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PICO RIVERA, CALIFORNIA

Kater-Crafts Bookbinders

The small family-run business has kept alive the fading art of creating beautiful handmade book covers.

Kater-Crafts Bookbinders in Los Angeles is a place where it's perfectly acceptable to judge a book by its cover, as a great deal of work goes into making books covers as well as their insides sturdy and exquisite.

The traditional bookbinding operation, which has been in existence since 1948, and at its current Pico Rivera location since 1965, is one of very few which have survived tremendous changes in book production technology and reading behavior itself.

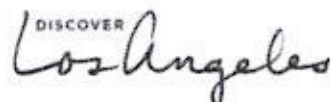
Started by Mel Kavin, for several decades most of the store's business came from library binding and custom restoration work. One of Kavin's very first creations was a monkey fur-bound copy of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*.

A few years ago, when library orders began to dwindle, Kater-Crafts reinvented itself to focus on specialty work, and has since worked on several commissions from actors and athletes like Tom Cruise and Shaquille O'Neal who commemorated their special projects or career accomplishments with special handmade books.

The business which is now run by Kavin's three children has scaled down significantly since its heyday, and now has a staff of about a dozen. Restoration of old family treasures like Bibles and photo albums is another part of their work and requires great precision and care.

Some of the processes use machines, which are themselves a rarity after their production was ceased, and some of it is done by hand, but each piece is closely monitored and worked on by the staff. Color swatches, leather strips, metallic sheets for embossment, and a whole host of other materials that are slowly transformed into fine book covers and insides line the workshop, making it a nirvana for art and design fans.

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