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Bonsai & Stone Appreciation

2022
Q3

Casuarina equisetifolia, recipient of the BCI Excellence Award at the IBC, Indonesian Bonsai Championship. It is a very impressive large bonsai owned by Mr. Alexander Bambang, Chairman of the Indonesian Bonsai Society, Jakarta Chapter.
Photo by Alexander Bambang.



Celtis sinensis, The Pursuit of Perfection
Keido, a window on nature
Spring Festival at Bonsai Zentrum, Heidelberg
The Indonesian Bonsai Championship
12th National BSAPI Show and Competition
David De Groot Retrospective
Valentina's First Taxus
Celebrating Ten Years at Nature's Way Nursery



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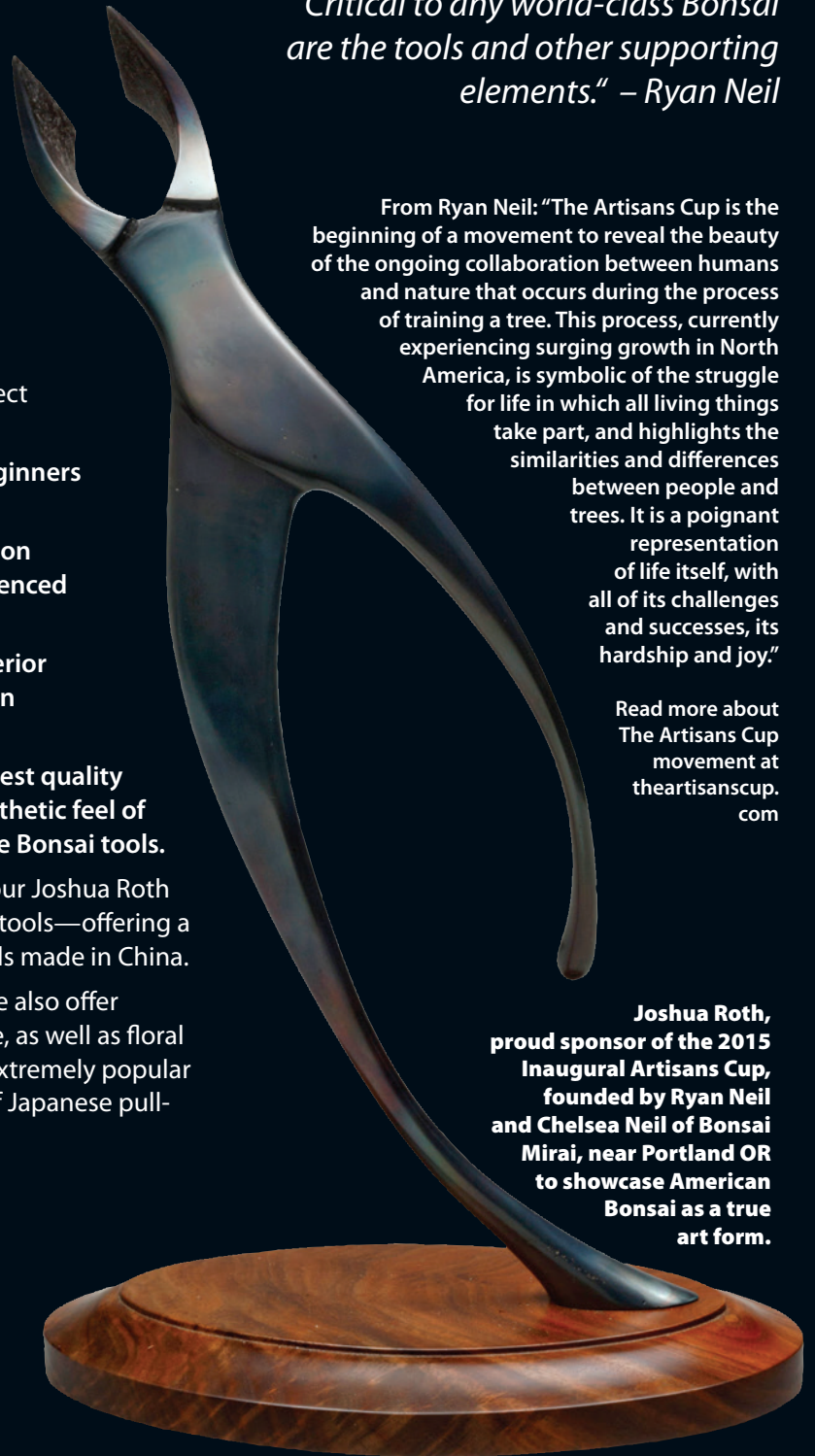
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“Critical to any world-class Bonsai are the tools and other supporting elements.” – Ryan Neil

From Ryan Neil: “The Artisans Cup is the beginning of a movement to reveal the beauty of the ongoing collaboration between humans and nature that occurs during the process of training a tree. This process, currently experiencing surging growth in North America, is symbolic of the struggle for life in which all living things take part, and highlights the similarities and differences between people and trees. It is a poignant representation of life itself, with all of its challenges and successes, its hardship and joy.”

Read more about
The Artisans Cup
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President's Message

Welcome to the 3rd edition of Bonsai Clubs International magazine 2022.

Finally, we see a light at the end of the tunnel regarding this virus!

Bonsai clubs and organizations are slowly starting to hold in-person events in the USA, Australia, and Europe! We thought this day would never come, but it is finally here!

Our 60th Anniversary BCI Convention is being held in Taiwan this summer. I think it will still only be a domestic event. I have attended past Taiwan shows, and they are spectacular experiences! This one will not disappoint when it comes to the wow factor.

The 60th Anniversary BCI Convention in Taiwan will be the first time BCI will give out the new BCI Excellence Award medals on neck ribbons. This will start a new chapter in BCI's evolution. A lot of work went into these new awards, as you saw in the article in the last issue. I hope they are well received.

We are getting some inquiries about hosting possible future BCI shows, some from the USA and other countries. I, for one, can't wait for the annual and regional BCI shows to get going again. I'm still a little stir crazy from the lack of international traveling!

We have set the dates for the BCI's annual fundraiser auction! We are excited again to have the Everything Bonsai Auction from November 12 to the 19th. So it's time to ask everyone you know for donations for this year's auction.

This auction has kept BCI afloat financially during this pandemic shutdown these past 3 years! Since most of our income is from our conventions and memberships, these auctions have been very helpful.

The auction has played a vital role in our financial existence these past three years. And I want to personally thank each of you for your donations and your bids! We could not have weathered this financial storm without each and every one of your help! Thank You Again.

So now we must make this auction even better than the past auctions. So please look around, find gently worn bonsai items you don't need anymore, and donate them to the auction.

Ask the bonsai professionals and bonsai vendors to please consider donating to this year's auction.

We also need to support these bonsai professionals, bonsai vendors, and our magazine advertisers by buying from them and supporting them year-round.

So again, if you are interested in hosting a BCI convention in the next year or two, please contact the convention committee on our website. <www.bonsai-bci.com/bci-conventions/bci-convention-committee> and send Committee Chair Helen Su a message.

We also have a few BCI coffee mugs available for purchase. They make a perfect gift for that bonsai someone in your life.

As this magazine issue comes out, I will be approaching the end of my first year as President of Bonsai Clubs International. I want to thank you all for your hard work and support of BCI and my presidency. I have really enjoyed being BCI President this past year and can't wait for next year!

Again, bonsai people spread love, not hate... Don't take life for granted. Make the most of every day we have!

Please pray for the people in Ukraine.

Frank Mihalic 🌳



The 60th Anniversary BCI Convention in Taiwan will be the first time BCI will give out the new BCI Excellence Award medals on neck ribbons.

60th Anniversary BCI Cup

\$20.00 (plus shipping)

See page 72.



You are invited to be a part of the BCI Vision.

**We are raising funds for the future of BCI!
Any donation you can make, will help.**

Remember BCI in your will, your trust, your future!

For more information contact:

Frank Mihalic, president@bonsai-bci.com

Message from the Editor

Have you registered for BCI's 60th Anniversary Convention in Taiwan? It is a free, virtual convention delivered on the YouTube platform to registered guests only. See the ad on page 31 or visit www.bonsai-bci.com/60years for more information and to register. I predict the demonstrations by Taiwanese Bonsai masters will be exceptional. One of the artists demonstrating for this convention is BCI's own Vice President, Min Hsuan Lo. He turned a Chinese hackberry started from a cutting into a masterpiece in less than 20 years, as you'll see in the first article in this edition.

This edition also includes reports on four exhibitions, a sure sign that the bonsai world is normalizing after global pandemic disruptions. Gudrun Benz, Contributing Editor and avid viewing stone collector covers great shows in central Europe and introduces us to a new artist, Valentin Brose, who prefers the term Bonsai Designer. Master, artist, designer, whatever term you want to use, these people have one thing in common. They make drop-dead gorgeous bonsai.

BCI Director Budi Sulisty reports on IBC, the Indonesian Bonsai Championship that attracted Indonesians from far and wide to a competition celebrating bonsai, companionship, and outstanding bonsai.

I love the title of Susan Lee's article on the Philippine National Bonsai and Suiseki Show. She captures our frustrations over the last two years and shows how Filipinos have bounced back with a vengeance.

Elsa Durham is a new contributor to this magazine. She kindly agreed to write about the David De Groot Retrospective at the Pacific Bonsai Museum, explaining the context and background to this show that honors this museum's ex-curator. Even though David's job was curating what was then called the Weyerhaeuser Pacific Rim Bonsai Collection, he created beautiful bonsai in his backyard from humble "starter material." My favorites are the two with Penjing-like forms.

Readers know how Italians love bonsai and how good they are with this artistic medium. In one article, a young artist, Valentina Castagneri, comes of age with an award-winning styling of a *Taxus cuspidata*. In another article, veteran bonsai artist Mauro Stemberger crosses the Atlantic to celebrate 10 years of collaboration with Jim Doyle, owner of Nature's Way Nursery in Pennsylvania. The yamadori Rocky Mountain juniper they worked on is destined to win acclaim at a future show.

For scholars and lovers of the Japanese aesthetic, Massimo Bandera provides an essay on *Keido*, the formal display of objects in a *Tokonoma*. This lengthy article is a short introduction to a subject many do not truly understand or appreciate. How often have we seen well-meaning but superficial attempts by non-Japanese at creating a *Tokokazari*? A fascinating part of this article is the letter to Massimo written by Susumu Sudo, discussing the Keido aesthetic and its relationship to bonsai and Zen philosophy. Massimo concludes, "For Keido lovers, it is as if the ultimate goal is not to arrive at a beautiful bonsai but to show it."

This ties in very well to how this awful pandemic dramatically disrupted bonsai's social world. I wish you and your bonsai club joyous days ahead as we gather to show our trees. 🌳

—Joe Grande, Canada

MISSION STATEMENT

BONSAI CLUBS INTERNATIONAL

Bonsai Clubs International, a not-for-profit educational organization, advances the ancient and living art of bonsai and related arts through the global sharing of knowledge. We educate while promoting international friendship and solidify world relationships through cooperation with individuals and organizations whose purpose is consistent with ours.

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The Magazine reserves the right to edit all materials accepted for publication. Articles requiring extensive editing will be returned to the author with suggestions from the editorial staff. Manuscripts, drawings & photographs, with clear identification for captions, should be provided in digital format, on disk, or by e-mail or internet. Digital images must be provided at 300 dpi resolution for an 8 x 10 inch size minimum.

Authors are requested not to submit articles simultaneously to another publication.

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Issue	Month	Closing Date
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FEATURED ON THE COVER: *Casuarina equisetifolia*, recipient of the BCI Excellence Award at the IBC, Indonesian Bonsai Championship. It is a very impressive large bonsai owned by Mr. Alexander Bambang, Chairman of the Indonesian Bonsai Society, Jakarta Chapter. Photo by Alexander Bambang.



Fung Keng Celtis, painted by Mr. Lee Jun De

Celtis sinensis Chinese Hackberry

The Pursuit of Perfection

By Min Hsuan Lo, and Andrew Lo, Taiwan

Photos courtesy Min Hsuan Lo

In my studio hangs a painting, *Fung Keng Celtis* (鳳坑毛朴), painted by Mr. Lee Jun De in November 2004. I would like to thank Mr. Lee for his efforts in helping Fung Keng leave a permanent record. Getting along with the painting day and night, the spirit of Fung Keng Celtis became a part of me. Sometimes when I was styling and creating, its soul and characteristics would appear in my bonsai.

As it was written in the painting in traditional Chinese Calligraphy, the main characteristics of Fung Keng Celtis are:

「主幹似楷隸之穩重，
分幹似行草之翻轉順暢，
而細枝似篆體枝枝分明。」

“The main trunk is steady and powerful like Regular Script and Clerical Script; the twisted branches in all directions are like the Cursive Script, and the fine twigs are neat with distinction like the Seal Script.”





However, after the 1980s, with the establishment of Hsinchu Science Industrial Park, known as Taiwan's Silicon Valley, some old settlements and Celtis were gradually replaced by factories. After a couple of years, they could only be recalled in photos.

Preface

After graduating from university, it was an honor to become a second lieutenant and fulfil my mandatory two-year military service. As the troops moved, we were stationed in Hsinchu and Taoyuan for nearly half a year. During the six months, what impressed me the

most was the cold weather in winter. We had a short stay in old military camps (which no longer exist) near the Nanliao Fishing Port (南寮漁港), known as Hsinchu Harbor nowadays. There was a windbreak forest near the port, composed of Casuarina, Taiwan Acacia, and Celtis. While hiding in the windbreak forest, the biting winds cut through our flesh and bones. In such a tough army life and exercising a strong body and willpower, I also enjoyed the tree in the windbreak forest, especially some old Celtis. Therefore, I had a deep impression of Celtis, which greatly influenced my future bonsai creation.

Detail photo of Celtis



The native habitat of *Celtis* lies along almost half of the western coast of Taiwan, from Changhua(彰化), through Taichung(台中), Miaoli(苗栗), Hsinchu(新竹), Taoyuan(桃園), to the coastal area of Taipei(台北). They are mainly located north of Touqian River(頭前溪) Fung Keng Village, Hsinchu. To deepen my understanding of *Celtis*'s beauty, I have visited there many times during the Lunar New Year while the leaves fall. I also took many photos and was left with many images worthy of appreciation again and again.

Top left: 2004/02/01 *Celtis* forest in Fung Keng. *Celtis* with old twisted trunks are on the left-hand side, and young ones with straight trunks are on the right-hand side.

Middle left, and bottom: The detail photos of old *Celtis* in Fung Keng, Hsinchu, Taiwan.

Magnificent trees around the world

I have been lucky to have many opportunities to travel abroad since 1997. Not merely for lectures and demonstrations but also to explore and find old trees worldwide. I feel thankful to my bonsai friends on my travels, for they are always generous and willing to take me to see old trees in their country. I indulged myself in wandering in nature, appreciating the twisted trunks and branches of giant trees, and taking inspiration from nature. Most of the old giant trees have similar characteristics, especially the branches and canopy. Next time you walk outside your house, in your backyard, in a public park, or anywhere near your home, please stop and look around; you can find some splendid trees right by your side.

Facing Page

Top left: 2008/12/18 Photo taken in the front gate of Forbidden City, Beijing.

Top right: 2009/04/13 Photo taken in Warsaw, Poland.

Middle left: 2011/11/21 Photo taken in Osaka, Japan.

Middle right: 2014/10/29 Oak. Photo taken in San Antonio, Texas, USA.





The process of gaining inspiration from nature.

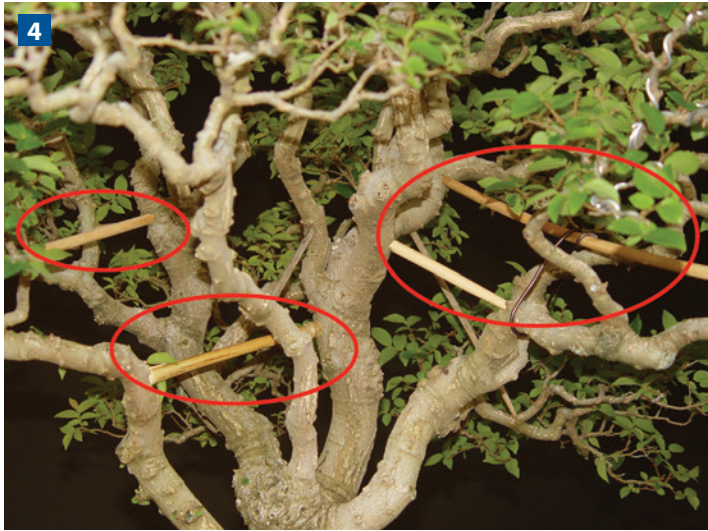
I planted a great number of *Celtis* materials in my garden in the early 1990s. My mother always pruned the trees in nondirectional way, which was similar to “Cut and Grow.” It is an important process in cultivating good materials.

1 2001. In the second year of transplanting from ground to pot, the branches grew too high. Therefore, I used aluminum wire to lower them.

2 2002. Using aluminum wire (North school) helps guide the branches to the right direction. After wiring, proper fertilizing helps accelerate the tree’s growth.



3 2004 Summer. Wiring the entire tree could also soften the twigs and lead it to the right direction.



4 2005. Summer. I used chopsticks to adjust the spaces between branches.



5 2006. Few works were left in the final stage; transplanting to a display pot, adjusting the ramification and controlling the water. Proper water can inhibit the growth of water shoots, and thus let the tree reach a stable status. Gradually, the bark would get older.



6 2007/02/09: Back side.



7 2007/02/09: Left side.



8 2007/02/09: Right side.



2007/02/09 Early spring. Front.

Aesthetic of Natural Style

To most people, the first sight of this picture might feel a little strange. Because the branches of *Celtis* stretch in all directions, making it look out of order. Also, its outlook is a far cry from the traditional bonsai. But if we take a closer look at the details of the trunk and branches, it is possible that we can find the beauty of nature on *Celtis* bonsai.

First, the main trunk consists of not only one but five trunks, overlapping and extending in all directions, which make it filled with wild charm. Second, the tree canopy is presented in the shape of clouds, irregular but unique. Each tree canopy is like a small tree. But if we combine them together, it turns into a huge forest. When a bonsai is not just a bonsai but a vast forest, it will open our eyes and widen the space for imagination.

How to transform a normal material into a masterpiece by air layering.

When facing a bad material, how shall we deal with it? Firstly, take time to explore and find the potential and advantages of the tree. Secondly, follow your heart to restyle and transform the materials. Nevertheless, there are successes and failures on the road to creating. Don't be afraid. Just do it! Lastly, take care of it densely and continuously. I believe that one day, an ugly duck will turn into a beautiful swan.

The technique of recreating and restyling a half-dead bonsai (or a bad material) that gives bonsai a new life, is called “駄木活性術” in Japanese which translates to “Activation of the wood.”

9 to **15**



2002. Too many thick branches at the same point leads to a swollen trunk.



Air layering with a 45° angle in order to make the maximum of main trunk.



2003/09/30 If the tree is strong enough, prune it in late September.



2005/01/23 Got rid of some unnecessary branches before the spring buds come out. Besides, took off the bottom right branch and shape the wound deeper to make the main trunk more harmonious.





2007/02/19 Before the spring buds came out. Wiring branches on the left-hand side helped them grow faster and thicker.



2009/02/06 This oval cyan-blue pot was the first display pot for this Celtis bonsai. It lasted for one year until I found that it might not be the best choice.

Choose the most suitable pot

2010/02/02 I tried to find other pots that may suit the Celtis bonsai. I picked three pots and finally chose the Miaoli Gongguan (苗栗公館) old glazed pot as its new home, made nearly 50 years ago. (Bottom left)

The second pot, shown middle left, was too wide and shallow.

The third pot, shown bottom right, was too deep.

Miaoli Gongguan "Apo pot" (公館阿婆盆)

Miaoli Gongguan used to be famous for the bonsai pot industry, for the soil there was full of clay suitable for pot-making. The industry began to develop in the period of Japanese occupation (1895–1945).

"Apo Pot" had the highest quality glazed-pot reputation in Taiwan. The owner of "Apo Pot" was a gracious and kind woman. ("Apo" means grandmother or an honorific title for old women.) Every time the kiln was opened, a large number of bonsai enthusiasts would immediately snap up the glazed pots fresh from the kiln. When I was a kid, I used to go there and buy pots with my father several times. There are still dozens of them in my garden, and I fully cherish them. In the picture, to highlight the beauty of this Celtis bonsai, I chose the most representative, dark blue, 50-year-old Apo glazed pot as its final display pot.





Seasonal color

2010/02/12 Spring. Light yellow and green leaves.



2010/12/31 Celtis leaves are the ornamental focus of deciduous trees. In the winter of Taiwan, the leaves of Celtis will turn into yellow. While in some north country, it becomes yellow or red in autumn.



How to maintain and cultivate Celtis Bonsai

Variety Selection

It's easy to get Celtis seedlings under a big Celtis or collected in the wild. Unfortunately, the ones from seeds are not suitable for bonsai. They may easily die back, which leads to poor ramification. The best way to obtain good Celtis material is by cutting and air-layering from a mature Celtis bonsai. Only in this way can we get good materials and maintain its branch development.

Soil

Raw Celtis materials are suitable for all kinds of soil. To maintain branches and twig in a mature bonsai, use a mixture of 70% (or even more) Akadama and 30% mountain sand.

Styling and Defoliation

Celtis is a good sample that mixes the North (Wiring) and South (Cut and Grow) schools. Wiring and Styling can be done when new leaves mature in May. Aluminum wire is suitable for Celtis. But remember to remove the aluminum wire carefully before it cuts into the bark (same as all kinds of deciduous bonsai). Celtis can be defoliated two or three times per year if it is in healthy condition.

Pest and Diseases

Fungal infection is the primary disease for Celtis. After the rainy season, it is important to spray fungicide to prevent infection. Scale insect is another common problem for Celtis, and they usually appear during a hot and humid summer. If the scale insects are found on the tree, remember to brush the branch and use power water to get them off.

Repot timing

Celtis grow very fast, especially their roots. Therefore, annual repotting for mature bonsai is necessary. Celtis materials could be repotted every two to three years. Early spring is the best time for repotting before the buds sprout out in early spring. Repotting the second time in late summer or early autumn helps maintain ramification. If repotting in spring, we could clean all the soil. But if it is the second time repotting, remove the soil only close to the sides of the pot, which means only 10 to 20 percent of the soil can be removed. At the same time, it's essential to defoliate and put it in the shade.

Watering

After repotting in early spring, once a day is enough. Celtis grow vigorously in summer. When the temperature rises, the leaves come out and turn from light yellow to green, water twice a day. Due to the thin and small leaves, watering twice or even three times per day is necessary in hot summer to keep a splendid ramification. When it comes to autumn, the leaves start to fall, and water should be decreased. But still, pay attention to the soil humidity. In winter, watering once in 2 to 3 days is enough. If the soil is too wet, it might hurt the roots.

Fertilizer

Both chemical and organic fertilizer is OK for Celtis. Raw material shall be fed with sufficient fertilizer every two months, while mature bonsai shall be given weak fertilizer every month, depending on the health situation of the bonsai. If it is given enough fertilizer in autumn, the buds will grow better next spring.



2010/09/20
Celtis sinensis
Miaoli Gongguan 50-year-old glazed Apo pot
Min Hsuan Lo 🌲



Spring Festival at Bonsai

with Valentin Brose, bonsai designer



Zentrum HEIDELBERG



Top: Bonsai at the sale area are placed on benches and shaded by nets. In the background, is the old village water tower.

Insets: The courtyard where people relax and enjoy the fine weather, cup of coffee or tea, and the beauty of the excellent bonsai in the garden.

Top right: A colorful bonsai at Brosebonsai.

Middle: Impressive different species of bonsai at the museum garden.

By Gudrun Benz, Germany

Photos by Gudrun Benz, Benjamin Czernoch, and Valentin Brose

The corona pandemic blocked all activities of public life for two years. So people were thirsty to go out and meet and enjoy life again. It wasn't surprising that many bonsai lovers decided to attend the "Great Spring Festival" at the Bonsai Zentrum Heidelberg. The beautiful sunny weather favored the event, so even more people than usual came for an outing at the large bonsai center. Here all was carefully prepared: big, beautiful, and impressive bonsai and small specimens in the courtyard or on long benches in the sales area. The extensive choice of bonsai pots was another attraction for bonsai practitioners, even if the season for repotting was already over. People who just wanted to have a look and perhaps a coffee could relax in the comfortable seats in the courtyard. A stand for tea tasting was another alternative.

As usual, the garden of the bonsai museum and the museum itself were other attractions with outstanding bonsai, three Tokonoma, and exhibits of east Asian art objects.

Top: The attraction in this display is the huge Ying stone of abstract shape and a scroll showing a single lily. The accent fern is quite big but suitable because of the empty space available.

Middle left: Tokonoma display at the museum: a pine together with a scroll showing a pagoda and an accent plant, a daisy showing the season.

Middle right: Impressive different species of bonsai at the museum garden.

Bottom: An old olive tree, an accent plant, and a heuchera create an effective image.



Festival's Highlight

However, the festival's highlight was bonsai demonstrations on Saturday and Sunday by bonsai designer Valentine Brose. He was assisted by Milan Karpízek. Valentin worked on both days on two different pines (*Pinus sylvestris*), a species he likes to work with. The material, two yamadori, was challenging, but he coped with it mainly by shortening long branches by wrapping and wiring (see the photos).

I feel most participants enjoyed the event and were happy with the variety. In short, the spring festival was a great success.

I would like to tell you more about Valentin Brose because he is a talented and ambitious bonsai designer, a term he likes more than bonsai demonstrator or artist.



As a child, Valentin was interested in plants and even bonsai. Later, he also became interested in culture and art. The contact with Japanese and Chinese art strengthened his interest in bonsai. He learned the gardening basics through an apprenticeship in flower gardening, but this work didn't satisfy him. He believed in getting more satisfaction from bonsai and therefore decided at the age of 25 for an apprenticeship in a bonsai garden in Japan. He had this opportunity in 2008 at Shunka-en Bonsai Museum, the bonsai garden of Mr. Kunio Kobayashi in Tokyo.

During his apprenticeship, he had a tough time with 12 to 15 working hours per day, seven days per week, and only one free day per month. This time was not comparable to his apprenticeship at the flower garden.



Top left: This *Acer palmatum*, displayed inside the bonsai museum, conveys an impressive image of age and dignity.

Top right: A Meng or Moore stone of Edis Ziegler attracts by its pitch black color and unusual shape on a modern wooden stand. The origin of this modern Chinese scholars' rock is Guangxi Province, South China.

Middle left: This spectacular old olive tree displayed on a rotating platform attracted the visitors' attention.

Middle right: "Toad" is the title of this Shangshi (Chinese viewing stone), and it is a Dahua stone from Guangxi Province.

Bottom: This is a so-called bamboo leaf stone, a pattern stone of Chinese origin.

Saturday

Top left: Announcement of the bonsai demonstration of Valentin Brose by the owner of the Bonsai Zentrum Heidelberg Edis Ziegler.

Top right: Valentin explains his intentions on how to style the tree to the audience.



Middle left: Yamadori, before the shaping.

Bottom left and right: The first steps of the shaping. To avoid breaking the branches by bending, he wraps them. Specialized compression clamps help with the bending.

In addition, there were language problems because he spoke only very little Japanese besides English. At this time, Japanese apprentices who worked at Shunka-en didn't speak English.

He learned a lot about bonsai by watching when he assisted master Kobayashi and his senpais and during photo shoots for bonsai magazines. (Senpais are advanced apprentices compared to the newcomers.) He learned, among other techniques, how to “read” a

tree to be able to bring out its best features. Shunka-en is also famous for its different Tokonoma exhibits. Valentin and the apprentices furnished these according to the seasons under the guidance of master Kobayashi.

Valentin's personal view regarding bonsai:

Valentin has owned a bonsai garden near Stuttgart, Germany, for five years. He gives priority to creativity and the health of a tree. Of course, Valentin's bonsai



design is influenced by Master Kunio Kobayashi. Nevertheless, he considers himself a bonsai designer who goes on his own way. He needs to grasp the essence of a tree to find the best shaping. He doesn't feel obliged to follow fixed regulations regarding tree shaping. Still, he prefers an individual kind of creativity because there doesn't exist only one way to create a bonsai. At this point, he also contradicts the West's common view that only one uniform system of Japanese bonsai styles exists.



Top left: Milan Karpižek assisted Valentin. Thick wire should hold the bent branches in shape.
Top right: Much strength is needed to bend old branches.
Middle right: Teamwork of Valentin together with Milan .
Bottom: Final result of the demo on Saturday.

His openness to different possibilities to create a bonsai is reflected in his yearly visits to China near Hangzhou to work with bonsai/penjing.

Sunday

Top left: Starting material

Top right: Valentin, together with his starting material on Sunday morning.

Middle left: Stumps of thick branches are transformed into shari and jin.



Middle right and bottom: Wrapping and wiring before bending is necessary in order in to not break the thick old branches

On the contrary, each bonsai master has his or her own style, which differs from a uniform norm. One can see this very well in the works/creations of masters Kimura, Kobayashi, or Suzuki. In Valentin's view, "creativity is creativity," individual and subjective.

His openness to different possibilities to create a bonsai is reflected in his yearly visits to China near Hangzhou to work with bonsai/penjing (before the corona pandemic). The penjing culture in China is experiencing a renewal after the stand-still during and shortly after the cultural revolution.

Valentin has traveled a lot in the 10 years after returning from Japan. He is busy with around 20



Top left: Wiring.

Top right: Last look at the work.

Bottom: Final result of Sunday's work on this *Pinus sylvestris*.

... each bonsai master has his or her own style, which differs from a uniform norm.



Views of Valentin's bonsai garden, Brosebonsai, near Stuttgart, Germany, and the superb bonsai he is creating.

Facing page:

Top left: *Juniperus sabina*

Top right and bottom: *Pinus sylvestris*

workshops in different European countries, such as Switzerland, Austria, France, and of course in different parts of Germany. In addition, he has many clients whom he visits regularly. His wife supports him actively by taking care of the bonsai during his absence. Workshop participants work with their own plants. Possibilities of how to shape the plants and maintenance tips are discussed in detail during the workshops.

Valentin hopes to reduce travel in the future because he wants more time to develop his own bonsai further. He likes to work with conifers, for example, *Pinus sylvestris*, and deciduous trees. He has many azaleas

and different kinds of *Acer*, many of them he developed himself from seeds or cuttings. But one can also see many spectacular mature bonsai in his garden, native specimens, as well as some that are imported, under expert care for many years. 🌲



My First Taxus



By Valentina Castagneri, Italy

Photos courtesy IBS (Istruttori Bonsai e Suiseiki)

On the occasion of the XXIII IBS congress and the V Congress of Bonsai Club Rivalta, held in Rivoli (Torino), I presented a bonsai for the first time in a national exhibition.

This Japanese yew, *Taxus cuspidata*, arrived in the garden of the Bonsai Time School in 2015 after being bought in the Netherlands. It was healthy and vigorous, but there were some areas of rot in the deadwood in the trunk's cavity.



The first intervention in 2018 was to remove portions of the deadwood to prevent water stagnation. First with high-speed cutters and then manually finishing with gouges and chisels. Subsequently, with a high-pressure water gun, all the deadwood portions were cleaned. This eliminated both the residue of the old jin liquid and the bark on the live veins. This operation, which is not usually carried out, was necessary to remove the flakes of the bark, which were too large and therefore not aesthetically suitable.





Left to right: IBS instructors Luca Bragazzi, Carmelo Bonanno, and Giorgio Castagneri.

After waiting the necessary time for the wood to dry, the parts most at risk of rot were consolidated with epoxy resins, and then the jin liquid was applied again.

In October 2019, on the occasion of the Autumn Exhibition in Rome, the first styling was carried out by the IBS instructors: Giorgio Castagneri, Carmelo Bonanno, and Luca Bragazzi, who as the speaker, entertained the public by explaining the various stages of cultivation.

After this processing, the plant was left to rest until the spring of 2020. It was repotted in a mixture of akadama, kiryuzuna (zeolite), and pumice because the old substrate was compacted and deteriorated.



Here we are in winter 2021 when the taxus was entrusted to me with the task of wiring it and setting it for future exhibitions. For me, it was a great commitment and responsibility of execution as it was my first intervention on this type of plant. Many hours of cleaning the greenery, and as many hours for applying the wire to get to the final branch positions gave the result you can see.

In January 2022, the specimen's owner allowed me to register it in my name as a supporting friend, for the IBS trophy, during the 23rd national congress.



Valentina and colleague, Riccardo Dessi wire the taxus with impressive results.



Left to right: Valentina Castagneri, BCI Director Massimo Bandera, IBS president and instructor Luca Bragazzi, and Bonsai Club Rivalta president Alessandro Geraci.



Thus we arrived on the day of the congress and, during the awards ceremony, to my great surprise, Maestro Massimo Bandera, Director of the BCI, awarded me the prize for Bonsai Authors.

It is a great honor for me to have received this recognition, first of all, because I only have a few years of experience in this sector and, no less important, to be a woman in a primarily male bonsai world.

I would like to thank the Bonsai Time School that supports me on my educational path, the plant's owner who allowed me to exhibit it, the national college IBS for the opportunity given to me, and finally, a special thanks to Massimo and everyone in BCI. 🌲





OF EXCELLENCE

BCI 60 Years Anniversary Convention in Taiwan

September 24 & September 30, 2022

Sept. 24: Exhibition in Changhua



This exhibition will show the best 60 Bonsai trees and the best 60 Suiseki selected by BCI 2022 Convention Committee in honor of BCI's 60th Anniversary. Committee organizers are Taiwan Bonsai Masters and BCI Life Members. We will use YouTube to share with everyone. A Commemorative Book of the exhibit will be available as well.

Demonstrations by Bonsai Masters:



Cheng Cheng-Kung

Lo Min-Hsuan

Hsu Sung-Chan

Ho Chih-Hsung

Four Taiwan bonsai masters will demonstrate their creative concepts on YouTube during the exhibition period.

Free Admittance:

Free for everyone! Go to www.bonsai-bci.com/60years to register. BCI members and registered guests will receive links by email to all convention activities and events on YouTube.

Sponsors and Supporters:

Organized by I C Su and Helen Su,
Taiwan Bonsai Masters, and BCI Life Members
Changhua County Government
National Bonsai Association, Taiwan, ROC



Sept. 30: Su's Garden Taoyuan City, Taiwan

The exhibition in Su's garden will feature Bonsai, Suiseki, Imperial Diet, and Pot collection in a very natural environment.



Su's Bonsai Collection

Su's Bonsai Pot Collection

Su's Suiseki Collection

Su's Imperial Diet Collection

REGISTRATION & INFORMATION

www.bonsai-bci.com/60years



Keido, a window on nature

By Massimo Bandera, Italy

Photos courtesy Massimo Bandera

Translation by Joe Grande

Keido, born in Japan in the sixties with Ichiu Katayama, which today finds its continuation in its best students such as Susumu Sudo and Kunio Kobayashi, is a real rarity and is discussed less and less, perhaps due to an intellectual complexity.



Masahiko Kimura's millenary Juniper "tooryu-no-mai" (Dancing Dragon) which won the Prime Minister's award, marking universal acceptance of contemporary bonsai.



My first national prize, ABAN 1991, for the Larch "Aurora del Giorno."

My great European prize, the 2012 Crespi Cup for the Taxus "Il Tigre."



UBI (Unione Bonsaisti Italiani) prize of the Italian Republic of my Larch "Il deserto interiore."





Tokokazari by the master Kunio Kobayashi with three elements: suiseki (island stone) in cobalt blue in an enameled suiban, rice kusamono, and kakemono with a hazy sun on the sea. The suggestion of imminent summer during the tsuyu (rainy season) is expressed by the painting that strengthens the season with the rice kusamono. It almost seems that the waves break on the island's coasts, in an interior space expanded to the immense.

The bonsai experience sooner or later leads us to the awareness of perceiving true beauty precisely from nature, and we understand why the Japanese have drawn from it the canons of beauty. These aesthetic-moral values accompany us on a continuous journey of universal beauty, improvement, and becoming.

If I think of the pride with which my great teacher Kimura Masahiko gave me the photo of his millenary juniper “tooryu-no-mai,” which won the Prime Minister’s award in 1993 (I think for the first time). This marked universal acceptance of contemporary bonsai. If I look at his Kokufu awards—countless today—or if I think of my great European prizes, I am sure I am in the same contemporary, modern, avant-garde reality—ambitious and artistic. Today, these moments are thought of as the goal of bonsai, but bonsai is not a prize. It is art. Of course, everyone has their own experience and follows what they like or believe in the most.

Indeed, the prizes are pleasing, and I do not say professionally that they are not important for the diffusion of bonsai. The exhibitions also have their informative merit, and they are artistically significant: accessible communication and beauty are a tremendous undertaking. That’s the way it is today, mostly.

In Japan, however, there is another bonsai moment, a final point beyond the work—a special exhibition in the *Tokonoma*—the sacred alcove of the Japanese house, in which an exhibition of art, including the *Keido*, finds a way to express to bonsai all their most refined beauty.

Here, there is no place for the dominant follies, but a pure and light emotion of true Japanese beauty—as Susumu Sudo says—makes concrete an entirely Japanese experience worth discovering. *Keido*, born in Japan in the sixties with Ichiu Katayama, which today finds its continuation in its best students such as Susumu Sudo and Kunio Kobayashi, is a real rarity and is discussed less and less, perhaps due to an intellectual complexity.



Wonderful room of Tokonoma Gyoo at Kunio Kobayashi's Shunka-en Bonsai Museum in Tokyo: here we see a fundamental concept, the Tokonoma is not a piece of furniture, but the alcove in the back of the room and is part of it. *Zelkova serrata* in a winter dress with poetry. The bare bonsai awaits, a sense of impermanence sustains the beauty of emptiness (*Yohaku*) and nothingness (*Mujookan*).

In today's bonsai world there coexists Chinese Penjing of ancient and Taoist origin, classic Japanese bonsai of the great masters, and contemporary bonsai—artistic and magnificent work. Keido exhibits classic Japanese bonsai.

Keido literally means “The way of exposure,” a “window on nature.” Susumu (Uhaku) Sudo, a student of Katayama, says that Keido is in every way the highest form of contemplating a bonsai or a suiseki, a means of artistic presentation in its maximum expression of the beauty of nature.

Keido is a form of life, a path of the soul, a spiritual path (dojo) based on practice and not only on the knowledge of the rules.

No rule can be formulated that is always true, but intuition can develop with practice.

Knowledge of Japanese culture, as Sudo says, is the most essential aspect of a splendid display.

MAIN ELEMENTS

The space is at the heart of the Keido exhibition.

Whenever we mount an exhibition (*tokokazari*) in the Tokonoma (Japanese room or alcove), we have to choose the best elements: bonsai, paintings, poems, calligraphy, herbs, objects, etc., but we must not forget that the main element is the space. The space, the void, is essential to create the feeling of refinement, to provide calm, as a propitious place for contemplation. It can be said that space is the means that allows us to see beyond our gaze. Space guides us in personal feelings, invites us to imagine and think, becomes *Yuugen* (mysterious profundity).

Expressing the universe within the physical limits of Tokonoma requires sensitivity and discipline in the use of space.

If the message that our exposition launches can be expressed with two elements, why include a third? Anything that does not enhance the central element or reinforce the presentation's message must be eliminated.



Tokokazari Gyoo-Gyoo by Kunio Kobayashi in Tokonoma Soo: the flowering Ume is a symbol of winter, a *Pyrrisia* enhances the aesthetic value of the *Sabi*, and the painting brings a note of movement with the flight of birds

Refined exhibitions are not very specific, and they leave room for the imagination, with feelings of temporal brevity and instant and spontaneous emotions.

The presentation in the Keido can include two or three elements (even four if there is the *Tana*, a shelf or ledge, as a rare and specific case), where only one is the main character. In panel presentations (*sekikazari*), only one or two elements are used. Bonsai, *suiseki*, *ikebana*, and sometimes *kusamono* are the main elements.

Secondary elements help or implement or reinforce the expository message and are scroll paintings (*kakemono* or *kakejiku*), framed paintings, paintings on *kanzaku*, herbs (*shitakusa*), *Biseki* or *Chinseki* stones, and small objects (*tempai* or *tenkei*) in bronze, silver, or ivory. In the past, bronze was precious, and in some eras, it was forbidden to use it in art (it was only for weapons and coins), so the bronze *tempai* was rare, precious, and kept hidden.

The accompanying elements are always very small, leaving a lot of void around them, leaving room for the imagination: a three-centimeter deer *tempai* is not seen well because it is small ... but you imagine it a lot, it is more suggestive!

Primary elements are never shown together.

You never repeat the message but reinforce it.

Japanese *suiseki* is a representation of the landscape. For this reason, it is rarely exhibited with a bonsai. The trees are already in the landscape even if we do not see them. The sand in the *suiban* is space, and the author chooses the size of the tray (ceramic *suiban* or bronze *doban*). It does not represent earth or water. Vivid colors must be avoided.

The paintings are secondary elements, and they reinforce the themes and often indicate the season that the *suiseki* stones cannot do. The seal, the *Rakka*, in red should be opposite the main element. For a *suiseki* display, the ideal subjects are sun, moon, clouds, not landscapes with repeating mountains,



Screen Display: One of Japan's most famous *Pinus pentaphylla* Bunjin resting on a *jita funagata* which is a piece of the bottom of a restored fisherman's boat. Everything is pervaded by a poor simplicity, great beauty of imperfection and poverty understood as supreme wealth. The sense of sublime depth is very Zen, *yuugen* and *wabi sabi* are the dominant aesthetic values.

while in a bonsai display, it would be better to avoid branches and trees.

Seasonality must be presented based on the traditional 24 seasons, and a scene from the past season is never shown.

The companion plants should be small, preferably wild, with tiny showy flowers in three- to six-centimeter pots. For *suiseki*, given their sophistication, herbs without flowers are better.

Refined exhibitions are not very specific, and they leave room for the imagination, with feelings of temporal brevity and instant and spontaneous emotions. Sudo says *Keido* is looking beyond what you see.

Everything must be immaculate. Cleaning for the Japanese is an aesthetic value derived from Shinto. Refinement (*Miyabi*) is not possible without cleaning. Washing the sand until the water comes out clear is the best example of cleanliness, a physical and an essential exercise in our spiritual training.

RULES OF CONDUCT

- An exhibition is not a criticism;
- There is no need to comment on the technique or skill of the person who edited the exhibition;
- Much less, never say how they would do it! The feeling is learning from the masters in silence. Where the pupil does not accept, there is no learning;
- Never ask if a stone is cut;
- When you don't like a *suiseki* or bonsai, try to change yourself, not the stone or the tree. If you don't, all your bonsai or *suiseki* will be the same, and the monotony will plunge you into the abyss of stereotypes.
- It doesn't matter if we make an impressive *tokokazari* or with a simple object, for significant occasions or not. The important thing is to express respect for art, culture, and the displayed objects.
- Our presentation talks about ourselves, our own sensitivity.



Tokokazari by master Kunio Kobayashi with Buddhist-themed calligraphy, daruma ceramic *tempai*, and Juniper bonsai in an ancient namban vase. The strength of the formal shin display creates the great suggestion of the monumental bonsai.

THE TOKONOMA

Originally in a Japanese house, or more precisely a hut, a bed was placed against the side of a wall to sleep in, slightly raised so as not to have the unhealthy effects of humidity and the presence of insects and animals. In the room thus equipped, the alcove remains a privileged point in the Japanese mentality: the best part of the house. With this mentality, the centuries of Japanese history have been crossed, and the Tokonoma still remains a privileged place to store a family's most important things. In ancient times, objects were displayed in the Tokonoma on a blue cloth, still used today under tables or supports in the Tokonoma.

Over time, the Tokonoma has become sacred, a formal display space for religious objects and images and the images of the ancestors, even their ashes.

Depending on family traditions, Tokonoma furnished Buddhist and Shinto temples.

In ancient times, works of art were placed in the Tokonoma, such as paintings, statues, weapons, ceramics, *suiseki*, etc. Only in the twentieth century were bonsai allowed. In the past, bonsai were not considered so pure as to access the Tokonoma, precisely due to the presence of the soil, a dirty thing, incompatible with the Shinto mentality for which everything must be immaculate, as still today it is seen in modern Japan.

Over time, the display of objects inside the Tokonoma has become a proper art form, complete with schools, among which the Keido school represented by Susumu Sudo stands out. In the current tradition, exhibitions are represented mainly in ikebana and tea ceremony events, often organized by clubs or professionals who carry out their work. Clients pay for courses or seminars to learn about the compositions that showcase Japanese culture's traditional aspects and aesthetic values.

Everything is normally present in the more traditional world, with a feudal orientation and high society.



Tokokazari Shin Soo with bunjin Juniper, ferns companion and bamboo scroll with Chinese poetry. Here, there is a strong link with Chinese painting and the symbolism of the origin of bunjin.

In the traditional exhibition, the three styles, *shin* (formal), *gyoo* (informal), and *soo* (free style), are distinguished as the primary references to make the display of art objects and paintings coherent. The rules corresponding to the styles are applied at a scholastic level, but the aesthetic characteristics are applied without fixed rules at advanced levels. Seasons and occasions are among the main reasons for creating an exhibition, but many cases reference Japan's archetypes and historical periods.

The paintings and calligraphies are mounted in classic Japanese matt black lacquered frames with rounded internal and external corners. They can also be mounted in the *kakemono*, where the silk brocade mount maintains the repeated measurements of half and double according to a series of regulated proportions. These silks are richly adorned only in the case of Buddha-related images or calligraphy, generally intended for the temple. The red seal that usually represents the painter's name represents a bit the closing point of the lines of movement that dominate that

particular composition. Therefore, the picture must be positioned bearing in mind this closing effect.

Units and Measures

The Japanese measurement system, imported from China, is based on the *Shaku*, the measurement we want to construct the Tokonoma.

In the second half of the Japanese Middle Ages, the *Shaku* (about 355 mm) becomes the basic unit of measurement coinciding with the English foot: 303.02 mm.

- 1 *ri* = 150 *jō*
- 1 *jō* = 10 *shaku* = 100 *sun*
- 1 *shaku* = 10 *sun* = 100 *bu*
- 1 *sun* = 10 *bu* = 100 *rin*
- 1 *bu* = 10 *rin*

Another unit of measurement appeared in the Middle Ages, the *Ken*, which was originally the distance between two beams (the ideogram *ken* means distance or interval in Chinese). After some variations, two main methods for the construction of the Japanese house appear:

***Shin* (formal),
Gyoo (informal),
and *Soo* (free
style), are
the primary
references to
make the display
of art objects
and paintings
coherent.**



Tokokazari Shin Soo featuring a bunjin. The beauty of the void is enhanced by the aesthetic value of *Fukinsei* (asymmetry) that appears only where an art no longer appears entangled in regularity, perfection and symmetrical exactness, but goes beyond these characteristics of normality. Here we see the beauty of the broken, the thinned out, and the vanished.

- The *Kyō-ma* method, where 1 *ken* = 6.50 *shaku* (1,969.63 mm or 6.46 feet).

- The *Inaka-ma* method, where 1 *ken* = 6.00 *shaku* (1,818.12 mm or 5.96 feet).

The first method was used in the city; *kyoo-ma ken* literally means “measure in the city of the distance between columns,” while the second is more practical and suitable for standard systems used in rural environments and was official in the Edo era.

The *Ken* (1.818 meters or 5.9645669 feet) is the measure we use for the *Tokonoma*.

Construction

The modular construction system is called *Kiwari*, the residence of the warriors of the highest rank and of greater aesthetic content. Furthermore, the standard section of the column is four *Sun* (121 mm).

The main construction rules are:

- The previous measurements must keep their proportions with the floor of the room, made of *tatami*

(each *inakama-tatami* is 60 x 30 *sun*, 1818 x 909 mm, or approximately 6 x 3 feet);

- The traditional *Tokonoma* is found on the floor level of the room or slightly above the ground;
- The height of the *Tokonoma*, not being a piece of furniture but a part of the room, must take into account the height of the room;
- The side columns must have a dimension equal to the beams of 12 x 12 cm;
- The *Tokonoma* is raised from the ground with the *tokogamachi*, a traditionally black lacquered profile of 4.8 *sun*, 145.50 mm, or 5.73 inches.
- The width of the *Tokonoma* will be one *ken* (1818 mm or 6 feet) from the center of the side columns;
- The depth of the *Tokonoma* is half *ken*, 909 mm or 3 feet.
- The *Tokonoma* can have on the side the *Tana* (shelf) or *chigai-dana* or *tokowaki* (literally to the side of the *Tokonoma*), a small alcove attached to the *Tokonoma*. The shelf is separated by a column called *Tokobashira*. The column is a crooked trunk with



Tokokazari Shin Shin featuring a large centenary juniper: The power of the formal display reveals the aesthetic value of the *Masuraobi*, masculine beauty and *Wabi*, simplicity. The depth of the *Aware* value, sentiment, leads us to share the beauty of the nature scene.

bark for *Soo* exhibition, a straight peeled log for *Gyoo* exhibition, or a perfect beam for formal *Shin* exhibition.

- The Tana, (shelf), is open to the Tokonoma but separated from the main space by the pole.
- The height of the Tokonoma will therefore be that of the room, usually 290 cm or 9.5 feet.
- A window that allows the entry of light is located on the side of the Tokonoma where the light of different colors enters from the garden. This window is not always present in a Tokonoma .
- In addition to the traditional Tokonoma, there are various sizes depending on the place and time.

DISPLAYS IN THE TOKONOMA

TOKOKAZARI SHIN

In the *Shin* or formal style display made with two objects, the scroll is positioned in the center, and the main object is displayed under the painting or just to the side, usually with straight objects. With three objects, the scroll is always hung in the center. The main object is placed at a distance of 60% from the limit of the alcove to one side of the scroll. The companion object is positioned at a distance of 40% from the edge of the Tokonoma. The subject of the painting must support the entire exhibition theme, remembering that the more the subject is a detail, the more profound the exposure is, and both calligraphy and painting can be used.

A Tokokazari is a display in a Tokonoma.



Semi-formal Tokokazari *Gyoo* by master Kunio Kobayashi with Azalea bonsai in full flower, *kakemono* with poetry about nature in the mountains, and *kusamono* of *Pyrrosia* ferns. The suggestion is a game of contrasts, the austerity of the mountain and the triumph of Azalea flowers in June.

The main features can be distinguished in:

- Vertical arrangement of the exhibition;
- Symmetry is essential: the paper rolls are hung in the central part with a maximum variation of 1-2 cm;
- The lines are very rigid;
- Frequent use of ancient rectangular vases;
- Use of neutral and sober colors;
- The vertical orientation for the stones involves positioning in the center of the Tokonoma;
- Bonsai are usually conifers of stiff and straight trunk styles or vertical cascades on high tables for the *shin-shin* style, medium-trunk conifers also sinuous on high tables for the *shin-gyoo* style and bunjin on slabs for the *shin-soo* style;
- Formal rigidity is indicated for art objects positioned vertically;
- The bonsai used are pines, junipers—conifers in general—and long-lived species.

The reference styles are Chokkan and Kengai. Slightly inclined Shakans and Moyogi with strong characters are also allowed. In short, old and colossal bonsai.

TOKOKAZARI GYOO

The *Gyoo* exhibition is informal, where there is more movement and greater width, without that austerity typical of the *Shin* form. In the use of bonsai, deciduous and broad-leaved trees, in general, are preferred, usually with a companion element that is put in the foreground given the difference in size. The main subject is placed on the opposite side of the light source, and ample illumination must be given to the flux lines, which allows the objects to be adapted, generating a harmony in itself: *Chowa*.

The essential characteristics of the style are:

- A prevalence of horizontal lines;
- An asymmetrical arrangement of the objects on display;
- A soft line both in the bonsai and in the exhibits;



Informal *Soo*-style *Tokokazari*, with small Biseki stone, *kakemono* with water cascade, and large *Rhus kusamono*. The Tokonoma column for the *soo* style is a Camellia with the bark, slightly moved and informal. The scenery is very free and fresh, a feeling of rain and water pervades the environment, and summer arrives.

- The use of oval or round vases with delicate curves;
- Use of low tables or wooden bases;
- Large trunk deciduous bonsai for *gyoo-gyoo* styles and thin trunk deciduous trees for *gyoo-soo* styles

The root of the word *Omotenashi* is *Omote*, an impressive term in Japanese culture, with multiple meanings (“face,” “mask,” “front,” “surface,” “was,” “stranger”), and of the verb *Tenasu* (“What” comes or reception that I ignore).

Omote with the particle *Nashi*, which means “without” or “no,” would have a literal translation of “do not stay out,” which we could suggest being a feeling, with an intimate meaning of “do not feel strange,” is the current term of “hospitality.”

Probably the Japanese “hospitality,” as a social characteristic, arises from the need for protection among the Japanese, as a defense mechanism in the face of the harshness of its climate and its territory, but many authors believe that the Japanese do not consider their environment as something “out of themselves.” In their

own cosmogony, they consider man as part of Nature, not its master and lord, but they fully identify with Nature and therefore do not consider it as something hostile; thus the life force of man and the force of the universe is in harmony since the former could not live again without the latter—the theory of the opposite, *yin-yang*.

Let us remember, in a simplistic way, that the emotional identification with things is *mono no aware*, the deep feeling that makes us move with the snow, the moon, or the flower (*setsugeka* - the opinion intimately related to the cycle seasons)

This emotional identification with nature is transformed into an aesthetic attitude transmitted through the exhibitions in the Tokonoma. This is a daily activity, an aesthetic experience as in many things or daily activities that can be so satisfying, pleasant, or appreciated, being able to give rise to aesthetic pleasure.

Thus the sense of “hospitality” is so strong and profound that it is imbued with strong, cultural, and obviously aesthetic values. We also speak of *Omotenashi*



Contemporary *Tokokazari Shin* (creative *sosakukazari*) with modern painting. Here the prevailing sentiment is *Datsuzoku*, the freedom of the individual from rules, conventions, constraints and formulas. Just as Zen does not belong to any authority, but each practitioner becomes a master of himself or herself, so the artist must not allow the self to be conditioned by conventions, but reflect the surrounding reality with spontaneity and naturalness. With practice, constraints and rules become a natural part of being.

no kokoro, that is, “Feeling, Heart or Spirit of not feeling like a stranger.”

Omotenashi is an appeal to the non-duality between the “I” and “the other,” only there is a profound “hospitality” when the host can internalize the feelings of the guest. We recall the advice “If you want to paint the bamboo, transform into bamboo.” *Omotenashi* reminds us of the call to eliminate the barrier between object and individual.

Omotenashi also means “without a mask,” that is, without artifice, without falsity—truth, simplicity as a fundamental aesthetic value in our conception of *suiseki*. There is no genuine hospitality if it is not sincere. This value is so strong that the real “I” comes to express in Japanese as *Omote no makoto*; remember that *makoto* can translate as “sincerity,” “fidelity,” and even “verbal.”

We have always said that to know *suiseki*, it is essential to at least be aware of the aesthetic principles predominant in other traditional arts. Thus, traditional pottery can help us better understand *Yuugen*. To

better understand the meaning of *Omote*, the approach to the NO Theater is very interesting.

Omote is one of the principles of the NO Theater. Remember that this word has the double meaning of “mask” and “face.” This double definition is something really fascinating because it suggests the identity between the mask, which is also said in Japanese as *kamen* or “temporary face,” and the clean, non-disguising face, *sugao*. The actor is called “The mirror room” or *Kagami no ma*. The transformation of the actor/ the face into the character/the mask is so profound that when the actor puts on the mask and looks in the mirror, he internalizes his character; at first, he continues to see himself. Later, he sees himself behind the mask, gradually transforming himself into the character.

The identity between “individual” and “object,” between actor and *suiseki* and *suiseki* character, shows us a relationship of “reciprocity.”

This “reciprocity,” according to Zen, reaches the point that art is transformed into “life,” and life is



Here we see the previous bonsai, however, with a traditional *kakemono*: the rising sun represents Japan; changing one element becomes a *tokokazari shin shin*.

transformed into “art,” this being the meaning of the *Michi* or “the way,” that leads to “True Mastery.”

In this context, we certainly cannot end without discussing the highest relationship, the guest-host relationship, the *Chanoyu*, or the Tea Ceremony. Each meeting between host and guest, or guests, is unique in space and time, *Ichi-go, Ichi-e*, the unrepeatable nature of a moment:

Omotenashi is also, therefore, a call to the consciousness of time, not only of space. The importance of every moment, enjoying every moment, feeling the seasonal cycle, the flowering, the fall of the leaves, the colors of autumn, and hospitality. Therefore, the single moment treads the feeling of transience, of impermanence.

This feeling of impermanence also reconciles the Japanese with their destiny, their acceptance of life as it is.

I believe that studying the profound meaning enclosed by the aesthetic concepts of Japanese culture shows us a wonderful exhibition experience. Sincerity, *Makoto*, and heart, *Kokoro*, confirm one of the Japanese culture’s

first and most important aesthetic values, *Makoto no kokoro*, the clean, sincere heart.

During the Fuji Yohaku event, Kimura told us that sensitivity and personality grow over time.

Sincere Heart-Truth, Transience-Impermanence, *Mono no aware*; according to the teacher Yuriko Saito one of the basic characteristics of Japanese appreciation of Nature is the identity of this with man. This identity manifests itself in a double aspect: Emotional, *mono no aware*, and what we can call Spiritual.

TOKOKAZARI SOO

The *Soo* exhibition is the totally free one, which suggests a broad and vast movement, with informal lines of movement. It can also be of only two objects where the *suiseki* or *bonsai* is the main one. When using three objects, the companion elements must harmonize with the necessary cultural substrate linked to the historic and aesthetic values of the medieval era.



Tokokazari Gyoo with a broom style Zelkova. Femininity in the kakemono scroll and the pair of guardian dog tempai: the archetypes of Japanese culture intertwine to tell a fiction of society.

The main features are:

- Irregular and apparently random arrangement of the exhibition. The asymmetrical arrangement of objects;
- Horizontal trend of the flow lines;
- Soft shapes with gentle flowing lines;
- Use of oval or round vases;
- Colors can be more vivid than formal displays;
- The most appropriate bonsai style is the bunjin style, but mostly kusamono are suitable, and best represent the Japanese traditional twenty-four seasons.

I propose this interesting letter from the great master Susumu Sudo that he sent me during my in-depth studies on Japanese aesthetics. It is very significant for Westerners.

“The most important thing is to become aware of the true meaning of the spirit and aesthetics of Bonsai with long years of practice and experience in search of the truth. The answer to his questions can only be found in feeling with your heart and taking possession of that feeling. Consequently, it is very difficult, especially with words, but I will try to answer your question briefly. First of all, as you have realized, it is impossible to interpret the aesthetics of Bonsai based on the concepts of aesthetics and theories of Western art. It is necessary to approach this topic by deleting the above concepts by returning to the heart of a newborn. Only when one manages to abandon one’s ego is it possible to see the other. The thought that people create a work of art to arouse emotions in others is not consistent with the aesthetics of Bonsai. In the case of the world of Bonsai, there is only one body: the person and the Bonsai. In other words, man coexists with nature by merging with it and continues to live together as long as he is alive. This is precisely the way to search for the meaning of life in the aesthetics of Bonsai. There is no point of arrival in Bonsai.

I felt a lot of admiration for your excellent theory on Bonsai, Massimo, I think your theory is based on the aesthetics of Western art, but it is different from the fundamental concept of the Japanese. The ideal beauty of nature that the Japanese grasp is not the exquisitely elaborate artificial beauty but the truly natural sophistication that creates not even the slightest feeling of artifice. Naturally, we try to bring the plant to the ideal state during the cultivation and preparation phase, using any technique. However, in the end, all the Mochikomi interventions must be done in the Bonsai pot for long years to eliminate any effect of the artificial technique to make the Bonsai perfectly natural. As long as you feel the hand of man, you consider artificial beauty, where art is the sublime beauty of artifice. It is very interesting to compare the Japanese Bonsai to the Chinese one, as knowing and understanding the Chinese Bonsai, we can discover the true substance of the Bonsai. It is not possible to understand Japanese Bonsai by excluding Chinese ideological elements. The Japanese Bonsai, however, contains the feeling of nature, religion, thought, and culture of its own, different from those of China; Japanese aesthetics are perfected on the basis of these elements that develop the typical Japanese beauty. Your thesis is very interesting, which states that the avant-garde in the Japanese bonsai world has reached the supreme level with the works of Kimura Masahiko. However, his works are neither the traditional ones of Japan nor are they works that seek extreme Japanese beauty. In my opinion, his goal is to reach the top of the art of Bonsai through free creativity using living plant material without taking into account Japanese cultural elements. Consequently, he creates the works completely ignoring the beauty of nature (Fuzei: suggestion, Fuushui: elegant and refined), the most important element for connoisseurs of Bonsai. His works have nothing to do with the traditional beauty of Japan, as he is only looking for beauty from his point of view.

The seven elements of the 'beauty of Zen' are the essential concepts for investigating the traditional beauty of Japan, but it is also important to investigate them from the bottom of one's heart, not objectively. The object should not be observed by relativization. I enjoyed reading your thesis on the art of avant-garde Bonsai. It is truly significant that the Bonsai culture makes possible cultural exchanges in a common search for the supreme beauty of Bonsai. Since it is obvious that there are differences in the aesthetics of Bonsai and in the theory of art, depending on the cultural background, I think it is important to mutually recognize each other's cultures. However, it is also necessary to know one's culture correctly. I think it is impossible to touch the essence of Japanese Bonsai, which focuses on the aesthetic sense of Zen, which is the traditional beauty of Japan, through the artistic concept of the West. The Japanese consider all living beings in this world to be divine and worship, respect, and celebrate holidays to thank them. The pine tree



Sosakuzari shin shin with cascading juniper in a restored kintsuji (golden joinery) pot and modern painting of the dragon depicting the creation of Japan featuring the kanji for Kimura, the author of the seminar where this bonsai was made. Here the strong *Datsuzoku*, (to escape from the daily routine, to take a break from the conventions and mundanities of one's life), exalts the concept of the author in an air of creative freedom.



Powerful *Ishitsuki*-style black pine in *Tokokazari Shin Shin* that the master Kobayashi presents us with the rising sun and the pagoda. The symbology leads to the archetypes of esteemed Japan and to the sacredness of the Buddhist temples that house its relics.

is one of the most representative cases. The Japanese do not consider Bonsai as an object of beauty but live in the search for extreme beauty, in the path of perfecting Bonsai, merging with them. The aesthetics of Wabi and Sabi correspond to the beauty of life. The beauty of Bonsai concretizes the culmination of the traditional beauty of Japan.”

—Susumu Sudo, 14 September 2004

Plastic Arts of Zen

- Escape from oneself, represented by matter: Zen's main objective is to free oneself from attachment to one's ego, represented by matter.
- Total detachment: The term *Mu* does not simply mean anything but indicates the absolute freedom achieved by escaping from any form and matter. Or it indicates the spontaneous materialization of a supreme being without matter, which is a spontaneous appearance of the real Buddha without matter.
- Comparison of symbolism: Western culture is that which places man at the center of the universe, considering the material ego. The fundamental element and the abstract painting created by Westerners try to destroy the pre-existing order and try to express itself according to real rules sought and discovered by them.



Formal Tokokazari Shin with island stone. The kakemono with the sea and the rising sun recalls sacred Japan, while the Kikyū, the Japanese Campanula brings us back to May, the month of festivities linked to the tradition of traditional Japanese teaching culture.

Beauty of Zen

- Asymmetry - *Fukinsei*: do not be stubborn to perfection and scruple. It does not have to be imperfection before reaching perfection, but it is an imperfection that surpasses the perfection of form.
- Escape from the mundane world - *Datsuzoku*: do not be obstinate in things. Free and unobstructed. Since there is no form, it is free to be any form.
- Nature - *Shizen*: not to be artificial. It must be natural and without forcing.
- Simplicity - *Kanso*: it does not have to be complicated and excessive. It is a highly simple and spontaneous beauty.
- Silence - *Seijaku*: it is a limitless silence, the heart turned inward.
- Dry and excellent - *Kokoo*: it is dry, resistant, and experienced. It is as solemn as a secular tree
- Deep mystery - *Yuugen-Yoin*: it is a resonance hidden deep within. It is the infinite profound meaning.

Conclusion

For Keido lovers, it is as if the ultimate goal is not to arrive at a beautiful bonsai but to show it. Beyond sharing this aspect or not, the bonsai community certainly needs to elevate the aesthetic and not just remain at the level of technique. Keido can be an excellent visa for aesthetic study. I, therefore, urge you to study to improve your bonsai so that you can also improve yourself and humanity!

We thank the master Kunio Kobayashi and Shunka-en Bonsai Museum in Tokyo for having allowed us to photograph his spectacular exhibitions over the years. 🌳

Together Again!



By Budi Sulistyo with Contributing Editor José L. Rodríguez Macías
Photos by Budi Sulistyo



Top: Senayan Park, located in the center of Jakarta.

Insets, left to right: Opening Ceremonies

Showering the tree to symbolize the opening of the exhibit.

Attendees of the IBC at the opening ceremony and at a reunion getting reacquainted.

As the global pandemic gradually subsided, government restrictions allowed social gatherings again. After a long period without opportunities to hold large-scale bonsai exhibitions in Indonesia, members of the Indonesian Bonsai Society (PPBI) were enthusiastic about supporting the National Bonsai and Suiseki Exhibition.

After many years without sponsoring an exhibition, the Jakarta Chapter of PPBI took the challenge of preparing the first-large scale bonsai and suiseki display from May 29 to June 2 called IBC or Indonesia Bonsai Championship.

In the aftermath of COVID seclusion, well over 200 chapters of PPBI enthusiastically participated in the competition. Each chapter was eager to accumulate and win as many awards as possible to win the coveted Championship Cup. Under the leadership of Mr.

Alexander Bambang, the new Chairman of the Jakarta Chapter, this new idea of competition lured countless new works from all over the Indonesian archipelago.

The venue was in a new shopping mall with a large park called Senayan Park, located in the center of Jakarta. It was a perfect location for people to visit, easy to reach from all directions, with plenty of places for food and social gathering and especially the large garden for the bonsai exhibition.

It was not too much to call it the best ever Bonsai Exhibition in Indonesia in terms of bonsai quality and the number exhibited. There were 340 selected bonsai displayed, with various species, from *Juniperus*, *Podocarpus*, *Ulmus*, *Ficus*, *Casuarina*, *Wrightia*, *Pemphis*, *Casuarina*, *Haematoxylum campechianum*, *Carmona*, *Celtis*, *Syzygium*, *Malpighia*, *Neea*, *Diospyros*, *Tamarindus*, *Pithecellobium*, *Premna*, *Bucida* to *Streblus asper* and many others.

IBC. The Indonesian Bonsai Championship

Bottom right: *Casuarina equisetifolia*, recipient of the BCI Excellence Award at the IBC, Indonesian Bonsai Championship. It is a very impressive large bonsai owned by Mr. Alexander Bambang, Chairman of the Indonesian Bonsai Society, Jakarta Chapter. This tree is featured on the cover of this edition.

Photo by Alexander Bambang.

No matter how good the trees and stones are, they are nothing without friends and companionship.



One of the best things about this event is that many bonsai lovers from all over the provinces of Indonesia came and had a bonsai lover's reunion in Jakarta. They did not stay for one or two days but over four days. Amazingly, some people from as far away as Bali, Sumatra, Sulawesi, and even Papua came just for the Indonesia Bonsai Championship.

The exhibition was divided into four sections:

- Pratama**, for bonsai, exhibited for the first time.
- Madya**, for bonsai that have been exhibited but did not get good marks.
- Utama**, for bonsai that got excellent marks in Madya
- Bintang**, for bonsai that got excellent marks in Utama.

As a Director of Bonsai Clubs International, I chose a *Casuarina equisetifolia* for the BCI Excellence Award. It was a very impressive large bonsai owned by



Top right: *Wrightia religiosa*
Bottom: Grand Champion or
the best in Bintang category,
Ulmus parviflora

Mr. Alexander Bambang, the Chairman of the Jakarta Chapter. The tree is very old with natural style and balance in the shape, trunk, branches, twigs, and ramification. It showed like a giant pine bonsai tree.

The best-in-show was awarded to an old *Pemphis acidula* from Sampang, Madura. The grand champion (the term for the best in the Bintang category) was awarded to a Chinese elm from Surabaya. The Championship Cup stayed in Jakarta as Jakarta had the most winning trees. The 2nd IBC, Indonesian Bonsai Championship, will be held in three years.

Hoping for the aftermath of the pandemic to materialize worldwide, the Indonesian Bonsai Championship (IBC) success represents a valuable lesson. No matter how good the trees and stones are, they are nothing without friends and companionship. 🌲





Top: *Ficus microcarpa*
Bottom: The Best-in-Show,
Pemphis acidula



Top right: *Bougainvillea glabra*
Middle left: *Malpighia glabra*
Bottom left: *Tamarindus indica*
Bottom right: *Premna microphylla*





Top: *Celtis sinensis*
Middle right: *Pemphis acidula*
Bottom left: *Pemphis acidula*
Bottom right: *Juniperus chinensis*



Rocky Mountain Juniper Celebrating Ten Years at Nature's Way Nursery

By Mauro Stemberger, Italy

Photos courtesy Italianbonsaidream.com

Sketches by Matteo dal Lago



Time flies. It seemed like yesterday when my friend Walter Pall visited my place in Italy in 2011 with Jim Doyle, the owner of one of the best bonsai nurseries on the East Coast. It is always great meeting bonsai people, and Jim is that kind of great bonsai friend you enjoy knowing. He was so nice to invite me for a small tour in the US in the spring of 2012; it was my first time doing bonsai in the United States.

This year we celebrate 10 years of friendship and bonsai collaboration. During these years, I styled many trees for the nursery, but we kept a special one for this year. The renowned bonsai collector Randy Knight from Portland collected this impressive RMJ (Rocky Mountain Juniper) five years ago. The tree was probably collected in Wyoming, as most of the RMJs in the US. The weather, cold and windy in winter and extremely hot and dry in summer, create the perfect environment to make fantastic yamadori material suitable for bonsai.

The renowned bonsai collector Randy Knight from Portland collected this impressive RMJ (Rocky Mountain Juniper) five years ago.

The weather, cold and windy in winter and extremely hot and dry in summer, create the perfect environment to make fantastic yamadori material suitable for bonsai.



The deadwood and live veins on the better trees are incredibly hard because these trees grow very, very slowly. Commonly, the best ones are found on granite cliffs between rocks. Some are impossible to collect, but some grow in natural rock pockets and have a very small rootball. This material is the perfect example of one of those!

In spring 2020, I saw the tree for the first time, but it was not ready for styling, and it had to grow enough foliage to be considered established. The first styling is generally the most amount of stress we give to the material, so the tree must be at the top of its strength.

Also, thanks to the COVID Lock-down, we waited two more years while the tree grew nice and strong, and here we are in Spring 2022 with the tree, analyzing the best front.



Front 1

This view shows an interesting transition of the trunk line. Visible live vein on the right side. Good foliage.



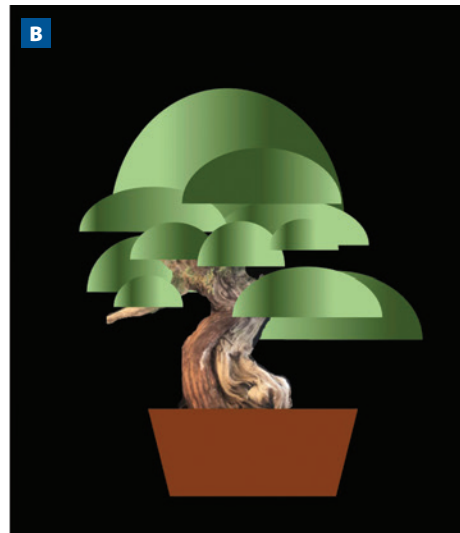
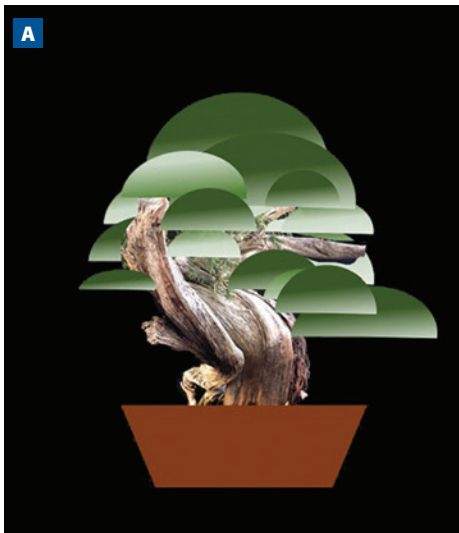
Front 2

Massive live vein with good movement. Good deadwood in the lower section. Very straight trunk in the upper section. -



Front 3

Nice transition between lower and upper deadwood. Interesting trunk line, not so straight as for the other two fronts. Decent view of the live vein.



Basically, we have three options for a front that are equally interesting; sketches **A**, **B**, and **C**. Deciding on the best front depends on the bending of the upper branch. I would like to use 100% of the foliage of the tree. I don't like to cut off too many branches at the first styling because it will weaken the tree and the process of transforming it into a bonsai is very long. So my goal is to bend the upper branch and bring all the foliage down.

Using a saw, I divide the branch into two parts, maintaining the live veins. Then using a die grinder, I remove the inner part of the deadwood to gain flexibility. (See next page)





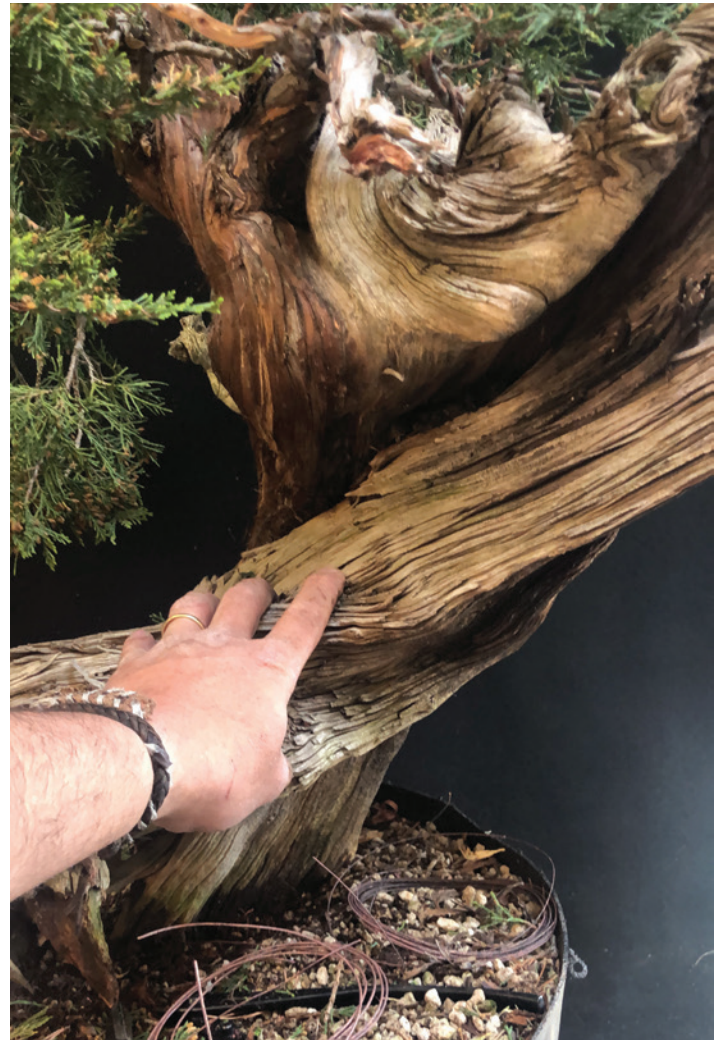
I pack wet paper inside, wrap it with raffia, put back the two sections of the branch, one on top of the other, and seal everything with black tape to maintain humidity.



The bent section needs to be secured with guy wires to avoid movement during the work's subsequent phases.



Now I have a much clearer image of which one will be my front. (See *middle left*) A great transition in the deadwood and also in the trunk line. I can use one part of the branch I just bent as a first branch and the other part as an apex. All the other branches on the right side are perfect to create the rest of the canopy framing the beautiful trunk.





Now the wiring work can start, taking care of the pads from the lower left side, creating a nice rhythm and transition following and framing the trunk line and the deadwood. When I have the tree's structure set, I like to work on wiring, creating pads, and positioning them from the lower branches up to the top.

At the end of the work, I step back to observe the final result, and if needed, I make minor adjustments to the lines and volumes until I am satisfied with the final results.



I think the green foliage frames the powerful deadwood very well, especially in the central area of the tree, which is my focal point. The apex builds the natural direction of the triangle's left and right lines, forming the silhouette of the canopy.

I'm very happy after a nice full day of work on this tree. It is always interesting to try to break down the creative process and analyze all our options before making decisions. For this project, the key was solving the upper bend to optimize the tree offered us to pick the perfect front. Knowing and applying the technique, I could reach my goal and make this transformation.

Below, a final good picture of Jim and me celebrating, with this tree, 10 years of passion for bonsai. 🌲



SHOW OF REVENGE

12th National BSAPI Bonsai and Suiseki Show and Competition

By Susan Lee, Philippines

Photos courtesy BSAPI (Bonsai and Suiseki Alliance of the Philippines, Inc)

Below: Our distinguished guests from left: Robinsons Managers Rafael Arciga and Engr. Wesley Villanueva; Laguna Congresswoman Ann Matibag; BSAPI President Lettie Ligon; BCI Director Susan Lee; Atty. Vic Ceballos; and Robinsons Managers Richard Pulido and Vicente Mallafre.



Facing page, top three insets: Busy Judges: Bonsai competition judges (from the top) BSAPI Director David Du; BCI Legal Counsel Atty. Vic Ceballos; and BSAPI Vice Pres. Vic Deroña.

Bottom inset: Scores Tabulation: The suiseki judges are meticulous with the numbers. From left, Bonsai Institute of the Philippines (BIP) founder Nolan Sison; BSAPI co-founder Dr. Elmer Villareal; and BSAPI VP-Suiseki and Pinoy Tropical Bonsai founder Dr. Erwin Fabros.

After more than two years of pandemic lockdowns, people coined terms to get back on various deprivations to redeem lost privileges. Travels, tours, dine-outs, parties, concerts, sports activities, and live shows, among others. We called our show “Revenge.” As if these were pent-up frustrations that climaxed into a vengeance.

So, after two long years of absence from the national scene, the Bonsai and Suiseki Alliance of the Philippines, Inc. (BSAPI) has recently unleashed its long-awaited 12th National Bonsai and Suiseki Show and Competition. And for the first time in the club’s history, the venue was outside Metro Manila or the National Capital Region.

Laguna province is a southern suburb, just an hour’s drive away from the capital city of Manila, with a vibrant economy of manufacturing hubs, industrial estates, and agriculture. Laguna is a Spanish term for lagoon or lake, named after “Laguna de Bay,” the biggest freshwater lake

in the Philippines and the second largest in Southeast Asia, with 911 square kilometers of fertile fishing waters.

Although the world is still in a state of a pandemic, all health restrictions and protocols in the Philippines were relaxed as COVID-19 transmissions are low (double-digit figures), and 70% of the population is fully vaccinated. Thus, more than 230 bonsai and suiseki converged at Robinsons Galleria South to take part in the showcase of nature’s beauty and splendor.

From the collectors and enthusiasts in far-away provinces, some coming from 1,200 kilometers away, these arts of nature traveled by planes and trucks to be exposed in the limelight of accolades, awards, and appreciation.

But lo and behold! Many entries were from never-before-seen collections, and it was these treasures’ “coming out party.” These were the hidden gems from gardens and private museums that were reserved for upcoming big shows like this. Or these are the semi-developed pieces that were “ripened” in the 2-year lockdown hibernations. The Pemphis, Junipers, and Diospyros made a big splash. The Hibiscus, Casuarinas, Vitex, and Ficus also held their grounds. Loud “oohs,” “wows,” and “hanep” (slang for “hayop” or animal, a colloquial term of positive appreciation in the Tagalog language) were the usual sounds in the showroom.

Oh, it was a grand reunion of bonsai and suiseki collectors, artists, and hobbyists. Stories, gifts,

Best-in-Show. This Bantigue tree (*Pemphis acidula*) garnered three major awards. Best-in-show, Best in Bantigue, and Gold Awards. Susan Lee collection.





Top: Gold Awardee. From the collections of Mike Peña. Banyan (*Ficus microcarpa*).

Bottom: Best in Tropical Bonsai and Gold Awardee. From the collection of Mar Ruel Sumabat. Argao Taiwan (*Premna microphylla*).

Facing Page:

Top: Gold Awardee. From the collections of Mike Peña. Taiwan Hibiscus (*Hibiscus sp.*)

Bottom left: "Rockweiler." Gold and Best in Abstract Stone awardee. From the collection of Susan Lee.

Bottom right: Half-Half. Best in Object Stone. From the collection of Pablo Dychitan.





Top: Mount Majesty. Suiseki, Best-In-Show, Best in Landscape Stone, and Gold Awards. From the collection of Stephen Philip Arquisola.

Bottom left: Silver Award. Mike Peña, Sampalok or *Tamarindus indica*.

Middle right: Silver Award. Susan Lee, Bantigue or *Pemphis acidula*.

Bottom right: Silver Award. Fides Ferre, Yangya or *Terminalia fontalia*.





fellowships, and “kumustas” (Como Estas or how are you) flowed like a whitewater river from a burst dam.

A summit of the presidents of provincial, city, and town clubs in the Southern Luzon regions was also held before the formal opening of the show. The objective was to establish the semi-autonomous BSAPI - Southern Luzon (BSAPI-SL) to better manage the 75 local clubs affiliated with BSAPI. Judges’ training programs and artists’ training workshops were listed as priority projects. Officers of the new regional club were also elected and sworn into office.

The show was hosted by the Laguna Bonsai Philippines (LBP), another first, wherein a local club

worked with the national club to pull off a successful exhibit and competition. Guests were the Laguna Congresswoman, the Cabinet Secretary, and a conglomerate executive. Judges were renowned experts in miniature trees and natural stones.

It was revenge, indeed. A well-deserved positive retaliation of goodwill and positive vibes from the years of deprived rights and liberties. It was a celebration of life, a way of honoring those we lost to the virus and opening the gates of horticultural and natural stone arts.

Now, we all can say... bonsai and suiseiki make us humans. 🌳

Top left: Silver Award. Laguna Bonsai Society, Tigerbark or *Ficus microcarpa*.

Top right: Silver Award. Susan Lee, Barbados cherry or *Malpighia emarginata*.

Bottom left: Silver Award. Jay Cortez, Hibiscus Taiwan or *Hibiscus tiliaceus*.

Bottom right: Silver Award. Mar Ruel Sumabat, Bantigue or *Pemphis acidula*.



Chinese elms (*Ulmus parvifolia*)

From modest beginnings

David De Groot Retrospective at the Pacific Bonsai Museum

By Elsa Durham, USA

Photos courtesy David De Groot

As a docent for the Pacific Bonsai Museum, I have had two personal objectives at every show over the years. First, I try to introduce the public to the wonder and magic of bonsai. Secondly, I try to teach them to respect bonsai as an art form with the variety of subject matter, styles, genres, and history they associate with painting and sculpture. David De Groot's current retrospective at the Pacific Bonsai Museum accomplishes both of these objectives with a mere eight trees.

De Groot's Retrospective contains four bonsai in the traditional Japanese style, three with a traditional Chinese style or elements, and one in the only recognized American contribution to a bonsai style. This variety in eight trees is a testament to David De Groot's knowledge, openness, and creativity in bonsai.

David De Groot grew up and attended college in Wisconsin. He then earned a graduate degree in music in Boston before heading to Louisiana in 1972 to join the New Orleans Symphony. Within a year, he found himself at the second meeting of the Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society led by Vaughn Banting, one of the epicenters of American bonsai through the 1970s and 1980s. During this period, he also honed his teaching skills as a part-time music faculty member of Xavier and Loyola Universities in New Orleans.

In 1989 David's creative and teaching talents were transferred from music to bonsai when he accepted the position of curator of the newly formed Pacific Rim Bonsai Collection created by the Weyerhaeuser Company. During his tenure as curator, he traveled to Japan to study bonsai with Yasuo Mitsuya, satsuki with Tatemori Gondo and Hayata Nakayama, and display with Uhaku Sudo.

As curator of one of the first public bonsai collections on the West Coast, he had the unique opportunity to explore the creativity and art of bonsai coupled with the scientific resources of a Fortune 500 company to explore the horticultural aspects of bonsai. David's creativity and access to scientists and laboratories devoted to forestry resulted in experiments that tested some of the traditional bonsai practices. This resulted in the best practices for the Pacific Rim Bonsai Collection, and David also published numerous articles informing the bonsai community of these results.

Over the years, David combined his creative and artistic senses along with his search for best practices in bonsai to publish articles in the *ABS Journal*, *BCI Bonsai & Stone Appreciation* magazine, *International Bonsai* magazine, *Penjing Shangshi* magazine, *Bonsai Sekai* magazine, and *Bonsai Today* magazine, among others. He also made live bonsai presentations in North America, South America, Europe, Africa, and Asia during this time.

The culmination of his career, however, is his book *Principles of Bonsai Design* which draws from his years of creativity, study, teaching, and knowledge of bonsai. This book explains that it does not address "how to" do bonsai but "why" we do bonsai. It introduces and explains the creative and artistic tools we need to bring to the art of bonsai in a manner that no other book has done. It is fast becoming one of the "must-have" books on bonsai here in the Northwest.

Over his twenty-five years as curator of the Pacific Rim Collection, his pursuit of creativity and excellence established that institution as one of the best public collections in the United States. Over this period, David De Groot's creativity, design, and teaching skills established him as one of the premier American artists in bonsai. In 2014, David retired from Weyerhaeuser, and the Pacific Rim Collection evolved into the publicly-funded Pacific Bonsai Museum, which today has maintained its reputation for excellence as one of the top collections in the USA.

The David De Groot Retrospective at the Pacific Bonsai Museum runs from May 7 to September 4, 2022, in Federal Way, Washington, a 30-minute drive from Seattle. The De Groot Retrospective is running parallel with the Museum's show "A Gallery of Trees" which displays the core bonsai from the Museum's collection. By coupling David's bonsai from his personal collection together with the "Gallery" show, the Museum is respecting the past while illustrating its continued commitment to excellence and creativity through David's successor curator, Aarin Packard.



Bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*)

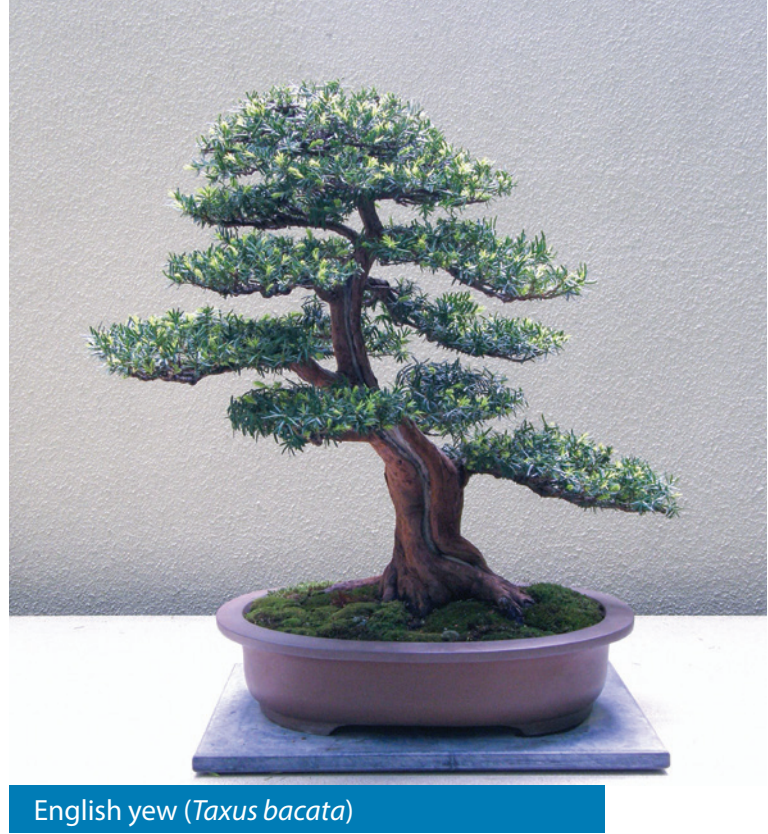


Coast redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*)

The De Groot Retrospective begins with a group of thirteen Chinese elms (*Ulmus parvifolia*). He received them as a gift of eleven seedlings in 1973 in a single shovelful of soil. He planted them in a ceramic oval in 1976. In 1978, he reversed the front and separated them into two groups. Just before the turn of the century, he



Hinoki cypress (*Chamaecyparis obtusa*)



English yew (*Taxus bacata*)



Littleleaf boxwood (*Buxus microphylla*)

restored the original front and moved the two groups together. This bonsai evolved as one tree died in 2015, restoring the original gap, and he allowed three root sprouts to grow. Today the group contains thirteen trees, eight in the primary group separated by a small gap with five trees in the secondary group.

The bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) is designed in the only American contribution to an original bonsai style, the flat top, which was introduced by Vaughn Banting, David's mentor in New Orleans. This tree was collected from a beaver pond near Pearl River, Mississippi, in 1983. The trunk had been chewed

off twice, and the lower trunk had decayed and was completely hollow. David initially styled it as a formal upright, but excessive growth and thickening in the upper trunk and branches made that choice impossible. In 2016 he began the conversion to the flat top style. In 2019 he reopened the trunk, which had largely grown over, and removed the top jin to make a smoother transition into the crown. Today the flat top is established. The resulting tree would look right at home in a bayou near the Mississippi River delta.

The Coast redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*) was a collected tree purchased from Mendocino Coast Bonsai at a convention. It is the first of the three Chinese-style bonsai in the Retrospective. As it was rooted at both ends, David believed it was a section of a root that stood upright. Initially, it had many sprouts, and David became intrigued with the possibility of using the sprouts as a small grove of trees and using the trunk or root as a landform. The live areas on the resulting arch eventually receded, and David restricted the growth to the grove of trees. He then carved the newly deadwood to blend it with the natural dead area on the right. In 2021, he decided that the bonsai needed context. He then designed the landscape we see today using implied water to create this setting in the manner of a Chinese penjing.

David purchased this large hinoki cypress (*Chamaecyparis obtusa*) at a sale at a local nursery in 2013. The tree was balled and covered in burlap in a large nursery pot so that he could not view the lower trunk, nor could he see the upper trunk due to its thick foliage. When he unwrapped it, he found a trunk bend just above the root base and not one but two right-angle bends in the upper trunk. David abandoned any notion of conventional styling but was aware of the Chinese "Square Turns" style that has right-angle changes in the

trunk and branch structure but otherwise appears rather “normal.” He decided to style the tree in this completely abstract way. Its poetic name recalls the iconic poses of human figures in Egyptian Hieroglyphics.

The Littleleaf boxwood (*Buxus microphylla*) was purchased in 1987 from a New Orleans landscaper who dug it from a client’s yard. The tree was transferred from the wooden growing box to a mica pot in 1995. David made the final transfer into the ceramic pot in 2015. The tree itself, done in an “oak tree” style with long spreading branches, has been changed very little from its original appearance. David, however, has added a figurine of an older couple, having an intimate moment, directly under the tree and within the container in penjing style. This figurine couple not only serves to give the bonsai a sense of scale but also relates to the tree in much the same manner as elements do in a bonsai display or a tokonoma.

The English yew (*Taxus bacata*) was field-grown by Bonsai Northwest for five years before being transferred to a one-gallon nursery pot in 1998. David purchased it to serve as a backup tree for the 1999 BCI Convention and, at their request, transferred it into a bonsai pot. However, he used a different tree for the demonstration. In 2002 David gave the tree its first pruning in a workshop with American bonsai icon Ben Oki. The following month David wired the tree for the first time, loosely following Ben’s design. The bonsai has developed to its current stage based upon that initial styling.

David found this Blaauw’s juniper (*Juniperus chinensis* ‘Blaauw’) in 2010 at the “Wee Tree Farm,” a former bonsai nursery off the beaten path in Oregon he frequented to obtain material for demonstrations. When he discovered the juniper in one of their greenhouses, the nursery owner explained that she had begun work on the tree about fifteen years earlier. However, the tree had been long neglected and had become seriously overgrown. David found the trunk interesting and bought the tree. With design work, pruning, and regular care, he has developed the juniper into this classically styled informal upright.

The Japanese black pine (*Pinus thunbergii*) was purchased in New Orleans in 1988. He made the first cut to determine its future style at that time. A few years later, he styled it into a cascade at a Sunday demonstration at the Pacific Rim Collection. He has continued to grow and develop it over the years. It is now one of his favorite bonsai.

He is not alone in finding this cascade black pine a favorite. It is a fitting close to the De Groot retrospective as it resonates locally. The Seattle area lies between the shadow of the Cascade Mountains to the east and the Puget Sound and the Olympic Mountains to the west. Even non-bonsai residents intuitively appreciate the cascade style of bonsai and the precipitous landscape, which is its home. This black pine falls like the snow melt of the Cascades seeking the Puget Sound.



Blaauw’s juniper (*Juniperus chinensis* ‘Blaauw’)



Japanese black pine (*Pinus thunbergii*)

The Seattle area is, among other things, a major tourist destination to many throughout the United States. The Pacific Bonsai Museum not only draws bonsai enthusiasts from around the world but also a far larger number of the American public, many of whom have never before seen bonsai created by a top bonsai artist. By introducing them to styles that originate in Japan, China, and even one in America, the David De Groot Retrospective opens their minds to the wonder and magic of bonsai and bonsai’s variety of styles, genres, and rich history. At the same time, the references to the modest beginnings of some of the bonsai in the De Groot Retrospective help make this fine art form more relatable and memorable to these viewers. 🌲

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