

# THE BONSAI Wire

October 2019

The Newsletter of The Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society

## FROM THE President

**W**e were indeed fortunate to have Joe Day as our guest speaker for the September

Meeting. His presentation was on "Managing Your Collection". Joe offered some great insights and common-sense solutions to collection management. Joe has been active in the bonsai community for over 40 years and it was a pleasure to have him visit us and share the benefits of his experience. If you were there, I know you enjoyed it and if you were not... you missed a great program.



No Joe was not taking a nap... I'm just a lousy photographer!

## MEETINGS & Events

### Tuesday, October 8, 2019

**Intermediate Study Group 6:00pm-7:15pm**

**Program: "Three Ring Circus" Styling 7:30pm**

Three members of the club (Robert Reed, Kirk Vaughn and Kathy Barbazon) will simultaneously demo three different trees - a Shimpaku Juniper, an Elm and a Kingsville boxwood. Bonus: ***The three styled trees will be raffled off at the end of the night!*** The trees were acquired from a hobbyist retiring from bonsai. All three trees are large and well developed (not starter material).

### Tuesday, November 12, 2019

**Intermediate Study Group 6:00pm-7:15pm**

**Program: Guy Guidry Lecture/Demo 7:30pm**

Nationally renowned bonsai expert Guy Guidry (and longtime GNOBS member) will be visiting us to do a lecture demo. Guy will demo three junipers with an emphasis on creating deadwood, jin and shari. Guy is always an entertaining presenter and a artist at doing original bonsai designs.

### Tuesday, December 10, 2019

**Intermediate Study Group 6:00pm-7:15pm**

**Program: Annual GNOBS Christmas Party 7:30pm**

Bring your spouse or plus one and your favorite covered dish (side dishes, entrées, desserts) for our annual potluck Christmas party. The club will supply a ham, beverages and plates/utensils.



President cont.  
pg 9

Meetings take place at the **Marine Corps League Hall, 2708 Delaware St., Kenner, LA**. For more information, articles and everything bonsai, check us out on our website at [www.gnobs.org](http://www.gnobs.org)

[facebook.com/NewOrleansBonsai](https://facebook.com/NewOrleansBonsai) [gnobs.org](http://gnobs.org)

# SPECIES Spotlight

## Bald Cypress as Bonsai (Part 8)

### (Developing New Apices on Stump-Collected Bald Cypress)

by Randy Bennett

*The following is the eighth in a series of articles on bald cypress as bonsai*

**W**hether you trudge into the swamp to collect a medium to large cypress stump, purchase one at a bonsai auction, or dig one up out of someone's yard (Who does that?!?!), you will typically have a cut like the one pictured below, where the top of the collected tree was removed with a saw.



When cypress stumps are collected during the winter, they rarely have any shoots on the trunk base, particularly if they were collected from the swamp. However, when spring comes, the stump will bud profusely. These buds will elongate into shoots that may grow from a few inches to a couple of feet in length in a single growing season. And there will always be shoots that sprout at or near the top-cut.

The bald cypress used as an example in this installment was one that came out of Dawn Koetting's yard. And no, I didn't go on a midnight bonsai collecting trip! Dawn dug it up and put it in the GNOBS Auction in August of 2018. I

won the bidding and the photo below shows the tree the day after the auction. The brown foliage is a result of windburn acquired on the trip from Dawn's house to the auction. However, the tree suffered no serious ill-effects.



The tree was beginning to develop flutes and I thought it might be a good candidate for a flat-top style bonsai. I kept the tree in full sun and kept it thoroughly watered. On February 10th, 2019, the buds began to pop.

Normally, you would allow a collected tree to recover for a couple of years after removing it from the ground. But I am very familiar with bald cypress and was certain it could take another repotting, particularly since I had no intention of cutting any roots and was going to put it back into the same soil. I simply wanted to get it into a more



shallow training pot, so I could properly determine the front of the tree and begin the process of developing knees.

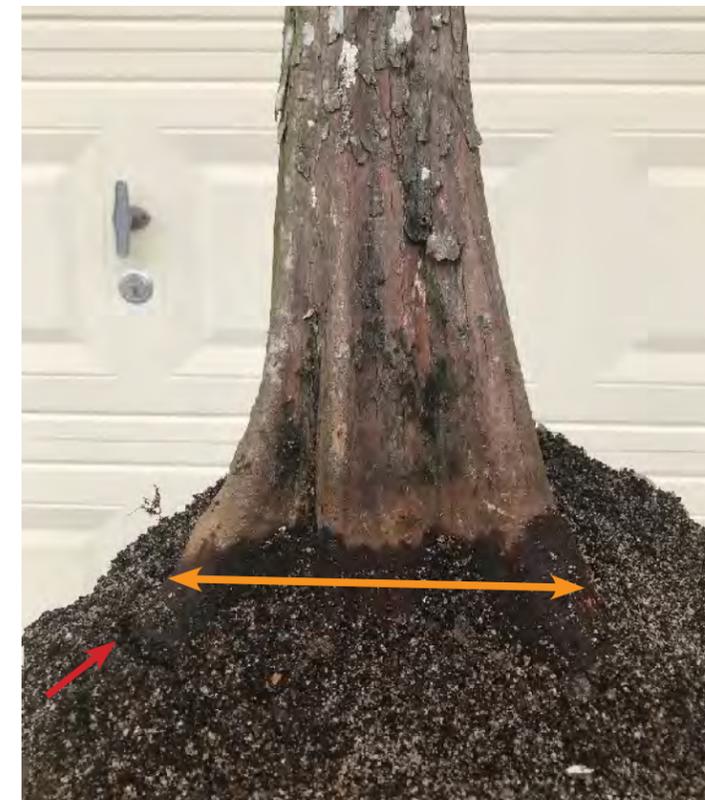
The photo below shows the tree after carefully removing it from the nursery pot. I made sure that the course potting mix was very wet. This helped to insure that the soil would not simply fall away from the roots. I was delighted to find that the flare of the buttress increased as the upper level of soil was brushed away and the picture shows the side selected to be the front of the tree. The yellow line shows the original line of soil



The orange line in the photo following shows where the new soil line will be when the tree is planted in the training pot. The red arrow shows where the rootage on the left-hand side of the tree was cut. Although unclear in the picture, new roots had sprouted from the cut.

The tree was repotted into a mica pot. To secure the tree into the new container and ensure that it would not move, once repotting was completed, three pieces of 17 gauge galvanized steel wire were fed through multiple points in the bottom of the mica pot. A mound of the current soil was placed in the bottom of the container and the root mass was pressed on top to help insure a lack of air pockets.

Once the tree was in place and the newly selected front properly positioned, three wood screws were partially screwed into the base of the tree below the future soil



line with a cordless drill. The location of the screws was determined by selecting woody material under the surface roots that corresponded with the steel wire that had been inserted. Two ends of the same piece of steel wire were then twisted together on top of one screw. The same procedure was performed with the other pieces of wire and screws.

Once all three wires were snugly in place, they were tightened once again with pliers. The screws were then snugged up against the base of the tree with the drill. This ensured that the tree would not move once repotting was complete. Making sure that a newly potted tree cannot move is a critical step for good root growth. If a tree wobbles in a pot from wind, animals or simply moving the pot to a new location, it can break and damage newly forming roots. This can cause a tree to go into shock or even kill the tree.

Steel wire was used because aluminum wire stretches and can easily break when tightening. Although not to the same degree, the same holds true for copper. The screws will not harm the tree.

Once I was certain that the tree would not move in the pot, it was time to select a new apical shoot and properly carve the top-cut to ensure proper healing and taper. The diameter of the top-cut was two inches. Scar tissue and thick, heavy callouses are not attractive on a bonsai. They must be kept as inconspicuous as possible. So how do you do that with such a large cut?

To keep the round shape of the trunk and enable callous tissue to form smoothly and quickly, rather than make a straight, slanting cut, a slanting convex or rounded cut is required. As far as I know, Gary Marchal was the first of us in Vaughn's study group to come up with this idea. Making a large, flat, slanted cut on the back of a tree is not a good practice.



Looking at the front of the tree, a shoot in the center, near the top was selected to become the new apex. The yellow arrow in the photo above shows the shoot that will become the new apex and develop a continuing line of taper in the trunk line.

The first step was to remove the bulk of unwanted woody tissue in back of the future apex and trunk line. To do this, a root cutter was used, always being mindful to not prune into the convex shape that was being developed. Once all the material was removed that could comfortably



be cut away with the root cutter, a Dremel tool with a sanding drum attached was used to create a smooth surface and finish creating the slanting convex surface that was needed. And for those of you who have been told that I must own stock in Dremel, it is not true (although I wish I did)!

**A convex cut was made by carefully removing unwanted woody material from around the edges with a knob cutter and concave cutter and then smoothing the entire convex surface using a sanding drum on a Dremel tool.**



Once a clean, smooth surface was created, cut paste was applied to seal the wound

After sealing the wound, the next task was to carefully wire the new apex upward, in line with the trunk. The diameter of the new apical shoot measured slightly less than

3/8 of an inch immediately above the convex cut. Next, any point on the trunk that had two shoots emanating from the same point, one was removed, including the one at the base of the new apical shoot. If these double-shoots were located near the top-cut, the weaker shoot was kept. On double-shoots at the lowest locations, the stronger of the two was kept.

Finally, all of the shoots on the trunk were reduced in length, with the higher shoots cut shorter than the lower shoots. This was done to help equalize the strength of these shoots.

All of the current shoot-tips contain auxins; growth hormones that the tree deposited there in the fall. By reducing their concentration, you force back-budding and, more importantly, the accelerated growth of those shoots whose tips you did not prune – namely, the new apical shoot.

Most will be removed next winter, but all will be kept for now to help the tree regain strength. It must seem contradictory to severely cut back shoots while saying that you want the tree to regain its vigor. But you must remember that, although you want the tree to regain strength, you do not want the lower branches to become excessively large in a flat-top design. You are trying to force as much energy and growth as possible into developing the new apex and develop the taper in that shoot. So the bulk of new growth must be forced into that region.



*The new apical shoot has been selected and wired*



*After pruning back all shoots and wiring the new apical shoot*

The above photo shows the tree with this winter's work complete. The buttressed base at the soil line is 9 1/2 inches in diameter. The height of the tree at the top-cut is 30 inches. The finished height of the tree is anticipated to be about 48 to 52 inches.

#### NEXT STEPS

The transplanted tree was placed in a plastic mortar tub. The tub was then filled with water. The height of mica pot and soil is slightly above the rim of the mortar tub. That way the mortar tub can be kept full of water without inundating the soil surface. This is the method I use for growing cypress knees. But that is a topic all unto itself. I will provide a follow-up article on growing cypress knees.



I began a fertilizer regimen in March, after new growth has hardened off. The apex shoot will be allowed to grow unchecked for at least two years. By that time, it will have thickened significantly. Cypress will typically grow 1-2 feet a year! During that time, I will keep the lower growth pruned short to force as much growth into the apical shoot as possible.



*July 10, 2019 – 5 months after pruning and repotting. This photo shows the shoots on the main trunk. They were cut back severely on June 1. What you see above is the growth that has occurred in only 6 weeks*



*July 10, 2019 – This photo shows the new growth from the apical shoot. It has grown 22 inches in the past 5 months*



*The apical shoot was 3/8 of an inch when pruned and repotted in February, 2019 and has increased in diameter to about 7/8 of an inch in the past 5 months. You will note the callous tissue beginning to roll over and heal the convex cut.*

It will take at least two to three years for the newly created convex top-cut to completely callous over and heal. Larger diameter top-cuts will naturally take longer. In two to three years, I will wire the apical branch over into a 55 to 85 degree angle, cut back the apex shoot and begin development of the flat-top structure.

Below is a photo of another cypress where the convex stump-cut method was used on the back side of the tree. The slanted, convex cut was over 3 inches across and 5 1/2 inches vertically. It took 3 years to completely seal the wound. You can see the small ridge in the center where the two edges of callous tissue eventually met. Hopefully, you can see how smoothly the callous tissue formed using this technique as opposed to the thick roll of tissue typically formed when using a straight or concave cut.



Below is the same tree from the front. This photo was taken in January of 2019. You may also see a few of the knees that were developed. This tree was clearly not grown in the flat-top style, typical of bald cypress. I grew this tree to illustrate a traditional formal upright bonsai style as an immature blunt and fluted variant bald cypress. It has been six years since this tree was collected. It was only a stump with no branches or shoots.



*This bald cypress measures 14 inches across at the soil line and is 43 inches tall.*

Below is a photo of the knees that developed. This photo was taken in the spring of 2017 – the same year that the knees emerged from the soil.



*23 knees emerged in the spring of 2017*

# BONSAI Basics

## Apex Building

by Harry Harrington (bonsai4me.com)

The very top branches of a bonsai are known as the apex. In a mature field-growing tree and a bonsai the apex is seen to be a broad dome of foliage above the rest branch structure. Whilst building and shaping the branches of a bonsai is frequently described in bonsai literature and is therefore reasonably well understood, apex building, or the formation of the apex, is rarely described and can be difficult to style.

### What is the Apex?

It must be understood that the apex is a general term that describes the upper branches and silhouette or shape of the top of the tree. It is a part of the branch structure of the tree and not a separate entity that just sits on top of the trunk.

A common fault in bonsai styling in past years has been that the apex has been visibly separated from the rest of the branch structure by a visible gap or band in the foliage. Fortunately, this does seem to be a thing of the past!

The one thing that nearly all bonsai apices have in common is a broad, dome-shaped apex. This is reminiscent of a mature tree; a narrow, pointed apex is normally illustrative of a young tree and should be avoided in bonsai.

Apex building should depend on whether the bonsai is deciduous or coniferous and the style of the bonsai; whether it is naturalistic (realistic) or abstract (styled like a Pine).

### Building the apex of a classical, abstract or 'Pine Style' bonsai

This category contains deciduous and broadleaf trees structured in the classical or abstract style. That is, they have largely near-horizontal branches with clearly defined foliage pads.

*For trees in this style it is usual to build what is described by John Naka as a 'tree upon a tree'.*



*The abstract-style apex cannot be used on bonsai styled with natural, upward growing branching.*



### Building the apex of a naturalistic, contemporary and naturally-styled deciduous bonsai

This category contains deciduous and broadleaf trees that are naturalistic, that is, they are styled and structured to look like a natural deciduous or broadleaf trees.

*The uppermost branches grow at upward angles and fan out above the top of the trunk to create the apex and the crown of the tree.*



*The natural apex style can be used with success on classical, abstract or 'Pine Style' bonsai.*



## Coniferous Bonsai

This category includes Pines, Junipers, Spruce and similar species that are naturally seen growing in the 'Pine Style' with horizontal branching and clean foliage pads.

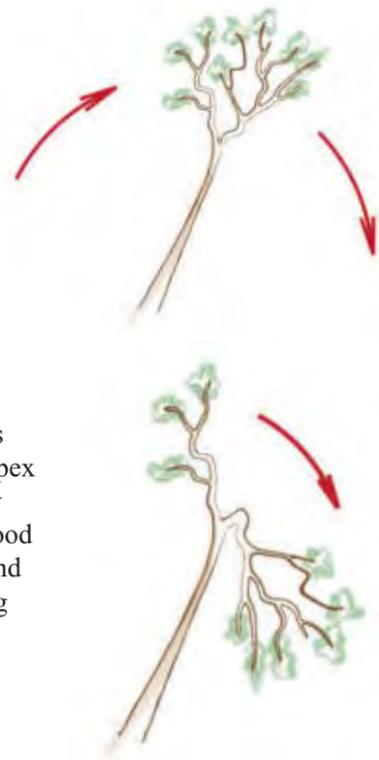
Unlike deciduous species that are in the 'Pine Style', the apex should be built with less (primary) branches growing from the trunk itself. One advantage with building the coniferous apex is that the branches are never bare and the structure is never revealed.

### *The easiest way to build a coniferous apex is using the 'T-bar branch'.*

One or two branches at the very top of the trunk are allowed to grow as a (T) bar-branch. Smaller secondary shoots and foliage is encouraged to grow along the length of the T-bar branch to create a dome of foliage



A more satisfying and possibly more contemporary approach, is to use a small group of secondary branches near the top of the trunk and 'layer' them into a pad of foliage; each individual branch and the overall foliage pad must be kept lighter than any other branching on the tree. This method of 'layering' the apex of a coniferous tree is very often seen used on deadwood or heavily carved trunks and bonsai that are styled using only one or two primary branches.



### **The Shape and Direction of the Apex**

The apex should have implied direction that reflects the implied direction of the tree.

The apex has a roughly irregular triangular shape- that is, one side of the rounded apex slopes more gently than the other. The side with the steeper slope is said to indicate the direction that the tree is facing (toward the sun).

This direction is nearly always facing the same direction as the bonsai's first branch. That is; if the first branch faces left then the apex should also face left.

*All images in this article by Ninoslav Pirš*

The apex of a coniferous tree should not be built from the wheel-spoke branches that are often seen growing on a pine. An apex built this way will suffer with inverse taper at the top of the trunk and will tend to have a bald patch in the middle of the apex.

**GNOBS has acquired a club discount with American Bonsai Tool & Supply Co. (AmericanBonsai.com). All club members can receive a 10% discount by using the discount code GNOBS10 on the checkout page. There is no minimum purchase required to receive the discount and shipping is FREE on orders over \$99.**

**American Bonsai is known for their high quality stainless steel tools. They also sell pots, supplies, soil, wire etc.**

*President cont. from pg 1*



## October Program

The October program promises to be something a little different. We will have three of our very talented and knowledgeable bonsai artists styling trees at the same time. Kirk Vaughn will be styling a Chinese elm. Robert Reed will be designing a Shimpaku juniper and Kath Barbazon will be working on a large Kingsville boxwood.

Each artist will be sharing knowledge and their decision-making process with you as they each design their tree. At the end of the night, all three trees will be raffled off! The Kingsville boxwood alone would sell for about \$400 as UNSTYLED pre-bonsai stock at a bonsai nursery! This is a program you will not want to miss!

## Tips for October

Have you noticed what is happening to the tree foliage around you in nature and the landscape? They are already starting to change color. I noticed the sweetgum in Hammond. About half their leaves are a banana yellow, while the other half are still green. The swamp maples are starting to get an orange tint mixed in with the green, as is the Chinese tallow and black willows. I even noticed a stand of bald cypress today whose foliage was beginning to bronze slightly. So it's definitely time to start some very specific tasks on your bonsai.

1. You should, once again, be fertilizing your trees. The most important point is to provide your trees with the nutrients they need to gain additional strength during the winter months, namely: a fertilizer without nitrogen. You do not want a lot of foliar growth at this time of year. Rather, provide your tree with phosphorous and potassium to grow strong roots and strong cell walls in twigs and branches. This will help your tree sustain itself over the winter and provide for more vigorous growth in the spring. It will also help trees such as swamp maples and Japanese red maples (which are prone to sacrifice branches over the winter months without rhyme or reason) to remain strong and curtail unwanted dieback.
2. Be ever mindful about the amount of water your trees are

getting. As trees begin dropping some of their leaves and daytime temperatures begin to cool down, there will be less evaporation and transpiration taking place. You will need to cut back on your watering somewhat. But always feel the level of moisture in the soil with your finger. It is the best way to tell whether or not you need to water a particular tree.

3. Once we start routinely getting daytime highs around 80 degrees, move trees like Japanese maples and Hinoki cypress back into full sun.

4. Continue to be on the lookout for pests and conduct preventative spraying for fungus and insects.

**Randy Bennett**  
GNOBS President

## GNOBS Elections

Elections for the 2020 Board will be held in November.

Current Nominations are:

Randy Bennett - President

Dennis Burke - Vice President

Dawn Koetting - Treasurer

Cheryl Mechler - Hall Manager

Kathy Barbazon - Newsletter/Website Editor

Jim Osborne - Masters Program Director

Peggy Howard - Secretary

All members are welcome to run for any board position with the exception of President. Any nominees for President must have served on the board previously. If you would like to run for a position please let Randy know at the October meeting so he may announce it.



**Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society**  
PO Box 381 Kenner, LA 70062

President:  
Randy Bennett  
504-402-3646 (cell)  
504-888-7994 (home)  
ourproperty4u@gmail.com

Newsletter/Website Editor  
Kathy Barbazon  
504-470-8134 (cell)  
504-737-6747 (home)  
kbarbazon@me.com

Vice-President:  
Dennis Burke  
504-224-0038 (cell)  
dpbbonsai@yahoo.com

Masters Program Director:  
Jim Osborne  
504-458-6956 (cell)  
wevoodoo@cox.net

Treasurer:  
Dawn Koetting  
985-859-3400 (cell)  
dkoetting@msn.com

Hall Manager  
Cheryl Mechler  
504-452-1222  
mechler465@att.net

Recording Secretary  
Peggy Howard  
504-715-7228  
peggylh@cox.net

Past President:  
Peggy Howard