



SOMERSET BONSAI SOCIETY

Bonsai Newsletter November 2023

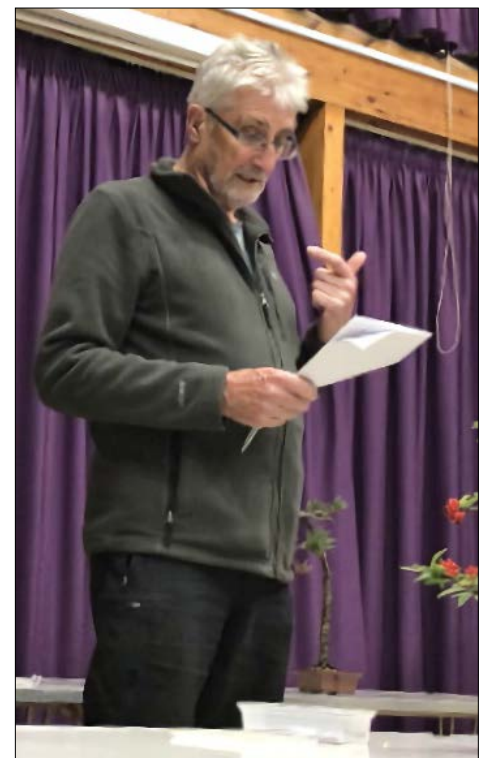


Geoff's landscape, with a log for a pot

Welcome to the November meeting report. This month we had our annual Pot night, hosted by Society President, John Trott, and Society Chairman Ade. This is another popular night with members and combines general advice on choosing pots, with specific advice on which pot would best suit members' trees.

Ade explains the "guidelines" for pot selection

Before looking at specific trees, Ade explained that there were a few guidelines which make the selection of the right pot easier. It's exciting to get a new tree into a bonsai pot for the first time but before you rush ahead always consider whether it is ready for a proper pot! If a tree is still in development, the confines of a bonsai pot will slow that process down. So, first point is to have a little patience. Plastic bonsai pots are a good halfway house in that they are generally deeper and do at least look better than a flower pot, washing up bowl etc! A bonsai pot is like a frame for a picture. It should enhance a tree and show it to its best but not distract or become the main focus. For any given tree there may be several pot types and colour that might suit – there is no single solution. Pot choice is can completely change the feel or mood that a tree imparts. Choice is personal but with time/experience you should get a feel for what looks right....and wrong! To help you along there are Guidelines:



- Pot should be 2/3 height or width of tree, whichever is greatest.
- Pot depth should approx. equal width of trunk just above nebari.
- Unglazed “earth” colours for evergreens.
- Subtle glazes for deciduous.
- Bright colours for flowering or bright foliage.
- The pot must be large enough for the tree to thrive.

These guidelines will serve you well, but there are exceptions, and you should not follow slavishly!

- Some trees need deeper pots e.g., azaleas, crab apples and many other flowering trees. They may struggle in shallow pots, where the depth of the pot is equal to the width of the trunk.
- Cascades will need tall, deep pots – you can’t match trunk thickness.
- Crescent pots are good for semi-cascades.



Ade’s Semi cascade Larch in a crescent pot made by Tony Oswin

- Groups/clump style generally look best in relatively shallow pots.
- A shallower pot tends to give a “landscape” impression.
- Colour. Think about when your tree looks best – or when you want to display it. You might want to match spring or autumn colour for example. Try to make a subtle match to leaf colour, bark etc. For flowering trees, a bright contrasting colour may look good and will show off the flowers or fruit. Powerful masculine trees look best in chunky angular pots. Ovals and rounded edges suit elegant feminine trees.
- Take care with round pots, best used for:
 - (a) trees where the apex lies at/beyond the pot edge - this will appear to anchor the tree.
 - (b) elegant/tall/literati.



John's Red pine, in a rugged round pot

- Abstract pots suit dramatic trees. Many trees that are neither powerful nor elegant – fall in between these guidelines.
- Raised feet make a pot look more elegant.

John's Kokonoe White pine "Little Sumo" in a pot by Thor Holvila.

- Curves soften a pot.
- A line or part glaze will make a pot appear shallower than it is.
- A lip or rim also softens/lightens the appearance of the pot.



Use these tricks to achieve the look that you want.



Geoff explains his pot-less landscape.

Before starting on members' trees, Ade asked Geoff to explain how he came to create his landscape on a log. Geoff started by explaining that he had brought it along as it was something different, it was cheap to make and had kept him busy for almost a week. It started when Geoff and his wife, Sue, visited a reclamation yard in Devon.

Geoff spotted the log and purchased it as "fire wood" however he could see that it had potential and decided to make it into a "picture, a bit of countryside". Geoff reflected on it for a while then, around a month ago, decided to start adding plants to it.

Over a period of a week, Geoff added various young plants, took them off and added others, repositioned them, added moss and other small accent plants until he finally arrived at the above design. The final piece was a small model of a Red deer, purchased on eBay, which gives scale to the landscape.

Geoff intends to leave it alone now to allow the plants to take root and the only issue will be stopping the birds removing all the moss, something we all have to deal with at this time of the year! So there you have it, a different aspect of "bonsai" which anyone can try their hand at.

John commented that he was pleased to see people experimenting with the concepts of "small artistic trees" and that it reminded him of his trips to Vietnam where landscapes like this are a big part of the bonsai scene. Although over there, some of the landscapes reach several metres in length and have dozens of trees etc on them.



John critiques an Oak/pot combination

Looking at the tree, there are several “guidelines” that have not been followed. Although the tree is still in the development stage, the pot is too deep for the size of the trunk. The glaze is also too bright for this type of deciduous tree.

Oaks have rugged bark and look better in matt glazes and subdued colours. John explained that if you are going to display a tree at a show, or just show it properly, then there are four parts to consider: the tree, the pot, the stand and the surface of the soil.

The pot should complement, not compete with the tree and the stand should complement the tree/pot combination, picking up on design aspects of either the tree or the pot. We won't get into the use of accent plants, suiseki or bronzes as that is a subject for another meeting.



The Tree of the Month Theme - "Pot and tree combination"

You can see them below and to see the judge's comments [click here](#).



Peter's Metasequoia



Richard M's Larch



John's Chinese Elm



Richard P's Beech



Michael's Blue Cedar

The winner of the people's vote was Richard P's Beech and the judge's choice, was Michael's Blue Cedar. Well done to you both.

Is this the right pot for Bob's Chinese Elm?

After a break for refreshments and "The tree of the month", it was back to helping members select pots for their trees. Bob had brought along a nice, medium size Chinese Elm which was now ready for a "nice" pot. Bob had selected an oval, light grey glazed pot, from the selection of Spectre pots that Ade had brought with him. John felt that it was a little bit too shallow for the health of the tree and that the pot in front of the tree, see above, would be a better fit for the tree. John explained that most potters are happy to take commissions and Chris would make Bob a pot of the right depth, in a slightly darker colour, to suit the Elm. The light blue of the above pot would work well in the autumn but not for the rest of the year.



Colour selection for bonsai pots is a complex thing and John explained that the best way to understand it is to go to some of the big shows and look at all the pots on display. That way you become familiar with what potters can produce and that will help influence your pot choices. Alternatively, you can browse the internet or go "old school" and look at some of the Chinese and Japanese bonsai albums to get an idea of what tree looks best in what pot.

Richard's Literati style Pine – is this the right pot?



Next item was a Literati style Pine belonging to Richard M. John challenged the audience to select a suitable pot for the tree. The audience's choice was a pot that was:

1. Shallow.
2. Round.
3. Unglazed.
4. Dark brown.
5. Rough textured to match the bark.

In fact, something like this! Oh, the wonders of Photoshop.

Once in a suitable pot, John explained that this would be a good looking tree. Unfortunately, good pots are expensive and always have been, relative to income. However, with the rising cost of electricity and raw materials, the cost of pots will not be going down and one should always try to buy good pots when one comes across them. Bonsai auctions and people retiring from the hobby are a good source of pots and often one can bag a bargain if you know what to look for and as John and Ade both mentioned "you can never have enough pots"!

On that note it was time to end. Next Month we will be having our Annual General Meeting, so our next Society meeting will be January 10th 2024 when our President John Trott will be giving a talk on "training nursery stock into potential bonsai".

Tree of the Month will be "Winter image".

Until then take care, have a restful Christmas and keep doing bonsai!

Alistair

P.S. It's not too late to add a couple of pots to your Christmas list, now you know what to ask for!