

## Heritage Trees 1,2, and 3.

Our first salute to RMS members' heritage trees begins with Todd Schlafer's trees.

### Tree 1. Limber Pine

Estimated age: 400 years

Ownership: Collected in the Rocky Mountains by Mistutaro Tawara early 1970s

Obtained by Harold Sasaki in 1977 and has been training as a bonsai ever since.

Present owner: Todd Schlafer, 2015



History: In July 1987 the National Bonsai Foundation sponsored an exhibition entitled "Outstanding American Bonsai" described as an exhibit of world class bonsai designated as the best in the United States. This Limber Pine was one of the 50 trees shown at this exhibit and is featured in a book (pages 44-45) of the same name as the exhibition. Harold Sasaki is the bonsai artist and was recognized by the National Bonsai Foundation as one of the 100 outstanding American bonsai artists at the time of this exhibit.

The book describes the tree as follows: "The tree stands approx. 31 inches and was originally planted in a brown unglazed Tokoname ware container. Bold use of the deadwood in this bonsai suggests a forest ancient which has died and been replaced by another younger tree of the same species."

This tree was originally collected in the Rocky Mountains by Mistutaro Tawara, one of the original founders of the Denver Bonsai Club. It then passed on to Harold Sasaki in 1977. It was trained as a bonsai for 15 years prior to this exhibit in 1987. The bonsai artist featured with the tree is Harold Sasaki, recognized for his teaching of bonsai and his studies under masters such as Harry Hirao, John Naka, Ben Oki and Chase Rosade. In 2015 Todd Schlafer acquired the tree from Harold Sasaki and took on the responsibility of preserving and restoring the tree, which he estimated to be a 3-5-year project. He repotted the tree in 2016 with the assistance of Ryan Neil of Bonsai Mirai. His future plans for the Limber Pine are to allow it to grow and flourish and then re-style it, again, with the input and assistance of Ryan. The full circle legacy of this tree is that both Ryan (starting at the age of 12) and Todd studied under Harold Sasaki for many years. Todd, with Ryan's assistance, will continue to work on the limber pine to preserve the tree's "Harold Sasaki legacy" and its connection to the what is referred to as "American bonsai". by the National Foundation. Todd felt that the tree's important history should be part of its future development and life.

### **Tree 2: Colorado Blue Spruce**

Estimated Age: 350 years old

Ownership: Collected by Jerry Morris 2003

Several years later the tree was obtained by Walter Buck

Present owner: Todd Schlafer 2016

The Colorado Blue Spruce pictured here appeared in a book titled "Best of BCI 50 stones 50 trees 50 years". It features 50 trees from all over the world that they, the Bonsai Clubs International, considered as member's best trees and stones. Walter Buck is the featured designer who is a member of RMBS.

The tree is described in the book as follows: "This Colorado Blue Spruce is unique in it's larger size and it's perfect proportions. It has a lot of dead wood that is a key feature of the tree. Colorado Blue Spruce are native to Colorado. Most of the Colorado blue spruce bonsais are collected in South Park Valley that is a micro climate covered in snow 6 months of the year and the only conifer to grow in this area."

'This Colorado Blue Spruce was collected by Jerry Morris at an elevation of 9,300 feet. The newly collected tree was planted in a plastic training tub and was re- potted in the container in photo 1 by Walter Buck in 2008 and displayed at the annual Rocky Mountain Bonsai Society exhibit. It was also displayed at the 2012 American Bonsai Society/Bonsai Clubs International convention in Denver and won a Best of Show Award."



Todd has repotted and styled the tree as seen in the next photo. Todd intends to feature this tree in future shows.





### **Tree 3: Lodge pole Pine**

This tree was styled by Kai Kawahara, one of the founding members of the Denver Bonsai Club in the 1950s (with seven other members of the Japanese community) and was their bonsai instructor for several decades. He became the gardener of the Sho-fu-en garden at the Denver Botanical Gardens from 1980-1993, working to maintain the garden in the Japanese tradition as well as to incorporate into it trees native to the Colorado Mountains. In 1983 he received the title of "Master of Bonsai". Kendall Condiff (former RMBS member) won it in an RMBS auction! Todd Schlafer has had the tree in his collections since 2018.

This tree is considered a "future" as Todd maintains it in his collection and contemplates what he will do with it next.



### **Heritage Bonsai owner**

Todd Schlafer

Todd's interest in bonsai began on a trip to Spain in 2002 where he purchased a bonsai seed kit. When it didn't grow to be a great bonsai in a few months he began to explore nearby nurseries for older material, which led him to Harold Sasaki, owner of Colorado Bonsai. Todd volunteered at Harold's nursery doing everything from pulling weeds to styling trees. His obsession with collecting trees started by going on a collecting trip with Jerry Morris. In 2012 he began his studies with Ryan Neil at Bonsai Mirai to learn how to style and develop material focusing on advanced techniques of setting tree structure which is the most difficult skill set to achieve in bonsai. This inspired him to pursue bonsai practice full time and he also began to instruct professionally as others sought him out for his expertise. His new profession has taken him all over the country and several trips abroad. Todd is a former president of the RMBS and an active member when he is in town, often providing demonstrations and workshops for club members. He has also been a featured artist on the Bonsai Mirai live stream.

Todd has an extensive collection of native trees, many that he personally collected. He has exhibited his own trees in the Artisans Cup in Portland Oregon, won the Best North American Species award at the National Exhibition in Rochester NY, is a recipient of the



Malcolm Corel Award, and also has a tree featured in the "Best of BCI 50 stones 50 trees 50 years" book.

Todd finds setting the initial structure of a collected tree, when done correctly, is one of the most fulfilling aspects of bonsai design. He says watching the tree flourish following such work can be unbelievably rewarding. "Good wiring...it's like a puzzle. Your brain hurts. It's not mindless and automatic. It's a game that never ends because the tree is continuously growing. It is chaos, beautiful chaos, taking that and turning it into something that makes sense is really one of the things that drives me".

