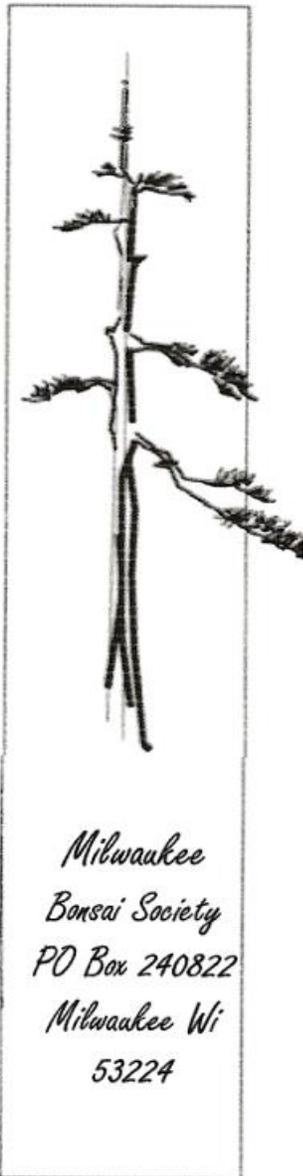


# BONSAI NEWS

March 2024



## Upcoming Meeting

Let's get started with some techniques to help you transition your skills to the next level. This month we have Steve showing us progress on air layering examples and Ron talking about wound care.

### Focus Topic

Unwrapping a pot with an Air Layer-Steve C will bring last year's air layer example from the air layering workshop to demonstrate this technique.

### Main Topic

Wound care, proper use of tools and cut pastes-Ron will take us through all aspects of wound care. Steve C wrote an article that was reprinted in the [MBS March 2013](#) newsletter on the glory of Parafilm and Pam W wrote an article, Essential to Controversial-Cut Paste in the [MBS December 2011](#) issue; including which artists use it and those who do not.

\*Open to MBS members only

## Next Meeting

March 1, 2024

9 am

Boerner  
Botanical

## March

- March 2 – Wound Care/  
Unwrapping an air layer
- March 9 – Fundamentals Class #3\*
- March 23 – Bonsai Skills 101\*
- March 23 – Fundamentals Class  
#4A\*
- March 24 – Bonsai Skills 201\*
- March 30 – Fundamentals Class  
#4B\*

## April

- April 6 – Dawn Redwood Forest  
Creation/Curved chisel use
- April 13 – Bonsai Skills 101\*
- April 14 – Bonsai Skills 201\*
- April 20 – Create a Larch grouping\*
- April 27 – Fundamentals Class #5\*

## May

- May 4 – Group Slash

## June

- June 1 – Preparing a thread graft/bring  
a tree for styling advice
- June 8-9 – 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual Exhibit  
Boerner Botanical Garden
- June 15 – Bonsai Skills 101\*
- June 16 – Bonsai Skills 201\*

## President's Message

The remarkable spring-like weather of the last month has resulted in many of my deciduous trees beginning to wake up, meaning an early opening of that brief window of time in which they can be safely repotted. In my own case, this has resulted in some scrambling to get the work done, including numerous trips up and down the basement stairs to sort through the chaos in my workshop to find the right match between pot and tree. In the process, I've realized a couple of things, and wanted to share some thoughts on pots.

A message that we come back to, time and time again, is "It's your tree, and you're the only person who it needs to please." The same is true about pots. Everyone has their unique taste and aesthetic sense, and what looks great to me might be seen by someone else as totally wrong, but that's okay. It's my tree.

We also all have our individual circumstances, including how much we're able to spend on this hobby. Especially for someone starting out, it's not necessary to spend a small fortune on an antique or collectible pot, or one made by a famous maker.

There are plenty of inexpensive, yet entirely serviceable and presentable pots to be had. There are even plastic training pots that look amazingly like unglazed ceramic pots, and cost a couple of bucks each.

All that being said, I noticed a couple of things in my treks back and forth to the basement. One, an amazing preponderance of my pots are blue—like probably 90% of them. Second, as my time in the hobby has progressed, my personal taste in pots has evolved. I see pots on the shelves that I purchased early on that are markedly different from those I've purchased recently. Some of those early pots are ones that today I probably wouldn't buy. I think that is because as I have learned more, and had more experience, I've come to more clearly understand what it is about a particular pot that pleases me, visually and aesthetically. And that is one of the several ways in which learning about bonsai has taught me something about myself.

I have several pots that, given the kinds of trees I work with, will probably never have a tree in them because they're too small. Nevertheless, there's something about them that rings my personal bell, and I cherish them. I also have pots that I bought in the belief that someday I'm going to have just the right tree to match with them. Until then, I can enjoy the way they look, all on their own.

I guess all of this is a roundabout way of saying that you should be comfortable about choosing whatever pot you like and however much you can afford. Yes, there are some basic boundaries, mostly having to do with the tree's health—is it deep enough, will it drain properly, and so on. But broadly speaking, the only "correct" pot for your tree is one that makes you happy when you look at it—because that pot is the house for your tree.



# Container Investment Notes

By Pam W



Close up of Tokoname showing distinctive grey mottle glaze.



Stamp of Isabelia Pottery



Wood Fired



Sara Raynor porcelain pot

## Guidelines for Bonsai Container Investment

What comes first, the bonsai or the container? The answer depends on which piece you find first. Selecting the right container implies putting it in context with the tree species, style, and size in a harmonious way. There are literally over 50 articles on the internet that help you choose a container that complement your bonsai. I want to help you find a container that has the best chance of fitting a future tree. In other words, choosing pots that help the tree appear as if it could have been in that container it's whole life.

## Investment

A pot can be an expensive investment. One thing that is often overlooked says Michael Ryan Bell (notable pot collector) is the 'the dignity of the pot should suit the dignity of the tree.' In this sense, dignity encompasses visual age, value, and aesthetics. Soon enough your trees will deserve dignified containers. The simplest way to identify quality is by pot material (clay, mica, plastic). It gets more complicated when considering place of origin, clay composition glaze and firing.

## Place of Origin

In general, place of origin is the county but let's look at some quality co-ops that are commonly talked about in the bonsai pottery world. An arrangement of potters who work in coordination to sell their work is known as a co-op.

Tokoname is one of these organizations. It is a region in Japan known for its ceramics; is the oldest (began in Heian Period 794-1185) of six traditional historic pottery centers in Japan. Not every pot that comes from Tokoname is a high-end container but there are many famous bonsai potters in the city.

Yixing pottery region in Cina also has a co-op type arrangement. This pottery capital produces well known and collectable teapots made since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. We will explore more as we discuss clay.

Isabelia is a co-op in Eastern Europe started by 3 Czech skilled ceramists

I am sure there are other artist and areas that offer curated quality containers.

## Clay

The clay used to make pots can be terracotta, stoneware or porcelain. Terracotta pots are fired to temperatures of around 1000 degrees C which results in pots that stay porous and absorb water. Stoneware or bisque is heated at around 1200 degrees C, making it harder than terracotta and unable to absorb water. Finally, porcelain can be heated up to 1400 degrees C which results in very hard but fragile pots.

The clay of Yixing is known collectively as zisha (purple sand), and there are three basic types: a purplish-brown clay; a buff-colored clay, and a cinnabar or deep orange-red clay. By mixing these clays, adding mineral colors, and varying the firing temperature and amount of time in the kiln, potters can achieve a wide range of earth tones.

One of the reasons that Tokoname is famous for bonsai pots is the clay. The clay is a blend that comes in different colors and properties, but has clay from Seto as a base. Most of the bonsai potters in Tokoname mix several Tokoname clays to get their own clay.

## Glazes

As with clay, there are hundreds of glazes, with artists having the ability to mix their own colors and textures. Glazes are made up of different minerals that react when fired. Today in the world of bonsai there are many popular glazes: cobalt blue (ruri), white or cream (shiro), yellow (kii); as well as more unique colors like blood red or pink. In addition to the standard, single tone glazes, there are also potters that use layering techniques and specialty glazes to create beautiful effects in the kiln. American potter Sarah Rayner has several distinct glazes and surface textures. Her pots are often identified by texture.

## Firing

Generally, the bonsai pots are fired twice. The first firing process, called bisque firing, takes place at approximately 800 – 900° C. Afterwards a glaze can be applied, if desired. The second firing process (stone ware firing) must go up to 1200 – 1300° C in order to achieve perfectly frost-resistant pots. When identifying bonsai pots, three main terms are used: low-fired, high-fired and wood-fired.

Mass produced pots go through a conveyer-belt kiln. Hand-made pots will be handled by artist at each step of firing. Low-end, inexpensive pots tend to be low-fired. This fact tells us that the pot will not be durable or weather tolerant. They absorb water, expand and when freezes may crack or begin spalling (glaze breaks off in flat pieces.)

Stoneware and other high-quality clays are frequently associated with high-fired are actually considered mid-range firing clays in the ceramics trade. Porcelains are the highest-fired clays. These containers are rare due to the higher cost of clay and increased cost of firing.

Wood-firing is a multi-day, complex process where pots are sealed and fired for multiple days with burnt wood. It creates a beautiful unexpected effect on ceramics which is why artist go through the effort. Relatively few potters engage in making wood-fired ceramics regularly. Wood-fired pots tend to be expensive due to the labor-intensive process and unpredictable nature.

## Patina

Patina on bonsai pottery is a very thin film of oxidized very small particles of substrate, dust, oils, and solid fertilizer that builds in a very particular way over a very long time with use. In a less literal sense, patina is visible age. Visually, patina is a darkening of the surface of the container that begins at the rim and the base and moves towards the center. Raised areas will develop patina faster than recessed areas, as will roughly surfaces. Many people leave their pots outdoors under benches so they slowly acquire a similar aged look.

## Significance of an Artist's Seal and Chops

Unlike mass produced containers, which pass through many hands, a quality bonsai container is made from beginning to end by one potter, and is stamped with his or her name. When a container is a collaborative work, then more than one seal can be found.

The chop is a kiln mark - indicating only which workshop/kiln the pot was produced in. Most of the kilns have workshops attached where several potters (master and assistants) work side-by side. If a pot has a chop only, then it may or may not have been made by the kiln owner/master (usually not). Instead, an assistant potter may have made the pot under the watch of the owner - using the exact clay, molds and glazes as any other pot coming out of that particular kiln. - the chop is then only allowed on the pot if it passes inspection with the owner, and meets his/her standards.

If the pot is signed, then it is most likely the owner/master whose hands produced that pot - the signature may also be accompanied by the kiln mark (chop), but not always. If there is a signature on the pot, then there is really no question which kiln it was produced in, so sometimes the kiln mark (chop) is not there as it is not considered necessary

Pots that do not have a chop mark can be assumed to be less valuable than an identified pot. There are mass produced Japanese, Chinese, Korean and other pots that don't have chop marks.

# Shohin School

Portland, Oregon, by Steve C

So last year when my granddaughter turned 17, she asked me if I would take her on a College Campus tour of the 5 schools she was planning to apply to for fall of 2024 admission. These 5 colleges were all in California. Of course I said yes... and immediately began looking for the perfect Bonsai event to attend while I was out on the west coast. I landed on the second annual Shohin School held in believe it or not, Milwaukie, Oregon. The event was presented by Jonas Dupuich, of Bonsai Tonight, and Andrew Robson, of Rakuyo-en Bonsai in Portland Oregon. My friend Thomas Jensen lives in Portland and he had been asking me to come out to help him repot a large Juniper that we had potted originally as a part of a class we both attended at Mirai. So... plans were set for the end of January, 2024.

I won't bore you with pics of the 5 campuses, but below are a few images of the bonsai event featuring Daisaku Nomoto of Kyushu Nursery in Miyazaki Japan. I have met and worked with Daisaku many times in the past when I studied with Boon in California.



My granddaughter Arabella



Daisaku



Daisaku with his interpreter... he was explaining how nervous he was



Jonas of Bonsai Tonight discussing developing shohin black pine



Andrew Robson of Portland



My friend Thomas doing final chop-sticking on the repot, yes... that is green grass in the background... in January !!

## **Ancient Arts Bonsai**

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New Videos are now available!

The February Membership meeting was a Ron Fortman extravaganza. For the month of February, three new videos have been posted to the MBS Membership Video Site. You will find a recording of the February membership meeting, along with two Focus Presentations, all by the instructor of our Novice classes, Ron Fortman.

Here's what's new:

### Monthly Meeting

February 2023 Meeting Main Topic – Cost-effective Training Pot options – by Ron Fortman

### Focus Topic Presentations

Chopsticking - Bullet Nose vs. Others – by Ron Fortman

Early Spring Fertilizing - Yes or No? – by Ron Fortman

Remember, the site is password protected and we ask that you do not share the login information with anyone outside of our organization. If you have lost or did not receive your login information, send us an email.

Additional videos will be added next month.



**WISCO BONSAI NOW HAS THE AREA'S LARGEST SELECTION OF ARTISIAN, HANDMADE BONSAI POTTERY, MUCH OF WHICH CONSISTS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL ARTISTS.**

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**AND OF COURSE THERES THE SUBSTRATE, WISCO GOLD... THE BEST NON-JAPANESE MIX AROUND WE ALSO OCCASIONALLY HAVE OTHER RAW SUBSTRATE COMPONENTS AVAILABLE (PUMICE, LAVA, ETC). SEVERAL SIZES OF KANUMA NOW AVAILABLE !!! GOT ORCHIDS ? WE HAVE A SUBSTRATE FOR THOSE TOO !!!**

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# Wound Healing Notes

By Pam W



Notice the healing has stopped at the top of the wound.



Owl nest.



White cedars jutting out of cliff at Peninsula State Park in Wisconsin.



California's Methuselah grove, which is home to the Methuselah tree.

## Wounds

Treatment of wounds is a necessary skill in Bonsai as structural pruning leads to the creation of wounds. Careful planning and execution of the carving of the wood in the cut is critical for a successful healed cut. By carving and possibly using a Dremel or other rotating grinder with small round bit to smooth the wood especially the edges to facilitate the new tissue to roll over edges of the deadwood with time to effectively hide it.

## Re-Opening Old Wounds

Another very useful technique is to reopen the wound to force it to keep sealing over. When a tree calluses over it usually starts to roll into the wound. Often it hits a snag and stops. To restart the healing process, remove the cut paste and clean the wound. Using a sharp tool, go around the inner edge of the new callas and re-open the wound. This is going to force the tree to send more tissue to this area to reseal the new wound.

## Removing Rot

Starting at the highest point, use a carving or pick to remove the soft punky wood till you find hard healthy living part of the trunk. Completely clean out all the deadwood. You may need a small Dremel to help really dig. Once you have it cleaned, use a wood hardener such as PC Petrifyer to seal the wood. An extremely large cavity may require cement.

## Convert Wounds into Deadwood Features

To accomplish a naturalistic style, go out into wild places or even Milwaukee's Forest Home Cemetery & Arboretum where you find 2600 old trees with deadwood as a feature and snap pictures. These captured images give you a template what natural deadwood looks like to mimic in your carving. For softwood species like elms, try to control your carving skills to make it look as though the wood naturally rotted away. Imagine "If water were to wear away this wood, what pattern would it make?" Maybe an owl has carved its home and you make a round depression in the wood like a crater. If you are thinking water at this point, burst the dam on the lower end of the crater and let the carving tool drip down the side of the tree in an asymmetrical shape.

## Accelerating Healing of Wounds

In general, when making any cuts in bonsai it's always a good idea to finish off the edge with a blade as this accelerates the healing process. However, allow any branches immediately above the wound to grow strong as this promotes sap to flow and assist in healing. Seal the exposed area well. This is very important to prevent air getting to the cambium and drying it out. You want to keep it airtight and moist below the sealer so it can roll over the wound. For hard to heal wounds, it's also a good idea to use the technique described above in Re-Open Old Wound to stimulate faster healing every season.

Finally, any scar that has been properly cleaned, reduced with the appropriate tools, and sealed with the right healing agent will look better, and the process will be faster.

## February Meeting



The February Meeting started with the Main topic and Ron F explaining the differences between types of Chopsticks and why some are better than others. The Focus topic followed with Ron talking to us about early spring fertilizing. Ron explained the pros and cons of this controversial topic.



### 2024 Burning Bush Yamadori Dig

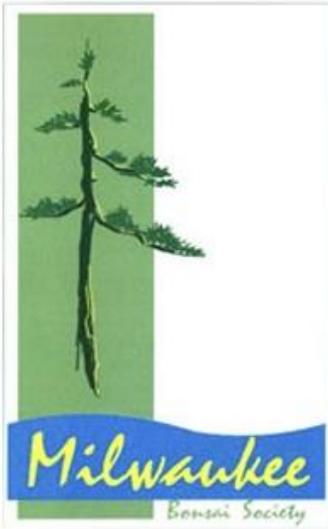
There may have been 30 people there last year and people had fun digging up new babies.  
Isn't that where babies come from?



<https://photos.app.goo.gl/ByvEdra6G3Uu1Vss7>

Please bring with you on April 6<sup>th</sup> after our meeting.

- Shovels
- Branch clippers
- Small saws
- Bags and pots to put them into
- Maybe a small cart. It's maybe 300 yards from the parking lot to the woods.
- Bring other family members for the walk in an old woods.
- Prepare at home with pots and wooden boxes



PO Box 240822  
Milwaukee, WI 53224  
[www.milwaukeebonsai.org](http://www.milwaukeebonsai.org)

Next MBS meeting will be  
March 1, 2024 @ 9am

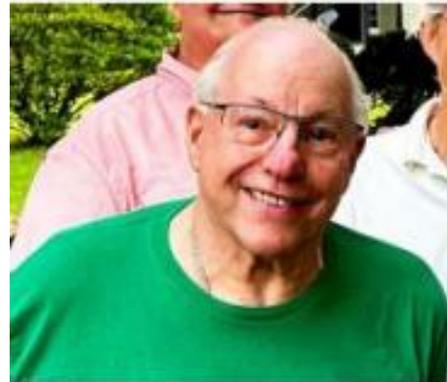
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Secretary [Greg R](#)  
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### Other Club Functions

Newsletter [Melissa J](#)  
Webmaster [Pam W](#)  
Librarian [Greg R](#)

PAB Board-Ron F, Houston S & Judy S



*Clif*

*Hands guided by heart  
Transforming wood into art  
He was its master*

*~Greg Raleigh*