

IBA News & Muse
Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter
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www.iabonsai.org

www.easterniowabonsai.ning.com

IBA JANUARY Activities

*January 18, IBA Board Meeting, 2 PM, Des Moines
Botanical Gardens*

*IBA Board Meeting held in the Walsh Room, DMBC. All
Board Meetings are open to the membership.*

*January 21, Association Meeting, 7 PM, Des Moines
Botanical Gardens*

*First meeting of the year. Discussion and finalization of
the year's activities. Bring the program options ballet
that was emailed to all. Ballets will be available at the
meeting for use following discussion.*

EIBA JANUARY Activities

February 13, 6 pm. Board meeting at Nothing But
Noodles restaurant on Collins.

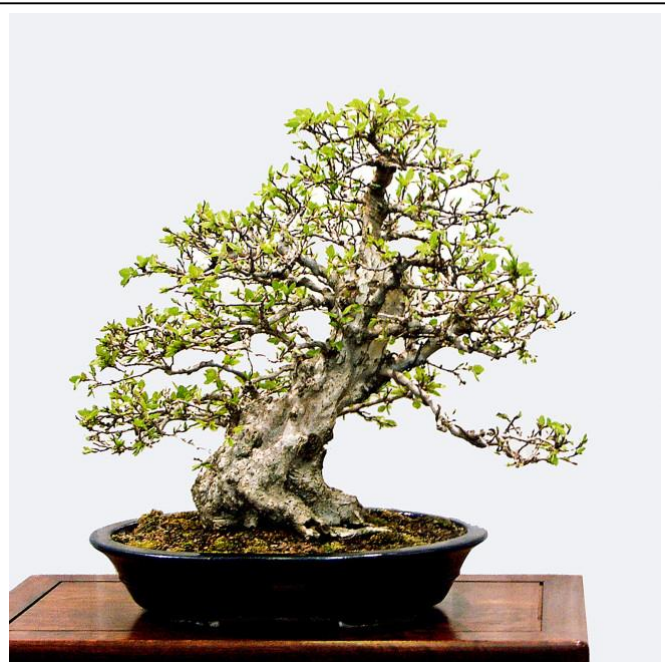
Final preparations for 2014 agenda.

February 20, 7 pm. Club meeting at Pierson Flower
Shop on Ellis Blvd.

*Agenda includes picking up club soil, pay dues, review
of 2014 activities planned, discuss bringing trees out of
hibernation and ready for repotting.*

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*Top: Korean hornbeam by Bill Valavanis 2005 Bottom:
same tree in fall 2013.*

Timely Tips

“Cold enough for ‘ya?” How many times did I hear that line this week? Yes, the temps and wind chill were brutal this first week of 2014. To shake the chill, I met with bonsai club members for a nice lunch. One of the guys, Bill Englert, lived just across the street from the café, so we ambled over there to see his trees (and rabbits, birds, koi, and interesting plants under lights). The first tree Bill showed us was a very nice crab apple still holding fruit. He also mentioned he would love to own a Chinese quince. A couple of hours later I ran across the following trees from the Omiya Bonsai Museum via Stone Lantern’s Bonsai Bark blog. All I can say is wow! A great crab and a world class quince.



Bonsai Imagination

By John Denny

Imagination is a wonderful thing. It can take us places we have never been, perhaps even, where no one has ever been. Imagination can create new solutions, cures, and devices that improve our lives. Imagination is a critical aspect of art – and bonsai. Below is a photo of an actual tree with little potential (straight, untapered, lifeless trunks with no interesting branches), followed by a simulated photo by Robert Steven of the same tree after applying his ample imagination. Amazing! Spending just a little more time imagining what our trees could be can do wonders for the future of our bonsai.



FORM: SCENERY SEEN THROUGH BONSAI

A review by Ivan Hanthorn

The book is haunting. It's a photographic essay about bonsai by a young and talented Japanese photographer, and it is certainly unlike any other bonsai photographic book you have ever seen or will ever see.

Ryo Ohwada, a rising star in the Japanese photographic arts scene, created the photos for the book as part of an exhibition that opened at the Omiya Bonsai Museum in Saitama, Japan, in 2011. The collection of photographs, all of bonsai, has no text. They need none. For those who need prose to tell them what they have experienced, there is an essay at the end of the book, by Toshiyuki Okuma, former Director of the Omiya Bonsai Art Museum and now Associate Professor at the Graduate School of Art and Design Studies at the University of Toyama—"Tenacious Structuralistic *Rimpa*--New *Bonsai* Photography by Ryo Ohwada." It's the sort of writing one encounters in academe about art and photography. One can skip it and still get everything out of Ohwada's bonsai images without a guide. Because Ohwada connects with something in your soul.

Ohwada's audacious thesis is simply that bonsai is the essential expression of a thousand years of refinement and distillation of Japanese aesthetics. His work was to interpret the core of that aesthetic with his own novel use of photography as an artistic tool to feel the heart of Japanese sensibility.

The great gift of the Japanese people to world culture was Japanese aesthetics, which resulted from that explosive introduction of Japanese artistic and material culture to the West in the century following the Meiji Restoration in the mid-nineteenth century. Consequently, Ohwada's photographs are not culture bound. They speak to us all. Furthermore, although only time will tell, they have the feeling of timelessness.

The first photograph immediately triggered a sound track in my mind (the introductory portion of Richard Strauss's symphonic tone poem *Also sprach Sarathustra*, known to many cinema buffs simply as the introductory score for Stanley Kubrick's 1968 *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The second time that I spent time with the photograph another sound track came to mind (the second score piece of the 2003 *The Last Samurai*, "Spectres in the Fog" (think thundering horses in the fog). Later I came back to this introductory bonsai photograph and there was no music, but there was satori. This photograph is perhaps the finest artistic expression of a creation myth that I ever recall encountering. I try to keep in mind the Keido precept that "What I see is not what you see." I do say that Ohwada's images are provocative.

My evaluation aside, I want to share a bit of My Okuma's critique. "Ohwada says that he has been interested in the Japanese way of seeing / showing things. As soon as he discovered the form of the *bonsai*, he found that the form if each tree represents an apotheosis of Japanese stylistic beauty. ... Following the style of actual traditional Japanese paintings, especially from the *Rimpa* group - which are specialized in decorative and witty structure, he now takes photos of the *bonsai*, part by part, and restructures them with collage techniques. The work is fragmented to represent the *bonsai* which doesn't exist but looks real in a solid way. Stoic and understated color tones of each work remind us of the subtle and profound style of the Japanese ink painting of the *suiboku-ga*. In this tradition, the existence of the *bonsai* is highlighted more strongly than the real *bonsai* can in fact show itself. This is the surrealist in his form, bringing together the tenacity of the *bonsaishis* who have dedicated themselves to passing on the techniques and the accumulated hardships of the *bonsai* over the years, revealing the found sculpture of a tree, surviving the restraints upon its life in the pursuit of an ideal form. ... Ryo Ohwada's approach has led to the fusion of photography and paintings over the living sculpture of the *bonsai*, triangulating culture, aesthetics, and the record as the composition of vision."

The photographic images are dark, moody. It takes a while to get used to this aspect of the book. Do find good light in which to view the pages. Go slowly. Return often.

I was surprised that I found no review of this book in the American press or the bonsai web universe, particularly since this premiered at the Omiya Bonsai Museum before moving on to other Japanese art venues. I noticed the book on the internet and did go looking for the most affordable way to acquire a copy here in the USA. It has been on eBay but at the usual high price for Japanese bonsai books. So what should I find but that it is now available at Amazon for a much more affordable price.

I highly recommend this book for those who want to expand their understanding of the many dimensions of bonsai as an art form and a cultural icon and most particularly for those interested in the juxtaposition of the two arts of bonsai and photography and their interrelationships.



Ryo Ohwada, images for Form

Ancient Trees

By John Denny



In our hobby of bonsai, we strive to make our trees show the respect of age. We do our best to develop a thick trunk, good nebari, craggy bark, and we lower the angle of the branches. Then we look for a venerable old pot to further enhance our tree. Perhaps our tree now looks like a 50 year old bonsai tree.

But, can you imagine a 500 year old tree? Or a 5000 year old tree? They do exist. We have heard of the giant Sequoia trees out west. One Sequoia has a 12 foot diameter 200 feet above the ground. And perhaps we have heard of an ancient Bristlecone pine, one of the slowest growing trees in nature. Here are some short lists of the oldest trees from around the world to give ourselves some perspective, both on trees, as well as with life in general.

The ten oldest trees with actual measured ages are: 1) 5063 years, a bristlecone pine, *Pinus longaeva*, growing in the White mountains of California. Imagine this tree growing 3000 years prior to the birth of Christ! 2) Methuselah, 4845, bristlecone pine, Inyo County, Ca 3) Prometheus, 4844, bristlecone pine, Wheeler peak, Nevada, cut down in 1964 by a researcher 4) Gran Abuelo, 3642, Patagonian cypress, Los Rios, Chili 5) Giant Sequoia, 3266, Sierra Nevada, Ca Dead 6) through 9) all Giant Sequoias in Sierra Nevada 10) Western juniper, 2675, Sierra Nevada.

Trees from around the world with estimated rather than actual ages: 1) The Sisters, 6000 – 6800 years, Olive tree, Lebanon 2) Llangernyw Yew, 4 – 5000, Common yew, North Wales 3) Sarv-e Abarkuh, 4000, Mediterranean cypress, Iran 4) The Senator, 3500, Pond cypress, Florida 5) Alishan Sacred Tree, 3000, Formosan cypress, Taiwan.

Finally, there are “clonal trees”. A clonal colony is a group of genetically identical individuals, that have grown in a given location, all originating vegetatively, from a single ancestor. Examples include: 1) Pando, 80,000 to 1,000,000 (yes) years, Quaking aspen, Fish lake, Utah, covers 107 acres, has 47,000 stems averaging 130 years old, heaviest living organism weighing 6000 tons 2) Jurupa oak, 13,000 years, Ca 3) Old Tjikko, 9550, Norway spruce, Sweden, no individual stem lives more than 600 years, 20 other spruce older than 8000 years also living in same area.



Bonsai Pots As Art

By John Denny

I have always liked trees. I became interested in bonsai because of trees. I soon learned there was more to bonsai than just trees. Now I own more pots than trees. Some pots I buy and have not yet used. Other pots sit empty as their tree has out grown them. And some pots sit empty in my collection as a result of a tree meeting its unfortunate demise. Andy Wood recently quoted a short poem:

*I never whine
I'm not a complainer
With every dead bonsai
I get a container.*

I have begun to appreciate beautiful bonsai containers. I have even purchased a couple just to put on a shelf for display. No tree. I also enjoy perusing Kokofu books looking at the beautiful pots which were selected to show the various trees at their finest.

We have some fine potters in this country – Rayner, Lang, etc. But, if you like older pots with lots of character and patina and history, we have to look to Japan and China. One of the more knowledgeable people on Japanese pots is our friend Matt Ouwinga. Matt has a growing collection of fine old pots and has gained an extensive knowledge of pots, potters, styles, techniques, glazes, painting, history, etc. He has developed contacts in Japan and is now buying and selling antique pots from Japan. If you would like to learn more about antique pots, check out Matt's web site, <http://kaedebonsai.com/> See his collection of pottery. Read his blog on pots. His blog posts feature many superb photos of great pots. Look at his pots for sale. Maybe you will find one you can use or that you just want to display.

Displaying bonsai pots as art is satisfying for those of us who have a collecting bug in our genetic makeup. And remember, you do not have to water or style a pot. They do not get fungus or bug infestations and they do not die! Also, as my wife, Gail, points out, pots don't take up as much room as trees and you do not have to overwinter them. Good points. I cannot afford nice paintings from the 19th century, but I can afford an occasional nice bonsai pot from that timeframe. You can expect my pot collection to grow in the future.





Heian Tofokuji



Clockwise from top Left: Suizan, Siewafu, Haruyoshi



Ikkou

Bjorn Bjorholm Bonsai Tips

By John Denny

Clean up for Show Prep.

“They say that cleanliness is next to godliness – I can’t vouch for this, but I will say that it certainly makes a notable difference in bonsai presentation. When prepping bonsai for exhibition, the application of proper cleaning techniques can mean the difference between success and failure of presentation. These cleaning techniques vary depending on the species we happen to be applying them to, though all are rather simple and logical

Let’s start with the top first. Foliage should be refined – dead needles, leaves and branches should be removed, silhouettes should be defined, hanging foliage should be removed or wired into place, etc. Next, trunks should be cleaned – wash the trunks of maples and other smooth-barked deciduous species with water and a soft-bristled toothbrush, scrub shari and jin in the same manner and paint with lime sulphur (typically 2 weeks before exhibiting), lightly sand-paper the live veins of junipers to bring out the reddish color of the bark, etc. The next step is to cover the soil surface with moss. For this, it is best to use various species, varieties, colors, and sizes of moss, placing them piece-by-piece, much like a puzzle, making sure to cover the entire surface of the soil, from the pot edge to the root base. Creating a natural appearance with the moss is a skill developed only through practice. Lastly, wipe the pot with a damp towel and, for unglazed containers, apply a thin coating of camellia oil to the entire surface of the pot.”

Editors: Bjorn Bjorholm is a fine young bonsai expert who has apprenticed in Japan. He has an excellent video series called Bonsai Art of Japan. This article was part of Bjorn’s new column in the ABS newsletter.

