

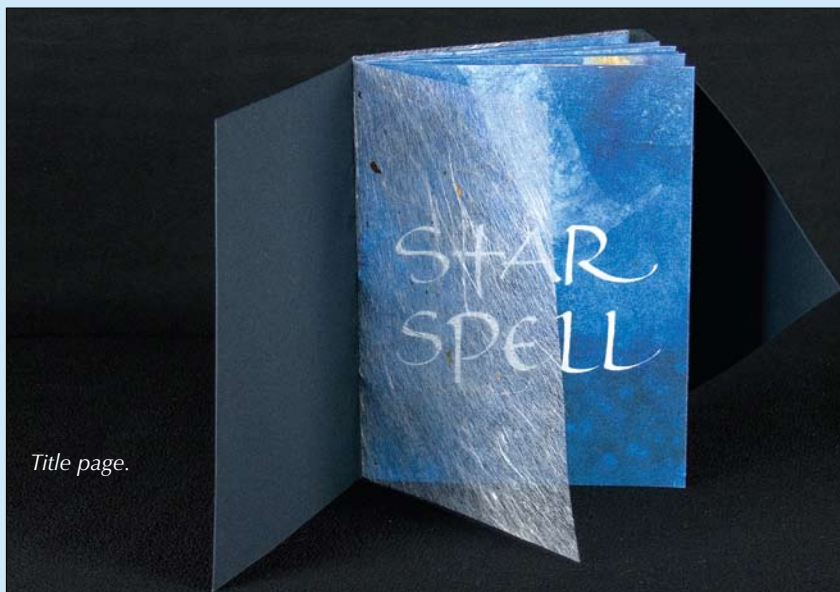
THE MAKING OF STAR SPELL

TEXT & PHOTOS BY CARI FERRARO



Folds.

Star Spell is a limited edition (53 copies) book with both a standard and deluxe version. The book contains 16 pages. Closed, the book is 4-5/8 inches high and 3-5/8 inches wide.



Title page.

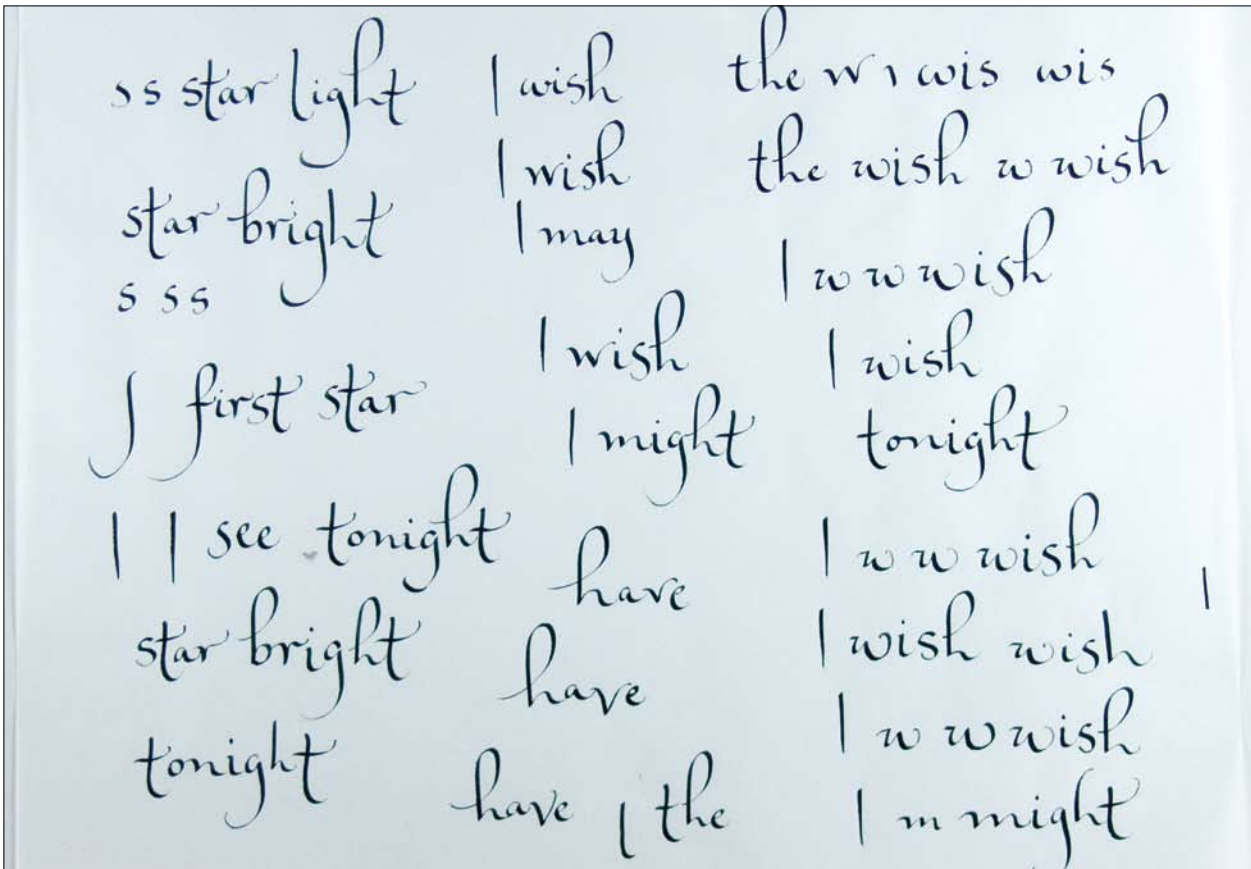


Figure 1. Lettering trials.



Fanned pages.

In 2007 I published my second limited edition book, *Star Spell*. I have been fortunate to find homes for many of my unique books, but they are generally too expensive for most people, so a limited edition makes my work accessible to a larger audience.

The idea for *Star Spell* grew out of an assignment in my calligraphy study group: make a piece of calligraphy about wishes. I chose the nursery rhyme “Star Light, Star Bright” because it is familiar to most people. It also fulfills the basic definition of a spell. I have been working with the idea of spells and spelling in my work for several years.

I wanted to try a new folded structure: a double French-fold accordion book. On a single sheet of Zerkall book paper, cut in half lengthwise, I lettered the words STAR SPELL in large caps using masking fluid in a split Coit pen, then painted the night sky with watercolor. After removing the resist, I painted the sheet

again. At the time I also made a second painting on the other long sheet, in case the first one didn’t turn out, but this time I used the masking fluid in a flat brush. After the painting was finished, I folded the paper into the book form. I lettered the words of the nursery rhyme on each page, gilded some stars, and completed the original book, which has now gone to a private collector.

To reproduce my first limited edition, *The First Writing* (see inside back cover), I simply scanned and reproduced the lettered, painted pages of the original manuscript book. However, for *Star Spell* my increased skill with Photoshop encouraged me to venture into the world of using the computer to add the text to the painting. I decided to produce the limited edition of *Star Spell* with the second watercolor painting. To begin I scanned the painting into Photoshop in several pieces and then “stitched” them together to form the continuous piece of art, as my scanner is only letter size.

I lettered the text in black ink on a smooth white paper and then scanned the lettering into Photoshop. There I chose the best-looking text and cleaned it up. This does not mean that I changed the lettering in any



Figure 2. Hidden detail.



Figure 3. Printer pocket.

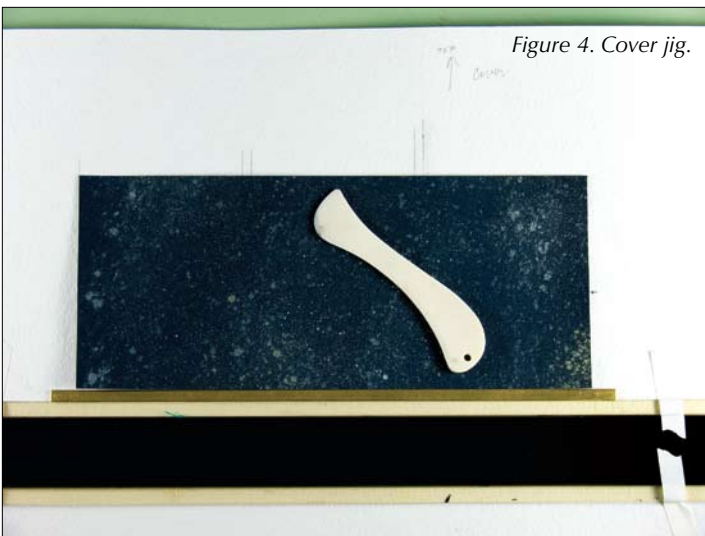


Figure 4. Cover jig.

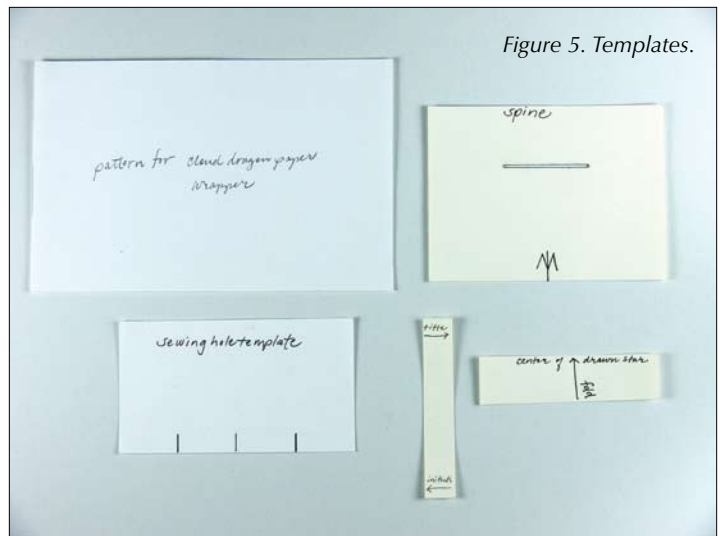


Figure 5. Templates.

fundamental way; I just filled in areas that were a bit too light and smoothed a few rough edges. Then I converted the lettering to white and pasted it as its own layer on top of the watercolor background in Photoshop. I tried several different lettering sizes and made test prints to determine the right size. This meant completely folding each book proof to see how the lettering looked on each page. If so, the entire layer needed to be resized so that the lettering would all be the same size. I printed the book on my Epson 2200 Inkjet printer with archival inks, which are lightfast and water-proof, so longevity is assured. My prototype book was printed on only one side. Many book artists design

editions to be printed on only one side to avoid the problem of shifting registration (getting the front and back sides to match up) on desktop printers. A book dealer advised me that the glimpse of white on the reverse side of the paper interrupted the feel of the night sky while turning the pages, so I decided to print the back side as well. For this I took the watercolor background, flipped it in Photoshop and made a new file, about 10 percent larger than the front artwork. This allowed me to trim the four edges of the front print, without fear of the white edges of the back still showing after the trim. It also allows the front and back paintings to be seen as slightly offset from each other when the opened-out pages are held up to

the light. The ghost image showing through from the other side adds to the magical feeling of the night sky. Having a reverse side let me hide some extra words inside near the binding of the book, echoing the idea of binding a spell – making sure it is used only for good (Figure 2). After several trials with different papers, I decided to print on Zerkall Book Paper, smooth, 100 gsm; the lightest weight for the easiest folding. This is the same paper that I used for the original book; it has a nice soft feel. It is a lightweight paper with little show-through. Feeding the long paper into the printer was problematic without denting it, so I fashioned a fabric “pocket” from a long table runner to hold the paper before it fed into the printer.

My office is very small so the printer lives up against a variety of other objects (Figure 3). Each page was hand-fed into the printer, twice for each book to print front and back. After each page printed it had to be trimmed because the color did not extend to the edge. I made sure to trim on the square because trouble-free folding was an exacting and tedious process, but the procedure was necessary for the book to fold correctly. The first fold was the lengthwise fold and went against the paper grain, so I scored it against a long straightedge to assist in the folding process. The score had to be exactly centered or it would show on the finished pages. To create the cover I spattered Arches black cover paper with



Back page.

silver and indigo acrylic inks. After I cut all the covers, I made a jig on my portable drawing board to make scoring the covers easier. I put a narrow brass rule atop the straightedge, squared up the cover against the rule, and then removed the rule while still holding the cover with my other hand. Then I put the triangle against the straightedge. The little bit of extra space let me rule down to the bottom of the page instead of bumping up against the straightedge and not getting a full score (Figure 4).

I decided that the book needed a deluxe version, so the first thirteen of the edition were gilded with palladium leaf, and a slipcase was made. Gilding the star for each cover of the deluxe edition presented

its own challenges. I was gilding on a fairly textured surface so the base either sank into the paper or showed too much of a ragged edge. I finally settled on a thinned PVA, fed through a standard ruling pen (one of my favorite tools for thin lines and freehand flourishes). The interior pages also have a few gilded stars, which were much easier to apply. I then gilded with palladium leaf. The standard version's stars were drawn with Dr. Martin's iridescent silver calligraphy ink, a nice dense metallic ink that catches the light nicely and flows well through the ruling pen after being thinned with a little water.

The slipcases for the deluxe version are made from 90# Arches hot press watercolor paper, painted

with a silver watercolor which was then lifted off ("blotted" with a paper towel to give a textured look). A silver acrylic would have dried waterproof, but the watercolor gave a better silver color. So I sprayed the painted papers lightly with Krylon matte finish spray to fix the watercolor before folding and gluing them.

Once all of the trials were made and the design decisions finalized, the production began to go much more quickly. I wanted *Star Spell* to be published and announced on my 54th birthday because most of the work occurred during the year following my 53rd birthday and I chose the edition size based on my age. This meant that I was working with a deadline of my own making,

but it also meant the project was completed instead of languishing in a neverending limbo of decision making. The manufacturing of the books (from Latin *manu factus*, literally, made by hand) has been very time consuming, but the advantage of being able to oversee the production of the book from beginning to end has been worth it. ✨

More information about Cari Ferraro can be found at www.proseandletters.com