



## Becoming a Bonsai

By Aarin Packard

*“There are no borders in bonsai. The dove of peace flies to palace as to humble house, to young as to old, to rich and poor. So does the spirit of bonsai.”*

This quote of John Naka’s conveys the universal appeal of bonsai. The art of bonsai is described as being unbound by one’s surroundings, age or economic status. As the Assistant Curator of the Bonsai Collections, I see this precept revealed in the diversity of visitors who come to the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum to view this unique collection of living sculpture.

Since bonsai is for everyone, how can we at the Museum encourage our visitors to take that first step down the path of bonsai? One response to that question is given through our summer exhibit *Becoming a Bonsai*. The exhibit, which runs from July 4th thru August 31st, focuses on the steps involved in taking a rough piece of plant material and turning it into a bonsai. It is my hope that after viewing this exhibit our visitors will feel confident enough to try creating their own bonsai.



Exhibit Poster.

The star of *Becoming a Bonsai* is a Crape Myrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica*), one of many trees of this species that were part of a genetic scientific research experiment at the U.S. National Arboretum. But I chose this particular tree because I saw that it had the potential to be styled as a bonsai.

The exhibit is divided into five sections that describe the creative process with images, objects, and text. The first

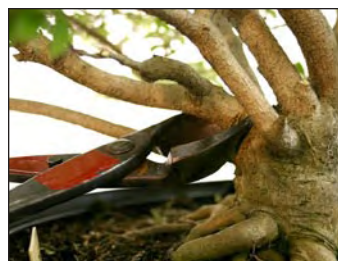
section asks: “Can I find the bonsai within?” In this section, I explain that bonsai are miniature artistic representations of natural trees and in order to create a bonsai, it is important to observe how trees grow in nature. In the next section, I explain what is the front of the bonsai and how you find it. The third section focuses on the basic principles of pruning. To help convey these pruning techniques, several “wire trees” originally created, used and donated by Toshio

Kawamoto are displayed. In section four, I demonstrate how wire is used to further refine the shape of a bonsai. Here illustrations, taken from John Naka’s book *Bonsai Techniques*, show how a tree is wired to style it. Also included in this section is a plaque of John’s that demonstrates the various types and gauges of bonsai wire. The final section deals with the repotting

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Tree Front.



Pruning.



Wiring.



Repotting.

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## President's Letter



"Bonsai is for everyone," as Aarin Packard points out in this issue's cover story. Whether the practitioner is young or old, bonsai opens a door to the beauty of nature. We can then better appreciate all that is around us, and feel more connected to our natural environment.

For bonsai teaches us a new language—the language of nature itself. Nature talks to us through bonsai and then we are able to listen more carefully to her message and to begin to look at our natural world through the prism of another living thing whose life is in our care. The wonder and mystery of a bonsai becomes reverence for all of nature, and we treat our planet more gently.

To see Aarin's explanation of how easy it is to begin learning this universal language—understood by bonsai

lovers all over the world, please visit the new exhibition on *Becoming a Bonsai* at the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum if you are here in Washington, D.C., or view it on the NBF website ([www.bonsai-nbf.org](http://www.bonsai-nbf.org)).

We shall dearly miss **Jean Smith** and **Alice Greaves**, both of whom passed away recently. Jean was a key leader in the American bonsai community who, as an NBF Director and on behalf of many other bonsai organizations, helped to expand greatly the art of bonsai in the United States. Alice Greaves will always be remembered at the Museum for the stunning American viewing stone exhibit that she and her husband Jim presented last year in the Special Exhibits Wing of the International Pavilion.

Like others mentioned in this column in the past, Alice and Jean have given us a legacy to cherish: they opened their hearts to the world of bonsai and viewing stones and then selflessly passed this love of nature on to others.

*Felix*

### *Becoming a Bonsai*

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process and shown here is a set of soil sieves that once belonged to Yuji Yoshimura. These help to explain the importance of choosing the right soil in growing a bonsai. Each of the five sections includes photographs of me working on the bonsai-to-be. Finally, as the visitor exits the exhibit, the completed bonsai is displayed on a pedestal.

My goal for this exhibit was to make bonsai more approachable to visitors by showing that growing and styling a tree is within the reach of anyone who is willing to acquire the proper skills. It is the responsibility of the National

Bonsai & Penjing Museum, with support from the bonsai community, to replace the many misconceptions about caring for bonsai. We can do that by providing information that teaches the correct techniques and displaying illustrations that demonstrate sound practices. I think that the exhibit **Becoming a Bonsai** is one way of achieving this objective.

And it is my hope that this show will inspire more people to create a bonsai so that the spirit of this wonderful art will spread.

*More information on the exhibit **Becoming a Bonsai** can be viewed on the NBF website at <http://www.bonsai-nbf.org/site/exhibits.html>.*

Visit NBF's Website:  
[www.bonsai-nbf.org](http://www.bonsai-nbf.org)

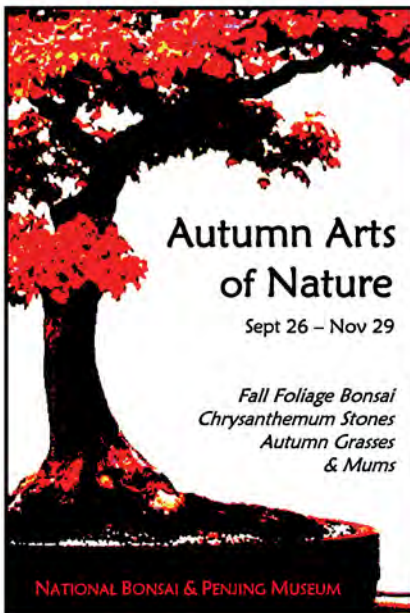
## Museum Notes

- **Bob Carlson** of San Francisco, California recently donated a Mountain Stone to the National Viewing Stone Collection.



Winter Mountain Stone. Collected from Thomes Creek California. Gift of Bob Carlson, 2009

- When tree leaves change colors, grasses go to seed, and chrysanthemums bloom in frosty temperatures—these signal the end of the annual growth cycle in nature. The focus of the *Autumn Arts in Nature* Exhibit (September 26 through November 29) is the transient beauty of autumn. The display in the Special Exhibits Wing will change weekly to incorporate bonsai, kusamono and chrysanthemums at their most seasonally poetic moments.



Poster of the Exhibit.

- Early this Spring **Sasha Obama**, the youngest daughter of President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama, visited the Museum with her class from Sidwell Friends School. Students were urged by staff to return soon and to bring their parents!

## Another Great Bonsai Festival!



First place winner of the Juried Bonsai Exhibit Joe Gutierrez with David DeGroot.



David Kreutz teaching in the Yoshimura Center.



Felix Laughlin, Harry Hirao, Jack Sustic, Carl Morimoto and LeAnn Duling at the conclusion of Harry's demonstration.



Harry Hirao works on the tree of the late Kaz Yoneda.



Vendor Tent in the Great Meadow.



Chuck Croft (PBA President), Todd Stewart (Juried Show Winner), David DeGroot (Presenter), Stephen Moran (Juried Show Winner), Felix Laughlin (NBF President), and Tom Elias (Arboretum Director) in the Maria R. Vanzant Upper Courtyard.



Peter Bloomer and NBF Board members Fay Sharer and Mary Bloomer enjoying the reception.



Guests in the International Pavilion indulging in refreshments.



Godfrey Trammel (PBA), Kathleen Emerson-Dell (Assistant Curator), John Ruth (PBA) and Chase Rosade (NBF).



Cheryl Inglesby, Museum Volunteers, Richard Winchester and Tom Inglesby, and Nancy Winchester in the Special Exhibits Wing.

## Jean Smith 1925–2009

By Donna Banting

Jean Smith, a long time supporter of the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum, died on May 15, 2009, in her home city of Fort Walton Beach, Florida.

Jean was a protégé of the late Ed Potter, the first President of Bonsai Societies of Florida (BSF). During the early 1970s their work together brought about a solid federation of 16 member groups and the formation of *Florida Bonsai Magazine*. This provided the foundation for hosting Bonsai Clubs International Bonsai Congress in 1975. She was also President of her local organization, the Fort Walton Beach Bonsai Society, and was a mentor to its members. In addition she served as President of Bonsai Societies of Florida, President of Bonsai Clubs International, editor of BCI's *Bonsai Magazine*, and she was a National Bonsai Foundation board member. She also co-chaired the World Bonsai Convention, the *International Bonsai Congress 1993*, which was hosted by BSF, BCI and the World Bonsai Friendship Federation.

Her many bonsai accomplishments were well known by friends and family along with members of BSF. Together they honored her work by the installation of the Chinese Scholar's Studio in the Mary E. Mrose International Pavilion



Jean Smith

at the Museum. Jean initiated many bonsai programs; for example she started the *Ben Oki Bonsai Workshops* for a Florida prison and began a work/study program in Japan for young bonsai enthusiasts. She established strong and lasting friendships with bonsai artists and hobbyists around the world and was especially instrumental in encouraging new talent.

While on one of her travels on behalf of bonsai, Jean, with her husband Ed Smith, was involved in a devastating auto accident that caused serious injuries for her and resulted in many surgeries. Over the last several years, although suffering much pain and discomfort, she continued to hold a weekly get together with bonsai friends.

Jean Smith loved trees and she learned to love stones. A devout missionary for bonsai, she will be deeply missed.

## Alice Kikue Greaves, 1935–2009

Alice Greaves, who was best known to friends of the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum for the 2008 exhibit, *Beyond the Black Mountain: Color, Pattern and Form in American Viewing Stones*, died in Santa Monica, California this past May.

Alice was born in Hawaii and moved to California in 1960. In 1988 she met Jim Greaves and very quickly adopted his passion for the appreciation of viewing stones and the collection and display of them. Together they developed an extensive personal collection, which they made available to the public through exhibitions at institutions in California, Washington State, and at this Museum.

The acclaimed Washington D.C. exhibition included the catalogue *American Viewing Stones—Beyond the Black Mountain: Color, Pattern and Form*, published by the American Viewing Stone Resource Center, which was founded by the Greaves. As part of the program at the Museum the Greaves presented a workshop for children and lectured on *Viewing Stones and the Art of Display*.

Throughout their time here last year Alice, Jim and their little dog Taka enthusiastically welcomed visitors and joyously shared their infectious love of stones. A personal testimony to the life of Alice by Jim Greaves can be read in the



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Alice Greaves.

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