

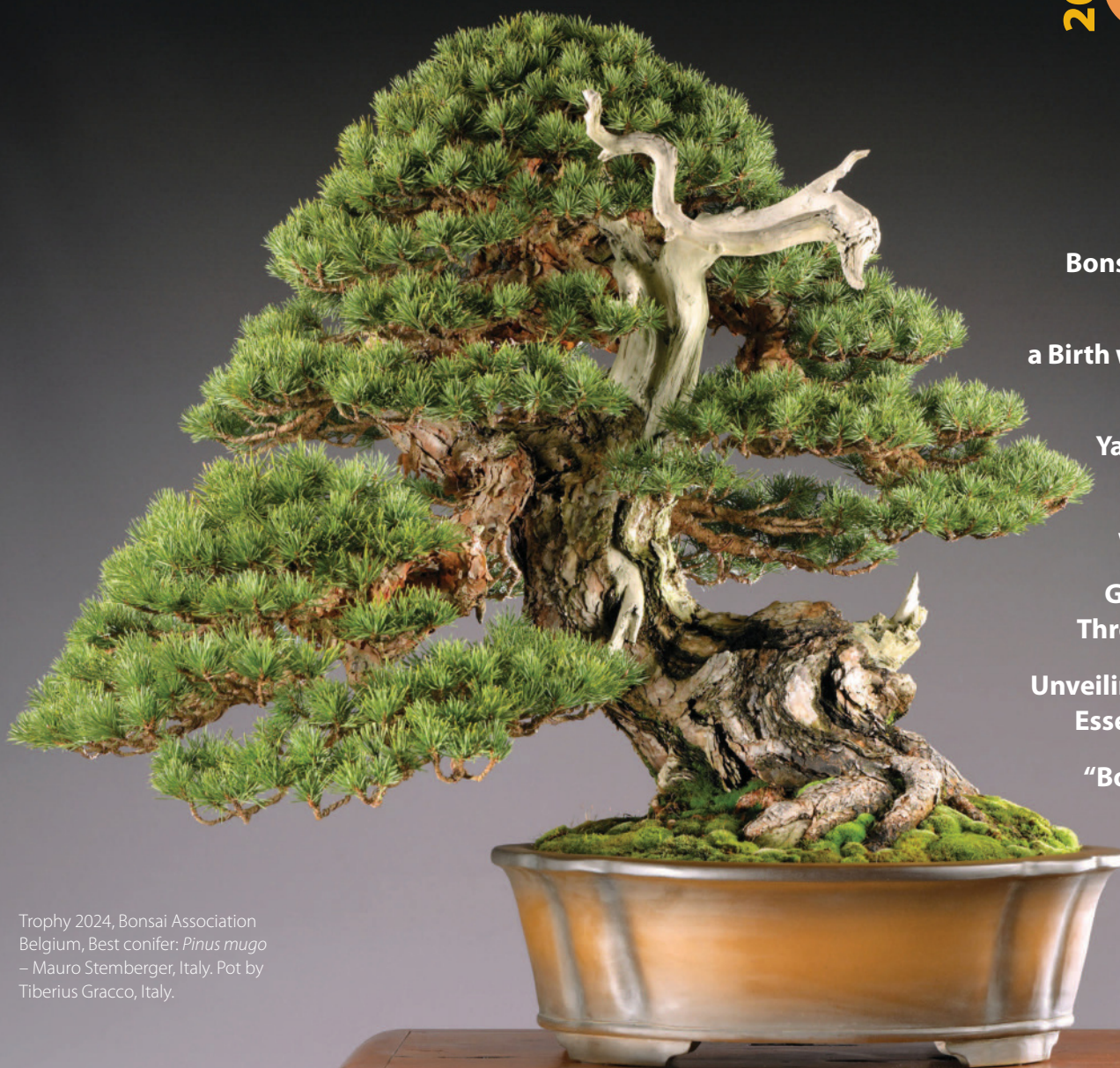
promoting
international friendship
through bonsai



bc

Bonsai & Stone Appreciation

2024 Q2



Trophy 2024, Bonsai Association
Belgium, Best conifer: *Pinus mugo*
– Mauro Stemberger, Italy. Pot by
Tiberius Gracco, Italy.

Trophy 2024

Bonsai in Thailand

**Celebrating
a Birth with a Pitanga**

**Air-Layering
Yamadori Mugo**

**Telling stories
with an image**

**Geisha: A Stroll
Through a Dream**

**Unveiling the Artistic
Essence of Bonsai**

**"Bonsai Paradise
on Earth"**

**Presenting
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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."

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President's Message

Dear Esteemed Members of the BCI Family,
As the delicate petals of spring unfurl, I extend my warmest greetings to each cherished member of our global bonsai community. I reflect with profound gratitude upon the journey we have shared, culminating in the vibrant tapestry of 2024, and I am filled with excitement as we embark on the blossoming possibilities of the new season.

For our members in the southern hemisphere, where the golden hues of autumn cast their enchanting spell, I extend a heartfelt embrace to each of you. Across the vast expanse of the southern hemisphere, where nature's palette paints landscapes in hues of amber and crimson, let us come together in celebration of our shared passion for bonsai.

With gratitude in my heart, I reflect upon the bountiful harvest of friendships cultivated throughout the year. From the lush forests of Asia to the sun-kissed shores of the Americas, BCI stands as a beacon of cross-cultural cooperation and camaraderie.

With the fragrant breezes of camaraderie and cross-cultural cooperation guiding us, BCI stands poised at the threshold of a transformative year. I am humbled by the trust and support bestowed upon me as your president, and I am committed to steering our ship with passion and dedication.

Spring heralds the dawn of new beginnings, and what better way to celebrate than by convening at the much-anticipated "Bonsai on the Bayou International Convention" in Houston, Texas. Hosted by the Houston Bonsai Society in collaboration with the Lone Star Bonsai Federation and Bonsai Clubs International, this gathering promises to be a symphony of bonsai excellence and international friendship. From April 25th to 28th, let us unite under the verdant canopy of bonsai artistry, forging connections that transcend borders and enrich our shared passion.

I sincerely thank the organizers and my esteemed executive team for their unwavering dedication in orchestrating this momentous event. Together, we have cultivated an environment where bonsai thrives as a symbol of harmony and unity.

As the petals of spring unfurl, let us nurture the seeds of collaboration and continue to elevate bonsai to new heights of excellence. With each stroke of our pruning shears, we carve pathways to mutual understanding and



Mr. Chen, Chang
BCI President

**I sincerely thank the organizers
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event. Together, we have
cultivated an environment where
bonsai thrives as a symbol of
harmony and unity.**

cultural exchange, fostering a tapestry of international friendship that spans the globe.

In the spirit of growth and renewal, I invite you to join me in embracing the boundless possibilities that lie ahead. Together, let us cultivate a world where the art of bonsai flourishes and the bonds of friendship endure. 🌳

With warm regards and heartfelt appreciation,
Chen, Chang BCI President

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

We are raising funds for the future of BCI!
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Remember BCI in your will, your trust, your future!

For more information contact:

Mr. Chen Chang, president@bonsai-bci.com

Message from the Editor

As we usher in a new season, we find ourselves amidst the vibrant tapestry of the bonsai world, where each tree tells a story. With excitement and anticipation, we present this latest edition, brimming with tales from the heart of the international bonsai community.

In this issue, we embark on a journey through exhibitions that showcase the pinnacle of bonsai artistry. From the triumphant celebrations captured by **Herbert Obermayer** in the Bonsai Association Belgium's Trophy 2024 to the serene elegance of Suiseki explored by **Gudrun Benz**, each page unveils a glimpse into the excellence of bonsai and stone appreciation at this prestigious event. The Best Conifer: *Pinus mugo* by **Mauro Stemberger**, Italy, in a pot by **Tiberius Gracco**, also from Italy, grace the cover of this edition.

BCI Vice President **Min Hsuan Lo**, a headliner in Bonsai on the Bayou, reports on his experience in Thailand, the warm welcome he received from this tropical country's bonsai practitioners and the superb bonsai they are creating.

Venturing further, we delve into insightful articles from enthusiasts and experts. From **Min Hsuan Lo** and **Andrew Lo's** exploration of celebrating a birth with a Pitanga instead of the traditional *Nu Er Hong* and **Juang Yuan Hung** to **Herbert Aigner's** groundbreaking techniques of air layering wild alpine Mugo pines, these narratives paint a vivid picture of the boundless creativity, energy, and craftsmanship.

But our journey doesn't end there. With **Maurizio Lissolo** and **Massimo Bandera**, we uncover the captivating allure of Geisha, a *Juniperus chinensis*, and along with **Tony Tickle's** poignant reflections on the artistic essence of bonsai, we invite you to immerse yourself in the aesthetics of this ancient art form.

As we turn the pages, we also spotlight the vibrant spirit of bonsai clubs worldwide. **Gabriele Sbaraini** shares the birth and growth of the Arcobonsai Club. At the same time, your editor provides valuable insights into Bonsai Empire's Intermediate Course 3, underscoring the importance of education in nurturing the next generation of bonsai enthusiasts.

BCI director **Enrique Castaño** introduces us to **Greys Herrera** from Cuba, an avid photographer and bonsai enthusiast who combines her two passions with a creative spirit and poetry to tell evocative stories. BCI Director **Massimo Bandera** discovered **Valter Giuliano's** bonsai paradise and his creative force, which will inspire many to look in their own regions for alluring yamadori. Valter also raises the bar to show how a bonsai garden can look. Got mountains?

This edition is not just a collection of articles; it's a celebration of the enduring passion and dedication that unites us all. Whether you're a seasoned practitioner or a budding enthusiast, we invite you to join us as we embark on this captivating journey through the world of bonsai.

As we prepare to debut this edition at the 2024 BCI International Convention, Bonsai on the Bayou, in Houston, Texas, let us come together to celebrate the artistry, innovation, and camaraderie that define our beloved bonsai community. 🌳

—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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Q4	O/N/D	September 1



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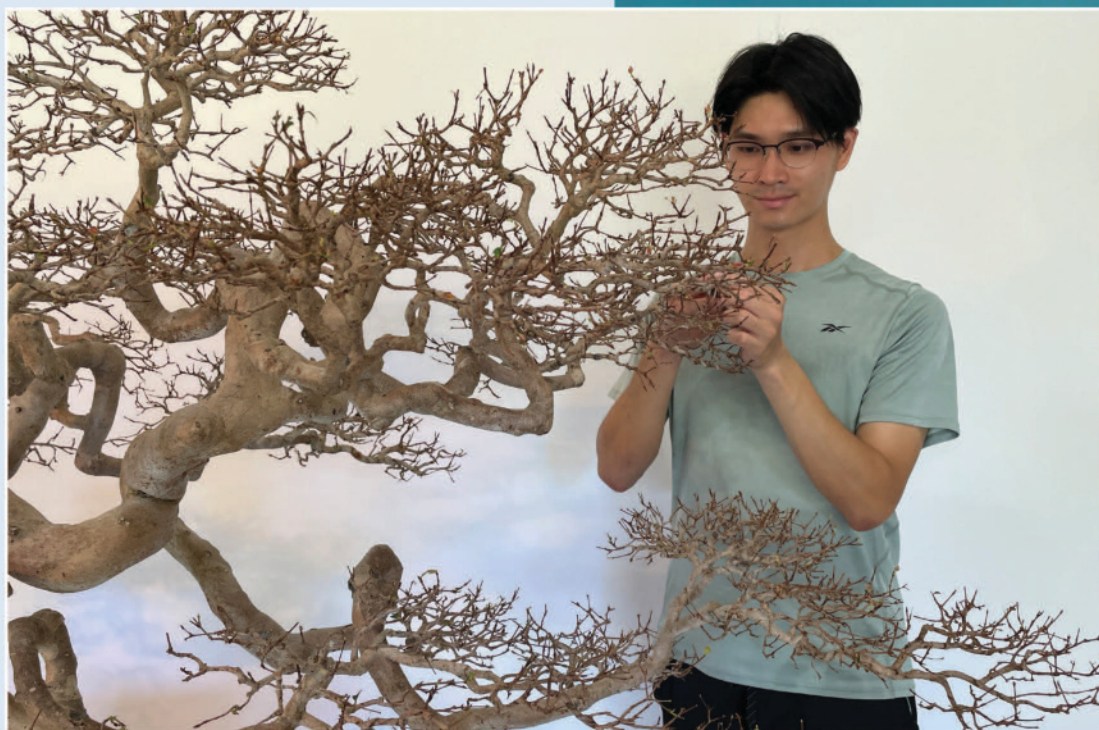
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Nu Er Hong (女兒紅) and Juang Yuan Hung (狀元紅)

Celebrating a Birth with a Pitanga

By Min Hsuan Lo and Andrew Lo, Taiwan



**Min Hsuan Lo's son
Andrew and this
Pitanga both started
their life's journey in
1996.**



It is said that “Nu Er Hong (女兒紅),” a type of Shaoxing wine (紹興酒), originated in the Jin Dynasty (晉朝) in 304 AD and has been a long-standing custom in Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province (浙江省). It was a precious item that wealthy families must prepare when their daughters are born or married. At the time of a daughter’s birth, the “Nu Er Hong” would be brewed, carefully sealed, and buried deeply under the osmanthus tree in the backyard, symbolizing the hidden love of the father. Afterward, the father would often spend leisure time near the osmanthus tree, seemingly feeling more at ease. When the daughter got married, the well-aged wine would be dug up and served to guests, praying for the longevity, health, and prosperity of the whole family. The same custom is also observed for the birth of sons, with the wine called “Juang Yuan Hung (狀元紅),” anticipating the celebration of their success in the imperial examination.

When Andrew was born, as a bonsai creator, I was unable to brew “Juang Yuan Hung” like the tradition. However, I embraced the

spirit of a flourishing bonsai and chose a hundred Pitanga seedlings to cultivate a new bonsai dream. I diligently shaped and cared for them, hoping that they would bring joy to everyone, just like Nu Er Hong and Juang Yuan Hung.

Conflict and Fusion of Aesthetics

With easy access to information in recent years, the world of bonsai has rapidly grown and become more globalized, yet also more standardized. High standardization leads to high bottlenecks. Bonsai should not be limited to just being bonsai. In the space between tradition and modernity, new modes of thinking and expression must inevitably incorporate diverse cultures. Attempting to bring together diverse cultural concepts amidst the noise of conflicting opinions will inevitably lead to countless clashes and oppositions in the early stages. As experiences of intense disharmony gradually become commonplace, further attempts at bold experimentation and bonsai cultivation may lead to fusion in the future. A rich and

In 1996, when Andrew was born, I wanted to give a meaningful gift similar to the traditional Chinese gifts of “Nu Er Hong” and “Juang Yuan Hung.”

diverse culture can produce a more civilized future for bonsai. Although the new standard of civilization may also be a stumbling block for the next wave of civilization, it is hoped that it will serve as the foundation for the next wave, the history of bonsai civilization in the centuries to come.

It's hard to imagine what would happen if Bach's unaccompanied Six Cello Suites, Van Gogh's *Starry Night*, and Huang Gongwang's *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* were all placed together in one space, alongside Huai Su's *Kuang Cao* (a highly cursive script in Chinese calligraphy). With such a diverse collection of elements, whether in conflict, opposition, or harmony, there would certainly be countless chemical reactions that would leave us in awe. These elements, which cannot be reflected by our left or right brains alone, may be significant factors in the evolution of civilization. Bonsai can also learn from this approach. By considering the impact of different elements and the resulting clashes, rejection, fusion, and harmony, bonsai can draw inspiration from the great history of art and culture.

1 1996

In 1996, when Andrew was born, I wanted to give a meaningful gift similar to the traditional Chinese gifts of “Nu Er Hong” and “Juang Yuan Hung.” However, being a bonsai enthusiast but lacking the ability to brew wine, I decided to plant bonsai as a gift instead. After searching my garden for the perfect specimen, Pitanga was my final choice. Every afternoon, after finishing my daily watering routine, I would ride my bicycle to the neighbor's nursery and select 10 small Pitanga each time. This process was repeated for a total of 10 times, spanning over a month until winter arrived.

When choosing the best material for Pitanga bonsai, there are certain characteristics to consider: 1. Leaf size and shape: Opt for tree variety with small and flat leaves. 2. Internode length: Opt for tree variety with shorter internodes. 3. The old leaves are as red as possible, and the color of the leaves is uniform without

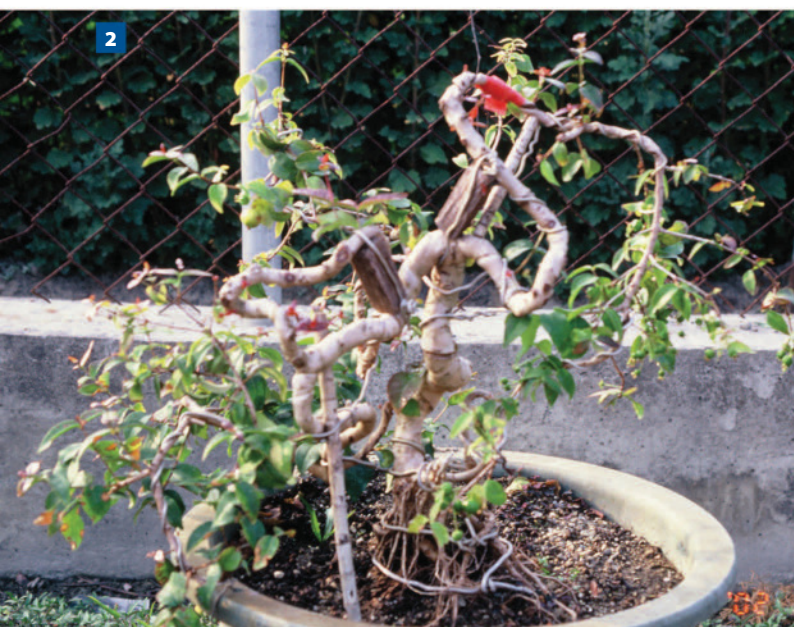


any other color spots in the middle. 4. Choose the ones with slender trunks which make it easy to bend and shape with aluminum wire. By doing so, the first step of selecting materials is completed. I will always remember those afternoons when riding a bike to choose seedlings. Looking at them, I felt immense happiness and boundless hope for the future.

2 2002 02 15

Just like education, being a good bonsai requires a solid foundation. This means starting with very small and precise wiring. Similar to how a child receives proper training from the moment they are born, bonsai

***Eugenia uniflora*
Pitanga,
Surinam Cherry,
Brazilian Cherry**





also benefit from early and careful shaping. By establishing a strong base, bonsai can develop into beautiful and well-formed creations. As a father, only I can truly understand the power and feeling of love. No matter how many aluminum wires I have to deal with or how many hours are spent thinking about how to style the bonsai, the same idea applies to treading on the Nu Er Hong in the backyard.

3 4 2008 02 09

In 2004, I moved the tree from a medium-sized plastic training pot to a huge Star anise cement training pot. Over the past five years, I focused on fast growth, intensive care, and styling, which are crucial for developing the raw material into a masterpiece. It's similar to a child in junior or senior high school, requiring careful nurturing and proper nourishment. Additionally, I pruned unnecessary branches, much like removing rough edges to cultivate the right direction.

5 2010 12 31

In the huge training pot, the growth was very fast, requiring a significant amount of time to observe and design various potentials and to create fresh new perspectives. Almost every morning and afternoon, I take hikes in the backyard to closely engage with those Pitanga.

6 2015 06 24

It's hard to believe that five years have passed by so quickly. During this time, the focus has been on promoting growth by allowing branches to elongate and thicken, as well as performing precise and deliberate pruning, even on longer branches. Wiring techniques have also been utilized to shape new twigs according to the desired design.

7 2016 02 14

Before the new buds emerge in spring, it is the ideal time for repotting. However, it can be risky to transfer the bonsai from a large training pot to a display pot. Usually, it is recommended to prune large roots one year in advance. Unfortunately, Pitanga roots are more delicate and sensitive. Therefore, it is important to carefully check for the emergence of small roots before repotting. Additionally, placing moss on the pot's surface and using burlap to wrap the branches can help maintain humidity and provide shade. These measures will help ensure the well-being of the bonsai during the repotting process.

...placing moss on the pot's surface and using burlap to wrap the branches can help maintain humidity and provide shade.



8 2016 07 16

However, despite waiting for the best time and season to repot, almost half a year passed without any noticeable changes. No new buds emerged until early July when suddenly a multitude of new buds sprouted within a short period of time. Remarkably, all of these buds appeared healthy and vibrant. This indicates that the bonsai has successfully survived and is now showing signs of vigorous growth.

9 10 2018 02 16

In the later part of winter, all the leaves turn red for almost a month. This period, before the flowers bloom and new buds emerge, is the best time to shorten new small branches and do wiring.

11 12 2018 06 12

To protect the bonsai from direct sunlight and prevent sunburn on its bark, it is necessary to cover it with some old clothes or fabric.

13 14 2018 06 26 15 16 2018 06 29

During three intensive days, the typical tasks of bonsai care were performed, such as promoting growth,



pruning, and wiring. These activities are essential aspects of daily bonsai work, regardless of expertise level or the climate in which the bonsai is grown.

17 2019 07 05

Andrew has graduated from university, and it was time for him to receive formal training in bonsai.

18 2020 06 24

To rapidly increase the ramification, it is necessary to wire annually.

19 2020 09 07 20 21 2020 09 14

The later summer is the best season for defoliation, and all preparations for this process should be completed beforehand. After defoliation, new buds will typically sprout within 7 to 10 days.

22 2022 03 17

During the late winter and early spring, hundreds of bees are attracted to the blossoms for nectar collection. Especially in the early morning, the cheerful buzzing of bees fills the air, signifying their fruitful harvest. It is truly a delightful experience to witness and appreciate these natural sounds orchestrated by the wonders of nature.



18



19



20



21



22





Wiring is always necessary, even when the ramification is already splendid. After wiring and defoliation, it is important to place the bonsai under shade to ensure its proper recovery and growth.

23 Spring couplets of 2022 08 11:

福虎吉祥 (*Fortune and auspiciousness with the tiger*).

Wiring is always necessary, even when the ramification is already splendid. After wiring and defoliation, it is important to place the bonsai under shade to ensure its proper recovery and growth.

24 Spring couplets of 2023 06 25:

兔躍福至 (*May good fortune come with the leap of a rabbit*).

By defoliating and placing the bonsai under shade, and taking care of it diligently, we can expect a rewarding outcome. Bonsai have a way of reciprocating the care they receive.

25 Multidimensional Flow

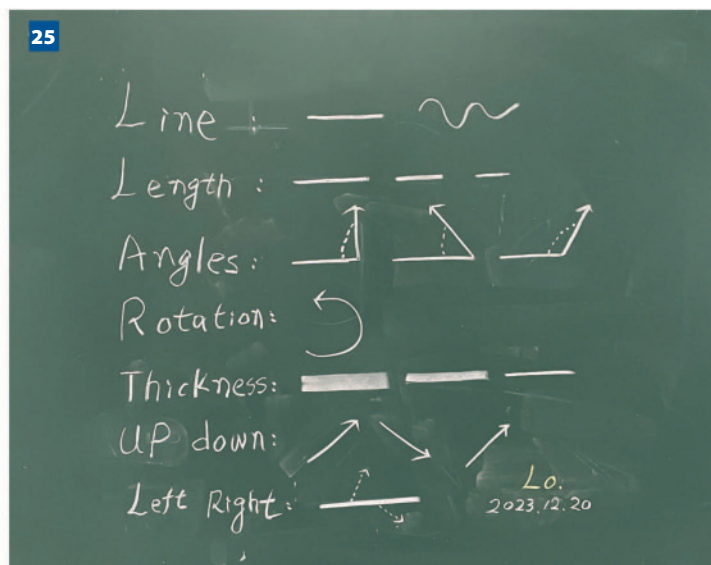
Analyzing the compositional elements of this work:

1. Lines: Straight and curved lines. Length: long, medium, short. Angles: acute, obtuse, right angles. Rotation / Thickness / Direction: up and down, left and right. Countless contrasting and diverse elements collide and combine to form the composition.

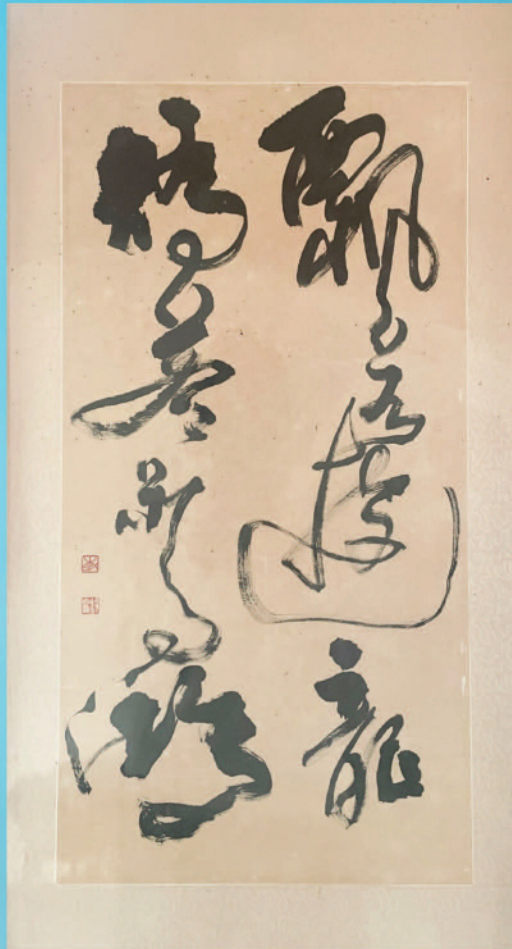
2. Analysis of Space: In tropical and subtropical regions, giant trees often have an umbrella-like shape, while in temperate regions, coniferous trees and traditional Chinese paintings tend to have larger spaces. This artwork combines the characteristics of coniferous trees and traditional Chinese paintings, presenting a style with larger spaces than broad-leaved trees. Through the diverse combination of the aforementioned lines and spatial elements.

3. Calligraphy is also an important element included in the artwork. "Flying gracefully like a dragon in the sky, Soaring lightly like a startled swan."

—Master "Lee" Qin Quan.



“揉和運用多年累積諸般工法，再現千年老巨木之可辨識特徵。完全訴諸於點、線，嘗試讓創作更加自由、更加多樣。在框架之外，追尋盆栽更豐富可讀性。”



“Blending and applying various techniques accumulated over many years, we aim to reproduce the recognizable features of ancient giant trees that have stood for millennia. By focusing solely on dots and lines, we strive to make our creations more free and diverse. Beyond the framework, we seek to enrich the readability of bonsai.”

“Flying gracefully like a dragon in the sky, Soaring lightly like a startled swan.”

—Master “Lee” Qin Quan.





“Dance aesthetics blend seamlessly with the static allure of bonsai, infusing dynamic movement reminiscent of dance into its serene beauty.

What emotions do these four sets of images evoke in you? Which front resonates with you the most? How does the intimacy of the close-up image contrast with the grandeur of the panoramic view? Which portrayal better captures the essence of the bonsai, with or without leaves? Do you have any additional thoughts on this artwork? Your comments are eagerly awaited and appreciated.”

—Min Hsuan Lo 🌳





Background photo: View of the exhibition.

Left inset: Crowds of spectators admired the bonsai on display.

Right inset: More than 100 dealers fulfilled all bonsai wishes.



Trophy 2024

The top spot confirmed

Kick-off to the new bonsai year delighted thousands of visitors.

Text and photos by Herbert Obermayer, Germany

Formal photos courtesy Bonsai Association Belgium, Jörg Derlien



Trophy 2024 in Genk, Belgium, once again confirmed its reputation as Europe's most important bonsai exhibition. Visitor after visitor, outstanding trees, an overflowing range of dealers, and high-quality demos contributed to this assessment. Above all, however, it was once again clear how important the human element is at Bonsai: The Trophy derives much of its appeal from the large number of encounters; it is a platform for communication in a class of its own: it is practically impossible to walk through the exhibition and past the dealers' stands without shaking hands and at least a brief conversation.

Traditional events tend to have deadlocked processes and framework conditions. The Trophy organizers try to avoid the resulting dangers and are open to optimization: At Trophy 24, the significantly improved lighting conditions in the exhibition hall were noticeable. During the demos, an XXL video wall made it easier for visitors, even those in the back rows of the auditorium, to follow details on the stage closely.

Top: Special Nominations,
Forest: *Juniperus chinensis* –
Nicola Crivelli, Switzerland.
Bottom: Best conifer: *Pinus
mugo* – Mauro Stemberger,
Italy.



The close positioning of the exhibits in the exhibition gave rise to criticism, as it was sometimes very difficult to concentrate on a single tree. Curator Danny Use countered the argument “less is more” by stating they deliberately wanted to give newcomers a chance to present their work this year. There were 164 bonsai entries, including seven trees from Nippon Bonsai Sakka Kyookai Europe and 15 from Danny Use’s private collection. 23 suiseki and 31 pots were shown.

These figures also make the Trophy one of the largest bonsai exhibitions in Europe in quantitative terms. A closer look reveals which species are currently “in” and which have declined in popularity.

The leading roles of the various pines among the conifers and the Acer species among the deciduous trees are unshakeable. With 36 mentions, the Pinaceae account for almost a quarter of all 155 bonsai (the shohin displays are not included in this evaluation). Within this group, the common pine *P. sylvestris* leads with 13 specimens, ahead of the white pines (10) and the mountain pines (7). The strong presence of *P. parviflora* is somewhat surprising, as Japanese pines have only played third fiddle behind *sylvestris* and *mugo* in recent years.

Among the junipers, *Juniperus chinensis* is the leading species with 26 entries, followed by six Sabina junipers.

Among the deciduous trees, *Acer buergerianum* and *Acer palmatum* are among the favorites, with the seven Trident just ahead of the palm maple. With five entries, the Korean hornbeam is becoming increasingly popular with bonsai lovers, ahead of the wild olive and privet (4 each). Hawthorn (3) and hornbeam (2) seem to have lost popularity. Azaleas (2) were also seen more often in previous editions of the Trophy.



It is pleasing to note that “exotics,” which are only occasionally found in European bonsai collections, keep appearing at the Trophy. In Genk, for example, these included the stone apple *Osteomeles anthyllidifolia* from Taiwan, which Václav Novák (Czech Republic) had brought with him to Belgium.

Since its inception, the Trophy has been conceived as a European exhibition. In 2024, at least 15 nations were represented with their bonsai, including a bonsai friend from Malta, for the first time. Most entries this year came from Germany, with at least 32 exhibits. This was followed by France (25), the organizer country Belgium (20), Spain and Italy (17 each), and the Netherlands (11). The other countries remained in single figures.

The standard of the Trophy has steadily increased in recent years. Two observations underline this: On the one hand, trees that had won awards in previous editions now play only minor roles, even if their quality remains unchanged; on the other hand, the number of exhibits that could easily be shown at the most important Japanese exhibitions is growing.



Top left: Best Pot: Patrik Lüthi, Switzerland.

Top right: Best deciduous: *Olea europaea* – German Gomez Soler, Spain.

Bottom: Best Shohin: Mark & Ritta Cooper, United Kingdom.

Top left: Special Nominations, Composition: *Juniperus chinensis* - Fabrice Huertas, Spain.

Top right: Nominations, *Juniperus sabina* - Lorenzo Agnoletti, Italy.

Bottom: Special Nominations, Kifu: *Juniperus chinensis* - Xema Laguna Font, Spain.



Among the conifers, a mountain pine from Mauro Stemberger (Italy) was among the judges' favorites. It also won the WBFF Award and the Bonsai Art Award. The nominees in this group were not inferior, with Lorenzo Agnoletti's Sabina (Italy) and Hartmut Münchenbach's Mugo (Germany) being particularly impressive.

The deciduous trees were headed by a wild olive from the old master German Gomez Soler (Spain); however, many visitors considered the extraordinary quince from Frank Jesse (Germany) to be at least as good.

In the Shohin category, Mark and Ritta Cooper (United Kingdom) lived up to their role as favorites, while Xema Laguna Font (Spain) won the Kifu competition with a *Juniperus chinensis*.



Top left: Nominations, *Buxus* – Ruben Ciezar Villanueva, Spain.

Top right: Nominations, *Pseudocydonia sinensis* – Frank Jesse, Germany.

Middle: Nominations, *Punica granatum* – Warren Radford, United Kingdom.

Bottom: Best Bonsai of Bonsai Association Belgium, *Fagus sylvatica* – Cindy Verstraeten, Belgium.

For several years, the Trophy organizers have awarded a special prize for a different design form every year. After previously focusing on literati and windswept bonsai, a “Special Nomination” for forests was awarded in 2024.

The exhibits in this part of the competition showed the full diversity of this form, known in Japan as Yose-ue. Extremely naturalistic designs with sometimes almost opaque “undergrowth” stood alongside highly stylized forms with great depth. The tree species used for these forests also offered great variety: boxwood, trident and palm maple, juniper, hornbeam, cypress, and pine demonstrated the wide range of possibilities for successful forest plantings.

Friends of viewing stones also got their money’s worth in Genk. 23 exquisite Suiseki, stylishly presented by Holger Göbel, fascinated experts and amateurs alike. Pot makers have now also secured a permanent place at the Trophy: from classic, conservative shapes to unusual vessels with delicate glazes, there was something for every taste—even steampunks would have gotten their money’s worth.

The design demonstrations this year featured new names. Andrés Bicocca (Argentina) has been causing a sensation in this country with his deadwood work since moving to Europe, and he demonstrated why in front of hundreds of spectators on stage with a large pine tree and an olive. Yannick Kiggen (Belgium), who started with bonsai at the age of ten, took up Bicocca’s “template” and put two trees on a promising bonsai path.

Bonsai artists from South Korea are regular guests at the Trophy. Now, Sae Won Kim, President of the World Bonsai Friendship Federation (WBFF), has brought Lee Cheol Ho and Choi Song Ho to Belgium, where they convincingly worked on several Sabina junipers together with colleagues from their delegation.

And then, of course, the Trophy also includes the dealer area, which is more important than the exhibition





for some visitors. Over 4300 square meters, everything the bonsai enthusiast's heart desires was on offer, from bargains for little money to exquisite solitaires in the five-digit euro range. Anyone who didn't find what they were looking for here should note the date for the next edition of the Trophy: This is planned for Friday, February 21, to Sunday, February 23, 2025. Ryan Neil (USA), Koji Hiramatsu (Japan), and Mauro Stemberger (Italy) have been announced as demonstrators so far. 🇪🇺

Top: Bonsai Art Magazine Award, Kifu, Roland Schatzer, Italy.

Middle left: Picking the fruits: *Diospyros kaki* – Harald Lehner, Germany.

Middle right: Bonsai in the frame: *Juniperus chinensis* – Wolfgang Weber, Germany.

Bottom: Controversial: *Ulmus parvifolia* – Laurent Darrieux, Artist, France. Niklas Brockschläger, Owner, Germany.



Suiseki Trophy 2024

By Gudrun Benz, Germany

Photos by Gudrun Benz,
Herbert Obermayer
and courtesy Bonsai
Association Belgium,
photos by Jörg Derlien



Top: Overview of the suiseki exhibition.

Bottom: Winner of the suiseki "Nomination", the only award for suiseki: "Horai Yama", distant mountain stone, Ibigawa-ishi, Japan, 43 cm w x 23 cm d x 25 cm h, owner Christoph Kurz, France.

The Trophy is one of the largest international bonsai exhibitions with suiseki in Europe, and the presentation is also considered exemplary. Internationally renowned bonsai demonstrators are proud to be invited to a Trophy where they can show off their skills. The event's success is also due partly to the artistic direction

of Danny Use and, not least, to the commitment of the members of the Belgian Bonsai Association. It is amazing how committed the members of this bonsai club have been to the organization, i.e., the planning, construction, implementation/set-up, and dismantling of their annual exhibition since the exhibition began in 2000. During the event, it is necessary, for example, to



Top: Mountain stone; 23 cm w x 18 cm d x 12 cm h, origin: Alps, Switzerland, owner: Holger Göbel, Germany.

Top right: "Prometheus", waterfall stone, 22 cm w x 11 cm d x 15 cm h, origin: Liguria, Italy, owner: Nicola Crivelli, Switzerland.

Middle: Distant mountain stone, origin: Liguria, Italy, owner Sami Amdouni, France.

Bottom: "Beyond time and space," plateau stone, 26.5 cm w x 11.5 cm d x 9 cm h, origin: Japan, owner Mrs. Daniela Schifano, Italy.



carry out checks at the entrance, monitor the exhibition, implement the results of the judging committee for the issue of the winners' documents and allocation to the trophies, and much more to ensure that the event runs smoothly. Since its inception in 2000, the event

has changed venues several times, as the space was no longer sufficient for the growing number of exhibits and dealers. Since 2015, the exhibition has been held in the Limburghal in Genk. The exhibition hall is separated from the dealer area. There were more than 100 dealers from all over Europe this year. Bonsai demonstrations are performed at the amphitheater, which is part of the complex of buildings of the Limburghal. Additional tasks were added that visitors are unaware of, such as the instructions for the dealers, including checking and instructing the vehicles in the separate car park, which is on the other side of the hall from the visitor car park, and much more. Usually, a whole professional team would be required to manage all these tasks.

As before, there were several sections in the exhibition hall this year: bonsai dominated, and shohin, bonsai pots, and suiseki displays were given their own row. Like last year, there was a row of tokonoma displays from Nippon Bonsai Sakka Kyookai Europe, which this



Top: Wuling cave stone, 45 cm w x 13 cm d x 15 cm h, origin: China, owner: Bonsai Museum Heidelberg, Germany.

Middle: Distant mountain stone, Yamagata ishi, 36 cm w x 10.5 cm d x 13 cm h, owner: Beata Rutkowska, Poland.

Lower middle: Shelter stone, Yojuro-ishi, Kifune, Japan, 24 cm w x 7 cm d x 11 cm h, owner: Igor Barta, Czech Republic.

Bottom: "Penguin", a Moore stone, 37 cm w x 22 cm d x 25 cm h, origin: Guangxi province, China. Owner: Gudrun Benz, Germany.

year were located behind the suiseki row and not at the opposite end of the hall as last year. At the entrance side of the exhibition hall was an artistic arrangement by François Jeker (France), this time with three bonsai. Danny Use also showed some of his best bonsai from his private collection.

The infrastructure allowed for appealing presentations. New to the exhibition this year was the covering of the tables and the background with wrinkle-free cloth. The blue table runners were also made of special water-resistant material, so no stains occur when the bonsai and accent plants are watered. The black background and the table cover with blue table runners created an elegant impression. The back walls were high enough to hang scroll pictures in the suiseki exhibition. In the bonsai exhibition, the back walls were sufficient even for large cascades on high tables or large bonsai. Only very few bonsai protruded beyond the back wall. For some, the dominant black of the table cover and back wall may have looked too gloomy, but the bonsai with their tables generally stood out well, emphasizing the details of the design and presentation. At the suiseki exhibition, the scroll paintings and most of the suiseki also stood out well against the black back wall. The suiseki exhibition included 23 suiseki from as many exhibitors from 9 countries: Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, France, Czech Republic, Netherlands, Italy, Poland, and Japan. Several high-quality exhibits were on display. As usual, the awards were presented on the gala evening on Saturday. The nomination for suiseki went to the impressive Japanese mountain stone entitled "Hora Yama" by Christoph Kurz from France. His Ibigawa ishi has a width of 43 cm and a height of 25 cm. As usual, the landscape stones dominated, with the suiseki from Japan standing out in particular. But the "penguin," an animal-shaped Moore stone, also attracted much attention.

To summarize, this year's Trophy lived up to its reputation as one of the biggest and best bonsai and suiseki shows in Europe. 🌳



Yamadori Quest

Exploring Alpine Bonsai and the Art of Air-Layering

By Herbert Aigner, Austria

Photos by Herbert Aigner, and courtesy Herbert Aigner



My country is stunning

Vienna, the capital of Austria, is characterized by its ancient grand buildings. Strolling through the old town, one feels transported back in time. Music fills many squares, and cozy taverns invite you to indulge in culinary delights. Austria is world-famous for its classical music. Vienna became the center of classical music in the 18th century. Renowned composers shaped this era: Josef Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart,

and Ludwig van Beethoven were the three masters of Viennese Classicism.

For me, however, the most beautiful city in Austria is Salzburg. For centuries, clergy dominated here. Countless churches adorn the old town of Salzburg. Above the baroque towers of the churches, the Hohensalzburg Fortress looms. It is the landmark of Salzburg. Strolling through the streets of Salzburg in the evening is an unforgettable experience. One

Top left inset: Vienna State Opera

Top right inset: Mozart's birth place

Bottom left: Salzburg

Bottom right: Salzburg City Center



encounters Mozart at every turn because he was born here. Countless tourists pilgrimage to Mozart's birthplace every year.

Austria's Nature

Austria is small but very diverse and scenically varied. The country is intersected by many lakes. The water of the lakes is crystal clear and invites for a refreshing dip on hot summer days. However, our country is characterized by the Alps, a mighty mountain range that stretches through Austria. The peaks of the partly still relatively untouched mountains reach a height of 3,800 meters. These Alps are now the destination of our Yamadori tour.

My Appreciation of *Pinus mugo*

For 30 years, I have been passionately involved in cultivating and caring for bonsai trees. Fifteen years ago, I began experimenting intensively with old *Pinus mugo* air layering in the high mountains. At that time, it was still believed that pines could not be air-layered. This was true for most pine species in Europe. Attempts with *Pinus sylvestris* and *Picea abies* showed they formed too few or no new roots. However, our native *Pinus mugo* reacts well and reliably to the air layering method. It is even excellently suited because it is genetically predisposed to form new roots when a branch touches the ground. Since then, Yamadori tours in the high mountains have become my great passion. I have air-layered more than 100 Mugos so far, covering a distance of about 80,000 meters on foot.



***Pinus mugo* reacts well and reliably to the air layering method. It is even excellently suited because it is genetically predisposed to form new roots when a branch touches the ground.**



A bag of sphagnum moss, a sharp knife, plastic wrap, and a string stowed on the backpack, and off we go by car at five in the morning.



Outside of nature reserves, it is still allowed in Austria to collect trees with the landowner's permission. In this report, I invite you to accompany me on a tour of the high mountains.

The Quest Begins

It is mid-June. Finally, the snow has mostly melted in the mountains, at least on the south-facing slopes. I



have been looking forward to the first tour to air layer Mugos all winter long. So let's go.

Four o'clock in the morning, and the alarm clock is making a racket. The brain, feet and whole body resist getting out of the warm bed. But there's no use; ultimately, the alarm clock has won the battle. We have to go up the mountain. Bundle up because, in mid-June, it's still cold in the mountains.

A bag of sphagnum moss, a sharp knife, plastic wrap, and a string stowed on the backpack, and off we go by car at five in the morning.

By 6:00 a.m., we arrived at the starting point of today's tour. We are now at 1,200 meters above sea level.

We will hike for three hours from here until we reach the bonsai paradise at 2,100 meters. The weather is splendid. No danger of an approaching thunderstorm. This can be very dangerous in the mountains. In the rocky, high mountains, there are hardly any places to seek shelter from storms. Despite the beautiful weather, it's still cold, and a mist forms in front of our faces as we breathe out.

Mist also lies over the lush green meadows. It slowly rises until it dissipates in the emerging sunlight. The water gurgling in the small streams along the way plays like music to our ears. This is how I imagine paradise. We could linger here forever, but we want to go up to the high mountains where we want to search for old Mugos, marked by the forces of nature.

The valley is filled with bird song, and flowers bloom in all shapes and colors on the meadows. The path leads us further and further uphill over carpets of blossoms. Seeing this, one is almost left speechless with wonder. A feeling of happiness spreads throughout the body.

My absolute favorite flower is the blue gentian. Its deep blue, trumpet-shaped blossom attracts the gaze magically. It grows almost majestically from a small crevice in the rocks. One simply has to stop and enjoy it.

After half an hour of walking, the sun rises above the mountain ridge. The first gentle and soothing rays of sunshine convey a feeling of boundless freedom. Dewdrops on the needles of the trees sparkle in the sunlight like diamonds. With the warmth, the insects also awaken. Colorful butterflies suddenly flutter through the air and settle on flowers to suck nectar from them. It would be nice to watch this peaceful bustle for longer, but we want to climb further.

The Ascent

Curve after curve, we climb the forest road uphill. Suddenly, a roar drowns out the gentle sounds of nature. With each step, it becomes warmer and louder. It is a roaring waterfall. Pure drinking water plunges here 60 meters over a rock ledge. An excellent opportunity to fill our water bottles and take a five-minute break. There's also time to build a cairn. These were built by the mountain people in the past to orient themselves in the mountains, even in fog.

Our path continues past an ancient spruce. It has stood here in the sparse forest for centuries. How old is it, and what has it already experienced?



Step by step, we continue to climb uphill. We are now on the edge of the tree line at 1,700 meters. The first *Pinus mugos* appear next to the path. Here, they still grow too sheltered and have too many nutrients. The branches are long, and the greenery is not near the trunk.

Above the Tree Line

After another half-hour of walking, we are above the tree line at 1,800 meters above sea level. On the sunny slopes, nature has awakened from its winter slumber, and the grass and herbs already gleam in lush green. The farmers have already brought some of their cattle



A rock shaped like a stone bench is in the middle of a meadow



to the high pastures. Here, the cows feed on the best and juiciest fodder until mid-August before they are driven back into the valley. In some depressions, there are still remnants of snow from winter. Barely has the snow melted, and the spring flowers are already pushing to the surface, finally turning their blooms towards the sun again. One of the first spring flowers is the alpine anemone with snow-white blossoms. A few days later, it is followed by the spring gentian. It grows in clusters, and its blue color shines far and wide. Yes, nature has to be quick in the mountains. In three months, the first snow can fall here again.

Breakfast on the Plateau

We are close to reaching a plateau now. That's also my favorite place. A rock shaped like a stone bench is in the middle of a meadow. I would like to place this bench in my bonsai garden. Next to the bench blooms a shrub with alpine roses, and in the distance, you can see a peak of our Alps. This would be another place to sit down and let your soul unwind.

Slowly, we realize that our feet are getting tired, and our steps are getting shorter. We have been walking for two hours now. But we are about to reach our

intermediate goal. Just two more curves, and we arrive at an alpine hut. The hut keeper is a friend of mine. We will take a break for breakfast and exchange news with the keeper. The sun has already warmed up the cool mountain air, so we can have breakfast in front of the hut. We recharge our batteries with a hot cup of coffee and hearty scrambled eggs before setting off for the bonsai paradise.

The half-hour break has done our feet good, and we set off again. We still have 300 meters of altitude to cover. The path initially leads gently upwards over lush alpine meadows. From a distance, we can already see our destination. First, we have to climb to the peak on the left side of the picture, and then a narrow path along the ridge leads us to the right side of the picture. The ground is very rocky, and the trees have little water and few nutrients. These are good conditions for finding exceptional trees. We still have an hour's walk ahead of us.

After a few minutes, the landscape changes. Mugos, as far as the eye can see. The trees are so dense that walking off the path is hard. We have to go further up where the Mugos stand more loosely.

Suddenly, our path becomes very steep and rocky. We gain height quickly, but it's tough on the knees and muscles. Our legs become heavier. In addition, the sun is now heating up the air powerfully. The hot air rising gently from the valley drives beads of sweat onto our foreheads.

Just around the corner is a memorial for a deceased mountain comrade. His name was Franz. I didn't know Franz, but since hiking up here, I always take a break to relax my tired bones. A drink and a snack are also necessary to replenish energy.

After the short break, we must again motivate our tired legs to cover the final meters to the summit. We





First, we have to climb to the peak on the left side of the picture, and then a narrow path along the ridge leads us to the right side of the picture



briefly enjoy the panorama at the summit cross before following a path along the ridge.

We leave the path and make our way through steep terrain, scree slopes, and among the Mugos. The search for good trees will take three hours. We will look at hundreds of trees to find the extraordinary one. At this

altitude, the growth conditions for trees are very harsh. Avalanches, rockfalls, and intense storms break or split trunks, and the pressure of the snow lying meters high brings about bizarre twists of the branches. That's the kind of tree we're looking for.



Top left and middle left: The summit of our quest.

Mugos, as far as the eye can see. The trees are so dense that walking off the path is hard.



The First Yamadori Potentials

Yes, this could be something. Ten meters below us, I see a mighty trunk with a lot of deadwood. We will take a closer look because its suitability as a bonsai cannot be determined from here. The tiredness in our legs disappears, and our heart rate noticeably accelerates.

When we reach the tree, I sit down and analyze the Mugo to see if it is suitable as a bonsai. I take my time with this. I examine the trunk line. Which branches are usable, and are they well distributed? Is there a good transition to form a crown?

Before us lies a trunk with a diameter of 20 centimeters, originating between two boulders. The live bark winds bizarrely around the trunk. The top of the trunk was probably damaged by rockfall, and over the last decades, wonderful deadwood has formed. The





greenery is near the trunk, or it can be easily wired into the correct position. The only drawback is that the tree is not very robust. In the valley, a Mugo can reach an age of 300 to 400 years. Here in the high mountains, the conditions are so extreme that the trees can only live for 150 to 200 years at most. This tree will not survive another 10 years here. However, if the tree still has sufficient energy for air layering and thus forms new roots, it will become vigorous again in the valley and will live for many more decades.

The Air Layering of Mugos

The air layering of Mugos is very simple. Even with very thick Mugos with a trunk diameter of 20 cm or more, only a bark strip of 2 to 3 cm needs to be removed. Mugos form hardly any cambium at the cut, as we know from air layering some maple species. There is therefore no risk of overgrowth of the cut. The best time for air layering in the high mountains is from mid-June to mid-August. During this time, the tree is full of sap, and the bark with all the cambium can be easily removed.

I also air layer Mugos late in the fall. After mid-August, Mugos in the high mountains already start to draw sap from the cells again. The cambium is no longer juicy but tougher and firmly connected to the sapwood. It is therefore difficult to tell whether all the cambium has been removed. However, there is a simple trick for this. After removing the bark, wait for 5 minutes. As soon as air reaches the cambium, it changes color from white to pink or brown. Simply scrape off the discolored areas with a knife.

After applying a 2-3 cm thick layer of sphagnum moss, I use a strong black plastic wrap and loosely enclose the package with a string. If the plastic wrap is tied too tightly, the newly formed roots will grow into a massive clump. When combing out the roots



after separation, many of the newly formed roots are damaged. It is not necessary to water the tree during this time. If it rains, the water runs along the bark, and the sphagnum moss absorbs water again. It is even advisable to make cuts with a knife on the underside of the plastic wrap in case of a horizontal air layering, as shown in the picture, so that excess water can drain away. Otherwise, the roots may rot in the plastic due to excessive moisture.

Mugos with a trunk diameter of 20 cm or more, only a bark strip of 2 to 3 cm needs to be removed.



Avalanches, rockfalls, and intense storms break or split trunks, and the pressure of the snow lying meters high brings about bizarre twists of the branches. That's the kind of tree we're looking for.

A Dance of Joy

As I sit next to the tree, one half of my brain is doing a dance of joy. A beautiful tree will find its way into my garden. The other half of my brain is already estimating the weight of the tree and considering how we will carry the tree through the pine field up to the ridge

and then all the way down. So, about 30 kilograms is the estimated weight of the tree.

Collecting yamadori trees is like collecting mushrooms. Where there is one, the probability is high that other good trees can be found. That's the case today as well. A few meters from our first find stands





another mighty tree. Shaped by ice and snow and by the storm, it stands in a small clearing. This tree will also be about 100 years old. My knife is almost jumping out of my pocket.

So, sit down again and analyze the tree thoroughly. The trunk is bizarrely twisted. The twist extends to the crown of the tree. The trunk has a diameter of over 20 cm. The later positioning in a pot is very feasible. So, let's get to work.

A glance at the clock shows that it is already 2 p.m., and we must slowly make our way back. One eye focuses on the path, and the other eye scans the surroundings incessantly. You must know that. In the middle of a scree slope, 20 meters below the path, I spot an unusual Mugo. We'll take a look at that one too.

An Extremely Twisted Mugo

Today is our lucky day. An extremely twisted Mugo, like I've hardly ever seen, grows in the middle of a scree field. It is exposed to the weather extremes without protection. In its young years, its delicate branches were broken and twisted by storms. Nevertheless, it survived. It has little greenery left, but what remains is perfectly positioned. Looking at the old twisted trunk, which consists mainly of wonderful deadwood, the sap runs up to the crown of the tree. Now I must acknowledge with great admiration that nature produces the most wonderful creations.

Because of the many twists in the trunk, it is not easy to find a suitable spot for air layering. This is very important because it determines the later positioning in a pot.

Luck is on our side today. Upon closer examination of the tree, it turns out that it is possible to make two

air layerings on one plant. In the upper area, there is a nicely twisted side branch that cannot be included in the future design. But on its own, this branch makes a beautiful bonsai.

Deeply impressed and overjoyed by our finds today, we can now make our way back down to the valley at 3 p.m.

Smiling All the Way Home

After 12 hours, we arrive back in the valley, smiling all the way home. Thank you for accompanying me today.



About the Author:

Herbert Aigner, a seasoned bonsai enthusiast from Austria, has spent the last three decades passionately nurturing air-layered wild Mugo pines from high altitudes into magnificent works of living art. At 65 years old, his dedication to the craft of bonsai speaks volumes, reflecting a lifetime of patience, skill, and a deep-rooted appreciation for nature's beauty.



Narrar historias desde una imagen

(Telling stories with an image)

An essay by Greys Herrera Vilá, Cuba

Bonsai and photos by Greys Herrera Vilá

Contributing editor, Enrique Castaño, Mexico

Telling stories through imagery is capturing the essence of a tree's gaze in an unrepeatable moment. An image that is as unique as the tree itself. Where care remains forever, much like the life of its creator. Visualizing and connecting with everyone through the freshness of effort is one of my goals; it's about arriving and staying, akin to how a tree clings to the earth. It's about seeing beyond, much like the trees that prepare themselves with each passing season.

Narrating stories through imagery is to halt time and leave it green, like the leaves of those trees that accompany me forever. Being part of time is akin to granting a truce to the hours, allowing for the birth of new branches and new dreams filled with hope.

Uniting the ancient, the old, and the nearly obsolete with my trees is an open suggestion. This visual game harmonizes what I want to convey with what each individual can perceive. It's about persisting in everyone through the image, through color, and through love for trees

Photography, with its vast possibilities of contrasts, strengths, eternity...

Photography, with its immortality, is as if the soul expels its fibers, guiding us to blank spaces, which blend with the colors and scents of wet, deep, and arranged earth...

The mysterious silence of trees imbues an inner strength and an encounter with art that is, in itself, a surge of emotions, shivers, a rupture with all linguistic and established customs that confine the imagination of the creator and nature itself.

"Inspiration only accepts one law: the lack of any law; independence." — José Martí (1876).





Enough of not *understanding*. Furthermore, demanding lofty individual concepts, narrow parameterizing factors shield themselves in *norms* conveniently placed to bridle creation, in opposition to their very essences and to nature itself, which is free from all *constructed* restraints artificially imposed by humans. The freedom of creation is not at odds with rules, which are beneficial for appreciating works, movements, and novelties. The problem lies in the mediocrity that appropriates itself, introduced into artistic groups—like

ours—by those for whom vocation and love for art are matters of outward display, who self-label as masters, specialists, and judges of everything that is and isn't judged on the internet grapevine... Thus, they limit the flight of every creator, diminish their efforts and illusions, and forced to castrate trees shielded by *norms* that they repeat and do not depart from as if life had stopped in them, imprisoning it; hence, leading to the copying of ideas, to the vice becoming generalized as evidence of excellence, of *their wisdom as masters*,



ultimately reducing art to a minimal expression of crudeness and bad taste. Where populism applauds without posing any minimal question, without knowing anything, ignoring the existing tradition, and where negative comments are more applauded than a good reflection. To calm myself, I always remember what José Martí wrote in 1876:

“Art is fleeing from the mean, and affirming oneself in the great. Because you can be silent with the silence of images!”

Art is a fire that burns, it is holding onto the greatest thing which is your being (because you are incomparable), we build castles without walls, reaching the limits of the unattainable, touching the infinite by breaking down seas and oceans with the humility and generosity of the great that rests and expands in the small. We conquer the world in our reserved space because that’s what art is about, giving a breath of fresh air with the taste of rain, of damp earth. We touch souls by bringing out the best in ourselves, in human beings, making them love trees, knowing that there is a tree-human relationship that is a faith in life. Because life is a constant art, without hurry, without time, without competition, we are our own competition as we overcome ourselves.

“The truth in works of art is the dignity of talent”
—José Martí (1884)





Bonsai, photography, and art in general exist not to forget. It is a whole, so that the past is present, the future to be captured. They merge with each other and a new way of understanding what already exists in reality emerges. Cultivating beauty in small spaces, watering them with the strength of good and bad days, with a contagious, overwhelming effort of pure waves crashing against the chest that organizes a whole

intimate, personal universe. So I say goodbye, telling stories through images, giving a nod to life...

And it's because, "My job is to sing everything beautiful, to ignite enthusiasm for everything noble, to admire and make others admire everything great"

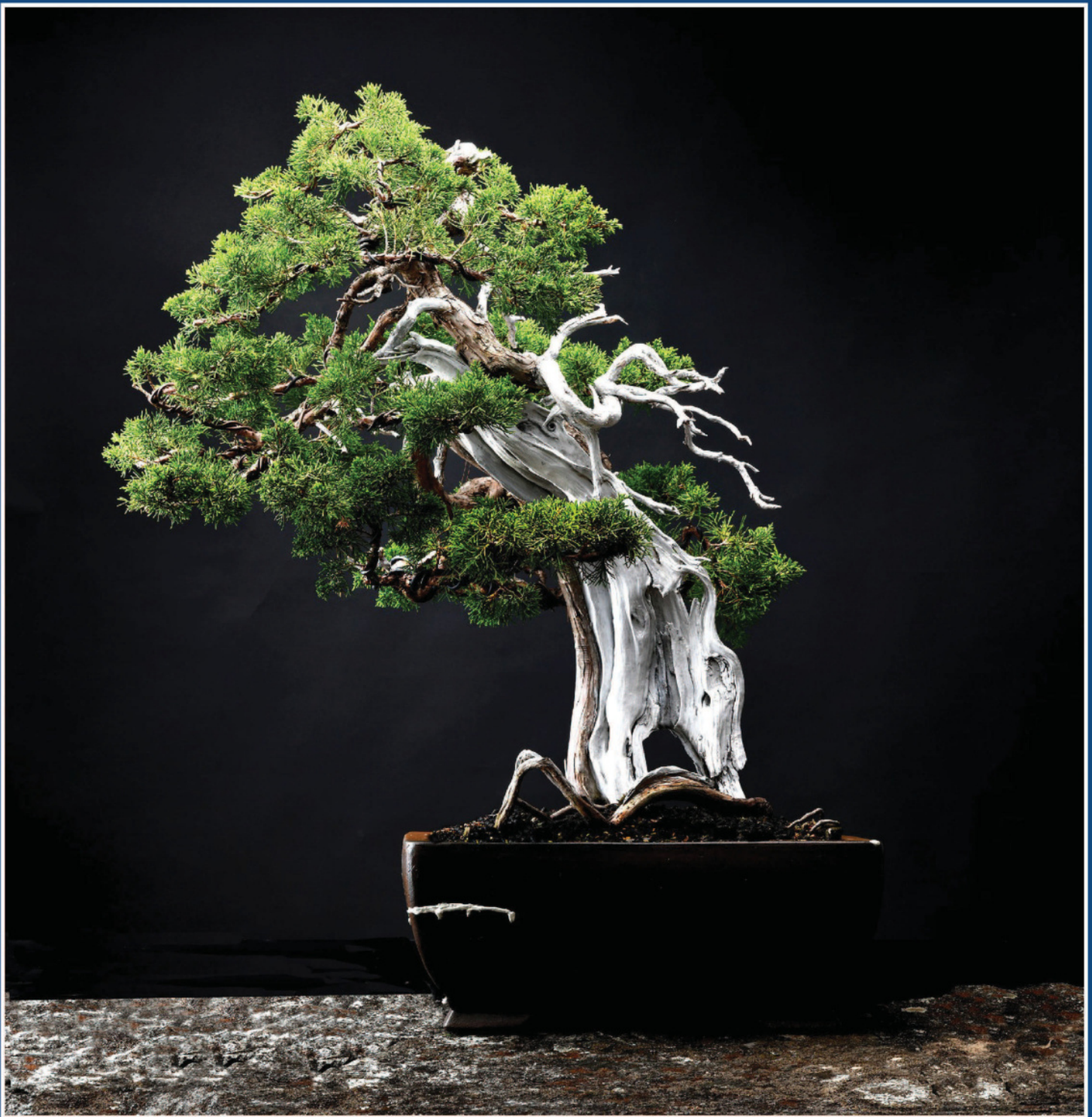
— José Martí. 🌳



About the Author: Greys Herrera Vilá is from Cuba, she works in speech therapy, and has been involved in bonsai for 20 years.



José Julián Martí Pérez (1853–1895) was a Cuban nationalist, poet, philosopher, essayist, journalist, translator, professor, and publisher, who is considered a Cuban national hero because of his role in the liberation of his country from Spain.



Juniperus chinensis var *itoigawa*
Author Massimo Bandera 2004
Imported 1997, style change in
2018 by Ryan Neil
Owned by Maurizio Lissolo
Height 80 cm
Estimated age 500 years,
Japanese Yamadori
Japanese pot: Tokoname, Mr.
Koyo Kunisada, with kintsugi
restorations

Geisha

A Stroll Through a Dream

By Maurizio Lissolo and Massimo Bandera, Italy
Photos by Massimo Bandera and Fabrizio Pangrazi

Since childhood, I've always felt a great attraction to these miniature trees. Perhaps it's because much of my youth was spent in a chestnut grove on the border between Piedmont and Valle d'Aosta, where I developed a close relationship with nature that I continued to nurture through my walks in the Alpine valleys in all seasons.

I purchased several small bonsai trees, but over time I realized I wasn't fully capable of managing them, and above all, I had the desire to learn the cultivation techniques, as well as the philosophy and history behind these living treasures. It was in June 2022, through an internet search, that I became aware of the presence of the FKB school in the area near where I live, where I met Master Massimo Bandera.

I remember the day I met the Master because I was in search of a Larch bonsai because at that moment in my



Above: Geisha's first owner, Bruno Pronzato with the first styling in 2004.

Top right, middle and bottom: In December 2018, the bonsai was worked on in a seminar with Ryan Neil, who gave it a new front and inclination.





This bonsai is truly an example of a succession of workings done by people who have followed the contemporary style of Kimura's bonsai.

life it symbolized strength, resilience, and adaptability to the surrounding environment for me. I remember the Master advising against the purchase of that bonsai and suggesting I focus on a Mountain Pine instead. In that brief conversation, I understood that FKB school, but above all, the Master, was my starting point for embarking on a long journey of study in the world of bonsai. In parallel with the school, I also decided to begin an equally long journey of in-depth lessons with the Master. In the autumn of the same year, I invited the Master for a walk in my valley on the "Path of Souls," and it was during this walk that I was compelled to ask him a somewhat bold question... "Could I ever have a bonsai created by you, one of your works?" ... I still don't know today what Massimo thought of my request at that moment (maybe that I was audacious?) ... all I know is that one year later, I am fortunate to have in my garden one of his works, the Geisha, a magnificent *Juniperus chinensis* grafted with Itoigawa.

The story of this bonsai is very fascinating. The Master encountered this bonsai in a collection in Japan, from which he acquired five pieces, including this particularly ancient Juniper. He then imported it to Italy in 1997. Bruno Pronzato, a renowned collector, loved to buy materials to restore or completely redo where the Master could work in his garden while he watched the work come to life. It was for Pronzato that the Master crafted the Geisha, a masterpiece in 2004: an avant-garde juniper with a very complex sculpture and the wild leaf of the oldest varieties of Japanese juniper.

In December 2018, the bonsai was worked on in a seminar with Ryan Neil, who gave it a new inclination that we can see in the images and then maintained in subsequent workings: in this, the young disciple of Masahiko Kimura has truly extraordinary visionary skills. The owner at the time, Paolo, also did some



work on the nebari by unraveling a root that had a very beautiful shari. In 2019, Alessandro Bonardo, another Kimura apprentice, carried out the approach grafts technique (*Koromogai*) using the Itoigawa variety, replacing the foliage with approximately a dozen grafts. The bonsai was then cultivated for years with high vigor protocols to develop the new canopy, which in 2023 Massimo Bandera reset with the latest design of the current shape that preserves the front and inclination chosen by Ryan. This bonsai is truly an example of a succession of workings done by people who have followed the contemporary style of Kimura's bonsai.

AESTHETIC ANALYSIS BY MASSIMO BANDERA

PHYSICAL ASYMMETRY (Fukinsei)

- Asymmetric triangularity
- Trunk inclination
- Branches embracing the jin
- The jin on the right side gives a sense of movement and sinuosity
- The living vein resting on the shari.
- An ancient root in front of the shari undulates
- Part of the roots, with an undulating movement, wrap around the geisha and enter the ground
- Pot with restoration elements in gold with kintsugi technique

METAPHYSICAL ASYMMETRY

- The presence of the *oku* (the through hole) at the bottom of the shari gives the idea that this plant is anchored in the ground like two legs. The image of this trunk and its appearance of feminine movement recalls the aesthetic concept of Miyabi, where the ideal of feminine elegance and refinement is combined with the gentle movements of the juniper veins, and in this case becomes the title of the work: Geisha. The shari resting against the trunk that embraces it with its branches and supports it harmoniously.
- The old and sculptural part is enhanced thanks to the younger part, just as in life, the young needs the knowledge of the wise, and the latter needs the desire to live and the curiosity of the young.
- The sculpture is an essential part of the tree, and the observer can admire its details (shari, oku, saba, and jin). The sculpture gives strength to the tree, and this is perceived by the observer. The trunk is extremely hollowed out and consumed, in a physical asymmetry that leaves the center free, opening up the possibility of exalting the centuries-old age of the work.

PHYSICAL SIMPLICITY (Kanso)

- The canopy veils the jin
- The living vein with shari without jin at the bottom
- The simplicity of the pot embellished with gold tears
- The selection of branches is very strong. Some top branches have reconstructed the current canopy.
- The sculpture at the bottom has slightly undulating lines typical of the trunk of the undulating ones without excessive movement typical of Moyogi, while at the top, there are still long jin representing the slow change over time of the shari: many parts are centuries old, others decades.

METAPHYSICAL SIMPLICITY

- The movement of the trunk guides the gaze towards the canopy and the jin. It generates a sensation of vigor starting from the simplicity of dead wood. This can be seen as a path to spiritual elevation.
- The canopy that envelops the jin recalls the mysterious aspect of Yuugen. Even the oku invites the observer to embark on an imaginary journey towards a world beyond the plant, an ideal of beauty



in the emptiness of something that was but has now been consumed, a beauty of what has disappeared but only serves to enhance the charm of the memory of what once was.

- The tall rectangular pot, rounded, balances with the sinuosity of the Geisha, and the kintsugi white gold restorations are in harmony with the half-millennium of the juniper and a history of difficulties treated as if they were signs of a long life that also had its problems. In this case, the kintsugi is interpreted by enhancing the breaks to highlight them.

PHYSICAL AUSTERITY (Shibui/Wabi Sabi)

- The half-millennium age of the bonsai denotes an austere, dry, excellent, consumed, and severe appearance.
- The shari is large and worked by the artist but also by time. Elements like oku, jin, shari, and saba give the plant a stern appearance.
- The old patina vase is very dark but reveals the reddish hue of the original slip that underlines the juniper bark and the winter colors of the leaves.



METAPHYSICAL AUSTERITY

- The bonsai conveys a vitality force that can be perceived by observing the canopy and is balanced by the shari, which vaguely recalls the past and conveys the sensation of wisdom and resilience, hinting at what its past has been.
- Observing the bonsai, the person is led to contemplate the past (as well as the here and now), realizing that old age has a positive and strong connotation, a wonderful season to live. Observing the clear and dry shari, very white by choice of the author who sees it as a contemporary avant-garde work, another aspect of its austerity can be perceived because it suggests that everything is mutable towards tranquility.

PHYSICAL NATURALNESS (Shizen)

- Being an avant-garde slanting style, it has a lot of vegetation on the slope side. This vegetation is counterbalanced by the inclination of the shari and the presence of many jin.

- The shape of the old tree with branches that reveal the jin that seem to intersect with them and roots that come out of the ground.
- The tree has lost its lower branches due to the old shape, and the apex is very rounded, typical of old bonsai and old trees.

METAPHYSICAL NATURALNESS

- There is harmony between the trunk and the canopy that form a whole and complement each other. One can see the author's mark on the plant without altering it and appearing violent. Those who observe perceive the connection between the author and the plant and grasp its spontaneity and naturalness.
- The plant allows the author to show the hidden potential so that the observer can savor its beauty and uniqueness every time.
- The beauty of the bonsai also lies in highlighting the sculptural part while maintaining its naturalness and history.

- The author connects with the plant and listens because he acts in harmony with it without being influenced by his own thoughts and emotions.

PHYSICAL SUBTLE DEPTH (Yuugen Yoin Aware)

- The plant is veiled. The canopy reveals the jin and the upper part of the trunk.
- The complexity of the sculpture opens the doors to an extremely articulated story that can be read in a depth that increases the more time is devoted to observation.

METAPHYSICAL SUBTLE DEPTH

- Much of this work is left to the observer's imagination. At the top, the canopy partially hides the jin from view.
- The oku present at the base of the shari is like the entrance to a cave that encourages the observer to embark on an introspective journey towards what lies beyond.
- The bonsai conveys all its strength thanks to the living vein opposed to the past suffering testified by the shari and jin.
- The suggestion of movement, which is a balance between a refined but also very severe taste, reminds one a bit of the beauty of an old lady, who, like a Geisha, tells of a veiled beauty of great charm.

FREEDOM FROM PHYSICAL ATTACHMENT (Datsuzoku)

- The shape of this bonsai with shari, oku, jin, saba, and the inclination make it unmistakable. These are details that make it unique.
- The shape is unique, and one can see the artist's hand. It is the epitome of *Datsuzoku* because it is a recognizable and inimitable bonsai.
- The presence of the pot with restoration elements in gold with kintsugi technique enhances this value

METAPHYSICAL FREEDOM FROM ATTACHMENT

- Freedom of thought can be noticed in all the details of the shari that give balance to the plant
- Based on the chosen work, the author analyzes the tree's history. These choices are visible only to a prepared observer.
- By overcoming the rules, only after studying, accepting, and internalizing them, can the spirit be allowed to create.
- The pot in which the Geisha is positioned enhances the idea of the search for aesthetic beauty starting from materials worn by time and events. Similarly, in life, imperfections can be exalted rather than hidden.

PHYSICAL TRANQUILITY (SeiJaku)

- The contrast between the sculpture and the canopy represents the juxtaposition between difficulty and its overcoming, the old and the new. These elements represent aesthetic tranquility.
- With this artistic approach, the sculpture becomes part of the bonsai's strength, and the work becomes abstract, informal, certainly not a copy of nature.

METAPHYSICAL TRANQUILITY

- It is the beauty of this bonsai that reveals a veiled world.
- Tranquility also comes from the fact that life manages to prevail over death. Death is there, present and visible to the observer's eye, but life, through the canopy, overshadows it and manages to contain it.
- There is a peaceful coexistence between the author's work, what the plant has to say about its past and what it is now. The observer can enjoy these emotions by connecting and listening to what the plant has to say. The tree communicates these emotions.
- The naturalness and harmony of this bonsai are signs that the work was conceived respecting first of all the plant and a quality of cultivation that makes it healthy and vigorous. Bonsai trees also provide aesthetic tranquility even when they are very vigorous with healthy and bright green parts.

This Shakan bonsai emanates incredible strength and stands out among all the other bonsai for its veiled beauty. Approaching it, you can admire the beauty of the shari where the artist has left his mark without altering it, admire the vein that rests on the shari and nourishes the canopy that wraps the jin like a fan. The bonsai conveys all the emotions of its past, such as the struggle for survival in a hostile environment, but also leaves the hope of the beauty it is experiencing now, represented by the luxuriance of the branches, but also reveals all its potential, what it could become if cared for and nurtured. I believe it is very important to learn the techniques for managing bonsai correctly, but it is equally necessary to connect with them to fully understand their potential. I thank Master Bandera for giving me the opportunity to discover and deepen the technical and above all the philosophical themes related to this art. I think taking care of a plant can help take care of oneself. 🌳

About the Author:

Maurizio Lissolo, a passionate bonsai enthusiast with a deep connection to nature fostered in his youth, embarked on a journey of study and discovery in the world of bonsai. His encounters with Master Massimo Bandera and the acquisition of the Geisha, a magnificent *Juniperus chinensis* bonsai, reflect his dedication to bonsai.

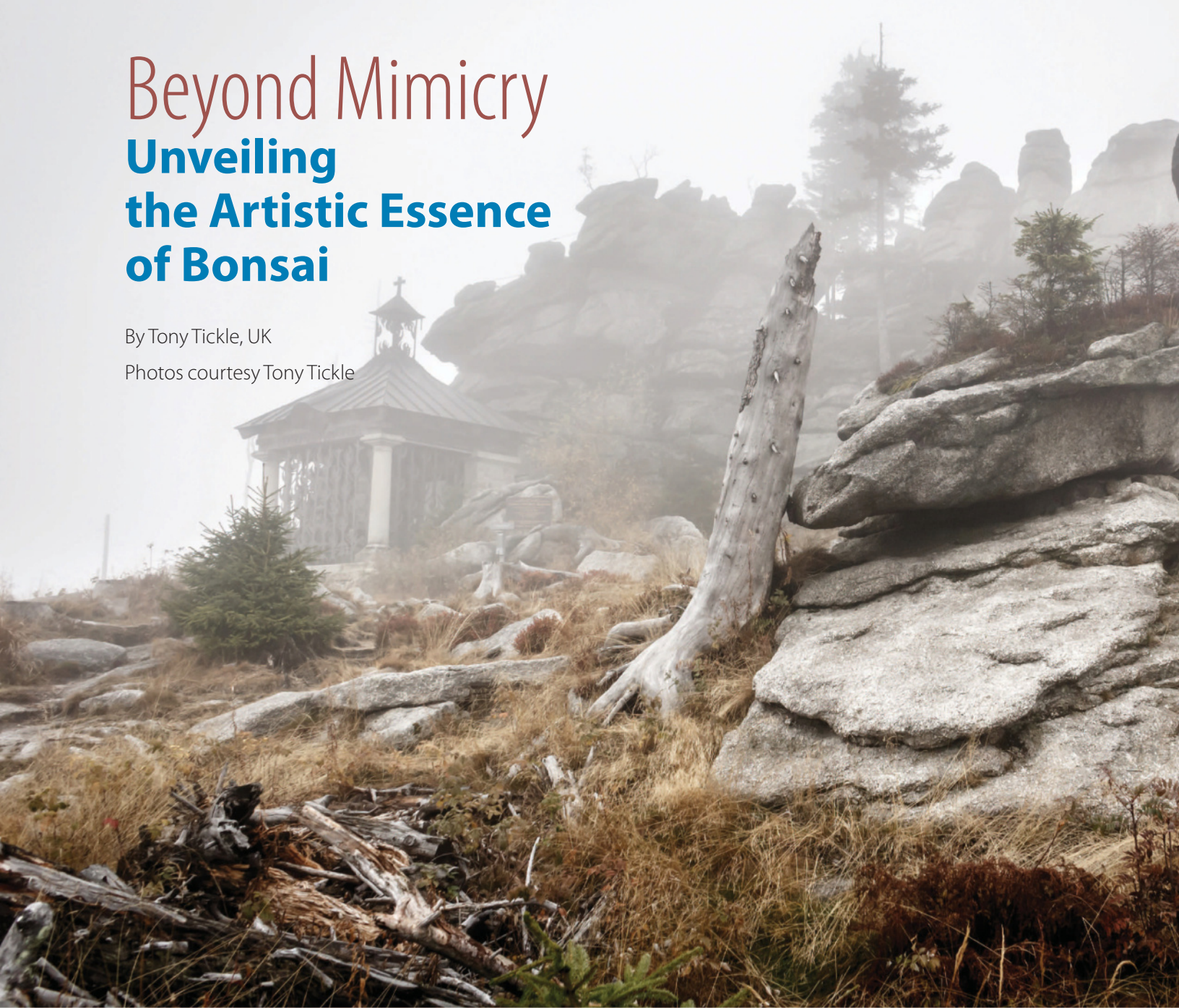


Beyond Mimicry

Unveiling the Artistic Essence of Bonsai

By Tony Tickle, UK

Photos courtesy Tony Tickle



Top: The Author in nature

Facing page:

Top: One of the authors
favorite trees

Bottom: Oak Nebari

In the introspective journey of personal growth through the art of Bonsai, Tony Tickle delves into the profound interplay between nature and nurture, unveiling a plethora of questions that linger in the realm of artistic undertakings.

The fundamental query arises: do we merely replicate nature, or do we engage in the creation of Bonsai inspired by images we've encountered in the work of other artists? Where does one find the wellspring of inspiration when we venture to create our own trees?

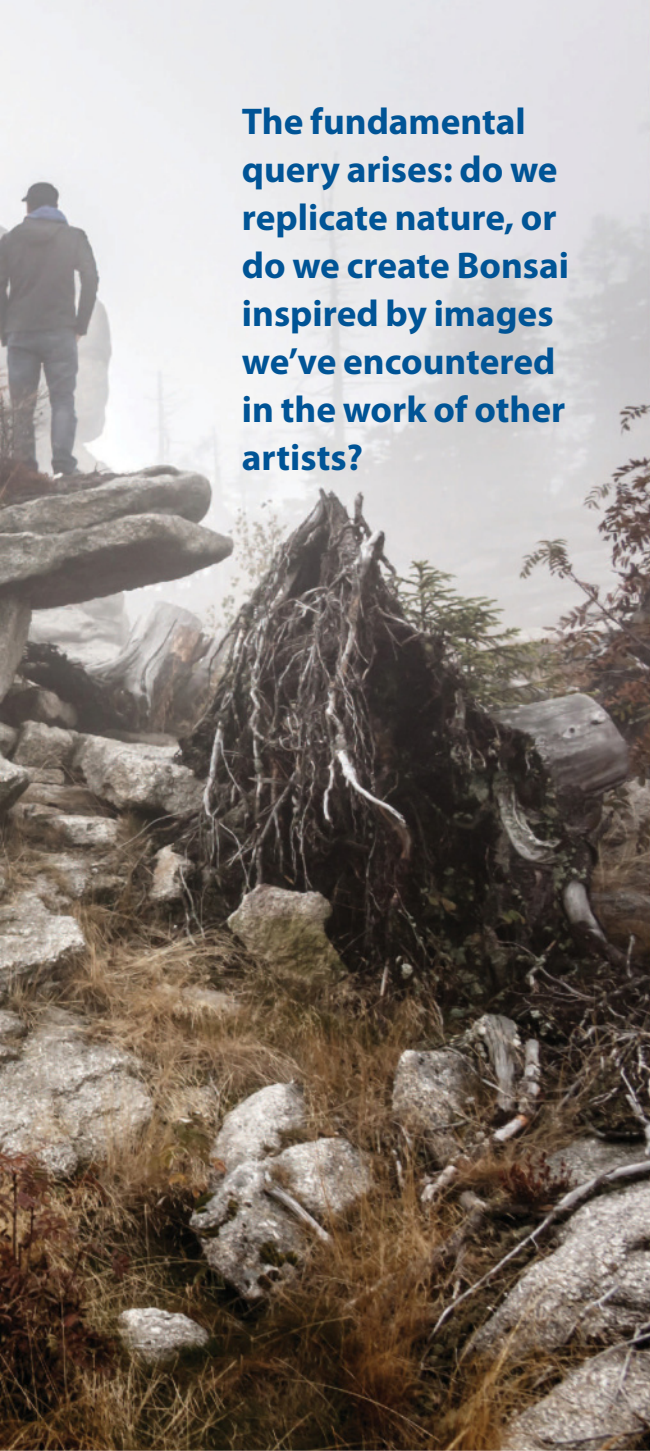
My private Bonsai collection becomes a stage for observing the reactions of non-Bonsai enthusiasts. When queried about their favorites, visitors often gravitate towards the Bonsai that mirrors images familiar to them, particularly those resembling flowering trees or the archetype of a "real tree." I challenge this

conventional preference, asserting that true success in Bonsai lies not in mimicking nature but in eliciting profound thoughts, memories, or ideas in the viewer.

While traveling throughout the UK and Europe, I've developed a fondness for various majestic trees that I make a point of revisiting regularly. Among them, I'm drawn to the intricate branching patterns of deciduous trees, which are most captivating in winter when their intricate ramification is fully revealed. In contrast, towering pines dominate the scenery during the summer, their height emphasized by the lush foliage concentrated at the very top, the inspiration for the literati style.

Having attended numerous Bonsai exhibitions and even serving as a judge at international shows, I've had the privilege of witnessing thousands of wonderful

The fundamental query arises: do we replicate nature, or do we create Bonsai inspired by images we've encountered in the work of other artists?



Bonsai. It leads me to ponder whether Bonsai is, in essence, a form of reordering nature to align with our own perspectives—a meticulous re-creation.

However, I've come to believe that the true essence of Bonsai transcends the mere development of techniques or styles. Instead, it lies in using these techniques and styles as tools to establish a profound communication channel between the artist and the observer. Bonsai, then, becomes a medium through which the artist conveys their unique perspective on the beauty and harmony found in nature, fostering a connection that goes beyond the physical representation of the trees in miniature.

The age-old debate arises: should Bonsai faithfully replicate the growth pattern of tree species in nature, or is it a form of artistic expression that transcends



Top: Winter tree ramification
Middle right: Pavement
inspiration
Bottom: Pines in Scottish Loch

**...look beyond
the municipal
park for
inspiration.**



mere mimicry? Let's delve into questions of styling branches, regional aesthetics like a potential 'European' or 'American' style, and the nebulous distinction between naturalistic and styled approaches. Amidst this sea of inquiries, I believe the subjectivity inherent in artistic preferences—what one likes becomes the guiding principle, and dismissing another style due to a lack of affinity seems unwarranted.

In the initial stages of my bonsai journey, I vividly recall engaging in discussions with fellow club members.



When confronted with a bonsai featuring substantial white deadwood, numerous members expressed disbelief, claiming they had never encountered such a tree in nature. My unwavering response was a blunt suggestion to “look beyond the municipal park for inspiration.”

In my view, the pinnacle of Bonsai greatness lies in its ability to evoke thought or emotion in the viewer. A truly great Bonsai, irrespective of style, technique, or skill level, transcends the superficial and engenders a significant response in the viewer's mind, heart, or soul.

The essence of a truly remarkable Bonsai goes beyond just having a solid concept or flawless execution. True greatness, in my opinion, lies in its ability to create a lasting impression on the observer. Personally, I've spent countless hours studying specific trees in gardens and exhibitions, and I believe this experience transcends mere appreciation—it becomes a form of meditation.

Extending the comparison beyond the realm of Bonsai, I underscore the universal nature of inspiration. It can spring forth from the tranquil allure of a park, the grandeur of towering mountains, or even the ostensibly ordinary crevice in a pavement. The liberty to glean inspiration from diverse sources and transmute a fleeting idea into palpable reality stands as a testament to the limitless potential ingrained in the artistic journey.

The perennial debate of “naturalistic” versus “styled” Bonsai finds its way into my contemplations. Reflecting on the preferences of Bonsai judges and the general public, I note the enduring favor for naturalistic Bonsai, particularly those that emulate the appearance of trees in the landscape. I conclude the ultimate measure of success lies not in adhering to a specific style but in the artist’s capacity to convey the emotional connection they share with the tree to the viewer—a sentiment that transcends the ongoing debate and brings the focus back to the core of artistic expression and its impact on personal growth. 🌲



Top: Broom Style Bonsai: Martin Nielsen, *Bonsai Art Nature*

Bottom: Yew Bonsai by the Author



True greatness, in my opinion, lies in its ability to create a lasting impression on the observer.

BIRTH, GROWTH, AND ACTIVITIES OF THE ARCOBONSAI CLUB

By Gabriele Sbaraini, Italy

Photos courtesy Arcobonsai Club Garda Trentino



Top: “Torre di Arco,” a medieval castle, at 273 meters and reachable with a 20 minute-walk by a path through the olive groves.

Left inset: The Market offering visitors many bonsai and bonsai-related items.

Right inset: The convention venue is the Casinò Municipale di Arco, a 19th century historical building in the Liberty style. It is situated right next to the heart of the old centre of Arco, just a few kilometers from the northern shores of Lake Garda.



Origins and Early Years

In the 1980s, Dr. Carlo Oddone, a veterinarian from Turin, left his medical profession to dedicate himself to bonsai, which had already been occupying all his free time for years, quickly becoming one of the leading experts in Italy at that time.

In 1985, he moved, along with his plants, to Arco, a city which, despite its latitude, has Mediterranean climatic characteristics and is therefore suitable for cultivating various plant species.

Oddone, an amiable and pleasant person, was immediately surrounded by people who had already heard of



The flagship activity for which Arcobonsai is known internationally is its annual “Arcobonsai Convention,” which reached its 37th edition in 2023.



bonsai or had made some attempts at cultivation based on the very modest literature available at that time.

The possibility of enjoying the excellent availability of an expert like Oddone was an immediate bond for these neophytes, who immediately felt supported in approaching and getting to know the wonderful world of bonsai.

At the national level, there were very few reference points; the attempt by Carlo Oddone himself to establish the Bonsai Club Italia had failed, just as the new Associazione Italiana Bonsai founded by Verter Paccagnella in 1981 was utterly



More views of the exhibition venue, the old city center, and the market



Top: The Arcobonsai exhibit takes place in the Celebration Hall of the Casinò Municipale di Arco, which can seat up to 250 people for a gala dinner, and by utilizing other areas, such as the bar and terrace, can be extended to cater for 400 guests. The Celebration Hall can also be set up with a stage or theatre style for meetings of up to 300 people. There are two further smaller rooms, ideal for parallel sessions.

Bottom: Regional club representatives participating in the Arcobonsai Convention pose for a group photo.

unknown and limited to the Piedmont, Tuscany, and perhaps Lombardy regions.

To find answers to the numerous questions that future bonsai enthusiasts exchanged among themselves, the search for possible sources of training began, discovering the texts of Kenji Murata, John Naka, and the images of Paul Lesniewicz. Thus began meetings with exchanges of mutual experiences always under the watchful eye of Oddone, who, however, could not follow everyone, especially since, in the meantime, interest had spread well beyond municipal boundaries, involving a good number of enthusiasts.

So the decision was made to intensely focus on conventions and, after the first experience organized by Oddone in 1986, the second edition held in 1987 saw the Club, although not yet formally established, become the absolute organizer of the event, managing to have the event information published in the magazine of the Associazione Italiana Bonsai (AIB). The amateurs who had immediately called themselves Arcobonsai still had an informal structure. Still, they were already

experiencing their first encounters with other realities, gaining experiences from experts and enthusiasts from all over Italy and even from all over Europe.

Formalization and Expansion

In August 1989, in response to bureaucratic needs, they established themselves as an amateur club, formalizing their existence for “promoting, without profit, spreading and enhancing the cultivation and education of miniature plants, according to the ancient Japanese art.”

Thanks to the support of the Municipality, the Club immediately acquired a headquarters where, with weekly meetings, members exchange their experiences in cultivation and plant styling.

The associative life was expressed in the organization of introductory courses, participation in exhibitions and conventions abroad, meetings with experts in plant physiology and styling, and Japanese culture in general. In the last 10-15 years, the Club hosted twice a year a national instructor who works with members





Left and center: Otsumi Terakawa demonstration, before and after, with club president Gabriele Sbaraini. Right: Marc Noelanders and Gabriele Sbaraini with an interviewer.

on their plants for two days, an initiative full of interest and results!

Perhaps a comparison with the emerging situation at the national level was also facilitated by the Club's involvement with the Associazione Italiana Bonsai. From 1989 until the end of 1992, Carlo Oddone was its president, and Gabriele Sbaraini, president of Arcobonsai then, was its secretary. Their actions revived the fortunes of the National Association, which had entered a deep crisis devoid of members and organizational activities.

Arcobonsai Convention: A Cornerstone Event

The flagship activity for which Arcobonsai is known internationally is its annual "Arcobonsai Convention," which reached its 37th edition in 2023. The 38th edition, scheduled for the end of April 2024, will host the Congress of the Italian Bonsai Union for the eighth time. Without false modesty and based on the testimonials received, Arcobonsai is considered the most important amateur bonsai event nationally. This has led the Club to play an important role in the Italian bonsai movement through encounters with the most important Italian and European masters and experts hosted over all these years. Among these, we can mention Colin Lewis, Peter Chan, Peter Adams, Peter Brawn, David Prescott, Walter Pall, Horst Krekeler, Wolfgang Kohlhepp, Gerard

Vorderwulbecke, Guy Maillot, Romuald Dudà, Luis Vallejo, Carolina Piris, Tamas Biro, Karel Kalous.

Japanese masters include Otsumi Terakawa, who has been in Arco four times, Jura Takashi, who has honored us with his presence also four times, the last of which was on the occasion of the last Convention, and Isao Omachi, whom we invited in 2014 with a fundraiser for the damages he suffered during the tsunami. For the hospitality of the Japanese masters, we could rely on the assistance of our friend Shozo Tanaka, who unfortunately passed away after following the Club since its early days.

Over all these years, we have hosted three European Conventions of the European Bonsai Association, seven Conventions of the UBI, Unione Bonsaisti Italiani, and two of the IBS, the Collegio degli Istruttori Bonsai. As mentioned, however, we will host the XXVIII National Congress of the Italian Bonsai Union, UBI.

The growth of the Club and the events organized by it have benefited from the simultaneous growth of Italian experts, with the unforgettable and enlightening scientific reports by university professors Augusto Marchesini and Ferruccio Poli, the magical reports by Massimo Bandera, who manages to frame the interest in bonsai in the vast field of Japanese culture that supports it, making his performances an event eagerly awaited by bonsai enthusiasts annually. Practical advice for cultivation activities by Luca Bragazzi, Danilo Bonacchi,

We believe that the Club does not have to create super bonsai enthusiasts but to give its members the best opportunities to approach the art bonsai and grow, guided by various masters.

Bottom: Arcobonsai Club Garda Trentino Instructors pose for a group photo.



Top: "Birra, Bonsai e Baraonda" (Beer, Bonsai, and Ruckus) evening, where up to 400 guests dine together in joy.

Middle left and right: Gudrun Benz, left and Massimo Bandera, right, present awards to winning participants.

Bottom: Winner of the BCI Excellence Award.



Arcobonsai has hosted three Conventions of the European Bonsai Association, seven Conventions of the UBI, Unione Bonsaisti Italiani, and two of the IBS, the Collegio degli Istruttori Bonsai.



and Gino Masina remains. Memories also remain of the demonstrations by bonsai masters/instructors such as Sandro Segneri, Mauro Stemberger, Giacomo Pappalardo, Lorenzi Agnoletti, Carlo Cipollini, Adriano Bonini, Stefano Frisoni, Zino Rongo, Salvatore Liporace, Donato Danisi, Gaetano Settembrini, Enrico Savini, and many others who followed in the footsteps of pioneers Giovanni Genotti, Gianfranco Giorgi, Werther Paccagnella, Mario Gomez. Reports and examples are

published on the Club's website (www.Arcobonsai.com).

Already in May 2011, we hosted the So Saku Bonsai Award of the Bonsai Creativo School, which, on that occasion and thanks to the mediation of Massimo Bandera, awarded the plants on display the "Masahiko Kimura Excellence Award for contemporary bonsai."

In the face of somewhat commendable situations of personalism that were growing at the national level along with the spread of interest in bonsai, we accompanied the Convention with a plant styling competition among bonsai instructors and clubs. The spirit of friendship that supports this initiative, with participants evaluating each other and with the absence of extravagant prizes but only a single recognition of the value of the performance, has allowed us to reach the 22nd edition without having to register any disputes. This spirit of friendship represents the sense and the right amalgam that supports the Club first and foremost but inevitably reflects in the tradition of the Convention. Bonsai enthusiasts now participate in this event knowing that they will find this spirit, the friends they have met or reunited here, not only a technical but also a human opportunity; and the highest expression of this spirit is represented by the "Birra, Bonsai e Baraonda" (Beer, Bonsai, and Ruckus) evening, where up to 400 guests dine together in joy.

Of course, an essential corollary of the event is the bonsai and suiseki exhibition, which has allowed the numerous public and enthusiasts to enjoy the presentation of the best Italian and foreign specimens over the years.





Cultural Exchange and Community Engagement

As mentioned, we also try to present other aspects of Japanese culture, materialized through demonstrations of origami, ikebana, shodo, Sumi-e, kusamono, iaido, tea ceremony, kimono dressing, as well as exhibitions of Japanese dolls, katanas, etc.

Arcobonsai has also paid attention to suiseki, with presentations by Willi Benz and presentations and exhibitions by Chiara Padrini, Luciana Queirolo, and Ezio Piovaneli. Thanks to the collaboration with the I.B.S., Arcobonsai has also taken an interest in Chinese Penjing, hosting the Manlung Penjing Organization School from Lingnam with its prestigious masters.

An integral part of the Convention is the bonsai market, which sees the participation of about seventy vendors from all over Europe. Traditional guests are Michèle Corbian, editor-in-chief of the French magazine *Esprit Bonsai*, and Farrand Bloch of

Bonsai Focus, a European magazine published in six languages.

Here are some indicative numbers of the volume of activities carried out by the Club in the 37 editions of the Arcobonsai Convention held up to now:

- We have hosted over 2,440 people
- There have been 166 scientific and technical reports
- There have been 342 demonstrations
- 189 experts from 23 different countries have been hosted
- Over time, 243 Bonsai Instructors and 446 Clubs, including 19 foreign ones, have participated in the plant processing competitions
- 24 Bonsai Schools have had the opportunity to present and demonstrate themselves

To mention a final data point, the last edition of the Convention saw over 300 convention participants, 4,000

Top left: Winner of the BCI Excellence Award.

Top right: Winner of the UBI Award.

Middle left: Winner of the UBI Award.

Top left: Winner of the "Io difendo l'Ulivo" award.



Top: Arcobonsai Award.

Bottom: Arcobonsai Award

visitors to the exhibition, and about 25,000 people who visited Arcobonsai and ArcoFiori.

For the past 25 years, in parallel with the Arcobonsai Convention, we have also organized the concurrent ArcoFiori event, a trade show for floriculture and local products derived from agriculture and breeding, to offer guests the products and beauties of our territory.

Finally, it should be emphasized that for 26 editions, the event has had the Patronage of the Consulate General of Japan in Milan.

Digital Outreach and Modernization

Another aspect is that our mission to disseminate bonsai culture has been dramatically facilitated and implemented with the advent of computerization. In addition to information about the Club and, more generally, about the world of bonsai, we have disseminated all the conventions' proceedings with images of the exhibited plants and, above all, with the reports and demonstrations that have taken place.

On the old website, closed as of November 30, 2018, we had 785,300 visits. We have moved on to diversified promotion using other social media platforms, with significant followings and new views from countries such as Italy, Germany, the USA, France, Austria,



An essential corollary of the event is the suiseki exhibition, which has allowed the many visitors and enthusiasts to enjoy the presentation of the best Italian and foreign specimens over the years.

Switzerland, Spain, the Netherlands, Poland, and the Czech Republic. The website has had 17,201 visits in the last three months, with 41,204 throughout the year. The Club has reached 2,511 followers on Facebook and 1,215 on Instagram.

Impact and Legacy

One aspect that makes us particularly proud is the evaluation of our work by the various institutions of the territory and its inhabitants. Our activity has received considerable appreciation from municipal and provincial authorities and economic operators, especially tourists. This has resulted in economic support, allowing us to face various organizational expenses. Even the local population greatly appreciates our activity, especially for the respect for nature. Over the years, we have organized exhibitions with our plants in other municipalities, offering the proceeds of the exhibitions to local charitable activities.

Reflections and Future Directions

A final consideration for bonsai enthusiasts who want to establish a Club or who are already managing one: we believe that the Club does not necessarily have to create super bonsai enthusiasts but to give its members the best opportunities to approach this fascinating art and grow following the suggestions and indications of the various masters, Italian and foreign, who have trained over all these years. To allow admiring the specimens created by those who, in addition to knowing the techniques, also have the creative and artistic spirit that is specifically required. Being together in friendship, enjoying each other's achievements, and consoling each other in the face of some failures justify even the sacrifices that associationism requires.



The Club has always been a member of the BCI. The recent proposal by Joe Grande, Editor of the Magazine of the Bonsai Club International, to share our experiences with BCI readers worldwide, helping us translate and adapt our story, has been exciting. We are available to provide additional information. 🌲

Thailand

The Land of Smiles

By Min Hsuan Lo and Andrew Lo, Taiwan

Photos by Min Hsuan Lo



Top: A blend of classical and contemporary elements in Bangkok.

Bottom left: Mr. Pisith Ariyaamornkul, President of the Thai Bonsai Association, delivering a speech during the opening ceremony.

Bottom right: The garden featuring Japanese imagery.

This marks the first time Thailand has hosted an International Bonsai Convention, which took place on December 9-10, 2023. The event was held at Aryia Garden Resort, the private garden of Pisith Ariyaamornkul, President of the Thai Bonsai Association. Spanning about 30 acres, the garden is nestled in the serene countryside, surrounded by a beautiful forest and situated upstream of the Kwai River, approximately 200 kilometers from Bangkok, reachable by a 4-hour bus ride.

This marks the second edition of the Bangkok Bonsai Contest, held every four years. The first edition took place six years ago but was canceled due to the Pandemic.

Thai Hospitality

During the convention, the committee invited nine international headliners from five countries:

- Taiwan: Zhong Hong Lee, Ho Jen Lee, Min Hsuan Lo.
- Malaysia: Mike Siow, Mr. Vichit & Simon.
- Indonesia: Rudi Julianto.
- Vietnam: Nguyen Thanh Tam.
- Philippines: Bernabe Millares.

Additionally, 168 international Bonsai enthusiasts from Taiwan, Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Vietnam attended. All 177 international guests received accommodation, meals, and transportation





throughout the convention. Over 50 dedicated women worked tirelessly to prepare meals for the guests, serving delicious Thai breakfast, lunch, and dinner. They would wake up early to ensure breakfast was ready by 7 am. Despite working until midnight the previous night, they displayed joy and enthusiasm. The warmth and friendliness, extended not only by the international crew but also by the local participants, left a lasting impression. Thailand truly is a country filled with genuine smiles that come from the heart.

The International Bonsai Convention was filled with joy and excitement. The nine international headliners showcased their skills and knowledge on the main stage, while 25 domestic demonstrators worked behind the scenes. Though the platform was crowded, the audience had the opportunity to observe the demonstrations up close and interact with the demonstrators. Assistants were also available to help the demonstrators whenever needed. This event was not a traditional bonsai gathering but more like a bonsai festival, combining education, peace, and joy.

Top left and right: The famous historic River Kwai Bridge.

Bottom: The garden featuring Chinese imagery.





Top: Bonsai of various sizes, including middle and shohin size

Middle left: Grand prize winner of the domestic "Creative Competition."

Bottom right: *Baeckea frutescens*.

On the second day, 32 domestic teams participated in the "Bonsai Art Contest," a highly creative competition similar to new talent bonsai competitions in Europe. This competition aimed to encourage more young people to join the bonsai community and showcase their creativity.

While Thailand is well-known for its tourism, not many people are aware of the country's excellence in bonsai. Next time you visit Thailand, don't forget to explore the world of bonsai alongside other attractions. 🌳





Top: One of the largest Bonsai billboards in the world, measuring 4 x 17.55 meters. Photo by Por Thanakon Wannaphuek.

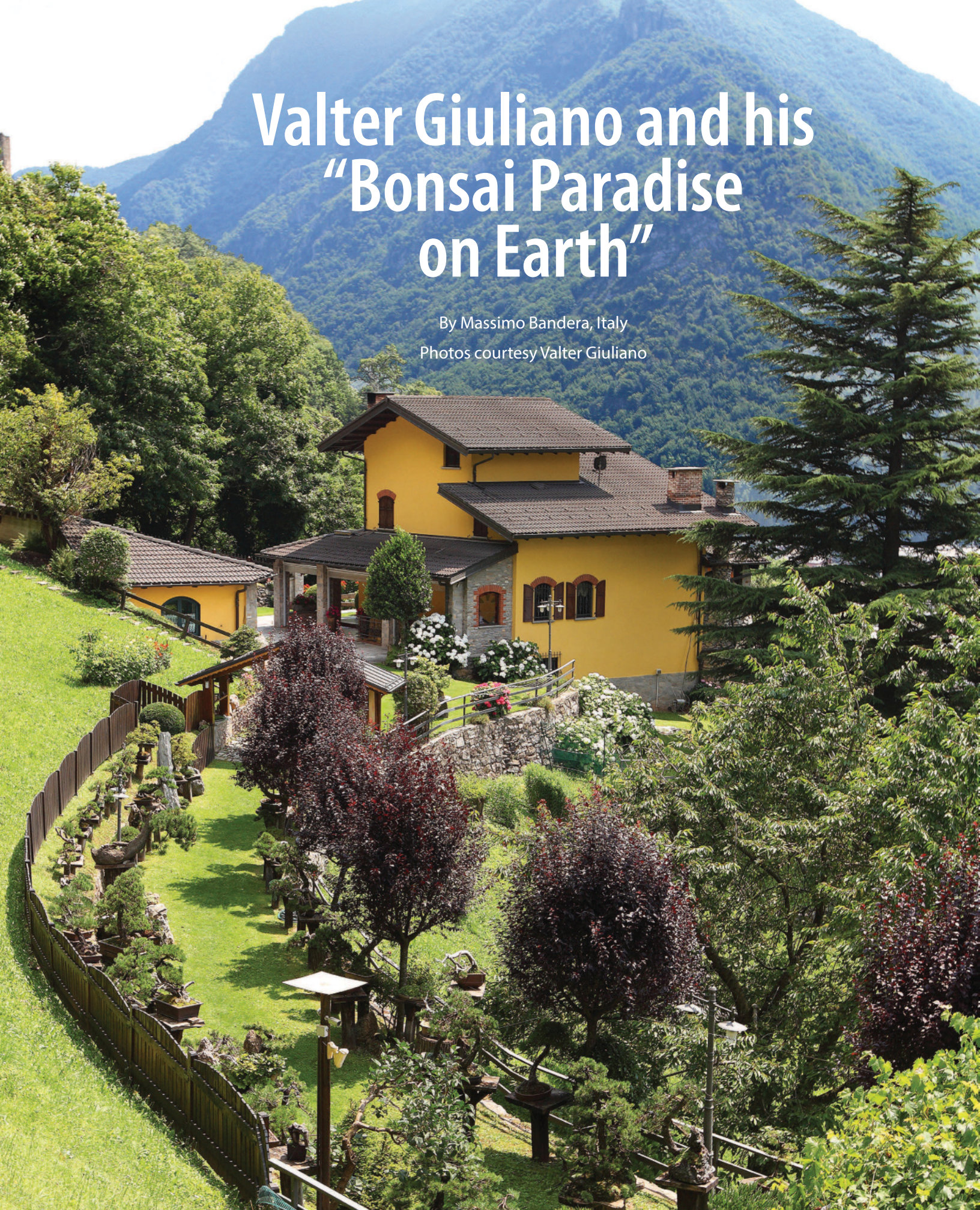
Middle left: *Wrightia religiosa*.

Middle right: *Ficus microcarpa*.

Bottom: Grand prize winner of the exhibition, showcasing a *Premna obtusifolia*.

Valter Giuliano and his “Bonsai Paradise on Earth”

By Massimo Bandera, Italy
Photos courtesy Valter Giuliano



When I first met Valter in the mountains, I immediately realized he was a great artist.

Valter is accustomed to mountain life, work, and the hardships in Vernates in the Italian Western Alps bordering France and captures the taste of austerity. On one side, this austerity reflects the wild beauty. On the other, it is a deep and intimate penetration of refined Japanese aesthetics found in Zen, where nature is the true beauty and the primary teacher.

Today, his marvelous garden called “The Paradise on Earth” (“Loù Paradis su’d la Tèra” in Occitan) contains his collection of over 200 Bonsai. Valter is perhaps an example of how alpine nature, in general, leads to the most beautiful bonsai: wonderful examples of beauty in miniature.

From a technical point of view and regarding cultivation we know what tools they are essential to be able to express his own idea, Walter took twenty years of difficult self-taught work with a few seminars with masters before starting to have sufficient technique to turn materials collected in nature into masterpieces.

Walter’s family has owned mountain lands for generations, allowing him to gather many plants and build an extensive collection of pine, larch, beech, juniper, white maple, hawthorn, and Swiss stone pine. What’s most fascinating about his journey, not initially guided by a physical master but by nature itself, is finding a strong personality and outstandingly realizing his unique bonsai concepts. Perhaps it’s because Valter’s artistic ability and creative flair are remarkable, resulting in a truly personal collection from every perspective.

Sometimes, imperfections due to limited technical pressure and imprecise cultivation lead to a beauty of imperfection. As bonsai age, these imperfections become a characteristic and the most evident element in Valter’s collection. His aesthetics sometimes produce bonsai not appreciated by the bonsai community. However, when he recently exhibited a marvelous Bunjin Pine in a regional show where I awarded it a wonderful prize, it became clear that time in bonsai is a crucial element. Maturing plants achieve great beauty even if the technique is not top-notch. Technique is crucial for quick results, but technique cannot replace time.

In the future, Valter plans to improve his cultivation and technique as an additional challenge to bring forward some of his most promising bonsai to an international award level—an impressive feat for someone over seventy. Besides being a great bonsai enthusiast, having consumed over 20,000 liters of wine, Valter’s passion for hospitality and parties is evident. In the company of friends and numerous guests visiting his garden, he finds a moment of pleasure and peace that becomes constructive in his artistic career. A timeless character, he is now a reference in Italian bonsai for one of the largest collections of yamadori bonsai, perfectly harmonized with his mountain territory. Observing his collection, one learns how yamadori leads to exceptional bonsai, different from the norm and forming the





Valter's bonsai embody the beauty of imperfection, freedom from constraints, natural authenticity, effortless simplicity, and profound mystery.



foundation of the true beauty of masterpieces that define our art: Wabi-sabi, Datsuzoku, Yuugen, and the most refined aesthetic values are present in Valter's bonsai.

The beauty of nature leads to aesthetic values. In the plastic arts of Zen, we encounter the symbolism of Zen beauty, discussing asymmetry, seijaku—meaning not being obsessed with perfection or meticulousness—a free center where imperfection surpasses the perfection of form. Then there's the escape from the mountain world—the famous Datsukoku, freedom of authorship, meaning not being obsessed with things, being free and unobstructed away from stereotypes. Without form, it is free to be any form. Next is the beauty of nature—Shizen, which should not be artificial, as the Japanese word means “as it is,” without artifice, natural, and especially without forcing. This is evident in Valter's yamadori, as they appear very natural. Then simplicity, Kanso, the concept of not being complicated or excessive, is an effortless and spontaneous beauty. Spontaneity is undoubtedly another highlight of this collection, and the character is expert and solemn like an ancient tree. Finally, the deep mystery, Yugen, a hidden resonance in the deep interior, a profound and infinite meaning.

Valter's disciple and friend Carlo Perini says: “I met Valter some time ago while walking in the mountains. After the day ended, I visited his garden, and I remember my first impression was still being in the mountains, in an environment both austere and artistic. Valter is a man with a big heart comparable to an old tree, an

enviable energy, and perhaps one of the most resilient people I've met, with a bold spirit, admirable kindness, and simplicity. In the bonsai world, Valter is a role model for many professionals because he has collected many fantastic native plants, which are now mature, maintaining his unique character in processing and setting without ever changing his mind. At the same time, he tries to improve and refine his technique even today, to make them even more beautiful, but he never deviates from what his bonsai idea is: the natural beauty of plants.”

Valter, who deserves all the best, my greatest wish is that he may be an example for the bonsai community and a reference in our art. 🌲



A Gallery of Valter Giuliano's Bonsai



Fagus sylvatica, *Pinus sylvestris*, and *Larix decidua* collected in the early 2000s are among the first yamadori collected by Valter.





Six *Pinus mugo* with 10 years of work.





A forest of *Fagus sylvatica*, the materials Valter finds in his grandparents' lands grazed by goats and deer, which in a few years become splendid bonsai forests.



Prostrate *Pinus mugo*.



Bunjin styles of *Larix decidua* and *Pinus mugo* on natural slabs crafted by Valter by gluing pieces of stones.

Facing page

Buxus sempervirens, typical of the valley where he lives, are a true specialty of Valter's. He performs hand and router sculpture on the deadwood.

Pinus mugo cascading on a table carved by Valter, who also enjoys making tables; he is a complete artist.

Pinus sylvestris on slabs collected twenty years ago.



Insights

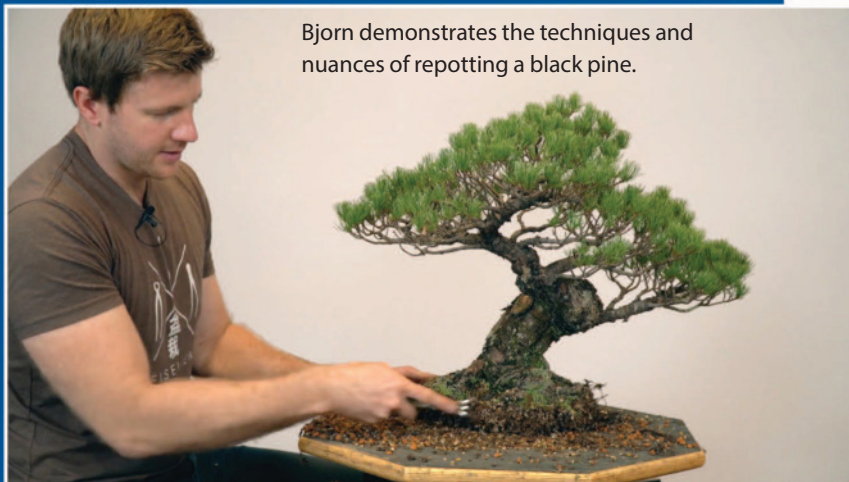
Bonsai Empire's Intermediate Course 3

By Joe Grande, Canada

Bonsai potting substrates explained in detail.



Bjorn demonstrates the techniques and nuances of repotting a black pine.



Root-pruning and balancing the nebari is the focus of repotting a maple.



Enthusiasts of the ancient art of bonsai cultivation have a unique opportunity to delve deeper into the intricacies of tree care through the Bonsai Intermediate Course 3. This course, led by seasoned experts Bjorn Bjorholm and Michael Hagedorn, offers a comprehensive exploration of essential techniques tailored for intermediate-level practitioners.

Repotting, a fundamental aspect of bonsai maintenance, takes center stage in this course. Participants gain valuable insights into repotting techniques meticulously tailored to different tree species. Bjorholm and Hagedorn guide students through the process, discussing the benefits of various substrates and presenting two in-depth case studies illuminating the art and science behind repotting.

Root pruning and root grafting emerge as crucial topics covered in the course. Participants learn advanced techniques to graft roots, offering a transformative opportunity to enhance their bonsai trees' nebari—the surface roots. This skill, when mastered, enables practitioners to achieve symmetry and balance, elevating the aesthetic appeal of their creations.

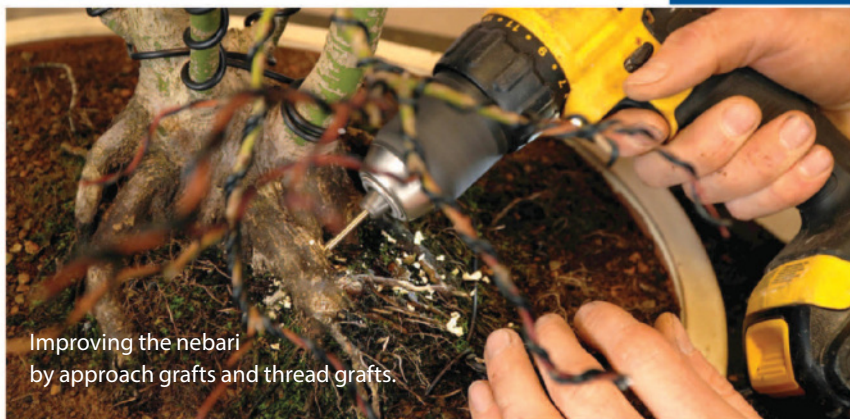
Beyond the fundamentals, the course delves into various facets of bonsai care and maintenance. Accent plant creation, an art form in its own right, is explored, offering participants the tools to create visually striking compositions that complement their bonsai. Furthermore, practical lectures on moss collection and application provide valuable insights into enhancing the authenticity and beauty of bonsai displays.

One of the highlights of the course is the emphasis on preventing pests and diseases, which is essential for maintaining the health and vitality of bonsai trees. Bjorholm and Hagedorn share practical strategies and expert advice to help participants safeguard their trees against common threats, ensuring their longevity and resilience.

With a total duration of 4.5 hours, the course offers a comprehensive learning experience accessible to enthusiasts at an intermediate level of proficiency. Lifetime access to all course materials ensures that participants can revisit and reinforce their learning at their own pace, further deepening their understanding and mastery of bonsai care techniques.

Aspiring bonsai practitioners are invited to embark on this transformative journey, guided by the expertise and wisdom of Bjorn Bjorholm and Michael Hagedorn. Whether seeking to refine repotting skills, explore advanced techniques such as root grafting, pruning, and balancing roots, or enhance the visual appeal of bonsai displays, the Bonsai Intermediate Course 3 offers invaluable insights and practical knowledge to elevate one's bonsai journey to new heights.

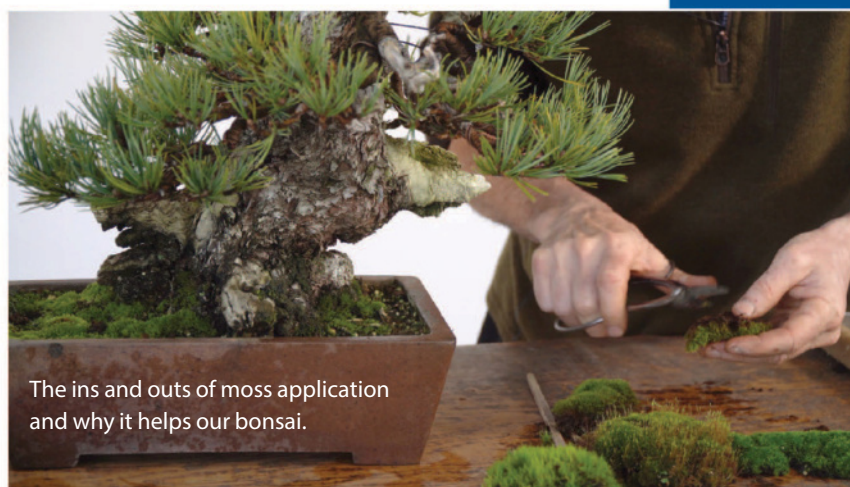
The course is accessible through the Bonsai Empire website for those eager to immerse themselves in this enriching experience. Don't miss this opportunity to unlock the secrets of bonsai care and take your craftsmanship to the next level. 🌳



Improving the nebari by approach grafts and thread grafts.



Pruning theory and demonstration on a raft-style bonsai.



The ins and outs of moss application and why it helps our bonsai.



Learn how to create companion plantings that enhance your bonsai display.

Class Curriculum

Introduction

1 2:02 Welcome

Advanced Repotting Techniques

2 9:04 Repotting theory and tools

3 11:21 Substrate and soil

4 33:17 Case study - Pines

5 34:54 Case study - Maples

Techniques and Care

6 23:35 Approach grafting roots

7 11:45 Thread grafting roots

8 10:48 Creating a Raft style Bonsai

9 31:42 Creating a Clump style Bonsai

10 15:51 Azalea Bonsai

11 21:22 Pests and Diseases

Display essentials

12 12:23 Kusamono and Accent plants

13 13:19 Creating a Kusamono - 1

14 11:11 Creating a Kusamono - 2

15 11:32 Acquiring and applying Moss

Conclusion

16 1:21 Final remarks and next steps

17 C Certificate

LEVEL: Intermediate

TOTAL TIME: 4.5 hours

ACCESS: \$ 69.99 (lifetime access to all materials)

TEACHERS: Bjorn Bjorholm and Michael Hagedorn

LINK:

<www.bonsaiempire.com/courses/intermediate-course-3>

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William N. Valavanis's Japanese Maple
© 2023 Photo by Jen Fonseca

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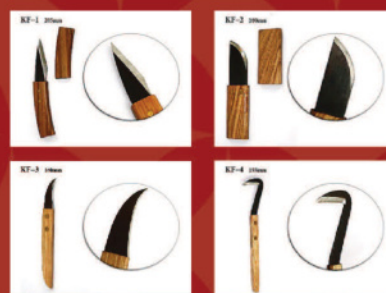
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