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# bc

# Bonsai & Stone Appreciation

2026 Q3



Best in Show at Bonsai Pilipinas  
2026, *Punla at Pamana*.  
Bantigue (*Pemphis acidula*),  
120 cm high,  
by Mar Ruel Sumabat,  
Philippines

**The Dancing Crane: *Murraya paniculata***  
**Bonsai Pilipinas 2026: *Punla at Pamana***  
**The 40th Arcobonsai**  
**Indian Bonsai Association Exhibition**  
**Spring Festival 2026 at Bonsaizentrum**  
**2026 European Bonsai & Suiseki Convention**  
**The Inaugural U.S. National Tropical**  
**Bonsai Exhibition Comes to Houston**



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## President's Message

**A**s spring gives way to summer, the global penjing, bonsai, and viewing stone community continues to flourish. Across the world, exhibitions, competitions, workshops, and symposiums have brought artists, collectors, and enthusiasts together to share knowledge, celebrate creativity, and strengthen international friendships. These exchanges continue to build a strong foundation for the growth and appreciation of our art forms worldwide.

### Special Committee for Penjing and Viewing Stones

One of the most significant developments in China this year was the establishment of the Special Committee for Penjing and Viewing Stones under the China Viewing Stone Association. The new committee creates a national platform dedicated to promoting education, exhibitions, research, and artistic exchange while strengthening the connection between penjing and viewing stone appreciation. We look forward to future collaboration between this organization and BCI as we continue building bridges between Chinese and international practitioners.

### Two Outstanding Exhibitions

This issue also highlights two outstanding exhibitions that demonstrate the vitality of our art across Asia. In China, the First Invitational Exhibition of Fine Chinese Bolan Penjing and the Hainan Provincial Penjing Exhibition celebrated the distinctive character of tropical penjing and the rich artistic traditions of Hainan. In the Philippines, the Punla at Pamana National Bonsai and Stone Competition & Joint Art Exhibition brought together hundreds of outstanding bonsai and viewing stones while welcoming participants from throughout Southeast Asia and beyond. **I encourage readers to explore the feature articles in this issue for a closer look at both remarkable events.**

### Bonsai, penjing, and viewing stones are living cultural traditions

Beyond Asia, clubs and organizations throughout Europe, the Americas, and other regions continue to organize exhibitions, educational programs, and workshops that introduce new enthusiasts to the art while helping experienced practitioners expand their knowledge and skills. Across cultures and continents, a common understanding continues to emerge: bonsai, penjing, and viewing stones are living cultural traditions that connect people through a shared appreciation of nature, creativity, and heritage.

BCI remains committed to its mission of fostering international friendship, advancing education, encouraging artistic excellence, and supporting the worldwide development of bonsai, penjing, and viewing stone appreciation. To better serve our members, the redevelopment of the BCI website is now approaching completion. The new platform will provide expanded educational resources, multilingual content, enhanced communication tools,



Mr. Chen, Chang, BCI President

and new opportunities for members around the world to connect and learn from one another.

### BCI International Bonsai & Stone Convention in November 2027

Looking ahead, I am pleased to announce that Manila, Philippines, will host the BCI International Bonsai & Stone Convention in November 2027. Under the leadership of BCI Director Susan Lee, BSAPI President Mike Morden, and the Bonsai and Stone Alliance of the Philippines (BSAPI), preparations are already under way for what promises to be one of the most significant BCI events in recent years.

Manila will provide an exceptional gathering place for artists, educators, collectors, and enthusiasts from around the world. Through exhibitions, demonstrations, workshops, and cultural programs, the convention will celebrate the diversity of our art while strengthening the friendships and partnerships that unite our international community. I encourage all members to begin making plans to join us for this landmark event.

The essence of penjing lies in honoring tradition while embracing creativity and innovation. BCI's role is to connect people, encourage learning, and help ensure that these timeless arts continue to inspire future generations.

***I look forward to welcoming you to Manila in November 2027.***

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

For more information contact:

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## Message from the Editor

**T**his third-quarter issue explores bonsai as a language of shared standards and individual expression—a dialogue carried across continents through exhibitions, judging, and the quiet pursuit of refinement. From Germany and Italy to India, China, the Philippines, and the United States, each contribution reminds us that while regional traditions may differ, the values of dedication, craftsmanship, and lifelong learning unite our global community.

The exhibition season opens in Europe. At Spring Festival 2026, **Gudrun Benz** invites us into **Bonsaizentrum Heidelberg**, where trees, ceramics, and thoughtful display celebrate both seasonal beauty and enduring friendships. She returns later in this issue to chronicle the **EBA/ESA Convention**, capturing the energy of Europe's premier bonsai and suiseki gathering—a meeting where artistic excellence and international exchange continue to strengthen one another.

**Gabriele Sbaraini** commemorates the **40th Arcobonsai**, reflecting on four decades in which a regional exhibition has grown into one of Europe's defining celebrations of bonsai, friendship, and community. **Susan Lee** transports us to the Philippines for **Punla at Pamana**, where remarkable artistry is matched by a profound respect for cultural heritage, while **Neera Neelambara** documents the **Indian Bonsai Association Exhibition**, revealing the vitality and growing sophistication of bonsai throughout India.

Our feature articles look beyond the display table. **Min Hsuan Lo** and **Andrew Lo** continue their thoughtful exploration of *Murraya paniculata*, demonstrating how technical challenges such as reverse taper can become opportunities to discover balance and harmony. **Budi Sulisty** and **José L. Rodríguez Macías** take us to Hainan Province, where judging *Blachia chunii* penjing becomes both a study of species-specific excellence and an exchange between cultures and traditions. **BCI President Chen Chang** offers a personal reflection on judging in the Philippines, reminding us that every exhibition is as much about discovering inspiration as it is about selecting award winners.

The issue concludes with news by **Dawn Koetting** of the inaugural **U.S. National Tropical Bonsai Exhibition in Houston**, an important milestone that reflects the growing prominence of tropical species and the expanding diversity of bonsai practice across North America.

Taken together, these pages illustrate that bonsai continues to flourish through openness—to new ideas, different aesthetics, and meaningful dialogue between cultures. Every exhibition is more than a display of finished trees; it is a gathering of teachers and students, artists and enthusiasts, each contributing to a tradition that is constantly renewed. As you turn these pages, look beyond the awards and accolades. Notice the countless hours of patient cultivation, the generosity of those willing to share their knowledge, and the enduring friendships that give this art its deepest roots. In doing so, we are reminded that bonsai's greatest achievement is not perfection, but its remarkable ability to bring people together through a shared passion for living art. 🌳

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

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| ISSUE | MONTH | CLOSING DATE |
|-------|-------|--------------|
| Q1    | J/F/M | December 1   |
| Q2    | A/M/J | March 1      |
| Q3    | J/A/S | June 1       |
| Q4    | O/N/D | September 1  |



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**FEATURED ON THE COVER:** Best in Show at Bonsai Pilipinas 2026, *Punla at Pamana*. Bantigue (*Pemphis acidula*), 120 cm high, by Mar Ruel Sumabat, Philippines.

BCI President Chen, Chang served on the international judging panel and immediately recognized the tree's exceptional artistic quality. Having previously championed this same bonsai for Best in Show at the BCI Exhibition in Vigan, he was especially gratified to see it finally receive the highest honor after years of thoughtful refinement. In this issue, President Chen shares the remarkable story behind this extraordinary Sea Hibiscus and reflects on the perseverance, artistry, and dedication that transformed a near-champion into a deserving Best in Show winner. See page 37



# **The Dancing Crane**

*Murraya paniculata*

# **Seeking Harmony Within Reverse Taper**

By Min Hsuan Lo & Andrew Lo, Taiwan





**Brilliant white flower clusters of *Murraya paniculata* glowing through the summer season.**

### **Fragrance Through the Summer Wind**

**F**ew plants are named directly for their fragrance. *Murraya paniculata* is among the rare exceptions, celebrated for its enchanting and penetrating perfume. Throughout the long flowering season—from April to late October—its white blossoms unfold in abundance, releasing a rich fragrance that drifts far beyond the garden's edge, as though scent itself were given a name. The white corymb-like clusters breathe fragrance into the air. Sometimes present, sometimes elusive, the scent wanders gently around the body, intangible yet ever near, bringing indescribable pleasure and calm.

### **Summer White Blossoms**

**1** Brilliant white flower clusters of *Murraya paniculata* glowing through the summer season.

An evergreen shrub or small tree with odd-pinnate compound leaves, vigorous in growth and highly tolerant of pruning.

Pure white flowers, elegant evergreen foliage, and intoxicating fragrance—these qualities made it one of the most beloved hedge plants during the Japanese colonial era in Taiwan. It was widely planted around public buildings, schools, parks, sugar refineries, and private residences. Its refined elegance and welcoming fragrance surrounded countless homes, becoming a quiet symbol of the peaceful atmosphere of early Taiwan.

Even today, amid rapid urban development, many rural landscapes still preserve old hedges of *Murraya paniculata*. Though new species and modern landscape concepts continue to emerge, it remains deeply accepted and continues to stand among the foremost choices for hedging.





**2** At the foothills of Bagua Mountain in Tianzhong Township, Changhua, the Hsiao family has lived here for four generations. Their hedges of *Murraya paniculata* have remained faithfully beside them through the decades, silently guarding the century-old home.

### Reverse Taper

**3 4 2007**

For those immersed in bonsai work over long periods, endlessly repeating familiar methods can gradually lead to fatigue and creative numbness. Materials that deviate from convention—unorthodox, even rebellious—often carry irresistible temptation. They invite experimentation, encouraging one to wander beyond established paths and explore subtle territories left untouched. Such ambition fulfills the artist's desire to create.

It fills neglected corners, and in some measure enriches the diversity and cultural depth of bonsai art itself.

“Taper” has long been regarded as one of the essential structural principles of bonsai. By contrast, reverse taper is almost entirely unacceptable in traditional bonsai aesthetics.

Most corrective methods involve cutting back and reducing the slender main trunk so that the base appears stronger, more stable, and visually convincing. In simpler terms: remove the reverse taper, and reshape it into proper taper.

### The Joy of Treasure Hunting

The thrill of searching for hidden treasure seems innate to human nature. Whether in antique shops, open-air markets, or remote mountain terrain, people dream of discovering something overlooked and transforming it into something precious.

Yet within mature bonsai circles, finding treasure discarded by others is nearly impossible. Perhaps the truer meaning of “treasure hunting” lies instead in discovering unconventional material through a unique perspective and personal sensibility—then dedicating years to giving it renewed life.







**If left untreated, the deadwood would rapidly deteriorate beyond recovery.**

This old *Murraya paniculata*, collected from the mountains in the 1970s and cultivated in a container for many years, possessed harmonious proportions throughout trunk and branches. Yet it lacked refinement and delicacy. This work intentionally preserves the slender reverse-tapered main trunk. Within imbalance, it searches for harmony. Within instability, it seeks charm, playfulness, composure, and quiet balance. Perhaps opening another window may allow bonsai art to become richer and more diverse.

### **Cleaning the Ancient Deadwood**

**5** Years of accumulated mineral deposits had loosened the wood fibers. Signs of decay were already obvious, and portions had become infected with green algae and bacteria. If left untreated, the deadwood would rapidly deteriorate beyond recovery. That would have been a terrible loss.

**6** The deadwood was carefully cleaned using a powerful stream of water, removing the softened surface and bacterial growth. Beneath it emerged astonishing crimson deadwood—hard as stone.

**7 8** After cleaning, the finer branches were shortened and the overall structure carefully reexamined. Looking closely... sigh. The value of many years of previous effort suddenly seemed to vanish. Everything would need to begin again.

### **Deadwood of *Murraya paniculata***

In fertile soil, *Murraya paniculata* grows vigorously. Although its wood is naturally hard, true deadwood



formation is extremely rare. Only in the harsh coral-rock terrain of Kenting National Park in southern Taiwan do ancient specimens endure decades of erosion, leaving behind remnants of intensely hardened crimson wood. Because such material is extraordinarily rare, it deserves to be preserved and cared for like treasure. This plate-like crimson deadwood possesses a stone-like hardness. It requires only periodic cleaning two or three times a year to remove mineral deposits and moss. Over many years, it has remained almost entirely unchanged.





**9** The unique reverse-taper deadwood awakened limitless imagination, expectation, and possibility. Its explosive instability seemed to hover between concealment and revelation—waiting to be discovered, waiting to be shaped.



## Traditional Techniques Combined with Modern Methods

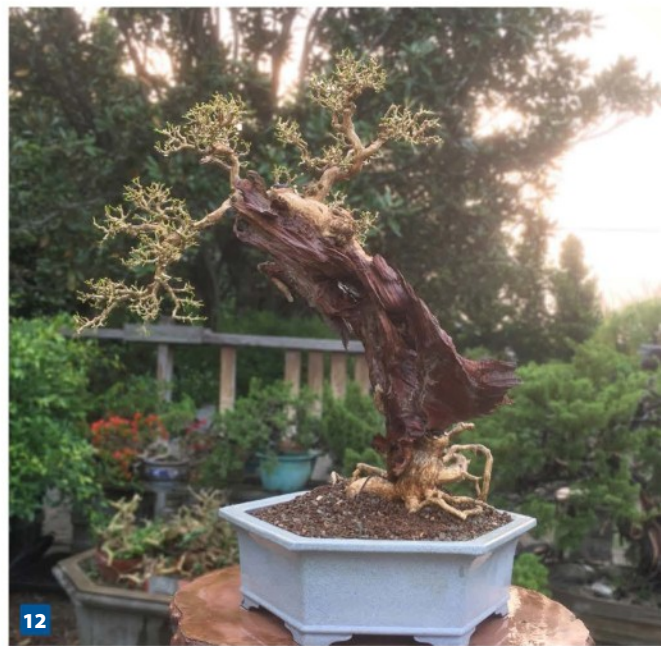
### Cut & Grow plus Wiring

The branches of *Murraya paniculata* are relatively rigid, while new shoots emerge unpredictably. For middle and outer branches, extensive aluminum wiring becomes essential to guide direction, soften branch structure, and accelerate refinement. If relying solely on clip-and-grow techniques, the branch pads and fine ramification remain sparse and open—making dense refinement nearly impossible.

**10** Some branches were removed, and the tree was repotted into a multicolored Canton glaze pot. Part of me wanted to compromise—to avoid drastic change. Could this really be enough? Perhaps more time was needed for quiet reflection.

**11** 2017.05.07

After ten long years, the shari remained remarkably well preserved.



### A Decade of Uncertainty and Reconstruction

**12** From 2007 to 2018

Creation often becomes lost within its own abundance of ideas. Too many concepts.

Too many plans. Direction becomes blurred. One repeats unnecessary actions, abandons previous efforts, and starts again.

Throughout these ten years, the tree was repeatedly redesigned and rebuilt while strictly adhering to the traditional cultivation methods for *Murraya*

*paniculata*—using only scissors, completely avoiding wiring techniques.

A shallow white hexagonal pot was chosen in hopes of creating a subtle literati atmosphere. Yet the tree's untamed and rebellious spirit hidden deep within never fully emerged. So once again, it returned to silence and refinement.



In 2018, the tree was returned to a larger training container, and intensive wiring techniques were resumed.



13



14

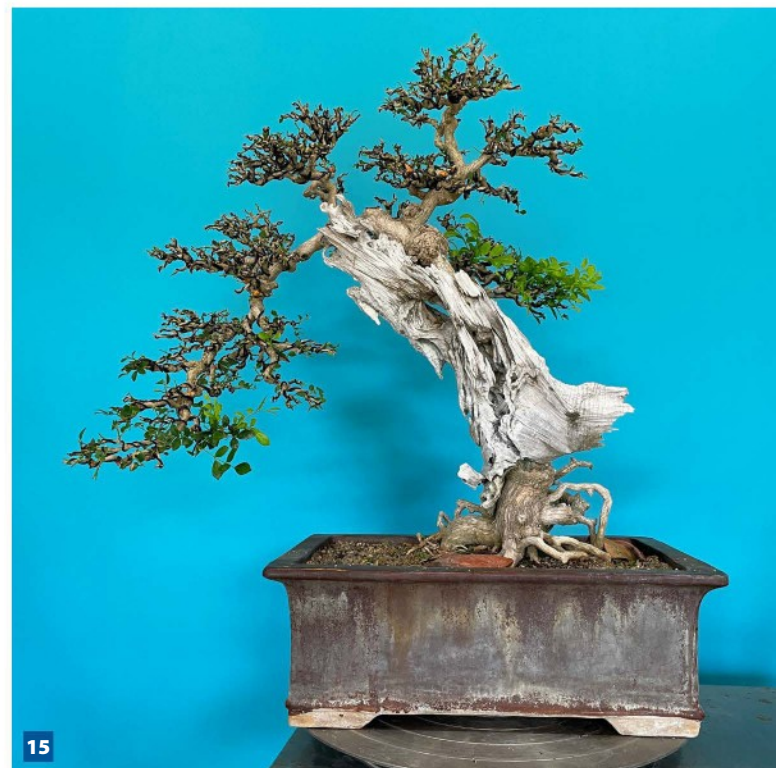
13 2021.09.15

In 2018, the tree was returned to a larger training container, and intensive wiring techniques were resumed.

### A Major Turning Point

14 15 2023.09.26

The original shallow hexagonal pot was abandoned and replaced with a roughly sixty-year-old Taiwanese square brown glazed pot. This bold transformation in pot selection finally revealed the tree's unique charm and personality. Such change comes only through years of experience and sharpened sensitivity.



15

### Pot Selection

Experience remains one of the primary foundations of aesthetic judgment. Throughout the creative process, many different containers were tested, yet none successfully revealed the character hidden within this tree. After repeated experimentation, a deep rectangular Taiwanese glazed pot, approximately sixty years old, was finally selected.

Its deeper, archaic form quietly stabilizes the visual instability created by the reverse taper, transforming what is traditionally regarded as a flaw into a defining characteristic. Rather than concealing the tree's unconventional structure, the container helps frame and





**Throughout the creative process, many different containers were tested. After repeated experimentation, a deep rectangular Taiwanese glazed pot, approximately sixty years old, was finally selected.**

support it, allowing the composition to achieve a sense of balance and harmony.

Perhaps a distinct personal style is precisely what every creator ultimately seeks.

**16** 2024.08.12

After further cultivation, branch density showed clear improvement. Following defoliation, however, the branch structure appeared somewhat chaotic.

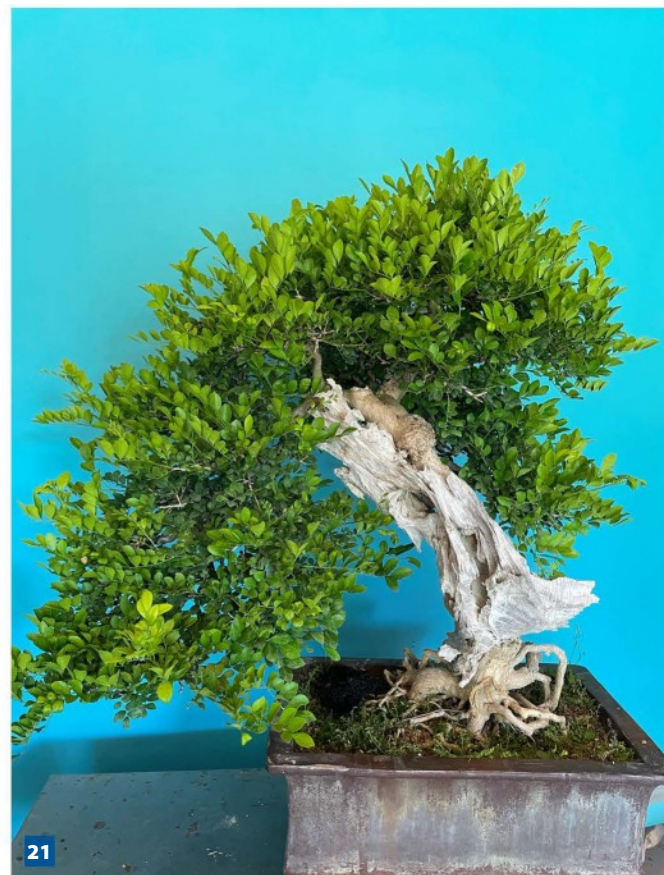
**17** 2024.08.17

After several days of work, the branch structure was reorganized once again.

**18 19 20** 2024.08.26

In the intense heat of summer, tender new shoots exploded into dense growth within only ten days. The vivid fresh green was irresistibly beautiful.





**21 2025.05.13**

In early summer, as temperatures gradually rose and the spring shoots matured, the first major annual work of the season began.

**22 23 2025.05.22**

Fine deciduous ramification is fragile and easily broken. Work must proceed slowly, gently, and with great care. At this stage, the mind gradually settles. The work ceases to feel like pressure and instead becomes a kind of quiet practice—something to be enjoyed.

**24 2025.07.18**

Approximately two months later. High summer. Vigorous growth under intense heat.

**25 2026.03.18**

Late spring. Temperatures gradually rising. Daytime temperatures hovered between 25–28°C. Perhaps waiting another month before defoliation would have been wiser. But patience had already run out. Defoliation began once again.

**26** As always, the weaker and drooping branches were defoliated first.

**27 28 29 2026.03.29**

Bonsai is an endless and unceasing journey. These images are merely fleeting glimpses from certain moments along the way. Will the future continue along the familiar path of endlessly refining dense ramification? Or will further transformation and reinvention emerge? The answers remain uncertain. The possibilities are limitless. And perhaps that uncertainty itself is the greatest challenge in bonsai— and also its greatest joy.

The story of this tree is inseparable from the story of its species. The following pages offer a brief introduction to *Murraya paniculata*—its history, cultivation, and enduring place within the bonsai traditions of Asia.





**These images are merely fleeting glimpses from certain moments along the way. Will the future continue along the familiar path of endlessly refining dense ramification? Or will further transformation and reinvention emerge?**















Top: Pinnate foliage consists of multiple leaflets arranged along a central leaf stem, giving the leaf a feather-like appearance



## A Brief Introduction to *Murraya paniculata*

### At a Glance

- Native Range: Southern Asia
- Common Name: Orange Jasmine
- Bonsai Tradition: Lingnan Penjing
- Climate: Tropical to Subtropical
- Notable Features: Fragrant flowers, ornamental berries, aged bark, elegant movement
- Main Challenge: Developing dense fine ramification
- Repotting: Approximately every two years

*Murraya paniculata* is widely distributed throughout southern Asia, including Taiwan, mainland China, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Within the Lingnan school of Chinese penjing, it is regarded as one of the most important species, producing many celebrated masterpieces of exceptional value.

From the 1960s through the 1980s in Taiwan, it stood alongside elm and zelkova as one of the dominant deciduous broadleaf bonsai species. Many famous specimens became icons of major exhibitions. By the late 1980s, however, emerging species such as *Celtis* gradually rose in popularity. The pinnate foliage of *Murraya paniculata* made it difficult to construct dense fine ramification, causing it to slowly decline from mainstream prominence. Pinnate foliage consists of multiple leaflets arranged along a central leaf stem, giving the leaf a feather-like appearance. While attractive, this compound leaf structure can make the development of dense fine ramification more challenging than in species with simple leaves such as elm or zelkova.

During the 1990s and early 2000s, large-scale export demand led to excessive wild collection, especially in Kenting and Miaoli. Most specimens originated from mountain collection. Because collected trees often suffered from oversized root cuts, fine roots regenerated only partially, leaving wounds unable to heal completely. Over time, decay spread through the exposed wood into the trunk itself. This prolonged internal decay eventually caused mysterious branch dieback that was nearly impossible to remedy. This became another major reason for the species' decline during that period.

### Soil and Cultivation

Like many tropical and subtropical species, *Murraya paniculata* grows vigorously, and its root systems quickly fill containers. Repotting every two years is generally recommended, with early to late April being the ideal season. For training containers, thoroughly washed mountain sand remains the preferred medium. As refinement progresses, Akadama may gradually be incorporated—though ideally no more than 30–40%. Clean mountain sand remains one of the best substrates for tropical and subtropical broadleaf bonsai. Because mountain sand retains less moisture, watering during hot summer periods becomes more frequent—sometimes two or three times daily. In short, *Murraya paniculata* grows best in well-drained, aerated substrates. As with many deciduous bonsai, covering the soil surface with moss or moving trees into partial shade can help alleviate summer heat stress.

Regardless of changing trends and shifting popularity, *Murraya paniculata* continues to shine quietly, much like the hedges that have long accompanied Taiwanese homes. It remains a species worthy of slow appreciation.



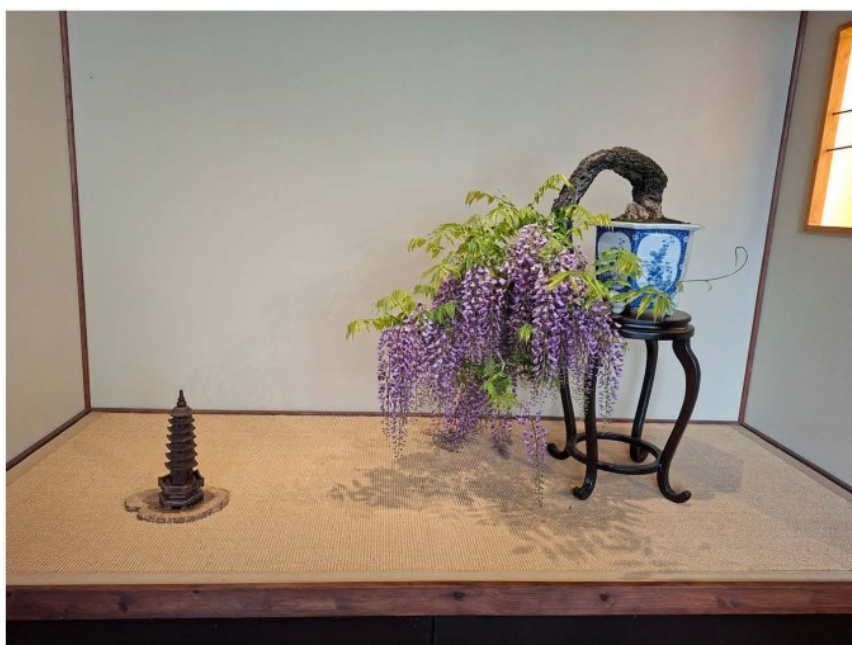


# Spring Festival 2026 at Bonsaizentrum Heidelberg

Text and Photos  
by Gudrun Benz,  
Germany







*Top:* Beautiful bonsai displayed in a tokonoma in the museum.

*Middle:* Wisteria with blue flowers displayed in a tokonoma in the museum.

*Bottom:* View into the museum. This wisteria has white flowers.



Each year, the Bonsaizentrum Heidelberg celebrates its Spring and Autumn Festivals. This year, the Spring Festival took place on 2 and 3 May. Not only the pleasant weather—bright sunshine and agreeable temperatures—contributed to its great success—there were also several additional activities that attracted many visitors.

As usual, visitors received a drink at the entrance if they wished. They were invited through the open doors of the museum, or they could go in the other direction for a walk through the bonsai area. The well-known bonsai demonstrator Mario Komsta from the bonsai museum of Luis Vallejo in Spain gave demonstrations where visitors could learn how to improve the shape of bonsai through pruning and wiring. Guided tours through the bonsai grounds also took place, during which Mr. Carocci explained, for example, the different kinds of maple trees and their growing conditions.

Those who visited the museum could enjoy outstanding exhibits of Chinese scholars' rocks, shangshi and suiseki, as well as other objects of Asian craftsmanship.

At the tea stand, visitors could taste and purchase Japanese tea. From time to time, they could also participate in a tea ceremony. An antique dealer offered





*Top left and right: Mario Komsta during a demonstration.*

*Middle left: Flower arrangements embellished the museum.*

*Bottom left: Large fern specimen.*

*Bottom right: Impressive Moore (Meng) stone, a modern Chinese scholars' rock, at the entrance to the Bonsai Museum. Place of origin: Guangxi Province, China.*



craft and art objects for collectors and art lovers. Last but not least, and for me the most interesting attraction, was the stand featuring "Micro Painting."

I saw Mrs. Marion Bernhardt bent over her microscope with a small brush in her hand, carefully painting with watercolors on a tiny curved object. After observing her for a while, I asked what she was doing,



**As usual, visitors received a drink at the entrance if they wished. They were invited through the open doors of the museum, or they could go in the other direction for a walk through the bonsai area.**





Top row, left to right:

Ying stone, a traditional Chinese scholars' rock. Place of origin: Guangdong Province, China.

Bamboo leaf stone, a surface-pattern stone. Place of origin: South China.

Structure stone of limonite (iron oxide).

Middle left: "Toad," an animal-shaped Dahua stone. Place of origin: Guangxi Province, China.

Middle right: Glass display case in the Bonsai Museum containing Asian craft objects.



Bottom left: Shelf displaying glass snuff bottles decorated using the verre églomisé technique.

that is, what she was painting on. Her answer was: "I paint little bonsai on dried rose petals."

She had first photographed the original bonsai in the bonsai garden with the help of her laptop. She then

"copied" the image onto a rose petal, which was later photographed. The original bonsai painting remains on the small rose petal, while the photographs can be enlarged to postcard size or assembled into calendars. It is a very special and skilful form of art.

I was very happy to receive ten photographs of bonsai and two photographs of suiseki from Mrs. Bernhardt. Together they formed a charming little calendar-like ensemble that demonstrated the many possibilities of this unique artistic technique. Her delicate paintings on rose petals preserve a fleeting image of beauty in a form that is both unusual and memorable, making them a fitting reminder of a most enjoyable festival. 🌸





*Top left:* Mrs. Marion Bernhardt at work.

*Top right:* Postcards featuring bonsai paintings on rose petals.

*Middle left:* Tea stand.

*Middle right:* Stand displaying antique craft objects.

*Bottom left and right:* Mr. Carocci explained to tour participants the different kinds of maple trees and their growing conditions.





Top: The Hainan Penjing Chairman pointed out two drastically different Bolan penjing styles: raft and willow.  
Bottom: Budi carefully judged the raft-style Bolan penjing to award the appropriate score.



# Judging *Blachia chunii* Penjing in Dongfang City, Hainan, China

By Budi Sulistyo, Indonesia

Contributing Editor: Jose L. Rodríguez Macías – Puerto Rico





In early March 2026, while reviewing my emails, I received a pleasant surprise: an invitation to serve as a judge at a bonsai exhibition in Hainan, China, on April 16, 2026. Frankly, it was a real surprise. As a BCI Director, I did not recall any discussion about a BCI convention in Hainan. When I inquired about it, I was informed that it was a regional event. The organizers had invited Alex Tangkulung, President of the Indonesian Bonsai Society; BCI Board Member Susan Lee; Mike Morden, President of the Bonsai Alliance of the Philippines; and myself to serve as judges for the exhibition.

### Judging is complicated

Over the years, I have attended many bonsai congresses in China and have been invited several times as a guest demonstrator. However, this was the first time I had been invited to judge a bonsai exhibition. As a side note, it is not uncommon in China for exhibitions to be judged exclusively by local judging panels. This is understandable, as many foreign bonsai artists have been trained according to Japanese aesthetic principles, while Chinese penjing follows its own distinct and, perhaps, more complex artistic traditions.



I recall the Asia Pacific Bonsai Convention held in Shanghai in 1997, when Chinese penjing was still in the early stages of being introduced to the international bonsai community. The judging panel consisted of several prominent bonsai figures led by Mr. Saburo Kato. However, when the judging results were presented to the organizing committee, they were rejected. The

*Top:* A view of Sanya City along the beach, reminding me of Waikiki in Hawaii.

*Bottom:* Bolan trees planted on a slanting hollow rock, with varied movement that complements the shape of the rock.



*Top left:* A tall, old Bolan tree displaying a natural hollow groove along the trunk. The design is particularly interesting, with the apex and a long, thick branch developing all the secondary branches and twigs on the right side. The elongated tip sways gracefully to the right, while a small growth emerging from the right root is balanced by planting the tree in a rectangular brown pot decorated with landscapes, creating a very harmonious bonsai composition.

*Top right:* Several clumps of upright Bolan trees were combined in a long, shallow, light-colored pot. A taller clump was positioned on the left, leading the overall composition.

*Bottom:* Strong winds from the left appear to have blown the branches and twigs of this defoliated tree, including the smaller trees in the lower section. The absence of leaves reveals the richness of the ramification, enhancing the drama of the penjing.



organizers argued that the foreign judges did not fully understand Chinese penjing and therefore conducted a second round of judging using Chinese artists.

This time, during The BCI China BoLan Penjing Masterpiece Invitational Exhibition and the 5th Hainan Provincial Penjing Exhibition, there were nine local judges and four foreign judges. We were each given a list of trees, a judging form, and a pen.

### The judging criteria

The judging criteria were based on a point system. A Gold Award was given to trees scoring between 91 and 100 points, Silver Awards to those scoring between 81 and 90 points, and Bronze Awards to those receiving between 71 and 80 points. Trees scoring below 65 points were not considered for awards. This system relies heavily on trust and on the judges possessing the maturity, knowledge, and experience necessary to evaluate the trees fairly.

Unlike Japanese bonsai, Chinese penjing does not follow a rigid set of rules or protocols. As judges, we encountered ancient, natural, beautiful, and highly creative compositions displaying remarkable diversity in style and expression. One aspect I particularly appreciated was the opportunity to study each tree carefully, one by one. The judging process itself became an enriching experience as we observed the unique beauty and artistic qualities of every exhibit.



## The Hainan-Indonesia connection

Hainan is a tropical island located in the southernmost part of China, close to Vietnam and the Philippines. The climate is not very different from that of my hometown in Java. I have known the name Hainan since childhood. In the 1960s, due to political circumstances, some Indonesian Chinese families, including one of my cousins, returned to China and settled on Hainan Island because of its climate, which is similar to that of Indonesia.

During our visit, we met several people of Indonesian heritage who were still able to converse with us in Javanese. Today, Hainan has developed into a beautiful tropical tourist destination, featuring long stretches of white-sand beaches and impressive coastal development. In my opinion, the local government hopes to develop Hainan into a world-class tourist destination comparable to Hawaii, Dubai, or Bali.

## *Blachia chunii*, the featured species at the exhibit

Approximately 300 tropical bonsai were displayed at the exhibition. There were no pines or junipers, as the collection consisted entirely of tropical species. As is often the case in China, many creative and expressive styles were represented, including weeping, windswept, and raft-style compositions.

One of the species for which Hainan is especially renowned is *Blachia chunii* (originally described by botanists Y. T. Chang and P. T. Li), commonly known as Bolan, Bolan Wood, or Wrinkle-bark Tree. The genus *Blachia* consists of evergreen shrubs and small trees belonging to the *Euphorbiaceae* family.

This species is endemic to Hainan Island and is mainly distributed in coastal low hills and dry open forests along the seashore, particularly in areas such as Sanya and Changjiang. It is characterized by an aged and elegant appearance, small dark-green leaves, and rough, fissured bark that resembles the wrinkles of an elderly face, giving rise to its popular name, the Wrinkle-bark Tree.

The taxonomic classification of *Blachia chunii* has undergone several revisions. It was first formally described as a new species in 1988 and was later treated as a synonym of *Blachia siamensis*. Recent botanical research conducted in 2025 compared living specimens with type specimens and concluded that they are identical to *Blachia cotoneaster* Gagnep, which was originally described in 1924. As a result, *Blachia chunii* is now recognized as a synonym of *Blachia cotoneaster*.

Due to its strong budding ability, excellent tolerance for pruning, and naturally aged appearance, *Blachia chunii* is highly valued as a bonsai species in Hainan, where it is commonly known as Bolan. It was also once mistakenly classified within the genus *Poiloniella* before being correctly reassigned by botanists.

Bolan is also found in the Philippines and has been cultivated as bonsai material there for many years. In the Philippines, it is often mistakenly referred to as Kamuning Binangonan or Kamuning Bilog.



However, “Kamuning” is the local name generally applied to species of *Murraya*. This misidentification should be corrected, and the species should properly be referred to as *Blachia*. Bolan also grows very well in Indonesia, where I have cultivated it successfully for many years from plants I originally brought home from the Philippines.

## Exhibit highlights

Among the exhibits were several outstanding Bolan bonsai, including one particularly impressive weeping-style composition that evoked the image of a willow tree. The willow has long been a cherished artistic symbol in Chinese culture and has inspired generations of scholars, poets, and artists.

Top: A Philippine Bolan that I purchased some twenty years ago as a small tree, known as Kamuning Binangonan (Bilog), has grown very well in my garden and has been shaped into a natural broom-style tree following Japanese bonsai principles.

Bottom: The Bolan trees demonstrated by Master Chen Chang were placed on display for auction.



The legendary, *Willow Charm and Vigor of Willow Branches Brush Melodies into Ten Thousand Homes*.



Lingnan bonsai emphasizes harmony with nature and advocates drawing inspiration from natural forms while transcending ordinary appearances. Artists seek to capture both the physical character and the spirit of a tree, transforming these observations into living works of art. Among the many Lingnan styles, the

willow-style bonsai is one of the most iconic, admired for its graceful, flowing, and elegant form.

The title of this remarkable Bolan composition was *Willow Branches Brush Melodies into Ten Thousand Homes*. Standing 120 cm tall, it was originally created by Mr. Wu Cheng Fa of Hong Kong and later refined



by Mr. Chen Chang of Baowen Garden Bonsai Garden, bringing the work to a high level of artistic maturity.

Bolan's rapid branch development, abundant ramification, and vigorous budding make it particularly suitable for creating the drooping foliage characteristic of willow-style bonsai. Inspired by the naturally graceful and flowing movement of willow branches, the composition was developed through repeated cycles of pruning and branch refinement. Careful attention was given to taper, branch movement, and structural balance, producing a harmonious transition from strong primary branches to delicate secondary growth.

Although the branches cascade gracefully downward, they never appear weak. Instead, they convey inner strength and vitality beneath their elegant form. The resulting composition displays excellent layering and rhythm, combining softness and refinement with a sense of enduring strength.

In conclusion, witnessing the highest level of Bolan penjing artistry in Hainan was a memorable experience. It reminded me that even after many years in bonsai and penjing, there are always new perspectives to discover and new lessons to learn. We never truly stop learning in this art. Those who believe they already know everything may miss the opportunity to gain new knowledge and appreciation. For me, this experience opened yet another window into the endless world of bonsai and penjing.

Notes: Inspired by "Willow Charm and Vigor of Willow Branches Brush Melodies into Ten Thousand Homes (Bolan Bonsai)" by Xu Dongting, published in *Flowers & Bonsai Magazine*. 🌿



*Top right:* An interesting and simple Bolan with a slanting trunk that developed into a raft style. The composition begins with a small shoot emerging from the root and continues through branches along the reclining trunk, all growing upright.

*Bottom:* A stunning creation of several Bolan raft trees arranged into a long, picturesque composition. This exceptional work was awarded Best in Show.





Dominating the skyline above the town, the ruins of the medieval Torre di Arco stand atop a dramatic limestone outcrop 273 metres above the valley floor. Reached by a short walk through ancient olive groves, the castle has become the enduring symbol of Arco and a landmark familiar to visitors from around the world. Nestled between the mountains of Trentino and the northern shores of Lake Garda, Arco is celebrated for its mild climate, rich cultural heritage, and spectacular natural setting. The town is also renowned among climbers as the host of the annual Rock Master competition, where the sheer cliffs that frame the town provide a fitting stage for one of the world's premier climbing events.

# The 40th Arcobonsai

## A Celebration of Art, Friendship, and Community in Arco

By Gabriele Sbaraini, Italy

Photos courtesy Arcobonsai Club Garda Trentino and Massimo Bandera

**F**rom April 24–26, 2026, the historic center of Italian bonsai culture once again became a gathering place for enthusiasts from across the country and beyond. The halls of the Municipal Casino, the surrounding gardens, and the Palatennis in Arco hosted the 40th edition of Arcobonsai and the 27th edition of ArcoFiori, welcoming visitors during three days of beautiful spring weather that provided the perfect setting for one of Europe's most established bonsai events.

This year's edition carried particular significance as it also hosted the XXIX National Congress of the Unione Bonsaisti Italiani (U.B.I.). The collaboration celebrated Arcobonsai's long-standing role within the Italian bonsai community as one of the nation's most active and influential clubs. Following last year's theme of respect, the organizing committee chose friendship as the guiding theme for 2026, highlighting the bonds that develop naturally among people who share a passion for bonsai, suiseki, and Japanese culture.





### Masters, Demonstrations, and Education

The technical program featured an impressive roster of leading bonsai artists and educators. Among the most anticipated appearances was Mauro Stemberger, who interrupted his Latin American tour to participate in the event. Joining him were renowned professionals Salvatore Liporace, Massimo Bandera, Donato Danisi, Giacomo Pappalardo, Sandro Segneri, Carlo Cipollini, Adriano Bonini, and Argentine artist Kec Fernandez.

The educational component remained a cornerstone of the event. Lectures and presentations by Luca Bragazzi, Antonio Ricchiari, Gianni Picella, Marco Zocco Ramazzo, and Marco Tarozzo provided visitors with opportunities to deepen their understanding of

bonsai aesthetics and technique. For suiseki enthusiasts, Daniela Schifano offered a comprehensive exploration of viewing stones and their cultural significance.

### Competitions and Emerging Talent

The Palatennis, the town's indoor sports arena, served as the center for the event's competitive activities. The U.B.I. National Talent Contest crowned Michele Claudio Lauria as "Talento U.B.I. 2026," following demonstrations by the recognized U.B.I. schools and outgoing Talento 2025, Filippo Biscontin.

Among the traditional Arcobonsai competitions, Marco Tarozzo emerged victorious in the Arcobonsai Instructors Trophy, prevailing in a field of fifteen professional instructors. The Arcobonsai Club Trophy

Arcofiori is a highly anticipated annual flower and botanical market show held in the historic center of Arco, Italy. Scheduled over a weekend in spring—often running concurrently with the renowned Arcobonsai festival—it features local horticultural displays, floral installations, and stalls set up along the avenue in front of the Casinò Municipale.









Facing page, top, middle and bottom rows.

Demonstrations showing Before and after:

*Picea excelsa*, styled by Club Sakura of Pordenone, whose team placed first in a competition involving nineteen clubs from across Italy.

*Pinus sylvestris*, styled by Marco Tarozzo, winner of the Arcobonsai Instructors Trophy, prevailing over a field of fifteen professional instructors.

*Taxus cuspidata*, styled by Mauro Stemberger from material imported from Hokkaido, Japan, transformed into a dramatic cascade composition.

This page, top: View of the bonsai exhibition in the Municipal Casino, one of Arcobonsai's principal exhibition venues.

Lectures and presentations enriched the Arcobonsai program.

Massimo Bandera presented "Yamadori, Joys and Sorrows," (middle left), while Luca Bragazzi explored bonsai aesthetics and technique. (Middle right). For suiseki enthusiasts, Daniela Schifano offered a comprehensive introduction to viewing stones and their cultural significance (lower middle left). Carlo Cipolini during his presentation at Arcobonsai.

Bottom left: Roberto Gretter's intricate origami creations and hands-on workshops attracted considerable interest from visitors throughout the event.



## Art, Culture, and Community

Beyond bonsai and suiseki, visitors enjoyed a variety of complementary artistic exhibits and activities. Roberto Gretter's intricate origami creations and workshops attracted considerable interest, while Catia Sala's embroidered artworks impressed visitors with their remarkable detail and craftsmanship.

A notable addition to this year's program was the participation of the Libera Associazione Garda Orchidee APS, whose orchid displays and educational activities broadened the horticultural appeal of the exhibition.

Among the many visitors was Red Canzian of the musical group Pooh, a well-known bonsai enthusiast who spent time exploring both the exhibition and the marketplace, much to the delight of attendees.

## Celebrating Forty Years

The 40th anniversary of Arcobonsai provided an opportunity to reflect on the club's history and

was awarded to Club Sakura of Pordenone, whose team topped a competition involving nineteen clubs from across Italy.

While the contests were highly competitive, they were conducted in the spirit of friendship that characterized the entire weekend, with participants sharing knowledge, experiences, and encouragement throughout the event.

**The 40th anniversary of Arcobonsai provided an opportunity to reflect on the club's history and the people who have contributed to its success.**



Top left: BCI Award of Excellence Medallion.

BCI Awards of Excellence were presented by former BCI Director Frieda Joris and BCI Director Massimo Bandera to Arcobonsai President Gabriele Sbaraini (top right), Carlo Matteo Perini for his *Pinus pentaphylla* (middle left), and Ettore Gardini for his *suishiki*, *Giappone* (middle right).

Bottom: Carlo Matteo Perini, *Pinus pentaphylla*.



**As part of Bonsai Clubs International's long-standing tradition of recognizing excellence in exhibition display, two special BCI Awards were presented for outstanding bonsai and suiseki exhibits.**



the people who have contributed to its success. To commemorate the milestone, participants received a special USB drive containing the digital edition of the annual bonsai agenda created by the late Carlo Oddone. Filled with practical daily cultivation advice, the publication remains a valued resource and a fitting tribute to a respected friend and educator.

Additional commemorative works were donated by master Carlo Cipollini and the artisans of Vulkanik Art,

marking the occasion with lasting artistic contributions.

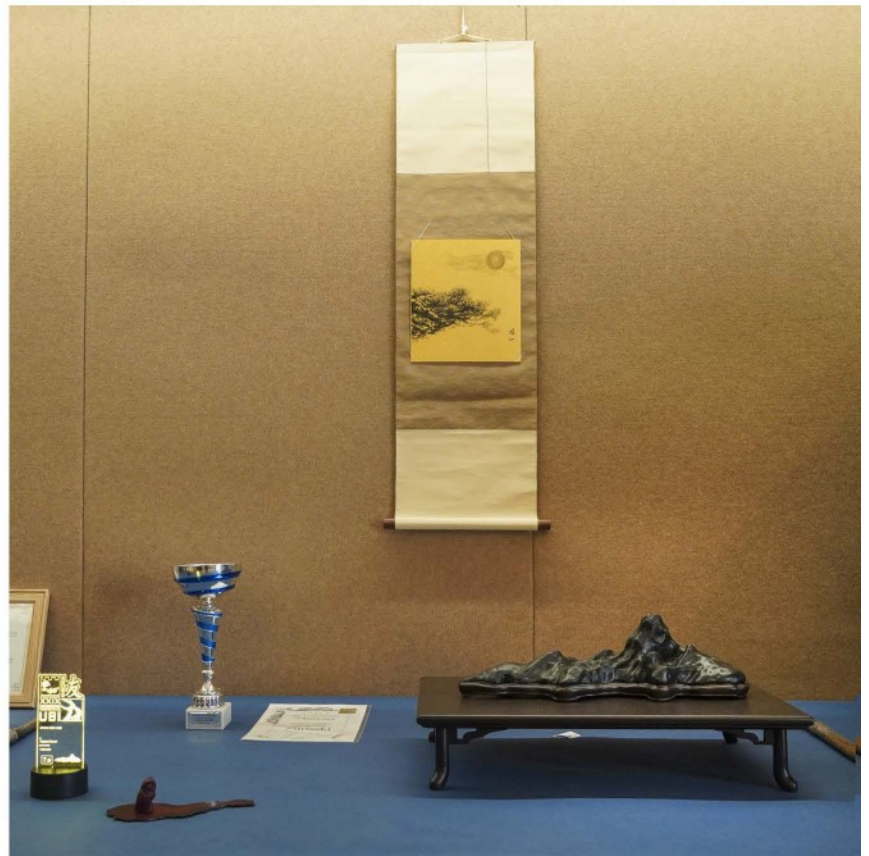
One of the most meaningful moments of the weekend was the presentation of the traditional bronze bridge, created by Tuscan goldsmith Andrea Terinazzi. This year's sculpture, inspired by a historic bridge in Nagano Prefecture, was presented to the Mayor of Arco, Arianna Fiorio, in recognition of the municipality's long-standing support of the event. The bridge continues to symbolize friendship, cooperation, and the connection between cultures and generations.



Top: Ettore Gardini, Giappone.  
 Middle left: *Pinus sylvestris*, by  
 Francesco Nano.  
 Middle right: *Ombre nella Notte*,  
 suiseki by Roberto Ferrari.



Arcobonsai also extends its sincere gratitude to the many individuals and organizations whose support has contributed to the success of the event over the past four decades. Special thanks are due to Assocentro, A.I.A.S., and the Palace Hotel Città di Arco, which has welcomed participants for forty years and continues the tradition of hosting the event's gala dinner. The organizers also wish to recognize the dedication of Massimo Bandera, whose guidance, assistance,



and unwavering support have been instrumental to Arcobonsai through the years.

### Recognition from Bonsai Clubs International

Arcobonsai's international stature was further affirmed by the presence of two distinguished



Top: *Pinus sylvestris*, by Mauro Stemberger.

Bottom: *Taxus baccata*, by Arsenio Ammaccapane.





Top: *Ulmus minor*, by Antonio Biagio Di Giuseppe,

Bottom: *Acer buergerianum*, by Scuola Trentina d'Arte Bonsai.





representatives of Bonsai Clubs International (BCI): former BCI Director Frieda Joris of Belgium and BCI Director Massimo Bandera of Italy. Their participation underscored the importance of an event that, for forty years, has served as a point of reference not only for Italian bonsai enthusiasts but also for the international bonsai community.

During the official ceremony, the BCI representatives presented Arcobonsai's President with a gold medal accompanied by a letter of congratulations signed by BCI President Chen Chang. The recognition highlighted Arcobonsai's significant contribution to the promotion of bonsai and suiseki culture, as well as its role in fostering friendship and exchange among enthusiasts from different regions and countries.

As part of Bonsai Clubs International's long-standing tradition of recognizing excellence in exhibition display, two special BCI Awards were presented for outstanding bonsai and suiseki exhibits. The BCI Bonsai Award was presented to Carlo Matteo Perini's *Pinus pentaphylla*, a tree distinguished by the quality of its cultivation, aesthetic maturity, and refined presentation. The BCI Suiseki Award was presented to Ettore Gardini's stone no. 10, Japan, recognized for its evocative character and exceptional artistic merit.

The presentation of the BCI Awards further underscored the high standard of the exhibition, which brought together some of the finest bonsai and suiseki currently displayed in Italy. It also reaffirmed the international reputation Arcobonsai has earned throughout its forty-year history.

## Major Awards

The exhibition featured some of the finest bonsai and suiseki currently exhibited in Italy. Among the principal awards presented were:

### Memorial Antonella Carioli Trophy

Best Bonsai: *Pinus sylvestris* — Francesco Nano  
Best Suiseki: "Ombre nella Notte" — Roberto Ferrari

### U.B.I. Awards

Bonsai: *Pinus sylvestris* — Mauro Stemberger  
Suiseki: "Giappone" — Ettore Gardini

### I.B.S. Presidential Awards

Bonsai: *Taxus baccata* — Arsenio Ammaccapane  
Suiseki: "Giappone" — Ettore Gardini

### "Io Difendo l'Ulivo" Award

*Ulmus minor* — Antonio Biagio Di Giuseppe

### Bonsai Club International Awards

Bonsai: *Pinus pentaphylla* — Carlo Matteo Perini  
Suiseki: "Giappone" — Ettore Gardini

### City of Arco Trophy (People's Choice Award)

*Acer buergerianum* — Scuola Trentina d'Arte Bonsai

### Top Exhibitor Award

Bonsai Do, Stand F07

### U.B.I. Assembly and Closing Remarks

The U.B.I. Annual General Assembly concluded the weekend's activities on Sunday afternoon. In addition to conducting association business, members recognized the retirement of longtime secretary Gino Costa. The gathering expressed its appreciation for his many years of dedicated service and his invaluable contribution to the successful organization of national congresses.

The organizers also acknowledged the support and cooperation of Assocentro and A.I.A.S., whose contributions helped ensure the success of the event.

Benefiting from excellent weather, strong attendance, and a remarkable display of artistic and horticultural excellence, the 40th edition of Arcobonsai reaffirmed its position as one of Europe's most important bonsai gatherings. More importantly, it demonstrated that beyond the trees and stones, the enduring strength of the bonsai community lies in the friendships and shared experiences that continue to bring enthusiasts together year after year. 🌳

Author and Arcobonsai President Gabriele Sbaraini (far left) and Participants in the Arcobonsai Instructors Trophy.







# Judging Excellence and Discovering Inspiration in the Philippines

By Chen Chang, BCI President

**A**t the invitation of the Bonsai and Suiseki Alliance of the Philippines Inc. (BSAPI), I traveled to Bocaue, Bulacan, Philippines, to participate in the 2026 Philippine National Bonsai and Suiseki Competition

and Bonsai Pilipinas as a judge and representative of Bonsai Clubs International (BCI).

The exhibition brought together many of the Philippines' finest bonsai and suiseki artists and offered an excellent opportunity to observe the continued

*Top: Celebrations and entertainment at Punla Pamana 2026.*

*Bottom: Group photo of VIPs and BSAPI organizers.*







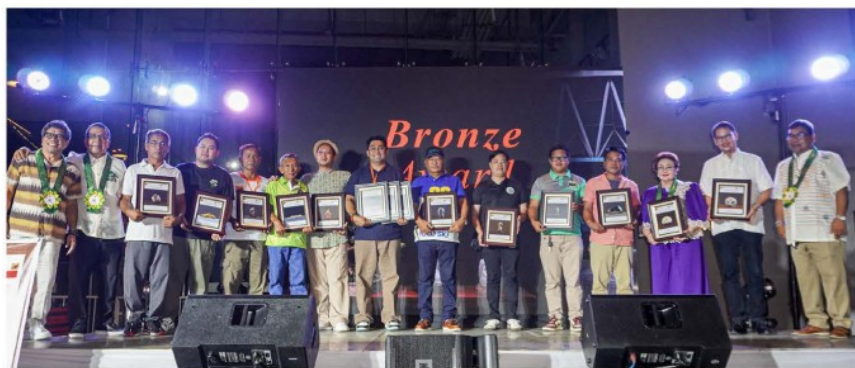
growth of bonsai culture throughout the country. Beyond my judging responsibilities, the visit provided valuable opportunities to exchange ideas with local artists, strengthen relationships between BCI and BSAPI, and gain a deeper appreciation for the unique character of Philippine bonsai.

### Serving as a Judge

On May 27, I joined a distinguished panel of judges to evaluate the competition entries. Drawing upon more than sixty years of bonsai experience and many years of international judging, I worked alongside my fellow judges to assess each exhibit for artistic design, horticultural quality, technical execution, and overall expression.

The quality of the entries demonstrated the dedication and skill of Philippine bonsai practitioners. Across a wide range of styles and species, exhibitors displayed both technical competence and artistic maturity. The competition reflected the increasing sophistication of Philippine bonsai and its growing influence within the international bonsai community.

The following day, I participated in the exhibition's opening activities and had the opportunity to meet artists, collectors, enthusiasts, and horticultural leaders from throughout the Philippines. What impressed me most was the enthusiasm and sense of community that surrounded the event. Bonsai and suiseki continue to thrive in the Philippines because of the commitment of dedicated individuals who generously share their knowledge and passion with others.



*Top left:* Susan Lee presenting BCI President and event judge Chen Chang with a Certificate of Recognition.

*Top right and left column:* The many winners in the bonsai and Suiseki competition.



The exhibition also provided an opportunity for discussions regarding future international cooperation. During the event, representatives of BSAPI and BCI confirmed their mutual commitment to supporting a major international bonsai and suiseki exhibition in the Philippines in 2027. The enthusiasm shown by local organizers and volunteers reinforced my confidence that the Philippines will continue to play an important role within the global bonsai community.

Having judged exhibitions throughout Asia and attended countless international bonsai events over the decades, I have witnessed the evolution of many national bonsai movements. What impressed me in the Philippines was not only the quality of individual trees, but also the confidence with which artists are developing a distinctly Philippine identity. Rather than simply imitating established styles from other countries, many exhibitors are embracing native species, local growing conditions, and their own cultural influences. This willingness to build upon tradition while expressing a unique regional character is one of the strongest indicators of a healthy and maturing bonsai community.

As BCI President, I am encouraged whenever I see artists balancing respect for established principles with a spirit of innovation. The future of bonsai depends not only on preserving techniques handed down by previous generations, but also on allowing each generation to contribute its own creative vision. The Philippines is demonstrating that balance remarkably well.

### Visiting Philippine Bonsai Leaders

Beyond the exhibition hall, some of the most rewarding moments of my visit came through personal exchanges with Philippine bonsai leaders.

I visited the private gallery of Artiste Museum owned by Anthony Gedang and the bonsai garden of Vice President Mike T. Peña. These visits provided valuable insight into the depth and diversity of bonsai culture within the Philippines. Their collections showcased both native and traditional species, reflecting a unique regional identity while maintaining strong connections to broader bonsai traditions.

During our discussions, we explored topics including native species development, bonsai design philosophies, cultivation techniques, and opportunities for future cooperation between artists in the Philippines and China. Such exchanges are among the most valuable aspects of international bonsai activities.

In many ways, these personal visits are just as important as the exhibition itself. Displays and competitions allow us to appreciate finished works, but conversations in gardens and workshops reveal the thought processes behind them. Standing beside a tree with its creator often provides a deeper understanding than any judging score or exhibition label can convey. It is through these exchanges that lasting friendships are formed and knowledge is shared across borders.

I was particularly encouraged by the openness of Philippine artists and their willingness to discuss both successes and challenges. The bonsai community is



*Top:* President Chen visited the private gallery of Anthony Gedang's Artiste Museum.

*Middle:* President Chen met with BCI Legal Advisor Vic Ceballos to discuss future BCI activities and opportunities to further promote bonsai and suiseki internationally.

*Bottom:* He was accompanied throughout the event by Tim Xu Dongting, Secretary-General of the BCI China Committee (right), and Huang Zhenyu, Deputy Secretary-General (left).

strongest when knowledge flows freely. The friendships established during this visit will undoubtedly lead to future collaborations, educational opportunities, and stronger connections among bonsai practitioners throughout Asia and beyond. They allow us to learn from one another while building friendships that strengthen our shared appreciation for the art.

I was accompanied throughout the event by Tim Xu Dongting, Secretary-General of the BCI China



Top: Among the many exceptional exhibits at the 2026 Philippine National Bonsai and Suiseki Competition, one bonsai left a lasting impression on BCI President Chen Chang—a remarkable Sea Hibiscus (Bantigue, *Pemphis acidula*) whose refined artistry and inspiring journey exemplify the rewards of patience, dedication, and continuous refinement. Judges President Chen and Bonsai Master Liu Chien-Cheng pause to admire the award-winning tree, which ultimately captured the exhibition's highest honor.



Bottom: The judging panel presenting Mar Ruel Sumabat, (third from left) the Best in Show Award.

Committee, and Huang Zhenyu, Deputy Secretary-General. Together we met many dedicated practitioners whose enthusiasm and commitment continue to advance bonsai culture throughout the region.

I also had the opportunity to meet with BCI Legal Advisor Vic Ceballos to discuss future BCI activities and opportunities to further promote bonsai and suiseki internationally. These conversations reinforced

the importance of collaboration among individuals and organizations dedicated to the advancement of our art.

### An Extraordinary Sea Hibiscus Bonsai

Among the many outstanding exhibits at the exhibition, one bonsai left an especially profound impression on me: a remarkable Sea Hibiscus (Bantigue or *Pemphis acidula*) that embodied both artistic excellence and the perseverance of its creator.

From the moment I saw the tree, I recognized its exceptional quality. Its composition, branch structure, visual balance, and overall artistic expression immediately distinguished it from the many excellent works surrounding it. Together with fellow judges and respected bonsai masters, I spent considerable time studying the tree and discussing the qualities that made it so compelling.

As we examined the bonsai, an interesting story emerged.

Years earlier, at a BCI International Bonsai Exhibition in Vigan, I had strongly supported this same Sea Hibiscus as a candidate for Best in Show. Even then, its artistic qualities were extraordinary. However, despite its excellence, the tree was unable to claim the highest award because one portion of its design exceeded the competition's permitted size limitations. Although the



decision was consistent with the rules, I remember feeling disappointed that such an exceptional work could not receive the recognition its artistry deserved.

What followed is a testament to the dedication of its owner.

Rather than accepting disappointment, the artist continued refining the bonsai over the ensuing years. Every adjustment was made with great care and respect for the original design. The necessary modifications brought the tree into compliance with exhibition standards while preserving the character, movement, and spirit that had originally made it so extraordinary.

When the Sea Hibiscus appeared once again at this year's exhibition, it had matured into an even stronger artistic statement. The refinement was subtle yet significant. Its silhouette was cleaner, its proportions more harmonious, and its overall presentation more complete.

This time, the bonsai achieved the recognition it deserved.

Watching the tree receive the exhibition's highest honor brought me genuine satisfaction. As judges, we are often required to make difficult decisions. We evaluate trees as they stand before us at a particular moment in time, guided by established standards and competition rules. Yet behind every bonsai is a human story that cannot always be measured by points or rankings. The Sea Hibiscus reminded me that the true value of bonsai lies not only in the finished image presented to the public, but in the years of dedication, setbacks, learning, and perseverance invested by its creator.

When I first encountered this tree years ago, I already believed it possessed exceptional artistic merit. Seeing it return after years of thoughtful refinement was like meeting an old friend whose character had deepened with age. Its eventual success was not the result of dramatic redesign or radical change. Rather, it was the product of patience, restraint, and the artist's unwavering commitment to improvement—qualities that lie at the very heart of bonsai.

The award represented more than the success of a single exhibit. It demonstrated the value of patience, discipline, and the relentless pursuit of improvement. Great bonsai are rarely created in a moment. They are the product of years, and often decades, of thoughtful refinement.

From an international perspective, I believe this Sea Hibiscus stands among the finest tropical bonsai I have encountered. It successfully combines technical mastery with artistic sensitivity while expressing a strong regional identity. The tree possesses qualities that transcend cultural boundaries and speak directly to universal principles of beauty and balance.

Its journey from near-champion to champion serves as an inspiring reminder that excellence is achieved not through shortcuts but through perseverance and continuous improvement. The bonsai's success reflects not only the talent of its creator but also the enduring spirit of bonsai itself.



## Looking Forward

The 2026 Philippine National Bonsai and Suiseki Competition was more than an exhibition. It was an opportunity to witness the continued advancement of Philippine bonsai, strengthen international friendships, and encourage future collaboration throughout Southeast Asia.

Among all the experiences of this visit, the story of the Sea Hibiscus remains the most memorable. Its journey from near-miss to championship winner demonstrates that success belongs not only to talent, but also to persistence and dedication.

As bonsai artists, we are all engaged in a lifelong pursuit of improvement. The Sea Hibiscus stands as a powerful example of that principle and serves as a reminder that true mastery is achieved through patience, vision, and unwavering commitment to excellence. 🌳

*Top:* The Best in Show winner also received the BCI Presidents Award. Left to right: Susan Lee, Mar Ruel Sumabat, Chen Chang, BSAPI President Michael M. Morden.

*Bottom:* BCI Director Budi Sulistyo presents the Best in Show Suiseki award to winner Toney Alvarez.





Top: Ribbon cutting ceremony at Punla at Pamana. Left to right: Mike Siow, Susan Lee, Michael Morden, Sam Adena, Budi Sulisty, Leticia Ligon, Bulacan Vice Gov. Alex Castro, Mr. Chen Chang, Representative of Bulacan Gov. Daniel Fernando, Chien-Cheng Liu, Lee Chung Hung, Manuel Lee, Rudy Julianto

Insets, left to right:

Member of the dance troupe; Susan Lee, Leticia Ligon, and friends;

BSAPI President Michael Morden;

Susan Lee and BCI President Chen announcing the BCI/ Bonsai Pilipinas 2027 Convention.

## Bonsai Pilipinas 2026 *Punla at Pamana* Where Heritage Takes Root and the Future Begins

By Susan Lee,  
Philippines

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

The year 2026 opened with a spectacle unlike any other. For the Bonsai and Suiseki Alliance of the Philippines (BSAPI), it was not merely another exhibition; it was the realization of a vision that had been steadily growing through the years. From the very beginning, BSAPI carried a singular ambition: to stage the largest Bonsai and Suiseki Competition in the Philippines, bringing together clubs, societies, collectors, artists, enthusiasts, and newcomers under one roof in celebration of a shared passion.

That vision came to life through Bonsai Pilipinas 2026, carrying the theme “Punla at Pamana.”

The title itself tells the story of the event. A *punla* represents beginnings, growth, and the promise of tomorrow. A *pamana* embodies the wisdom, traditions, and culture handed down by those who came before us. Together, they capture the very essence of bonsai and suiseki—art forms rooted in history yet constantly evolving with each new generation.

Appropriately, this year’s gathering was staged at the iconic Philippine Arena, the world’s largest indoor





*Top left and middle left:* This year's Best in Show winner embodied everything that makes the species extraordinary. Entry No. 85, owned by Mar Ruel Sumabat, (far left) captivated judges and visitors alike with its commanding presence. It is featured on the cover of this edition.

*Top right:* This year's highest honor was awarded to a suiseki by Tonee Alvarez. The stone also earned Best in Object/Figurative, Best in suiseki, Top 5 Gold Awards, and Artistic award—a testament to its powerful imagery.

*Bottom:* One of the Top 5 Gold Awards, Bantuliniao (*Maba buxifolia*) by Arch. Mike Peña



Top: *Hibiscus tiliaceus*. One of the Top 5 Gold Awards, by Mar Ruel Sumabat.

Bottom left: Kamuning Tulis, Orange Jasmine, (*Murraya paniculata*)

One of the Top 5 Gold Awards, by Arnie Lobaton.

Bottom right: Bantigue (*Pemphis acidula*). One of the Top 5 Gold Awards, by Mar Ruel Sumabat.







*Top: Best in Penjing, by Leticia Ligon*

*Bottom: Best in Mame, by Anthony Gedang*







*Top left:* Best in Rock Clasping,  
by Mike Peña

*Top right:* Best in Small Bonsai,  
by Anthony Gedang

*Middle left:* Best in Rock  
Growing, by Edwin Pineda

*Bottom right:* Best in Literati, by  
Charlie Lee

arena. The scale of the venue mirrored the scale of the dream—a national showcase worthy of the artistry, dedication, and heritage of the Filipino bonsai and suiseki community.

Some may say BSAPI is ahead of its time. In truth, it is simply responding to the times. Every generation interprets art differently, and every generation deserves the opportunity to discover it in its own way. To preserve bonsai and suiseki is not merely to protect tradition; it is to allow tradition to grow, adapt, and flourish.

Like a bonsai shaped through decades of patient care, the future of the art depends on its ability to welcome new hands while honoring old roots.

Nowhere was this more evident than in the remarkable exhibits and competitions that defined Bonsai Pilipinas 2026.





## The Bonsai Competition

### Bantigue: The Jewel of Philippine Bonsai

Every major bonsai exhibition has its stars, but few species command attention quite like the bantigue (*Pemphis acidula*).

Among Filipino bonsai artists, the bantigue occupies a place of honor. Shaped by nature along rocky coastlines battered by salt spray, strong winds, and relentless tropical weather, it develops characteristics that artists around the world spend decades trying to create: aged bark, dramatic movement, intricate ramification, and an unmistakable sense of resilience.

It is, in many ways, the bonsai that speaks most clearly of the Philippines.

This year's Best in Show winner embodied everything that makes the species extraordinary. Entry No. 85, owned by Mar Ruel Sumabat, captivated judges and visitors alike with its commanding presence. Every element worked in harmony—the powerful trunk, the mature branch structure, the refined foliage pads, and

the natural character that can come only from years of careful cultivation.

It was not simply a beautiful tree. It was a living testament to Filipino artistry.

The bantigue has become the standard-bearer of Philippine bonsai on the international stage. Its rugged elegance and unmistakable character tell a story uniquely our own. When enthusiasts from other countries see a world-class bantigue, they immediately know where it came from.

It is not merely a species native to the Philippines.

It is a symbol of Philippine bonsai itself.

Yet beyond the spotlight of the Best in Show winner stood hundreds of equally passionate entries representing different styles, philosophies, and interpretations of bonsai artistry. Each tree reflected years of patience, vision, and dedication, proving that the beauty of bonsai lies not in a single form but in the countless ways artists express nature through living material.

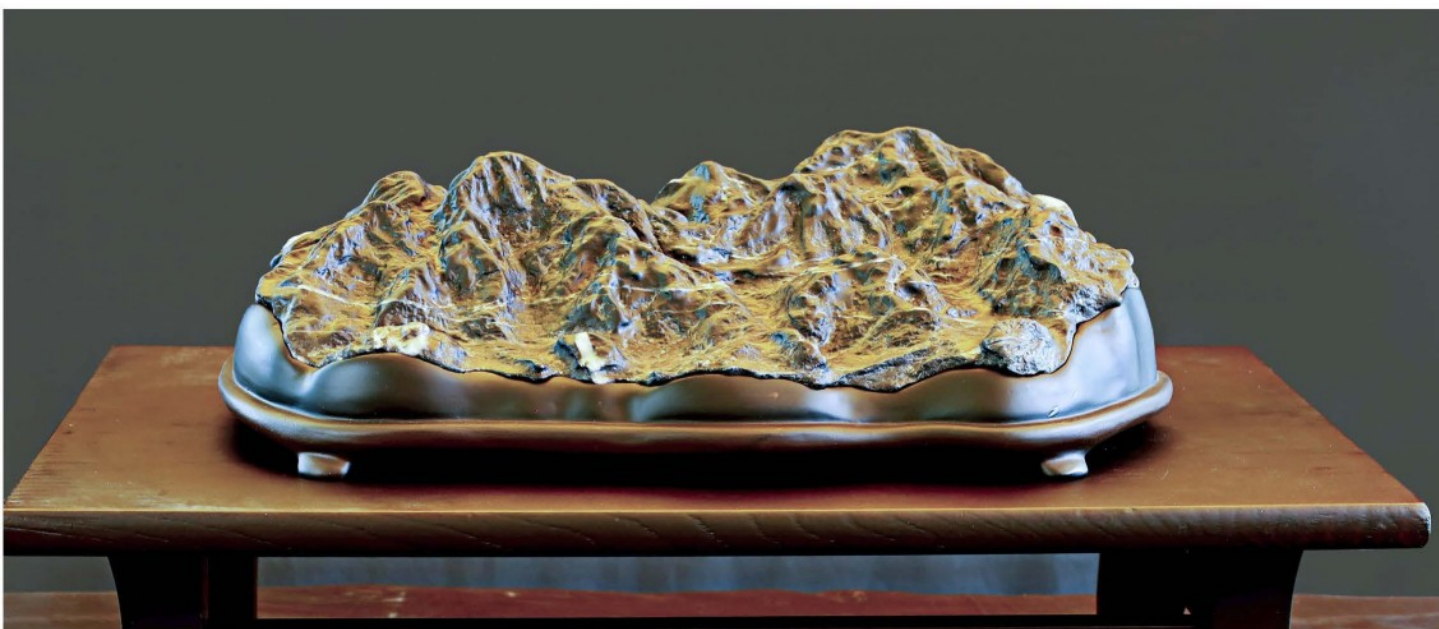
*Top left:* Best in Cascade, by Mike Peña

*Top right:* Best in Fruiting, by Susan Lee

*Middle left:* Best in Innovation, by Mark Pasion

*Middle right:* Best in Flowering, by Manuel Lee





*Top left: Best in Pattern, Top 5 Gold Awards, Ehecatl, Mexico, by Yssabelle Luna*

*Top right: Top 5 Gold Awards, by Ryan Barangay*

*Bottom: Best in Landscape, by Raze Sanchez*

## Celebrating Excellence Across Styles

One of the great strengths of Bonsai Pilipinas is its recognition of the diversity within bonsai. Every style presents its own challenges and opportunities, requiring unique artistic decisions and technical mastery.

This year's winners demonstrated excellence across the spectrum:

- Best in Penjing — Leticia Ligon
- Best in Small Bonsai — Anthony Gedang
- Best in Innovation — Mark Pasion
- Best in Mame — Anthony Gedang
- Best in Flowering — Manuel Lee
- Best in Rock Growing — Edwin Pineda
- Best in Rock Clasp — Mike Peña
- Best in Literati — Charlie Lee
- Best in Cascade — Mike Peña
- Best in Fruiting — Susan Lee

Together, these award-winning entries showcased the breadth of bonsai artistry in the Philippines—from delicate miniature compositions to dramatic cascades, from flowering specimens bursting with seasonal beauty

to literati trees expressing elegance through simplicity and restraint.

Every tree told a different story, yet all shared the same foundation: patience, imagination, and a deep respect for nature.

## The Suiseki Competition

### The Marvelous World of Viewing Stones

Imagine walking along a riverbank.

Hundreds of stones lie scattered before you, most unnoticed and forgotten. Yet among them, one suddenly catches your eye. In its contours, you see a mountain range, a moonlit horizon, a mother's embrace, a weathered face, or a moment frozen in time.

That is the world of suiseki.

Unlike sculpture, nothing is carved. Nothing is altered. The artist's role is not to create but to discover.

Suiseki invites us to slow down and look closer, to find beauty where others see only stone. It is the art of imagination, observation, and appreciation. It reminds





us that nature has been creating masterpieces long before human hands ever touched them.

### Best in Show

This year's highest honor was awarded to Entry No. 113 by Tonee Alvarez.

The stone possessed a remarkable presence that immediately drew attention. Its form suggested a deeply emotional image, inviting viewers to pause and interpret its meaning for themselves. The longer one looked, the more details seemed to emerge. It was the kind of suiseki that lingers in the mind long after leaving the exhibit hall.

The stone also earned Best in Object/Figurative, a testament to its powerful imagery and exceptional ability to evoke emotion through natural form alone.

### Excellence in Viewing Stones

Equally captivating were the winners in the major suiseki categories.

Best in Landscape transported viewers to distant mountain ranges and rugged terrain, proving how a single stone can evoke an entire world within the imagination.

Best in Abstract demonstrated the limitless possibilities of interpretation. Free from recognizable forms, it challenged viewers to engage their creativity and discover personal meaning within its contours and textures.

Best in Pattern perhaps provided one of the most enchanting moments of the exhibition. The winning stone, resembling a luminous full moon resting upon a dark celestial backdrop, possessed a quiet elegance that stopped visitors in their tracks. Simple yet profound, it reminded everyone that beauty often resides in the smallest details.

These stones exemplified the heart of suiseki: finding wonder in nature exactly as it is.

## See You at Bonsai Pilipinas 2027

As the curtains close on Bonsai Pilipinas 2026, the work continues.

BSAPI remains committed to building a home for every bonsai and suiseki enthusiast—from seasoned masters and respected collectors to first-time exhibitors discovering the art for the very first time. Our goal has always been to create a stage where talent can flourish, friendships can grow, and heritage can be passed on to future generations.

### Next year marks another exciting chapter.

Bonsai Pilipinas 2027 will be held alongside an international event in partnership with BCI, bringing the Philippine bonsai community to an even larger stage. It is another step forward in our continuing effort to elevate the standards of exhibition, education, and artistic excellence.

Like the finest bonsai, great things are never built overnight. They are shaped through patience, vision, and the support of a community that believes in the journey.

We invite everyone to be part of that journey.

Support BSAPI. Encourage new enthusiasts. Invite friends and fellow artists. Help us welcome sponsors, exhibitors, collectors, and future practitioners. Together, let us continue celebrating the gifts of nature and the artistry that transforms them into living masterpieces.

The seed has been planted.

Now let us grow the heritage.

See you at Bonsai Pilipinas 2027. 🌳

*Top left:* Best in Abstract, by Susan Lee

*Top right:* Top 5 Gold Awards, by Fernando Adena



# Whispers in the Light

## A Journey Through Quiet Terrains

**Indian Bonsai Association Exhibition,  
New Delhi, April, 2026**

By Neera Neelambara,  
Past President, Indian  
Bonsai Association



*Some trees may stand taller,  
but every tree must feel heard  
in the silence of the landscape.*



**F**or me, bonsai has always been a quiet dialogue—an unfolding conversation between the tree, time, and the artist. Whispers in the Light emerges as an extension of that dialogue. As one enters the quiet enclosure of the hall, the exhibition unfolds not as a conventional display, but as an immersive landscape—an invitation to walk through a gently revealing terrain, where each tree becomes a pause and each curve a transition.

The exhibition, organized by the Indian Bonsai Association, New Delhi, was held on 4th and 5th April, 2026 at Constitution Club, New Delhi, India, under the thoughtful leadership of its President Kiran Jain and the efficient coordination of Secretary Jyoti Shankar.

### A Quiet Welcome, the First Pause

The layout, envisioned by Past President Syama Balbir, draws from the memory of natural landscapes—where movement is unforced and paths reveal themselves intuitively. Trees do not rest on the conventional tables; instead, they rise gently from the earth on modular block pedestals. These varied elevations create rhythm and depth. Each bonsai is given its own space and dignity. Together they do not compete but coexist—like voices in a quiet conversation.

Curving lines of gravel meander like silent streams, guiding the eye through moments of pause and presence.

### An Emerging Landscape

A small island of green at the centre anchors the space—not as a focal point, but as a moment of rest. Elements such as stones, driftwood and a stone lantern are introduced sparingly, suggesting a larger world beyond what is seen.

*Facing page: Chinese Elm, Informal Upright Style, by Syama Balbir.*

*This page, top: A Quiet Dance of Light and Shadow Across Ancient Worlds.*

*This page, bottom: An Immersive Bonsai Landscape.*







Bottom left: *Casuarina equisetifolia*, Windswept Forest Style, by President Kiran Jain.

Bottom right: *Diospyros montana*, by Nupur Agarwal.

### A Centre that Breathes

The dark draped backdrop isolates each composition, allowing the foliage and trunklines to emerge almost like silhouettes in a theatre.



### A Gathering of Winds

Light becomes an essential collaborator. It does not merely illuminate but reveals casting shadows that deepen the narrative of each tree.







### The Shadow that Listens

Within this setting, the viewer is invited to pause—to look beyond the visible structure of the tree, and perhaps to sense its journey, its resilience, its stillness—its life.

### Rooted in Silence

Alongside this quiet Landscape, a modest bazaar—meticulously curated by the Former President Lalita Jain, offered visitors an opportunity to carry a small part of the bonsai experience with them.

This exhibition is an offering—a moment to step away from urgency and enter a space where time slows, and trees speak in whispers.

Following, is a small selection of the trees on exhibit...



Bottom right: Long Island Fig, by Neera Neelambara.





*Top left: Exquisite Composition Shaped by Nature, Premna, Slanting Style, by Saveena Gadhoke.*

*Top right: Age and Strength in Graceful Turns, Ficus virens, Root Connected Style, by Kiran Jain.*

*Middle left: Rooted in Time, Ficus retusa, Group Planting Style, by Sudha Jain.*

*Middle right: A Living Sculpture, Powerful Roots, Long Island Fig, Informal Upright Style, by Neera Neelambara.*

*Bottom left: Forest in Miniature, Chinese Elm Forest Style, by Lalita Jain.*

*Bottom right: Grace Shaped by Time and Patience, Chinese Elm Informal Upright Style, by Kiran Jain.*







**Top left: Nature's Poetry Sculpted Branch by Branch,** Brazilian Raintree Penjing Style, by Syama Balbir.



**Top right: Artistry Meets Resilience,** *Ficus virens*, Clump Style, by Renu Vaish.



**Middle left: A Dance of Graceful Curves and Verdant Clouds,** *Casuarina equisetifolia*, Slanting Style, by Lalita Jain.



**Middle right: Small in Stature, Immense in Presence,** *Ficus benghalensis*, by Mohammed Zubair.



**Bottom scene: A World Condensed, a Lifetime Paused,** Chinese Elm, Diorama, by Saumik Das.





Top left: **From Seed to Summit**, Jade (*Portulacaria*), Informal Style, by Aradhana Malik.



Top middle: **Where Time Bends into a Single Branch**, *Carmona microphylla*, Literati Style, by Nupur Agarwal.



Top right: **A Single Tree, a World of Silence**, *Libidibia coriaria*, by Saumik Das.



Middle left: **Aged Roots, Mountain Memory**, Chinese Elm, by Syama Balbir.

Bottom left: **Time Folded into Twigs**, *Ficus microcarpa*, by Kiran Jain.

Bottom right: **The Whisper of Wind Captured in a Curved Branch**, *Feroniella lucida*, Literati Style, by Manjeet Tiwari.







Top left: **Cultivated Serenity**, *Operculicarya decaryi*, by Renu Vaish.

Top right: **Roots of History, Branches of Hope**, *Premna*, by Sheila Bhargava.

Bottom left: **A World of Silence in a Group of Trees**, *Pithecellobium dulce* (Indigenous), Landscape, by Kiran Jain.

Bottom right: **Whispers of Wind**, *Premna* Landscape, by Nupur Agarwal.



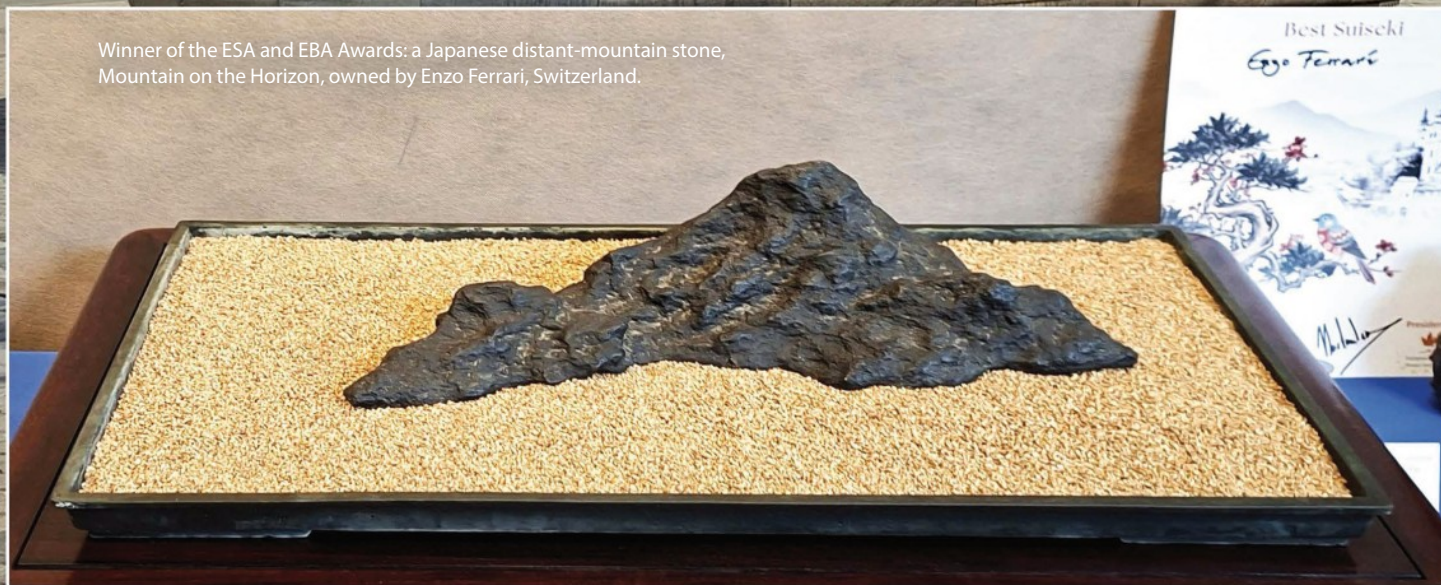


# EBA/ESA Convention 2026

## European Bonsai & Suiseki Convention



Winner of the ESA and EBA Awards: a Japanese distant-mountain stone, Mountain on the Horizon, owned by Enzo Ferrari, Switzerland.





Text and photos by Gudrun Benz, Germany

**T**he convention took place in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, from 10 to 12 April. It is a long journey for most Europeans, so some participants even arrived by plane. The city, with about 80,000 inhabitants, is located in the heart of Slovakia in a broad valley surrounded by the mountain ranges of the Low Tatras. It was founded by German settlers during the Middle Ages and flourished thanks to deposits of precious metals, mainly silver and copper. Owing to this prosperity, the city centre still displays many beautiful historic buildings. It is dominated by a high clock tower built in 1552.

The EBA/ESA Convention was hosted by the city of Banská Bystrica. The event was held in conjunction with Gardeniáda, a beautiful flower market.







*Preceding page:*

Square in the city centre of Banská Bystrica. It is named after the Slovak National Uprising. Although less well known than its famous counterpart in Pisa, the clock tower is also a leaning tower, with its top displaced 40 centimeters from the vertical.

*Inset, bottom left:* Castle of the town. In the background, one can see the mountain ranges of the Low Tatras.

*Inset, bottom right:* Flower market. Thousands of flowering plants, both small and mature, as well as young fruit trees, were offered for sale.

*This page, top:* View of the ESA suiseki exhibition.

*Bottom left:* Human-shaped stone, origin: France; owner: Pierre Chantry, France.

*Middle right:* Animal-shaped stone; origin unknown; owner: Novak.

*Bottom right:* Shelter stone, origin: China; owner: Jürgen Carocci, Germany.



The exhibition area for EBA (European Bonsai Association) and ESA (European Suiseki Association) was located in the LUX Hotel, whereas the exhibitions of the Slovak Bonsai Association (SBA) and the Slovak Association Suiseki (SAS) were displayed in tents in front of the hotel. The exhibition set-up, consisting

of cloth-covered tables and backgrounds for hanging scrolls, was already prepared when the guest exhibitors arrived on Thursday. As usual, the exhibits were photographed beforehand by the organizers.

A total of 48 bonsai displays and 33 suiseki were presented in the EBA–ESA exhibition. The official





*Top left:* Mountain stone, origin: Hokkaido, Japan; owner: Marcin Brudziana, Poland. It received the top prize at the EBA-ESA convention and exhibition

*Top right:* Pattern stone, origin: Czechia; owner: Šárka Bílátková, Czechia.

*Middle left:* Bridge-shaped stone, Black Pearl stone, origin: South China; owner: Gudrun Benz, Germany.



*Lower middle left:* "To the Zenith", surface-pattern stone, origin: Japan; owner: Tom Nishiyama, Japan.

*Middle right:* Distant-mountain stone, origin: Japan; owner: Enzo Ferrari, Switzerland.

*Lower middle right:* Mountain stone, "Misty Mountains," origin: Japan; owner: Vladan Laxa, Czechia.

*Bottom left:* Mountain stone.

*Bottom right:* Tunnel stone, origin: Canary Islands; owner: Bogdan Pociask, Poland. This suiseki received the Italian Suiseki Amateurs Association Award for Best Suiseki.



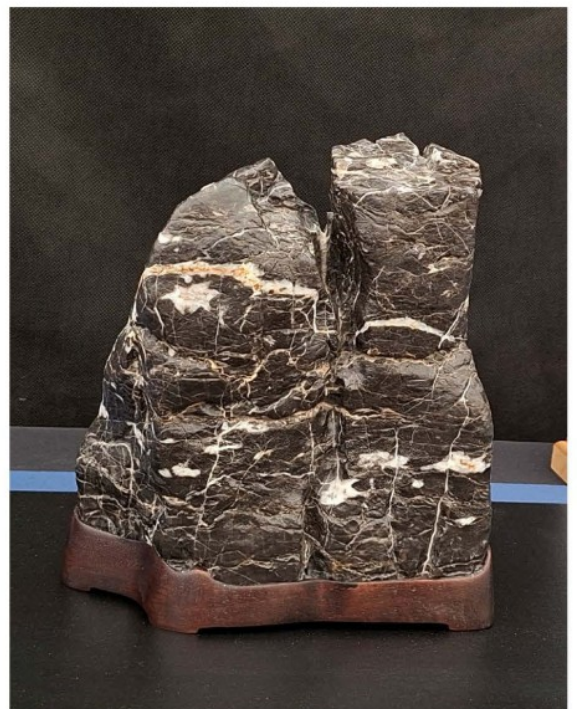
*Top left and right:* Suiseki of Mrs. Ella Gornerová, Slovakia; origin: presumably Czechia or Slovakia.

*Middle:* View of the SAS exhibition (Slovak Association Suiseki). All suiseki were displayed on black boards sized according to each stone. No scrolls were used.

*Lower middle left and right:* Vlado (Vladimir) Kamocsai, President of the Slovak Association Suiseki (SAS), together with a stone he found in Czechia.

*Bottom left:* Pattern stone, origin: Slovakia; owner: Vlado Kamocsai, Slovakia.

*Bottom right:* Pattern stone, origin: Slovakia; owner: František Mikuš, Slovakia.







*Top left:* Distant-mountain stone, origin: Indonesia; owner: Ján Vidlička.

*Top right:* Mountain stone, origin: Czechia; owner: Rasto Hradský.

*Middle left:* Object stone, origin: Slovakia; owner: Ľuboš Špalek.

*Middle right:* Distant-mountain stone, origin: Spain; owner: Miguel Ángel Domínguez Naranjo, Spain.



opening ceremony, attended by guests of honour, took place on Friday afternoon. Conveniently, all activities were held at the LUX Hotel and in its immediate surroundings.

The headline guests were Mr. Masayuki Fujikawa, Director of the Japan Bonsai Association; Mr. Su Fang, Director of the China Bonsai Association; Mr. Walter Pall; and Mr. Adrija Zokić. Mr. Fujikawa gave several bonsai demonstrations on Saturday and Sunday, while Mr. Pall and Mr. Zokić also presented demonstrations. The EBA New Talent Contest was held on Saturday.

I was amazed by the high standard of the exhibits and therefore walked through the exhibition several times each day. The award ceremony took place during the gala dinner on Saturday evening. Meetings of the EBA and ESA boards were held on both Saturday and Sunday. Three EBA board members did not stand for re-election, among them the long-serving Secretary, Detlef Mostler. The former President of the SBA, Lukás Jancina, was elected as the new EBA Secretary.

All in all, it was a beautiful event in a beautiful city. The memories of it will surely remain for a long time and inspire the attending bonsai and suiseki enthusiasts in their future work. 🌿

*Bottom left:* Animal-shaped stone.

*Bottom right:* Abstract-shaped stone; owner: Milan Klika, Czechia.





Top: View of the Slovak bonsai exhibit.

Middle left: Bonsai demonstration by Mr. Masayuki Fujikawa, Japan.

Middle right: Bonsai demonstration by Mr. Andrija Zokić, Croatia.

Bottom: EBA-SBA Convention 2026 Diploma, *Juniperus sabina*; owner: Ivan Machaček.

Facing page, top left: EBA-SBA Convention 2026 Diploma, *Carpinus betulus*; owner: Michal Zbončák, Slovakia.

Facing page, top right: EBA-SBA Convention 2026 Diploma, *Fagus crenata*; owner: Jozef Pánik, Slovakia.

Facing page, bottom: EBA-SBA Convention 2026 Diploma, *Pinus sp.*









Top: EBA-SBA Convention  
2026 Diploma, *Morus alba*;  
owner: Dušan Finka, Slovakia.

Bottom left: EBA-SBA  
Convention 2026 Diploma,  
*Taxus cuspidata*; owner: Jürgen  
Carocci, Germany.

Bottom right: EBA-SBA  
Convention 2026 Diploma,  
*Juniperus sabina*; owner: Lukáš  
Praš, Czechia.







Top left: *Juniperus* sp.

Top right: *Pinus mugo*; owner: Bogdan Pociask, Poland.

Middle left: *Juniperus chinensis*; owner: Josef Valuch, Czechia.

Middle right: *Carpinus betulus*; owner: Julius Kolesár, Slovakia.

Bottom left: *Juniperus sabina*; owner: Richard Lénar

Bottom right: *Juniperus* sp.





*Top:* Inspired by the traditions of Chinese penjing, this evocative composition titled *Mi Barrio* by Pedro Morales combines two *Bucida spinosa* trees with miniature architectural elements that reflect the vernacular landscapes of Puerto Rico and the tropical regions of the United States. The familiar neighborhood storefront, modest home, and winding pathway transform the planting into a living narrative, celebrating the close relationship between people and nature. By blending tropical bonsai artistry with cultural storytelling, Morales creates a scene that is both deeply personal and universally recognizable.

# The Inaugural U.S. National Tropical Bonsai Exhibition Comes to Houston

By Dawn Koetting, USA

**T**his Labor Day weekend, September 4–6, 2026, Houston, Texas will host a landmark event for the North American bonsai community: the inaugural **U.S. National Tropical Bonsai Exhibition**.

Known for hosting world-class conventions and cultural events, Houston now adds a new distinction to its resume with the first national-level bonsai exhibition dedicated exclusively to tropical and subtropical bonsai from across the United States and Puerto Rico.

The exhibition will take place at the Marriott Westchase Hotel, a venue familiar to many bonsai enthusiasts through its hosting of numerous major bonsai events, including recent Bonsai Clubs International (BCI) and American Bonsai Society (ABS) conventions.

The two-day exhibition will feature approximately 100 juried bonsai displayed in fifteen award categories,

showcasing some of the finest tropical and subtropical specimens in North America. In addition to bonsai, visitors will enjoy exhibitions of suiseki and shitakusa, each with their own award programs. A special ceramics exhibition will display approximately 80 handmade shohin pots competing in four categories, with awards presented to the top three entries in each category.

More than forty vendors are expected to participate, offering bonsai, tools, containers, stands, scrolls, and related supplies.

## Distinguished Artists and Judges

A panel of experienced tropical bonsai artists representing a broad range of styles and expertise will oversee both the jury selection process and judging.

The exhibition's special guest artist will be Ed Trout of Florida, a respected tropical bonsai practitioner





with more than four decades of experience. Trout will conduct a bonsai demonstration and lead two exhibit critique walk-throughs during the weekend.

Joining him are the exhibition's organizing artists:

**Pedro Morales (Puerto Rico)**

**Mike Lane (Florida)**

**Dawn Koetting (Louisiana)**

**Hurley Johnson (Texas)**

Pedro Morales and Mike Lane are internationally recognized artists who have traveled extensively as headline presenters. Dawn Koetting exhibits nationally and has earned numerous awards with trees from her extensive tropical bonsai collection. Hurley Johnson,

owner of Timeless Trees Bonsai Nursery, is an accomplished bonsai artist and experienced convention organizer whose work has received significant recognition throughout the bonsai community.

### **A Full Weekend of Activities**

Festivities begin Friday evening with a sponsor and exhibitor reception featuring food, beverages, and a preview of the exhibition.

One-day and weekend passes will be available and include access to all exhibits, the vendor area, artist demonstrations, and participation in small-group critique sessions conducted throughout the weekend.

*Top left: Dawn Koetting, Brazilian Rain Tree (Pithecellobium tortum)*

*Top right: Pedro Morales, Puerto Rican Roble (Tabebuia heterophylla)*

*Bottom: Pete Parker, Burt-Davyi ficus (Ficus burtt-davyi)*



**In addition to bonsai, visitors will enjoy exhibitions of suiseki and shitakusa, each with their own award programs. A ceramics exhibition will display approximately 80 handmade shohin pots...**





Top left: Albert Smith, Dwarf Jade (*Portulacaria afra*)

Top right: Boyd Snellgrove, Bougainvillea (*Bougainvillea glabra*)

Bottom: Kar Chong, King Men Ficus (*Ficus maclellandii* 'Amstel King')







Saturday evening's Awards Banquet will recognize outstanding entries across fifteen bonsai categories, twelve ceramic awards, and additional exhibition honors. The two demonstration trees created on Saturday will be auctioned during the evening's festivities.

The weekend concludes on Sunday with the auction of the remaining demonstration trees following the final demonstrations.

## Entry Opportunities

Bonsai artists wishing to exhibit may submit photographs of their trees for jury consideration through July 1, 2026. Ceramic artists have until July 15, 2026 to submit entries for the ceramics exhibition.

To document this historic inaugural event, organizers will provide an on-site photography studio to

professionally photograph all accepted entries. These images will be used in a commemorative publication celebrating the exhibition and its participants.

## Join the Inaugural Event

Additional information regarding submissions, award categories, schedules, registration, and hotel accommodations is available on the exhibition website.

The U.S. National Tropical Bonsai Exhibition is planned as a biennial event, making 2026 the beginning of what organizers hope will become a lasting tradition celebrating tropical bonsai excellence in North America.

Don't miss the opportunity to be part of this historic first exhibition—otherwise, you'll have to wait until 2028 for the next edition. 🌴

Top left: Mike Lane, *Premna obtusifolia*

Top right: Hurley Johnson, Melonseed ficus (*Ficus retusa* 'Melonseed')



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