

Journal of The Ottawa Bonsai Society

Journal de la Société de bonsaï d'Ottawa



April/Avril 2005

www.ottawabonsai.org

Vol. 20, No. 8

NOTES FROM YOUR STEERING GROUP

In this issue:

Dans ce numéro:

Notes from your steering group / Le mot de votre conseil d'organisation

1

New member / Nouveau membre

2

Events Calendar / Calendrier d'activités

3

Courses / Cours

3

Live demo

4

Bonsai design (part 3)

4

Meeting Location / Lieu des rencontres

7

It seems that participants in our styling studies at the January meeting remembered the four junipers and the alternatives we discussed because they turned out on to the March meeting “raring to go”.

After announcements that (i) our flea market/swap shop will be held at the April meeting, (ii) the Beginners’ Development Workshop will be held May 7th, and (iii) Loretta MacDonald brought a large selection of pots to the meeting (some bargains for members and some choices for the Beginners’ Workshop), we all went to work on the four junipers that Vianney Leduc had coaxed out of dormancy.

Most of the groups were keen to implement the preferred styling plan they developed with no major changes; however, Group 1, led by Ian McRea drew the most challenging tree, from a styling point of view. There was no consensus in January on how they would proceed. Even Barney was constrained to admit that the tree, a *J. virginiana* “Silver Spreader”, had less bonsai potential. Obviously inspiration struck on March 21st and the clumsy nursery specimen was transformed into a very attractive cascade style bonsai.

Group 2 led by Mike O’Connor drew a *J. chinensis* “Pfizer” that was a natural for an informal upright style. The extraordinary trunk movement and opportunity for dramatic jin was admired by many members.

Barney Shum was unable to attend this meeting so Art Phelan stepped forward and led Group 3. We reviewed the January design plan and pretty much followed it. Art pointed out that the foliage was a bit dry so we pruned judiciously to avoid unnecessary stress. Hopefully this *J. chinensis* “blue chip” will pull through. It will be a very attractive informal upright bonsai.

Group 4 was led by Vianney. Their tree, a *J. chinensis* (sorry, we don’t have the cultivar name) also became a very attractive informal upright. All four of these bonsai will make nice prizes when they are raffled off at future meetings.

A tip of the OBS hat to our group leaders and to Gord Williams who realized in November that four end-of-season bargains at Richmond Nursery really preferred to be bonsais rather than landscape specimens. We all benefited from their insight and experience and it was fun!

Group 2 : before the design



Group 2 : after initial design



NOUVEAUX MEMBRES / NEW MEMBERS

Nous souhaitons la bienvenue à :
A warm welcome is extended to :

**Joan Taillefer
Scott Minnis**

Ottawa Bonsai Society
P.O. Box 4254, Station "E"
Ottawa, Ontario
K1S 5B3

Société de bonsaï d'Ottawa
B.P. 4254, succursale E
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1S 5B3

Ottawa Bonsai Society Events Calendar



Monday April 18 at 7:00p.m.

Would you like help on the design of a “problem” tree? Would you like to re-design an existing bonsai? Is your tree sick and you want some advice on what to do? Well, this meeting is specially designed for you! Bring in your bonsai or pre-bonsai stock and get the advice and consultation of senior members of the society. **There will also be a Bonsai “Flea Market” / Swap Sale.** Bring in any bonsai, bonsai starter material, cuttings, plant stock, pots, etc. and sell them for a worthy cause. 10% of all proceeds will go to the Ottawa Bonsai Society and you keep the rest. Don’t miss all the bargains to be had! **Make sure you don’t miss this meeting to give you a head start on Spring, the most active bonsai season!**

Atelier pour débutants sur la formation d’un bonsaï, le samedi 7 mai, édifice #72, Ferme expérimentale centrale, de 9h30 à 15h30.

Cet atelier s’adresse directement à ceux et celles qui ont suivi le cours pour débutants au mois de novembre. Durant cette session, les participants recevront les conseils de membres chevronnés de la SBO et procéderont à la formation de leur propre bonsaï à partir d’un pant de genévrier San Osé. Ce plant, un pot approprié de même que le terreau et le fil pour ligaturage seront fournis. Les instructeurs mettront leurs propres outils de bonsaï à la disposition des participants qui n’auraient pas les leurs. Autant les participants que les instructeurs devraient apporter leur lunch – l’endroit dispose d’un frigo et d’un four à micro-ondes. Le coût de cet atelier est de 55 \$ par personne. Il y a une limites de 15 places !

Les membres intéressés devraient s’inscrire avec Yvon Bernier : (819) 684-0586 ; fax (819) 684-7365 ; ycbernier@infonet.ca

Bonsai Development Workshop, Saturday, May 7 in Building #72, Central Experimental Farm, from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

This is a workshop aimed specifically at those who have taken the Beginners’ Bonsai Courses given last November. Participants will receive assistance from experienced OBS members to begin developing their own bonsai using nursery grown San Jose junipers. The plant material, a suitable pot and the necessary supplies will be provided. The team of instructors will make their own bonsai tools available for sharing among those participants who may not have their own. Participants and instructors should bring their lunch; the room is equipped with a fridge and microwave oven. The cost of this workshop is \$55 per person. There are only 12 places available!

Interested members should register with Yvon Bernier : (819) 684-0586 ; fax (819) 684-7365 ; ycbernier@infonet.ca

Live demo with Sandy Anderson!

Sandy Anderson, is an expert native of Scotland, has lived in Jericho, Vermont for over 25 years. He has been studying Bonsai for over 30 years. Sandy is the owner of Mill Brook Bonsai a nursery devoted to Bonsai and unique plants. He particularly enjoys working with native Vermont plants such as Red and White Cedar and Buckthorn. In recent years, his focus has broadened to include tropical and indoor trees that can be enjoyed in our climate throughout the year. Sandy is going to "WOW" us with a demonstration on a how to create a bonsai forest/grove. Location: Bonsai Concepts Canada greenhouse in Cardinal, On (directions can be obtained through web-site at www.bonsaiconcepts.ca or by calling 1-866-3BONSAI)

Date: Sunday, April 24th, 2005

Start time: 1:00PM (approx. 2 hours).

All are welcome, no charge for this demo. People are asked to bring their own lawn chairs. If weather permits (10 degrees celcius or more) it will be outdoors and if so the more the merrier. If weather is not on our side (less then 10 celcius) then indoors. Be warned solar heat makes the greenhouse very hot so dress in layers. Our greenhouse can hold 50 for sure. We are hoping to have it outdoors.

BONSAI design (part 3 of 4)

(Special thanks to Walter Pall from the Hanford Bonsai Society for this excellent article!)

Naturalistic: This is the style where trees are formed so that they look as close as possible like real trees. This means that many classical rules have to be broken. Often these trees are looked at as „weeds" or raw material by the audience who is not yet used to them. It seems to be easy to design a naturalistic tree – just let it grow. This is by no means true. A good bonsai in the naturalistic style needs just as much consideration as an abstract one. Otherwise it really is just a weed.

In many discussions on the internet it became obvious that most people find it difficult to accept the term "naturalistic". The general feeling is that it is superfluous because every serious bonsai enthusiast tries to create natural looking bonsai anyway. Nothing could be further from the truth. Most bonsai enthusiasts try to create bonsai which are as ideal as possible, making them quite the opposite of naturalistic; they are rather abstract, idealized trees. Another misunderstanding is that people think a naturalistic bonsai is one that is left as is, without any further design. This is, of course, absolutely not the case. Lynn Boyd proposed to call it "romantic" style. This should be a title which is better understood by most people.

Any bonsai or piece of art needs some degree of abstraction. The naturalistic bonsai has a lesser degree than the abstract one, but it still has the helping hand of the artist. Only the artist wants this to look like it was never touched by human hand. If done well, it may look to the audience like this should not be so difficult, they could do the same thing. This is similar to people standing in front of a modern abstract painting and saying that this could be done by their child. Well, if this is the case, why is the child not world-famous?

It is interesting to note here that many contemporary artists are either going towards very abstract or very natural trees, to the extreme in any case. It is often overseen that many classical trees of Japan are naturalistic and also most Penjings. In the West this seems to be revolutionary. It is only as a reaction to neo-classical design with slavish adherence to rules which never were meant to be used like a law.

We have to be reminded that style in the context of this classification means the overall spirit of a bonsai, contrary to the form, the shape of a specific tree. One can well take a classical form and design it with naturalistic details, thus creating a naturalistic bonsai, because of the overall feeling. For many tree species and certainly for many individual trees the classical forms just don't fit; at least this is the feeling of some artists. Thus they have started to create new forms with trees that before were not used commonly as bonsai. Vaughn Banting has dared to replicate the natural look of Swamp Cypresses, which have a flat top with several crowns in nature. The author has pioneered the candelabra form on conifers. Very often trees along the timberline are struck by lightening and the main trunk dies. Lower branches develop into one or several new trunks which then look like a candelabra. Another form that has emerged to accurately describe and represent trees that grow in nature is the Banyan "style" for Ficus. Banyan trees grow in tropical climates and typically include air roots that emerge from the trunk and descend from branches to the soil. In nature these roots function to stabilize the tree and to help the tree establish its "territory". Another example is the Baobab "style" which resembles the rather strange natural growth of Baobab trees in Africa. In South Africa Baobab trees are styled just like they appear in nature, with their enormous branches which look like fat roots sticking into the air.

Charles Ceronio mentions some more African forms besides the Baobab-form which he calls "styles": The Pierneef Form: The acacia is a tree every one knows in Africa. It grows in a typical almost geometrical semi-circle-crown, like open umbrellas. Another form is the Flat Top Form, which again is the typical form of an acacia species which is common in the warmer parts of Africa and there actually is called "flat top acacia". The top is very flat indeed and someone outside Africa might call it grotesque. But it all is just a matter of what one is used to see. Ceronio also defines the Bushveld or Natural Form, which is basically the same as the informal broom form, or Oak Form, which is the most common form of deciduous trees anyway. The Wild Fig Form is mainly identical to the American Banyan "style".

The overwhelming majority of deciduous trees and many conifers grow in the informal broom form in nature which usually has a single trunk with some taper that very soon spreads into several trunks which grow upwards and again spread into upwards growing branches. The trunk and the branches of this form are bent. When they are straight, one speaks of the well documented formal broom form. It is most interesting to note that traditional bonsai rules simply have no term for this form which is by far the most frequent in nature. Every bonsai enthusiast must have wondered at one time why he is not supposed to style his trees just like the ones he sees in his front yard. Contemporary bonsai artists now style in exactly that way. Paul A. Ringo has described this form which he calls "live oak style" and wonders why it is not used more often for western species. One can go further and also wonder why it is not used more often for Asian species.

The informal broom form could make a similar career as the informal upright or mojogi form. It is very hard to believe that as late as 1955 in Japan it seemed to be necessary to encourage the public to use this "new" form. When the natural resources of collected material had shrunk considerably it became normal to create bonsai from nursery grown trees. These were invariable in "ideal" shapes – at the time the formal upright form too often was the only ideal. So the advice in "An Easy Guide To Bonsai" was: "...training the individual tree freely in accordance with its own characteristics, so as to bring out its special flavor to the full". This was aimed at the fashion of trying to style every tree into the formal upright form and thus creating clichés and repetitions which all looked alike and often where not fit for the species used. It seemed to be necessary to make it clear to people that trunks did not have to be straight, they could be bent; branches did not have to be straight and always in the ideal position, they could have bends and kinks.

It is hard to believe today that the informal upright form needed special encouragement not so long ago. It is by far the most common and popular form today. The informal broom form could go the same way. It is nothing more than a variation of the informal upright form, where most branches appear on one level and branches in general have a strong tendency to grow upwards – a form found in most deciduous trees out in nature.

Naturalistic and natural are not the same. A naturalistic tree can be created with very artificial design methods. It is quite possible to have a tree with totally artificial deadwood which was created so well that it absolutely looks natural. It is also common to wire a tree up to 100 % and carefully bring all the branches in position so that the tree looks very

natural. This is one of the paradoxes of bonsai.

As Colin Lewis has pointed out we should not forget that bonsai are a tiny fraction of the size of their natural counterparts, They therefore need to be simpler in structure and form. Salient characteristics need to be enhanced and irrelevancies eliminated. So it is simply not feasible to just copy a large tree. A bonsai conveys not necessarily the exact appearance of a natural tree, but the sensation one feels when you see it. The most skillful artists magnify the sensation by presenting us only with those elements that create it. One can create this sensation by simplifying and idealizing the tree, by making it more and more abstract. Then it is a rather abstract bonsai. One can also create this sensation by using natural forms and details, then it becomes a more naturalistic bonsai. But it is still far away from a direct copy of a natural tree, it is still idealized somewhat and thus abstract; but less than the first one.

It would be a mistake to think that it is easier to create a good naturalistic bonsai than an abstract one. Exactly the contrary is true. A naturalistic bonsai resembles an ideal, a typical natural tree. What is normal should obviously be easy to create. But just like a graceful move in dance or athletics, it is deceptive in its simplicity. It looks so easy ... until you try to replicate it. Then the apparent simplicity is unmasked to reveal quite a bit of complexity. One has to appreciate that a bonsai always is abstract to some degree. The classical bonsai are quite abstract. There are well known rules or guidelines which tell us how to create a classical, abstract tree. But there are very few written rules which tell us how to create a naturalistic tree. The solution is not to just let a tree grow, cut it back and let it grow again. By this standard clip and grow method one gets a pruned tree. But it depends very much on how the tree was pruned. It can well become an abstract tree that way.

Reiner Goebel asks : " bonsai started out with 'natural' or 'naturalistic' plants, a thousand some odd years ago. It took all this time to get it to its present state of refinement. And now you want to turn the sun dial back?" No, not at all. This is what is meant: „Pause for a moment and think about what you are doing. Bonsai is the art of giving a small tree in a pot the appearance of a large tree – or use any similar definition. Now, what are most doing? Are they looking at large, natural trees and try to bring this feeling onto their bonsai. Or are they looking at bonsai books, at rules and try to copy bonsai masterpieces and apply rules? The latter is the case. How about a painter who paints people and goes to museums, studies books, hides himself and paints what he KNOWS should be painted. When he walks on the street he sees real people, but not for as second it comes to his mind that these could be used as models. The real people don't conform to the rules this person has learned about "ideal" people. Change real people or change the rules?"

As John Naka has pointed out repeatedly and shown in his famous books, the bonsai enthusiast cannot look enough at natural big trees to get inspiration for his art. Lisa Kanishas noticed that bonsai influences the way one looks at trees in nature rather than the other way around. This is an interesting observation and explains why so many bonsai enthusiasts enjoy looking at trees and pictures of them, only to go back and design their bonsai to look like bonsai rather than natural trees. In discussions on the internet it is repeatedly pointed out that while a picture of a tree in nature can look beautiful to most people, this does not mean that it would look beautiful as bonsai. Meaning: if it breaks some classical bonsai rules!. How about that: a person that looks beautiful to most people does not look beautiful on a painting. Meaning: if it does not look like the "ideal" human being. How brainwashed can one get? This goes so far that bonsai people who see the picture of a natural tree that breaks some bonsai rules but that is considered most beautiful by the overwhelming majority of ordinary people will say that it is not a nice tree. They are not aware anymore that they are applying neo-classical bonsai rules to a natural tree and judging it by these, instead of using their common sense and change their rules according to reality.

A sub-category of the naturalistic style is the romantic style. Designs in this style drive the naturalistic side to the extreme, try to achieve a lovely tree or scenery also with inclusion of accessories like rocks and figurines. Examples are the water-and-land Penjings of Qing quan Zhao and some creations of Nick Lenz.

Société de bonsaï d'Ottawa**Meeting Location / Lieu des rencontres****2004/2005 Executive****Exécutif 2004/2005****Treasurer / Trésorier**

Yvon Bernier
208, avenue des Explorateurs
Gatineau, QC J9J 1M9
(819) 684-0586

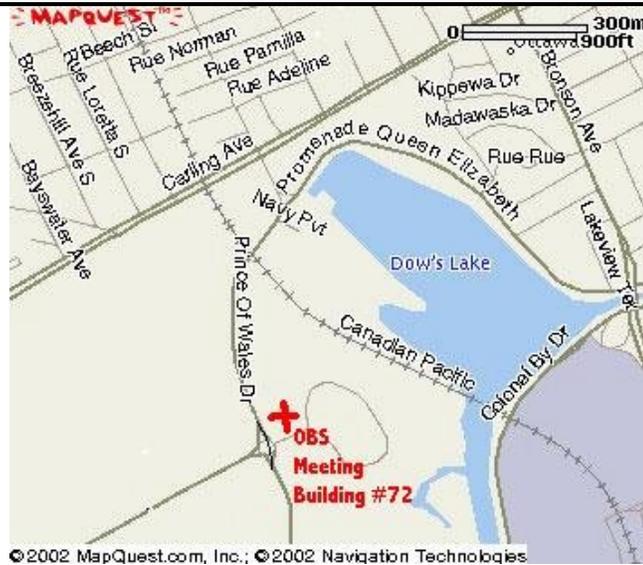
Nos rencontres se tiennent à l'édifice #72 de la Ferme expérimentale centrale. Pour vous y rendre, prenez la direction sud sur la promenade Prince of Wales jusqu'au rond-point à l'intersection National Capital Driveway et Prince of Wales (qui est aussi l'entrée principale de la Ferme expérimentale et de l'Arboretum), où vous prendrez la direction Est menant à l'Arboretum. Une courte distance plus loin, à la première fourche, Prenez la route de gauche qui mène directement à l'édifice #72 (vous verrez une affiche juste en face de l'édifice, de l'autre côté du chemin, qui dit «Friends of the Farm» .Le stationnement est situé de part et d'autre de l'édifice.

Librarian /Libraire

Mike O'Connor

Steering Group**Comité d'organisation**

Yvon Bernier
Duart Crabtree
Vianney Leduc
Art Phelan
Barney Shum
Gordon Williams
Matt Yakabuski



Our meetings are held at Building #72 at the Central Experimental Farm. Heading south on Prince of Wales, at the traffic circle at the intersection of the N.C.C. Scenic Drive and Prince of Wales, the major entrance to the Experimental Farm and the Arboretum, exit east into the Arboretum. After a very short distance, where the road divides, turn left to Building #72 which will be down a short distance on your left. There is parking just before or just after the building. The entrance is on the street side (east side) and there is a sign reading "Friends of the Farm".