

THE BONSAI Wire

April 2023

The Newsletter of The Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society

FROM THE President

W

e had two great Garden Show weekends in a row. We gained 4 new members from the Destrehan show

and 2 new members from the City Park show. I think we can plan on going back to Destrehan next year with all the interest we generated there. We had a great variety of species (about 20) on display. It is good to see our member's trees admired by the public. We heard plenty of exclamations about the trees! Once again we heard how difficult it was for the visitors to pick their favorite tree for the Viewers Choice Award. My Azalea won 1st place, however I have to thank Cheryl and Johnny for doing most of the work on it before I came into possession of it. Dawn's Chinese Elm Forest on a rock won 2nd. Cheryl's Brazilian Rain tree came in 3rd. I would like to thank the following people that helped make both garden shows a success: Kathy, Cheryl, Harold, Dawn, Donald, Randy, Felix, Carl, Tina, Jackie, Ryan, Byron, Jorge, Melissa, Mark, Lee and Gerald. More than a few people told us we were the reason for them coming to the Garden shows. We had a lot of interest on all the trees. Many people inquired about the ages and techniques on how to make a bonsai. We also had a lot of questions about the "years in training". We also heard from more than a few folks that they were surprised at how many species you could make into bonsai. It seems that we did our duty as a club to spread the appreciation of the art of bonsai by the amount of interest that we had from visitors.

Dennis Burke
GNOBS President

MEETINGS & Events

Reminder - our new home for meetings is:

American Legion Hall 1225 Hickory Ave, Harahan, LA 70123

Tuesday, April 11, 2023

Program: Open Workshop 7:00pm

Bring your own tree to work on. Club will provide wire. (Bring your own tools). Catch up on styling and maintenance or seek the advice and opinions of other experienced members. (We have a limited number of trees to purchase - primarily for brand new members acquired from the Garden Show.)

Friday, May 12, 2023

Program: Byron Myrick Creating Bonsai Pot demo 7:00pm

Byron Myrick has been a potter and teacher of pottery for many years, and a bonsai enthusiast for the past fourteen. He will also be bringing pots for sale.



Saturday, May 13, 2023

Program: Byron Myrick Bonsai Pot Workshop 9:00am

Byron will assist workshop participants in creating their own custom bonsai pot (up to 8" x 10") including selecting the glaze. He will take the pots back to his studio and then ship the fired pots to participants. Sign up sheets will be available at the meetings. Cost of the workshop is \$95. (If needed there will be a second workshop group in the afternoon)

For anyone who believes they may not be able to do this - I assure you that you can. Byron has created a system and multiple tools that makes it easy for anyone to create their own pot. He has done workshops for us in the past as well as other clubs and conventions and everyone has been satisfied with their creations - plus it's a lot of fun!

Friday, June 16, 2023

Program: Evan Pardue Water Elm Demo 7:00pm

Evan Pardue, Manager of Underhill Bonsai, will be doing a lecture/demonstration on Water Elm. Evan has a history in art and has been involved with bonsai for 10 years now. As a Louisiana native,

Meetings cont. pg 7

The Bonsai of Average

By Rob Kempinski



The Wind Tunnel Effect by Ade Hanft

I've traveled a lot over the last 30 years and I've noticed that there is a real trend towards homogeneity. Go from one city to another in the USA and

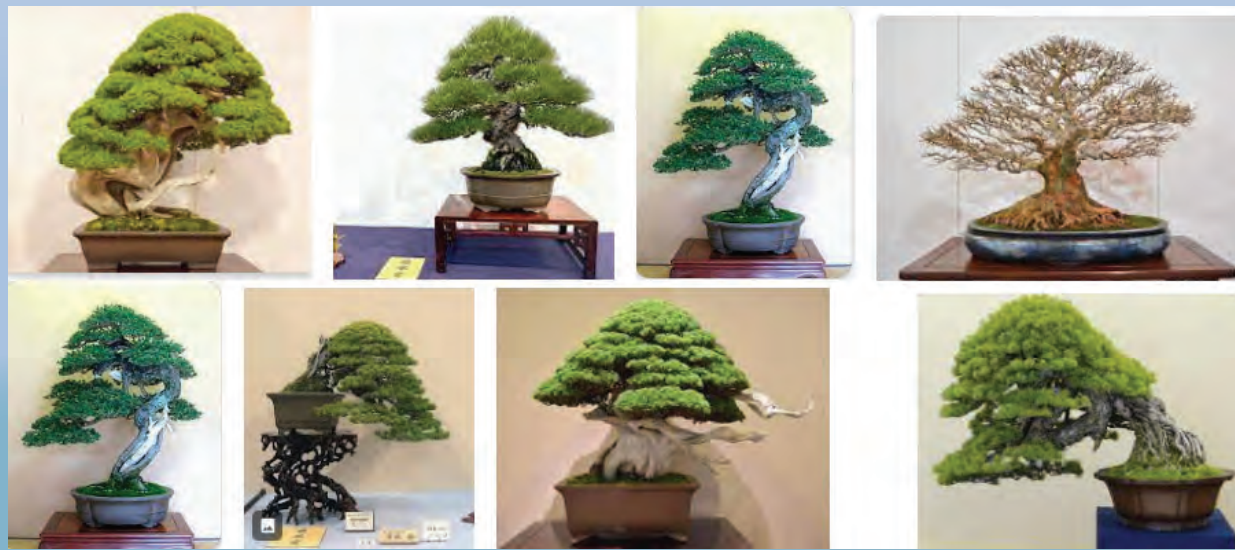
you find the same look, strip malls, fast food restaurants, planned neighborhoods with similar boxy houses, familiar architecture, road and development proliferation and similar looking cars everywhere. It's sarcastically called "Generica". However, what I have also noticed is that this is not limited to the USA. Many other countries are following the same path. International airports around the world all have the same shops, cafes in global cities have the same look – raw wood, white walls, kind of hipster interior architecture – even the people across the world pretty much dress the same. You wouldn't believe how many man buns I've see in all continents. It's like the world has iterated itself down to average.

Bonsai design is not immune to this savage trend. A few years ago I

attended the Kokufuten exhibition in Tokyo with a relatively new bonsai enthusiast. After he wandered the show by himself for two days he linked up with me and said, "If I see another Shimpaku juniper in a pot I am going to puke." The homogeneity of the trees, even "world class trees," can get tiresome.

A similar event happened when I attended the last Ginkgo show in Belgium nearly 10 years ago. The late Nick Lenz was in attendance and I walked with him a few others through the exhibit. Nick, known to have a very different point of view, described one tree after another as "helmet on a stick," next tree, "helmet on a stick." When Nick returned

home to write a review of the show for his personal blog, he didn't even bother to talk about the trees but rather penned a bizarre but humorous account of his staying in a garage converted to a guest room in Ghent.



Even great trees can get monotonous – the dreaded helmet on a stick.

How did this happen? There are a couple of reasons.

Human nature needs humans to be copycats. As a species we rely on the progress of other humans to exist. Most of us don't design and make

clothes, or grow food, or build cars. We rely on the effort of other people for countless daily tasks. It seems natural when we take up bonsai we look to see what others have done and copy them. What exacerbates the issue is that many look to Japan for bonsai inspiration. And while Japan is a great country, it is one of the most homogeneous countries in the world. It is well published that Japanese people engage in group think. A favorite expression in Japan is "出る釘は打たれる" pronounced "Deru kugi wa utareru"; the nail that sticks out gets hammered down). And while there is not total conformity in Japan and I wouldn't build a view of Japanese culture on one phrase, on a continuum Japanese people would tend to the conformity side versus the individualism side. The west has sent hundreds of students to Japan to serve as apprentices and they have this conformity drilled into them. The trained professionals then bring that to their homes and perpetuate the notions. While Japanese inspired bonsai might look nice they do develop a rote-ness that borders on repetition.

The nail that sticks out



Another reason is trees can only do so much – they need leaves, a trunk and something to grow in. The physiology of tree will dictate that it requires certain structures to live. These structures start to look similar. Different species might offer different characteristics, like needles versus single leaves versus compound leaves. Some trees might make nice flowers, while others have nice bark but in the end they start to look like "helmets on stick."

Then there is craft versus art. Bonsai demos and programs are

replete with rules – right branch, left branch, back branch. Apex over roots, no bar branches etc. We've seen and heard them all. For people new to the art, learning these rules means one has the ability to develop the rote-ness of a Japanese styled bonsai and to make nice trees. Most exhibitions reward the craft – look at any major bonsai exhibition and the winning trees typically perpetuate the craft-based design. The best-executed average trees win the accolades or awards. The trees that stick out get ignored (or hammered down.)

What can we as bonsai artists do about average? Maybe nothing. It is human nature and average trees can look good and bring pleasure and you can enter them in shows and join the clique. Many people have made a career doing this. But if you want to break average it will take some thought; some simple and perhaps some complex. It boils down to creativity. Can you think outside the box? Creativity can manifest itself in so many ways it would be foolish to try to list them all here. However I will throw out a few ideas:

Try unusual species or perhaps native species.

This is a native Florida Pine, the Slash Pine (Pinus elliott) in a weeping style.



Have a design concept that goes beyond "Make a plant look old."

Making a tree look old is probably the most common bonsai design goal. Yet it is not the only one. Go back to your native culture and look for inspiration. You can find it in literature, geography, history, pretty much anywhere. Just think differently.

Break the pot idea. Try growing a tree in something other than a pot.

Get creative in tree displays. Consider using temporary scenery for a display instead of the typical two or three point display. Think multimedia. Mix video and sound and other stimuli with trees.

Bonsai trees displayed in temporary scenery for a show as a Post Apocalyptic Chinese Wax Factory



It might be interesting to try artificial intelligence to come up with a design. Ask ChatGPT to design a bonsai and then use that as a template.

This last one might take some effort – try genetic engineering. Mix the DNA of drought tolerant trees with those with small needles; mix flowers with pines. The sky the limits. (I did say it might take some effort.)

Rob Kempinski

Rob is an internationally recognized bonsai artist and author. He enjoys teaching bonsai at all levels and introducing newcomers to the pleasing art of growing miniature trees in a container. Rob has written many articles for bonsai magazines and journals. He has published several books, many on the art of bonsai.



Rob Kempinski showing his Texas sage

GNOBS Events

City Park Garden Show - GNOBS Display



SAVE THE DATE!



The Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society

ANNUAL

Bonsai Auction

& Plant Sale

(FREE and Open to the Public)

August 12, 2023

Viewing of trees & plant sale begins at 4:00pm
Auction 6:00pm – 9:00pm

**HUGE selection of master styled bonsai,
bonsai, starter material, pots and supplies**

VFW Hall – 1133 Hickory Ave, Harahan, LA 70123

gnobs.org

facebook.com/NewOrleansBonsai

Bonsai Society of Acadiana
is happy to announce we will be hosting the

2023 Louisiana Day of Bonsai

Saturday, September 30th.

This is our state meeting, rotated amongst the member clubs.

We are also thrilled that **Jennifer Price** has squeezed us into her busy schedule and will be our guest artist. We hope that all club members around the state will mark their calendars and make every effort to attend.

More details will follow at a later date.

It takes a village for a small club to do LABS. Please make plans to attend!"



Embracing the Art and Science of Bonsai

Underhill Bonsai is a full service bonsai nursery focused on horticultural science and the timeless traditions of bonsai. We offer products and services for everybody at every level of interest. We support you in your bonsai journey.

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he has knowledge and interest in many of our native species. He has been conducting demos/workshops in the Southern region and recently completed intensive training at Crataegus bonsai garden with Michael Hagedorn.

Saturday, June 17, 2023

Program: Evan Pardue Water Elm Workshop 9:00am

Evan will be conducting a workshop on some nice water elms (approx 1" caliper with nice movement). Cost of the workshop will be \$65. Sign up sheets will be available at our meetings.

Tuesday, July 11, 2023

Program: Initial Competition for Johnny Martinez Award 7:00pm

All members (including beginners) are asked to bring in their best trees (limit 2) for a friendly competition. (Note: Only SINGLE trees - NO GROUPS) All members present will get 3 votes for their favorite trees. The 3 trees with the most votes will be displayed at the Auction. Auction attendees will vote for their favorite tree from the 3 for the Johnny Martinez Award. We ask that you not bring in a tree from a workshop done in the past year. *Our experienced members will provide a constructive critique with suggestions for further development of the trees. This is an excellent opportunity to get feedback and advice on your trees.*

REMINDER; Our annual Auction is August 12. Now is the time to assess your collection for donations, style some nursery material and root cuttings for the bargain table.

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