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through bonsai



Bonsai & Stone Appreciation

2026
Q2



This *Prunus spinosa* (Blackthorn), yamadori collected in the UK 15 years ago by Tony Tickle, features trunk movement and white flowers. Displayed in a Chinese Jun ware piece, possibly over 100 years old with a Liuzhou-acquired stand, it won Best Composition at The Trophy 2026

The Trophy 2026

Kokufu 100

Lingnan Penjing Exhibition in Hong Kong

AKI-TEN 2025

Hope & Passion, *Ficus microcarpa*

From Zero to Hero, *Pinus mugo*

Francisco Correa: Bonsai in Brazil

A Pilgrimage to The Trophy 2026

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

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

Read more about The Artisans Cup movement at theartisanscup.com

Joshua Roth, proud sponsor of the 2015 Inaugural Artisans Cup, founded by Ryan Neil and Chelsea Neil of Bonsai Mirai, near Portland OR to showcase American Bonsai as a true art form.



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President's Message

Time, ever in motion, brings renewal.

The festive spirit of the Lunar New Year—the Year of the Horse—still lingered across China as bonsai enthusiasts throughout the country returned, with characteristic dedication, to their benches and trees. For the Chinese bonsai community, the art never truly pauses. It is cultivated with the same quiet commitment that shapes a trunk over decades: patient, purposeful, and full of life.

For my part, I had the privilege of gathering with fellow artists and masters from near and far at Baowen Garden in Guangzhou, and of visiting Jiangmen to explore its thriving bonsai industry firsthand. These encounters—rich in dialogue and discovery—reaffirm what we have long believed: that the pursuit of artistry is without end, and that the journey itself is the practice.

The new year has also brought welcome news. The Hainan Provincial Bonsai Specialist Committee has formally submitted an application to BCI to host a regional exhibition in mid-to-late April 2026, dedicated to Bolan (*Carmona retusa*) bonsai—a species of remarkable character, deeply rooted in Hainan's natural landscape. This exhibition will offer a compelling window into a distinctly Chinese bonsai tradition and contribute a fresh voice to the ever-broadening global conversation surrounding this art.

Across the globe, European bonsai continues to inspire. Italy's National Bonsai Exhibition is scheduled for September 2026, and following productive discussions with our Italian colleagues, BCI is pleased to confirm its involvement in elevating this event to a full-scale BCI regional exhibition. We extend a warm invitation to enthusiasts worldwide: come experience the beauty of Italian bonsai and viewing stones, and witness—in the quiet language of branch and root—the extraordinary dialogue that unfolds when East meets West.

BCI has always held its global friendships in the highest regard. We remain steadfast in our commitment to building lasting and meaningful platforms for international exchange. To that end, we are actively working to bring BCI exhibitions back to Houston and Denver—reconnecting with the North American bonsai community and renewing a tradition of collaboration that has long enriched our shared world.



Mr. Chen, Chang, BCI President

Italy's National Bonsai Exhibition is scheduled for September 2026... We extend a warm invitation to enthusiasts worldwide: come experience the beauty of Italian bonsai and viewing stones, and witness—in the quiet language of branch and root—the extraordinary dialogue that unfolds when East meets West.

In the Year of the Horse, we move forward with energy and conviction. BCI will continue to engage the world with openness and practical purpose—broadening the community of bonsai and viewing stone appreciation, deepening the exchange between tradition and contemporary practice, and nurturing an art that grows stronger through every connection it makes.

To all our friends and fellow enthusiasts around the world: may bonsai be our common language, viewing stones our shared bond, and art the path that carries us—together—toward new horizons. Let us move forward, write new chapters, and ensure this art we cherish continues to flourish on the world stage. 🌳

Chen Chang

President, Bonsai Clubs International (BCI)

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

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

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

For more information contact:

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

Message from the Editor

Across continents, this second-quarter issue traces bonsai's evolving conversation—between heritage and experiment, local identity and global exchange. From alpine courtyards to Hong Kong galleries and Japan's most storied halls, the season reveals a community both rooted and restless. In these pages, voices from Europe, Asia, and the Americas reflect on craft, display, and the meaning of gathering now.

In exhibitions, the team at **Bonsai Club Brixen** frames a mountain dialogue of trees and ceramics, where altitude and clarity sharpen the language of display at AKI TEN 25.

Ho Wai Fong and **Kam Chi Wai** chart Lingnan's contemporary pulse, revealing a refined miniature vocabulary that balances vigor with restraint.

At Kokufu 100, **Massimo Bandera** captures a centennial milestone with reverence and precision, distilling what it means for a tradition to reach one hundred iterations without losing its edge. And I reflect on **The Trophy 2026**, a European stage where bonsai's maturity is not a fixed state, but a living dialogue—one that welcomes critique, celebrates diversity, and embraces the courage to evolve.

The articles turn inward. **Min Hsuan Lo** and **Andrew Lo** write with quiet resolve about hope as a discipline, not a sentiment—something practiced daily at the bench.

Piotr Czerniachowski maps a practitioner's ascent with candour, reminding us that mastery is less a destination than a series of honest thresholds.

Mauro Stemberger revisits the transformative vision of **Francisco Correa**, tracing how one artist's clarity can recalibrate an entire regional aesthetic and inspire generations beyond its borders.

In **People**, **Richard Keijzer** offers a tender counterpoint: a shared journey between father and son that reframes The Trophy exhibition as memory-making, where the true prize lies in time spent together. It is a reminder that bonsai's deepest roots extend beyond pots and pedestals into the relationships it fosters.

Our News section introduces a **new website for BCI**, a digital canopy—an initiative led by Bonsai Clubs International—designed to connect members, honour contributors, and support learning across languages and geographies. It signals a shift toward greater accessibility and continuity, where knowledge is not only preserved but actively shared.

Together, these contributions suggest a simple truth: bonsai endures by dialogue—between generations, disciplines, and places—and by the generosity of those who carry it forward. As you read, notice how display becomes language, how pots and trees co-author meaning, and how exhibitions function as classrooms without walls. Consider, too, the patient timelines behind each image: decades of cultivation, a season's risk, a moment's grace. This issue invites you to look closely, travel widely, and return to your benches with renewed intent and a deeper sense of belonging to a living, shared art form—one that continues to grow through every hand that shapes it. 🌳

— 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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| Q1 | J/F/M | December 1 |
| Q2 | A/M/J | March 1 |
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FEATURED ON THE COVER: This *Prunus spinosa* (Blackthorn) is yamadori material that Tony Tickle collected in the UK 15 years ago. The movement and age within the trunk, combined with the brilliance of its tiny white flowers, make it a truly special tree. The pot is a pre-revolutionary Chinese Jun ware piece, possibly over 100 years old, and its colour provides an ideal foil for the bonsai. The beautifully crafted root stand was acquired at the BCI Convention in Liuzhou in 2024. Wonderfully complemented by master Shinji Suzuki, the overall display was awarded Best Composition at The Trophy in Belgium, 2026.



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Hope & Passion

By Min Hsuan Lo and Andrew Lo, Taiwan



2



Preface

“I was once asked: *How can refinement, individuality, and experimentation be balanced?* Achieving such balance seems almost impossible. An emphasis on certain proportions may itself be an expression of personal style, while the pursuit of balance can easily fall into rigid conventions. Refinement, elegance, cleanliness, and perfection have long been the ultimate goals of masters throughout the world, rarely challenged or surpassed. The pursuit of individuality is undoubtedly the lifelong goal of bonsai artists, perhaps even a romantic and elusive ideal, yet it remains one of the essential forces driving the evolution of bonsai civilization. Individuality and experimentation are inseparable; sufficient successful experimentation can establish a

personal style. Yet failure and wasted effort are often the likely outcomes of experimentation. Even so, the possibility of failure must not deprive us of the courage and motivation to explore.”

This text records my pursuit of bonsai during my younger years. It was first published in *Bonsai Journey* in 2010. After many years it has been revised and presented again. Time has passed, and although age has gradually diminished physical strength, my thoughts remain vigorous and passionate. What has never changed is my hope and passion for bonsai.

1 2 2008/05/31 86cm, front and back view.

The evolution of bonsai civilization depends on limitless creativity and transformation in order to elevate bonsai into the realm of true art. Along this path, bonsai artists must endure a demanding process. Each work requires decades of cultivation before it can be considered complete, and only a very small number of works from thousands of experiments will truly endure. Most inevitably fail.

Whether beginning with nursery stock or collected material from the wild, the artist must possess knowledge and foresight in order to plan for decades or even centuries ahead. The bonsai artist must not only control the present and the process but must also foresee the future development of the tree.

There is no denying that Taiwan is a kingdom of *Ficus microcarpa* bonsai. More than a century of cultivation has produced countless masterpieces. Yet throughout the evolutionary process many problems have arisen that must be carefully studied and improved.



This is another story of transforming an old tree. When facing a tree cultivated in a container for more than fifty years, one must approach it with humility and respect, sensing the traces of time and listening to echoes from the past.

Ancient trees in nature are unique spirits, and bonsai that have survived decades in containers possess an even deeper spiritual presence.

3 1990

This tree was acquired in the late 1980s and photographed in 1990 after three years of correction. The main work included adjusting the direction of the trunk, transforming horizontal branches into naturally ascending ones, removing unnecessary inner growth, and encouraging unrestricted elongation of the trunk to increase both thickness and height. A trunk section was also added on the lower right side to fill an empty area.

4 1993

To promote rapid growth, the tree was transplanted into a wide and shallow container. *Ficus microcarpa* is unsuitable for deep pots because most roots develop in the upper soil layers, while deep roots tend to decay.

The lower right branch had already fused with the

main trunk, although traces of grafting remained visible. Trunk chopping combined with branch development is one of the essential techniques for creating aged branches. Unrestricted growth is a necessary method to achieve natural harmony and smooth transitions. Controlled surface damage created by irregular impacts with stones or metal tools produced, after healing over several years, a distinctive sense of age and weathering.

5 1994

The tree was transplanted into an extremely wide shallow container and allowed to grow freely for four years. Heavy applications of organic fertilizer on one side encouraged the rapid development of the lower right branch.

6 1995 Before Operation

By the spring of 1995 the overall length and proportions of the trunk were close to completion. At first glance the future appeared promising, and within a few years the tree might have been ready for exhibition. However, I realized that continuing along this path would inevitably create serious problems that would eventually reduce the tree to failure if left uncorrected.

Bonsai represents the essence of nature, and its form

may be shaped according to the artist's vision. Yet the conditions of container cultivation often produce results that contradict natural growth patterns. One of the most obvious examples in *Ficus microcarpa* bonsai is the development of the main trunk.

The main problem of *Ficus microcarpa* bonsai is that energy accumulates in the main trunk, causing it to expand far more rapidly than the branches. The trunk base had already become abnormally massive, and within only a few years the tree would have become a grotesquely swollen form with lost proportions, a large trunk supporting a small structure—nothing like a natural ancient tree.

At that time the tree still required several years before completion, yet the main trunk had already exceeded the volume planned for the finished work. Continued trunk chopping and branch development would inevitably increase the size of the trunk even further. Each cycle of unrestricted growth followed by pruning would add mass primarily to the main trunk.

The fundamental responsibility of a bonsai artist is honest observation and truthful expression. When problems are discovered, they must be faced and corrected with courage.

Change requires major sacrifice and carries great risk. Even with skill and confidence, complete failure is always possible. Success and failure often lie only a narrow distance apart.

7 1995 After Operation

In mid-June 1995, just before the end of the rainy season, a major operation was carried out.

More than two-thirds of the main trunk was removed, leaving only one-third intact. The entire left side was cut away because it had formed mainly from fused aerial roots, leaving only the original trunk. Portions of the right side were also removed.

Several important principles guided this operation:

1. Extensive prior experience with similar cases allowed a clear understanding of the correct degree of reduction. Large wounds produce abundant aerial roots whose growth rate far exceeds that of the trunk. If only partial reductions are made, the resulting aerial roots may actually increase the thickness of the main trunk. The amount of trunk retained depends on both artistic intention and the preservation of the tree's vitality.

2. Wound healing itself is not a major concern. New roots develop from the cambium and eventually cover the exposed surfaces.

3. Such operations should be performed during humid periods within the growing season, ideally before the end of the rainy season and no later than October. During periods of vigorous growth, new roots develop readily and expected results can be achieved. Such work should never be attempted during autumn or winter.

4. All cuts must be made smoothly with sharp tools to encourage root formation and prevent decay. Wounds should be covered with wet newspaper and sealed with transparent plastic to maintain moisture and stimulate root development.



5. Approximately half of the leaves should be removed to balance water supply and transpiration. If roots are heavily reduced the tree may be kept in partial shade, otherwise full sun is acceptable.

6. Heavy fertilization should be applied during the three months preceding the operation to strengthen the tree, but all fertilizer should be removed about ten days before the operation.

7. An interesting phenomenon occurs after such operations: new roots on old trees quickly develop an aged appearance. Within three to five years they begin to resemble the old bark, and after seven to ten years they become almost indistinguishable from the original roots.

Courage, experience, and sincerity supported me in carrying out this transformation. At the time many people expressed doubt and ridicule. Visionaries are often lonely, yet I enjoyed that loneliness, as well as the recognition that came years later from those who



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followed similar paths. More than anything, I enjoyed the fearless creativity of exploring territory where no one had gone before. In all seriousness, this spirit is the greatest reason why I have devoted myself so completely to bonsai creation.

8 1996

By the summer of 1996 the tree remained healthy and vigorous. New roots had developed and fine roots had already reached the soil. The plastic covering and newspaper were removed at this stage.

9 2000

After four years of growth, fine roots had filled the previously empty wound areas. These new roots were shaped with aluminum wire according to the intended design, producing a very interesting structure.

At this stage the branch framework had become well developed, while the root remained relatively weak. The upper structure was large and vulnerable to wind, requiring supports to prevent the tree from leaning.

Comparing the weak root base at this stage with the completed tree clearly demonstrates that in *Ficus microcarpa* bonsai the most difficult element is achieving



14

smooth and harmonious branch structure in the middle sections, while the root is actually the easiest part to complete.

10 2003

After eight years of development the main trunk had become highly refined, and the overall proportions suggested a mature ancient tree. The root base still required further improvement.

11 12 2003

Some smaller branches on the right side were still incomplete. Aerial roots can assist or accelerate localized growth, but once balance is achieved they must be removed.

13 14 2003

Roots exposed to air and sunlight grow several times faster than those beneath the soil surface.

To achieve balance between root and crown, the roots were exposed. At this stage the roots were still very fine and easily damaged by sunlight. Bricks were used to cover and protect them, maintaining moisture and warmth while encouraging even development.

15 2004

The lower right branch was still relatively weak, so foliage was retained to accelerate growth. Overall balance had been largely achieved.

16 2005

Like branches, the root must be shaped. Aluminum wire was used to guide the roots into a specific design.



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17 2005

18 2006

Gradual refinement continued.

19 2006

In the spring of 2006 the aluminum wire was removed, although some marks remained visible.

20 2008

Fresh green shoots created a lively and delicate atmosphere.

After twelve years of effort the original goal was finally achieved. The overall proportions conformed to the aesthetic principles of bonsai.

The entire process resembled climbing a mountain. Although demanding and exhausting, it was filled with anticipation and joy. Only those who reach the summit can experience the beauty found there.

The Slender Waist

21 A slender waist is a special natural phenomenon in *Ficus microcarpa*, resembling the slender waist of a beautiful woman. It adds elegance and poetic character to an otherwise massive tree.

22 (Right view)

23 (Back view)

24

A flawless main trunk and root system.

25 26

Like all true works of art, each viewing angle reveals a different kind of beauty.







Writing this article has reminded me deeply of the old saying that a single minute on stage requires ten years of preparation. The article itself may be completed in a short time, but the years of creative work behind it are beyond description.

I am grateful to the reader for spending so much time listening to the dialogue between this old tree and myself.

This transformation represents an extremely specialized and potentially dangerous procedure. Words and photographs cannot fully convey the complexity involved. Anyone considering a similar project is encouraged to contact me directly, and I will gladly share my knowledge and experience. 🌲





AKI-TEN 2025

Bonsai, Ceramics, and the Art of Display in the South Tyrolean Alps

Top: Views of AKI TEN opening and exhibit

Bottom: Suiseki by Riccardo Sorbino

Text and photos courtesy
Bonsai Club Brixen, Italy



On the first weekend of November, every two years, the autumn exhibition AKI-TEN transforms the historic alpine town of Brixen (Bressanone) in South Tyrol into a meeting place for bonsai artists, ceramicists, and enthusiasts from across Europe. With its fifth edition, AKI-TEN once again demonstrated why it has become one of the most distinctive bonsai exhibitions on the European calendar.

Hosted by the Bonsai Club Brixen and held at the Forum Brixen cultural center, AKI-TEN combines several elements rarely found together in a single event: a high-quality bonsai exhibition, an international ceramic competition, lectures and demonstrations, and a strong emphasis on the refined art of display. The result is an exhibition that celebrates not only individual bonsai trees but also the broader artistic culture surrounding them.

According to Helmut Bachmann, president of the Bonsai Club Brixen, the exhibition has steadily evolved since its founding. Each edition builds upon the last, gradually raising the artistic standard while preserving the relaxed and welcoming atmosphere that has become a hallmark of the event.

A Carefully Curated Exhibition

AKI-TEN 5.0 featured 52 bonsai presentations, including six tokonoma displays. The inclusion of tokonoma compositions—complete displays combining tree, accent plant, stand, and accompanying elements—reflects a growing interest among European practitioners in the refined traditions of Japanese display aesthetics.

In these displays, the bonsai tree is only one part of a carefully balanced composition. Accent plants, scrolls, or small objects contribute to the overall atmosphere, often suggesting a season, landscape, or poetic theme. Achieving harmony among these elements requires not only horticultural skill but also a keen sense of artistic proportion and narrative.

Visitors to AKI-TEN are often struck by the diversity of styles represented in the exhibition. Trees ranged from rugged alpine conifers evoking the surrounding mountains to delicate deciduous bonsai and refined shohin compositions. Together they reflected the evolving character of European bonsai—deeply influenced by Japanese traditions yet increasingly confident in its own aesthetic voice.

A small but carefully curated merchant area complemented the exhibition. Vendors offered bonsai trees,



Top, left to right: Peter Brunner Landesrat, Bachmann Helmut President BCB, Sami Amdouni Ceramic artist, Frankreich, Francesco Forno, Shohin Expert, Andreas Jungmann, BM Brixen.

Middle: AKI-TEN book, published by the Bonsai Club Brixen. This elegant coffee-table volume showcases the finest displays from the first four AKI-TEN exhibitions.



Bottom left: First Prize: Christian Falk (Italy)

Lower middle: Second Prize: Roman Hussmann (Germany)

Bottom right: Third Prize: Raimondi Matjaž (Slovenia)



Top: Winner of the 2023 Cups:
Thomas Höfer, pot maker/
Bruna Parma, planting

Middle: 2nd Place in the 2023
Cups: Tatjana Malola, pot
maker/Raimund Gebhart,
planting

Bottom: 3rd Place in the 2023
Cups: Luis Seiwald, pot maker/
Francesco Pizzolato, planting

...the bowls are raffled among the exhibitors. Each recipient must then plant a bonsai in the pot and present the composition at the next AKI-TEN exhibition two years later.



ceramics, tools, and accessories, providing visitors with access to specialized materials while also contributing to the lively atmosphere of the event.

The Ceramic Contest

One of the most distinctive aspects of AKI-TEN is its international ceramic contest, which has become a central feature of the exhibition. The competition highlights the important role of ceramics in bonsai art and encourages collaboration between potters and bonsai artists.

In 2025 the contest attracted a record 27 ceramic artists, representing several European countries. The growing number of participants reflects the increasing recognition of bonsai ceramics as an art form in its own right.

The winners of the 2025 competition were:

First Prize: Christian Falk (Italy)

Second Prize: Roman Hussmann (Germany)

Third Prize: Raimondi Matjaž (Slovenia)

Christian Falk's victory was particularly notable, marking his third win in the competition. His work continues to demonstrate an exceptional balance between sculptural elegance and the practical requirements of bonsai cultivation.

Yet the AKI-TEN ceramic contest includes an unusual and engaging twist. Instead of immediately awarding the winning pots to the artists, the bowls are raffled among the exhibitors. Each recipient must then plant a bonsai in the pot and present the composition at the next AKI-TEN exhibition two years later.

This tradition creates a fascinating continuity between exhibitions. The ceramic vessel, initially judged as an independent work of art, later reappears as part of a living composition. In this way the contest encourages a dialogue between ceramic artist and bonsai artist, emphasizing the inseparable relationship between tree and container.

At the 2025 exhibition, visitors were also able to see the results of this process: the three winning ceramics from the 2023 contest, now planted with bonsai and displayed as complete compositions.

Tenpai and Kusamono

Another highlight of AKI-TEN 5.0 was a special exhibition dedicated to Tenpai and Kusamono, curated by Harald Lehner.

Kusamono—accent plantings displayed alongside bonsai—have evolved considerably in recent years. Once limited mainly to simple grasses, they now often feature carefully composed arrangements of seasonal plants, mosses, and small containers. In the context of a bonsai display, these accents provide subtle seasonal cues and help establish a sense of place.

Tenpai, by contrast, are small sculptural objects placed within a display setting. They may represent animals, figures, or abstract forms, and are used sparingly to enrich the narrative of a composition.

The special exhibition brought together a wide range



Top left: Kusamono by Georg Frener / Tenpai Lehner Harald
Top right: Kusamono display (#4). Right: Helmut Bachmann. Left: Roswitta Leimgruber.
Middle left: Kusamono by Plaikner Maria/ Tenpai by Peter Ebersperger
Middle right: Kusamono by Nicola Krivelli / Tenpai by Harald Lehner
Bottom left: Kusamono by Paolo Gaia/ Tenpai by Enzo Ferrari
Bottom right: Kusamono by Sven Berthold/ Tenpei by Terozzi Marco



Another highlight of AKI-TEN 5.0 was a special exhibition dedicated to Tenpai and Kusamono, curated by Harald Lehner.



Top: Georg Frener

Bottom: Bonsai Pot by Sami Amdouni

of examples from different collectors and artists, demonstrating how these small elements can profoundly influence the atmosphere of a display. For many visitors, it offered an opportunity to explore aspects of bonsai presentation that are often overlooked but essential to the overall aesthetic experience.

Lectures and Demonstrations

Educational programming is another important component of AKI-TEN, and the 2025 edition featured a series of lectures and demonstrations that drew large audiences.

Spanish bonsai artist Andrés Álvarez Iglesias had originally been scheduled to participate but unfortunately had to cancel due to a family bereavement.

The lecture program opened with Othmar Auer, who presented an intriguing talk titled “Ceramics Seek Plant.” The lecture explored the relationship between bonsai trees and the containers that support them—an aspect of bonsai design that is often underestimated.



Auer examined how the form, color, glaze, and proportions of a container influence the overall character of a bonsai composition. Rather than viewing the pot as a neutral vessel, he emphasized its role as an integral artistic element that must harmonize with the tree.

Italian bonsai artist Francesco Forno followed with an in-depth presentation on Shohin bonsai. Over the course of a three-hour talk, he shared examples from his own collection while explaining the challenges of creating cohesive shohin displays.

Shohin presentation requires an extraordinary level of precision. The small scale of the trees leaves little room for imbalance, and the arrangement of multiple trees must achieve harmony without appearing rigid or formulaic. For many attendees, Forno’s presentation provided valuable insights into one of the most demanding aspects of bonsai exhibition design.

On Sunday, French ceramic artist Sami Amdouni demonstrated his technique for relief carving on porcelain bonsai bowls. The demonstration revealed the patience and technical mastery required to create detailed sculptural surfaces in porcelain. Unsurprisingly, many ceramic artists attending the exhibition took seats in the front row to observe the process closely.

Community and Atmosphere

Behind the scenes, organizing an exhibition of this scale requires considerable dedication. Coordinating exhibitors from several countries, arranging displays, preparing lecture programs, and managing logistics all demand months of planning.

“Yes, as always the experience was exciting. One could say that this year there was something magical...”
—Enzo Ferrari



Top left: Andreas Holzes1
Top right: Bruna Parma
Middle left: Manfred Huber
Middle right: Walter Resch
Bottom left: Jean Paul Polmans
Bottom right: Chris Pietrse





Top left: Roland Schatzer
Top right: Enzo Ferrari
Middle left: Harald Lehner
Middle right: Helmut Bachmann
Bottom left: Udo Fischer
Bottom right: Joachim schleich



With each edition, AKI-TEN continues to refine its distinctive identity. By bringing together bonsai artists, ceramicists, and collectors in a single setting, the exhibition highlights the interconnected arts that shape the bonsai tradition.





The success of AKI-TEN is due in large part to the commitment of the organizing committee and the members of the Bonsai Club Brixen. Their efforts have steadily elevated the quality of the exhibition while preserving the friendly and collaborative atmosphere that participants value.

Swiss exhibitor Enzo Ferrari captured the spirit of the event in a message to the organizers:

“Yes, as always the experience was exciting. One could say that this year there was something magical. I very much hope that in two years I will be able to propose something worthy again for your fantastic event.”

Such sentiments are widely shared among participants, many of whom return for each edition of the exhibition.

The AKI-TEN Book

Another highlight of the event was the presentation of the AKI-TEN book, published by the Bonsai Club Brixen.

This elegant coffee-table volume showcases the finest displays from the first four AKI-TEN exhibitions. Carefully designed photographs present each composition in a consistent format, allowing readers to appreciate the harmony between tree, container, stand, and accompanying elements.

Interspersed among the photographs are short poems that capture the atmosphere and emotional tone of the displayed scenes, adding a contemplative dimension to the visual experience.

The book reflects the international character of the exhibition: it is produced as a trilingual edition and presented in a high-quality format. • 280 pages • Format: 27 × 30 cm • Hardcover with slipcase • Trilingual edition • Limited to 300 signed copies

With its refined design and careful documentation of the exhibition displays, the book stands as both a record of the event and a celebration of the evolving culture of bonsai display in Europe.

Looking Ahead

With each edition, AKI-TEN continues to refine its distinctive identity. By bringing together bonsai artists, ceramicists, and collectors in a single setting, the exhibition highlights the interconnected arts that shape the bonsai tradition.

The success of AKI-TEN 5.0 confirms the growing importance of the event within the European bonsai community. As anticipation builds for AKI-TEN 6.0 in 2027, it is clear that this alpine exhibition has established itself as one of the most inspiring and thoughtfully curated gatherings in the bonsai world. 🌲

Top left: Josef Auserhofer
 Top right: Ricardo Vinciguerra
 Middle left: Maria Plaikner
 Middle right: Matteo Dal Lago

From Zero to Hero

Text and photos: Piotr Czerniachowski, Poland



Imagine this:

You are on a dream journey into the mountains, searching for the perfect material for a future work of art—bonsai.

You know how difficult it is to find such material, yet you also know exactly what you are looking for: old, cracked, silver bark; abundant natural deadwood testifying to centuries of age; a dynamic trunk line; and a dense, well-developed crown growing close to the trunk. In short, the image in your mind is clear—a very old, healthy pine tree with character and presence.

For such material, a bonsai artist will go to great lengths. Finding it, collecting it, and ultimately transforming it into a bonsai masterpiece is the dream that drives many of us into the mountains.

The pine presented here (*Pinus mugo*) was **not** such material.

Collected many years ago from the Slovak side of the Tatra Mountains, the tree struggled for a long time to survive. Infested with bark beetles, it lost several living branches. The soil it was planted in did little to help the roots recover. In this weakened condition the tree eventually arrived at my AKiNA nursery.



After careful treatment and a period of recovery to restore its vigor, the pine was finally ready for its first styling—a process documented in this article.

About a year before the styling began, the deadwood was cleaned and reduced, revealing the path of the living vein along the trunk. My friend from England, Will Baddeley, carried out this work beautifully. Thank you, Will.

Before styling, the pine measured nearly 190 cm across—an enormous plant with only a single living branch. For any bonsai artist, this represents both a challenge and a risk, especially knowing that a single mistake could end the life of the tree.



Protecting and securing the branches was therefore the most important task during the first stage of styling. For this I used raffia combined with self-vulcanizing rubber tape. The direction of the wrapping had to correspond with the intended direction and rotation of each branch during bending. The placement of the wire followed the same logic. In this case, both aluminum and copper wire were used.



Bringing the branches closer to the trunk required patience. Over the course of four hours, the branches were gradually repositioned in stages using copper guy wires, a carpenter's clamp, and a turnbuckle to provide controlled tension.





The second day was devoted to wiring the remaining branches and determining their final positions. Because light is essential for the development of new buds, special care was taken to avoid shading any potential growth points. Wiring alone took nearly five hours.



After two days of careful and deliberate work, the first stage of styling was complete. The proportions had been established, and the crown had been significantly compacted.





The result was very satisfying. Yet, as every bonsai artist knows, this moment is only the beginning. For this unusual and very old pine—one that has already endured many hardships—the real journey from zero to hero has only just begun..



From Zero to Hero — A Vision of the Future

Today, this mountain pine is only at the beginning of its transformation. The structure has been set and the living line revealed, but the crown will require years of patient refinement. New buds must develop, branches must ramify, and the foliage must gradually be brought into balance with the powerful trunk and ancient deadwood.

The photomontage by the author presented here offers a glimpse of that future—a vision of what this tree may become. Set in a suitable bonsai pot, the composition begins to show its potential: a compact crown emerging from a dramatic, weathered trunk that tells the story of survival in the mountains.

Such visualizations are not predictions, but guiding ideas. They help the artist see beyond the current stage of development and make thoughtful decisions that move the tree steadily toward its ultimate character. 🌲



Francisco Correa

His Vision Changed Bonsai in Brazil Forever

Text and photos: Mauro Stemberger, Italian Bonsai Dream





After years of careful development, they evoke the presence and maturity of yamadori—trees shaped by nature itself—though they began humbly in cultivated soil.

In the southern Brazilian town of Esmeralda, a quiet revolution in bonsai has been unfolding for more than three decades. At its center stands Francisco Correa, entrepreneur, collector, and founder of the Museu do Bonsai—a living testament to vision, perseverance, and passion.

When Francisco first encountered bonsai nearly 30 years ago, he was captivated by the refined masterpieces he saw in Japanese magazines. The artistry, age, and natural beauty of those trees stirred something profound in him. Yet there was a challenge: importing such bonsai into Brazil was not legally possible. For many, that would have been the end of the dream. For Francisco, it was only the beginning.

Building Yamadori from Cuttings

If he could not bring the trees to Brazil, he would create them himself.

Starting from small cuttings, Francisco embarked on a long and patient journey. Over the years he developed one of the most important bonsai collections in South America. His trees are primarily field-grown or carefully collected. His junipers, in particular, are remarkable: built from *Juniperus formosana* stock and later grafted with Itoigawa foliage, they are cultivated in open fields where trunks and primary branches are shaped annually.

This disciplined schedule of twisting and directional growth gives the trees a convincing, natural character. After years of careful development, they evoke the presence and maturity of yamadori—trees shaped by nature itself—though they began humbly in cultivated soil.

In Brazil's subtropical climate, where winters do not halt growth, junipers develop year-round. The accelerated growth cycle allows for rapid refinement when guided by a skilled hand. Under Francisco's direction, time becomes an ally.



A Meeting of Minds

In 2014, thanks to a mutual friend, Mario Leal, I traveled to Brazil for the first time to participate in an event held at the Museu do Bonsai. When I met Francisco, I immediately recognized a kindred spirit. He possesses that rare combination of entrepreneurial determination and pure artistic passion.

What began as a visit evolved into a collaboration that has now continued for more than a decade. Together, we have worked to refine extraordinary trees and, more importantly, to cultivate people.

Escola Internacional de Juniperus

From this shared vision was born the Escola Internacional de Juniperus, with branches in Esmeralda (in collaboration with Rock Junior), in Lajeado (with

Facing page: Mauro Stemberger, left, Francisco Correa, right.



Daniel Haetinger), and in Belo Horizonte (with Fernando Magalhães). The school has become a reference point not only in Brazil but across South America, welcoming students from Colombia, Chile, Argentina, and the Dominican Republic.

The program spans three years. Students begin with raw material—often one of Francisco’s field-grown junipers—and progress step by step toward exhibition-ready bonsai. The goal is not simply to create beautiful trees, but to establish a solid foundation of knowledge. Technique, aesthetics, horticulture, and vision are integrated so that graduates can confidently continue their own artistic journeys.

The results are deeply satisfying. The finished bonsai speak for themselves, but perhaps more important is the transformation of the students. After three years, they possess not only skill, but independence and artistic clarity.

Top left, right and middle left: field-grown junipers styled and presented in alcoves with companion plants.

Bottom: Students begin with raw material—often one of Francisco’s field-grown junipers—and progress step by step toward exhibition-ready bonsai.

Facing page: Mauro and colleagues style a field-grown juniper.





A Museum with a Mission

The Museu do Bonsai is more than a collection. It is an active cultural center dedicated to education and inspiration. Each year, at the end of May, it hosts a major bonsai exhibition that draws enthusiasts from across Brazil and beyond. Workshops, demonstrations, and

courses are offered throughout the year, reinforcing its role as a dynamic hub for bonsai development in South America.

Visitors to Esmeralda encounter not just trees, but a philosophy: that excellence can be built locally through patience, discipline, and shared knowledge.

This and facing page: Another example of a field-grown juniper expertly styled by Mauro and his Escola Internacional de Juniperus colleagues.



For more information about the museum, annual exhibitions, and educational programs, visit:
www.museudobonsai.com.br

You may also follow my ongoing work and collaborations in Brazil through my YouTube channel, Bonsai Dream.





A Personal Reflection

As a bonsai professional, I feel blessed to have met Francisco and the many passionate students of Brazil. They have helped me grow—not only as a teacher, but as a person. Bonsai, at its highest level, is not about possession or prestige. It is about community, shared effort, and the courage to pursue a vision.

Francisco Correa dared to imagine world-class bonsai growing from Brazilian soil. Today, that vision stands before us—alive, thriving, and shaping the future of bonsai in South America. 🌲





Top: Shohin Penjing : The Winner of "The Most Popular Penjing Award"

United for the Future

Lingnan Penjing (Miniature) Exhibition in Hong Kong

By Ms Ho Wai Fong and Mr Kam Chi Wai, Hong Kong

Photos courtesy KASH Art Center

From January 24 to February 5, 2026, the Forsgate Conservatory at Hong Kong Park was transformed into a sanctuary of miniature penjing and cultural harmony. The Lingnan Penjing (Miniature) Exhibition: United for the Future, organized by the KASH Art Center, was not only a celebration of artistry but also a landmark of unity. With 8,056 visitors and nearly 80 pots of miniature penjing representing 26 species, the exhibition became a living testament to the power of collaboration and shared heritage.

For the first time in Hong Kong's history, local penjing clubs and associations joined forces to present their miniature masterpieces in one coordinated effort. The KASH Art Center played a crucial role as a bridge, harmonizing diverse groups into a single collective voice. This unity was the heart of the



Top right: Ms. Chen Zhaonian, Vice President of Bonsai Clubs International, presented a valuable souvenir to the organizer of the exhibition (KASH Art Center Company Limited)

Top left: Mr. Fu Yan Tong (Middle) and Ms. May Ng (2nd left) introduced their Shohin Penjing, *The Stone's Rhythm of Lingnan, a Realm Unto Itself*, to Ms. Chen Zhaonian, Vice President of BCI, China (Right)

Upper middle right: Indonesia Youtuber, Ms. Wahyuni Sri (left), introduced her exhibit to visitors

Middle left: Ms Chan Wai Yu introduced her penjing (*Diospyros vaccinioides*) to visitor.

Lower middle right: Ms Ho Wai Fong provided guided tour to tourists.

Bottom: Ms. Chen Zhaonian, Vice President of Bonsai Clubs International, China, led all leaders of Penjing clubs/associations in Hong Kong and stakeholders for opening ceremony



Top left: The exhibit, *Diospyros vaccinioides*, from Association of Horticulture, Lantau Island (大嶼山園藝協會)s

Top right: The exhibit, *Juniperus*, from Hong Kong Penjing and Artstone Research Institute (香港盆景文化研究會).

Middle right: *Malpighia glabra* 'Li' with rock

Bottom left: *Fortunella venosa* with rock

Bottom right: *Phyllanthus cochinchinensis* with rock

For the first time in Hong Kong's history, local penjing clubs and associations joined forces to present their miniature masterpieces in one coordinated effort.





exhibition. It demonstrated that penjing is not the possession of one club or one artist, but a shared cultural treasure nurtured by many hands.

In addition, the presence of 23 local penjing artists, alongside an enthusiast from Indonesia, underscored how collaboration transcends borders, enriching the art form and strengthening bonds across communities. This united front was more than symbolic—it was practical. By pooling resources, expertise, and creativity, the penjing clubs and associations were able to present a richer and more diverse exhibition than any could have achieved alone. Visitors were not simply viewing individual works; they were witnessing the collective spirit of Hong Kong's penjing community, united for the future.

Another highlight of the exhibition was the publication of a thoughtful article titled in Chinese 「樹勢論」. This article was jointly endorsed by the participating clubs and associations. This intellectual contribution was a powerful gesture of unity and the sharing of knowledge. By agreeing to present this

article together, the clubs demonstrated that penjing appreciation is not about individual ownership but about shared understanding. The article guided visitors to look beyond surface beauty, encouraging them to see penjing as a living philosophy—embodying resilience, balance, harmony, expression, and inspiration. It served as a reminder that penjing is not only a living art form but also a way of thinking about life and nature.

Top left: Serissa japonica with rock

Top right: Malpighia coccigera with rock

Bottom left: Phyllanthus cochinchinensis with rock

Bottom right: Euphorbia milii with rock



Top left: *Fortunella venosa*

Top right: *Zanthoxylum beecheyanum*

Middle left: *Malpighia glabra* 'Li'

Middle right: *Zanthoxylum beecheyanum*

Bottom left: *Pyracantha fortuneana*

Bottom right: *Fortunella venosa*



In addition, the presence of 23 local penjing artists, alongside an enthusiast from Indonesia, underscored how collaboration transcends borders...





Top left: *Ficus microcarpa*
 Top right: The forest of black pine from KASH Art Center Company Limited (卡思藝術中心有限公司)
 Middle left: *Sageretia theezans*
 Middle right: The exhibit, *Ficus microcarpa*, from Ching Chung Taoist Association (青松觀)
 Bottom left: *Ficus microcarpa* var. *Crassifolia*
 Bottom right: *Podocarpus macrophyllus* (Title: Dance with Ascending Grace)



Top left: *Bougainvillea spectabilis*

Top right: *Ponamella pragiliagagnep*

Bottom left: *Ponamella pragiliagagnep*

Bottom right: The exhibit, *Buxus sinica* (both) from Wun Chuen Sin Kwoon, (雲泉仙館)



The exhibition was designed to welcome and involve the public. An opinion survey, including a vote for the “My Favorite – Most Popular Penjing Award,” allowed visitors to select their favorite penjing. A total of 423 votes were cast, turning appreciation into active participation. This democratic element gave attendees a sense of ownership and connection to the exhibition. The satisfaction rating from the opinion survey was 4.89 out of 5, reflecting the overwhelming enthusiasm, joy, and appreciation of the public. It showed that the exhibition not only met expectations but exceeded them, leaving a lasting impression on visitors.

Live pruning demonstrations revealed the delicate artistry behind each miniature landscape, while two hands-on workshops gave participants practical skills.

The positive feedback underscored how shared learning strengthens community bonds and deepens appreciation. Moreover, a WhatsApp group was established among participants to facilitate follow-up action, ensuring that the spirit of unity and learning would continue beyond the exhibition itself.

Penjing was expressed as a living art, and unity was also expressed through a diversity of artistic activities. Chinese calligraphy sessions, origami workshops featuring plants and flowers, hand-weaving workshops, and educational talks on ecosystems for both the public and students expanded the exhibition's scope. These activities reminded visitors that penjing is part of a larger cultural ecosystem—an art that thrives when connected with other traditions. The exhibition celebrated both variety and harmony, showing how different forms of creativity can coexist and complement one another.

To ensure that no visitor was left behind, guided tours were offered continuously—every hour throughout the exhibition. This dedication reflected the organizers' belief that knowledge should be shared generously, echoing the united spirit of the clubs. The opening ceremony was graced by Ms. Chen Zhaonian, Vice President of BCI, China, whose speech emphasized the global resonance of this collective effort. Her presence underscored that the unity achieved in Hong Kong was not only local but also part of a worldwide movement to preserve and promote penjing.

The true achievement of the exhibition was not only the beauty of the miniature penjing but also the unity of the people behind them. By standing together, local penjing clubs and associations demonstrated that collaboration magnifies impact. Their joint effort allowed the public to see penjing as a cultural treasure belonging to all, rather than to any single group. This united front set a precedent for future exhibitions, proving that when communities work together, traditions flourish and reach wider audiences. It also ensured that penjing in Hong Kong will continue to thrive.



Top: The exhibits from Institute of Lingnan Penjing, Hong Kong (香港嶺南盆景藝術學會)

Bottom: The exhibit, *Diospyros vaccinioides*, from Sha Tin Bonsai Association (沙田盆栽會)

The exhibition showed that unity is not only about the present—it is about securing the future of penjing for generations to come.

The success of the Lingnan Penjing Exhibition was built on the dedication of many: clubs, associations, individual contributors, international participants, and the enthusiastic public. Thanks to all stakeholders, the exhibition became a living testament to the power of unity. It showed that penjing is not just miniature art—it is a collective vision for the future, rooted in shared heritage and nurtured through collaboration. 🌱



Kokufu 100

An Epic Edition



By Massimo Bandera, Italy

Photos courtesy Massimo Bandera.

Top: Kimura's masterpiece featuring 15 years of Itoigawa grafts.

Bottom: A section dedicated to archival images from the early Kokufu exhibitions of the 1930s, illustrating the extraordinary evolution of Japanese bonsai throughout the twentieth century.

The 100th edition of the Kokufu Bonsai Exhibition, held at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum in Ueno, was truly extraordinary. Experiencing this historic milestone was unforgettable.

As usual, the exhibition was divided into two sessions and featured more than 350 masterpieces. The overall level was exceptionally high due to a rigorous selection process. Dozens of former prize winners were on display, along with some of the most extraordinary bonsai ever presented—trees that rank among the finest examples in the history of the art.

The top prize winners were especially impressive. Their size and presence are impossible to fully appreciate in photographs; in person, they are simply breathtaking.

Particularly moving were the junipers by Masters Kato, Kimura, and Suzuki—trees that conveyed an indescribable emotional impact. Standing before them was a reminder of the profound artistry and dedication that defines the highest level of bonsai.

For me personally, this exhibition also marked a deeply meaningful milestone. This year celebrates fifty years since I began practicing bonsai, and I chose this moment to exhibit one of my own trees at Kokufu for





Top: The Fuji Room at the Imperial Palace Hotel, venue of the Kokufu 100 Grand Gala—a day of truly remarkable events.

Middle, left to right:

One of the most emotional moments was the opening toast of the Grand Gala: a resounding “Kampai!” with sake served in traditional Chamaecyparis wooden cups engraved with the Kokufu 100 logo. With the ceremonial mallet striking the cask, we toasted the event—and, of course, kept the cups as mementos.

Mrs. Nobuko, wife of the Emperor’s cousin, delivered an extended address of great historical and cultural significance. The Imperial Family continues to play an essential role in major bonsai events, and Imperial Bonsai remains profoundly important today.

The invitation to participate. Invitations to the Grand Gala were extended by the Nippon Bonsai Association and its sponsors, and issued by leading masters and authorities.



The central message that emerged from this historic gathering was clear: The future of bonsai is moving toward a more natural expression.

the first time. The tree was a Japanese white pine, which was accepted into the Kichō category—reserved for monumental and highly significant bonsai in Japan.

I also had the privilege of presenting a tree by my student Emanuele Cappellano, an important Japanese black pine previously from the renowned Oguchi collection. The tree was carefully prepared for the exhibition by Alessandro Bonardo, and Master Masahiko Kimura generously lent historic antique containers for the display.

Beyond the exhibition itself—already a once-in-a-lifetime event—another extraordinary moment was the Grand Gala organized by the Nippon Bonsai Association. The celebration was held at the Imperial Palace in the Fuji Hall, where the masters organized an impressive evening that blended speeches, bonsai

demonstrations, cultural performances, and refined cuisine. There were dance performances, music, and an exhibition of exceptional bonsai masterpieces.

Master Kimura personally invited me to attend. The opening portion of the gala was strictly by invitation, limited to 200 guests, selected from among the most dedicated figures in the contemporary bonsai world. I learned of the invitation only at the last moment—it had been sent through my teacher, Kimura, who informed me just the day before. Attendance was reserved for true devotees of bonsai, and only a very small number of foreign guests were included.

The invitation itself was not commercial in nature; it was extended directly by the Nippon Bonsai Association. In keeping with Japanese custom, however, guests were encouraged to offer a donation presented in a traditional



ribboned envelope (*noshi-bukuro*), a gesture of respect and appreciation for the occasion.

One particularly moving moment was the presence of Lady Nobuko, the wife of the Emperor's cousin, who attended as a representative of the Imperial Family. In her speech she spoke eloquently about the historical importance of bonsai to Japan and its cultural heritage.

The event was distinctly Japanese in character rather than international in scope. Yet it revealed, in a very profound way, the historical depth of bonsai in Japan—an art refined over centuries. It also highlighted the exceptional quality of the masterpieces we can admire

Top left: Carlo beside Suzuki's Kokufu Prize-winning juniper—another monumental tree in a more classical style.

Top right: Alessandro Bonardo poses beside the historic Japanese black pine of Oguchi, exhibited by my student Emanuele Cappellano in celebration of his fiftieth birthday.

Bottom: Massimo stands beside his Kichō Japanese white pine (*Pentaphylla*), exhibited at Kokufu for the first time—a tribute to fifty years in bonsai. For the occasion, Kimura lent me this magnificent Taishō-watari container. In two years, after export certification, the bonsai will arrive in my garden.





Top row, left to right:

Takahiro Kato, fifth-generation master of Mansei-en, is today one of the most influential figures in bonsai.

Shinji Suzuki, alongside Kato, exhibited an extraordinary award-winning juniper.

Massimo with Master Kimura. I was honored to be invited by my teacher, to whom I extend my deepest gratitude.

Kunio Kobayashi was another key figure at the Grand Gala, presenting a demonstration in collaboration with his students.

Middle left: This yew is, in my view, one of Kimura's finest works—a famous Kichō, previously exhibited at the World Bonsai Convention. It belongs to one of the master's collectors and a major supporter of Japanese bonsai.

Middle right: In mid-February, the flowering ume—abundant at Kokufu—comes into bloom. Occasionally, flowering cherries are also exhibited for their beauty, advanced through greenhouse cultivation.

Bottom: Another absolute masterpiece from Takahiro Kato's collection displayed at the Imperial Palace—one of the finest Japanese white pines ever seen, set in a superb Kowatari container. Holding numerous prestigious roles, Kato represents the institution of bonsai itself. His garden houses one of the richest collections of historic masterpieces.



Top left: Kato's Kokufu Award-winning juniper, a million-dollar masterpiece of breathtaking beauty, displayed in the 74 cm Taishō-watari container lent by Kimura.

Top right: A historic Japanese black pine from Kato's collection, renowned for its exceptional bark. Kato told me it began as a modest plant, but a century in a pot transformed it into a masterpiece—time creates masterpieces.

Middle right: One of the oldest Zuisho pine mother clumps.

Bottom left: One of the ten Kokufu 100 awards was given to this extraordinary monumental flowering quince, displayed in a beautifully decorated container featuring fan motifs.

Bottom right: *Carpinus coreana*, spectacular ramification, First Prize in the Deciduous category.





Top left: A magnificent pine. This edition also featured older bonsai expressing a refined aesthetic of imperfection—subtle and highly sophisticated.

Top right: The legendary nebari of Kokufu maples are astonishing when seen in person.

Middle left: Red-flowering *Prunus mume*

Middle right: *Acer palmatum* var. *Shishigashira*

Bottom: As at every Kokufu exhibition, Murata presented a piece from the Imperial Collection. In this edition: an ancient Japanese red pine displayed with a Kawamoto container, set against gold screens and a traditional purple cloth.



(Kokufu 100) also highlighted the exceptional quality of the masterpieces we can admire today, not only in the trees themselves but also in the extraordinary ceramics and containers that accompany them.



Top left: The famous juniper by Moriyama that won the Sakufu 2021—stunning in person

Top right: white-flowering *Prunus mume*

Bottom left: As in every Kokufu, the Shohin, Kifu, and Chuhin sections showcase the very best of Japan.

Bottom right: flowering cherry, *Prunus serrulata*



today, not only in the trees themselves but also in the extraordinary ceramics and containers that accompany them.

In my fifty years practicing bonsai—and after many trips to Japan—I have experienced countless memorable moments. Yet I had never before witnessed a gala so remarkable, so artistic, and so deeply rooted in the spirit of bonsai. Sharing this experience with my teacher, Master Kimura, and many of the most important figures in the bonsai world made it truly unforgettable.

The central message that emerged from this historic gathering was clear: The future of bonsai is moving toward a more natural expression.



Top left: *Juniperus chinensis*

Top right: Carlo poses beside one of the finest junipers in Japan—an absolute masterpiece.

Middle left: *Picea jezoensis*

Middle right: My friend Francesco Morettin exhibited this splendid pine at Kokufu 100 in memory of a dear friend and central figure in the Italian bonsai community who recently passed away. Kimura lent the Kowatari container for the display.

Bottom: *Pinus parviflora* on a Kurama stone slab



The Trophy 2026

A Living Dialogue Between Tradition and Europe's Bonsai Maturity



By Joe Grande, Canada

Photos courtesy Bonsai Association Belgium

Top: On stage, Shinji Suzuki and Hiroaki Suzuki embodied a living lineage of Japanese bonsai, joined by students Manuel Turpin and Theo Zimmerman—a global reflection of their teaching, with Peter Warren guiding the dialogue.

Bottom: the Bonsai Association Belgium team and guests, who organized and produced The Trophy.

Facing page: Views of the exhibition in Limburg Hall in Genk.





The 2026 edition of **The Trophy**, organized by the Bonsai Association Belgium, once again affirmed its status as one of Europe's premier bonsai exhibitions. Held at the Limburg Hall in Genk, the event welcomed approximately 5,000 visitors—an impressive increase that reflects both the vitality of the European bonsai scene and the enduring appeal of this uniquely immersive exhibition. As in previous years, The Trophy succeeded as a display of refined trees, and just as importantly, as a meeting point of cultures, generations, and philosophies within the bonsai world. A central highlight of the 2026 edition was the presence of Shinji Suzuki and his son Hiroaki Suzuki. Representing a direct lineage of Japanese bonsai

Top: Best Broadleaf Tree
Carpinus coreana, by Mark
and Ritta Cooper (United
Kingdom).

Bottom: Best Conifer
Taxus baccata, by Andrés
Alvarez (Spain).



tradition, their demonstrations offered more than technique—they conveyed a philosophy rooted in restraint, observation, and long-term vision.

They were joined on stage by two of their students: Manuel Turpin from L'île de la Réunion (a small island in the Indian Ocean), and Theo Zimmerman, illustrating the global reach of Suzuki's teaching.

As noted by Peter Warren—who served as translator throughout the demonstrations and discussions—"European bonsai has reached a level where dialogue with Japan is no longer imitation, but conversation." His role extended beyond translation; he contextualized the Suzuki approach for a European audience increasingly confident in its own aesthetic voice.

A particularly moving tribute accompanied the demonstrations: a curated lineup of 16 bonsai originally created by Suzuki and imported into Europe years ago. Their reunion in Genk formed a rare and powerful narrative—trees shaped in Japan, matured in European hands, and revisited by their creator. During dedicated morning sessions, Suzuki offered commentary on their



Top: Best Composition
This *Prunus spinosa*, by Tony Tickle (United Kingdom), is featured on the cover of this issue.

Bottom: Best Tree (BAB Member)
Chaenomeles sp., by Lydie Carpentier (Belgium).



Top; A remarkable 30-meter wall of antique scrolls, presented for the first time from a private collection.

Bottom: Angela Ramirez, North American Bonsai Pottery Competition (NABPC), contributed an international dimension by presenting selected winners from major U.S. competitions.



development, emphasizing the passage of time as a co-creator in the art of bonsai.

European Excellence: Collections and Composition

Complementing the Suzuki tribute was a distinguished presentation of 16 mature bonsai from Udo Fischer's collection. Fischer's trees, known for their technical refinement and naturalistic structure, demonstrated the depth of European bonsai at its highest level.

The broader exhibition featured 97 bonsai in total, which included 19 Kifu-sized trees, 15 Shohin compositions, and one Mame composition.

This range highlighted a diversity of scale and Europe's growing sophistication in composition and display. The Shohin displays in particular reflected a nuanced understanding of rhythm, spacing, and seasonal storytelling—areas once considered uniquely Japanese domains.

Angela Ramirez, North American Bonsai Pottery Competition (NABPC), contributed an international dimension by presenting selected winners from major U.S. competitions, further reinforcing The Trophy's role as a global crossroads.

Beyond Trees: The Expanding Language of Display

True to its philosophy, The Trophy extended beyond bonsai to embrace the full ecosystem of display arts:

- 52 suiseki (viewing stones), forming a contemplative counterpoint to the living trees.
- A comprehensive exhibition of bonsai pots, spanning artisan-made works and historic collector pieces.
- A remarkable 30-meter wall of antique scrolls, presented for the first time from a private collection.

This integration reflects what many contemporary authors—including François Jeker—have emphasized:



“bonsai is not an isolated object, but part of a composed visual and cultural language.” The inclusion of scrolls at such a scale signals a maturation in European display, moving closer to the tokonoma ideal while still interpreting it through a distinctly Western lens.

Commerce, Community, and Celebration

No account of The Trophy would be complete without its vibrant commercial and social dimensions. The bonsai market, featuring approximately 110 traders,



Top: 52 suiseki (viewing stones), forming a contemplative counterpoint to the living trees.

Middle: Complementing the Suzuki tribute was a distinguished presentation of 16 mature bonsai from Udo Fischer’s collection. Fischer’s trees, known for their technical refinement and naturalistic structure.

Bottom left: Best Suiseki Waterfall stone (Taki-ishi, Ibigawa stone), owned by Igor Carino (Italy).

Bottom right: Best Suiseki Display

Distant mountain stone (Toyama stone, Setagawa stone), owned by Eric Sardi (France).



Top left: Unglazed pot nomination: Juri Martens.

Top right: Best Chokkan *Cryptomeria japonica*, by Andrés Alvarez (Spain).

Middle left: Glazed pot nomination: Fusion Ceramics.

Bottom: Decorated pot nomination: Martin Englert.



offered everything from raw material to museum-quality pots, reinforcing the event's role as both cultural exhibition and economic hub.

The gala dinner and awards ceremony provided a fitting culmination. This year, the evening was elevated by a performance from mezzo-soprano Lucia Barcelona—a thoughtful addition that echoed bonsai's own blend of discipline and artistry.

A European Identity, Fully Formed

The Trophy 2026 demonstrated something increasingly evident: European bonsai has come of age. No longer defined by its relationship to Japan alone, it stands as a confident, evolving tradition—rooted in

respect, yet unafraid to interpret. As Peter Warren has often observed, the most important shift is not technical but cultural: “the understanding that bonsai is a long-term collaboration between artist, tree, and time—one that transcends geography.”

In Genk, that collaboration came vividly to life, with The Trophy standing as a living dialogue—uniting past and future, East and West, and master and student. 🌲



Top: Kifu Nominations
Acer buergerianum, by Jean-Pierre Reitz (Luxembourg), .
 Middle left: Conifer Nominations
Pinus sylvestris, by Mauro Stemberger (Italy).
 Middle right: Kifu Nominations
Acer buergerianum, by Angelika Weisberger (Germany).
 Bottom left: Conifer Nominations
Juniperus chinensis 'Itoigawa', by Alexander Smuzikov (Switzerland).
 Bottom right: Broadleaf Nominations
Olea europaea var. *sylvestris*, by German Soler (Spain).







Facing page, top left: Conifer Nominations
Pinus mugo, by Gil Marriner (Germany).

Facing page, top right: Broadleaf Nominations
Carpinus turczaninowii var. *coreana*, by Alexander Smuzikov (Switzerland).

Facing page, Bottom: Best Belgian Tree
Pinus parviflora, by Wim Jame (Belgium).



Top left: Bonsai Art Award (Heike Van Gunst)
Medium: *Diospyros kaki*, by Holger Göbel (Germany).

Top right: Best Kifu
Acer palmatum with *Chaenomeles japonica*, by Bob Van Ruitenbeek (Netherlands).

Bottom: Best Shohin Composition
Mixed species composition including *Juniperus*, *Premna japonica*, *Trachelospermum asiaticum*, *Pinus thunbergii*, *Gardenia jasminoides*, and *Pyracantha*, by Miguel Ángel López Iglesias (Spain).



Top: Conifer Nominations

Pinus uncinata, by Jiri Fraus
(Czech Republic).

Bottom: Shohin Composition
Nominations

Mixed composition by
Ritta Cooper (UK) including
Juniperus rigida, *Pinus
parviflora*, *Ligustrum
obtusifolium*, *Chamaecyparis
obtusa* var. *sekka*, *Ulmus
parviflora*, *Zelkova serrata*,
Trachelospermum asiaticum,
and *Acer palmatum*.

Facing page, top: Shohin
Composition Nominations

Composition by Francesco
Forno (Italy) including *Pinus
thunbergii*, *Diospyros kaki*,
Chaenomeles 'Chojubai',
Elaeagnus, and *Pinus parviflora*.

Facing page, bottom: Kifu
Nominations

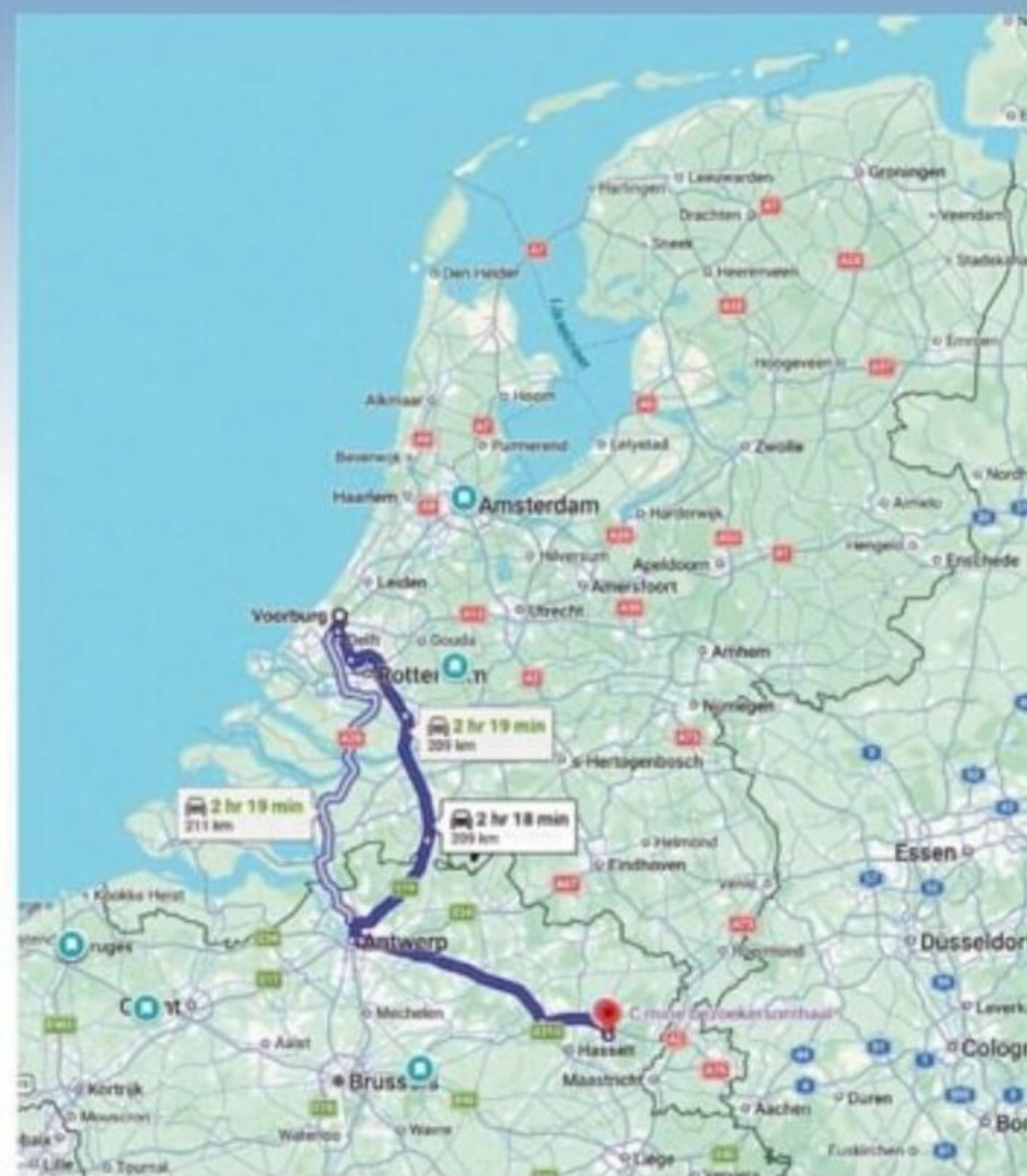
Juniperus sabina, by Lukáš
Praus (Czech Republic).





A Father & Son Pilgrimage to The Trophy 2026

By Richard Keijzer, Canada



Top left and right: My father, Jan Keijzer, and I left early, driving through the flat Dutch landscape towards the gentle terrain of Belgian Limburg.

Bottom: Entry of the Limburghal—a large complex hosting the competition floor and trading hall.



When my father turned eighty this year, I surprised him with two tickets to The Trophy.

The Trophy is Europe's largest and most prestigious bonsai exhibition, held every two years in Genk, Belgium. Organized by Bonsai Association Belgium, the 2026 edition ran from 28 February to 1 March at the Limburghal—a complex that dedicates 4,000 square metres to the competition floor and another 4,000 to the trading

hall. For over twenty years, it has drawn the continent's finest trees and most passionate enthusiasts. This year was no exception: approximately 5,000 visitors passed through the doors. The headline attraction was the first European appearance of Shinji Suzuki and his son Hiroaki.

I had never been before and did not know the scale of The Trophy. Coming from a very cold and challenging bonsai climate in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, I was impressed by the quality and quantity of the exhibition



Bonsai people often talk about patience... What we talk about less is the patience of the people around us: the family members who tolerate our disappearances to the workbench, our pilgrimages to exhibitions, and our “one more tree” negotiations.



On the trading floor, we saw raw yamadori alongside refined shohin, antique Japanese pots alongside contemporary European ceramics, and starter seedlings next to mature pre-bonsai. We took home two mugo pine seedlings.

and the overall experience. Within a few minutes of walking in, my father exclaimed, “Wow, just walking around here and seeing all these beautiful trees—it really does not help with my inferiority complex for working with bonsai.” I was thinking the same.

The Journey

I am based in Winnipeg. Trips back to the Netherlands to see my family are special, and this time I included a visit to The Trophy in Genk, Belgium—a

two-hour drive south from my parents’ home, easy enough for a day trip.

We left early, coffee in hand, the flat Dutch landscape giving way to the gentle terrain of Belgian Limburg. My dad is not yet an experienced bonsai practitioner. He has a wide range of interests and a quiet curiosity, and the craftsmanship speaks to him.



Walking In

The first impression of The Trophy is its sheer density. You enter the Limburghal and the space opens up: rows of competition displays on blue cloth, each tree spotlighted against dark backdrops, with scrolls and accent plants carefully placed. There is a hush in the competition area that contrasts sharply with the buzzing energy of the trading floor next door. On one side, contemplation; on the other, commerce. Both felt alive.

We saw deciduous trees in full winter silhouette, their ramification so fine they looked like pencil drawings. We didn't say much—we just looked. We moved slowly through the rows, stopping often to admire the trees.

The Competition Floor

The quality of trees at The Trophy is exceptional. This year's exhibition featured 97 bonsai, 19 kifu, 15 shohin compositions, and one special mame composition—a selection of high-quality trees drawn from across Europe. The competition entries included formal uprights with beautiful taper and pad structure, cascades, and several deciduous specimens shown in bare winter form.

The Best Conifer award went to a *Taxus baccata* by Andres Alvarez from Spain, while the Best Broadleaf Tree was a *Carpinus coreana* entered by Mark and Ritta Cooper. Among the nominated conifers were a *Pinus*



The Saturday afternoon demonstration was the event's centerpiece for us. Shinji Suzuki and his son Hiroaki worked on a large taxus—a substantial tree with dramatic deadwood and dense live veins.

...my father exclaimed, "Wow, just walking around here and seeing all these beautiful trees—it really does not help with my inferiority complex for working with bonsai." I was thinking the same.





Top left and middle left: A highlight of The Trophy for me was meeting headliner Shinji Suzuki and UK bonsai artist Harry Harrington, along with many other bonsai lovers.

Top right: A bonsai composition evoking the wind-shaped trees of the Canadian Shield—its rugged forms recalling quiet days paddling through those northern lakes.



sylvestris by Mauro Stemberger, a *Juniperus chinensis* 'Itoigawa' by Alexander Smuzikov, a *Pinus mugo* by Gil Marriner, and a *Pinus uncinata* by Jiri Fraus.

Beyond the competition, two special lineups anchored the exhibition. Sixteen bonsai created years ago by Shinji Suzuki, since imported into Europe, were brought together as a tribute to the master. On Saturday and Sunday mornings, Suzuki-san discussed these trees with visitors, with Peter Warren acting as translator. A second collection of sixteen mature bonsai belonging to Udo Fischer, the well-known German bonsai artist, added further weight. Angela Ramirez brought several award-winning pots from a United States exhibition, offering a transatlantic perspective.

The exhibition was rounded out by 52 selected suiseki and a full row of bonsai pots divided into categories for potters and collectors—glazed, unglazed, and decorated. For the first time, a 30-metre wall of antique kakejiku scrolls from a private collection stretched along one side of the hall. That evening, the Trophy's traditional gala dinner and prize-giving ceremony included a vocal performance by



Middle right: A commemorative display honoring the late Teunis Jan Klein and Bryan Albright, presenting their trees as enduring expressions of their artistry and legacy.

Bottom: Shinji Suzuki stands before a rare gathering of sixteen of his own bonsai—created years ago in Japan and now reunited in Europe—sharing their stories with visitors, with Peter Warren translating his reflections.



Top left and right: No visit to Belgium feels complete without frites, and The Trophy delivers with a stand in the entrance courtyard—where, in the late-February chill, we stood with paper cones of frites and mayonnaise, watching the crowd flow in and out.

Middle left: Bringing my father—eighty this year—to The Trophy was the true prize: the trees in Genk will outlive us, but that Saturday together was the real trophy.

professional mezzo-soprano Lucia Barcelona—a first for the event.

The Suzuki Demonstration

The Saturday afternoon demonstration was the event's centerpiece for us. Shinji Suzuki and his son Hiroaki worked on a large taxus—a substantial tree with dramatic deadwood and dense live veins. They were assisted by two of their students: Manuel Turpin from Réunion Island and Theo Zimmerman from Germany. Peter Warren translated throughout.

What struck me most was the pace. The Suzuki team worked as a unit—father and son, plus two students—constantly shifting tasks and reading each other without words. Suzuki senior assessed the tree, made decisive cuts, and moved on. His son, Turpin, and Zimmerman repositioned branches, applied wire, and cleaned deadwood in parallel. It was more a coordinated performance than a demonstration. The audience of several hundred sat in silence, observing the elegant teamwork and admiring the transformation.

Watching a father and son work together with that level of implicit understanding felt different when sitting beside my own father. The before-and-after transformation was remarkable: the tree's movement clarified,

the deadwood was revealed to greater effect, and the foliage reorganized into a coherent silhouette—all in a matter of hours.

The Trading Floor

If the competition hall is a cathedral, the trading floor is a bazaar. One hundred and ten European nurseries, potters, toolmakers, and specialists set up shop in a vast adjacent hall. The range was extraordinary for someone from Winnipeg, where access to quality bonsai material can be limited. We saw raw yamadori alongside refined shohin, antique Japanese pots alongside contemporary European ceramics, and starter seedlings next to mature pre-bonsai.

Belgian Frites and Shared Time

No trip to Belgium is complete without frites, and The Trophy obliges with a dedicated stand in the entrance courtyard. We stood outside in the late-February cold, eating frites with mayonnaise from paper cones, watching the crowd stream in and out. It was an unremarkable moment in the best possible sense.

That is what I will remember most about The Trophy 2026: experiencing this world together with my father—sharing something I love with someone I love.

Reflections

Bonsai people often talk about patience—the years it takes to develop a tree, the long view required. What we talk about less is the patience of the people around us: the family members who tolerate our disappearances to the workbench, our pilgrimages to exhibitions, and our “one more tree” negotiations. Taking my father to The Trophy was an incredible experience.

He turned eighty this year. The trees in Genk will outlive us both. But the Saturday we spent together—that was the real trophy. 🌲



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A New Digital Canopy Bonsai Clubs International Launches a Platform for Connection, Knowledge, and Growth

Members with multiple roles—Director, Committee Member, Instructor, Author, Club Administrator, Individual Member, or Advertiser—can manage everything through a single login.

By Joe Grande, BCI Editor

In bonsai, growth is deliberate—shaped over time with vision and care. Bonsai Clubs International (BCI) brings that same philosophy to its newly redesigned website, a platform that marks a significant evolution for one of the world’s most respected bonsai organizations. Currently in its final stages of development, the new [bonsai-bci.com](#) is a unified digital ecosystem—built to serve individuals, strengthen local clubs, and connect a truly global community. While the core framework of the site is now complete, much of the content is actively being added by volunteers around the world—a process that will continue to expand and refine the platform over the coming months.

Rooted in Tradition, Designed for a Global Future

Since 1960, BCI has fostered international friendship through bonsai, traditionally through conventions, publications, and club networks. The new website carries that mission forward with a clean, intuitive structure that makes the organization’s resources more accessible than ever. Whether a beginner exploring bonsai for the first time or an experienced artist refining technique, users will find a platform designed to support continuous learning and engagement.

A Living Library of Bonsai Knowledge

At the heart of the platform is a comprehensive knowledge base—an evolving library of bonsai and





suiseki content. From species guides and technical instruction to exhibition standards and expert articles, the website consolidates information that has historically been scattered across books, clubs, and informal channels. The result is a centralized, reliable resource that supports both education and inspiration.

Empowering Local Clubs

A defining feature of the new platform is its focus on local bonsai clubs—the foundation of the bonsai community. Clubs can now create dedicated profiles within the BCI website, allowing them to: Present their identity, leadership, and mission. Share meeting schedules, workshops, and exhibitions. Publish photos, news, and updates. Provide clear contact and membership information. These profiles act as ready-made digital

homes, eliminating the need for separate websites while increasing visibility and professionalism.

Stronger Communication, Locally and Globally

The platform improves how clubs communicate—not only with their own members, but with the wider bonsai world. Members benefit from a centralized source of accurate, up-to-date information, while clubs gain the ability to connect with other organizations internationally. This encourages collaboration, shared learning, and cultural exchange across borders.

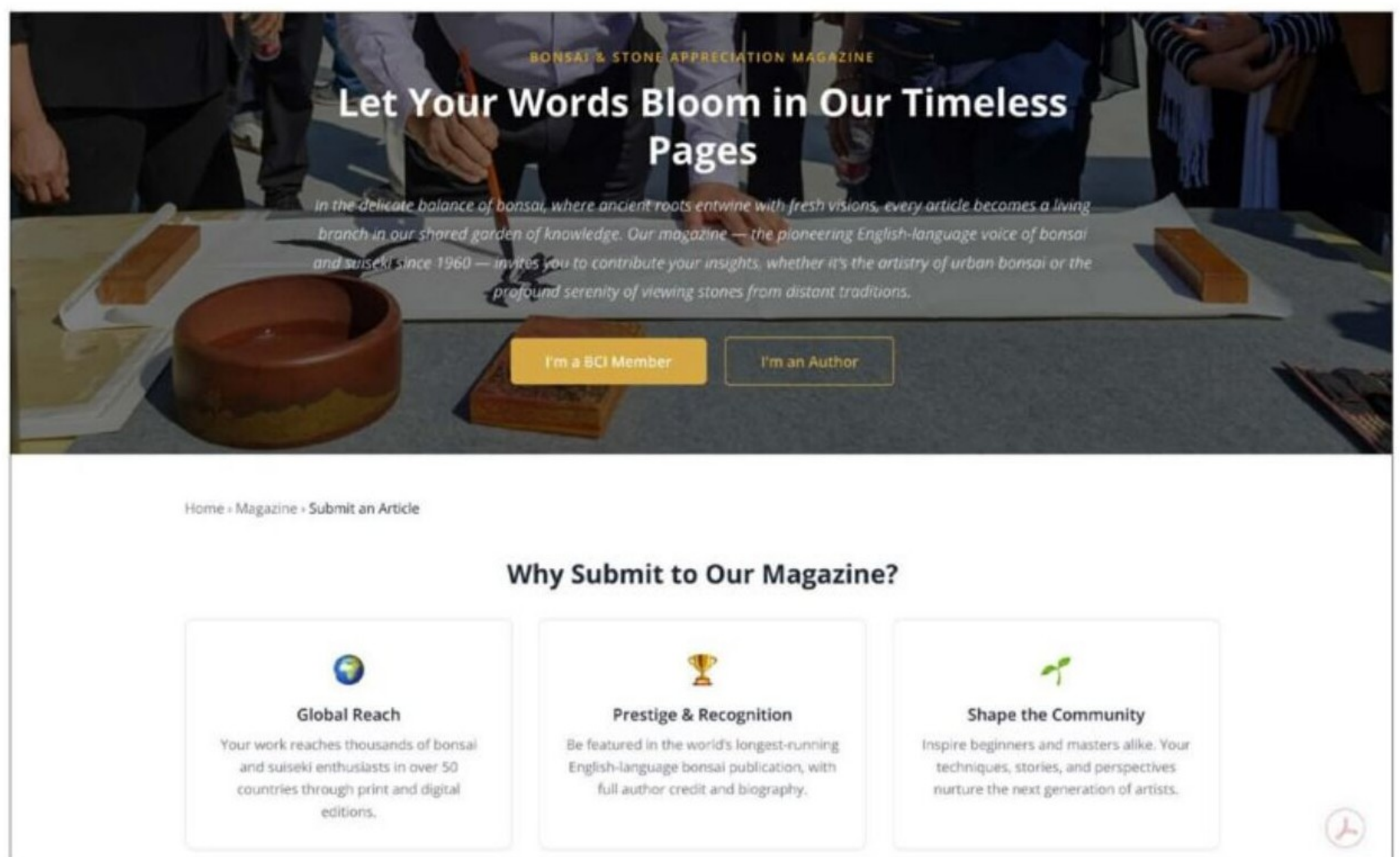
Membership as an Interactive Experience

BCI membership is fully integrated into the platform, transforming it from a passive subscription into an

Clubs can now create dedicated profiles within the BCI website to showcase their identity, leadership, and mission, while sharing events, photos, and updates.



Authors can submit articles in their preferred language and receive edited versions in the same language. The platform tracks submissions and credits contributions on each author's account and in the Authors' Directory.



active experience. Members can access exclusive content, manage their profiles, and stay informed about global events and opportunities—all within a seamless digital environment.

A Magazine for the Digital Era

Bonsai & Stone Appreciation Magazine is now part of the platform's ecosystem, offering expanded access to current and archived issues, along with opportunities for contribution. This integration strengthens the relationship between readers, contributors, and the broader bonsai community.

Connecting a Worldwide Community

Through event listings, convention information, and international outreach, the website reinforces BCI's role as a global connector. Clubs, professionals, and enthusiasts are no longer isolated—they are part of an interconnected network where ideas, techniques, and experiences can be shared freely.

A Clear Commitment to the Future

The platform also reflects modern values, promoting sustainability, ethical sourcing, and environmental awareness—ensuring that bonsai continues to evolve responsibly.



The Benefits, Simply Stated

At its core, the new BCI website delivers a set of clear, practical benefits:

- Visibility:** Clubs and members gain a global presence
- Connection:** Easier communication within and between clubs worldwide
- Education:** Centralized, high-quality bonsai knowledge
- Engagement:** Interactive membership and community participation
- Growth:** Tools to attract new members and strengthen local clubs

Efficiency: All resources—events, articles, club and member profiles—in one platform

The Next Chapter

As the website nears completion, it stands as both a reflection of BCI's legacy and a foundation for its future. Like a well-crafted bonsai, the platform is carefully structured, globally rooted, and designed for continued growth—supporting not just the art itself, but the community that sustains it. 🌳

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