

THE BONSAI Wire

May 2023

The Newsletter of The Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society

FROM THE President

It's beginning to feel a lot like summer! We had a weird spring for us here (yes, the calendar says it's still spring till June) with the few cool spells coming through. Now the heat is on and will get more intense as we all know. Unless it rains at least an INCH (I have a rain gauge on my fence) on my trees I am watering every day already. Yes, if it's just a sprinkle I water thoroughly with the hose. Don't let the wet ground and surroundings fool you. Just because everything looks wet on the surface doesn't mean your trees got enough. No harm in checking the soil an inch or so down. You can also use a bamboo chopstick as a rain gauge stuck into the soil. Luckily as I type this, it has been raining all afternoon. I get a break from watering today, but I still check my trees to make sure they are still upright to get properly watered. I have a few tall trees in nursery containers and a few lightweight trees in grow pots that topple over with strong winds. It's been on my to do list to pot them up to larger or more stable containers. It's safe to "slip pot" any time of year. Continue to check for insects and fungus on your trees. You can use neem oil, horticulture oil, insecticidal soaps or similar as a preventative and as a treatment if you have bugs on your trees. Just be sure to follow the label directions so they are used effectively. Subsequent applications may be necessary in a certain time frame. It is best to identify the pest first to ensure you get the correct treatment.

I am excited to see Byron Myrick back to give us a demo and workshop to make your own bonsai pot. He was

President cont. pg 7

MEETINGS & Events

Reminder - our new home for meetings is:

American Legion Hall 1225 Hickory Ave, Harahan, LA 70123

Friday, May 12, 2023

Program: Byron Myrick Creating Bonsai Pots 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. Byron's handmade pots are unique and beautiful and encompass a wide variety of glazes, shapes and decoration.



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. Cost of the workshop is \$95. Due to high demand, there will be morning and afternoon sessions. Both workshop sessions are currently full.

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, 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.

Meetings cont. pg 7

A Guide to Bonsai Critique

By Harry Harrington (bonsai4me.com)

Within the Art of Bonsai, there are a number of rules or guidelines that are intended to help both the viewer and practitioner understand or learn what makes a good or 'bad' bonsai design. To the novice, a bonsai will be simply a tree in a pot; to the more experienced enthusiast, a good bonsai will have certain features that makes it superior.

The beginner has to understand these rules in the same way that one has to learn what makes a Leonardo de Vinci painting better than a child's.

These rules are not set in stone. They are there to help guide those new to bonsai and learning them can help the beginner begin to 'read' a bonsai rather than simply see it as a mass of leaves and branches. Most classic and many good quality bonsai will break 'rules'; this helps to make them unique. However, until these basic rules are learned, understood and mastered, it is difficult to break them with success.

General points

- There should a greater mass of foliage behind the tree than in front of it to create a sense of depth.
- Man-made cuts or wounds should not be visible from the front unless created as features.



- The tree should be 3-dimensional, it should not appear 'flat' when viewed from the side.
- The tree should not appear to lean backwards; informal forms should have an apex that leans forward.
- Roots Roots/nebari should run flat along the surface of the compost and not be raised out of the compost (excepting trees grown in a true exposed-root style).
- Roots spread should reflect the form of the tree and appear to anchor the tree firmly into the compost; for trees with upright forms the roots should radiate evenly from around the base of the trunk, for slanting forms or cascades the roots should appear stronger on the opposite side of the trunk to the direction of lean.
- Roots should appear to be of a roughly even size as they emanate from around the base of the trunk; inferior material will display 1 or 2 disproportionately thick roots only. However, slightly thicker, stronger roots should be located at the sides of the trunk and should not protrude towards the front.
- Surface roots not be straight and should exhibit some taper and branching.

Trunk

- With most forms, the trunk must taper from its thinnest point at the apex to its widest point at its base. It is preferable for the trunk to taper as gradually as possible.
- The trunk must not have inverse taper; that is to say the base of the trunk should not be thinner than any other point of the trunk.
- Half to two-thirds of the trunk should be visible from the front to reveal the structure of the trunk.
- Trunks with any slope in any direction should also slope at ground level.
- Grafted trunks should not be apparent unless inspected very closely.
- Informal forms should preferably have turns or bends that diminish in size



and length as the eye travels from trunk base to apex.

- Trunks should be cleaned of algae and moss.

Branches

- Branches normally commence around one-third to half the height of the tree.
- The first branch should be the thickest with the branches thinning in diameter as they progress towards the apex.
- The first branch should normally point towards the left or the right when the tree is viewed from the front.
- No branch should lie directly above another.
- No branch should cross another.
- All branches should exhibit taper from trunk to tip.
- All branches should be shaped similarly to each other and should reflect the movement (or lack of) in the trunk.
- Normally, only branches in the top third of the tree should point directly forwards, towards the viewer.
- No two branches should appear from the same place on the trunk (bar branches).
- No two branches should appear to be at the same height.
- No branches should cross the trunk as seen from the front.

Tree outline

- The trees' outline is normally roughly triangular.
- Depending on individual species the apex should be triangular or rounded but not pointed.
- Group plantings or trees with multiple trunk forms should have an overall triangular outline, this triangular shape should not be symmetrical.
- In some groups, a dominant tree can disturb the overall triangular shape.

Foliage, flowers and fruit

- Dead or diseased leaves should be removed.
- Leaves should not show white lime deposits from being misted or sprayed with hard tap water.
- No insects or cobwebs should be visible on the tree.
- All leaves should be of similar size; overlarge leaves should be removed.
- All flowers or fruit should be free of blemishes.

Pots

- Pots should be clean and undamaged.
- The color of the pot should not clash with the dominant color of the tree whether that be the color of the leaves, flowers or fruit.
- Glazed pots are generally considered better for deciduous species whilst unglazed pots are generally used for coniferous trees.
- Antique pots should be used for old trees, new pots should be used for younger trees.
- The pot should not distract attention from the tree, it should compliment and enhance it.
- Ornate pots are more suitable for flowering and fruiting trees or mame bonsai.
- The tree should not be planted centrally in the pot except when a round or square pot is used.
- The dominant mass of the tree should be above the center of the pot. A tree leaning to the right should be planted left of center so its center of gravity is above the middle of the pot.
- The tree should be planted slightly toward the back of the pot.
- The tree should only be over potted for horticultural reasons; visually under potted trees look as though they have thicker trunks than over potted trees.

Soil surface

- The tree should be planted proud above the surface of the soil, which should slowly fall away in height to the edges of the pot.
- The surface should be kept free of weeds and debris from the tree; old leaves and flowers for instance.
- The soil surface should not be plain, gravel or mosses can be used to great effect.
- The use of small ceramic or wooden animals or models should be used with considerable discretion.

Multi-trunked Bonsai

- There should not be an even number of stems or trunks.
- Multi-trunked trees should have all their stems rising from ground level and not from part way up the trunk.
- All stems should emerge from the surface of the compost closely and gradually diverge as they ascend.
- All stems or trunks should have a similar form.
- The thickness of individual trunks or stems should be in proportion to their heights.
- Multi-tree plantings All trunks should be visible from the front and the side.
- There should not be an even number of stems or trunks.
- The tallest tree should be planted highest in the pot.
- Space in the pot should be left to imply a natural expanse of open ground.
- Trunk thickness should be reflected by trunk height.



BONSAI Design

The Application of Art Principles in Bonsai: Visual Movement

By Harry Harrington (bonsai4me.com)

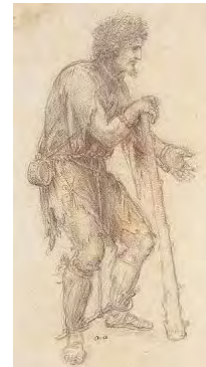
There has been much debate in recent years as to the relationship between Bonsai and Art. Is the practice of Bonsai purely horticultural or does it have strong artistic aspects as well?

Many enthusiasts initially approach bonsai for its horticultural practices and it is only when they then attempt to style and form their trees, that the artistic and creative side of the practice comes into play.

There are in fact many basic artistic principles at play when we design our trees; or, at least there should be. Many of these principles are already provided for us in the commonly applied 'Rules of Bonsai'.

Visual Movement, the subject of this article, is often found in 'the Rules of Bonsai' that determine the positioning of a bonsai in its pot and the relationship between objects in a Japanese 3-point display.

Visual Movement



This sketch by Leonardo da Vinci is known as 'Masquerader in the Guise of a Prisoner' and is taken from an old book of printed sketches by Da Vinci.

Each sketch in the book has been placed squarely on its page; possibly by the publisher or possibly by Da Vinci. This sketch is ideal for illustrating the purpose of, understanding, finding and using movement in Art, bonsai and photography.

If the image is studied, key components can be found that show the direction of 'energy', the 'flow' of the picture or its movement.

Arguably the most important features are the subject's face and hands, and to a lesser degree, his knees and feet. All are directed towards the right and therefore, the 'movement' of the picture could be said to be towards the right. (If one notices the cup hanging from the Masquerader's belt, even this is open and facing towards the right).

Armed with this knowledge, the central figure can be placed in different positions in a larger frame, to better and worse effect.



Move the figure to the right hand side of the frame and something is now wrong with the composition. The flow and the movement of the figure is now cramped and the energy of the figure is lost. The empty space 'behind' the figure (on the left) looks unnecessary and awkward, almost wasted space.

Visual Movement, like the Golden Section is something we all 'see' and 'recognize' automatically on an almost subconscious level but we sometimes fail to acknowledge when we compose our own Art. Understanding movement in bonsai, photography or Art can help us exploit the subconscious of the human eye and enhance composition and the illusion of movement.

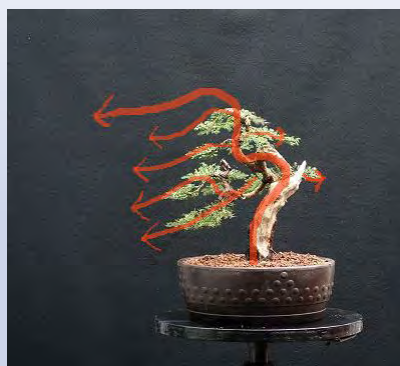
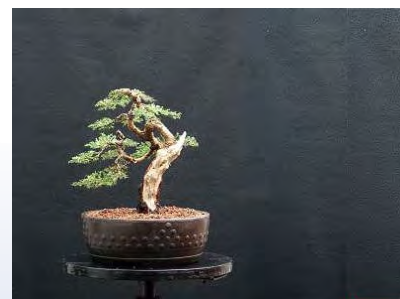
Another example using a photograph of a Juniper (digitally enhanced for the purpose of this article).

As with most people who take digital photographs, I like to crop my raw photographs to reduce file size and to improve the composition of my photos.

Though perhaps a little exaggerated, I have seen images of bonsai, portraits and other photos with a strong focal point, cropped as badly as this. Why does this image look wrong to most people who study it, even those with no bonsai knowledge?

If the flow of direction of this bonsai is studied, even briefly, the visual movement is very strongly towards the left. Therefore the focal point (the bonsai) should be on the right hand side.

With the flow of movement of the tree found and the tree positioned in the composition correctly, the photograph looks correct. (Just compare the difference with the previous cropping).



At this point it is worth mentioning that some images don't have pronounced movement left or right.



This image of Da Vinci's 'The Lost Battle of Angiari', is a good example of an image where the focal point is better placed centrally.

If the direction of movement of the main figures in this image are studied, their movement is inwards towards a central point. The figures on the right face left, the figures on the left, face right. All movement can be considered to be inward facing.



The focal points of this image are already balanced and to balance the composition overall, the focal point is placed centrally.

Some focal points such as the one above all equally face outwards; again creating a focal point that is naturally balanced. Off-center positioning of the focal point is therefore unnecessary.

A naturally balanced focal point can also be considered as being a focal point without movement.

Now the movement of a focal point and the repositioning of focal points according to their movement, have been established in this article. How can you apply movement to the focal point (the bonsai) yourself?

When styling a bonsai, the bonsai artist can decide which way he would like the movement of the tree to face and how much movement there should be. There are no real hard and fast rules when deciding how much movement can be added to a tree and indeed, in which direction the movement should be.

Essentially, the movement of the overall tree should imitate the movement of its trunk. While it is fine to have a strong, thick-trunked deciduous tree with a balanced canopy (like one you might see on a large meadow tree like an Oak) with little or no movement, a Juniper with a contorted trunk like that shown below, shouldn't have foliage that is balanced, it should have movement one way or the other.

As explored previously in this article, the movement of this Juniper is towards the left. The majority of the foliage is on the left hand side of the trunk, facing towards the left hand side.



If I wished to make the tree more restful and balanced, I could reduce the foliage mass on the left and increase the foliage mass on the right.



If I wanted the movement of the tree to be towards the right, I would need to place even greater emphasis on the foliage that is on the right hand side of the trunk and faces the right. Which of these three options is 'best' is subjective and lies in the hands of the artist.



Indicators of Movement

Particular to Bonsai For our purposes, an article on visual movement would not be complete without mentioning the visual strength of the apex and the first branch on a bonsai. In Bonsai, both the first branch and the apex are very strong indicators of movement (focal points); if the first branch of a bonsai (or sometimes the branch with the lowest foliage) faces left, it is very difficult to make the movement of the tree face right convincingly.

Notice the first branch in the last Juniper image and compare it to the previous images. For the tree with movement facing right to be convincing, the lowest foliage had to be moved to the right and the previous first branch on the left, had to be lifted and lightened. The apex of all bonsai has two sides, one steeper than the other; the steeper side indicates the direction of movement and nearly always reinforces the direction of the first branch.

Again, as such a strong indicator of movement, it is difficult (though not impossible) to convincingly show movement one way or the other if the first branch and the apex face in opposite directions.



The above image has the Juniper with strong movement to the left, (including a strong first branch towards the left) but, has the right-facing apex taken from the previous image.

The conflict movement of the left first branch and right facing apex is very unsettling to the eye.

Why Take Any Notice of Movement?

Movement has to be acknowledged for a bonsai design to be successfully convincing; if a bonsai doesn't quite look 'right', consider whether its movement is satisfying to the eye.

It must always be remembered that though the rules of Movement in Art and Design are known to few, all potential viewers of your work will subconsciously 'see' and acknowledge movement as being 'right' or 'wrong' in their eyes.

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

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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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Meetings cont. from pg 1

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.

Program 2: GNOBS Styling Competition 7:00pm

GNOBS will supply some nice reasonably priced junipers for entrants to purchase. All competitors will receive a randomly selected juniper that they will style during the meeting. The winner will be determined by a panel of experienced judges. A sign up sheet and more information will be available at the meetings.

President cont. from pg 1

last here as club guest in 2018. He was also here for our hosting of the Louisiana Day of Bonsai in 2021. Byron is an excellent potter and has taught ceramics for years, we are lucky to have him return! Byron will do a demonstration on his pottery wheel and go over techniques for making extruded pottery Friday night. If you didn't make it into the workshop you are welcome to come be a silent observer Saturday.

Dennis Burke
GNOBS President



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