THE BENT TWIG

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Dedicated to learning, enjoying and promoting bonsai. **May 2011**

Monthly Meeting: May 24th

May Demonstration

Bob Shimon will style a beautiful collected redwood. Don't miss this chance to learn more from Bob, and maybe win this great tree in the raffle!

For our June meeting, we plan a hands-on defoliation workshop. Bring your deciduous trees, especially oaks, maples, liquidambar, hornbeams and elms for help with defoliation. This technique is one of the best ways to improve ramification. If you are planning on defoliating your oak, make sure not to pinch or prune it, just let it run and feed heavily to promote strong back-budding to rebuild the interior of your trees.

Refreshments provided by Ann Harris & Bob Michael.

DEMONSTRATION BY PETER ADAMS
WINDSWEPT STYLE

The club was fortunate to have Peter Adams to provide the demonstration for our March meeting. Originally from England and now living in Washington State, Peter is an internationally recognized bonsai artist with an emphasis on "artist." Among his many accomplishments, he has owned a bonsai nursery and developed trees now in the British National Collection. But that isn't all. A classically trained artist, who has worked at portraiture, cartooning, and ceramics, he brings an artist's eye to bonsai design. Demonstration of his ideas is made clear by wonderful sketches to illustrate artistic and horticultural principles of his designs. For our club demonstration using a pygmy cypress, he completed a life size drawing that was presented, along with the tree, to lucky raffle winner Ann Harris (Yes, she won again). Peter has published many books both in the US and the UK. A partial list is included at the end of this article. All are illustrated with great photographs and his detailed illustrations.

Overall Assessment of the Possible: The club provided Peter with a pygmy cypress originally collected by Mendocino Bonsai about 24 inches high with a trunk diameter of about 1 ½ inches. The bark was mature with weathered brownish-gray peeling strips. With pygmy cypress, it is nearly impossible to gauge the age from the appearance. The tree might be 80 to 100 years old depending upon the original growing conditions. Peter talked about getting to know the tree and feeling connected. He thinks of a styling project as an artist working with the tree in a partnership. Many times throughout the demonstration, Peter returned to the topic of doing what the trees wants to do, only just encouraging it to cooperate in a way that helps the tree by keeping it healthy and helps the artist by assuming the desired shape without the need of dramatically forcing it into one of the "correct" bonsai styling templates.

"This is a quintessentially American tree," said Peter. "When working with native material like this, you need to respect how it grows. This tree will grow lots of linear lines reflecting its experience with the effects of wind and sun. It has beautiful bark and a naturally pretty shape. The purpose of bonsai styling is to make a tree look old. When you have a tree that already looks old, the pressure is on you not to stomp all over it and impress a "bonsai" unnatural shape onto it."

Selecting the Style: Peter did some preamble sketches of the tree to try out alternatives to see what the finished tree might be like. One can try out several sketches in a few minutes and possibly save several years of frustrating and useless attempts at branch development for a design that must be abandoned. The purpose of the sketches is to:

- Identify the existing natural growth masses
- Identify trunk quality & main support features
- Identify natural shapes that would be formed by this tree
- Understand the themes suitable for the tree

In this case, Peter sketched out two different styles, one upright and one windswept. The windswept style definitely seemed to suit this tree. Peter suggested that, because this tree already has some developed growth, the best procedure would be to "take away the young stuff and encourage the natural growth of the remainder."

He also showed us a portrait of the finished tree with a custom-made fiberglass rock planting pot so that we could clearly visualize the future of the tree.

Jin for Year One: Because this pygmy cypress is an old tree far from its native habitat, it must be handled in stages. Attempts to root prune, repot, style and branch prune in the same year would likely result in a quick death. This tree is still growing in its collected soil. The pygmy cypress is very sensitive to pH and mineral soil changes. If styling is done this year, repotting should be delayed at least one more year.

Peter decided that this year would see only a beginning of development of the small branch jins and removal of some of the foliage. He began by squeezing the bark in likely places with a jin pliers to start the naturally occurring areas where jin would develop on an old tree.

"Don't worry to much about the process, you just want to free the worst of the bark; fingers are a great bonsai tool. You will come to a point where the bark will stick which is not a bad place to stop," he said. You don't have to do anything about the bare branches this year. "Acres and acres of white lime sulphur have nothing to do with actual natural wood."

Basic Branch Adjustment for Year One: The artist's choice is to find the balance between a totally happy tree and one that conforms to the desired style. A healthy tree will want to be very full. In a windswept style, emphasis is on the linear lines and not on a fluffy branch structure. In order to decide how to treat the branches:

- Look at the levels of the tree that will support the desired image,
- Pull gently in the direction of growth to separate loose leaves and partially thin bushy spots,
- Clip only a small amount of foliage to avoid unnecessary stress on the tree,
- Too much damage will cause the tree to move into repair mode and not growth mode.
- Visualize the total arrangement of the tree elongated on the horizontal to harmonize with the fiberglass pot. The natural branch movement is to go up and down.
- Do the big bits first and move gradually and professionally into detail, using the trunk as a base and then finding a series of shapes that emphasize the pleasing aspects.
- It doesn't matter what method of design as long as the horticulture pushes the tree in the direction desired.

"Wire the main branches only, don't get cute with the little stuff," Peter said. " A half trained green tree is much better than a fully wired brown one on its way to the great pulp mill in the sky.

Wiring for Year One: "Wiring is only part of the journey, not the journey itself," Peter said after telling us several funny stories he has encountered with people practicing unique wiring concepts. The purposes of the wiring in the first year:

- Not so much technical excellence as a way to know quickly if design idea will fly or not,
- The artistic concept is to make shape first, otherwise you will never know if the shape works.
- Grasp of the feasibility of the idea is more important than the technique at this stage,
- Wiring and positioning a branch is the only way to see if moving it is what is really wanted,
- Education on horticultural techniques is necessary to fully accomplish the design.
- Make sure to check the lines at the top this tree because want to remove lower branches later,

- Any excess that breaks the level of what is OK with the tree will always make problems.

Styling Aftercare: Proceed with styling at the time that the tree is just coming out of summer dormancy. Ensure that the tree gets plenty of moisture and zero wind exposure. Wind can do more damage in drying tissue than lack of moisture. Use an aggregate soil base. Support moisture retention with light shade.

Ensure that the planting is deep enough to hold moisture. Do nothing more with the tree over the summer. Come back in August and do a little fine-tuning. The temptation to keep snipping and wiring is very high. Don't do it. Let the tree put on some growth before you start pinching. Never pinch a newly emerging growth bud. Feed correctly and let it grow to a good extension to ensure vigor.

Designing a Custom Fiberglass Planting Rock: For this particular tree, Peter recommends an artificial rock to emphasize the one sided nature of this windblown design. The rock must provide as much soil as a pot. There are at least two ways to accomplish shaping the main root space for the tree in a fiberglass pot:

- The cavity can be shaped with heavy gauge wire or another mold form big enough for the roots, or
- the rock can be constructed so that the tree with its entire pot can hide under the rockscape.

If the tree remains in a pot, additional landscaping with moss and/or small plants is necessary to hide the margin between the pot and the rock. Peter cautions that the root ball should have the same amount of soil in a home made rock as would be necessary in a regular pot because all of the same horticultural factors apply.

In addition to the main cavity, there can be as many auxiliary spots as necessary to achieve your complete design. There are unlimited possibilities. These rocks are heavy, but nowhere near as heavy as a natural stone of the same size. Peter suggests designing secondary cavities to plant permanent accent plants and really having fun creating a unique and pleasing original composition.

Making the Base of a Fiberglass Planting Rock: Detailed instructions for making a rock planter with photographs are in Chapter Six of Peter's book *Bonsai Landscapes* with photographs by Bill Jordan, ISBN 0-7063-7767-2. Materials required:

- Wood, pipe, and scrap metal to make the core of the sculpture
- Heavy-gauge wire to form the basic shape of the armature to support the fiberglass sculpture
- Chicken wire netting to form the rough details of the shape
- Fiberglass cloth (not fiberglass mesh) to form fine details and hold the painted coats of resin
- Cement or Ciment fondu powder to build details of the rock. Natural color dries dark grey
- Tools for armature: scissors, wire-cutters, pliers, saws and drills for wood if used
- Tools for working fiberglass: old paint brushes, a selection of trowels for mixing and modeling
- Equipment for mixing goop: Old coffee can, plastic bucket

Use fingers, pliers and 6 mm aluminum wire to shape the frame. Make a cage roughly the shape of the rock. Paint on the fiberglass resin. Put on as many coats as necessary. Build up additional details as desired.

Making a Fiberglass Planting Rock Look Realistic: Peter suggests using the color combinations of a real rock to match your paint. He makes a rock portrait of the fiberglass rock and colors it in so he can see how the colors will come together. When he is happy with the effect, he can use the picture as a model to paint the rock. There are several ways to get a realistic effect:

- When finishing the rock, drop fine silver sand onto the wet resin to build up a rock like texture
- Use concrete to build up details that need improvement, and then cover with another resin coat
- Paint the rock with a flat undercoat of gray to dull the shine
- Build up the color of the rock with acrylics, model railroad paint, or any permanent color

- Add darker color to the recessed areas to enhance the shadows and highlight the featured areas
- Adjust coloring to represent a real rock surface

"You should all have a go at it. It's a tremendous lot of fun," said Peter. "When it's all finished, secure the plant, build up the soil and add ground cover and little grasses or other accent plants."

HORTICULTURAL INFORMATION

The Mendocino Pygmy Cypress

Cupressus Goveniana ssp. *Pigmaea or Pygmaea*
or Callitropsis pigmaea

The Mendocino or Pygmy Cypress is only found on Mendocino White Plains alluvial benches, the coastal terraces between Fort Bragg and Anchor Bay in an area dominated by Redwoods, Bishop Pine and Mendocino Shore Pine typically below 1650 feet elevation. The trees grow naturally in both dense thickets and also in open groves. Tree size is highly variable. In good soil, the trees grow over a hundred feet tall. In acidic nutrient-starved soil with drainage impeded by an iron hardpan, the trees adopt a pygmy form. Natural sites are often flooded during the winter, forming shallow bogs or ponds. A tree with a trunk diameter of one-quarter inch, standing only a foot or two high, may be a hundred years old.

The peeling bark is dark gray-brown and becomes fissured on old trees. The root systems are extensive and shallow, forming a taproot and numerous laterals in the first year. The foliage is a dull dark to light green color. Scale-like leaves are about a tenth of an inch long. The almost spherical cones are small, ½ to 1-inch long. In nature, the cones remain closed on the trees for many years until a forest fire kills the tree, then cones open so the seeds can germinate on bare fire-cleared ground.

Seedlings are shade intolerant and survive best in full sunlight on bare mineral soil. Trees will lose foliage if grown in full shade. Seedlings are susceptible to damping-off fungi and coryneum canker. Fungicides are effective in preventing the spread of the disease but cannot eradicate it once infection has begun.

SOME BOOKS BY PETER ADAMS

The Art of Bonsai, Peter Adams, Ward Lock Ltd., 1990, 9780706368376; 0706368371

The Art of Flowering Bonsai, Peter Adams, Ward Lock Ltd., London, 1998, Bill Jordan photographer, 9780706376250

Bonsai Landscapes, Peter Adams, Ward Lock, Ltd., 1999 Bill Jordan Photographer, 9780706377675

Bonsai Design – Deciduous and Coniferous Trees, Peter Adams, Ward Lock Ltd., 1990, 9780706368369

Bonsai with Japanese Maples, Peter Adams, Timber Press, 2006, 0-8069-6902-1

Shaping Maples, Peter Adams, Haskill Creek Publishing, 2007

Successful Bonsai Growing, Peter Adams, Ward Lock, Ltd., March 1992, 978706370409; 0706370406,

Successful Bonsai Growing, Peter D. Adams, Cassell Illustrated, 1995, Paperback, 0-7063-7439-8

Successful Bonsai Shaping, Peter Adams, Trafalgar Square, London, 1993, 9780943955704; 0-7063-7138-0

~ Carolyn Van Hoecke

Dear Friends in Bonsai,

Mark your calendars for these upcoming important events.

May 7, 2011 (Saturday) 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Nursery Tour 2011 - Gems of the Sierra Foothills

This is our first year of participating in the tour of local nurseries. Bud & Gloria Bradley, two very talented local artists (photography), collage, pottery, sculpture) will be showing some of their work at Lotus Bonsai Nursery. Refreshments will be served. Each person who makes a purchase is eligible for a ticket that will be drawn to win a Bonsai valued at $200.

May 21, 2011 (Saturday) 10 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
Wakamatsu Open House

This is a very important event celebrating the unique contribution and history of the Japanese who came to the Sierra foothills shortly after the "Gold Rush". We will have a display and be doing a Bonsai demonstration.

May 27-29, 2011 (Friday, Saturday & Sunday) 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Lotus Bonsai Nursery
5th Annual Spring Sale

Directions to the nursery at http://www.lotusbonsai.com/map.html

All pre-Bonsai plants/trees at 20% off.
Most pots at 20% off.
Imported pumice: akadama, kanuma, hyuga, kiryu at $18/bag.
Special discounts of Bonsai in pots.

We look forward to seeing you at these events.
Bolet Salvador
Lotus Bonsai Nursery & Gardens

TED MATSON DEMONSTRATIONS
DECIDIOUS AND EVERGREEN SHOHIN

Ted Matson, recent past president of the Golden State Bonsai Federation and a nationally known bonsai master who teaches classes throughout the USA, highlighted our April meeting with two Shohin demonstrations. Raw material was provided from the growing beds of Greg McDonald. There was a bushy and vigorous deciduous flowering apricot with a nice old broken trunk and a tiny evergreen coast redwood with a broad base of interesting swirls of deadwood and new growth.

Ted started out by discussing all of the design considerations of the flowering apricot. Because the trees are grown for the flowers and because the best trees are usually collected specimens from old gardens, they generally defy the traditionally named styles and tend to be quite abstract. The wood is often hollowed out and may be decayed. If not already misshapen, the tree will take carving well to make it look aged. Often in this tree, one will use the ugly dead and broken branches to make a focal point to contrast with the texture of the delicate flowers.

"The winter flowering apricot is a very symbolic tree that is a harbinger of the oncoming season. It is shown primarily for its flowers," Ted said. "In this style it is OK to prune and let twigs run, cutting back each time to save a little twig growth until the end of June. After June, let the sprouts run out for the remainder of the year and do not cut back again until after flowering next winter. Use the long flowering twigs in ikebana."

The demonstration tree did not have a traditional left branch or back branch, but a tree can be left out-of-balance with its foliage because the wood can be used to balance the composition. Ted, assisted by Greg, took off all of the excess and trimmed all of the side shoots back to two buds to define the basic shape. This resulted in removal of more than one-half of the vigorous straight top growth leaving only the older bottom branches to get a movement more consistent with the scale of the trunk, break the asymmetry, and counter balance the woody visual mass by creating interest with layers of foliage.

"When pruning, carefully examine each leaf bud to determine where to cut. Each petiole tells where the next round of growth will go. This is an alternate budding tree and each bud will break in a predictable pattern. Wait for at least 7 leaves, then choose each bud and cut back to 2 or 3 leaves determined by the terminal bud pointing in the direction you want the final branch to go."

Carving was marked with red pencil now as a styling reminder and will be delayed until later.

"This tree trunk shows its life line with a large crack between the live and dead wood. All of the sap has withdrawn from the dead side of the tree," Ted said. "We could go into the dead side and hollow it out and make a chimney and this tree would be OK," Ted said. "To do the carving, we would go into a second place

with a ¾-inch spade bit and cut a flat hollow surface, then start hollowing out. The opening into the hollow space might be narrow because we must save all positive life wood," Ted said. He used a red grease pencil to mark the two places where carving will begin.

"Instead of leaving the solid mass of wood flare, we could open it up and take the core out to visually lighten up," Ted said. "We could run a channel to open more to make a front that creates a visual entry. We would leave some contours and leave some planes to get a parallax contour to give visual depth. We would leave most of the outside wood to create a deep interior space," Ted said. "Ume wood is really hard. You don't need to preserve it and it will last forever. It doesn't matter what time of year the carving is done. You can get the wood down to ¼ inch thick and it will still be OK because you are not working near the life line on the other side."

"Another thing that could be done to this tree is grafting," Ted said. Lots of the original flowering apricots were wild and were limited to simple white flowers. Any variety of single or double, straight or weeping style of branches can be easily grafted. It is possible to graft more than one color on the same tree. Modern hybrids have better flowers and can be grafted with scions as slip graft, or with approach graft.

"Take grafting wood in December, wrap in damp newspaper and put in a baggie in the fridge and forget about it," said Ted. "Wait until early leaf push and take it out of the fridge and do your scion graft by cutting your segments and wrapping properly. Use scion material that matches the cambium diameter."

This tree should be planted in a shallow wide pot to bring out the visual interest of the spreading root mass. As it is, the tree has the perception of being squeezed with root base hitting the edge of the pot. It needs to show off the full quality of the base. Within a few minutes, Ted had transformed this vigorous bush of wild young shoots into a knarled old fruit tree which will only improve as its new shape matures.

Next, Ted worked on the redwood. Restyling started with cutting the plastic pot down using a root pruning scissors so that the full base of the tree could be seen. "Nature has done the work of carving. This tree has lots of sweeping dead wood. We will only try to accelerate what nature would do. In nature, the wood decays from fungus and water and movement appears with cracks and splits. Some people get carried away with trying to carve redwoods for movement, but if you get too cute with the carving, the long term effect is not natural," Ted said.

"This tree is almost to the perfect description of a Sumo," Ted said. "We have to bring a focal point to the dead wood and use the branch structure and foliage mass to focus on the dead wood at the base. This piece has many folds, with veins that twist and wrinkle with an incredible spread of weathered wood."

"The goal will be to create a mass of foliage to balance the wood and also use the foliage to frame the focal points," Ted said. "The first thing to do is clean out. The tree has sprouts everywhere. The burl is going to continue to sprout. Every time they erupt, they produce a tissue mass and add character with lumps, bumps, and expansion. We want the tree to look natural and to tell a story."

This style will have a minimal structure, but will have to grow a twig structure for the canopy. If not carefully planned and controlled, the final composition would have a proportionately overwhelming top. We have to make a trunk style to balance the rapidly growing branch structure. The entire tree will only be about 6 to 8 inches high when finished.

"We want the trunk life line to be on profile because even if hardly noticeable, it will continue to thicken. If it's on profile, the growth is more noticeable. If it's in front or back, you won't see it. The trunk needs to be united with the proportion of the deadwood for the long term structure."

"One must be careful in selecting the branch structure. We need to eliminate secondary growth so close to the base where it obscures so we can see the variations of depth and artistry of nature. If a branch is too low to the ground, it doesn't read like a branch. We do want to save a back branch for depth. The goal with a redwood is to shorten and pinch branches to get back budding. Over time, the branch will build up depth and get layers that will stack up and feather and we can put in some movement and build character. The goal is a bonsai style canopy heavily layered with foliage. The actual branch structure is secondary. The shape of the canopy is more important."

"For first wiring, twist wire up to branch just a hair loose because branches will continue to swell. This is not "show quality"wiring, just put the wiring in to do its job. With a redwood, if you break a branch, just wait for the next one to sprout. If a branch comes out at an odd angle, remove it and wait for a new bud," Ted said. "Use your finger to provide resistance and don't twist wire against the branch. The movement of the branches should be an echo of the movement of the deadwood contour. We are trying to use care and thought to reinforce the natural design elements.

This tree could look good in a round pot because it has good views from all sides and probably has more than one front. When trees are good in three dimensions, they should be styled with a good back as well as a good front.

With a shape of this type, it would be possible to drill holes in the wood below the soil line to wire down the plant to the pot so the wire does not show. However, one must be careful not to overstress a tree with too much work at one time.

For training, the tree was placed in a rectangular pot using pumice and red lava to hold moisture. These materials are electrically neutral so they will not bind nutrient ions in the way that organic compressed clays such as Akadama will hold on. It is important to train roots to splay out and to treat them carefully. Use sharp tools for cutting. Do not shred or squish roots or expose them to air for more than very short periods. Be sure to keep roots moist.

The raffle produced two happy winners of these interesting trees. We hope to see them return at show-and-tell so that we can see how they are progressing.

Our thanks to Greg for providing the material and to Ted for showing us two of the many variations of Shohin bonsai. Additional inspiration and pictures of mature Shohin bonsai with an introduction by Ted Matson can be found at Art of Bonsai http://www.artofbonsai.org/galleries/shohin.php

HORTICULTURAL INFORMATION

Flowering Apricot

Prunus ume or Prunus mume

The plant is known by a number of different names in English, including Japanese apricot, Japanese plum, and Chinese plum. Alternative names are *ume*, from the Japanese name, or *mume*, from the scientific name, also ultimately based on an older, alternative Japanese pronunciation—possibly the original—of "mme" (