difficult to execute successfully.

Rule 5: Avoid academic owls, and instead look out for an attractive black-and-white wine motif.

A question of place and size

You should always remember the correct place for a bookplate: the center of the inside front cover of your book—not on the free endpaper, which may curl. Care should also be taken to affix the bookplate properly, using colorless glue intended for paper and photos. Pre-glued paper is not recommended. Imagine the disastrous results of a bunch of pre-glued bookplates stored in a damp place.

The original size of Dürer's *ex libris* for Pirckheimer is 8 x 5.5 in (20 x 14 cm)—obviously not a very practical size for a bookplate to be tipped into modern books. The size might work for large books like *The Oxford Companion to Wine* (10 x 7.5 in [25 x 19 cm]), but small books like *Hugh Johnson's Pocket Wine Book* (7.5 x 3.5 in [19.5 x 9.5 cm]), while a good fit for a pocket, make a bad fit for Pirckheimer's plate. A bookplate 3–4 in (8–10 cm) tall and 2.5–3 in (6–7 cm) wide would be handy for most modern books. It is all a question of size, as one of Moses' spies in the land of Canaan remarked at the sight of a very large cluster of grapes. The popular bookplate motif in the *ex libris* of German lawyer Joachim Kretz—two scouts carrying an enormous bunch of grapes (Fig 9)—was designed by Polish artist Zbigniew Dolatowski, who specialized in detailed linocuts in book-friendly sizes.

Rule 6: Make sure that your bookplate is designed in a handy size, and take care to place it properly on the inside front cover of your books.

The right man for the job

"The writing of one's name in a book is sacrilege," Belgian artist Mark Severin wrote in his book *Engraved Bookplates* (1972). "The writing of anything else, unless it be an inscription by the author, is an abomination. But no book, however fine, is marred by a seemly bookplate. On the contrary, it is often much enhanced." Severin was one of the right artists for the challenging but rewarding task of creating seemly bookplates. Nudes and erotic themes were his favorite motifs. "They make an ideal subject and it is easy to understand why they have such a universal appeal. Good taste should always be the

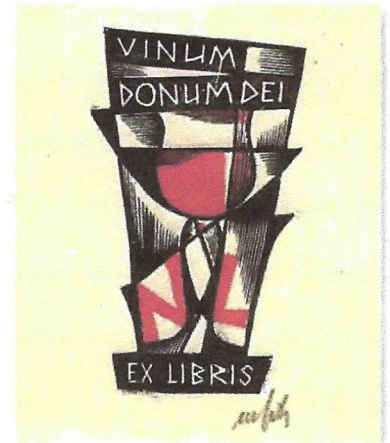
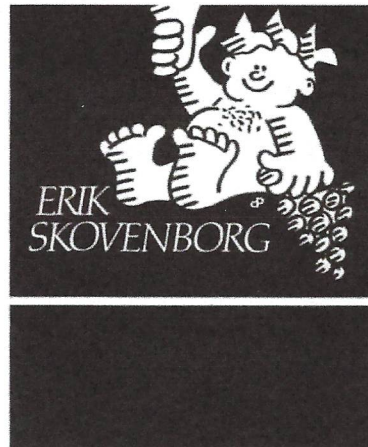
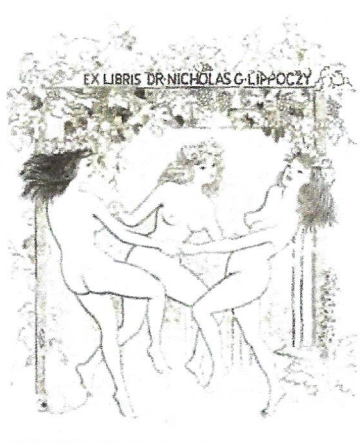


Fig. 10

Fig. 11

Fig. 12

criterion, and many artists have engraved exquisite nudes." The graceful figures dancing in the vineyard of Dr. Nicholas G. Lippoczy, engraved in copper by Severin, is a fine example of both good taste and craftsmanship (Fig 10).

Severin has been dead for several years, however, so you will have to look elsewhere for the right artist. Few collectors are as lucky as I am in having among my friends a talented advertising designer. The rules of good advertising are to listen to the client, to use clear and concise illustrations, to draw perfect letters, and to add color with style. Combining these abilities with a deep insight into the graphic process and a sense of humor, Per Christensen has everything required for excellent bookplate design. Please meet his friendly Dionysus, whose smile cheers the reader every time he opens one of my wine books (Fig 11).

Unless you happen to be so gifted yourself, you should look for a professional artist. A dilettante sketch tipped into your wine books will almost certainly mar them, and you will very likely regret that you did not seek out the right person for the task. Help may be found at The Bookplate Society (www.bookplatesociety.org) and the American Society of Bookplate Collectors & Designers (www.bookplate.org).

Rule 7: When commissioning a bookplate, look for a professional artist whose line of work suits your taste, and beware of dilettante work.

A collector's dream

According to Walter Hamilton, "the ideal collector is one who has money, taste, and leisure." In addition to collecting wine books, any book-loving enophile should consider collecting bookplates with wine motifs. Strong ties connect bookplates to books and the graphic arts. Most bookplates are original works of art printed in relatively small numbers. They will not demand a lot of space, and they may be bought at reasonable prices. But the best way to collect ex libris is to commission a bookplate of high quality from a reputable artist, and then to exchange it with those of other bookplate owners. It is far more fascinating and fun to do it this way.

Even with a flying start, however, you would find it hard to beat Norbert Lippoczy, an enthusiastic collector from Poland who, over decades, was able to collect more than 5,000 bookplates with wine motifs. After World War II, Lippoczy left his family of Hungarian vintners and moved to Poland, where he started to collect wine books. His library, holding more than 1,000 volumes on wine culture and wine growing, has been donated to the Wine Museum in Budapest. According to Plato, "nothing more excellent nor more valuable than wine was ever granted to mankind by God." So *Vinum Donum Dei* ("Wine, the Gift of God") was an entirely fitting motto for Norbert Lippoczy, as cut in wood by Czech surgeon Otakar Marik (Fig 12).

Rule 8: Collecting bookplates of high artistic quality is an entertaining and inexpensive shortcut to a fine collection of graphic art.

The lure of bookplates

The bookplate virus is chronic but seldom fatal. You may still live and collect for many years to come. Every once in a while, though, your fever will rise at the sight of a really wonderful bookplate. Just don't say you weren't warned.

Rule 9: The fascination of bookplates may develop into an obsession that carries the same risk of hangovers as the immoderate worship of Bacchus, which also happens to be one of the many themes depicted on them.

*If this book should chance to roam,
Box its ears and send it home.*

Suggested reading

- Audrey S. Arellanes, *Bookplates: A Selected Bibliography of the Periodical Literature* (1971).
- Fridolf Johnson, *A Treasury of Bookplates from the Renaissance to the Present* (Dover Publications, New York; 1977).
- James P. Keenan and Jacqueline E. Davis, ed., *American Artists of the Bookplate: 1970-1990* (Cambridge Bookplates, Cambridge; 1990).
- Mark Severin and Anthony Reid, *Engraved Bookplates: European Exlibris 1950-70* (Private Libraries Association, Middlesex; 1972).