



# RACHEL HAZELL

A creative career is one without a blueprint or map. It is a unique profession—a calling, a passion—that propels a person through a sense of fulfillment, adventure and creative exploration, while still paying the bills!

Rachel Hazell has built up just such a creative career for herself, as a bookbinder and book artist, all of which she blogs about as the Travelling Bookbinder.

**Q** What did you want to be when you grew up?

**A** I wanted to read all the time, so something involving books was inevitable. A career advice form completed in my teens recommended either being a librarian or getting a job in the beauty industry. I like to think the Travelling Bookbinder is a blend of both.

**Q** Could you have imagined what you do for a living now?

**A** There's some Super 8 film footage of me sitting in a tree, drawing and colouring with felt-tip pens. I had no idea that sometime in the future, this could be a job, that I would be sitting around a table mounded high with paper, surrounded by folk finishing their handmade books, pens scattered all over the place.

**Q** What education do you have? Did it lead into your current career or have you diverged from your original path?

**A** Three master's degrees may seem excessive: one in English literature from the University of Edinburgh, one in book art from University of the Arts London (Camberwell) and one in printmaking from Edinburgh College of Art. Oh, and a higher national diploma in bookbinding, too.

Continuing to learn and advance my craft is essential. Last summer, I took Lotta Jansdotter's course on the island of Åland. It was an inspiring trip with wonderful company (in the classroom and the sauna). This year I'll return to Sweden for a masterclass with an incredible Italian bookbinder, Cristina Balbiano d'Aramengo. My work continues to develop as a result of these kinds of experiences and I'm always looking for opportunities to grow. Curiosity takes us far!

**Q** From an e-course to in-person workshops and running an Airbnb... Please describe the scope of what you do to support yourself.





**A** Self-employment means keeping on top of everything! Therefore you often wear at least three hats at a time: logistics manager, photographer, admin assistant, cook... And the most important hat—artist maker—can get buried underneath. I'm very fortunate that my work has grown organically. As a result of teaching international workshops for the last 15 years, it became important to create an e-course so that people who couldn't access an in-person workshop could work with me online. The PaperLove e-course now runs twice a year, with the related Facebook groups continuing to grow lasting friendships—sending origami parcels and real Valentine's around the world. This is such a joy. Teaching globally and locally is exciting and varied: last week I taught a short workshop for those with dementia, organized by the National Library of Scotland. Now I'm "on retreat" on Skye, and summer will see me travelling to New Hampshire for my first Squam Art Workshop—Marks Magic and Meaning.

Creative space is important to me, so it's a pleasure to run a studio apartment for book lovers in the centre of Edinburgh, at the heart of a very literary capital city, called Bed With a View. Ongoing responsibilities include curating the mini-library, acquiring bookish accoutrements (literary tea-towels) and displaying book art from my own collection. Each guest finds a little notebook parcel and book-wrapped handmade soap—it's the little details that are satisfying.

Is this a portfolio career? For me, everything is connected to the book, and I'm happy with that.

**Q** *How are you fulfilled by what you do?*

**A** It feels as though I'm following my own path, which takes me through extraordinary landscapes and amongst people seeking to express themselves on paper. If it's true that everybody has a book inside them, then I'm travelling the world on a mission to encourage that creation. I love working with people to bind books using traditional techniques that are filled with their words and images, whether that's on one of my workshops or the PaperLove e-course. Seeing people's finished work is always a delight. Making book sculptures and limited editions fulfills a need for order and a desire for repetition. Unfolding stories is very satisfying. Having a job that involves so much travel is ridiculously stimulating—for the eyes, brain and taste buds!

**Q** *What sacrifices have you made in order to do what you do?*

**A** Not having the security of a nine-to-five job is the obvious answer—no pension, no sick-pay, no Christmas party. And being away for so much of each year makes it hard to commit to yoga or gym classes, or to be part of a choir—and I do love to sing!

**Q** *Is there anything you wish you had done differently?*

**A** I wish I'd brought in paid support sooner. Having a brilliant admin and web assistant, a practical book-keeping aid (totting up the endless receipts) and the boost of a dynamic publicist has improved the quality of my work life considerably.

**Q** *What goals or experiences or milestones are you working toward?*

**A** I'm working on my first book, looking for inspiring workshop locations (particularly in North America and Australia, especially on small islands), thinking about the next e-course and loving how my heart-home is both Edinburgh and the Isle of Iona.

**Q** *How do you see your career evolving over the next five or ten years?*

**A** From teaching a workshop every month, the diary has been honed down to five particularly special courses annually. So this year I'm doing Iona Driftwood, Squam Art Workshop, Paper Navigations in Amsterdam and Love Letters in Paris.

Since this career has evolved organically to date, it seems likely to continue shifting and adapting, although I'm determined to be less reactive. That resolution goes out of the window if a call comes in for a fantastic commission or astonishing contract.

**Q** *What advice do you have for others forging their own creative career?*

**A** Play to your strengths (first make sure you know what they are) and pay (or barter) for help with your weak areas.

Start small and dream big! At some point you will have to take a risk.

Be unusual. Career paths are unpredictable, but creatives, above all others, can manifest their imaginations.

Read about how others have done it (books, blogs, magazines), see how artists use images (Instagram is my eye candy!) and listen to experience (and then do your own thing). **U**

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