

**Next Club Meeting:
January 26, 2017**

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**PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE:
Ron Milostan**

Aaron Binn's article last month sure got me thinking. America is spending 10 times more money than Japan on Bonsai. I heard that someplace, I'm pretty sure it was 10 times, maybe it was 100 times, I am not sure. (Please excuse my political pun). If you can't I am willing to debate this but I want a very clear microphone.

So with America spending 100 times more money than Japan on bonsai I am sure the movement is becoming Americanized. When I say Americanized I am suggesting that the styling of bonsai is becoming more artistic and the displaying of bonsai trees is also becoming more artistic. Having attended the recent 5th U.S. National Bonsai Exhibition with Bill Valavanis in Rochester, New York this Americanization was very prevalent. However, we are also not losing the Japanese discipline and styling; this will always remain as a strong foundation. We are only taking this bonsai art to another level. Having the artist express an emotion when displaying the bonsai opens up a new avenue- another eye with which to view bonsai. That said, the more bonsai you look at and study the more you will

understand what makes it so visually appealing. When you see a bonsai that appeals to you, ask yourself what is appealing about it. What did the artist do to make you react? Remember these trees rarely look this way on their own. It's quite difficult to grow a "bonsai looking" tree naturally. Sure there are many yamadori trees that have a shock or amaze factor but the foliage of these is still in need of styling to give a pleasing and realistic eye appeal.

I am sure we will always have several forms of bonsai, be it Chinese, Japanese or American (artistically enhanced). I invite more discussion of this topic at meetings and on our Facebook Page.

Bill Struhar has an article in this issue which helps to explain American Bonsai. Also check out The Unbridled Art of Ryan Neil on his Web Page.

**SEPTEMBER'S PROGRAM RE-CAP:
Paul Kulesa**

September has come to mean the annual bonsai auction for members of the Ann Arbor Bonsai Society. For me there is a tinge of anxiety associated with this program for I feel responsible to ensure a smooth and seamless program for the members. This year I did get a little closer to my goal.

The success of the auction is due to those who took on those tasks to administer the auction. These members have my gratitude; Vicki Norfleet, David Glover, Bill Struhar, Don Wenzel, Dan Angelucci, Carmen Leskoviansky, Tom McCue, Jay Sinclair, Cyril Grum, John Cerovski and Becky & Mark Hanner.

The live and silent auctions were successful. There were thirteen members who brought items to sell and there were forty-seven registered buyers. The silent auction had 26 items to sell offered by six members. The live auction had fifty-one items sold by 10 sellers. Bill Struhar and Tom McCue returned serving as auctioneers.

UP FOR DEBATE:

An American Contribution

Aaron J. Binns

Just Breath

Don't panic. It's fall.

I know, I know, we all appreciate a break in the sweltering heat of summer when cool night breezes can be used as effective air conditioning and nature itself puts on one last spectacular show of beauty. Cider mills are running full tilt and it just isn't autumn unless you can enjoy a freshly backed warm apple cider doughnut. And then there is football. Glorious collegiate football. Despite all of these wonders I experience a certain amount of apprehension at this point in the season. It isn't that I don't enjoy what we are all experiencing now; I just hate what I know is coming. Winter my friends is upon us.

So what is a poor bonsai aficionado to do? We are just about to experience 6 months of boredom after all. No trimming and shaping to be done, no feeding schedules to maintain. I may even miss watering come mid-January. Smaller things have sent better men into despair. Did you know that Winston Churchill experienced depression? He referred to prolonged fits of depression as the "Black Dog". Granted he had World War II to worry about but sometimes I think that was only slightly worse than living through a Michigan winter. (Why didn't our ancestors settle in Hawaii?) So what advice would Sir Churchill give?

"To be really happy and really safe, one ought to have at least two or three hobbies, and they must all be real." Good to know that Churchill saw the benefit of hobbies too. Bonsai is a time consuming venture so in the winter look for another hobby that can fill your time. This can be as simple as catching up on some reading you have wanted to do. I have always wanted to try pottery. Wouldn't it be great if you could make your own

pots? (By the way, anyone know where to get pottery lessons?)

"We shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender." So don't give up. Keep fighting. Some of what I said in the opening paragraph isn't even true. There is still trimming and care to be given. If you don't have a tropical go get one. Two maybe. Also, use the winter down time to learn something new. Read a bonsai book or make plans for next spring. Here is a gardening tip I was given once: late winter you will receive seed catalogues use the deep freeze to plan next year's garden.

"I expect you will find that change is the best kind of rest." Let's face it the growing season is long. Don't be afraid to relax and stay inside for a bit. As much as I would like to say that every moment I spend with my trees is blissful, the truth is that it gets old. I actually look forward to a bit of a slowdown and you should too.

This month's debate question is a simple one. How do you pass your time in the winter when the trees are mostly all sleeping?

If all else fails and you still begin to miss the warmth of the sun there is another Churchill quote that I would like to leave you with. It speaks for itself.

"I could not live without Champagne. In victory I deserve it. In defeat I need it."

American Bonsai

Bill Struhar

Aaron Bins asks, "If there is such a thing, what is an American bonsai?"

Bill Struhar opines: "Well, it depends upon what the meaning of "is", is....

I had a precursor conversation 15 years ago on a few online bonsai blogs, and I was shouted down by prominent North American bonsai artists who all insisted that Japanese styles and methods (one not less important than the other) established the definitions of what is and what ain't Bonsai. During a few weeks of ongoingdiscussion... only an occasional onlooker joined my

side. I was disappointed, and surprised, but not deterred from the belief that there was such a thing as American Bonsai.

The basic premise of Aaron's question is clear: if there is an American bonsai, it is something definable. I have some thoughts that I would like to offer that are precursors to this discussion: Japanese culture is not like American culture. One is not better than the other, just different. Each has relative strengths and weaknesses, and each have decidedly different roots. Some of the strengths are pluses, and some are negatives in relation to bonsai. Some of the weaknesses are negatives, and some are positives, in relation to bonsai.

In Japan, the population is very homogeneous, -a wild understatement. In America, by the third generation most people have to stop and think when asked their ethnic heritage. By the fourth or fifth generation the question gets really hard or impossible to answer. The human tissue may be nearly identical, but the thinking process is shaped, differently, in each culture, and we can only escape it with great effort. In my opinion. We, Japanese and Americans, cannot imitate each other. We are whatever we are, and there's nothing wrong with that.

That said, I view bonsai in Japan as a Japanese discipline, not a hobby. And, I view bonsai in America as a hobby, with few Americans being able and willing to imitate Japanese discipline. In America, rigidity in almost anything is regarded as less than wonderful. In America, doing it My Way, is the order of the day.

Japanese culture revolves around self-discipline, -of knowing one's place in society, fitting-in and doing what is proper and especially, what is expected of you, respect for society, and veneration of one's culture including the aged, dead, authorities, and all things in nature. (I'm probably leaving out some important things, but I'm not Japanese.) After the big Tsunami in 2011 at Tohoku and the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster, the first response of the Japanese people was to appear in the streets with shovels and begin the clean-up.

Contrast that with American ideals/attitudes: The Me Generation was born here as was the New York minute and Political Correctness. We expect to do our own thing, to be inventive, creative, and find our own way. Americans are a diverse lot, and we are tolerant of others to a fault.

Our attention span needs work, but our desire for instant gratification leads the world. When you tell a prospective

bonsai enthusiast that it should take about five years for a starter tree to be a show-able tree, you can see it their face, the disappointment and the struggle to form the obvious next statement/question, "But how can I speed that up?" Our American attitudes have spawned millions of great inventions and technological advances because we respond to roadblocks by looking for a way around them rather than quietly waiting in line, but our society pays a price. Impatience. Add to that, humans in general respond poorly to criticism, and Americans are no exception. Critiques of our bonsai are often taken by us as personal criticisms instead of constructive advice. A sizeable portion of our trees in a show will be entered as "not judged", I speculate, for this reason.

Some of the Japanese characteristics that are invaluable in bonsai begin with the unquestioning respect for authority, the Masters of bonsai in this case, and the ability to do what is expected without a lot of complaining. But they can learn that from Americans and the rest of the world! Bonsai in Japan is not favored much by youth now, maybe because of the discipline associated with it. It is mostly an old man's thing, and many of the better trees are like race horses are here, cared for in professional nurseries and displayed on special occasions. In the olden days of Japan, before WWII, following the Master's instructions and the daily routine of watering and examining the tree for a bud that should be pinched or a wire to be removed or replaced was easier for the novice, because following instructions was ingrained. The pursuit of bonsai has diminished maybe because of the changes in Japanese society in the last 50 years. Anyway, we don't think like they used to. For good, bad, or indifferent, that's not us.

The self-discipline necessary in bonsai is still useful. A bonsai is like a dog. You need to do your part in caring for it every day. I tell beginners that bonsai is a hobby for the rest of your life. You need patience.

I can't think of anything useful to be contributed by American impatience, but our propensity to innovate, the "I did it my way" gene, might be useful. While the Italians are becoming famous for highly styled large trees, I'm not sure that it can be said that the Japanese haven't already exhausted every genre of possible bonsai form. After all, they've been at it for 400 years, and there are only so many ways to arrange the several parts. Of course there's always "modern art". A forest planting that had been burned down to charred stumps displayed by Dean Bull comes suspiciously close. I could offend all sorts of people by characterizing what passes for art in all the great galleries of New York and the world. And pop music has

evolved...sort of, to... sort of music. I hope that doesn't happen to bonsai. I know I'm not alone there. Rod King has taken deadwood to heights not seen in America, and one day you'll be able to say you knew him when... But that's still not new.

It's difficult to not characterize styling as the most important single component of what bonsai is. That said, what's left for Americans to affect? Horticulture methods and public acceptance and/or popularity as a hobby, are two areas that we might contribute something. A better soil formula may exist or be created, but having more than two people agree on it could be problematic. While everyone in bonsai seems to have their own formula, an outsider listening to a discussion of the differences only comes away with a better understanding of the term, nit-picking. Since growing bonsai is more a matter of each individual managing their own collection in a manner consistent with what works for them rather than a given soil formula working for all, a universal better formula will have an uphill battle. The tower of Babel comes to mind.

There IS lots of room for improvement in expanding the popularity of bonsai in America. It's a hobby for all skill and financial levels. I think the local clubs (two in the SE Michigan area) draw a steady stream of semi-interested new people to meetings and shows, but in my opinion, retain fewer as members than I think they should. People can do bonsai with a weed tree sapling pulled from next to any sidewalk and grown in a old food container. People with deeper pockets can satisfy their lust at the other end of the scale. People can exist at a skill level they are at peace with. Some people will be happy just to have a tree they can keep alive, and some people will leave no stone un-turned striving for the next level of great art. Clubs can be refuges for both, and at the same time.

We could make our mark in the bonsai world by making it a more wide-spread, common hobby here in America. After all, this is the home of the Pet Rock. Bonsai is a natural for OCD people. I tell people, "If you're a control freak, this is your dream hobby. Life or death, in your hands, -at your beck and call." If you are a quiet person and would like to retreat to your own corner and entertain yourself, this is for you! If you like to show-off your artistic skill whether you have any or not, this is your hobby. If you have lots of money and no skill or taste, you too, can have a great bonsai collection. If dogs raise their hackles and growl when you get close, you can have a substitute pet that requires about as much care and feeding. If you have children that need to learn the discipline of routine care, and are tired of buying a puppy every few weeks, this may be the answer. The sky is the

limit for expanding our membership.

I suspect that Americans have more hobbies and kinds of hobbies than any other people. We have more time and money than most, and watch too much TV, anyway.

Americans are ripe for the picking. I have urged in the past, and do again, club membership and management to do these things: (Some clubs already do some of these things)

1. Encourage people to freely attend club meetings, and only join if they want to. More prospects will attend if free, and it increases our exposure.
2. Have more meetings which are geared to new people starting bonsai, especially workshops with good, bullet-proof houseplants like Ficus and Arbutus. We have plenty of skilled old-timers who would be happy to spend a meeting with a single individual novice helping step-by-step with a plant small enough to do in two hours. Keep it cheap. Learning the concept by wiring a trunk & 4 or 5 branches is enough. We do NOT need to have many workshops with highly skilled outsiders, -as our subscription levels to these expensive workshops so aptly confirm.
3. Put on free Shows and displays as often and as widespread as possible. (I have had an exhibit of bonsai at the (Labor Day) Franklin Village Art Fair for 10 years. In some years other people have accompanied me and exhibited some of their trees, too. It's a great two-man adventure, but one person can do it. The public loves it. I spend all day answering cultural questions and listening to people tell me how great me and my trees are. I have an informational club flyer I give to people. I can hardly get back in my car because my head gets so big from the compliments all day long. The table space is free because I bring artistic eye-candy to the show, but I don't sell anything. I have done this in Royal Oak and Ferndale, but only have the time & energy for Franklin, now. There are similar art fairs all spring, summer and autumn. Most art fairs welcome eye-candy and will provide free space for non-selling exhibitors. I would be pleased to make the same arrangements for other bonsaiists.
4. Do styling demonstrations and/or speaking presentations for garden and other kinds of club meetings. (I do them for free, but they will pay a honorarium. Interesting speakers are hard to find.)
5. Lead/teach beginner workshops for garden clubs, schools, art groups, etc. You can buy starter Ficus, wire,

soil, scissors and concave cutters, and ordinary \$6 to \$8 pots for ~\$50 to \$65 per student in groups of ~6, and they will gladly pay \$75. You will do a good deed, advance the art, and enjoy your afternoon. It's another good one OR two man adventure.

My little animals, unusual rocks, mudmen, and Buddha figurines are devices that (I hope) provide complimentary and/or contrasts of extra interest for my bonsai display. I only continue because the public likes it. I especially enjoy seeing a small child get excited that he has found the animals that his parents missed. With the animals in the large forest, I intend to create in the public's mind a scene of peace and tranquility that they can momentarily see themselves enter and be burned into their memory for years. Hopefully, they'll want to someday have a bonsai of their own, too. The judges never get it. For them, the animals get in the way!

I lean towards the Chinese end of the strictly plain-Jane, no-nonsense, Japanese discipline verses the fancy schmancy, enjoy your art, Chinese end of the scale. Someday I will make Penjing, too. I'm old and still making plans, still planting seeds. I'm getting my money's worth out of bonsai, and urge others to do the same.

American bonsai is our approach. Bonsai as a hobby, not as a discipline, that's American bonsai. And, it's already here, -just in a small way, for now.

OCTOBER MEETING

October 26 - Monthly Meeting

Aaron Wiley discussed the reasons, goals and objectives of fertilizing, timing fertilizer application and fertilizers.

FOR SALE OR WANTED:

Ads in the Newsletter: All members can offer for sale any bonsai and bonsai related materials in the newsletter or at the monthly meeting with no sales fee. AABS Society Members' ads are free to publish in the Newsletter. Deadline for submissions to the Newsletter is the 5th of the month.

Prizes for the Raffle: We are soliciting donations suitable for prizes to be raffled during each general meeting, and,

for the Annual Bonsai Show Raffle. If you have a tree, bonsai pot, tool or anything else bonsai related, that you do not use anymore and is still in good condition, consider donating it to the Society. Please see Bill Struhar at any meeting, email Bill at wm.struhar@mail.com or call (586) 468-7169.

Club Logo Now Available: we will embroider the club logo on your garment for \$12 (plus modest additional charge for lined garments).

The logo comes in two forms; light green tree on dark green background, or dark green tree on light green background, with a border on both combinations and AABS lettering and Chinese characters with appropriate contrasting color depending upon the garment color.

Bring your garment in a clear plastic bag to a meeting, select your colors, pre-pay Bill Struhar, and your garment will be ready one or two meetings later. (The vendor may require a minimum of five garments per order)

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The AABS President is an ex-officio member of all committees with the exception of the Nomination Committee.

Fund Raising: William Struhar

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Show Committee: Ron Milostan and Paul Kulesa

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Membership dues are \$25. Please pay by check, written to Ann Arbor Bonsai Society or bring your credit card to the meeting and pay! AABS now accepts credit cards for membership fees and other AABS activities. Please talk with the Treasurer at the next meeting.

Tamara Milostan – Treasurer AABS
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The Ann Arbor Bonsai Society is affiliated with the American Bonsai Society: <http://absbonsai.org> and the Mid-American Bonsai Alliance: <http://mababonsai.org>

Support Local Bonsai Vendors

Hours: Wed., Thurs. & Fri.; 11:00 am to 6:00 pm Sat., 1:30pm to 5:00pm
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