



TAUNTON & SOMERSET BONSAI CLUB

Bonsai Newsletter October 2022



A shohin size, root over rock Zelkova.
30 years old, grown from seed by Ade

Question - "Do you enjoy wiring your trees"? Actually, "Do you wire your trees at all"? If you don't then you are not alone. I think that the use of wire in bonsai is possibly one of the most contentious issues for novices to contend with. It's cruel; it's unsightly; you have to wire everything all the time; don't use copper wire for deciduous; only use copper wire; wind on in the direction of bending; never cross wires; let the wire bite in; nooo never let the wire bite in! No wonder some give up and trust their trees design to luck and pruning!

Luckily for us we have had a few of those issues addressed this month as our guest speaker, Tony Oswin, loves wiring, is very good at it and even invited members to bring along their own trees to get the "Oswin style". Tony brought along Trevor Banbury, to assist with wiring. You may remember Trevor from our April meeting when he gave us a riveting talk on growing Box trees as bonsai as well as the numerous uses of horse liniment.



Michael eagerly awaits the start of the show!

The first tree up was a small Scots Pine belonging to Zac. Purchased as starter material from a Bonsai nursery, the tree had a lot of long branches, particularly in the crown, with little ramification. Lower down there were a number of competing bar branches which needed reducing and the trunk had little in the way of movement or character. Who doesn't like a challenge?

Tony started by wiring the trunk and every branch. As he explained, it was easier to wire everything and then remove what you don't use as you style the tree. Trying to figure out what you might use before you have the design set is a far more difficult and time consuming way. Then it was about getting some movement into the trunk. Tony started to gently flex the trunk and explained that with Scots Pines it was best to tease the fibres by gently twisting then leave it to recover for a bit then go again. Eventually the fibres will be sufficiently flexible to allow you to put the required bend into the area. Work like this is better done in the spring when the sap flow is increasing however we can't all wait until then.

Tony, ably assisted by Trevor, starts work on Zac's Scots Pine.





A close up of Zac's tree before styling

Tony was asked if he had chosen a front for the tree. He replied that he doesn't usually design trees with a front or back. He starts at the first branch, shapes that, then styles the second branch to complement the first and so on around the tree until the overall design is complete. He also mentioned that he often uses round pots for his trees as this makes it easier to produce a tree that can be viewed from any side rather than a two dimensional tree.

As well as wiring each branch, Tony also plucked half of the old needles leaving a tuft of needles at the end. In spring, when the buds at the end of the branches start to elongate, reducing each one by half will encourage back budding in the area where the old needles were removed. Once these new buds have started to elongate, then the branch can be pruned back and the new shoots will form the ramification of that branch. And so on, until you have achieved the required density.

In order to bring the overlong branches closer to the trunk, Tony introduced exaggerated S bends into them. He explained that Pines were probably the only tree that you could do this with and still end up with a natural looking design. Deciduous trees would not look natural as they do not grow at the sort of altitudes where wind and snow produce these effects on plants. Some species of Junipers will also both tolerate this extreme bending and still look natural. Tony then explained that he has several Pines at home that he uses to refine his bending techniques and seeing how far you can compress a tree down into a usable bonsai size. He also mentioned that Larches

were probably the easiest material to bend and are a good tree to start practicing on, if you are new to wiring. They can also be used to make very nice group plantings with relatively young material.

A question was asked about wire cutting in on Larches. Tony agreed that as Larches were fast growing, you did need to keep on top of them and remove/rewire them before the wire cuts in. Young Pines in spring can also thicken quickly and cause the wire to cut in. Although some people advocate allowing the wire on Pines to cut in, Tony explained that he does not, except where the trunk has a reverse taper. In these instances Tony will wrap the inverse part with horse bandage (see my April meeting report for more uses for horse bandages and liniment) then wire it and leave for a couple of years. The trunk will then swell up and even out the reverse taper.



45 minutes later Zac has a new tree in his collection. It will be interesting to see this tree develop over the next decade.

Tony starts work on a Hemlock belonging to Richard P.

This Hemlock, obtained on one of the club's previous collecting trips, was a fairly simple tree to style. Tony kept the majority of the trunk straight, introducing a bit of movement into the top third and fanning the branches down and out to give it a more mature appearance.

As with the previous trees, Tony emphasised the need to

wire every branch right to the end as this would produce a much better image and would overcome the need to rewire the same branches again and again. Whilst working on this tree, Tony explained that one of the differences in how we style bonsai in the UK and how they do it Europe was the relationship between branch placement and the trunk. We tend to leave the trunk open so that it can be seen for the majority of its height, whilst in Europe they adopt a more naturalistic look and are not afraid of crossing branches and foliage pads in front of the trunk. Try it and see what you think! Hemlocks tend to need the wire removed after 5-6 months and often will need rewiring to overcome any springiness in the branches



The finished image, well almost; as Richard now has to wire all the tips of the branches, with 1mm wire, to finish the design. Good luck Richard.

To finish Tony styled a couple of shohin size Scots Pines that he had collected from the New Forest, as part of Forestry England's plans to reinstate areas of heath land by the removal of any self-seeded trees. These trees had been initially styled by the deer and ponies that roam the forest and what a good job they have done. Now it was up to Tony to give them some character and age.



Tony works on one of the collected Scots Pines that he brought along.



Ade's lovely shohin Berberis. Unfortunately I don't have a picture of this tree before Tony styled it. You will have to imagine it somewhat overgrown and with much longer branches.

Tree of the Month competition - Autumn colour



A colourful little Ginkgo from Nigel.



Tony W's Japanese Maple.



Richard P's Spindle



Geoff's Field Maple group.



Michael's Pyracantha



Brian's Japanese Maple

And Richard M's Beech - which I unfortunately do not have a picture of. Sorry Richard!

Well the public voted, or at least most members did and the overall winner was... Brian's Japanese Maple. Well done Brian and all those who entered.

One tree Tony didn't get round to styling was this collected Scots Pine in the Neagari (exposed root) style. Perhaps you could get a pencil and some paper and style it yourself.. No prizes but good practice.



Well that is it for this month. Our next meeting is on Wednesday 10th November and we will be discussing trees and their pots. How to select the right pot to complement your tree. The theme of the "Tree of the Month competition" is "Evergreen", I can't wait!

Till the next time, stay safe and "keep doing bonsai".

Alistair