



The Tree Shrinker

Volume LX, No.4

A MONTHLY BULLETIN

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East Bay Bonsai Society
Monthly Meeting: Saturday, April 17, 2021 10:00 AM On-Line

April Meeting

By: Michael Hylton

This month our meeting will be a little different, so be sure to set your calendar for **Saturday, April 17th at 10:00 AM**. Peter Chan, bonsai master from Surrey, England will be presenting on maples.

Peter Chan is a self-taught Bonsai artist, starting with bonsai in 1967. In 1986 Peter founded one of the UK's premier bonsai nurseries, Herons Bonsai, on a seven and half acre landscaped site in Surrey, England.

Some of his achievements also include: appearing on British television since the early 1980's to talk and demonstrate bonsai, Chairman of the British Bonsai Association from 1980-1987, founding member of the Federation of British Bonsai Societies, honorary chairman of several bonsai societies and the bonsai collection at Royal Horticultural Society's garden at Wisley since 1997. Peter was awarded The Association of British Bonsai Artists' "Most Prestigious Award" in 2004 for the 'furtherance and betterment of British bonsai'.



Peter is well known for his record tally of 21 Chelsea Flower Show Gold Medals, a feat no other bonsai specialist has ever achieved. Many throughout the world have been inspired to take up bonsai as a hobby after reading one or more of his nine books. His first book 'Bonsai-The Art of Growing and Keeping Miniature Trees', is still in print in eight languages. He also has a prolific YouTube channel with nearly a quarter of a million followers.



March Meeting Review
By: Tom Fedor

We traveled virtually this evening to Feltre, Italy, where we were welcomed in the wee hours by Italian architect and bonsai artist Mauro Stemberger. Mauro began studying bonsai with his local club at age fourteen, and continued pursuing his art while studying architecture at IUAV University in Venice. He founded the Italian Bonsai Dream workshop in 2005 and has written articles for publication in many bonsai periodicals. His book "Bonsai Dream" is about sharing his "experience, techniques, vision and passion."



Mauro introduced us to the Mugo pines growing where they grow, on rocks at high elevation in his native Dolomites. This particular subspecies is not apically dominant, so it grows in outcroppings low to the ground, slowly creating soil for itself and its neighbors from previous years' needle mulch. The biggest challenge to collecting them, Mauro says, is convincing them to survive at the lower elevations where people live, where the climate and seasons are naturally different from their mountain home (although packing them home out of the mountains on his back was probably no picnic, either). Other subspecies of Mugo pines are more comfortable at lower elevations, where they even attain some apical dominance and out-compete the higher elevation pines that are Mauro's favorite.



As with junipers in our own mountains, of course, the very best examples of high mountain Mugo pines are uncollectible works of nature's art, having grown for hundreds of years in very harsh conditions. Their roots have had to burrow into the rock, making it impossible to recover enough root to survive; any attempt at collection would kill the tree. But Mugo pines have a remarkable ability to put out new roots where the trunk or a branch finds some auspicious environmental niche. Mauro has, accordingly, been experimenting with air layering them, using a mix of moss and rooting hormone to wrap scored and wounded areas of trunk or branch.



We were treated to some fabulous images of Mugo pine development that Mauro has coaxed from his collected examples. He explained that mountain Mugo are very slow to develop compared to lower elevation pines. The first reason is that they are naturally handicapped in their new lower altitude and consequently unnatural new climate. The second reason is even worse. It seems there exists a parasitic fungus that maintains a home inside the living tissue of the tree. When the tree is weakened or damaged, as perhaps by breakage under weight of snow, the fungus goes to work and destroys the tree. That's why, Mauro says, you never see weak or unhealthy trees up there where they grow. They've all perished from the fungus by the time you get there.



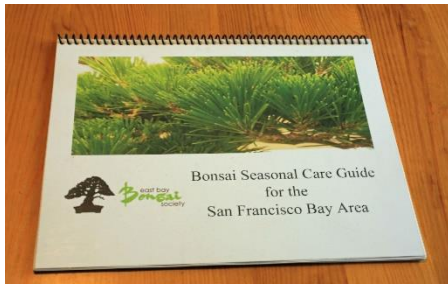
Anyway, that also why Mauro subjects his mugo pines to only one major intervention (i.e., wiring or repotting) per year; during the rest of the year the stressed tree will, one hopes, recover its health. The reward for patience with your Mugo is that, when the tree is vigorous, it can produce a second flush of growth after de-candling just like Japanese black pines and red pines. Hence, the

very beautiful trees Mauro so graciously demonstrated for us at a totally graceless hour of a beautiful spring morning in Italy.

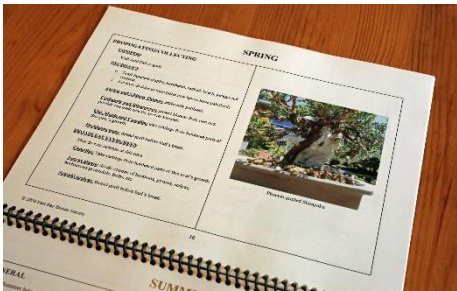
EBBS Seasonal Guide for the SF Bay Area

The new and improved bonsai calendar, the Bonsai Seasonal Guide for the San Francisco Bay Area, is now available! Order your copy today!

You can order to receive by US mail using this [link](#) or pick up a copy at the Bonsai Garden at Lake Merritt.



This 40-page guide gives all the information needed to care for your Bonsai trees based on your location. It even has a handy (suitable for hanging) chart giving quick information for reference in the guide.



Bonsai Calendar

- Watering – Start regular watering schedule as temperature rises; Do not over-water repotted plants
- Fertilizing – Do not feed deciduous trees Fertilize evergreens and conifers. Don't feed repotted trees until a month after repotting.
- Repotting – Repot camellias, cryptomeria, juniper, crape myrtle, willow, spruce, fir, cypress and redwood
- Styling/Pruning – Wire evergreens. Pinch junipers. Trim back branches on non-flowering, non-fruiting deciduous trees. Decandle Monterey pines, red pines, and cork-barked black pines.
- Graft – Japanese maples, hornbeam, redbud, beech, ginkgo, and wisteria
- Air Layering – Deciduous trees may be air layered if they have not yet pushed new growth.

A little humor from the past

By: Tom Colby

John Naka from Southern California was an early mover and shaker in the bonsai world. He was noted for being an avid collector of California Junipers and turned them into master pieces of bonsai art. Secondly and most importantly, he was the source of much information about the care and design of bonsai. This was at a time when there was little information available from Japan, so his knowledge was much treasured and is still very much used today.

One of the challenges facing bonsai artists is to create trees with thick trunks. As a rule, trunks of bonsai trees expand only slowly with age. John Naka offered a solution that he said would “greatly speed up the process and that was to heavily fertilize our bonsai trees with elephant droppings”. This is advice that we all should consider as a way to improve our bonsai trees in a timely fashion.

Congratulations Don Meeker

Don has recently turned 90 years old and has decided to retire from the East Bay Bonsai Society (EBBS). To honor Don for his many contributions to EBBS, the board has voted to make Don a Lifetime Honorary member. Thank you, Don! BTW, Don still some bonsais he is looking to depart with. So, if you are interested, give him a jingle at 925-933-4472 or email dmeeker@Astound.net.

Styling your Bonsai

By: Tom Colby

Let's imagine that you have purchased a big bush and you want to make it into a bonsai. The first step is to look carefully at what features in the bush that you can work with and from these visualize what the finished bonsai would look like. The next step is to determine where the front of the bonsai will be. Finally, you do the necessary stuff to bring your vision into fruition such as removing any branches that are not needed and wiring the remaining branches so you can carefully arrange them to positions that best compliment the visualized composition of the tree. All this is well and good, but have you ever thought about just what you are trying to accomplish?

Long ago the Japanese developed a deep love of nature which stems from both Buddhism and Shinto religions. What better way to express this appreciation of nature that it is to have a potted plant which you could admire at your leisure. How does one do this? What exactly is nature? It is easier to discuss the attributes of nature than it is to define it in a way that is useful in creating a potted plant.

Think of a pine tree growing at very high elevation in the Sierras. Clearly, this tree is a product of the forces of nature and these forces should be reflected in our bonsai. The pine tree is obviously a very old tree. An immediate attribute of our bonsai tree is that it shows great age. We like bonsai with short, fat trunks and trees get these trunks only after many years of growth. The short fat trunks give the illusion of great age even though our tree may be less than 10 years old.

A second attribute of our pine tree is that it had survived for many years despite the worst that nature could throw at it. Many of our bonsai tree have areas of dead wood. When the bare wood is on a branch it is known by the Japanese term jin and when it is on the trunk as a shari. Both jins and sharis signify that, in spite of setbacks the tree is still growing. To be a first quality bonsai the new tree must show both great age and survival of obstacles. The Japanese view their bonsai as a symbol of nature and not a scale model of a particular tree. The careful placement of branches on our bonsai created an idealized tree. In keeping with the value of a symbol, it is more perfect that a tree that you will see growing in the wild. Trees in nature lose branches due to a myriad of causes, including lightning and heavy snow loads. The tree grows in the direction of the brightest light which can cause lopsided trees. If the bonsai created from our recent bush purchase is successful, the viewer will be reminded of a tree that he had seen in the recent past even though the "real trees" are usually far less than perfect.



In California collected Sierra and California junipers are very popular and for good reason. Both trees grow in harsh environments that lead to very slow growth. Trunks grow at the rate of about one inch every seventy-five years or so. Many of the collected trees have trunks four inches or more in diameter, indicating that this tree could be several hundreds of years old. Also, many of

these trees have extensive dead wood when they are collected. Knowing that age and survival is crucial to a quality bonsai tree, these trees don't have to be made to look old and that they survived adversity---they are, in fact old, and they are survivors. They still need to be transformed into idealized trees, but the hard work has been done for you by nature.



Deciduous trees such as the maples show age and particularly survivorship in a different way. Rather than showing battle scars in the form of dead wood, they display just the opposite. Maples have lived an apparent long life without broken branches and scars in their trunks. When we remove a large branch on a maple, we encourage the healing over of the wound so where the branch was removed becomes invisible.

Next time you create a bonsai from a bush, the target of what it takes to create a top-quality bonsai tree is clear. Also, the next time you see a bonsai you have a yardstick to measure the value of the tree. Does it show age? Is it a survivor? Is it a symbol which reminds you of trees in the wild? If the answers to each of these questions is yes you are looking at a superb bonsai. You should admire the skill of the artist that created the bonsai.

Member 'for sale' items

Each membership household, free of charge, may place a five-line ad related to bonsai in two newsletters each year. Please submit your ad by the preceding Monday of the month to appear in the next publication. Send your ad to EBBS_Distribution@yahoo.com.

Have an idea for an on-line meeting? You can contact any board member or send a note to EBBS_Distribution@Yahoo.com. All suggestions are welcome!

Newsletter Editor: Beverly Martinez
Contributors: Tom Fedor, Tom Colby, Michael Hylton

East Bay Bonsai Society—Schedule for 2021
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Regular Meetings: Second Wednesday, every month (except July, August and October) @ 7:30 pm
Currently taking place on-line through Google Meetup
When in person: Place: Lakeside Garden Center, 666 Bellevue Avenue, Oakland. Visitors welcome.
Website for Bonsai Garden Lake Merritt: www.gsbflakemerritt.org/

<u>Meeting</u>	<u>Program</u>
Apr 5	EBBS Board Meeting
Apr 17	Maples – Peter Chan 10:00 AM
May 3	EBBS Board Meeting
May 12	Monthly meeting – TBA
June 7	EBBS Board Meeting
June 9	Monthly meeting – TBA