

RMBS

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FICAS MICROCARPA PAUL KOENNING 2020

President's Message

by David McPeters

Hello RMBS members. This is my first Presidents letter. Thank you for your vote of confidence in electing me. I am looking forward to 2021.

I hope everyone is well and is finding a way to live through this epidemic. I have new respect and understanding for those who lived through the 1918 flu, the depression, and the world wars. It is one thing to read about it or see documentaries and quite another to live it.

I want to again thank the previous board members and Andy in particular. The past two years have been unusual to say the least.

Our 50th anniversary show in 2019 was a great success. And then COVID turned us upside down in 2020. Yet we were able to pivot and go virtual, continue with meetings, and still have a show. This was possible due to Andy's leadership, and the significant contributions of the board members and other members all who gave their time and effort. Thank you.

The 2021 board is meeting in January to plan the year's schedule and activities. We are conducting an online survey to get your input on what worked in 2020 and what you would like to see the society take on in 2021. We can expect that the early part of the year will be virtual and then depending on

circumstances with COVID we may be able to restart in-person meetings and activities.

We are following the guidelines communicated by the Governor and are subject to the policies of the Denver Botanic Gardens.

One of my objectives for the society in 2021 is to provide both virtual and in-person meetings as standard practice. I believe this is necessary to allow all members to participate until COVID is no longer an issue and I believe it allows the society to extend its footprint to include bonsai enthusiasts all along the front range. Please take a moment to fill out the survey [here](#). Your input will guide the 2021 planning. I plan to have more to communicate about 2021 in the future.

Finally, a bit about me. I have always been interested in and enjoyed working with plants. Everything from perennial and vegetable gardening to bonsai. Working with plants keeps me in tune with the seasons. Spring is for planting, summer is for tending, autumn is for harvesting, and winter is for dreaming and planning. It keeps me grounded with the passage of time. It serves as a counterpoint to the fast-paced world we live in and the world of technology I spent my career in.

I started with bonsai shortly after moving to Denver in 2000. I took classes from Hal Sasaki at the botanic gardens and dabbled in bonsai for a few years attending occasional society meetings. The 2012 ABS/BCI convention was the turning point for me where I went from bonsai as a hobby to bonsai as a passion. The rest is history. I am

known in the society as one of those who keep Ficus. That is true. I started with Ficus and in the early years when I traveled extensively for work, they were easy keepers. I also enjoy working with native conifers and have been working with them since the convention. Over the past year or two I have been adding more deciduous trees.

One final note. It is my lot to follow Andy and his well-written and entertaining presidents' letters. My writing skills were honed writing technical documents of various sorts. So, my writing tends toward short declarative sentences and is more facts than literature. Bear with me.

I hope everyone has a happy, safe, and healthy holiday season. Here is to 2021.

David

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2020 RMBS Programs: A Year in Review by Tom Anglewicz

2020, and the pandemic it brought with it, presented the Rocky Mountain Bonsai Society with a unique set of challenges that demanded flexibility and creative response.

We began the year with a great set of programs and guest artists scheduled, and the logical notion that projected meetings and workshops would take place in person, indeed in the great new facility that DBG has provided.

January: Larry Jackel did an excellent program on accent, or companion, plants for bonsai display. The Japanese refer to these as *kusamono* or *shitakusa*, the latter term referring specifically to a planting to accompany bonsai. His presentation was very well received, and we all learned a good deal more about how to select and compose accent plants that successfully complement a formal display.

February: Mike Britten presented a well-researched dissertation titled "Symmetry, Assymetry and Balance in Bonsai Design" in person to the assembled group. Several of us were in Japan with Bjorn Bjorholm for the *Kokofu Ten* exhibition, and on the NHK newscasts (one of which is presented in English) we heard more news of the mysterious virus from China. When we left Japan on Valentine's Day a cruise ship in Yokohama had a number of sick passengers, and the Japanese were trying to figure out what to do with them. Returning to the States it still seemed that this was largely an Asian problem, but we wore masks on the flight home.

March: Andy Berry and I made the last in-person presentation of the year on the subject of Pinyon Pines (*Pinus Edulis*) as bonsai. Pinyons are wonderful trees with many attributes that lend themselves to bonsai design; but knowledge of how to work with them has been limited. Ryan Neil now refers to them as "outlier pines," but it seems that they can be successfully styled as short-needle, single-flush pines with some characteristics that are similar to Japanese Black Pines; but, unlike JBP's, they are not naturally multi-flush trees.

April: RMBS 2019 Artist of the Year, Adam Johnson, presented "Spring Concepts – Preparing Bonsai for a New Season of Growth." By now the Coronavirus was in full swing. The RMBS board had met and taken the decision that in-person meetings were no longer safe or prudent, given the advancing pandemic. DBG too was adopting new interim policies about garden society meetings at the Gardens. Looking ahead, the board determined that meetings would be virtual, likely for the balance of the calendar year, using the Zoom platform. Adam's beautifully created presentation was delivered in that format and is now fully available for review on the RMBS website.

May: RMBS members experienced our first full-blown live demo on Zoom as presented by Will Kerns. His topic was "Development and Refinement of Colorado Spruce as Bonsai." Will did a great job of combining prepared graphic material, including photos and diagrams, with his "live" work on the

subject tree. Again, this fine presentation is on the RMBS website for all to enjoy.

June: Our guest bonsai artist was our own Todd Schlafer. Working from his home studio, Todd did an admirable demo on a *yamadori* pine. Unfortunately, the video quality was less than wonderful, which made it difficult to really see and understand what was happening with the design effort. I think that this was the point at which we concluded that “virtual” presentations either had to have better quality video recording, or they had to be pre-recorded (see below).

July: Our focus was on viewing stones, or *suiseki* in Japanese. Former RMBS president, Paul Gilbert, and current viewing stone aficionado, Darrell Whitley, collaborated on a presentation focused on the interrelationship between *suiseki* and bonsai. These two art forms have a strong historical connection; but, in my opinion, too few of our members really understand or appreciate that relationship. Of course, this joint presentation in was initially intended to be in-person, with physical examples of viewing stones. Instead, they did a Power Point virtual presentation in which both artists pre-recorded their stories, but each were able to present that evening, from Greeley and Fort Collins respectively. The result was terrific, and I hope that everyone gained a stronger appreciation of the aesthetic and cultural connection between these art forms.

August: We welcomed a guest artist presentation from Jim Doyle, founder of Nature’s Way Nursery in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Jim has been involved in

bonsai for decades and is an avid student of Asian culture. The focus of his presentation was “The Art of Bunjin.” *Bunjin* or *Literati* is an elusive form of bonsai design that is difficult to define and often misinterpreted. Authentic examples are few and far between. Jim’s presentation showed that the concept of *bunjin* can be attributed to a wide variety of experiences, and he attempted to illustrate how these related to the art of bonsai. He also treated us to an extensive tour of his own bonsai garden.

September: Our attention, of course, turned to our annual bonsai and *suiseki* show. With the prudent feasibility of staging a “live” show in serious doubt, the RMBS board elected to produce an innovative virtual show that could be displayed on our website and available to the world. Members were invited to submit up to five trees; two venues were established at which the submitted trees and viewing stones would be professionally photographed in a formal display with accent plants or figurines.

In addition, members were asked to offer trees for a one-week display in the bonsai pavilion at the Denver Botanic Gardens. Show chair, Paul Koenning, hosted a virtual discussion of some of the trees in the pavilion exhibit, with commentary by curator Larry Jackel and yours truly. Also featured were bonsai demonstrations by Vince Le on a European Olive, and a joint demo by Todd Schlafer and Will Kerns on the historic “Thermopolis Juniper,” originally styled by RMBS founder Bob Kataoka.

October: we were originally scheduled to host a presentation by young bonsai artist Danny Coffey. Although we asked Danny to attempt a virtual presentation, he was not able to do so. In the spirit of “turning lemons into lemonade,” I came upon the idea of focusing attention on our very creative brethren in Wyoming. I asked Dan Wiederrecht if he and his partner Steve Varland, of “Backcountry Bonsai”, along with 2020 Artist of the Year, Jim Lantis, would put together a visual and verbal presentation on the “Wyoming Contingent.” What a nice departure this was!

Dan and Steve are some of the most competent and ethically consistent collectors of *yamadori* in this part of the world, and it was a delight to see collected and styled trees in their collections. Having dealt with them over several years now, I was especially impressed with their humility and dedication to the essence of bonsai culture.

November: We met (via Zoom) one of the most important young bonsai artists on the international scene, Jan Culek. I spent the better part of a year in polite communication with Jan, who lives in the Czech Republic. Todd Schlafer had strongly recommended that we bring him to Colorado, and he was scheduled to be in the States in November. Of course, with Covid-19 that didn't happen, but Jan was game to do a virtual demo. Our previous experience suggested that pre-recorded presentations seemed to work best, and Jan agreed. His pre-recorded and personally edited demo on a pine that is apparently a cross between a Scots Pine and a Mugo Pine was delightful and very

professional. His willingness to join us, in person from the Czech Republic at 3:00 AM his time, was phenomenal. There is something quite inspiring about Jan's attitude toward bonsai, which, in my mind, involves a real respect for the material he is dealing with, coupled with a very clear idea about his direction for the design of the tree. I hope that we can have him here in person in 2021.

So where do we go with programs in 2021?

In spite of current optimism about the progress of Covid-19 vaccines, it seems obvious that universal vaccination, and therefore safe opportunities for group gatherings, will not occur till the latter part of next year. This suggests that at least half of 2021 will likely involve “virtual” events by RMBS. Depending on feedback from the survey initiated by incoming president David McPeters, we have the option of combining informed presentations by our members with virtual presentations by guest artists.

At least three guest artists have indicated an interest in providing virtual presentations: our own Todd Schlafer, Bjorn Bjorhom and Sergio Cuan. Although I have not contacted them, I believe that other bonsai artists with whom we have relationships would be similarly disposed. There are, of course, financial considerations. Given reduced income, we have reduced resources with which to compensate visiting artists; so we must balance the potential of “home grown,” largely volunteer, presentations with those of experts from afar. These are judgments that will be reached by your RMBS board in the coming weeks.

2020 SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS AND ACTIVITIES

Date and Location	Agenda or Program
<p>December Monthly Meeting Tuesday, December 1, 7:00 PM Via Zoom</p>	<p>MEMBERS ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION: LOOKING BACK AT 2020- AND LOOKING FORWARD TO 2021 - PROGRAMS, ACTIVITIES, VISITING ARTISTS. GOALS AND ASPIRATIONS FOR RMBS.</p>
<p>January 2021 Monthly Meeting TBD</p>	

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:

- [New RMBS Web Site](#)
- [Colorado Bonsai Ltd.](#)
- [First Branch Bonsai](#)
- [S&S Bonsai](#)
- [RMBS Facebook Page](#)
- [Mike Horine Website](#)

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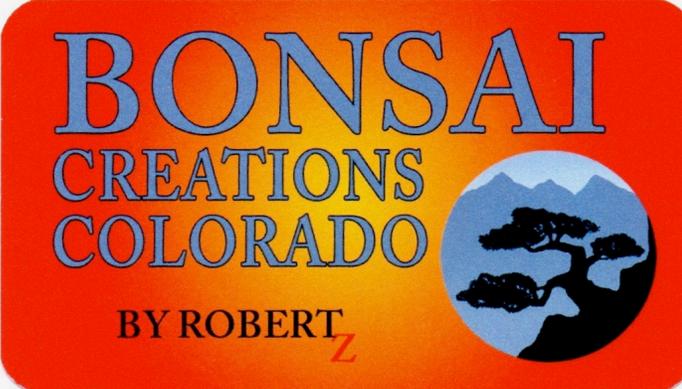
Specializing in Character and Colorado Native Collected Trees, Finished Bonsai, Starter Plants, Pots, Soil, Books, Tools, Wire, Private Lessons and Online Native Spruce sales.

Do you need a gift for a hard-to-shop for bonsai enthusiast? We offer Individual Bonsai Instruction Sessions and we have

Gift Certificates!! Use them for *anything* (supplies, classes, etc.) and at *any time*.

We're located on the west side of the Denver Metro area, near I-70 and Youngfield.

Email us at: co.bonsai.ltd@gmail.com



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