



The Tree Shrinker

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A MONTHLY BULLETIN

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East Bay Bonsai Society Monthly Meeting: Wednesday, May 12 at 7:30 PM **On-Line**

May Meeting

We are pleased to announce that Eric Shrader will be our presenter in May. You might recall Eric presented in January 2020 with a fascinating demonstration of root over rock. Eric will be working with redwood trees in May demonstrating spring pinching, cutback and development. He has some recently collected stock and an older tree. He also has cuttings of grown trees he may use.



Eric started bonsai in 2002 after attending a Bonsai Society of San Francisco (BSSF) show at the Cow Palace. Eric grew up in rural Mendocino county, and loved hiking among the oaks and redwoods. While studying with Boon for ten years Eric explored developing trees from seed and cutting, which has become a passion that he now pursues. In 2019 Eric started "Bonsaify", a business focused on connecting people to nature and an online shopping site that supplies small bonsai to the public.

To keep up to date on Eric's pursuits please check out bonsaify.com - subscribe to the newsletter! You can follow Eric on Instagram @ericshraderbonsai, see videos on YouTube and participate in Free Live Online Seminars by signing up at Bonsaify.com.

If you would like Eric to critic your redwood at the end of the meeting, send a picture to:
BARCALOD@GMAIL.COM.

April Meeting

In this special weekend edition of our monthly zooming escapade, we visited the renowned Peter Chan of Herons Bonsai in the lovely south of England. Peter is a self-taught bonsai artist and founded Herons, one of the UK's most fabulous bonsai nurseries, in 1986. His twenty-one Gold Medals at the Chelsea Flower Show is an all-time record achievement.

We met Peter up a ladder where he was pruning a maple tree; it turns out he's a landscape pruner as well as a bonsai artist and entrepreneur. We were treated to lovely views of his house and nursery by Herons Lake on seven and a half spectacular acres in all seasons, with seemingly miles and miles of Japanese maples. He also showed us, in the back, a small forest of fifty or so large zelkovas that "got away" from him while they were in the ground developing thick trunks. The other 250 (!) that he planted with them he eventually exhumed.



We next met the famous "Peter Chan's split trunk maple". This tree had been imported to the UK from Japan in 1962. One of the importers apparently took a

dislike to it. He also took an axe to it, and split the trunk down the middle. Whether this was with a view to improving the tree, or whether the man had a bad case of buyer's remorse, was left unclear. Peter acquired it in 1974, and he displayed for us its full developmental history since that time in snapshots throughout the seasons.



A slight diversion through Peter's long life and career followed. We learned that he wrote speeches for Mrs. Thatcher and other ministers lauding the benefits of her government's scheme for industrial de-nationalization. (Your humble correspondent lived in Mrs. T.'s London constituency during the later years of her reign, after Peter had left government service, and remembers the satirical slogan opposed (certainly not Peter's): "British Steel – Buying Back What You Already Own.") We learned how he met his wife (they were pen-pals!), that he competes in ballroom dancing and loves Western swing, and practices T'ai Chi on Herons Lake with a local master.



Back to Bonsai! Here we saw how to create clump style maples by simply strapping young tree trunks together and growing them until they fuse. Peter likes trident maples especially because they grow thick trunks fast. This is important to Peter because he "cannot stand" small trees; he'll tolerate shohin but nothing smaller, please. He grows his tridents five years in the ground, where frequent topping produces taper. Then they are

gently withdrawn from the bosom of Mother Earth and put into a pot. He takes all the branches off at this time and grows new ones, cutting back as many as three times during the growing season (not in the autumn). "It's the only way to produce good ramification", he responded to a questioner. To another, he replied that he doesn't really know what else he does contrary to received wisdom because he doesn't pay much attention to what other practitioners do. One can only admire.



Peter took a question about air layering and, depending on the species and time of year, can get roots in as few as six weeks (from a European hornbeam or mountain maple in April or May). If he starts them as late as September, he waits until spring to harvest.



He took many other questions (and compliments), rambling and incisive by turn. Some of them were even about bonsai. And rambling, dear reader, is what your correspondent would avert by not recounting them here. In short, he is immensely grateful to Peter (and his technical advisers in the UK and US, thanks Addison!) for the spacious views of his garden and nursery, the close-up views of his very beautiful trees, an in-depth exploration of his individual style, and an unexpectedly intimate view into the life of a charming gentleman.

Peter generously asked that his fee be donated to a charity of our choice. In appreciation, EBBS has purchased an inscribed paving brick for the Bonsai Garden at Lake Merritt.

Japanese Apprenticeship

By: Tom Colby

Although bonsai is a Japanese art there was prior to 1990 not a lot of contact in the United States directly with Japanese bonsai masers. Bonsai conventions and an occasional master visiting local clubs were just about it. In the mid 1990's Kathy Shaner went to Japan and served a five-year apprenticeship with a Japanese master and returned to the United states to teach what she had learned. Through her efforts, knowledge indirectly from a Japanese master became widely available to American bonsai enthusiasts. Kathy was the first non-Japanese person to study in Japan. Now there has been a waterfall of people traveling to Japan, either to serve a full apprenticeship or to study with a Japanese master. Among local folks you might recognize who have studied in Japan are Gordon Deeg and Jonas Dupich and there are several others. Peter Tea has served an apprenticeship in Japan.

While most of us will not go to Japan for study you might like to learn about what the life of an apprentice is like. We may have visions of being able to frolic among extraordinary bonsai, but the life of an apprentice is sobering. Kathy wrote an article for the 1993 May-June issue of Golden Statements entitled For Apprenticeship Dreamers: An Open Letter to Hopefuls of Japanese Bonsai Study which gives details of her experiences. Her comments mirror those of other people who have more recently gone to Japan as apprentices indicating that her experience is typical. Below are excerpts from her article.

"If you do not speak Japanese now, go to night school for at least a year. Without being able to converse easily with your sensei, much information is lost. It is not fair to your hosts and much more difficult to get around. You are going over as an apprentice to a businessman. He is not a hobbyist that has time to spend catering to your wants. Be prepared to work long hard hours in any weather. You will work most of the winter with fingers stiff and numb from the cold and no way to warm them. Many times, you will be working in wet clothes, summer and winter.

Do you take time off when you are sick? You work here, everyone does.

Do you now complain at work about something that you think is unfair, or putting in extra time? You cannot complain here -and it is all their time. No Pay, no overtime bonuses.

You must be able to lift heavy objects and lift them carefully. Two people in the United States are needed what for trees that are carried here by one person unless it is a very expensive pot. (Some pots cost upwards of \$9000). You might work on a tree that costs as much as your house. Road trips to clients are a mixed bag. The pressure is great. The time is limited at client's homes and so you must work fast and accurately. This is not the time to make mistakes. Many times, the working conditions are cramped or difficult at best.

At the home workshop you find that there are no instructions for the first hour or two. You must be a self-starter and know instinctively what needs to be done, or what your teacher wants done. Much information is gathered by observation and common sense. By observation I do not mean sitting around and watching your teacher work. This is not a "Convention workshop."

Having read Kathy's comments, one would wonder why one would knowingly expose themselves to such a daunting experience. Her concluding remarks provide an elegant answer to this.

"If you think that you can take it and lots more and do it for at least a year because less would be unfair to your hosts and would leave you with big gaps in your bonsai care information and your life currently exists for bonsai, there is no better place to be! I would do it again knowing now even what was ahead."

In Memoriam

It is with sadness that we report the passing of former EBBS President Stephen Faulk. Stephen died last August. An obituary for Stephen (Steve) Faulk was recently created on [OBITUARE.com](https://www.obituare.com). This online memorial has all the important information regarding his end-of-life services.

Please visit this page to receive updates for upcoming events and to show support for the family. Feel free to leave comments or upload photos you may have of Stephen (Steve) in the guest book comments section.

Link to online obituary: <https://www.obituare.com/stephen--steve--garfield-faulk-obituary-80982/>

"Indeed, Steve built the Bonsai Garden. The walls and the original benches were built or supervised by Steve. I remember him having large semi-tropical trees. I'm sorry to learn of his passing."

- Gordon Deeg

Bonsai in China

By: Tom Colby

Most of the activity on bonsai in the United States is focused on Japanese esthetics. When we visit a bonsai show, it is easy to overlook the fact that the art of bonsai is admired in much of Asia, particularly in China, and that the esthetics practiced in China are a bit different from those of Japan. As a matter of fact, the art of bonsai originated in China and was brought to Japan along with Buddhism in about the year 750 of the Common Era.

With the long history of what started out as a single art form, it is not surprising that the esthetics of the two countries have diverged. The Japanese view is that a bonsai tree is an ideal form of what a tree should look like. Every branch is perfectly placed and every imperfect leaf is removed. The result is a tree that is more perfect than any tree found in the wild. The Chinese take the view that the bonsai tree should reflect a tree found in nature. Any tree found in nature grows somewhat randomly and is subject to the effects of all the adversities that all trees suffer such as broken branches and insect attack. The Chinese celebrate these defects and as a result the finished bonsai is less than perfect. Many Chinese bonsai appear to have a more casual form than the sleekly elegant Japanese bonsai. The quality of each tree in both Japan and China depends on how well the tree reflects the esthetic goals of that country.

There are, of course, many styles for Chinese bonsai. One of the extremely popular styles of trees admired by the Chinese is a composition of one or more junipers mounted on a thin spire of rock. This style is related to the root over rock that we are familiar with but is distinctly different in final form. The source of this style may well rest in a style of classical ink brush painting that was popular in China for hundreds of years. About 100 miles south west of Shanghai is a group of spectacular mountains collectively labeled as Huang Shan or Yellow Mountains. These mountains have many steep rock faces and very deep gorges. Small pine tree grows in cracks of the rock. The pine trees are endemic to the area and have characteristic shape with extremely broad branches and relatively flat tops. They resemble our Monterey Cypress, although the two trees are in no way related.

Chinese artists for the last thousand years have considered these rock faces of the Yellow Mountain with their pine trees as a quintessential statement of what nature is all about. Because of the high regard the Chinese have had for nature, these cliffs have been very frequently featured in landscape paintings for hundreds of years. Just as nature is a focus of Chinese classical painting, a Chinese bonsai is also a statement about nature. Because of the common basis on nature, it is

easy to see that the bonsai on the rock splinters is a reflection of the subject of the brush paintings. We talk about the art of bonsai and it truly is an art form in Japan, but is focused on the composition of the tree, the pot and stand. In the case of the Chinese tree on a rock spires, the art is based on not the tree, but also the incredibly old art of brush painting.

Nature is also a frequent theme in Japanese art but focusses more on the feeling of a particular scene. For example, a heron standing in dry grass under a pale moon partially covered by clouds connotes the lonely feeling of a winter day. A good bonsai will remind you of a tree that you saw in the wild and how much you admired the tree.

It is difficult at first glance to see a direct carryover of Japanese art to bonsai, but the emphasis of feeling in classical art does have a direct although subtle influence on Japanese bonsai. For example, we want our tree show the feeling of great age. Perhaps there is more of a tie between classical art and bonsai in Japan than we suspect.

Both the Chinese and the Japanese view of what a bonsai tree should look like is based on the larger view of the respective classical art esthetics. This is particularly apparent in the Chinese view. The style in which these views are realized is distinctly different. As a simple summary, the Chinese view focuses on what a tree actually looks like whereas the Japanese view is on what a tree wants look like in its wildest dreams.

Bonsai Calendar

- Watering – Water regularly to keep root ball moist, not wet, and never dry.
- Fertilizing – Start regular feeding of deciduous trees after first flush of growth is completed. Continue regular feeding of conifers.
- Repotting – Not recommended at this time.
- Styling/Pruning – Rotate trees. Watch for wire cutting during this period of fast growth. Start defoliation. Shorten branches on fruiting trees. Pinch junipers, spruces and cedars.
- Air Layering – Deciduous trees may be air layered if new growth has hardened.
- Insect and disease control – Maintain defensive treatments for fungus. Watch for and treat insect infestations.

Refer to the EBBS Bonsai Seasonal guide for more information on care

Make your tree a Social Media Star! Our Facebook page is in need of member's trees to display. If interested in showing your tree, send a picture to EBBS_Distribution@Yahoo.com.

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
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East Bay Bonsai Society—Schedule for 2021

Regular Meetings: Second Wednesday, in person every month (except July, August and October) @ 7:30 pm. Meetings are currently taking place on-line through Google Meetup every month on the 2nd Wednesday at 7:30 pm. When in person: Place: Lakeside Garden Center, 666 Bellevue Avenue, Oakland. Visitors welcome.

<u>Meeting</u>	<u>Program</u>
May 3	EBBS Board Meeting
May 12	Monthly meeting – Eric Shrader
June 7	EBBS Board Meeting
June 9	Monthly meeting – TBA
June 28	EBBS Board Meeting
July 14	Monthly meeting – TBA