

**BCI Diplomatic Mailbag - The Ambassador's newsletter:
Communicating with BCI members around the World**

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Edition



BCI- Ambassador's

Newsletter

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Editors Message

Hi to all

WOW another fantastic event is over and certainly Puerto Rico was again a great success and congratulations to all concerned, these events are a great opportunity to catch up with old friends and meet new Bonsai minded people while soaking in the waves of knowledge being given freely by the demonstrators. My trip to this conference was no exception.

I have tried to give a small glimpse of the action packed five days but certainly more photographs will be published over the coming months.

Next year we are off to Saint Vincent in Italy so mark the dates in your diary now 24th – 28th September 2008.

Please as I always ask, as ambassadors of BCI in your club pass this newsletter on to your members and don't let it just hit the table and then the bin, use it as an add on benefit of being a member of your club.

Hope you enjoy this edition

Ian Glew – BCI Ambassadors Newsletter Editor : iglew@b022.aone.net.au

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BCI/Felab – Puerto Rico 2007



Pedro in the early stages



Milagros Rauber getting into her demo



The final article – Pedros creation



Artists impression of the finished product



Suthin Sukosolvisit about to commence



Artists impression of the finished product



Camera shy Marco in a rare pose



One of the many fabulous Ikebana creations



Arthur Skolinik in full flight



Xenio Baron readying for the demo



David Benavente about to start.



Hideko Metaxas(front) and Shinji Suzuki

Just a few of the many first class trees on display





The fantastic tree with a close up of the trunk

Isn't Nature fantastic



These amazing photographs of a frozen cherry tree were recently sent to me by a friend and I just had to share them around, in my country this is almost unheard of and makes it all the more fascinating to me. I would love to receive photographs of trees in your part of the world, how about someone from Africa sharing your unique tree varieties?

Banyan Fig – Jim Smith Florida

GUIDELINES FOR CREATING THE BANYAN STYLE

Banyans rank among nature's most unusual and distinctive trees. In their native ranges, these tropical figs can grow 100 feet tall, and develop canopies many times that wide. There are Banyans in India that stretch across acres and are considered sacred places by local residents.

Banyans can attain such amazing size because of their habit of sending down aerial roots from the trunk and branches. In time, these roots become trunks themselves, and the tree continues to grow outward like a spider's web.

Just as the rules for classical styles of bonsai are derived from observing pines in nature, the rules for banyan bonsai are derived from observing tropical figs in nature. Rather than being defined by the angle of the trunk, the Banyan is defined by its silhouette: a single, heavy trunk with a broad, low spreading crown and aerial roots descending from the branches.

Creating a bonsai that effectively evokes the imposing image of a Banyan raises some unique challenges for the artist and requires some unusual approaches.

SUITABLE SPECIES

Varieties of *Ficus* are the most common plants used for this style, although other plants can be used.

In nature, the most famous Banyan is the *Ficus religiosa* or Bo tree (the tree under which Buddha found enlightenment), but it is not usually used for bonsai because of its large leaves.

Ficus microcarpa is a much better tree for the Banyan style because of its small leaves and compact growth habit. There are several varieties, and most of them are susceptible to Thrips – a tiny insect that causes the leaves to curl. Thrip damage can be easily controlled with insecticides or by removing the infested leaves when you see them.

-- *Ficus microcarpa* 'Kinmen', also called 'Tiger Bark', is, in my opinion, the best microcarpa for bonsai because of its smaller leaves, beautiful bark, compact growth habit and many aerial roots.

-- *Ficus microcarpa* *retusa* 'Nitida' also produces an abundance of aerial roots. It is also more susceptible to Thrips than other varieties.

-- *Ficus retusa* 'Nitida Green Gem' is a variety that is not susceptible to Thrips.

-- *Ficus* 'Green Island' is one of the better varieties for growing indoors. There are two varieties: One has pointed leaves and the other round leaves. Both readily produce fruit.

-- *Ficus salicifolia* (also called *F. nerifolia*, *F. salicaria* and *F. celebensis*), or the Willow-Leaf fig, is one of my favorite trees for bonsai. The leaves are small and reduce well, the tree buds back prolifically when pruned, and it is very forgiving if the soil is allowed to become too dry. This tree also readily produces aerial roots.

-- *Ficus exotica* also have ideal characteristics for the Banyan style.

-- *Ficus benjamina*, also called the Weeping Fig, and its cultivars are all good for the Banyan style. Particularly useful are the small-leaved varieties, including *Ficus* 'Kiki' and *Ficus* 'Too Little'.

There are other *Ficus* with leaves that can be reduced and used for this style.

Schefflera arboricola, the dwarf umbrella tree, is another plant that is often used because it grows rapidly, produces aerial roots and its leaves can be reduced.

STYLING

Because Banyans are so unique, many of the rules for classical, Japanese-style bonsai do not apply.

The tree starts as a single trunk, but may divide into several trunks. It should be twice as wide as it is tall. The canopy spread from side to side should be slightly longer than from front to back. The foliage should start at one-third the height of the tree. These ratios can be adjusted somewhat to suit the individual tree. Miniature air plants can be attached to the trunk and branches to give the appearance of a Banyan in nature.

When choosing a plant for this style, look for a thick trunk with strong surface roots, low branches and aerial roots. Bar branches are acceptable, preferably with the two lowest branches coming slightly forwards, and one branch extending to the rear. Bar branches can really help define the flat bottom that is essential to a good canopy structure. Branches are not arranged in a specific order as we see in conifers and some broadleaf trees, although they should become smaller as they spiral around the trunk to the apex.

Exposed roots are very conspicuous and, on some varieties, may grow high above the ground. Roots that radiate like spokes are classic, but crossing roots that would be unacceptable in other styles can look fantastic here.

Before styling the tree, it is best to defoliate it in order to clearly see the structure.

Start by finding the front of the tree. Look at the exposed surface roots and the aerial roots, then consider the branches -- remember that branches can be moved, even large ones. If a large branch cannot be moved with wire alone, make a cut next to the trunk on the opposite side of the direction you want to move the branch and break it. It is necessary to wire it in the usual manner so that it can heal in the position you want.

Determine the height of the finished tree by assessing the character of the trunk and the placement of the lowest branches.

Shorten the trunk and all the branches to make the silhouette conform to the ratio of two to one, width to height.

Remove all the branches that are too large for their position on the tree. The lowest branches should be the thickest. The higher the branch, the thinner it should be. Crossing branches and those that grow straight up or down should be removed.

When shortening a branch, cut it back to a side branch that can be wired out to create a new terminal. Wire any remaining branches as needed.

Keep in mind that the canopy of a tropical bonsai has a different character than a classical Japanese bonsai, and the Banyan is no exception. Tropical bonsai should look lush and opulent. With *Ficus*, you can defoliate twice a year (or more in the tropics) to help rapidly build a finely ramified canopy. Keep the separation between foliage pads tight, and sculpt them individually, to give the canopy the look of a billowing cloud. Birds may fly into the canopy, but they can't fly through it.

AERIAL AND GROUND ROOTS

The roots are a key feature of Banyan bonsai. Surface roots should be natural looking. Remove any roots that are too large or are crossing, although crossing roots can be very attractive if they are so prolific that they appear as a fused mass. It is sometimes necessary to split a root that is too large in order to make it conform to the scale of the other roots. Roots of the Ficus can be drastically modified to help give a natural appearance.

Aerial roots really define the Banyan style. In nature, they grow only when the humidity is uncomfortably high and the air is still. But you can help stimulate the production of aerial roots on raw stock by wrapping the trunk in plastic to create a more humid microclimate, and putting the tree aside where it won't be disturbed. Make sure to keep it moist.

Aerial roots should look natural and be balanced from side to side in a relatively an even pattern around the trunk. They should be as vertical as possible, and the branches that host them should be close to horizontal. If a good aerial root is growing at an angle, dig out the base and straighten it, planting it more deeply to take up the extra length. Remove or split any large roots that are not in proportion to the size of the bonsai. Although these aerial roots are essentially secondary trunks, they should always be in scale with the diameter of the main trunk. If a well-placed aerial becomes too thick, carve it down until it is the proper diameter.

A new aerial root that is just starting to grow can be trained by using a soda straw to direct it into the precise spot desired. It is important to split the straw along its entire length before use so that it will be easy to remove when the root has attached itself to the ground. It's best to use straws after the tree has been placed in its bonsai pot.

POTTING

When choosing a pot for the Banyan style, the usual rules do not apply. This style looks better in a very shallow tray or slab that shows off the surface and aerial roots.

Since Ficus can tolerate drastic root pruning, it is possible to use very shallow pots and slabs.

The best time to pot is spring, but your climate may allow it at other times.

To encourage the development of a nice flare at the base of the trunk and powerful roots, we plant our pre bonsai stock deeply. When it's time to style the tree, we wash away the upper soil to expose the surface roots and then cut the remaining root ball so that only the surface roots remain. If you are working with a large tree, a chain saw can be used to remove the root ball. The tree can then be planted in a shallow pot or slab in the usual manner.

CONCLUSION

As a style of Bonsai, the Banyan is still in its infancy, and finding both fine examples of it, and good raw material, can be a challenge. But it is worth the trouble: With its aerial roots, broad canopy and vast nebari, a great specimen of Banyan bonsai can have a presence that inspires awe in the viewer. As the style becomes better understood, and gains more adherents outside the tropics, its place among the classical styles of bonsai will be assured.



Jim Smith

National Arboretums and collections around the World

I had the pleasure of meeting in person Richard Anderson (BCI's advertising Manager) at the Puerto Rico conference – Dick as he likes to be known has put together a CD of the collection in Chicago and this was featured in the Bonsai and Stone appreciation Magazine (July/ August /September) and the web site is listed below.

Pedro and the team in Puerto Rico are creating a museum for the display of some of their islands best creations and certainly I look forward to photographs from Pedro on its progress, I certainly need you to let me know of any other collections around the World that I am unaware of and I will certainly feature them in this section.

Washington – Go for a Virtual Tour

<http://www.usna.usda.gov/Gardens/collections/VirtualTours/index.html>

Birmingham –For a look at these magnificent Bonsai take a look at the web site

<http://www.nationalbonsaicollection.org/>

Australia – Although in its infancy watch the collection grow on the web site.

<http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/nonurban/projects/arboretum.shtml>

Chicago Collection

<http://www.chicagobotanic.org/explore/bonsai.php>

A small glimpse of the Chicago collection that I will feature next edition



Bonsai Courtyard in the Evening



Bonsai Courtyard - Aerial View



Closing and next Issue

We had another successful ambassadors meeting at Puerto Rico and it certainly was great to catch up, if there are any ambassadors out there without their special pin please let me know. There is another pin but there is a catch, you have to have been a ambassador for over 5 years and at an ambassadors meeting at a BCI conference to have it presented.

Below are some of the points that I went through at our meeting and I would certainly like feed back from you as to what BCI can do for you our ambassadors

Role of the Ambassador

- Promote BCI membership and goals
- Feed back to myself news of club activities and interesting events – shows, demos etc for publication in this newsletter.

What can Ambassadors do for BCI?

- Pass the newsletter around
- Articles for the newsletter
- News from your club
- Promote BCI within your club

Next Issue

- **I will have an article on the Juniper – Formal Upright that I wrote about some issues back and I am sure you will notice a difference.**
- **Chicago Bonsai collection**
- **Puerto Rico – more of the conference.**
- **An unusual group of trees in nature**

It is a bit scary but the next edition will be the Christmas one, what is your club planning to make this end of year celebration different? Thanks to Jim Smith from Florida for his article on Banyan Figs – keep the articles coming from all over the World, which is what makes our organisation strong.

