



American Bonsai Society

Bonsai in America

Written & Published by Dave Bogan

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Does this tree make my bonsai pot look big?

By Andrew Smith

Now that we've gotten Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years safely behind us we can start thinking about bonsai again. I hope your holiday season was relaxing, pleasant, affordable and filled with people you cherish and enjoy; and I hope you find yourself facing the upcoming year with confidence and anticipation.

Though the nights may be getting colder and the snow deeper, the days are already a wee bit longer and the world tilts inexorably toward spring whether we like it or not. Soon it will be time to start thinking that in just another six weeks or so, we'll know that it will be only a month or two longer, or maybe a little more, before we can start thinking of putting our long johns away, or at least not wearing them in the house anymore. How time flies!

The winter won't last forever, no matter how we plead with the weather gods. Soon enough it will be time to think about repotting bonsai. In fact, I've seen recent Internet posts from people in some devilish distant land called Florida indicating that they are actually repotting trees right now. Though that seems a bit premature to me, they seem to know what they are doing.

I wouldn't dream of repotting a tree right now, even if I had the right size ice pick to get it out of the pot. Repotting a tree with frozen roots is a sure way to get a deeper understanding of poetry, like this stanza by my friend George Gracy:

I never whine

I'm not a complainer

With every dead bonsai

I get a container.

That's heavy, man. Forget Maya Angelou, this is

the kind of clear, no-nonsense verse that speaks to me, especially when accompanied by a couple shots of my favorite beverage to steady my trembling hands. Anyway, I'll be waiting till May, or even early June to start with repotting. For now I'll be content to decide which trees are ready for repotting when spring does come, and start dreaming about what pots will suit them best.

Fine bonsai pots are things of grace and beauty. Many are artistic enough that they can be enjoyed and displayed on their own, without a tree in them and I have a lot of pots that will probably never hold soil. In America we have many, many fine bonsai pot makers, some very well known, and some barely known at all, and it's not too hard to find a custom made bonsai pot for your tree that is beautiful, unique and affordable.

A bonsai pot might be fine enough to display on its own, but it can only serve its true purpose when it is matched with a proper bonsai tree. I have read a lot, or at least gazed at a lot of printing, that described in minute detail the relationships between the size of the pot and the width of the tree; the depth of the pot and the diameter of the trunk, the curve of the trunk and the shape of the pot, the color of the flowers, bark or foliage and the color of the glaze on the pot and whether the two should compliment or accent each other.

I admit I have only the dimmest grasp of such things and am not trying to better myself by understanding more. My brain is already full, thank you, and my primary natural instinct has always been to find out exactly what the rules are, so I can break them. It's just my own inexcusable stubbornness.

But I also admit that there is a deep relationship between a bonsai and its container that can really create something magical when each helps highlight the other. So if you have a favorite tree, or ten, it is certainly time well spent to put some thought and consideration into the pot that might be its home for many years or decades.

When you consider the span of days it will spend there a perfect pot that is expensive may be a much better deal than one that is pretty good but cheaper.

Still, you have to make it work on your budget, to your own taste and for your local conditions.

I have an old multi-trunk Engelmann spruce that was ready for a nice pot. I found a custom-made pot that I really loved, could afford, and that seemed perfect for the tree. And when I put the two together I was happy with the result.

But when I had the tree judged at a show one of the main critiques was that the pot was too deep. And another very knowledgeable bonsai artist also told me the pot was nice, but too deep for the tree. So I looked at the tree again and saw that it would indeed look better in a shallower pot. They were right. But, after a time, I also decided that it was going to stay in the pot it was in.

This decision wasn't based on mere inexcusable stubbornness, but on our climate and work schedule. Our local growing conditions are erratic and I am usually working away from home. I think my trees are healthiest when they are in a slightly larger pot that can provide some buffer against the dramatic temperature changes we sometimes get. So I'll live, and more importantly- my trees will live-with a larger pot.

For us Northerners the repotting season is still some months away. Apparently down south it's already begun. In this vast and great land of ours spring already sends new green shoots into the edges of winter. I look forward to its return and to trying to match tree and pot once again.



The Next Step—

Advanced Tips & Techniques

By Bjorn Bjorholm

Bjorn Bjorholm is an American bonsai professional and the founder of Bjorvala Bonsai Studio. Since 2008, Bjorn has been studying bonsai as an apprentice under the tutelage of Master Keiichi Fujikawa of Fujikawa Kouka-en nursery in Osaka, Japan. During his period of study in Japan, Bjorn's work has been featured in many notable bonsai exhibitions including the Kokufu-ten, Taikan-ten, and Sakufu-ten shows. In addition, Bjorn helped co-found the Fujikawa International School of Bonsai, which hosts short-term students from around the world, and he serves as an instructor for the school. Bjorn also produces the Bonsai Art of Japan YouTube video series, which boasts thousands of subscribers and more than 1.3 million views. For more information about Bjorn, please visit

www.bjorvalabonsaistudio.com or www.fujikawabonsaischool.com.

Bonsai Tip of the Month – January

For many a bonsai enthusiast, January is a relatively low-key month for bonsai work. If you're like me, you'd much rather be hibernating along with the trees and boycotting the cold until spring rolls around. But, alas, this is an impossibility, particularly here in Japan. In fact, the colder months are some of our busiest, as exhibition season is in full swing with the Taikan-ten and Sakufu-ten shows in November and December respectively, and the Kokufu-ten looming just around the corner in early February. This means that the entire month January is devoted exclusively to exhibition preparation. In that light, I think it fitting in this first edition to discuss a bit about preparing our bonsai for public display.

They say that cleanliness is next to godliness – I can't vouch for this, but I will say that it certainly makes a notable difference in bonsai presentation. When prepping bonsai for exhibition, the application of proper cleaning techniques can mean the difference between success and failure of presentation. These cleaning techniques vary depending on the species we happen to be applying them to, though all are rather simple and logical.



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The Next Step—Advanced Tips & Techniques by Bjorn Bjorholm cont.;

Let's start with the top first. Foliage should be refined – dead needles, leaves and branches should be removed, silhouettes should be defined, hanging foliage should be removed or wired into place, etc. Next, trunks should be cleaned – wash the trunks of maples and other smooth-barked deciduous species with water and a soft-bristled toothbrush, scrub shari and jin in the same manner and paint with lime sulphur (typically 2 weeks before exhibiting), lightly sandpaper the live veins of junipers to bring out the reddish color of the bark, etc. The next step is to cover the soil surface with moss. For this, it is best to use various species, varieties, colors, and sizes of moss, placing them piece-by-piece, much like a puzzle, making sure to cover the entire surface of the soil, from the pot edge to the root base. Creating a natural appearance with the moss is a skill developed only through practice. Lastly, wipe the pot with a damp towel and, for unglazed containers, apply a thin coating of camellia oil to the entire surface of the pot.

By taking these extra, simple steps to clean up our bonsai before exhibiting them, we can ensure that the overall presentation will not be marred by easily assailable distractions. Bonsai is all in the details, so I encourage you, go that extra mile. I guarantee you'll be glad you did.



*With this issue and the above article, we proudly welcome the addition of **Bjorn Bjorholm** as a reoccurring professional writer. As with **Andy Smiths** column which expresses Andy's very unique style and expertise in collected bonsai material, Bjorn's column will add a new style of uniqueness. Having studied in Japan since 2008, Bjorn brings the rare ability to combine American techniques, styles and uniqueness with his vast knowledge and skills as a trained Japanese master. Although currently based in Osaka, Bjorn frequently travels the globe, teaching bonsai art to various related organizations and working with private clients and collections. Bjorn's work is also regularly featured in exhibitions and publications around the world. Personally, I love and frequently visit Bjorn's vast collection of videos of which he is the **sole** creator, producer, and editor of the **Bonsai Art of Japan** online video series.*

I consider myself very lucky in having known Bjorn for several years and additionally lucky to have him at my home most every year helping us to improve our collection of Bonsai. As mentioned his unique outlook on Bonsai has really impressed me. He is very open in his teaching and honesty, unlike some who bill themselves as "masters" and have very little true skills or teach that the Japanese way is the only way. His skills give him the unique ability to move quickly from one tree to the next and his work ethic is top notch. I have seen him work tirelessly late into the evening hours after having started very early and then start early again the next morning. He is one of the few that will not only increase your bonsai skills but actually listen to your ideas and join with you to create beautiful trees.

The Chicago Botanic Garden seeks an experienced Bonsai Curator to develop, maintain, interpret and exhibit a pre-eminent collection of bonsai. Maintenance duties will include pruning, watering, wiring, fertilizing, repotting, training and working with the Plant Health Care department to anticipate, prevent or control insect and disease problems for each individual bonsai. Manage curatorial activities of the collection including verification, procurement, deaccessioning and documentation. Implement the Chicago Botanic Garden Bonsai plan. Maintain complete inventory of all bonsai specimens. Keep detailed records on plant care. Set broad long-range objectives for collection programs and processes. Work with the Director of Volunteer Services to manage and develop the volunteer program to care for the collection. Should have ten years of experience in developing and training bonsai with excellent verbal and communication skills. Visit the Chicago Botanic Garden's website, www.chicagobotanicgarden.org, to complete an application for the position.

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Is your name
on the list?



**National
Bonsai & Penjing
Museum**
click here

Lets all support the NBF and its desire & mission to improve and maintain the fabulous bonsai collection in Washington D.C. Make it a point to join and support the NBF.

[http://www.
bonsai-nbf.org/site/
campaigngifts.html](http://www.bonsai-nbf.org/site/campaigngifts.html)

The National Bonsai Foundation is fully non-profit and exists only to support the museum

If you are a new member or an older member, it is so important you keep your e-mail address up to date. An incorrect email address can prevent you from using the web-site, receiving this newsletter or any other notices the ABS may put out.

Soil Conditions

Of course, the most important factor of which soil is used for is holding nutrients and creating an area for root growth. An additional factor is that soil creates a mini atmosphere. If the proper mixture is used, you are actually creating an area that is air conditioned. With the proper size particle, small air spaces are created through which moisture and more importantly, air will pass. A clogged soil—one that utilizes organic matter or small particles will not allow air movement, but rather hold and retain moisture which will heat up and actually hold warmth. A huge disadvantage in summer when the root temperatures may exceed 100 degrees.

Next, soil of course creates an area in which roots may grow, but an area that is often overlooked is the top inch or two of soil. Stop and think, which area of soil generally receives a daily pounding? The surface area. Daily watering will constantly compact or dislodge this area depending on how much water pressure or type of sprayer is used. If you inspect this area, typically you will see very few fine roots and will only see the larger roots that extend deeper into the soil area. Small roots will not survive in an area that is compacted or constantly moving. A good test of this is when moss is used on the surface of your tree. After a few months, remove a piece of live moss, in most cases you will see fine roots growing directly under or through the moss. These small roots are very important for the health and future growth of your tree. In many cases, we are not utilizing the upper inch or so of soil and thus creating a much smaller growing area than we thought. To eliminate this area of compaction or constantly dislodge soil, we need to create a buffer or impact area. We do this by applying a top dressing of gravel or moss. Personally, if not using moss, I buy small brown gravel at my local aquarium store. In addition to protecting our top soil area the gravel also adds additional air circulation which in summer is an added advantage.

My thoughts while creating areas of Exposed Wood

When creating shari on a juniper or many other trees, the books usually tell us to go slow, find the live veins and continue in accordance to the location of these live veins. Truthfully this only applies to old specimens that have already started showing signs of natural shari and or die back. In younger specimens where you cannot see any natural deadwood, the entire trunk area is alive. You do not need to find the veins. Veins are created only as a tree ages or sustains some type of damage. If you want to create shari on a juniper which shows good bark in all areas, cut away but of course, never create a full ring around the trunk and it's best to create smaller areas and widen them over a couple of years. With this in mind, you can create these areas of exposed wood and enhance the tree and not be held to excising areas around live or dead veins. This holds true on most all species including yews and if desired, deciduous species.

Creating and treating these areas.

Typically to create these areas, we will need to remove live bark and tissue. We start this by determining the area. If it's a jin, it's easier. We choose a branch and easily remove the bark, right? Before you start let's think, we want this area to look natural. Most books simply tell you to ring the bark at the point the branch meets the next area such as the trunk. How many times in nature have you seen a natural jin and it was clean all the way to the trunk with perfectly rounded and clean edges? I like to leave an area of bark still on the limb out approximately half the branches thickness out from the trunk and then also leave a wedge area extending out on the bottom of the branch. Over time some of this may peel off but typically it will remain live long enough to make it look a lot more natural

When creating shari, we generally use caulk to outline the area of bark to be removed. Once I am satisfied with the area, I usually go back and again trace this area with an ink marker. I find this more visible and more accurate than a wide chalk line. Now, rather than using a knife, I use my power carver with a small bit. I outline the area, carving down to the heartwood. Keep in mind when marking this area, try not to have any straight lines. Exaggerate the edges. Where possible utilize existing features like an old area where a limb died off. Next, using a slightly larger and coarser bit, I remove all the remaining bark again down to the clean (typically white) heart wood. Once done, I will now go back and cleanly cut the exposed live edges with a sharp razor knife and additionally remove any still remaining ink marks. Here again, try to exaggerate the outline. No straight lines. If you cut and peel the bark in the typical way, it can occasionally peel off more than desired if your cut edge was not deep enough or clean. If this happens, the area of loose bark will always die back to the edge that is still attached. Additionally, by using a power carver, it will leave the wood surface slightly rough which will aid in it drying quicker. Remember, this exposed wood will need several weeks or months of drying before you carve on it or treat it. It will be highly recommended that you do carve and sculpt these areas later. They need to have character.

I create most of my shari areas in spring. During early spring, the tree typically is very strong and best suited to sustain the stress and also start the healing process quicker. In many cases, within a week or so, I can see the wounds starting to heal. The only drawback on some species is there may be more sap flow but this can easily be cleaned up later when you actually carve the surface of the dried wood.

As mentioned in a previous article, I like to treat these newly wounded live edges with a small bead of white glue (Elmer's is great). Again, by the time the exposed wood is dry this edge of white glue will have served its purpose in protecting the live tissue and has usually started to peel away. Unlike many wound sealers that will stick and become imbedded in the wound if not removed.

After carving or cleaning the exposed wood area after it has dried, most people simply apply a coating of lime sulfur many times mixed with additional whitening agents like white paint. Sorry, personally I detest the pure white look so I always temper my coatings so the look is more natural. One of my techniques is to apply a liberal coating of lime sulfur. Allow it to dry for an hour or so and then I apply a second coat. This time though, after dipping my brush in pure, undiluted lime sulfur solution, I dip my brush into some ashes. As this mixture is brushed on the ash sulfur mix will create a more grey look. Additional ashes can also be brushed in or onto holes, deep cracks or crevasses to add darker highlights to these areas. Creating a nice color sometimes takes time. Many times after it has dried I go back and using some fine sand paper, I will lightly sand some of the high areas to create additional dark or lighter areas of color. Again this helps add contrast and create a more natural look.

Keep in mind, any of these areas will not look natural right away. In most cases, I figure it will take two to three years before I actually have a nice natural look. Over time as the area bleaches out and weathers, it will look better and better. Additionally the cut edges need a couple of years before they swell and look natural. Remember, some of the edges will need additional work by occasionally scratching the live edge to reenergize the callousing and additional sanding of the bark's edge will be needed to remove any unnatural bark that still looks fresh or to slightly sand it to remove any edges that have peeled up.

Another tip is to of course clean the bark on some trees. In many cases, the bark has become stained or discolored. Some of mine seem to have a silvery look (probably caused by overhead watering of the foliage daily) and I like the more brown or natural coloring. Now, we need to be careful and not remove all the old beautiful flaky or fissured bark, simply clean it. First, try scrubbing it with a tooth brush and water. If this doesn't give the desired look, first making sure the bark is dry, I use a small wire wheel on my power carver. Run it very very slow so it doesn't dig too deep and use very light pressure as you gently brush the bark areas. Additionally, any time you do use a wire wheel on a power tool, run it slow at lower RPM's. They may cut a little slower but they will last a lot longer. If you run them at high speed you will only wear them out quickly and in many cases, simply throw individual pieces of wire. Wire wheels are also excellent for cleaning and sculpting the exposed wood areas. This is especially true after the wood has dried and been exposed for a year or so. The wood will have weathered and small fissures will have been exposed. Utilizing the wire wheel it will remove the softer wood in the cracks or voids and deepen and enhance these fissures making it look even more weathered.

Note,

All articles contained in these newsletters except, those that show they were written by a specific person—Like Andy's and Bjorn's, are all written by me—Dave Bogan. ALL of these articles are from my own experiences containing my ideas and procedures for which I create and maintain my personal collection of Bonsai. In all cases, no matter who is writing the article, you must always consider your specific location and species. Most of my writing come from over 25 years experience in bonsai but, I will never say my way is the only way. To this day, I continue to learn and to modify my techniques based on new knowledge, changing conditions and my thoughts at the time. Always remember in Bonsai, you need to move slowly and learn new things as you go. When in doubt, always ask questions. - Dave

Mike Blanton

After a long battle with cancer, on December 17th, the bonsai community lost a great friend, teacher and benefactor. I consider myself and my wife very lucky in knowing Mike and his wife Amy for many years and considered both of them to be true friends. Probably the best known trait of Mike was his giving nature. Mike never met anyone that didn't instantly like him, his passion for bonsai and his passion for giving. Many many times, I saw Mike open his home and heart up to the newest or veteran bonsai person and treated them as long term friends. Mike's giving character continued as he was known to give not only his time and expertise but also trees and bonsai material to help others get started.

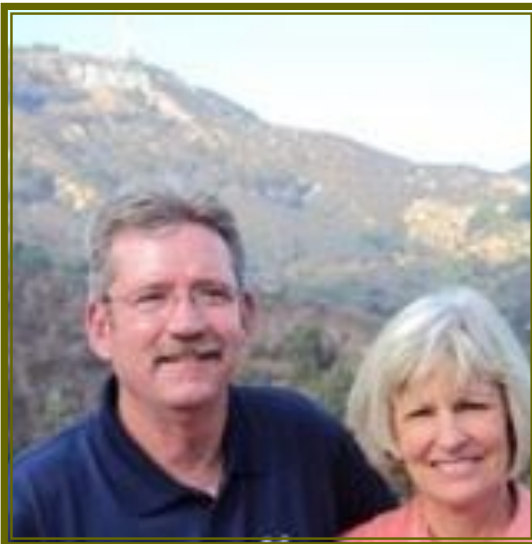
While serving on the ABS board, he was instrumental in increasing membership and was always active in many events or programs. At home, a retired firefighter in Murfreesboro TN, Mike was a huge benefactor of the Nashville

Bonsai Society. Mike and Amy hosted many of the clubs workshops, meetings and an annual Bar B

Que mostly at their own expense. Throughout the years, Mike and Amy hosted many well known masters of Bonsai at their home and they always invited anyone and everyone again, at his own expense to learn from the masters. Mike always shared.

I know my life has been enriched by knowing both Mike and Amy. As you move on in your life with Bonsai, lets never forget the ones that encouraged us, gave us the desire to be better, and honestly made our short life here on earth much richer. Mike was one of the very few that honestly gave of himself very unselfishly and all of our lives are better because of him.

Mike was one that honestly had a bonsai spirit. Teach what you can, help where possible, give and never ask for anything in return. Lets all help keep Mikes love of Bonsai and his spirit of giving in our hearts and practiced as he did.



A True Friend

***Thank You
for enriching our life.***

Dave & Barbara

