

Restyling a Juniper

By Randy Bennett

The juniper depicted in this restyling is a Parson's juniper (*Juniperus parsonii*). The tree was originally part of landscape in someone's yard and was going to be dug up and discarded by the homeowner. It was brought to me for the initial design and was originally styled as a twin-line semi-cascade. The owner maintained the tree for a number of years. The specimen had a 4 inch base with a fair amount of jin and shari that I created in the initial styling. Unfortunately, neglect had weakened the tree. Some of the branches had died and the original styling design had become lost.

Six years later, I was approached about wiring and styling the tree a second time, the tree was weak and the branches were quite "leggy" with little interior growth. In order to get the tree healthy enough for a redesign, it was left with me and was fertilized well and allowed to grow without any pruning for another year in order to ensure its strength and to try and promote some back-budding.

The photo below shows the tree after a year of a fertilizer regimen using Bio-Gold organic fertilizer and fish emulsion and no pruning or wiring. At the time of the photo below the height of the tree was 20 inches above the rim of the pot and it had a width of almost 40 inches. It was potted in a large mica pot.



The photo below shows the tree with the original front.



This is another photo showing the tree from the opposite side



This is a photo of the trunk taken from the right side and from underneath the canopy. It shows some of the jin. The left side of the tree has a large shari that extends from just below the apical leader all the way down to the soil level. The bark had been brushed with a stiff wire brush immediately prior to this photo being taken.



Whether you are going to work on a tree for the first time or work on one that has already been designed as a bonsai, never look at a tree from the original potting angle alone. Examine the tree from every possible angle. It is your job as the artist to discover the best presentation of the tree from a visual perspective.

After looking at the tree from many different angles, a new front was chosen. The entire angle of the tree was changed in order to present the viewer with a more interesting line of movement. The photo below shows how changing the potting angle and reversing the viewing direction enhances the visual impact. The new front was chosen from this angle but with a slight rotation to make the shari visible.



In our wet climate, deadwood does not last long if it is not treated properly. Moreover, shari that extends down to the soil line will rot even faster, due to the daily watering and the dampness of the soil. There are various products that can be used to preserve dead wood. In this case, I used Wood Hardener by Min-Wax. To achieve the bends necessary for the new design, raffia was applied to several branches which were then wrapped with several coils of copper wire. If you look closely or enlarge the photo, you will be able to see that a steel rod was wired to the trunk and a guy-wire attached to pull the apex into the proper position. Rubber pads were placed between the steel rod and the trunk to prevent damage. Using a steel rod in this fashion enables you to get a bend that raffia and heavy wire alone will not achieve.

Wiring the branches enabled the creation of multiple layers of foliage. The new design is a slanting style and the scalene triangle outline is maintained. The pot selected was a 4 inch deep, 18 inch wide, unglazed rectangle with indented corners. The reddish color of the pot was chosen to accent the reddish color of the bark.

The photos below show the appearance of the tree before the redesign and after. The transformation took one full day.



The finished height of the tree with the new design is 32 inches high and 36 inches across. Completely changing the design is not always necessary in a redesign or restyling, but in this case, the change greatly improved the beauty and value of the specimen.