

IBA News & Muse
Iowa Bonsai Association Newsletter
2015 SEPTEMBER

Volume 32, Issue 9



www.iabonsai.org

www.easterniowabonsai.ning.com

IBA SEPTEMBER Activities

September 15, 7pm, IBA MEETING
Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden, Botany Lab, 909 Robert D. Ray Drive
Shimpaku Workshop; create a raft planting or a twisted Shimpaku. Members will be available to help. Dasu will have materials for sale.

October 10-11, Saturday-Sunday, 9am-4:30pm
Reiman Gardens, Ames
IBA Fall Bonsai Show—"The Grandeur of Literati and Penjing"

EIBA SEPTEMBER Activities

September 10, 6 pm. Board Mtg at Nothing But Noodles Restaurant.

September 17, 7 pm. Club Mtg at Pierson's Flower Shop on Ellis Blvd in Cedar Rapids.
Topic: *Pests and Diseases. Al Pierson to speak.*

September 14 - 27. Artisans Cup. Portland Art Museum. Portland, Oregon.

October 8, 6 pm. Board Mtg at Nothing But Noodles Restaurant.

October 15, 7 pm. Club Mtg at Marion Library.
Topic: *All About Pots by Cat Nelson*

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This brilliant bouganvillia is by Tobie Klaynhans of South Africa. Good bonsai are cultivated around the world!

How Many Trees Are There On Earth?

A new study by researchers at Yale University using satellite data and forest plot density testing has determined there are 3 Trillion trees on the planet. That is 420 trees for each human. I told my wife I was, therefore, entitled to a lot more bonsai trees to reach my 420 number. So, does anyone have an extra sofa I can sleep on? jd

Timely Tips

September has rolled around. Temperatures usually abate somewhat, especially night time temps. If you have Tropical bonsai, it means watching the night time temps and bringing your trees in or protecting them from temps below 55F or 50F if you are braver and know your Tropical species can handle it. Remember, if the forecast is for a low of 52F, it might actually get down much lower in reality, so be conservative.

Humidity usually drops in September and leaves can dry out. Continue to monitor your trees and soils for moistness/dryness. IF the weather cools enough, we may get by with less watering. Now is a good time to rotate your trees to even out growth on all sides.

Continue watching for pests and disease. Remove diseased or dead leaves. Spray if necessary. Weeds are still growing actively in the soils of some of my trees, especially oxalis. Dig deep and pull them out.

September is a good time to begin cleaning your trees up a bit. Pots are dirty. Clean the sides and especially the underside where crud collects. Clean the soil surface of weeds, fallen leaves, old fertilizer cakes, etc. Clean your outdoor benches and display areas of spilled soil particles, clipped wires, and organic detritus. You may even want to resurface the bench tops if they are in bad shape.

With junipers you can prune away unwanted new growth in branch crotches and on the underside of branches, or unnecessary growth that is spiking straight upwards. Some folks like to remove the loose bark on juniper trunks, other prefer the rough look. Those who remove the loose bark like the attractive cinnamon color underneath. Removing it will not hurt the tree if you remove it gently. Use fingernails to pop the bark loose. You can use a soft brush or old toothbrush to clean the surface. No worries, the bark will grow back easily.

It is a bit early, but be ready with your camera to capture the beauty of the upcoming fall colors over the next few weeks. Share them with us!

Chris Burr

Chris Burr, President of the Eastern Iowa Bonsai Association, passed away August 15, 2015 after a short illness. Chris had been president for the past three years. He performed the job exceedingly well with a focus on new membership and communication. The club is much stronger as a result of his stewardship.

Chris was a kind, gentle person who loved his family and found beauty and spirituality in nature and art. Chris went to college in Decorah, Iowa where he grew to love the trout streams and limestone bluffs of the area. He loved flowers and plants of all kinds. In addition to bonsai, Chris painted, did ceramics creating many of his own bonsai pots, and wrote poetry. Trout fishing and camping near Decorah with his best friend of sixty years, Barney, was his passion. Chris enjoyed visiting Botanic Gardens, looking for unusual plants to place along the creek in his backyard. Chris spent many hours on the small back patio listening to the creek, drinking coffee, and working on his many trees, some of which had been passed down from his father.

Chris was a very accepting person. He did not judge others. He accepted everyone. Here is a reading from his funeral – a piece written by Ram Dass.

“When you go out into the woods and look at trees, you see all these different trees. And some of them are bent, and some of them are straight and some of them are evergreens, and some of them are whatever. And you look at the tree and allow it. You see why it is the way it is. You sort of understand that it didn’t get enough light, and so it turned that way. And you don’t get all emotional about it. You just allow it. You appreciate the tree. The minute you get near humans you lose all that. And you are constantly saying, ‘You are too this, or I’m too this.’ That judging mind comes in. And so I practice turning people into trees. Which means appreciating them just the way they are.”

Chris was able to go to Brussel’s Rendezvous this past May with three of us. We had a blast. Chris was first in line at every food occasion, smiling and having fun. That is the way we shall remember him!

Wood Adventures – Ask Wood

by Gary Wood

This is a new column – an advice column if you will – where you, the reader, can ask Gary Wood a question about your bonsai. Any bonsai. Any question is fair game. Ask why, ask how, ask when. Gary is a bonsai teacher from Alabama who travels extensively. He began life in a tree nursery, learning about trees and followed that by learning bonsai, pottery, and a whole lot of other things. We welcome him to our newsletter!

Question:

Hi, Gary
I woke this morning and found that a deer ate 30% of my Trident forest. All of the tops are gone except one as you can see in the before and after pictures. What should I do with the forest? Leave it and let it grow back or should I do something now? I am so disappointed. Thanks. Buck.



Gary Wood Answers:

Adapt, Improvise and Overcome. You have to be a marine sometimes to be a bonsai person. Sometimes it's hard to see the forest for the trees in more than one perspective. One's entire collection is a forest. The learning curve in bonsai is a forest. Everything we do in bonsai has to be looked at in perspective of what we know. How did we get there and where do we want to go? (The forest.)

A young forest like yours having this damage gives you the chance to develop your appreciation of the big forest. The hardest part of bonsai in the beginning is being lost in the forest. You recognize that, number one, is protection of your trees, whether it is deer, frost, sun, etc. Number two you can always reassess in the spring. Number three address the course of action.

Course of Action: The new growth probably will not have time to harden off prior to frost in fall. Your forest will need protection against frost to prevent new shoots which are now beginning to grow after the deer damage, from dying off. Currently, keep your forest in sun and feed heavily until frost. Design wise decide where you need larger trunks and leave them growing. Trees that you want small, like on the edges of the forest, you can clip their tops in late fall. Let 1 or 2 trees really grow for design purposes so you have variation in trunk sizes and tree heights. If you want movement you can wire the trunks in November after leaves are gone. Next year the trees will need to grow hard so lots of sun, water, and fertilizer. Let the trees grow "wild" next year to thicken trunks. Protect the forest this winter using standard winter care for Iowa (ask the local club members for tips). Next year, prune the trees you want shorter and leave the trees you want to have thicker trunks.

You are off to a good start, Buck. Do the follow up I suggest and send us a photo of your forest a year from now!

How to Develop a Broom Style Zelkova

by John Denny

I am developing a couple of broom style Zelkovas (*Zelkova serrata*). Broom style is defined by having all branches come from the same level of the trunk and looks like an upside down broom. Zelkovas are the most common species to style this way. However, trees do not help us out by growing naturally in this manner.

There are a couple of ways I know to encourage a Zelkova to grow into this style. The first method is to begin with a Zelkova that already has a decent trunk size and good nebari. The top will only have a few odd branches, not in the shape of a broom. Take this tree and cut the trunk with a fine toothed bonsai saw, horizontally across the trunk. Do this at the location vertically on the trunk where you want the new branches to pop. Once you have cut the trunk, use a very sharp knife to clean up the perimeter of the saw cut. Make it smooth and as regular as you can. New shoots will pop out from the callous area all around the perimeter of the cut. Let these grow. Remove any new shoots that push and extend from the side of the cut. You should now be on your way to a broom style Zelkova.

There is another way to accomplish this and is one I am working on right now. I acquired some Zelkova seedlings and grew them for a year, then put them into small bonsai pots. The growth has been slow. The trunks are very straight which is what you want for this style. The trunks are relatively tall and near the top there were four or five branches naturally emanating from the same point. My broom! But the broom was too high on the trunk for shohin which I want. I grasped the small delicate branches together into a rough broom shape and wrapped grafting tape around the bunch of tiny branches, not unlike a bouquet of flowers. The following spring the trunk was air layered at a point where the new roots would give a proper length trunk with the broom at the top. I am hoping the roots have done well this summer and we will separate them in the spring. It may be possible to take the leftover trunk and clean the saw cut next spring and perhaps I will have a second Zelkova from each original tree.



Zelkova in leaf and without so you can see the broom branching structure.

Bonsai Woodblock Prints by Lilian May Miller

by Ivan Hanthorn



Japanese Dwarf Plum Tree A (1928)

The Little White Plum Blossom Tree (n.d.)

The bonsai prints of Lilian May Miller have been for me a visual icon of bonsai appeal to a western eye since I first encountered these images years ago. They number only seven, 3 of which have a variant in color, so one could argue that there are only four bonsai images by Miller; art critics disagree. Her bonsai prints are only a small portion of the oeuvre of Miller. All of her work is still highly collectable and brings significant prices when they come to auction. Her work passes the classic test of art in that the work is as accessible and meaningful today as when created in the 1920s.

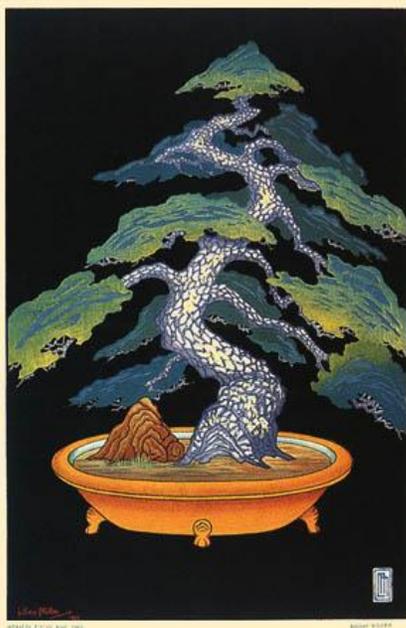
Lilian May Miller was born in 1895 in Seoul, Korea, where her father, Ransford Stevens Miller, was the American Consul General. She spent much of her life in Korea and Japan. She was trained in classical Japanese woodblock printing technique by Shimada Bokusen. Consequent to Korea being an important component of the Empire of Japan at the time, Miller gained a familiarity with both Korean life and Japanese life unlike any other Western artist practicing Japanese style art forms in the early 20th century. Furthermore, she was the only Western artist* undertaking the complete classical Japanese production technique of original painting, multiple set block cutting (one for each color), block printing, as well as doing her own marketing. Her collectors and dealers included a network of key female art patrons of the time, including Empress Nagako of Japan, Lou Henry Hoover, wife of President Herbert Hoover; Anne Morrow Lindbergh; and Pasadena art dealer Grace Nicholson, important connections in keeping her work known. The outbreak of WWII was a heartbreaking experience for her, but she did go on to join the OSS to do propaganda work (she really did know the “enemy”).

Miller died in 1943 during WWII. Her work might have faded away had not there been great interest in post-war USA in the traditional aesthetics of the recent enemy, Japan. Between 1946 and the beginning of the Vietnam War,

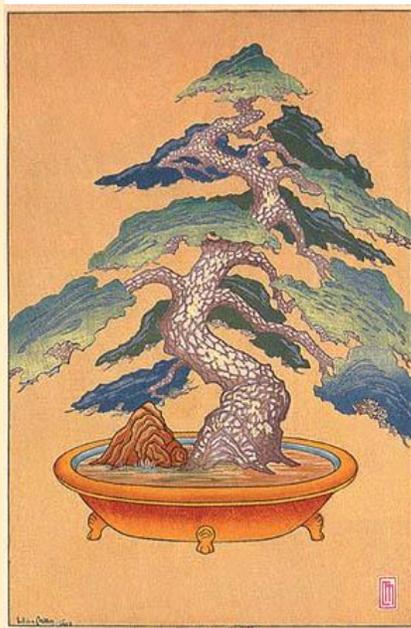
just about every US serviceman who served in the Far East and took R & R in Japan and every American tourist in Japan brought home one or more Japanese woodblock prints. These were usually prints within the Shin Hanga (modern prints) style—popular, colorful, usually floral themed prints that still have a strong following, the best of which are now in many museums. Miller’s work seemed to be within that category so remained popular for a while. Time, however, has its effect on everything. It was a major 1998 retrospective exhibition of the work of Lilian May Miller at the Pacific Asia Museum in Pasadena, and in this case more importantly the publication of the associated book on Lilian May Miller with the same title as the exhibition, that brought her work into currency once again in the art world. Kendall H. Brown’s *Between Two Worlds: The Life and Art of Lilian May Miller* (1998) remains the essential source for Miller’s life and work. The more recent work by Katrina Gulliver, *Modern Women in China and Japan: Gender, Feminism and Global Modernity Between the Wars* (2012) as well as *The Trans-Pacific Imagination: Rethinking Boundary, Culture and Society*, ed. by Naoki Sakai, Hyon Joo Yoo (2013) show the continuing interest in Lilian May Miller as a unique artist and as a representative of cultural phenomenon of current interest.

Her bonsai woodblock prints are a reflection of the bonsai aesthetic in that each print, just as with a bonsai, is stripped of inessentials, creating an abstraction that is a clear expression of the essence of the object of focus. This replication or duplication of essential aspects of image creation was not lost on Miller. For me one of the attractions of Miller’s bonsai prints is the use of an art form within another art form, which always must raise the question of whether the secondary artist understands the artistic message of the first artist, or whether it is only form itself that is the element of employment. I think Miller understood the philosophical essence of bonsai rather well.

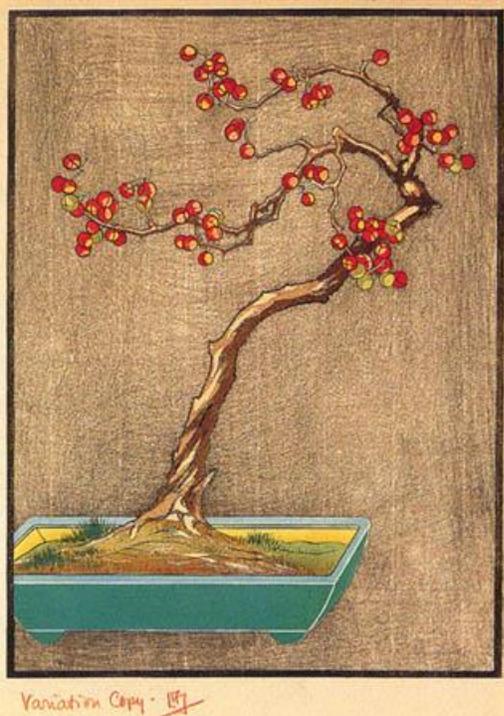
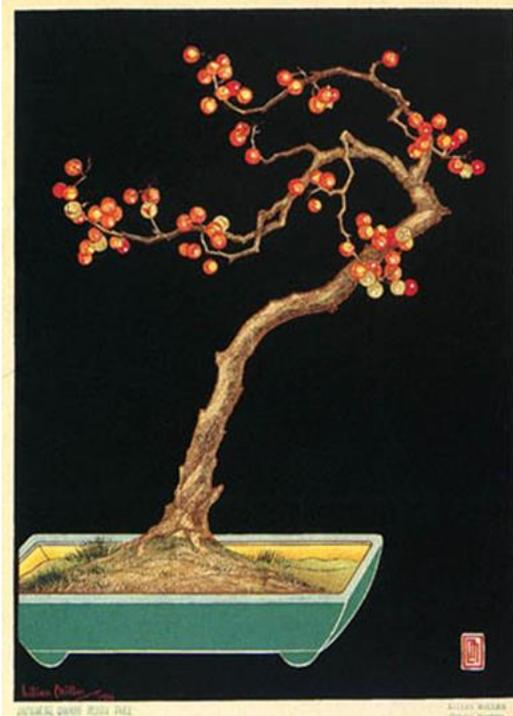
Interesting to note, following the above noted exhibition the art works were dispersed to the donor’s and a few sold. Each bonsai print was originally limited to a set of 10. With only seven bonsai images, there are only 10 possible complete collections of Miller’s bonsai, assuming all are still extant. The one set of bonsai prints assembled for the exhibition was dispersed. At this time there is no known complete collection of Miller’s bonsai prints, except for one—in Iowa, in private hands. Perhaps this is simply a sign that people in this state do have surprisingly good taste. Some of the more outstanding bonsai here also evidence the same.



Japanese Dwarf Pine Tree A (1928)

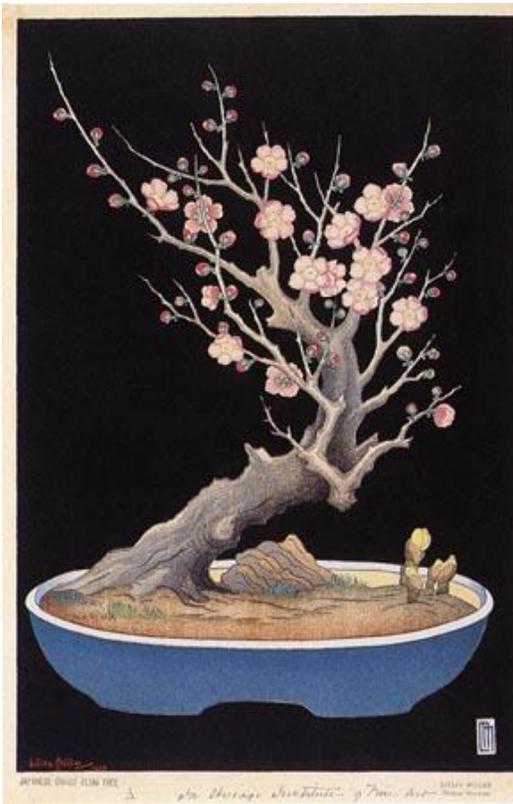


Japanese Dwarf Pine Tree B (1928)



Japanese Dwarf Berry Tree A (1928)

Japanese Dwarf Berry Tree B (1928)



Japanese Dwarf Plum Tree A (1928)

Japanese Dwarf Plum Tree B (1928)

*Helen Hyde, Bertha Lum, Elizabeth Keith, Charles W. Bartlett, and others.

IBA FALL BONSAI SHOW AT REIMAN GARDENS

by Ivan Hanthorn

It is that time again. Remember? Summer has passed, students are students again, leaves are turning, weeds are still growing healthily but there is a change in the landscape, fishing will be ending all too soon (unless you are Scandinavian and think a hole in the ice with a hook on a string qualifies as fishing), and—Oh yes, time for our annual Fall Bonsai Show at Reiman Gardens in Ames.

The formula is always the same: the first October weekend free of an ISU home football game. This year that is Saturday and Sunday, October 10–11. For some time now we have had a theme each show, which provided a framework for educational presentations and a few exemplary bonsais showing the highlighted style. This fall the theme is Literati, and because it is literati's source, Penjing. There will be two programs each day, one on literati (bunjin), with an emphasis on the Japanese form of literati and its American utilization, and one on Penjing. You do not have to show Literati or Penjing to be in the exhibition. We do need some examples of each so think of what you do have that might be interesting shown to your fellows and the public.

Do be thinking now about what bonsai you are planning to enter. I would like a preliminary count of bonsai trees by September 21. Just the number now, full information later. Space assignment, which has been masterfully accomplished for several years now by Alan Magruder, may be a bit more free range consequent at his absence just before the show to attend the Artist Cup in the Great Northwest, but things will come together. For now, figure out which bonsai you plan to show and the show space needed for each. Further details later.

The same arrangements as previous. Show hours are 9am–4:30pm each day. **IBA Board Meeting** at 2:30pm on Sunday. Reiman back gate and back door open at 7am Saturday for setup, or you can bring your materials Friday 2–4:30 pm to set up or deposit for final set up early Saturday. Volunteers are requested to help set up Friday afternoon from 1–5pm. No bonsai exhibit may be taken down before Sunday closing. We have until 7pm to be good Boy Scouts and leave the site better than when we arrived. There will be a bazaar table, which is always expected, and Dasu will vend bonsai materials to those brought to a fever pitch of passion by exposure to our great art. Members of the IBA and the EIBA get into Reiman for the show free of charge if they identify themselves as members.

Finally, I must address a matter raised last year by Reiman staff. Not that many IBA members attend the show except for those who exhibit. This is very unimpressive. Even if you are not exhibiting, please attend the show and see how your fellows conceptualize the formal presentation of their bonsai material. Remember that bonsai is more than the potted little tree: it is the right tree in the right pot on the right stand with the right accent to make it a total abstraction which is a memorable aesthetic experience. Only in a show do you see that.

Conversations with Lionel

by Ivan Hanthorn

Lionel Flood judged the State Fair Bonsai Show in August. As usual he was a font of great information about many types and aspects of bonsai which he shared with those who sat and talked with him. He and his wife remained for most of the afternoon after the judging ended. Lest you not remember, Lionel has been our State Fair judge before. He hails from Minneapolis, Minnesota. A longtime member of the Minnesota Bonsai Club and past officer of everything, Lionel is well versed in the minutia of bonsai in this country. He teaches beginners bonsai, a series of courses for the new members of the Minnesota club, as well as occasional intermediate courses.

Among the many and varied topics within the bonsai universe which were addressed during our conversation the item of greatest interest to me was his interpretation of the present state of bonsai in North America, with which I do agree. According to Lionel we are now seeing the success of a prolonged pressure in both Japan and in North America to change the nature of bonsai in this country to a horse racing class phenomenon. More elitist, more expensive, more glitzy, and more of more (for those who can afford it).

One could not help but notice the advent of this force a few years ago when just about everyone who knew the bonsai world started telling stories about Marco Invernizzi going about telling everyone to raise their prices (art should be a lot more costly than hobby or craft). And people began to follow his urging. Just remember how Golden Arrow prices shot up. Concomitant with this was the growing influx of a new crop of western barbarians trained in classical Japanese bonsai techniques by Japanese masters in Japan, not California or elsewhere. This was more or less unheard of before Kathy Shaner in the early 1980s. These newly minted masters wanted work in the Japanese mode, which was nothing like the American scene. In Japan, a very well developed bonsai is bought by the nouveaux riche, an investor, or any other sort of person who wants to own and exhibit a fine bonsai but not take daily care of that bonsai. That necessary care is provided by a traditionally trained professional bonsaiist. Japanese style professional bonsaiists need clients, clients with big, important, expensive bonsais. Workshops *ad infinitum* don't really make one a good living.

Fast forward, to the emerging center of New Bonsai Americana, the damp depressing center of winter alcoholism Northwest, with the emerging Bonsai Village and the soon to happen Artists Cup.* \$10,000 prize money certainly proclaims that this is a different form of bonsai!

The preceding is a much shortened précis of the logical development of this line of argument, but hopefully it gives a good enough impression. I do think Lionel validly suggested that this is a very interesting time in the development of bonsai in the USA. Where goeth bonsai? I am sure it won't be more of the same. Nothing ever is.

*On this matter I have the evidence presented by two academics who were old friends, both functional alcoholics for whom fog and snow were challenging. At one party long ago, Sherry said: "Why do you think Richard and I are such depressed alcoholics? We are both from Washington!" On the other hand, maybe the weather is good for bonsai.

Displaying Bonsai in Your Backyard



Bird's eye view of Dan Dolan's backyard display. Dan says you should spend more on display than on your trees themselves. (Dan's budget is bigger than most.)

