



September 2024

The Bent Twig

A monthly newsletter of the American Bonsai Association of Sacramento
<https://www.abasbonsai.org/>

Arboreal Abstractions

Learning to style a tree well is a core concept in bonsai. It is given the most attention and, rightfully so, because it is the hardest thing to learn, once you get past bulletproof horticulture. It is artistic design coupled with biology, on a time scale far outside of the daily human experience. What actions can I take (or not take) today that will create the desired outcome I desire in ten, twenty, or more years? I don't want to scare anyone off who is just starting on this path, but it is an important realization. It takes at least a few seasons of practice to scratch the surface of technique and longer yet to develop your own style.

In the beginning, we want to learn the "correct" procedures, and while there are most certainly correct and incorrect actions, it takes longer to learn that you can do anything you want stylistically. What matters is the intentionality and vision behind those decisions. You must learn the rules to break the rules.

I have embarrassed myself countless times, bringing sub-par material to professional workshops. I want to learn the entire process, how to create excellent trunks, as much as I want to learn refinement. Yet, many of the immature trees I have put in front of professionals have had little potential, already too late in lignification to create stunning trunks. Something can be made of any material, but it is a hard lesson to learn that some trees require an unimaginable amount of time to correct or will simply never be top-tier. The decision to cut ties with such material is one of the hardest to own.

A key aspect to this learning process is exposure to high-quality material. Poring over Kokufu books and magazines is one approach, an important one, but it does not carry the same weight as fully experiencing high-quality bonsai in-person. I've been attending professional workshops for four years now, and this point has only recently hit home. Like music, like visual art, like any human pursuit where immense skill is required to breach the initial stages of learning, the opportunity to study the output of masters is invaluable.

Again, like music, you can attempt to learn by reading sheet music and get far, but to reach a point of mastery, to develop a signature style, you need to learn to play by ear, to hear the subtleties of technique, phrasing, timbre and rhythm. This is only the beginning. Continue on this path, until the object of study becomes second nature, and little by little, your own style develops.

Bonsai is a multidisciplinary act of taking everything that is horticulture and tree art, and taking it to the next level. The next ten levels in fact. It is a lifestyle. It is way more than learning to style a tree; it is learning to pay uncommonly close attention to your trees, it is arranging your time to enable you to pay such close attention. It is developing a practice, like meditation, like learning a language, like learning music. In the time that you are not pruning or wiring - aside from the bevy of other plant care activities - you are inspecting, placing, evaluating, rotating, and rejecting. You are learning to read the horticultural history of your tree.

There is no replacement for this process and for putting in the time, season after season, to grow. Allow yourself to make mistakes, so long as it is in honor of building a regular practice, and then watch the results. This action/observation feedback loop can only happen on the scale of seasons. It may feel dissatisfying at first, to wait years for results, even bad results, but in bonsai, we are learning for the long term. It is as much an exercise in developing technique as it is in developing patience. But hearing this over and over still does not carry the same resonance as experiencing it for yourself. So, manage your expectations, prioritize working & viewing high-quality material, work with a master, and commit to a daily practice.

--Ian Baker



Last Meeting Adam Toth

On Tuesday, August 27, we welcomed bonsai artist Adam Toth to lead a discussion on shohin development. His talk covered a wide swath of technique and concepts, clearly rooted in extensive personal experience and passion. He brought along excellent examples from his own collection as well as early stage trees to illustrate his points. In the second half of the meeting, he also provided feedback on select member trees.

Adam resides in the Bay Area and has studied with Jonas Dupuich. More recently, he completed study with Taiga Urushibata at the Taisho-en bonsai garden in Shizuoka. He said his aim in giving this talk was to advocate for small bonsai and many ABAS members left the meeting inspired and informed to work on their own shohin (and mame!) trees. Congratulations to Mark Edelstein for winning the key raffle prize, a nice shohin olive group.



Above top: Adam discussing a juniper shohin, Above: Mark E. and his sweet raffle prize



What to Work on September

The Fall equinox has arrived! Daylight hours and temperatures are noticeably decreasing. It is time to evaluate placement of our bonsai for optimum growing conditions. Depending on the microclimate in your yard, shade cloth over conifers can be removed sometime in the next couple of weeks. Deciduous trees may need protection into October if temperatures stay above 90 degrees. Temperatures in September and October can be extremely variable.

Trees are starting the transition to winter dormancy. Aggressively growing deciduous and broadleaf evergreens may need a little more cut back otherwise wait until just after leaf drop in November for major pruning and thinning.

Now is the time to begin work on single flush pines (white pine, Scots pine, lodgepole pine, and other high mountain pines) and continue work on other conifers. It is too late for de-candeling Japanese black and red pines but fall clean up work can begin.

Remember that foliar growth may be slowing but trees continue to add tissue to trunk and branches. Pay close attention to branches with wire.

- Check wire on deciduous and broadleaf evergreens to make sure it is not cutting in
- Stay vigilant monitoring for pests and disease
- Adjust watering as temperatures increase and decrease
- Provide shade for sensitive and delicate species
- Fertilize as needed
- Refer to the yearly care sheets for conifers and deciduous trees on our ABAS website under the [‘Member Resources’](#) tab.

Upcoming Meeting

Fall Sale and Auction

It's that time of year! Hopefully you are already well-prepared for the annual ABAS fall sale and auction. Most of you know the drill, but there are a few key changes to consider for all. The consignment sale starts strictly at 6:00 PM; no holds, sales, or browsing is allowed until doors open at 6:00 PM. Once doors open, you may begin browsing, buying, and putting consignment material on hold. The auction preview is from 6:00 - 6:30 PM and the auction begins at 6:30 PM. We ask that you pay for held items or promptly inform hold table volunteers if you change your mind by 8:00 PM so that all items have an equal chance of being sold.

If you are selling items in the auction, please limit it to five potted trees, beyond the pre-bonsai stage. Please contact [Gage](#) at minimum 24 hours in advance of the sale to receive a seller number to sell in either the consignment sale or auction. Sales forms are available on our [website](#) and must be filled out accurately, following all procedures, for you to receive payment. Drop-off begins at 5:30 PM; check-in your consignment items by entering through the side patio entrance and auction items through the main front door. Additional details may be found on the attached flier. Organizing this event requires a great deal of coordination and support from volunteers, as well as cooperation from sellers and buyers, so thank you in advance for following these procedures and thank you to the volunteers who make it happen.



From top: a tasting of trees featured in 2024 auction cypress, hornbeam, privet, wisteria, ginkgo. Immediate left, above, right: scenes from 2023 auction.



In memoriam: Walt Brainerd

ABAS would like to acknowledge the passing of a bonsai master, past president, and friend Walt Brainerd. Just short of his 102nd birthday, Walt's final day was August 29, 2024. Comments below are from a few key club members and friends.

Walt's initiation to bonsai began around 1955, when a friend gifted him a bonsai. Little did his friend know that this gift would propel Walt into a lifetime endeavor of enjoying bonsai. He initially studied under Dan Buckley, an ABAS charter member, two-time President and subsequent Lifetime member. He also studied with numerous domestic and international bonsai professionals.

Walt served as Club President and for an extended period of time as a perennial board member, who lovingly shaped the values of ABAS. He became an ABAS Lifetime Member and was acknowledged several times by GSBF for his involvement in the bonsai community. His name is engraved on a plaque acknowledging Sacramento Bonsai notables at Bonsai Garden Lake Merritt.

Walt had a gentle mentoring nature that encouraged those of us he took under his wing to improve our bonsai skills. The Latin names of trees easily rolled off his tongue, giving them the due respect he assuredly intended. He would host club-sponsored workshops at his home, lead presentations at monthly meetings, and serve as an ambassador for our club when hosting visiting bonsai masters or attending conventions.

One of Walt's most noteworthy achievement was the completion of an intensive 4-year Satsuki Azalea course at El Dorado Bonsai, taught by two accomplished Japanese Satsuki experts. This achievement certified him with credentials to teach Satsuki Azaleas.

During Walt's bonsai journey, as his skill developed, he became known as THE person to buy plants from at various plant sales events. Those looking for bonsai that had been semi-styled bonsai, up to advanced bonsai that had been refined, quickly learned that Walt's plants were worth acquiring.

For over, 60 years any ABAS display of bonsai would always showcase Walt's beautifully refined plants. When passing his plants forward, Walt insisted that only ABAS members be allowed to acquire his plants; therefore, ABAS club members should be able to see some of Walt's bonsai creations at near, future and distant Sacramento bonsai shows and events.

Upon viewing Walt's garden, it appeared that he had build his house around his garden and bonsai collection - A fact that he would proudly share. Whether in an official capacity or just a bonsai enthusiast, Walt always generously welcomed club members and many others to view his garden and bonsai collection.



Clockwise from top left:
Walt was especially fond of Azaleas and is seen here making a presentation to ABAS on their seasonal care.



Walt is pictured with one of his lifelong bonsai friends, Hideko Metaxas. He and Hideko, a former GSBF President had a shared love for Japanese culture, suiseki and the bonsai community.

Photo of Walt in his yard, standing by one of his Japanese Black Pines.

Walt is seen here with past ABAS President and longtime friend Renee Seely and Peter Tea with whom he studied.





Welcome New Members: Nicole Sepulvida Smith

New members are connected with their area liaison and will receive a welcome letter with a free pass to one of our member workshops. The mentors are listed on our website under 'Member Resources, Club Liaisons', with contact information.

Member Workshop. The next member workshop is Saturday, October 12. Contact [Renee Seely](#), or sign up via our website to reserve a spot. Remember to specify if you prefer morning, 8:30am - 12:30pm, or afternoon, 1:00pm to 5:00pm. As always, the club provides wire for use; bring your own tools. Each workshop session is \$10 payable to ABAS.

Pacific Bonsai Expo

PBE is coming! If you have not already, secure your tickets for the Pacific Bonsai Expo October 26 - 27 at the Henry J. Kaiser Center for the Arts in Oakland, CA. This is the premier west coast bonsai exhibition and it's not to be missed! Parking for the event will be limited, so please plan to carpool or use the nearby BART station.

October - Dueling Demos and BYOT with Bjorn and Yannick

In addition to hosting our October club meeting, Bjorn and Yannick will be holding separate full day "bring your own tree" workshops. Bjorn's workshop is full but space remains in Yannick's. Yannick is an excellent bonsai instructor and his workshop is highly recommended. The workshops will be held on Monday, October 21 from 9:00 am - 4:00 pm for a maximum of 6 participants in each workshop. Yannick's workshop will cost \$130 per participant***.

Bring 2-4 trees to work on during the workshop, depending on the amount of work each tree will require. You may sign up for a remaining slot in Yannick's workshop at our August meeting or by emailing [Dodie](#). Participants will need to pay in CASH in order to have their spot secured in the workshop as no names will be entered on the sign up sheet without cash payment.

***Prices quoted are if the workshops are full (6 participants). The total cost will be divided by the # of participants in the workshop in the unlikely event that they do not fill to six participants.

SGAAC Japanese Garden Cleanup

Calling volunteers to assist with Japanese garden clean up Wednesday Oct 2 from 9:30 AM - 12:00 PM. Bring tools, gloves, brooms, rakes, pruners, buckets, etc. to help weed and tidy our signature garden. Contact [Dodie](#) for questions.

Events Calendar

2024

Tuesday, September 24, ABAS Live Auction and Consignment Sale

[In-person](#)

Saturday - Sunday, October 5 - 6, SGAAC Fall Sale

[In-person](#)

Saturday, October 12, Member Workshop

[In-person](#)

Tuesday, October 22, Dueling Bonsai Demos w/ Yannick and Bjorn

[In-person](#)

Saturday - Sunday, October 26 - 27, Pacific Bonsai Expo

[Oakland](#)

Saturday, November 9, Member Workshop

[In-person](#)

Tuesday, November 26, Hands On Fall Care w/ Renee and Carmen

[In-person](#)

Wednesday, November 27, Mention the word modus operandi for a free raffle ticket

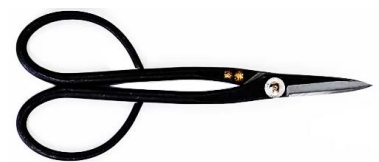
[In-person](#)

Wednesday, December 11, ABAS Holiday Party

[In-person](#)

Saturday, December 14, Member Workshop

[In-person](#)



Above: Additional scenes from Adam's presentation last month



AMERICAN BONSAI ASSOCIATION, SACRAMENTO

2024 LIVE AUCTION!!!

AND CONSIGNMENT SALE



Tuesday, Sept 24, 2024

Preview items at 6pm – Auction starts at 6:30pm

No sales or “holds” before 6pm!!!

Shepard Garden & Art Center
3330 McKinley Blvd (in McKinley Park)
Sacramento, CA 95816

In-Person Only

Seller forms for Auction and Consignment Sale available at:

<https://www.abasbonsai.org>



ABAS September Auction and Consignment Procedures

- All sellers must have obtained a seller number at least 24 hours prior to the sale by contacting [Gage](#)
- Please tag all sell items as shown in the directions. Use only merchandise tags – no tape or sticker tags allowed
- Bring completed forms with you – TWO copies of Auction Inventory and one copy of consignment form

Drop Off Procedures

- No early arrivals**
- ALL ITEMS, auction and consignment, must be checked in and inventory verified before being placed on tables.**
- Consignment items** are checked in & dropped off on the patio beginning at 5:30 pm (entry through patio doors)
- Auction items** are checked in & dropped off in main room (enter via regular door). Auction items are kept in numerical order by seller number
- After items have been dropped off, members may wait in the main room or outside. No one is allowed in the consignment area until 6:00 pm.
- Consignment items aren't necessarily kept in numerical order.
- Auction preview is 6:00 pm; Auction begins at 6:30 pm
- No sales or holds until 6:00 pm**

Closing Procedures:

- All items in the holding area need to be paid for and removed by **8:00 pm**
- Sellers must remove all unsold items by 8:45 pm.
- Unsold items should be verified against the seller inventory with ABAS rep. If verification isn't completed, seller will only be paid for items for which we have receipt of being sold.



American Bonsai Association, Sacramento presents
 Tuesday: October 22, 2024 • 6 pm - 9 pm
 Shepard Garden & Art Center • 3330 McKinley Blvd • Sacramento

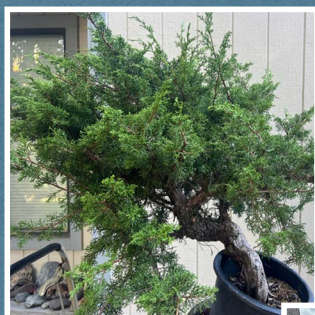
Yannick Kiggen and Bjorn Bjorholm will style two trees at the same time, switching midway through the demo.

Two lucky attendees will win these trees.

YANNICK KIGGEN VS. BJORN BJORHOLM

DUELING BONSAI DEMO

Experience these internationally respected bonsai artists face off in a styling duel using high-quality trees. Attend in person to buy raffle tickets.





**DOING OUR PART AND
FUNDRAISING TOO!**

WIRE RECYCLING PROGRAM

**BRING YOUR CLEAN, SEPARATED AND
USED ALUMINUM & COPPER WIRE TO THE
MONTHLY GENERAL MEETING. THERE
WILL BE LABELED COLLECTION BOXES
AVAILABLE.**

Email Debbie Ballanti at juno@pacbell.net with questions.

Sponsored by ABAS

