




# YAMA KI NEWSLETTER

“Learning from each other ..... Sharing with the community”

December

2005

## YAMA KI's TRADITIONAL HOLIDAY BUFFET & AUCTION DECEMBER 10, 2005 @ 12:30 PM BARTLETT ARBORETUM

As we  out the old year, YAMA KI celebrates with our annual holiday buffet. We also prepare for the next bonsai year with our semi-annual auction. This gives us the opportunity to get rid of our un-needed plants, tools, books, magazines, wire, trays and suiban, while helping each of our donors with tax deductions, and the club with funds which substantially help pay the fees for our guest artists. Weed your garage, attic, basement, tool shed. Simultaneously, we have the opportunity to buy (at fantastic savings) those bonsai items we need, e.g., that special pot, tool, wire, etc. For both events to be successful, members must participate. At 12:30 pm on December 10, at the Bartlett Arboretum the, festivities will begin, with the auction starting about 1:30pm.



Remnants from last year's buffet

The luncheon requires you to bring a dish: appetizer, salad, main course, or desert. Call or email either Gail Therrien (914-244-1320/[galtbon@aol.com](mailto:galtbon@aol.com)) or Rhoda Kleiman (212-724-7840/[irkleiman@rcn.com](mailto:irkleiman@rcn.com)) and let us know what you will bring (to avoid 3,000 pieces of sushi without a main course, etc. The plates, napkins, flatware, and cups are all on site. You can also volunteer to help set up (11:30 a.m. at the Bartlett) and/or clean up when you call about your buffet contribution. Come greet old friends, meet new members, shop with friendly competitors, and rejoice in bonsai bonanzas.

### BERNI'S PINES MINI-WORKSHOP

*Berni's* discussion on late autumn and winter maintenance ( while pines are dormant) evolved around the many pines members brought for review and pointers. The basic premise Berni emphasized is that, for pines, energy is stored in the foliage, not the roots. Therefore reduce the spring surge of needle growth by reducing energy available for that growth. This is accomplished by pulling needles: pull most where buds are strongest and less where buds are weaker. This most reduces the surge in strongest areas, less in the weaker areas. Since you have allowed more light into the interior and weakened the tips you will get bud back. Remove buds where branches are already at the length you desire. This will prevent new needle growth at the tips and the branch can use all the energy provided for bud back.



## KEVIN GOVEIA DISCUSSES THE ART AND SKILL OF MAKING CERAMIC POTS

*Gail Therrien* opened the November 12<sup>th</sup> meeting with a brief business session. She called for volunteers for the Holiday Party on December 10<sup>th</sup>, noted that there would not be a tokonoma until the January meeting, and raised the issue of upping our annual membership category to the National Bonsai Foundation, which was approved unanimously. She then turned the meeting over to *Kevin Goveia*, our resident expert on clay, slips, shaping, molding, coloring, firing, kilns, and matching pots.

Since we were working many miles from his studio, *Kevin* started his lecture on constructing bonsai pots with a Power Point slide program (worked out with *Mike Pollock*) that enabled us to see the techniques that he described on a large screen, projected from a laptop computer. Clay, the basis of traditional bonsai pots, is formed over time by the breakdown of elements in soil-- with silica as the major component. There are several different types of clay such as stoneware, porcelain, and earthenware. Porcelain is good, but stoneware is the best and most widely used type of clay for bonsai pots. Earthenware is not suitable for bonsai since it must be fired at low temperatures. Porcelain, fired at high temperatures is very satisfactory. To withstand winter frosts, clay should be fired at 2,100° F. Clay can become vitreous which makes it totally impermeable to liquid.

The three basic techniques for creating pots, without molds or a potter's wheel, are pinching, coiling, and slabs. Pinching is the most primitive and at the same time the most common means of creating a pot, done as its name describes: squeezing the wall of the vessel to the desired thickness. Coiling is taking a piece of clay and making a flat base of the desired shape, then taking



Coiling



more clay which you roll into long strips. Place a strip around the rim of the flat base. Build it up with successive layers of strips (coils). When you have 3-4 layers of strips, press them together to form the sides of your container. Continue until you reach the depth needed for your bonsai. He likes to shape his pots with a slight indentation at the bottom of the pot so that shadow line adds interest to the finished pot. Slabs for bonsai are a more modern suiban and tend to have a more geometric look. Containers should be very smooth on the outside and slightly rough on the inside. Regardless of which technique you use, you must cut out drainage holes (which do double duty to secure anchor wires). *Kevin* uses



Pinching



Wheel coiled



a bottle cap for uniformity, and tries to position the holes so that the wires will be readily available regardless of the bonsai's position in the container. He also prefers to place the holes close to the edges of the container rather than in the center so that water drains evenly.

*Kevin* spoke highly of pots made by Yama Aki in Japan. They use sawdust in their clay mix which burns when the pots are fired. This produces very light weight pots. Another reputable manufacturer is Seto which uses an unusual clay. Chop marks have traditionally indicated handmade pots and tend to add value to them, however current manufacturers are mechanically impressing such identifying marks. A signature (though rare on production pots) is the most certain way to spot a quality handmade pot.

## A LETTER TO THE MEMBERS FROM THE PROGRAM DIRECTOR

*John Cotoggio*

2006 will be a very special year for YAMA KI with regard to our monthly meetings! I have been able to put together an extremely diverse group of guest speakers. Thanks in part to the Board and their trust in me, we will bring our members a new opportunity to learn bonsai and its various techniques.

YAMA KI will challenge each guest artist to teach Bonsai to us. We will not be doing the same old lecture/demo as before. These serve little purpose in teaching bonsai. Once an artist has done a demo tree most never see it again. What was learned?

Along with teaching bonsai we will want all members to bring trees every month. We will ask each artist to critique and to teach us about our own trees. Each artist this year was selected because of his or her special talents. I think we have come up with an incredible list of outstanding bonsai artists. I encourage all members to take advantage of the tremendous opportunity to increase your bonsai skills in the coming year by making it a point to attend each and every meeting.

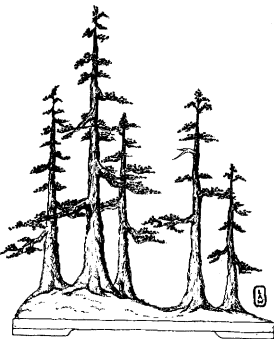
### FROM THE PRESIDENT

*Gail Therrien*

I unfortunately omitted *Norman Geisinger's* name from the list of exhibitors at this year's NY Botanical Garden show, and wanted to correct the omission for the record. *Norm's* trees (a Chinese elm and a Trident maple) were particularly valuable to the exhibit, as they represented a deciduous element in what was otherwise largely a sea of (ever)green. Thanks, *Norm*.

### MIDATLANTIC SPRING FESTIVAL 2006

April 21 - 23, 2006



Shortly after you read this NEWSLETTER, our United States Postal Service will deliver your 2006 Registration brochure for the MidAtlantic Spring Festival. Peruse it and promptly send in your reservation for the Festival. An early response will help save your place at a Critique, Workshop, or as an observer at the Workshops, as well as a bit of cash for those registering before April.

This year's festival is headlined by *Mr. Shinji Suzuki*, described as "the best new bonsai artist from Japan in a century." He will be joined by the ebullient *Mr. Marco Invernizzi*, of Italy who has studied with *Mr. Masahiko Kimura*. *M. Françoise Jeker* will round out the international contingent of bonsai artists. The USA's presenter will be *Ms. Pauline Muth* of West Charlton, N. Y.

The next few issues will present brief biographies of each of the artists.

Do you have friends who may be interested in bonsai? The public is invited to visit the Bonsai Exhibit area and the Vendor area on Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and on Sunday from 9:00 a.m. until noon, for an entrance fee of \$5.00 per person. The fee is waived for children under 12 years of age. The optional annual Banquet and Auction are scheduled for Saturday evening.

BACK TO BASICS WITH BERNI  
*Berni Gastrich*

IT'S WINTER AGAIN

Most of the magazine articles will tell you that this is a good time of year to sharpen your tools clean your pots etc. While this is all true, it is also the best time of year to remove wires from your bonsai, do major pruning, and rewire.

At this time of year, since deciduous bonsai are not covered with leaves, you can see the true structure of the tree and make far better pruning decisions than when they are in full leaf. Furthermore, you will get no bleeding at this time of year, unless your trees are kept in far too warm a place. Leaving half to three quarter-inch stubs, wherever you prune a thick branch will allow the natural dry back of this stub over winter, and the rest can be cut off at any time in the future. If you do not leave stubs be sure to cover cut ends thoroughly with cut paste.

All of the above assumes that your trees are available, and not frozen while you work on them. Making a bend on a frozen branch is of course asking for trouble. If your trees are outdoors and exposed to wind and sun, it is a good idea to spray them with a product called Wilt Proof which is available at any Garden Center. It is a somewhat wax-like coating which helps to keep moisture in the tree when its roots are encased in frozen soil, and cannot supply the needed moisture. It is quite inconspicuous and does not create a waxy look.

In my early days I made the mistake of thinking that deciduous bonsai need no water in winter. After all, they don't have leaves. I learned the hard way that they do, and need an occasional watering. Here is where a moisture meter is very handy. If you don't have one, use your finger and scratch down into the soil. If at 1/2 to 3/4 inch soil depth you do not find moisture, you must water. Evergreens do need more water, and the same finger scratching test works very well.

I believe that more hardy bonsai are killed each winter by keeping them too warm rather than too cold. Remember, this is the season when North temperate zone trees need dormancy. This means a temperature below 40° most of the time. If you violate this rule you will definitely lose trees the following season.

GLEANINGS FROM 5<sup>TH</sup> WORLD BONSAI CONFERENCE (Continued)

*Kathy Shaner:*

- ✿ No old branch is straight.
- ✿ Deadwood is never white. It should be silvery grey or black. Use Minwax Wood Hardener® which will soak in or Rot Terminator. The shine from Minwax® will disappear.
- ✿ Use hand tools for "woodwork." Allow such cuts to rot a while before applying wood hardener.
- ✿ A bunch of raffia over high roots will help keep the soil intact. As roots strengthen, push down the raffia.
- ✿ Too many trees in cheap, unattractive pots will cause dissatisfaction. Spend better money on better trees to warrant the time you expend. Every purchase must be better than what you have at home !!!
- ✿ Wire branches to very tips so that the needles/leaves can be turned up like a hand with fingers raised to catch the sun.

## BONSAI FOR CHRISTMAS? \*

*by Jim Lewis*

Are you considering giving a bonsai to someone for Christmas? Read this first!!

Knowing that I grow bonsai, people often ask about giving someone a little tree for Christmas, But often, the worst thing you can give a friend as a Holiday gift is an already potted and designed bonsai. And you should never surprise someone with a tiny tree if that someone has never grown a bonsai - or worse, has never grown anything.

Why such a hard-line against bonsai for the gift-giving season? Sad experience. As members of the Internet Bonsai Club (IBC—a worldwide Internet discussion group devoted to tiny trees in pots) we know about Christmas bonsai. Without fail, a few weeks to a month after the Holidays we get questions from clueless recipients of new bonsai about withered leaves or brown needles.

Almost always, these are first trees. Too often, it was their first potted plant! And with rare exception, there was little we could do for them; they had waited too long to send us their cry for help.

Usually, what they'd been given were mass-produced bonsai (often a small juniper) shipped to shopping mall garden centers in semi-trailer loads, or ordered from the Internet, or from catalogs. A diagnostic mark of these mass-produced bonsai is that the surface of the pot is covered with pebbles or other stones that are glued on. This makes watering difficult. On the IBC we call these "Mallsai."

Usually, it isn't the new owner's fault that their bonsai dies; the trees they were given were dead upon arrival at the store or at the giver's home - from improper watering (the glued-on stones); shipping (the long, dark, dry trip from where they were potted); or simply inept potting to begin with. Especially with needled evergreens like juniper, it's hard to tell when the sap stops flowing; remember how your cut Christmas tree stays green weeks, or even months after it is harvested.

An exception to the warning about bonsai as gifts is if the tree is from a local merchant who pots up his own trees and who can help the new owner with problems. However, many local merchants also advise against buying someone a tree if that someone is new to bonsai.

So what do you do if you're being pestered by someone who wants a bonsai?

Buy them a book on bonsai, and a gift certificate to a local nursery. They can read the book, enjoy pictures of decent bonsai made from many different species of tree or shrub, then can visit the nursery, find a bonsai pot and choose a plant to make their own little tree. Look for a long list of worthwhile bonsai books at this website.

I also suggest a gift membership to a local bonsai club or society (LCBS!). They also can join us on the IBC. Have them send e-mail to [bonsai-request@home.ease.lsoft.com](mailto:bonsai-request@home.ease.lsoft.com). Its free, but nothing beats belonging to a local club.

\* reprinted from the December 2004 issue of Lake Charles Bonsai Society's "Bonsai News"

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COMING EVENTS

- Jan. 14 *Mike Pollock, John Cotoggio, et. al. recap their 5<sup>th</sup> International Ginko Exhibition & Award tour led by Colin Lewis*
- Feb. 11 *Marty Schmalenberg*
- Mar. 11 *Sean Smith*

WEATHER HOTLINES

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