

Bonsai Intensive Program

Part 2

*By Bob King, Editor,
ABS Journal*



Boon demonstrates techniques in guided practice for students in a spring intensive.

This concludes a look at Boon Manakitivipart's Bonsai Intensive Program in Alameda, California. The first part was published in the previous issue, Volume 44, Number 2.

How or do you plan to share your new knowledge and skills? If yes, what are your long term goals or plans. Do you see teaching in your future?

John Kirby "I do some teaching, in person and on line. I would like to teach, it is something that I have done as a big part of my livelihood and something that I believe that I can do pretty well. I really like the science part of bonsai, that is, the understanding of tree growth and development, and how you can use that information to make better bonsai than you could if you didn't understand it. I like to share that with folks..."

John Callaway "In 2009 I started a bonsai study group hosted at my home in Shepherdsville, KY. My reason for starting the study group was to share the knowledge and experience with others in the area. Boon has shared so much knowledge with me that I want to share with others. It is my firm belief that we can grow bonsai with

a community of knowledge, instead of let it sit stagnant while people work in solitary. The 2010 study group schedule has been set, and we have already had our first meeting of the year. With already a few firm commitments and an aggressive schedule I think this year will prove to be very exciting."

Cheryl Sykora "I belong to two clubs where I assist with teaching members new to bonsai. I am able to pass on skills I learned from Boon and improve my skills through teaching people new to bonsai techniques that I learned from Boon.

My long term plans are to develop some good trees. I may enter them in more shows.

My teaching will be limited to those new to bonsai in clubs I belong to. I do not see myself obtaining the necessary skills to teach more advanced students."

Peter Tea "I currently teach Bonsai in California. In 2011, I plan on traveling to Japan to study under a bonsai master. When I come back, I would like to continue my Bonsai business full time."

Now that you have had this intensive experience in the design and horticulture of bonsai, what are your thoughts about the future of bonsai in North America as compared to Japan and Europe.

John Kirby “I like the future of bonsai in the US. We have some tremendous artists and teachers. I think you look at the number of folks who have done formal apprenticeships in Japan and the work they do here, coupled with the homegrown talent we have, we are in good shape. I am excited to see the National Exhibition that Bill Valvanis has hosted, the fine shows you see in California (Bay Island Bonsai for example) and at numerous sites in the US and Canada, and I see great potential for further improvement. What I like about the shows is that it gets folks to get their trees in fine shape, think about the display and presentation, and gets people working towards a goal with a deadline- not just a nebulous “sometime down the road”, I think we all need just a bit of both. I have seen a good number of bonsai in Europe and Japan. The Japanese have an amazing number of mind-boggling trees. many of them “multi-generational” trees that have continued to improve over the life of the tree. The Europeans have a lot of excitement in bonsai. One thing that you notice in Europe is the large population of young folks (teens to thirties) working on trees, showing trees, etc. So the youth in European Bonsai, if it holds up over time, is really exciting and something that would be nice to see in the US.

I think that Bonsai in the west will continue to get better and better as our trees gain age and development. This is going to require that trees pass from one generation of artists to the next. I personally believe that this concept of long term improvement and that trees will pass through the care of a number of folks before they are truly great is difficult in the west. I don't like to go to shows where “only the owner may have worked on it” because I know that the trees, while possibly nice, will predominately be immature. Just my opinion.”

John Callaway “While I don't have any experience with bonsai outside of the United States other than what I read online and in magazines, I would say that the future of bonsai in North America is bright. The bonsai community seems to be growing considerably and I find that people are often very eager to help each other. There are different schools in bonsai, but the love of trees seems to be the common ground for so many.

The number of artists that have chosen to make bonsai



From top to bottom: This Ponderosa pine, pinus ponderosa, was Cheryl Sykora's final project. The top photograph is prior to any design work. The next photograph shows the branches with raffia ready for bending into position. In the third photograph the branches are moved into position. The last photograph is the pine in the 2010 Bay Island Bonsai exhibit.

their profession in the United States has grown significantly in the last few years. I see this as an extremely good sign, as the number of fine trees in the country should grow considerably as these artists continue their teaching.”

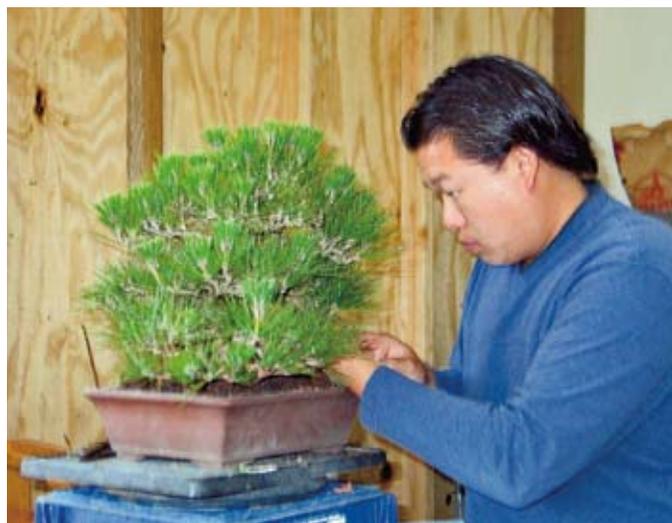
Cheryl Sykora “Bonsai in North America has been primarily a social hobby for retired persons or persons with stable home situations. Bonsai trees take a lot of time and care. Younger people are too busy with their families and other activities to devote enough time and care to develop good bonsai and can’t afford to buy refined bonsai. Bonsai can be done with limited funds if one is patient. I think with the simplification of life that the economy has forced on the US population, hobbies such as bonsai will become more popular. The popularity of younger enthusiasts completing apprenticeships in Japan and coming back to the U.S. to teach will improve bonsai in the U.S. I am seeing more younger people getting interested in developing bonsai skills.

I have not observed bonsai in Japan and Europe so I do not feel I can comment on where I see bonsai going in those areas.

Bonsai in the United States is very confusing. Each professional has her/his own ideas on potting mixes, styling, etc. The current system whereby bonsai enthusiasts take workshops from a variety of professionals, receive conflicting information, and never get beyond the initial styling phase is very frustrating to most enthusiasts. I think bonsai in the United States needs a system to qualify its professional teachers. I don’t see that now. Bonsai in the United States needs a system of accrediting or certifying its professionals.”

Peter Tea “I have seen a steady increase of Bonsai enthusiast in North America and Europe. I can see it becoming very big in the future, whereas in Japan, the younger generations don’t seem to be too interested in Bonsai anymore. I can see the quality of Bonsai in North America and in Europe increasing every year. I can see that in the future, new bonsai enthusiast wouldn’t have to travel to Japan to learn from a Bonsai master. They would be able to find a high quality professional and learn from him or her, locally.”

Editor’s Note: One of the goals of ABS is to serve as a focal point for bonsai learning in North America. I hope this two-part look at another outstanding program will encourage you to continue your educational journey. As before, I will be covering another program next year.



In these series of photographs, Peter Tea shows his work with Japanese Black Pine, pinus thunbergiana. The second and third photographs demonstrate the refinement techniques acquired in the Intensives.