

*IBA News & Muse*  
*Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter*  
*February 2013*

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[www.iabonsai.org](http://www.iabonsai.org)

[www.easterniowabonsai.ning.com](http://www.easterniowabonsai.ning.com)

## IBA FEBRUARY Activities

*February 19, 7:00 pm, Des Moines Botanical Center, Des Moines, IA.*

*A very short business meeting followed by a Bunjin workshop, led by David Lowman.*

*Cost of plant material is \$35 for a staked shimpaku tree. Soil and wire provided by the club. Pot is extra if you decide to pot-up. Notify Dave Lowman (DaSu Bonsai on the web) if you would like to have him bring a pot for you. You do not need to purchase a tree to participate. You can be an observer, or bring your own tree. You do not need to pot-up the tree; you can just work on the tree in pot. We encourage you to come even if you do not participate. Shake off the winter cob webs and come; this is really the beginning of bonsai season.*

## EIBA FEBRUARY Activities

*February 07, 6:30 pm Board Meeting. Chris Burr home.*

*February 21, 7:00 pm Club Meeting, Pierson Flower Shop on Ellis Blvd.*

*Payment of dues, distribution of club soil, discussion of 2013 calendar and workshops, organization of "Foster Tree program".*

*March 6, Repotting Workshop*

*March 7, 6:30 Board Meeting. Chris Burr home.*

*March 21, 7:00 pm, Club Meeting, Pierson Flower Shop on Ellis Blvd.*

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*A beautiful Japanese Winter Berry. Great pot, too.*

## Timely Tips

Boy, it was cold last week. My thermometer said -9F last Thursday night. Now it has snowed and warmed up considerably. How are your trees doing? It will not be too long before it is time to repot. This leads to an important question.

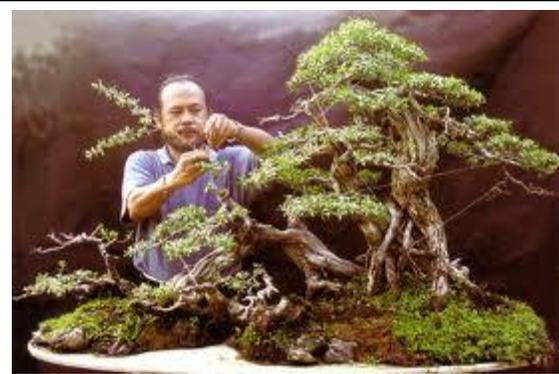
When to repot? Timing can depend on several things. Your winter storage conditions may speed up or slow down the first signs of spring. If your tree is frozen it would not be a good idea to repot it just now but if your maples are showing tiny green buds the time is now. Deciduous trees are usually ready to repot first. Look for signs of greening up on junipers and a bit of movement on pines. As the days get longer (and they are), trees start to respond showing signs of coming awake.

If you keep your trees in an attached garage, the first week in March works well most years to begin repotting deciduous trees. If your garage is warmer than most, you might even consider late February. If your trees are stored outside, your repotting will depend a great deal on the weather. Make sure your tree's soil and roots are not frozen before you repot. Junipers can be potted shortly after deciduous trees and pines can wait a bit longer. Personally, I tend to repot everything the same busy week, usually early March.

Tell yourself you are going to do a better job repotting your trees this year. The single most important procedure you do with your trees is repotting correctly. Your tree has to live in that pot and that soil for at least a year and likely 2 or 3 years. So, do it right. Have the right size pot, not just any old pot. Use the best soil, not just whatever is handy or left over from last year. Make sure you do your best work removing old soil, root pruning properly, and especially wiring your tree firmly into your pot. If you do these things well, trust me, your tree will thank you by growing strong and healthy and beautiful – and you will be proud for others to see your tree doing well.

## Is It Bonsai or Penjing?

By John Denny



*Robert Steven working on his combination of penjing and bonsai.*

Robert Steven is a bonsai master living in Indonesia who has developed a unique style impacted largely by his training in China in the art of penjing. In his wonderful and unique book, *Vision Of My Soul*, he describes the differences of the two styles and how he pulls them together for his very unique and dramatic style of “bonsai”. I will quote him directly.

“Some people say that my bonsai are contaminated penjing, and that my penjing are not authentic. I would like to explain the difference. Penjing means “landscape in a pot”. Bonsai, in Japanese means “plant (or tree) in a pot”. Penjing has a broader context in this art form, with its own specific nuances.”

Penjing has many sub styles, such as shuhuang penjing which is tree and pot. There is also rock and tree style, tree and water style, water and land penjing, etc. In penjing there is more than the tree and pot.

Robert continues, “The basic philosophy of penjing is, ‘Inspired by nature, admired as superior to nature’. With penjing we try to recreate the beauty of nature without eliminating the imperfections of nature. There is a great deal of creative and natural freedom in how the artist can do this.” In other words, penjing is not as encumbered with all the rules and guidelines of Japanese style bonsai. (cont. on p 6)

## A Note About the IBA Website

Ivan Hanthorn, web editor

You must have noticed by now that our website has not been updated for some time. Bonsai grow slowly but not as slowly as the website now suggests. The problem is that our technical web guru, Alan Spohnheimer, had a terrible accident in the fall of 2012. He fell off a house, landing on his head. Alan was the only one who knew passwords and all that other computer stuff which makes systems work. He is in recovery, but cannot assist us anymore. And the password has yet to be found. The internet powers that be have created catch-22 conditions that we have yet to circumvent.

So until further notice, our website is static. We hope to resolve this matter in the next few weeks. The site remains a good jumping off point into the wealth of information on bonsai now available on the web. But for calendar information we will continue to use this newsletter and occasional emails.

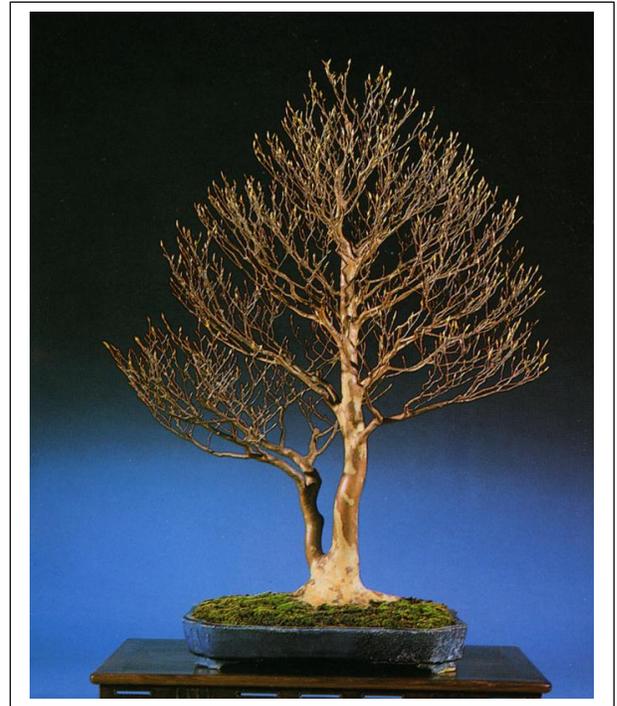
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*Very gnarly azalea from Empire Bonsai.*

## Stewartia monadelphica

By John Denny



Stewartia is a tree species that you do not see often in the US. There are many great examples of Stewartia in Japan, such as the one seen above. Michael Hagadorn, a bonsai artist from Oregon who apprenticed in Japan, thinks it is an under appreciated species.

What makes Stewartia an attractive tree? A few features stand out, at least with some Stewartia. One is nebari (the spreading surface roots at the base of a tree's trunk) and in particular, heavy impressively fused nebari that you sometimes see on deciduous trees, particularly maples and beeches.

There are at least two more outstanding features, that when taken together (and combined with an impressive nebari), can make for a very attractive bonsai. These features are smooth, variegated (reddish & tan) exfoliating bark and a stately elegance that you just don't see every day.

If you can find this species, give it a try.

## National Bonsai and Penjing Museum U.S. National Arboretum, Washington, D.C.

In 1976 during the American Bicentennial the people of Japan gave to the citizens of the United States a precious gift of 53 bonsai as a seal of the friendship between these two countries. To display these priceless trees a Japanese Pavilion was built on the grounds of the U.S. National Arboretum. This Pavilion provided the genesis for the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum. The Museum is now a widely recognized and well respected international institution, which has attracted millions of visitors and is the most visited collection at the Arboretum and a cultural icon within the museum community. Now, almost 35 years later, it is time to restore the Japanese Pavilion so that the invaluable bonsai gift that is housed there will be beautifully preserved for future generations to experience and cherish. To realize this important vision, the National Bonsai Foundation (NBF) is embarking on an ambitious campaign to raise the funds needed: The Campaign For The Japanese Pavilion: A Gift Renewed.

It is the magnetism of small trees in pots that draws thousands of adults and children to the glorious green space that is the Arboretum. Simply put, the Museum is the primary reason that visitors come to the Arboretum. This provides NBF with the incredible opportunity to educate these many people of all ages about bonsai and its related art forms. This is done through beautiful and didactic exhibits, educational programs and symposia, as well as an annual Bonsai Festival that brings to the Museum a joyous dimension that attracts bonsai lovers of all ages. Over the years the Museum's collections have become acknowledged for setting the standard of excellence for other similar Museums to emulate.

The Japanese Pavilion was the first Museum structure. Designed by the esteemed architect, Masao Kinoshita of Sasaki Associates, who was also the architect of the Japanese Embassy in Washington, the Pavilion was completed in 1976. Now in 2011, after almost 35 years of constant exposure to the elements, the walls are damaged, the benches that display the trees are deteriorating, and the structure and display areas need to be substantially upgraded.

If you would like more information about the National Bonsai and Penjing Museum or about the proposed plans for rebuilding the Japanese Pavillion, please visit the web site: <https://www.bonsai-nbf.org/site/campaigngifts.html>.

The National Bonsai Foundation is looking for \$2,000,000 in pledges. They have a commitment for \$1.5MM, but still are looking \$500,000.

This exhibit houses many old, old magnificent trees with great histories. They are looking for a little help. Maybe you can help out.

## Bonsai Book Thoughts

By Ivan Hanthorn

There is an amazing amount of literature out there now about bonsai. A few rise far above the competition. If one were careful, read reviews, and talked with fellow enthusiasts about bonsai books that they found useful, you could probably be a proficient bonsai student with no more than a half dozen bonsai monographs. Let me point out immediately that I did not follow my own advice. I am a retired librarian with a personal library. Books are my best friends. So I have a lot of books about bonsai and related subjects.

Regardless, the price of a book can be an important factor in the acquisition decision. The best prices are usually available at Stone Lantern ([stonelantern.com](http://stonelantern.com)), which seems to have a perpetual sale on just about everything. Amazon is also an interesting source. On February 6, 2013, under "Bonsai Books" Amazon listed 1,967 items. Near the head of the list in number two position was Harry Tomlinson's *Bonsai (101 Essential Tips)* for \$5 (\$0.91 used). A decent basic book, although I would rather recommend what was just down the list in fifth position, *Bonsai Survival Manual: Tree-by-Tree Guide to Buying, Maintaining, and Problem Solving* by Colin Lewis and Jack Douthitt at \$16.75 (\$6.84 used).

Among the many are a few really gorgeous books, some very big, most rather expensive. I once thought I had a list of the basic essential titles in this group, but a new publication has reduced the essential list to just one. If you are an American bonsai enthusiast. I refer to *Fine Bonsai: Art & Nature* by William N. Valivanis and Jonathan Singer (2012). Published at \$150 list price, Stone Lantern has this book listed currently on sale at \$95. I would not bet on this being available at a lower price in a long, long time. The market history with these large gorgeous bonsai books is that they go out of print and rise in price. This is an excellent book combining the work of one of the outstanding American voices of bonsai with the artistic eye of an amazing photographer. Take a look at the reviews on this book under the Amazon listing of the book. Following is the basic advertising blurb for the book.

In *Fine Bonsai: Art & Nature*, the most notable bonsai trees in the world are seen through the lens of renowned botanical photographer Jonathan Singer. This magnificent volume is the result of an extensive photographic campaign, in the course of which Singer was granted unprecedented access to the most respected public and private collections in Japan and the United States, including the Omiya Bonsai Village of Saitama, Japan, called the "mecca of bonsai," where photography is normally prohibited. Three hundred stunning full-page images and four lavish gatefolds present bonsai of all types, from quiet representations of nature to bold sculptural forms. The horticultural and aesthetic characteristics of each bonsai are concisely and authoritatively described in the narrative captions by William Valavanis, head of the International Bonsai Arboretum in Rochester, New York. And because the container is considered an integral part of any bonsai—indeed, the literal meaning of "bonsai" is "tray plant"—the book also includes some twenty-five photographs of traditional bonsai containers, with descriptions. A further sequence of twenty-five photographs is devoted to the related art of suiseki, or miniature stone landscapes displayed in the same manner, and often alongside, bonsai.

If you wanted to keep your collection of bonsai material to just a few but very relevant books, this could justifiable be one of them. It is an art object in its own right, full of visual and textual information and a great amount of inspiration. Think it over while it is still on sale. It is expensive; and it is a really fine book.

## Is It Bonsai or Penjing? (cont from p 2)

“The soul of penjing is revealed more in the whole presentation; the thematic message, the symbolism and poetry. The presentation is natural without too much of the aesthetic dependent on the details of the tree. Anatomical perfection is not a main requirement in penjing because nature is imperfect. The technical engineering skill important to bonsai is not so important in penjing. Instead the application of skill should be relevant to the tree only in order to successfully convey the thematic message to viewers. The essence of the whole principal in penjing is ‘In the picture, there is poetry, in the poem there is meaning, in the silence there is movement, in the movement there is rhythm’.”

Robert Steven concludes about his own work combining penjing with bonsai. “What I am doing with my own work is combining the objective aspect of bonsai with the subjective aspect of penjing, the beauty of the structural refinement of bonsai with the inner beauty of symbolic presentation of penjing, all to lend a unique nuance to the result.”

If you look at Robert Steven’s work, you know immediately who the artist is. His work is unique. It is beautiful, daring, dramatic, often complex with a landscape quality. I run across his trees which are often featured on the Bonsai Bark blog run by Stone Lantern. In my own bonsai, I wanted to push myself further artistically, a self judged weakness. Reading *Vision of My Soul*, making a detailed viewing of Robert’s trees, and reading his discussion on the specific aspects of art, I know I made progress. I am an analytical person by nature, but Robert Steven awakened something on the other side of my brain. I could almost feel the neurons connecting in new pathways. Google Robert Steven or check out one of his excellent books. You and your trees will benefit!



*A classic Robert Steven windswept style tree.*



*Another “windswept”. Notice how all twigs slope up and right indicating a light breeze rather than a strong wind which actually forces branches downward as in the previous tree.*

## Member Spotlight: Ron Heinen

We continue our Club Member of the Month interview series this month with a long term member of the IBA. Ron Heinen, a retired art teacher from the Ames community School District, is currently a supervisor for the Teacher Education Program at I.S.U. and teaches Drivers Education classes in Ames. Ron received the Hatfield Outstanding Novice Award in 1995. Since then he has served several terms on the Board of Directors and providing many demonstrations in the IBA meetings and on behalf of the IBA at the Iowa State Fair. Ron received the Helen Fagan Award for Significant Long Term Service in 2011. His enthusiasm for the art and the teaching of it is obvious.

Q: How long have you done bonsai and how did you get started?

I have been involved with bonsai for approximately 21 years. I was introduced to bonsai at a Christmas dinner sponsored by McFarland Clinic at which the ambiance (table décor) was provided by Dave Lowman. My significant other noted my interest and subsequently purchased a “serissa” from David as a Christmas present. The rest is history; my addictive behavior kicked-in.

Q: What do you like best about bonsai?

The art (process) of bonsai replaced my need to “do art” in a traditional manner. When I first got involved with bonsai, I was showing my paintings and drawings. Bonsai met all my aesthetic needs in a totally new and exciting fashion. The “process” of bonsai complimented my philosophy of “art”.

Q: What are your favorite trees and what do you like about them?

My favorite trees are pines, junipers, and conifers. However, the yew is rapidly becoming my favorite species to work with. Pines and junipers have the longevity and a certain degree of horticultural variety and complexity necessary to make them exciting to work with. We also have access to some excellent pine and juniper yamadori in America. The yew has an intriguing variety of coniferous and deciduous properties along with great longevity that make it, I believe, a well kept secret in the bonsai world. Also, we have a good supply and excellent access to some aged specimens of yews.

Q: What aspect of bonsai do you like best and what are you best at?

I find great satisfaction in collecting yamadori. The “process” is stimulating and challenging, and the results are so satisfying. I also find very rewarding the “aesthetics”, the feelings involved with the design process. Looking at a collected specimen is much like looking at a blank canvass. The potential is exciting. I feel most comfortable with the day-to-day care of bonsai. I have placed a lot of emphasis on proper soil, watering, siting, and appropriate care to keep a bonsai alive and healthy.

Q: What aspect of your bonsai ability would you like most to improve?

I would like to improve my horticultural knowledge of particular pine and juniper species. I would also like to

gain more experience with grafting in the mid-west.

Q: What bonsai experts have you worked with that you liked and why?

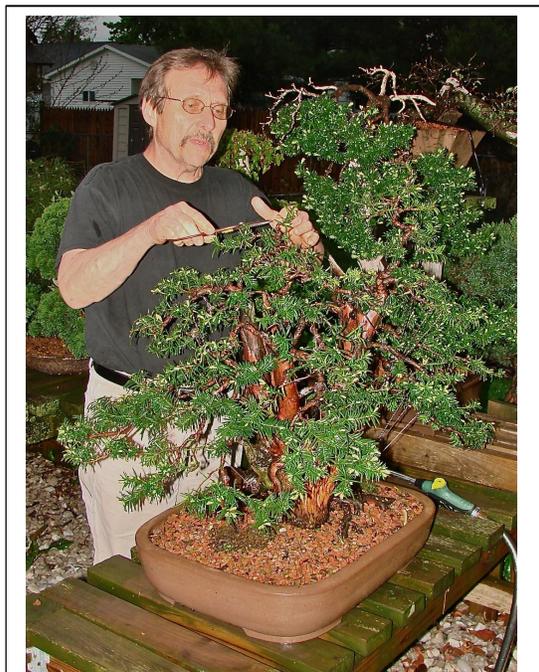
I have been fortunate to work with many outstanding bonsai artists. Besides the workshops we have sponsored in the Iowa club, I have had the fortune to have workshops with Colin Lewis and Kathy Shaner. Both were outstanding. I have spent, “defining moments” with Gary Wood in Muscle Shoals, Alabama. Peter Warren and Ben Oki were memorable. However, my first workshop with Horst Krekler left perhaps the most lasting memories.

Q: Do you have a bonsai highlight – trip, award, show, tree, workshop?

My most important bonsai highlights involve bonsai experiences shared with a friend I began bonsai with. Brian VanFleet and I began exploring bonsai together. We have shared collecting yamadori experiences that are among my most cherished memories. We have shared bonsai philosophy and “bonsai friendship” for 21 years. I have been fortunate to attend some great workshops, work on some outstanding trees, win a few very nice awards, and own some pretty nice trees. However, the friendships gained through my association with bonsai are most important to me.

Q: What do you get out of the local bonsai club?

The Iowa Bonsai Association has not only been a source of bonsai inspiration and knowledge for me, but also an outlet for me to share my passion. I have always believed that the act of teaching something can justify and solidify your belief system. Teaching also allows others to question and challenge what you believe. The club has afforded me the opportunity to challenge myself and “grow” my ideas about bonsai. The multiple insights and experiences of club members is invaluable if you want develop as a bonsai artist.



*Ron having fun with one of his great yews.*