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RMBS

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May President's Message

by Andy Berry

RMBS May 2019 President's Message: "*Nursery Stalking*"

"Bonsai is best experienced over many years, one moment at a time. I suppose maybe all of life is that way..."
–Dan Wiederrecht

While many other bonsai club newsletters dedicate yet another article to the work of repotting, I want to shift our focus to a different and exciting aspect of spring bonsai: **the evaluation and acquisition of nursery stock material for use in our bonsai practice.** As Backcountry Dan suggests, the art of bonsai is best appreciated in how the present moment is woven into the long tapestry of time. Now is the moment when garden nurseries are filling their coffers with new trees that would be an awesome addition to your collection. Some might turn up their nose at such sourced material. I would argue that nursey stock has many sought-after qualities that afford the bonsaist the opportunity to tighten their gloves and step into the ring. Being a relative newcomer to the art myself, I can say without a doubt that the trees I have gathered from local nurseries have allowed me the most freedom to take my technical skill as a bonsai artist to the next level.

Attributes abound. Nursey stock is relatively inexpensive. It is already containerized, and usually pot-bound. It often tolerates severe root reduction without batting an eyelash. Trees may have dense branching for thoughtful evaluation and selection in primary styling. A mindboggling array of species are available, including dwarf cultivars and flowering varieties. It is readily available and found everywhere from big-box hardware stores to boutique garden centers. Material for bonsai is often less desirable for landscapes and may be available at reduced prices (check at the end of the season for half-off deals). While very few nursery trees will become truly "world-class" bonsai, with the right care and vision, most will make impressive compositions that your friends will drool over.

Many RMBS members utilize nursery material in their practice. Mike Horine is perhaps the most prolific, and some of his works are true masterpieces. His Japanese flowering quince in an Iker pot is a sight to behold, and an olfactory experience. I am certain that Mike would be the first to caution the prospective "nursey stalker" not every tree that grabs your attention is worth putting into the back of your Subaru: **you need to know how to effectively and efficiently evaluate stock material to be certain you take home something worthy of a lifetime of attention.** Below are some of the characteristics I seek when evaluating such material, and a quick look at some trees that have made it home to the garden. Thank you to Bonsai Mirai for the insight.

- 1) **Look for trees that draw your attention.** Is it the tiny leaves or compact needles? The aged bark? The spreading roots? Interesting branches? Colorful flowers? Unique movement or deadwood? An unusual species? **Rule #1 is the "love at first sight" test.** Analogous to the human interaction, there may be a lot of baggage below the surface to avoid. Better to know before you take it home. But one must love something to dedicate a lifetime to its care, no?

Below we have a shapely pine with a lovely trunk worthy of care and affection. However, further soil work revealed an unattractive inverse taper which is difficult to overcome.



- 2) **Look for basal flare and a strong nebari.** A massive, radial root flare provides stability and is highly prized. Being able to assess the nebari on stock trees is difficult. Pull down the burlap if you are able and remove mulch and soil. Work your fingers down into the pot to see if you can find structural roots. If you can, great! Often, you must bet they are present. Sometimes you lose this bet. Below is a Japanese maple with imperfect nebari, but with good flare that adds stability to the composition. The base was halfway down the 5-gallon nursery container and I had no idea what I had until I got home and potted it. Below is a 2-year progression.



3) **Identify interesting trunk movement.** You can almost always move branches; the trunk is more difficult. Finding a piece with good trunk movement might mean taking it home. You often won't be disappointed. Below is a Chinese juniper I got half-off (\$13) at Walmart that looked like every other bush on the shelf in September. I was drawn to in the intertwined twin trunks that add interest. At the price, I figured it would pay dividends in wiring practice alone. Here's the tree 2 years out of the nursery can with severe root and foliage reduction.



- 4) **Unique branching is really something:** This factor is to be considered *after* the ones above. Recall branching can be manipulated. However, unique branches that are naturally created can “make” a mediocre tree exceptional. The following tree is a clump-style dappled Japanese willow with variegated foliage that turns pink in autumn. I passed over two more expensive, traditional appearing trees at the garden center because this tree has small interesting foliage and some very “unnatural” near 90-degree bends that are amazing. I repotted it from a 5-gallon container prior to the bud push last month.



- 5) **Special features add value:** This is really that “X” factor. Often it is a deadwood feature (*jin* or *shari*) that tell a tortured tale of the tree’s life. I am drawn to these focal points when evaluating such material. I can forgive quite a few flaws in a tree if it displays such special interest. Below is a Kintzley’s Ghost honeysuckle with large leaves and poor ramification that makes up for its deficiencies with fantastic deadwood and yellow flowers in the summer. Given its nature as a climber, fine branching is eclipsed by lyrical limb movement. Container is by RMBS potter Bill Sample. This tree is only one season in training.



Finally, please join me for our May program presented by our 2018 Artist of the Year: Les Siroky. **He will be discussing a particular area of mastery: palm-sized *shohin* bonsai.** Les is as specialist in this form of the art and he is likely the finest *shohin* master in RMBS today. I have sourced many *shohin*-sized trees from nursery stock, and what better way to embrace spring than to unearth a treasure at a local garden center and gather tips from Les on how to make it your next show-quality piece? *The moment is now.*

Your brother in bonsai,

Andy Berry

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2018 - 2019 SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS AND ACTIVITIES

| Date and Location | Agenda or Program |
|---|--|
| <u>Monthly Meeting</u> May Tue, May 7 th 6:30 – 9:00pm Central Christian Church 3690 Cherry Creek S Dr, Denver, CO 80209 | <u>SHORT PROGRAM: MYCORRHIZA & REPOTTING</u> ALLAN HILLS <u>LONG PROGRAM: SHOHIN BONSAI</u> Les Siroky |
| <u>Guest Artist Workshop</u> May Sat May 11 th 10:00am – 1:00pm Central Christian Church 3690 Cherry Creek S Dr, Denver, CO 80209 | <u>SHOHIN WORKSHOP</u> Les Siroky |
| <u>Takayama Park</u> May Sat, May 18 th 9:00am – 1:00pm 500 South Colorado Blvd, Denver | <u>TAKAYAMA PARK</u> ANNUAL WORK OF PARK PINES |
| <u>Shoji Screen Workshop</u> June Sat, June 1 st 9am – 3pm Gary Matsuda's home (His address will be sent just prior) | <u>SHOJI SCREEN WORKSHOP</u> THE SCREENS WILL BE WORKED IN THE MORNING MEMBERS ARE ENCOURAGED TO BRING TREES TO WORK ON |
| <u>Monthly Meeting</u> June Tue, June 4 th 6:30 – 9:00pm DBG Plant Society Building | <u>GREEN ELEPHANT SALE & AUCTION</u> |
| <u>Saturday Workshop</u> June Sat, June 8 th 9am – 3pm Derick Starkey's home (His address will be sent just prior) | <u>SATURDAY WORKSHOP</u> MEMBERS ARE ENCOURAGED TO BRING TREES TO WORK ON |
| <u>Guest Artist Workshops</u> July Sat Jul 6 th and Sun July 7 th 8:30am – 3:00pm DBG Plant Society Building | <u>BJORN BJORHOLM</u> |
| <u>Monthly Meeting</u> July Tue, Jul 9 th 6:30pm – 9:00pm DBG Plant Society Building | <u>BJORN BJORHOLM</u> |
| <u>Guest Artist Workshops</u> Aug Sat Aug 3 rd and Sun Aug 4 th 8:30am – 3:00pm DBG Plant Society Building | <u>TODD SCHLAFER</u> |
| <u>Monthly Meeting</u> Aug Tue, Aug 6 th 6:30pm – 9:00pm Central Christian Church | <u>TODD SCHLAFER</u> |
| <u>Mt Goliath Fieldtrip</u> Aug Sat, Aug 17 th 10am – 3pm <u>Mt Evans Rd. Evergreen, CO</u> | <u>BRISTLECONE PINE FIELDTRIP</u> TED ENGELMANN |
| <u>Monthly Meeting</u> Sept Tue, Sept 3 rd 6:30pm – 9:00pm DBG Plant Society Building | <u>LONG PROGRAM: BONSAI SHELTERS 101</u> |
| <u>Annual Show</u> Sept Fri Sept 6 th through Sun Sept 8 th Denver Botanic Gardens | <u>50TH ANNIVERSARY ANNUAL SHOW</u> |

The entire yearly calendar is online [here](#).

RMBS HERITAGE TREES - Pat Deutschman

RMBS Heritage trees- passing on a collection

"Bonsai has a beginning but no end" - John Naka. A bonsai is a living heirloom that can be passed down for generations. How can you create a plan to ensure a bonsai's survival after you are no longer able to care for it? That is the essential question we will explore here.

When the time comes to pass along either an entire collection or just a few trees to another caregiver whether it be due to the bonsaiist health, age, moving/downsizing, or just wanting to take the tree out of the collection to make room for something else, the decision can become emotionally difficult. Just hoping that the next caregiver will love and tend to the trees with the same level of personal commitment may be unrealistic. The next person to nurture the tree will ideally have a similar affection as well as sufficient expertise for that species in order to keep the tree in good health, the skills to "advance the design" and appreciation for its history. Sadly, we had firsthand experience when this does not happen. My husband, Fred, "lost" a number of his prized bonsai after leaving them behind in Florida to be cared for by a local bonsai "expert" who either gave some away or neglected their care and they died before we could go back and retrieve them! Fred's bonsai were all mostly tropical species and the foster caregiver worked primarily on cypress and buttonwoods. Thus, the mistaken assumption of interest for species the caregiver did not grow on his own- a bonsai is a bonsai- is somewhat surprisingly not the same to everyone. The emotional attachment to a long-term bonsai development relationship is difficult to measure and quite difficult to pass on.

So, here are some things to consider as you ponder the future of your "special" trees. Each tree has a story to tell, but you may be the only one who knows it! Keep a written record of your bonsai. Besides the tree's origin and approximate age, it has a unique history of time in training, styling or trimming protocol, diseases it has overcome or is

susceptible to, as well as its own quirks and habitat where it thrives. The Denver Botanic Gardens keeps an up to date log on each of the trees in its collections documenting the history of each bonsai and its care requirements and updates to all the above. This log is the tree's history and will stay with the tree to help ensure its required level of care regardless of who the caregiver is.

Some bonsai artists and nurseries attach an identifying tag on every bonsai to help maintain a record of each tree. Some photograph the tree and attach the photo to the log the trees history. Like our family ancestry, knowing where we came from is part of who we are, the more we know the more we have a full understanding of what makes us who we are.

So, what can you do with your trees when it is time to pass them on to someone else? Create a succession plan for your trees and don't leave it up to someone else's judgment who is not familiar with your trees. One current practice is to donate the trees to the Denver Botanic Gardens. The Gardens will accept one or all trees as an "in kind" donation. They commit to either keep the tree(s) in their permanent collection or donate the trees to a good home. Some may also be donated back to the RMBS to be auctioned off as a fundraiser for the club. The one thing that will not happen to the tree is it will not be destroyed. This is a very comforting pledge considering the amount of time and patience, attention, expense and artistic creativity that was invested into each tree, some for decades. All the bonsai in the collection at the DBG are 2nd or 3rd generation trees so they have begun with someone else first.

Attached to this newsletter the RMBS Heritage Program Guidelines. This program was created to provide care for a member's bonsai collection in the event of an emergency, sickness, age deterioration or death on either a temporary basis or to assist in either the sale or donation of a collection.

RMBS ARTIST SPOTLIGHT – Allan Hills

At RMBS we have developed a diverse, inclusive community of people who are passionate about bonsai, related arts and culture. We hope that learning more about our members and their practice will enrich our society, generate conversation and bring us closer together.

Who are you and how did you get interested in bonsai?

Allan Hills: Geologist (retired). I was born in Charleston, SC, and grew up in the swamp, near Charleston, where I became familiar with all the creatures and plants of the swamp and of the coast nearby. I attended the University of North Carolina for my BS in Geology, and Yale for my PhD. Later I moved to Buffalo, NY, where very unlike South Carolina, snow covers the ground from November until May, and there is nothing green to be seen. So, I started frequenting nurseries with green houses. In one, I found a couple of small books on bonsai, published by the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. I was hooked (1972 + or – 1 year). I read every book on bonsai I could find in the library; I found and joined the Buffalo Bonsai Society, where in a couple of years I became “President of Buffalo” (the Mayor never found out). Bonsai clubs always trick their newest members into taking this job. I moved to Colorado in 1975, went to work for the US Geological Survey, and in two or three years became president of RMBS—see what I mean about newest members. I became interested in Viewing Stones five to ten years after coming to Colorado. This should be a natural for a geologist but, strangely, I have found my best stones and best places to hunt them by accident, while looking for or doing something else.

What was your biggest challenge?

Keeping my trees watered while working in the field or while out of the country. Viewing stones are less of a problem.

What is/are your favorite species?

Native American Beach, Ponderosa pines, Larches

What is your history with RMBS?

President a couple of times. Artist of the Year twice, Long-time member



NEWS FOR MEMBERS

Takayama Park Workshop Saturday May 18th

Character Pine trimming at Takayama Sister City Park Saturday May 18th, 9:00am to noon. We are excited about this project, which has always been something we “just did” to keep our city beautiful. There is a park on south Cherry Creek Drive, known as Takayama Park which has some bonsai styled Ponderosa Pines. Takayama Park was dedicated in the 60s by Mayor Currihan to honor the many Japanese Americans who live in Colorado. RMBS, this year led by Wayne Berve, have trimmed these trees and maintained the park. Again, this year we will be partnering with the Denver/Takayama Sister Cities organization, led by Mr. Steve Comstock. Wayne is the project lead and will speak with us more on Tuesday May 7th on how the membership can be involved with this community project. It will be fun, and I hope we get to interact with the public, as they will be invited to observe and learn more about the park and the correct way to shape a ponderosa bonsai tree. The address is 3900 E. Cherry Creek Dr. North.

Membership Renewal:

RMBS has adopted a policy where all membership renewals occur on July 1, and cover the succeeding 12 months, ending on June 30th.

All memberships renew this summer on July 1st, 2018. Individual memberships are \$35 per year and family memberships are \$50 per year.

You may pay via cash or check at any monthly meeting or mail your check to the address below. If

you mail your check please be sure to include your email address and telephone number.

PAYMENT ADDRESS:

Rocky Mountain Bonsai Society
c/o Membership Renewal
PO Box 271043
Louisville, CO 80027

Discounts Available to Members:

We have an account established with Way to Grow Gardening Supply in Denver. You can receive discounts on some items up to 15%. You will need to tell them you are a member of RMBS.

Resources for Members:

Other internet resources:

[RMBS Web Site](#)

[Colorado Bonsai Ltd.](#)

[First Branch Bonsai](#)

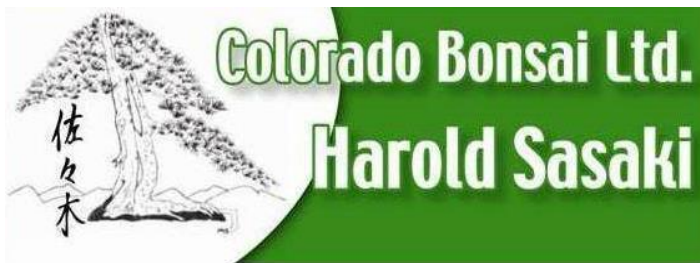
[S&S Bonsai](#)

[RMBS Facebook Page](#)

[Mike Horine Website](#)

[This video from above the trees in Tulum, Mexico is mesmerizing to watch and listen to](#)

[A perspective on foliar feeding](#)



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