

## **The Stifflexible...Resurrected!**

### **March 19th, 2008**

Sometime last summer, I started this blog in the search for finding the perfect black notebook. I related the story of how I had, in fact, already found the perfect black notebook, but that it wasn't being produced anymore. The Italian company behind it, Mazzuoli, had come up with a very innovative little black notebook called The Stifflexible, in which the hard, Moleskine-like cover actually had two creases in it that allowed it to bend open when folded, yet remain stiff at the same time.

Sadly, the company had since moved on to other endeavors, and I was lucky to come across probably the last five in existence on Ebay.

Thankfully, and in part to your letters, the Mazzuoli company has realized what a hit they have on their hands, and have put them back into production, with a redesign.

The other day, I received a package in the mail, and lo and behold, I had two of the new Stifflexibles to check out!

The edition I was sent is called the Black Cover, in part a reference to this website, and for this I am very flattered. But how to fairly review a notebook that is named after your website?? Good question – it's tough! There have been some changes to the design, which I urged against, but which are ultimately to make it stand out from the Moleskine.

First off, the cover – the main part of the Stifflexible. Like the original Stifflexible, this has two creases in the cover that allow it to be rifled through without opening it. Brilliant. According to the new insert, Giuliano Mazzuoli got the idea after finding a book in a Florentine library from the 1700s with a similar design. This latest edition of his popular notebook continues that idea, and I cannot praise it enough.

But something is different here! The oil skin cover (a la the Moleskine) has been replaced by a smooth, (I believe) latex-infused cardboard cover that is very, very firm and somewhat waxy to the touch. The feel is very similar to the Xonex Ru notebooks, only vertically lined instead of dimpled.

On the one hand, this change makes the notebooks look very, very sleek. Also, the cardboard adheres better than the oil skin did; after repeated use of the older version of the Stifflexible, the oil skin cover would unfortunately begin to peel back. I seriously doubt this is possible with the redesign.

The downside is that this type of material doesn't stand up to a beating as well as the oil skin – scratches show up pretty easily in the cover. Also, because it's thicker, it's a more rigid in terms of flexibility (though I'm sure this will go away with repeated use). Personally, I wish they had stuck with the old, but I also realize the reality of trying to stand out from the ever-popular Moleskine.

Size-wise, this is the absolute perfect dimensions for a notebook: 3.5"x5.5", and just slightly smaller than the Moleskine. Great for your back pocket, a book bag, coat pocket, purse, and beyond.

Let's check out the inside. On the first page is a place for personal information, which includes some distinctly Italian things I don't understand, like your "VAT code" and "Tax Code." There's also a place for your credit card number, though with the frequency I misplace my notebooks, that's probably the last thing that's going in there :).

The pages are different. Rather than the creamy yellowish color from their previous editions (the current color of Moleskine pages), these are very white. According to the insert, the new pages are from "well managed forests," "elemental chlorine free," have low wood and semi-chemical pulp content ensuring long life to the paper, and are fountain pen friendly, guaranteeing "the absorption of ink without affecting the opacity of the paper." This is all great news, especially to you fountain/quill pen guys out there (I'm fine with a boring old Bic, thanks!).

I'm definitely a fan of better paper quality, and it's an improvement over the old Stifflexible stock. But I will miss the old creamy yellow pages, and the colored page edges that made the old Stifflexibles distinctly European.

The Stifflexible continues to dominate the Moleskine with their back pocket, which doubles as a book mark:

And a tight elastic keeps the whole thing shut.

Let's not forget one more important aspect of this – this bad boy is made IN ITALY. This is not made in China for a company in Italy. This notebook was designed, produced, and finished entirely in Italy, a country I hold dear after living in the wonderful city of Bologna during college. The quality is top notch – you're not going to find broken spines or warped elastics with this notebook.

Overall, this is a different notebook than the original Stifflexible. Rather than being, essentially, a Moleskine with a bendable cover, Mazzuoli has redefined themselves to stand out as something different. This adheres more closely to the fine arts crowd than the all-purpose-throw-it-in-your-pocket-and- write-in-the-rain user, and you

frequent readers know how I've traditionally felt about that. But then, it's a Stifflexible, and where else can you find something similar?

I will miss the old Stifflexible edition (and deep down have my fingers crossed that some day it will return to the market unchanged), but even with the changes, its a breath of fresh air for those of us looking for the perfect little black notebook.

Company website: [Mazzuoli.it](http://Mazzuoli.it)

Where to buy: Still no distributor. Got ideas? Send them to Mazzuoli here.