



The Bonsai News of Houston

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE
Houston Bonsai Society, Inc.

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September 2003

September Meeting—Annual Club Auction

The next meeting of the Houston Bonsai Society (HBS) will be Wednesday, September 3 at 7:30 p.m. at the Houston Garden Center in Hermann Park, 1500 Hermann Drive. Refreshments will be served at 7 p.m. Come early so you can visit with other members before the meeting begins.

The September meeting will be our annual club auction. I would like to extend a personal invitation to all club members to come and participate in the club's major fundraising event of the year. Donations for the auction should be bonsai-related items such as trees in different stages of development, books, tree stands, pots, tools and aprons. Bonsai memorabilia from famous bonsai masters, logo pins and gift certificates are also great items to have to auction.

Although the list of items is almost endless...the one item everyone needs to bring is their checkbook! That's right—this is a fund-raiser and the club benefits from your generosity.

So come join us and have a good time and bid early and often in order to take home those items you can't live without.

See you at the auction!

--Ken

Saturday Study Group, Sept. 13

Our study group will meet Saturday, September 13, at 9 a.m. at Bayland Center in Bayland Park, 6400 Bissonnet (Bissonnet at Hillcroft--south of 59 and east of Fondren). Everyone is welcome--beginners and seasoned veterans.

Roy Nagatoshi Here Fri.-Sat., Sept. 26-27

Roy Nagatoshi, this year's Texas Tour Artist, will be in Houston September 26 and 27th. The annual Texas Tour is sponsored and subsidized by the Lone Star Bonsai Federation (LSBF) with profits from the state conventions.

Friday Lecture/Demo. Roy will have a lecture/demo Friday night at 7:00 p.m. at the Garden Center in Hermann Park. He will style a large Ashe juniper that Vito Megna collected several years ago. The tree will be raffled off Friday night at the conclusion of his lecture/demo. The observer fee for Friday night will be \$5.00 per person.

Saturday Workshop. Saturday morning Roy will start a bring-your-own-tree workshop at 9:00 a.m. at Houston Garden Center. The cost of this workshop will be \$25.00 per tree per participant and a \$5.00 per observer. If enough people sign up, we will have a second workshop. The first workshop is limited to the first 10 people who sign up and pay the \$25.00 charge at the September HBS meeting. Please note that this is a bring-your-own-tree workshop and let's bring some quality material for Roy to work with.

For Roy's biographical sketch, see page 47, below.

We are looking forward to seeing everyone Friday night and Saturday. Let's have a good attendance.

--Buddy

Fall Bonsai Show October 11-12

The HBS fall show will be October 11 and 12 in the Houston Garden Center in Hermann Park, 1500 Hermann Drive. The show times will be 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Saturday, and 10:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Sunday.

HBS members are encouraged to display one, or more, trees. We plan to have a variety of trees on exhibit, ranging from the small shohin to the larger trees that stand three to four feet. On both days, several members will conduct demonstrations and give presentations while they work on trees. We are asking members to volunteer for two or three hours as hosts, to greet and answer questions of visitors. Vendor members will be available for visitors (and members) who might want to take home their own tree(s), plant materials, tools, bonsai pots, books, videos, and other bonsai-related materials. The fall and spring shows are indeed our opportunities to share with the Houston community our trees and our love for the bonsai art.

Set-up time for the show will be Friday 6:30-8:00 p.m. Members may bring their trees on Friday night or early Saturday morning, but it is best to bring trees on Friday night to get an early start and be a part of the fun in setting up an exhibit. We would like to ask all members to please leave their trees on exhibit until at least 4:00 p.m. on Sunday.

--Donald

Monthly Bonsai Care

by John Miller

John Miller, who writes a monthly column for the Bonsai Society of Dallas and the Fort Worth Bonsai Society, has agreed to share his column with us. We need to make adjustments for our warmer, damper climate with its long summers, early springs, late falls, and erratic winters.

Check the trees you still have wire on. When the cooler days get here some trees will expand their branches and get wire cuts rather quickly. You need to check them periodically over the winter also. Winter growth will usually be pretty slow but can occur, especially on the evergreens. Cut the wire off. You can easily break the branches trying to unwrap the wire and its just not worth trying to save the wire. If you need to reapply some wire, take care. Remember that the branches will be more brittle when the sap is not flowing.

Watering now becomes harder. As trees slow their growth, they do not take as much water. Neither will they transpire as much on the cooler days. So check each one separately and water as often and as much as the individual tree requires.

You should help the plant slow down and get ready for winter by not applying nitrogen fertilizer about 90 days before the first freeze. This would be the first part of September in the Dallas-Ft Worth area. Out here in the boonies, I will stop before Sept 1. The reason is that nitrogen causes new growth to occur and will not have time to mature before a freeze occurs. You may fertilize with one with a formulation like 0-10-10. The other two, phosphorous and potassium, help the general hardiness of the plant and can be applied now. Evergreens, both needled and broadleaf, and tropical species that will be kept growing through the winter will benefit from a low nitrogen fertilizer.

Two things you can do now. You should prepare your winter quarters and you should study your evergreen trees to determine if you need to do any restyling later on this fall.

Check on the place you expect to winter your bonsai. Make sure that it is clean and that you will be able to check the water needs of the trees. It should be somewhat protected from winds but should have some air movement to help prevent molds from developing. Having it in a location where you can see the trees would allow you to enjoy the winter silhouette, i.e., the branch structure and twiginess, that is a great part of deciduous bonsai.

There is not too much to be done on deciduous trees at this time. Bugs and other problems are usually not a matter of concern since the foliage will be dropping soon. Evergreens and tropicals will still need to be watched for their insect problems, especially the spider mite which will be active into fall. Use the Garrett Juice formula to control them. If we should have a stretch of damp weather, you should be watching for fungal problems, leaf spot, mildew, etc. Treat fungal problems with Garrett Juice with potassium bicarbonate added (baking soda--sodium

bicarbonate--will work about as well). I would be okay with using a 1% hydrogen peroxide solution at this time of the year for fungal control.

Pruning and trimming can be done any time that there is not a lot of sap flowing. Sap flow is indicated by the foliar activity of the plant like in the spring. If your tree went into summer dormancy which occurs during hot weather, then the cooler weather might result in a larger sap flow in late summer or early fall. If your plant gets a flush of new growth, it would be advisable to postpone large pruning cuts for a while. Basically let you tree tell you when it is ok to operate.

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Correction

In the August newsletter, I erroneously omitted the author of the article on the Texas State Bonsai Exhibit. John Miller wrote the story. I'm sorry, John, but I'll take this opportunity to thank you for all your work in the promotion of bonsai in Texas. We appreciate it, and we in general, and I personally, particularly appreciate your monthly column on bonsai care. It is top notch. --ed.

Roy Nagatoshi

Roy Nagatoshi became involved in Bonsai in 1959. He learned the art of Bonsai from his father, Shigeru, and from John Naka and by reading numerous Japanese bonsai books. Roy has a B.S. degree in ornamental horticulture and has been conducting workshops and lecture-demonstrations since 1976. Bonsai teaching tours include numerous states in the USA, Canada, South Africa, Brazil, Australia and Mexico. Roy has been featured in major conventions nationally and internationally. He taught bonsai at the Community College and also conducts classes year round at his bonsai nursery, Fuji Bonsai Nursery. Roy is a past president of the California Bonsai Society and was credited as the bonsai specialist in the major motion picture, *Karate Kid III*.

Letter from the President. . .

Nominating Committee. I have appointed a nominating committee for the elections coming up in December. As required by the bylaws, I will chair the committee. I have appointed Paula Hickman, Donald Green and Buddy Allen to the committee. They have all agreed to serve. This year we will be looking for a secretary, a first vice president, and two new members-at-large.

I want to thank everybody for the work they have and are still doing. Without willing volunteers, the club would die. It takes a lot of time and hard work to keep the club going, as well as forward thinking. Thanks again.

Librarian Needed. We are still looking for a librarian for the club. If there is anybody that would like to act as the club librarian, all help would be appreciated. Some of the new members may not know about the club library. We have a very good library, with tapes as well as books. The library is free to the members of the club. You only have to sign out the books or tapes and return them when finished. The library is furnished from gifts and items the club has purchased. If you are interested, contact me, Virgil Curtis, at curtis.virgil@verizon.net.

A Thanks to Ed Thacker. At our last meeting Mr. Ed Thacker made a donation to the club of three pots and some hand written information on different trees. Mr. Thacker, a past president of the club, brought some notes from the past efforts of the club. The notes are Japanese information translated into English. They will be added to the club library for all to use.

--Virgil Curtis

Last Words on Soil, for Now. . .

I found the article on soils in the last few newsletters to be very informative. The information was thorough, well written and easy to understand and apply. I have put this information in my records for keeps and for review. It has strengthened my knowledge and increased the chances of my success with bonsai trees--a sharing of knowledge that increases the enjoyment and results in a longer lived hobbies.

--Virgil

* * *

Many thanks to Paul Weishaar for sharing the soil article with us. I have one comment on part 4. This is probably of little relevance to somebody living well north of Conroe, Texas, but here in Houston, parts of which may be in the subtropics, with long, long, long--and hot--summers, we grow a lot of tropical bonsai. They compensate for all the things we cannot grow in our

climate. So it is important that our members remember that the rule about not fertilizing in the summer does not apply to tropical bonsai. They need to be fertilized during the summer. I double checked with Buddy Allen about this and his comments are printed below. My recollection is that Mary Miller recommends weekly feeding for many tropicals in the hottest part of the summer.

--Dolores

* * *

I fertilize my "tropicals" all year long, the normal amount from April to September. I fertilize from October through March a very small amount (one tenth). Please remember that tropicals grow all year long, and there is very little food value in your typical bonsai soil mix.

This is what works for me and like what has been said before what works for me might not work for someone else.

--Buddy

Calendar of Events

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| Sept. 3 | Monthly Meeting of HBS. 7:30, Hermann Park CLUB AUCTION! |
| Sept. 13 | Saturday Study Group, 9:00, Bayland Park 6400 Bissonnet (Bissonnet at Hillcroft) |
| Sept 20 | Shohin Society of Texas, Carving & Follow Up TexShohin@.com or 512-280-5575 |
| Fri., Sept. 26 | Nagatoshi Lecture-Demo, 7:00 p.m., \$5.00 Houston Garden Center, Hermann Park |
| Sat., Sept. 27 | Nagatoshi workshops, \$5 to observe, \$25 to participate. Houston Garden Center. |
| Oct. 11-12 | HBS Fall Show |
| Nov. 15 | Saturday Study Group, 9:00, Bayland Park |
| 2004 | |
| Feb. 6-8 | Shohin Seminar, Ramada Inn (1-209-826-4444), Santa Nella, CA |
| Apr. 3-4 | HBS Spring Show |
| Oct. 9-10 | HBS Fall Show |
| May 21-23 | LSBF State Convention, Houston. Kathy Shaner, Guy Guidry, Mary Miller |

Bonsai and That Pesky Scalene Triangle

By Ron Martin

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Thanks to HBS member Jim Stone for submitting this article and obtaining written permission for us to use it. As Jim put it, this article "puts design into 'perspective' for folks."

Ever wonder what all the talk concerning that scalene triangle is all about. Just why is it so important in bonsai? Most bonsai have more curves than straight lines, so why not an oval? Is that scalene triangle a triangle or just a group of reference points for height, width and depth? A boundary so to speak in which our bonsai is confined? If so why? Just how does a tree's growth pattern relate to that scalene triangle? How does it make our little bonsai seem so big, so old and massive?

Why, of all things is it so important ?

I have posed some big questions here, the answers to which are not all that complicated but will take more than just a few words to answer. Surprisingly enough most of the answers have nothing to do with bonsai.

Bonsai is more an art of illusion than anything else. We take something small and try to make it look as big and as old as we can.

Forget art for a bit and let's just go with the illusion. Think about what makes things look big.

Go to the tallest building you can find. Look up. The walls seem to converge. The top of the building will seem to lean toward you. Look left and right. The sidewalk and the top of the building will start to converge off in the distance.

These are the visual cues that the brain associates with a large object. In bonsai we exaggerate these cues. The angles of our outline are more pronounced. The lean at the top a bit greater.

In bonsai, we crunch down a 60-foot tree to a much smaller area. The brain is fooled by the "triangles" we see. What was small is now big.

The answer to the first part of the question is perspective--or better yet trickery. This has nothing to do with art, just setting the stage, fooling the brain to think something is bigger.

Are we talking triangles or just converging lines?

All of us have seen that straight road that goes on forever. The edges of that road seem to almost come to a point way off in the distance. We know that the road is a constant 20 feet wide, so why does the road appear to be much narrower way off at the horizon? Our eyes distort the road. Items further away seem smaller. The brain interprets this as distance.

The same thing happens when up look up at a tall object. The sides converge.

This is something we can use to fool the brain--convince it that our little tree is much larger than it actually is.

Consider the trunk of the bonsai. What is usually desired is a trunk with movement and good taper. Nothing new there. But does that taper make the trunk look taller? Older and more massive? Will increasing that taper make it look taller? Will a drastic taper seem to make it more massive?

The same goes with a branch when viewed from the trunk out.

With trees our brain associates age with size and mass. This taper gives us mass, thus perceived age.

Using the same principle and looking upward, the brain expects the lower branches to appear longer than those further away.

So now let's fool the senses.

We set the viewer up. We dictate where the eyes go by adjusting the viewing height of our bonsai, forcing the viewer's eyes to a point about half way up the trunk of our little tree.

Now that the eyes are there, we have all those converging lines radiating out from that spot. Presto, the tree appears taller, more massive. This is trick number one.

One thing to remember though is, once I put all these converging lines together to form our bonsai, I do come up with a triangle of sorts.

So now we are back to the beginning. Just why is that scalene triangle so important? First and foremost is perspective, forced perspective at that. There are other more subtle reasons. The triangle implies:

1. Stability - The triangle is a shape with a wide base and therefore can not be easily knocked over (blown over?). The relativity of this to bonsai should be obvious, age = stability.
2. Scalene - symmetry is also a sign of stability but it does not include a lot of variety and/or interest. In bonsai terms, the symmetrical tree could become a tree by rote rather than a tree of artistic merit. Scalene is NOT symmetrical so avoids that problem but therefore needs the stability of the triangle--therefore a scalene (non-symmetrical) triangle.
3. Implied - By creating a bonsai with just the limits or corners of a scalene triangle evident, the artist requires the viewer to become a participant in the artistic work therefore adding interest for the viewer.

Are there other artistic schemes? Of course! Should all bonsai be forced into the scalene triangle format? Of course not!

So where does the scalene triangle fit in? As a guideline; as a beginning; as a safety net; as a tool. Just another thing we do to fool the senses into thinking something is bigger than it is.

What goes on in that triangle is the artistic part of the equation. But first we must create the illusion. Give the brain what it needs to think on a grander scale.

Take a photograph of a large tree. Make sure that there is nothing else in that picture that will give one a sense of scale. No cars, buildings, people, etc.

That 60-foot tall tree is now reduced to a 3x5-inch piece of paper. But even in the photo it still looks big.

Look closely at that photo. Find those converging lines (or triangles if you wish). See how the brain was fooled by that small photo. Now all we have to do is repeat this in our bonsai.

There are other tricks we have to fool the brain. Visual weight is one that comes to mind. But that is a subject much more complex and deserves an article of its own.

The most important thing to remember is that all these tricks are just tools. Just like those scissors, wire and concave cutters, nothing more or less.

Like the artist's paint brush, they are just a means to create the art. How these tools are used is up to the artist. But how and when these tools are used will govern how successful you are. Learn not only the "rules" but understand them. Know what results you derive from them. Then select the ones that fit the composition you are working on.

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