



# Fujii Notes

Newsletter of the Phoenix Bonsai Society

Vol. 14, No. 1 – September 2008

## Show of Trees

For the 2008-09 year we are making a small modification to the Show of Trees activity. We will be adding a 'Review of Trees' to our calendar activities. The Review of Trees will allow all members to bring in trees for comment and feedback. The Review of Trees will provide an opportunity to receive feedback and advice on the next steps to be taken to shape and design young trees, refine and improve trees under development and to receive feedback about those trees which present design problems. The Review of Trees will provide brief feedback that can be followed up with Mentors and other club members. We will also continue to have Shows of Trees which will be more formal and will include completed trees in show condition. We will strive to have the trees displayed as though they were at a show. The trees displayed in the Show of Trees will be neatly wired, trimmed, in clean bonsai pots and will have clean top dressing. These trees will be of such quality that they will help us all better understand what comprises a well designed, maintained, and displayed tree.

## Overview of the 2008-09 Handbook and Season

During the summer a team consisting of Elsie Andrade, Joan McCarter, Alex Gray, and Tom Gatz updated the "Bonsai Care in Phoenix" section of the handbook. This section has been updated and revised to be more accurate and user-friendly. As our cumulative experience with our trees changes over the years, so will the record of what material works here and how well. Several other Mentors reviewed the other sections and provided their edits as well. This updated text will also be reflected in the information contained on our Web pages. Not all of the edits developed were included in the current 2008-09 handbook, but during this next year we will get those changes entered into our master text so that all are reflected in the 2009 – 10 handbook.

Please also see the latest addition to our web site, "When Did Bonsai Come to the Various Countries and Territories?" (<http://www.phoenixbonsai.com/BigPicture/Nations.html>).

For the 2008-09 year we will continue to have various topics of interest related to the art of bonsai presented each month. The Mentors and various society members will provide the instruction on the topics at the meetings during the year. The topics to be covered during the year should help each of us gain additional skills and understandings to help us become more effective in developing our trees.

In addition to the monthly topics we will have two new activities. At the Show of Trees at our October meeting we will select one tree that will be displayed at the Golden State Bonsai

Federation convention in Modesto California at the end of the month. This will be an opportunity for our friends in California to view a bonsai developed by a member of the Phoenix Bonsai Society. Perhaps we will have an opportunity to explain how a tree is cared for in 118-degree heat with 2 percent humidity.

At the Show of Trees in December we will select the trees to be critiqued by Ted Matson. Ted will provide a critique of club trees at our last meeting in January. Listening to a professional critique of good trees is highly educational and is of value to the owner of the tree but very instructive to those listening to the critique. Ted is a member of several southern California clubs, was a co-founder of the California Shohin Society, and is a past member of GSBF Board of Directors and past editor of Golden Statements. Recently, Ted's work has been honored as one of America's Best 100 Bonsai in a contest sponsored by Japan Airlines. His trees have also appeared in the newsletter of Nippon Bonsai Association and on the covers of Golden Statements, Bonsai Clubs International's Bonsai, and International Bonsai. His comments about our trees will be highly instructive and will help all of us to better understand the attributes of a good bonsai.

## Summer Fund-Raising Activities

During July several trees belonging to members of the Phoenix Bonsai Society were photographed to be included in the artwork displayed at new RA Sushi restaurants. King Lawrence Photography was contracted to develop the artwork to be used at all the new RA Sushi restaurants opened across the United States. Mr. Lawrence is a highly innovative and creative photo artist and he elected to use bonsai trees as his subject matter. He photographed ten trees belonging to Jamie Sims, Susie Kingston and Ken Roberts. In appreciation of having the trees to photograph, Mr. Lawrence donated \$500.00 to the Phoenix Bonsai Society. Once his project is completed, Mr. Lawrence will provide members of the PBS with access to his studio on a Saturday morning so their trees can be professionally photographed. It is hoped that we can develop a small portfolio of PBS trees to display at the Matsuri Show and take with us when we visit the Huntington and the California masters.

## Preparing Trees For Shows

Preparing your trees for a show involves more than dusting off the pot and putting your bonsai on a stand. You will need to spend some time to properly prepare your tree by trimming and adjusting the shape. Wires should be inspected so that if wire remains on the tree it is neat and properly spaced. Roots should be inspected, and crossing and small surface hair roots removed.

The soil surface should be free of sticks, leaves and other debris. Check for any erosion that has occurred due to watering. Be sure your top dressing is clean and is of an appropriate size and color for your tree and pot. Avoid extremely bright colored lava or akadama dressing. If stones are used, they should complement the tree and normally be buried more than half way in the soil so they look 'in place' rather than just dropped on top of the soil. If moss is used, it should be healthy and not in a dormant stage.

The pot used to display your tree should complement the tree and not compete with it. Good trees look best in good pots. If you have invested time and money to develop a good tree, you should also invest in a good pot. The experienced eye -- and perhaps some inexperienced eyes -- can identify a good bonsai pot. The pot should be cleaned and any mineral deposits removed. Light oil, mineral oil or olive oil should be lightly applied several days before the tree is displayed and then lightly wiped off with a clean, lint-free cloth. You would not want the pot to be too shiny or sticky.

Take care to select a base that complements the pot and tree. The stand should be approximately one third longer than the pot. The color of the stand should complement the pot and not be an identical color. Most stands are low and rectangular in shape. Taller stands are used for cascade trees. The pot is always placed in the center of the stand.

To properly prepare your tree, it is wise to think a bit about how one would likely view a tree in nature. A feature article in the Art of Bonsai Project by Andy Rutledge (<http://artofbonsai.org/>) provides an interesting discussion regarding the placement of the bonsai tree on a stand, an accent plant, and a scroll or viewing stone. Mr. Rutledge notes that when viewing a tree in a natural setting the smaller accent plants would be in the foreground, the tree mid-ground, and a larger landscape image (scroll or viewing stone) in the background. The landscape image is difficult to display and is typically represented in formal setting via the use of a vertical scroll with an image of a mountain. The accent plant should be in a simple pot and on a small simple platform. The accent plant should not just sit on the floor of the display. Displaying the plant without a stand would be too informal and seem haphazard.

In addition to sharing your trees at shows, you can also display your trees in your home for your friends and guests to enjoy. Trees can be displayed indoors -- though not for too long a period. Having a tree indoors is stressful due to the indoor climate with its low humidity and a temperature that is likely very different from the outdoor living conditions. Having a tree indoors is advisable for only a few days at the most. When a tree is displayed in your home, you should attend to the same display standards as when presenting your tree at a formal bonsai show.

An article by Morten Albek, "Displaying Bonsai Indoors," also in the Art of Bonsai Project, discusses the traditional Tokonoma display often found in Japanese homes. The size of the Tokonoma is one tatami. The tatami is a reed mat that is used for floor covering in Japan and is also used as a measurement standard. One tatami is 35.5 x 80 inches. The Tokonoma is 35.5 inches long and 80 inches high. The floor of the Tokonoma where the tree is placed is from 4 to 25 inches above the floor of the home. Most American style homes do not have areas appropriate to having a permanent Tokonoma display area.

A Western-style display is called Yoma-Kazari. This is a table or shelf placed against a wall and has a more western look. It is essential to have a light background color wall behind the shelf or table. The wall would be the place on which to hang a Japanese-style scroll. The table used can be of a variety of styles, but it would be more desirable to have a simple non-ornate table so as not to distract or compete with the art of the tree.

## The Myth of the Single Front

Will Heath has developed another very interesting article in the Art of Bonsai Project web site. His article focuses on the concept that all bonsai trees must have a clearly defined and intentionally designed FRONT. We all recognize this concept and it is presented in nearly every book on basic bonsai design. Most books will spend some text space defining the concept of a front and provide a number of illustrations to help pick the best front for a given tree.

Mr. Heath argues that there is not only one type of front -- the front that is shown when a tree is displayed or photographed -- but that there are actually a number of different types of fronts in bonsai. Mr. Heath provides descriptions of various fronts in bonsai trees. Below is an abstract of his comments regarding the various fronts. The following text reflects the ideas and comments provided by Mr. Heath in his article ([http://artofbonsai.org/feature\\_articles/mythofthefront.php](http://artofbonsai.org/feature_articles/mythofthefront.php)).

Forced Front: Due to chop scars, improper branching, unbalanced branching, poor Nebari (exposed rootage), or other flaws a front is chosen based upon the need to hide these defects.

This is very common these days as many people wish to rush a bonsai into a pot and show the bonsai before the faults are given time to heal properly and correct themselves. Another name for this could very well be the Impatience Front.

Container Front: Due to the shape or nature of the container a front is chosen that compliments the shape of the container. The artist then places his or her personal Visual Front in a manner that coincides with the Container Front.

Relief Front: Due to poor styling many bonsai will only have one single view, which is visually acceptable. These bonsai are like relief sculptures in that they have one single view only that is pleasing and like relief sculptures, they virtually disappear when turned sideways. Bonsai with a Relief Front often photograph well and are considered good by many because of the single view they present.

Photo Front: Movie stars and other celebrities know that they have a side that photographs the best and go to great lengths to ensure that all pictures are taken from this flattering angle. While this is a good practice and cannot be condemned, the obvious must also be remembered: if these stars only had one good side, they certainly wouldn't be stars. And it must also be said that the side a person thinks is best may not be the side others think is best.

Visual Front: This is the front most bonsaist enthusiasts select when styling, photographing, or showing a bonsai. It is a combination of some or all of the other fronts. This front is the artist's preference: the single view that he or she thinks is the best. It is the front the artist seeks to highlight, in the styling efforts.

## Does Everyone See The Same Front?

Take a world-class bonsai, photograph it from six or eight different angles, then line up these pictures and show them to two separate groups of people. One group would consist of experienced bonsaist enthusiasts and the other group consisting of people who are only vaguely aware of bonsai, those that know what a bonsai is, and maybe that have wandered through a show or thumbed through a magazine before.

Now, ask each member of both groups to select the front of the bonsai. Ask them to write down their choice and not to share their thoughts with the others.

Mr. Heath has conducted an informal experiment with pictures of a Walter Pall juniper and the results were astounding.

The first group consisting of experienced bonsai enthusiasts did not all select a single front. Instead, the selections were about evenly distributed toward three of the six views presented, but no one view went unselected as the front. Amazingly, the majority was not with the front that Walter eventually chose to use in photographs.

What does this tell us? It tells us that each experienced viewer had a different way of seeing things, different preferences that were developed individually based on that single person's own life experiences. The best view they see is what brings out the best in the bonsai to them, what best said "bonsai" to them based on those persons' training, understanding of the art, and what pleases them.

The second group was even more interesting as were their questions and comments that ranged from, "What do you mean by a front?" to "Oh, I thought they were all different trees."

This second group, consisting of inexperienced people, had results that were remarkably even for each possible front. There was no real significant preference for any of the views, and most thought all were great and had a hard time choosing one single front.

As suspected, the fixation on a single best front is largely confined to experienced bonsai enthusiasts and most likely this prevails because that is how they were taught and not because it is some immutable law of bonsai.

## OTHER ARIZONA CLUBS

↻Bonsai of Scottsdale (est. 2000) meets at 1:30 p.m. on the First and Third Saturdays of the month at the Granite Reef Senior Center, Room 7, 1700 N. Granite Reef Rd. in Scottsdale, Cross streets are McDowell and Granite Reef. Contact Patricia Mitchell for more information (480) 575-5649, [patmitchell2003@yahoo.com](mailto:patmitchell2003@yahoo.com).

↻Tucson Bonsai Society (est. 1972) meets at 12:45 p.m. on the Third Sunday of every month at the Tucson Botanical Gardens' Porter Gardens facility, 2150 North Alvernon Way (near Grant). Contact David Meyer @ (520) 722-2000.

↻Southern Arizona Bonsai Enthusiasts (est. 2001) meet the FIRST SUNDAY of each month at 12:30 p.m. For information contact Doris Cavanaugh, [doris.c@worldnet.att.net](mailto:doris.c@worldnet.att.net) / (520) 290-0522 , Pat & Thelma Patterson [dezertrats@aol.com](mailto:dezertrats@aol.com) / (520) 825-9685 , or Kurt [simonsk@pop.mindspring.com](mailto:simonsk@pop.mindspring.com) / (520) 321-4173.

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This newsletter is named in recognition of Hideo "Leroy" Fujii (1925-1998), student of bonsai for nearly fifty years, a founding member of our club, and our sensei / teacher for more than twenty-five years. Our club logo, courtesy of grandmaster John Y. Naka, is based on one of Leroy's trees. Two pages of some of Leroy's other fine creations can be found on our web site at <http://www.phoenixbonsai.com/LeroysTrees.html> .

"Learn from your trees: they are a reflection of you."

-- Leroy Fujii

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