

January 7, 2012

You're the only person reading this now.
Tell your friends

 Twent 20

Top Life & Style articles

- [More Life & Style articles](#)

[Share on Facebook](#) [Email this story](#) [PRINT THIS STORY](#) Reprints & permissions

Showroom Consultant/ B...
\$40,000 - \$50,000+
Five Dock, NSW 2046
Adecco Services

Senior Account Manager
\$75,000 pkg
Sydney Metro, NSW
Recruit Direct

Online Content Producer
\$82,000+
Sydney Metro, NSW
Hudson Global Resources

Web Content Specialist...
\$70,000+
Western Suburbs, ...
Bluefin Resources

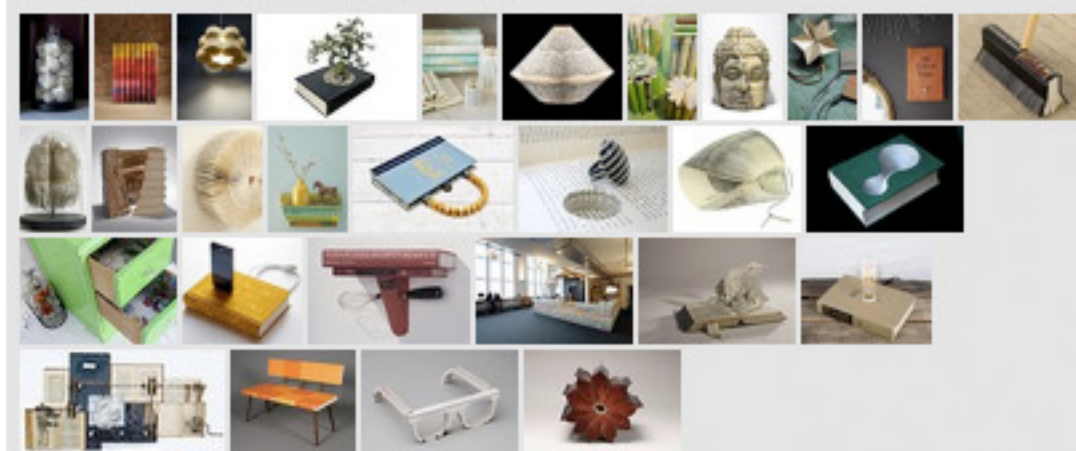
Old books can be works of art in their own right, beautifully printed and bound and lovingly worn from generations of use. But as the printed word gives way to the digital age, they are also increasingly becoming vestiges from another era. Many are abandoned in markets and thrift shops.

Not all are bound for destruction, however. The cyber world is awash with bookish objects made from orphaned volumes. Stripped, painted, bolted or glued, old books are being turned into jewellery, sculpture and furniture. From an old atlas refashioned into a chic lampshade to a Jane Austen hardcover stitched into a handbag, the projects display an astonishing ingenuity. Some designers, including Californian Jim Rosenau, treat books as lumber to create tables, chairs and even bookshelves.

Fine artists have also taken to second-hand books. Take the wild, intricate dissections done by Scottish artist Georgia Russell, which she mounts and bottles inside bell jars. The fragile, organic artefacts of Hawaii-based artist Jacqueline Rush Lee are rolled into circular forms engulfed in ink. And Melbourne sculptor Nicholas Jones folds and carves books into geometric shapes and landscapes.

Repurposed books

Nicholas Jones, book artist. Photo: Simon Schluter



Such wares are sold online and in design shops but for crafty types who prefer a hands-on approach, many can also be made from scratch.

A recent publication by the American artist Lisa Occhipinti, *The Repurposed Library*, shows how to transform unwanted books into a range of quirky objects. There are clocks, sewing boxes and chandeliers or, for the ultimate ironic literary statement, a hardback cover for your e-reader.

Occhipinti believes old books impart a sense of tranquillity to their surroundings.

"We live in this digital age and life is so fast-paced but there's a silence and stillness about books," she says.

Not only are books visually attractive, their stories convey a certain mystery, even if they can no longer be read in full, she says. The appeal comes down to a deep-seated nostalgia. "There's something very special about them and it may be that books may not exist some day," Occhipinti says. "There's this forebodingness about them, so all of a sudden they become even more precious."

English jeweller Jeremy May, of label Littlefly, agrees. He makes rings, necklaces and bracelets by laminating, carving and lacquering paper from old books. Environmental concerns first attracted him to recycling but over time he has come to appreciate his materials in other ways. Before he slices into a book, for instance, he reads it cover to cover.

"I have a problem with cutting a book that I haven't read," he says. "I don't know why but I have to read it. Reading the book helps the inspiration spark."

Brisbane designer Samantha Parsons also draws on the content of books to make domestic ornaments. Rather than disguising the pages and binding, she shows off colours, illustrations and typography.

Cairns artist Rosie Miller works with the spine's natural movement, sawing and sanding at the paper until it turns into stone- and shell-shaped sculptures. "It's interesting that you can take something so common and make it look so different - to think of a book as you would a block of clay or piece of wood," she says.

Most designers pledge not to touch rare titles but for a small band of book lovers, cutting any publication borders on sacrilege. Even Occhipinti regards some projects - such as those bound bundles of ripped paperbacks now popular with interior stylists - as thoughtless and sad.

But for champions of the trend, transforming books into new objects is a way of salvaging some of the countless tomes that otherwise would not survive. As Occhipinti says: "You can honour them and give them a whole new life."

The Repurposed Library by Lisa Occhipinti is published by Stewart, Tabori & Chang.