
Make a Magic Braid Leather Bracelet with Elke Bergeron

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Overview

- Hi, my name is Elke, and after working many years in the menswear industry, for companies like Nautica and Structure, I now have a small, handmade, leather goods and accessories company. I'll show you how to make a cuff that's braided without having to separate the pieces at all. It's made from one piece of leather. This technique is a little tricky, but once you get the hang of it, you can make it into different widths or lengths for cuffs or for belts. We will learn how to bevel the edges, condition the leather. We'll add a button stud, and you'll have a beautiful, finished piece.

Chapter 2 - Materials

Materials

- To make your leather braided cuff, you'll need some basic leather working tools and some craft supplies. You're going to need leather. This is vegetable leather. It's an eight to 10-ounce weight, which is perfect for bracelets. Some leather punches. I'll be using a medium punch to make the holes at the end. An edge beveler, an edge slicker, a polyboard or an old cutting board, water, leather conditioner, a sponge for applying the conditioner, a piece of wool shearling is optional for the finishing, a ruler, a rotary cutter, a rotary mat, a poly hammer, screwdriver, pen, and a small button stud closure.

Chapter 3 - Make the Bracelet

Preparing the leather

You want to begin with cutting the leather into the size that you're gonna need to make your cuff into. I cut my piece into one and a half inches by eight inches long. This is a nice basic size that will fit most people. You can always add a couple extra closures at the end to adjust the size. We're going to start by beveling the edges. We're going to cut the corners off to make for a smoother transition. We're going to go in about half an inch and to one inch down and cut off the corner. You'll have to give it some pressure to get through the leather. So we're going to repeat that on all four sides. And this will create the basic shape of your bracelet. We'll then turn it over and moving in about an inch and a half from either end, you're going to mark the spots where your punch holes will begin. So I'm going about an inch and a half down. And because this is an inch and a half wide, I know that to make three equal cuts, each one will need to be half an inch. Mark half an inch away, this is where we will punch holes so that when we braid it, it will have extra room on the end, and make it much easier to braid. We'll do the same on the other side. So I will go down an inch and a half to here. And make marks. Make that a little bit more even. There we go, half an inch apart. We'll then take our punch tool. You're also always going to need a poly board underneath any leather project that's gonna need punching. You'll take your leather punch and place it over the marks that you made. And hit it until it goes all the way through. This is a medium sized hole. And they come in all ranges. This is basically right in the middle. Turn it this way. Once you've made your holes, you're going to need to connect those by using your rotary cutter and a ruler. So it becomes three equal strips. So we move that. We'll go back to our cutting board. By taking your ruler and connecting the dots across from each other. You're gonna basically want half a circle on each side. So, you can see that you're cutting right down the middle. Hold it very securely with the ruler so it doesn't slide

around. And then take your rotary cutter and then connect the two holes by cutting a straight line. Make sure not to go through the holes. Just go nice and slowly. And then we'll do the next one. After you've cut the holes, you can check the ends and make sure they're completely separated. You can either use a small scissor, or you can probably just pull it apart a little bit, just to make sure it's a clean line. To make the edges of the bracelet nice and clean and finished looking, we're going to use our leather edge beveler. And this is a very basic leather tool. This tool has a V gouge at the bottom. So when you place it at a 45 degree angle on the edge of your leather and give it some pressure. If you push evenly you'll be able to give the edge a nice rounded shape instead of the hard edge that's already there. Make sure you keep your fingers away from the edge of the beveler. So by accident if it slips you don't poke your hands. So you're going to need to go around every side of the bracelet and remove the sharp edge with your beveler. This one is a size four, it's for thicker leather that you can also get different sizes. Two's, it's for thinner leather and doesn't take off as much. The higher the number the deeper the gouge. This definitely takes some practice, so I suggest that you get some scraps of leather, and practice taking the edges off before you want to work on your final project. This is something that you want to apply to both sides. The back side is more of a composite and it can be more difficult and not always work as easily as the front. But just be patient and if it doesn't come out perfect, just remember it is the back side. So sometimes you have to push it a little bit, scrape it. But in the end it'll be worth it. After you finish beveling the outside edges, you're also going to need to bevel the lines that we cut in the middle of the bracelet. And this is a little bit trickier, so just go slowly. If you start at the hole at the bottom, separate your pieces a little bit, and kind of wiggle your beveler in there. You'll be able to get a nice line. And go all the way until you hit the other hole. So we'll do the same. And then we'll flip it around and do the other sides. And just like the outer edges, this is a technique that we're going to want to do front and back. But it's a little tougher sometimes. Now all the edges are completely beveled. And we're ready to apply maybe a second finishing process on the outside. This is optional. You don't have to do it but it really makes the edges look finished and nice. And it's just a nice technique to learn if you want to learn anything about the leather crafts. So you're going to take a sponge and lightly damp it in some water. Just to the outside edges we can apply the water. So we'll just dampen all the edges all the way around. You don't need to soak it. This is basically gonna take the grain that is rough after cutting the edges and it's going to make it nice and smooth. So we're gonna grab our leather slicker, which is just a small plastic disk with a gouge in the middle. Using a slicker is optional. But it does give the edge a more finished and polished look. You'll hold your cuff tightly and you'll just rub it all around the edge to press down all the loose pieces. And this will make for a really nice smooth finished edge. By moving the slicker back and forth, this will also add some patina to the edges that would take, you know, a lot of wear to get on its own. And this kind of speeds up the process. Alright, before we make our braid, we're going to need to make the leather nice and supple and soft. So it's easier to braid it. Place your bracelet in a bowl of water, or under a running faucet. Anyway just to make it nice and soft. As you can see, it will turn the leather much darker but after drying it'll turn back to its original shade. So just massage it a little bit until it's soft. Okay. That feels pretty good. You can see it's already loosened up a lot.

Braiding the leather

- This braiding technique is a little bit tricky, and a lot of it is just muscle memory. So you might wanna practice this again and again, just keep on wrapping it and trying it until your fingers actually get the movements down. So I'll go very slowly. Since both sides are the same, there's no top or

bottom. So you'll just pick either end to start with. We're going to start with our right piece, and we'll cross it over the middle. We'll then take our left side piece and cross it to the right. So that's a basic braiding technique for any regular braid. Here you'll end up with a hole that you will stick the bracelet through on the right side. It's gonna look a little twisted at the bottom, but don't worry about that, it'll come out later when we finish the braid. By starting on the right side again, you're going to cross it to the middle. Take your left and do the same thing we did the first time. So you're gonna cross that one back again. And then you'll take your end and put it through the left side. And turn it right side out. And now you'll see the beginning of your braid. So basically, if you just take the pieces and work the leather a little bit so the braid is even and not all smushed at one end. There you go. There's your braid. Because the braid comes out a little bit lumpy, and twisted, and thick, I like to take a hammer to the backside to flatten it out. And because leather is a pliable, soft material, it'll kind of fit together more like a puzzle when it's finished. (hammer banging) I'm using a soft poly hammer because it's much more gentle on the leather. So you don't really wanna use a regular steel hammer if you can help it, or at least put maybe a cloth or something in the middle of it. (hammer banging) Okay, that looks pretty good, let's check it. You can see the ridges of where the leather crosses each other, but you can see how it's nice and even and flat now. So if you just take your bracelet, when it's still wet like this, and nice and flat, you can bend it into your bracelet shape. And just curl it around each other and let it dry. This is going to take a while to dry, but after you shape it, the leather has a memory, so this will help keep it in the shape. So when it's dry it'll already look like your bracelet. Our bracelet is dry, and you can see that it held the shape. It had the memory of when it was wet. Here's an example of the wet one, and you can see that it's totally returned to the original color. The veggie tan leather is really special in the sense that it changes over time, with exposure to the sun and the oils in your skin. It can start off looking very light like this, and after about a year of wear, it can turn really nice, dark, chestnut color. So it's nice to see the colors change. We're gonna take our dried bracelet, and we're going to add some leather conditioner to rehydrate the leather. After the water hits it, it gets really dried out. This leather conditioner, I like to apply it with a sponge. It's just a regular leather conditioner, you can find it anywhere, at a hardware store, or a shoe place. And you rub it all over the bracelet. And don't be afraid of using too much, you can always wipe some off. This will actually revert, more or less, back to the original color again, after it's totally dry. I like to pick up the edges of the braid and get the conditioner underneath as well. And you're gonna wanna do that on both sides. A sponge is actually a great applicator because it doesn't absorb the conditioner like a cloth would. It holds it, and you're able to use it more. So now that we've gotten the whole bracelet conditioned... An optional step for finishing the edges is to use a piece of wool or shearling. This is just a small scrap, but by rubbing it vigorously along the edges and the top of the bracelet, it will give it some definition and a patina that's really beautiful. You can see there. The best time to rub it, actually, is when it's still damp from the conditioner. You'll get more effect. I like to make the edges a little bit darker. It'll also help where you had beveled it to make it smooth, as well. So, just rub over all your edges until you're satisfied with the way it looks. Okay, it's not actually gonna stay this dark, it will lighten up a bit. But the edges will remain slightly darker than the rest of the body.

Adding button stud and finishing

- Let's add the button stud. You're going to need your poly board for hammering. You're gonna lay the bracelet out flat. We're going to need to punch some holes on the ends. One end will hold the button stud and the other end will be the closure. The side that has the button stud, I like to add

maybe two holes for adjustment. That way if it's too big or too small, you can change the position of the stud for it to fit. So the first hole will go about half an inch from the edge and it'll be centered. And using your poly hammer... (hammer pounding) Put the next hole a little bit less than half an inch away. (hammer pounding) That way you have room to adjust it. The other side will get the keyhole closure. (hammer pounding) I'm going to swap out my round punch for an oval shape to make my keyhole. You can buy one single punch. That will create the keyhole for you, but I use two pieces. So we'll place it right below the hole. (hammer pounding) Now we have a nice keyhole shape that the button can fit through. The button stud closure comes in two pieces. You have the male side and the female side. We'll take the male side and push it through one of the holes. You can pick either one, depending on which one fits you best. And then you'll take the female side and twist it on top. What you're definitely going to need is a screwdriver to make sure that it's in nice and tight. Now let's test the closure. You may need to wiggle it on a little bit, depending on how big your hole is. To make it a little bit small is not a problem because you can always make it a tiny bit bigger. But you definitely don't want it bigger than your button stud or else it's just going to fall out. Your bracelet is done. This magic braid technique is really fun to try with different variations, with different widths, with different color applications. This one was hand-dyed. This is actually just the patina of the light-colored leather and this one's two inches wide. We have the inch and a half, and this is an inch. And this one was actually applied with some metallic paint before it was wet so that it would get a nice, distressed metallic look when it dried. So with all these combinations and colors, you can make belts, headbands, bracelets, or you could apply it to any other leather accessory.