



JOURNAL



January 2010

www.torontobonsai.org

Schedule of Events

Meetings are held in the **Toronto Botanical Gardens** in the Auditorium (west side of building) unless otherwise noted.

Beginners Session: 6:30 – 7:20 p.m.

The Beginner's Session starts at 6:30 pm and is in Studio #2 upstairs. **Bonsai care: growing mediums, watering, feeding, pots.** David Johnson will be leading the discussion.

All beginners should read Bob Wilcox's excellent introductory articles, '**Information for Beginners**', and, '**Frequently Asked Questions**', on the **TBS web site**. There will be no **Beginners Session** for the February meeting!

General Meetings: 7:30 – 10:00 p.m.

January 11: TBS Meeting, 7:30 p.m. Bonsai Stands. Choosing the right stand for your bonsai. Please bring in your stands to display & discuss. **Slide show: Toronto Members' trees, Before & After. Wiring workshop,** using Christmas branches. Please bring in your **Christmas tree branches** for wiring practice. The club will supply wire. Save your branches, between one and two feet long, outside in a plastic bag so that they will be fresh!

January: Cement Fondue Weekend Workshop. Either the weekend of the 9th or the 16th. We will be making containers for bonsai and accent plants. Let Greg Quinn (on back cover) know in advance of your interest, as you will need some supplies and preparation.

February 8: TBS Meeting, 7:30 p.m. Silent Auction. Please bring in your donations to support the club. Forms will be available at the beginning of the meeting. No **Beginners Session** for February!

March 8: TBS Meeting, 7:30 p.m. Program to be announced. Beginners Session: acquiring trees.

Outside World Events:

The Joshua Roth New Talent Competition The Toronto Bonsai Society encourages any new member to enter and participate in this fun competition, conducted by the American Bonsai Society, and sponsored by Joshua Roth brand of bonsai tools. Visit the **New Talent section** at the **ABS web site**, or speak to Mike McCallion (info. on back cover) for further details. The Toronto Bonsai Society will contribute \$200.00 towards the general costs incurred by the member who is selected to participate in this event.

Mid-Atlantic Bonsai Societies Spring Festival April 16, **Kerhonkson, N.Y.** See the **MABS web site** for details.

U.S. National Bonsai Exhibition June 12, 13, 9 – 5, **Monroe County Hospital**, Rochester, N.Y.. See the **National Bonsai Exhibition** section at the **International Bonsai web site** for more details.

BCI Group Tour of China: Sep.- Oct., 2010. Contact Joan Greenway for details: joan.greenway@gmail.com.

Bonsai Theft Warning There have been four different incidents of bonsai theft this summer in different areas of Quebec. Please be careful when buying trees from non-members. Check the site www.interre.net/bonsai for pictures of stolen trees to ensure that you are not acquiring stolen property. You can send an email to jpm@bonsaiquebec.com to report any signs of these stolen trees.

ABS Stolen Bonsai To check for stolen bonsai in the USA, check the **Stolen Bonsai Registry** at the ABS web site.

On the cover: David Johnson's arctic birch (*Betula nana*) forest, as photographed by Reiner Goebel at the 2009 Fall Show.

January President's Message: I Hate Wiring

... or rather, I **used** to hate wiring.

Contemplating our upcoming wiring workshop I began to think of my own personal bonsai journey and how I learned to wire.

When I first started growing "bonsai" it was in the Peterborough area which had no bonsai club (and still doesn't). Therefore, I couldn't enjoy the many benefits of the likes of the Toronto Bonsai Society's program. I was relegated to reading the books and magazines I purchased on special trips to the GTA's few businesses that sold bonsai materials at the time. Living in a pre-Internet world, the option of surfing for information simply was not available to me.

It goes without saying that my initial attempts at bonsai were marked by pure trial and error (mostly error). I did succeed at purchasing (and rapidly killing) bonsai, improperly collecting trees, many which had no business being bonsai in the first place, lousy pruning cuts that endangered the life of the tree and the wiring, oh my, the wiring!!!

Sure, the books I read showed how to wire, but I always found it difficult. Maybe it was because I was using non-annealed copper, steel and even brass wire, but more importantly it was because I had nobody to learn from. No wonder I hated wiring! It was a very frustrating, expensive and time-consuming activity. I was "all thumbs", stripping buds off the branches, tearing the bark, snapping branches and my wiring job had the aesthetic of a bird's nest of fishing line.

No wonder I started to look for another way. I discovered clamps, guy wires, weights, using them with limited success but it was the discovery of the **Lingnan grow-and-clip style** that really caught my imagination. The revelation of directional pruning was very seductive to me. I no longer had to mess with that nasty wire anymore. I would simply prune my way to success! While I continue to love the Lingnan style, especially the **penjing** of **Wu Yee-sun**, I finally realized that those tree forms do not really reflect what grows here in North America. The technique itself takes far too long to do in our cold northern climate, with its extremely short growing season.

I would say that my dislike of wiring started to come to an end when I moved to the GTA and joined the Toronto Bonsai Society. Finally, I could watch the experts wire "live" and take workshops where I was taught how to do it correctly. The real breakthrough though happened when I took a workshop with Colin Lewis through the club. He taught us the "slingshot" approach to wiring. The simplicity of the method and the ease with which it was done dispelled my fear of wiring. I began to wire some of my trees more or less correctly and reap the benefits, but I can say that I still wasn't completely convinced. Often I found it quite time-consuming, and with many other interests and corresponding limited time, I often fell back on old ways. The disappointing results were unruly, non-exhibitable trees with branches too stiff to redirect, forcing me to cut branches back to the trunk (deciduous trees only) and start all over again.

It took a provocative statement from one of the senior members to finally change my mind forever. It went something like: "If you don't wire your trees, you might as well give up because your trees will never amount to anything!" Initially I took offense to this statement but with more thought and research I realized that it was true. Other than the Lingnan style, it would be quite a challenge to find a great bonsai masterpiece that has never had wire applied to it. Most have seen many applications of wire to every single branch (which is quite the task given the size of some of those trees). Only that type of serious commitment will result in a masterpiece bonsai.

So, where am I going with this, one might ask?

Wiring is the single, most effective and rapid way to advance the design of your bonsai. Yes, it is a difficult and time-consuming activity, but it can be learned by anyone and with enough practice, one can master the activity. It is in the mastering of the activity that you will begin to love wiring and the fruits of your labours – beautifully shaped trees that you can show to others with pride.

It is my hope that all of you will take advantage of the opportunity to hone your wiring skills in this month's workshop.

by Mike Roussel

An Observation On Wiring Bonsai

All of us, I am sure, have learned how, why and when to wire bonsai. We have been conditioned to accept that the wire is held just so; that wires never, ever cross; that the coils are evenly spaced, not too tightly applied, and so on.

What is not stressed to any great degree is when the wire should be removed from our bonsai. Usually, the books suggest removing wire when you see it cutting into the bark, or maybe when you think it's cutting into the bark, or at least when **you think it might be*** cutting into the bark, or some other words to that effect. That's not bad advice, really, and when you have experienced the problem you might appreciate the vagueness of these suggestions. Experience will also show that it is nearly impossible to predict exactly when wire damage will first occur but there are clues and these are straight forward. At least I think they are! So here we go.

Practically without exception, **every species of tree has its own growth characteristics**. Some have been designated "slow" growers, such as the boxwoods. Others grow and develop faster. But even slow growers can grow more quickly if given a favourable growing environment. At best, then, the rate of growth is relative and whether or not a specimen is slow or fast growing is immaterial to good maintenance, for a wire which is not removed in time can, within a matter of only two to three weeks, badly mar an otherwise handsome bonsai for several years to come.

Wire damage, more often than not, coincides with bursts of growth which are most noticeable in the spring and the fall of the year. At those times the bonsai enthusiast has to be constantly checking his/her trees to ensure the wire is not "biting" into the bark.

The rapidness with which a branch will expand in circumference during these growth periods is illustrated by the following example.**

Assume the branch to be wired is 0.4 cm in diameter. If the branch diameter expands to 0.65 cm during its growth phases, its **circumference** increases from 1.25 cm to 2.04 cm, an increase of 0.79 cm! The branch diameters in this example are arbitrary to show effect. So, since wire **does not expand** along with the branch, the branch will grow around and eventually over the wire unless it is removed in time.

Refining one's wiring technique is important and can only help to improve styling, appearance, and design of a bonsai, but it does not mean the wire can remain on the tree for any longer period of time. Damage can be reduced by learning the growth phases of your bonsai, and paying attention to wiring. So **don't wire too tightly**, check your wired bonsai often and remember that acute bends in branches will scar more quickly.

Having expressed these ideals, I can pretty safely say that most, if not all, mature bonsai have wire scars. Mine are no exception. Bonsai which are most often affected are deciduous, such as maples and other smooth-barked trees. Conifers, of course, can also suffer this sort of damage. The reason for saying deciduous bonsai seem to get scarred more often is that any wire on them is frequently forgotten. Once the bonsai is full of leaves it becomes a matter of "out of sight, out of mind". In other words, the owner can easily forget that a branch had been wired: there is no visible reminder. On the other hand with pines, for example, because of their openness, the wire is readily visible pretty well all the time and therefore provides a constant reminder for a quick and easy examination.

It is fair to say, I think, that most bonsai people have accepted that it's inevitable that wire damage will happen. That seems to be a fact of bonsai life. Unfortunately, once the scar is made there is not much that can be done to correct it. All the owner can do is to camouflage the damage. Nature, however, will help in a marvelous way. Over a period of many years, the spiral wire marks will gradually fill in and flatten out as the bonsai grows and gains girth. On smooth-barked bonsai the wire marks will never completely disappear but the darker mature bark will often help to further blur the damage. On conifers, particularly on pines that develop dense, grey plated bark, the wire marks will be difficult to tell apart from the natural fissures of the bark.

In closing, I would like to stress that **wiring should be effective and neat**. If you are successful in these goals you will be two-thirds of the way towards an appealing bonsai. So learn the "rules", wire often and don't be shocked when you are asked to redo your first wiring attempt.

By John Biel

* All emphasis added by editor.

** The formula for determining circumference is $C = \pi \times d$, where C is the circumference, pi is set equal to 3.14 and d is the diameter. With this formula, it is possible to determine the circumference when the diameter is known.

Norman Haddrick's Talk on the Styling of Bonsai

As if my previous letter to Mr. Haddrick was an impetus for a new beginning – a beginning to think over what I have learned from the special workshop session for beginners or from the general monthly meeting (and under the step-aside encouragement from Otmar) I now take seat to my desk and jot down some general thoughts and observations.

As a sequel to last month's topic on **The Origin of Penjing and/or The History of Bonsai**, Mr. Haddrick (henceforth, I will call him "Norman", to elevate myself to the sense of collegiality in the club) gave another informative and inviting workshop to us beginners on the theme of **introducing six basic bonsai styles**.

As he did the last session, Norman posted some of his original drawings as well as the collages of photos of his now-gone drawings to give us concrete illustrations of possible styles of bonsai (and at the same time, likely without his own awareness, we got a glimpse into what Norman's general taste in bonsai is...Ah! That is also partly how we get to know a bit of him as a bonsai artist). Emphasizing again the importance of **bringing out the characteristics of age** in every potential bonsai we are cultivating as a recap and a point of departure, Norman introduced us the six basic bonsai styles: **Formal upright** (Chokkan), **informal upright** (Moyogi), **slanting style** (Shakan), **windswept style** (Fukinagashi), **semi-cascade** (Han-kengai) and **formal cascade** (Kengai).

But rather than repeating what Norman has already nicely typed out for us in his handout the details of his lesson, I will summarize it here, as a way to digest my own learning:

1. An understanding of **the basic structure of the formal upright style** and the evolution of tree shapes in nature is critical to the appreciation and the practice of other bonsai styles.

2. There are three ways of entry, or, as Norman calls it, "different bonsai concepts" or "alternative design values", into visualizing "the initial, detailed or refined shaping" of our future bonsai:

A) Traditional, classical bonsai styles and sub-styles: "the Japanese brought the art of bonsai to its present high standards of naturalness and beauty".

B) Natural tree shapes: "There is a raw beauty in the non-conforming, yet natural trees".

C) Artistic, aesthetic value; as an interpretive art, bonsai creation encourages each artist to have his or her own imagination, flexibility, and freedom to develop an artistic form that is worthy to be called beautiful. What is beauty? Well, Immanuel Kant can be one reference, if one is philosophically inclined... But, Norman says it nice-and-simple: "if your peers admire your bonsai, then you have found some success", as long as the tree thrives, that is.

3. As an **art of illusion**, making bonsai demands that the bonsai artist has sufficient knowledge to inform that work of trickery. Here Norman gives us a friendly warning – "Bonsai should never be trained into shapes that do not, naturally, become its species", for after all, what we appreciate about bonsai is primarily its appearance of naturalness. Maybe that is why it is so hard.

Lastly, Norman pointed out that the most difficult task in styling bonsai, "is to develop a mental image to serve as a visual aid in training your tree". Fortunately, he also gave out some very useful guiding-questions to help us go through this step. They are so great that I feel like being put in a yoga session where the instructor simply takes you through the relaxation process by spilling out some essential guiding words!

The very last point, which cannot be found in the handout, yet was spontaneously brought out in Norman's actual talk on bonsai styling is the following magical choice of the right question: Stop asking yourself "what do I prune off?", but instead, "**What do I leave on?**"

by Jenine Ling

TBS Web Help Wanted!

Someone to create or find a friendly, functional, 'Bonsai Blog' for our web site.

Ideally the blog would be free for the club, would allow members ready and easy access without a cumbersome registration process, and would allow us to oversee and, if necessary, control what is published.

Please contact **Dierk**, our club **Web Master**, via email at dierkn@sympatico.ca.

TBS AT THE JCCC FOR THE JCGC

As always, this event, held every October, is a showcase of **Japanese Culture**. For example, artists from four schools of **ikebana** set up displays.

The beautiful kikka (**Chrysanthemum**) display is always at the centre of Japanese Fall exhibitions, detailing the beauty in the many forms of the chrysanthemum blossom.

There was also a fine exhibition of **sumi-e** (sumi - ink, sumi-e - ink painting), in which the artists show the power and the delicacy of their brushwork.

The **Toronto Bonsai Society**, since it evolved from its origins within the **JCGC** in 1962, has always given support to this endeavour, while meeting its own mandate to display and promote an artistic interest in bonsai culture.



Within the **JCGC** exhibit, the **bonsai** (bon - container or pot; sai - plant) display is quite small; and, at this time of year, beyond the best time for showing deciduous bonsai in prime fall colour. However, the display was impressive with colour, and in the variety of species on display.

We are blessed with many fine bonsai artists who quietly work together in making this show a success for the **TBS**.

by **Norman Haddrick**
photos by **Bob Patterson**

A Letter From The ABS

Dear Greg,

Thank you so much for helping the **ABS** promote the New Talent Contest. A special thanks to your group for its willingness to support a chosen nominee with some funds.

Some regionals are beginning to do run off contests and when these occur, the winner of such becomes a selectee for the contest. Perhaps this could occur in your area in the future.

Please also, if you will, encourage the many fine developed artists in your area to enter the **John Naka Design Contest**. See <http://www.absbonsai.org/NakaAward.html> for details.

Again thank you for the support.

Pauline Muth
ABS President

Editorial: Subjectivity And The Twilight Zone

Potting Bonsai

My head was spinning when I emerged from Bill Valavanis's presentation on bonsai pot selection. There are so many different pots to choose from, each with its own nuance to add flavour to your tree! You could spend years deciding which one is right. You do, in fact. Choosing pots is an on-going, never ending process, and is one of the main activities of bonsai. Your tree isn't a bonsai without a pot, and it isn't a good bonsai without the right pot. Bill outlined the basics, the reasoning behind those choices, and then went on to show how you can enhance the bonsai design even more with details in the feet, the lips, the texture, the shape- it was all very seductive!

My suggestion? Read John Biel's article, '**The Right Pot?**' on our TBS web site. Start collecting pots, so that you will have some choices when making that decision. Then make your best judgment, go with your gut, and live with the consequences. This way, you will have all year to remind yourself to get a better pot when you make a mistake. Bill said some growers change pots every season to match the changing foliage. What if our Spring Show is on the first day of spring? If your tree flowers in the fall, will the pot match it? You need to experience those seasons with your tree to see which one is best.

Another question that popped into my brain during Bill's presentation was how much you can get away with in containing bonsai. How far can you push it? Can we smudge the rules about proportion, style, colour, texture, transiting from the strict Japanese school style of bonsai we've been living in to a more open American style? The problem is it's easy to get lost in your search for unique composition. We are all looking for something fresh, but why would you want to head in a new direction? Throwing out the compass and maps because they're old means you'll be looking for that sign post the lost can all recognize – the Twilight Zone!

But how can you find your bearings?

Don't ask yourself how much you love your bonsai; ask yourself how much others love your bonsai. That way, you will know whether or not it is merely a nicely potted tree, and how expressive, and how impressive it is.

The larger question is of course what can you get away with in bonsai, while maintaining the illusion. The whole idea is to create the look of age and maturity in your tree, using all the practices of art, including the choice of a container. Bill also advised us to age our pots outside, exposed to the elements all winter. The 'beauty' is their aged look, an image beyond its crusty exterior, like mature vintage, with many layers of flavour. Looking at bonsai is similar to designing and creating it. In both cases there is an image to be appreciated. If the virtual amount created equals the virtual amount seen, that puts the onus on the bonsai artist to do better.

If that's too lofty for you, don't get too rattled, each year in spring you will get another chance, and another set of maps!

Bonsai Wired

In this **TBS Journal** you will find Mike Roussel's 'President's Message' and John Biel's articles on the topic of wiring bonsai. There are other wiring articles on the TBS web site, in the '**JOURNAL**' section, under '**2009**', '**JANUARY**'.

Arthur Skolnik, our sage senior member, has written a wiring article for the Buffalo Bonsai Society, which is published on their web site at: <http://www.buffalobonsaisociety.com/BonsaiWiring.html>. There's also a good basic wiring article online at **Bonsai4me**.

Seasonal Work

See "**Your Bonsai In January**" in the '**JOURNAL**' section on the **TBS web site**. Go to <http://www.torontobonsai.org/>, click the '**JOURNAL**' button on the upper middle screen, click the '**JOURNAL...2010**' button on the left side of the screen, and then click the '**JANUARY**' button in the middle of the screen. The articles for that month will appear on the menu at the left side of the screen.

Bonsai Students and Teachers

Even though spring is three months away, the timer is set. Will you be ready? If you are a **beginner**, here are some things you should have in stock for March: a set of bonsai tools and supplies, including concave & wire cutters, scissors, sieves, wire, training pots, and bonsai soil. If you need any of these things, contact Robert Dubuc (listed on back cover). If you need a tree to work on, tour your local nurseries, following Norman Haddrick's directions in his article '**Bonsai From Nursery Stock**'. Read also Reiner Goebel's article, '**Trunk Chop Bonsai**', in the 'Archives' section, about how to deal with overgrown stock. We will also be having a nursery crawl and collection again this spring. Stay tuned to this channel.

Intermediates should oil, clean, and sharpen their tools, have on hand bonsai soil, scoops and containers, and have prepared drawings/graphics on how they plan to improve their bonsai this year. You cannot follow through with a plan if you do not have one. If you cannot find any suitable pots, you can make one at our cement fondue weekend workshop, hosted by yours truly and led by Bob Wilcox. Is eight hours, spread over two days, really too long to spend on bonsai containers? Don't say we didn't do anything about the bonsai container crisis this year! Also, find a teacher.

The challenge to our **senior** members is to engage the beginning and intermediate members. Put their knowledge and experience to good use by choosing some students to guide through the coming bonsai seasons.

REGULAR TBS MEETINGS

Meetings take place on the second Monday of every month, except July and August, at the Toronto Botanical Gardens, located at 777 Lawrence Avenue East, at Leslie Street, in the auditorium (west side of the building) at 7:00 p.m. The general meetings frequently include: **DEMONSTRATIONS** of bonsai techniques, **CRITIQUES** of bonsai trees, and **WORKSHOPS**, in which each participant styles a tree with the help of an experienced member.

A small fee is charged for workshops, and a tree and wire are provided. To participate in workshops, it is necessary to register in advance of the meeting so that materials can be provided.

Members are encouraged to bring in bonsai to show and work on during the meetings. Wire is provided at no charge. Non-members may attend a meeting at no charge to see if the club is of interest to them.


Library Hours and Policy

The library is open to members at the beginning of our regular meetings. Members may borrow books free of charge for one month. Late returns cost \$1 per month with a minimum charge of \$2.

Membership Desk

The membership desk will be open at all meetings. The opening time may be extended for the first fall meeting to assist with renewals. You may also register for workshops there.

TBS EXECUTIVE:

<p>President: Mike Roussel mike.roussel@sympatico.ca</p> <p>Vice-President: Otmar Sauer otmar.sauer@sympatico.ca</p> <p>Web-Master: Dierk Neugerbauer dierkn@sympatico.ca</p> <p>Treasurer: Jean Charing jeancharing@rogers.com</p> <p>Editor/Publisher: Greg Quinn gquinn@hotmail.com</p>	<p>Workshop Coordinator: Rob Dubuc robubuc@bellnet.ca</p> <p>Membership Secretary: Linda Chevrier, Cheryl Johnson cjohnson24@sympatico.ca</p> <p>New Member Host: Karen Brankley kayeb29@hotmail.com</p> <p>Recording Secretary: Barbara Pope barbaralpope@rogers.com</p> <p>Past-President: Mike McCallion mwm@apliscanada.com</p>	<p>Librarian: Keith Oliver keitholiver1@hotmail.com</p> <p>Members At Large: Bob Cole bcole@metroland.com</p> <div data-bbox="1068 1220 1443 1856" style="border: 2px solid green; padding: 10px;"><p><i>The JOURNAL was founded in January, 1964, is published monthly, except July & August, and exists to further the study, practice, promulgation, and fellowship of bonsai.</i></p><p>Visit the Toronto Bonsai Society's website at: www.torontobonsai.org</p><p>Toronto Bonsai Society P.O. Box 155 Don Mills, Ontario M3C 2S2</p></div>
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