



November 2025

The Bent Twig

A monthly newsletter of the American Bonsai Association of Sacramento
<https://www.abasbonsai.org/>

Arboreal Abstractions

Ian Baker

Well folks, the Rendezvous has come and gone. It is hard for me to succinctly describe the experience of preparing for the Rising Star competition and everything culminating in a single, eight hour event. It was one of the most challenging and fulfilling days of my life, and despite the stress, I loved all of it. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to participate amongst such talent and happy with the results. I didn't win.

The lottery for assigning the material was in fact rounds of poker, so some quick brushing up on poker hands occurred Friday evening. I had the pleasure of coming in with the last pick, so my choice was between the last two rejects. That said, there was not a lot of difference in the quality of each Itoigawa. They were equally massive balls of overgrown foliage, reminiscent of a Looney Tunes fight cloud with branches sticking out everywhere and weak interior growth.

We had a few minutes to look at our material before going off to our rooms for the night. I took photos and did my best to come up with a plan, but it was hard to visualize the main lines with how overgrown it was. The next morning, I lugged in all of my gear, lift cart, and personal stash of wire. At 8:00, we were off to the races.

The hardest part was the time limit. I felt confident working junipers at home, but I had the luxury of stepping away. With the competition, so many different skills are necessary. The technical, the artistic, communication and showmanship, decision making. And time management. Without time to dither, I had to make decisions fast and stick with them.

My tree had a slightly un-ideal C-shaped trunk and I decided to lean into it with a windswept design using only two branches on the leeward side. I quickly jinned branches I didn't need and laid out shari. Next up was performing two big bends of the main branches using a bending jack and guy wire. With raffia and size 6 copper in place, I started cranking them down. This was a big time sink that involved redoing a guy wire. It felt like minutes had passed when I realized a quarter of the time had passed.

I had to speed up to finish on time, doing my best to lay out pads and provide some level of detail wiring. I left a lot of foliage on, half because I didn't have time to clean it up, and half because it's Itoigawa after all, and these things love going juvenile. I was roughing up my jins to the last second. My detail work suffered a little at the expense of finishing everything, and it definitely looked a little rough, but I was proud of what I created and the overall design concept. The asymmetrical branching lent itself well to the trunk.

This was the fastest eight hours ever and it was amazing to share it with the five other talented guys. I am hungry for more growth! A huge thank you to everyone who supported me throughout the leadup, during the event, and after.



Before



After

Right: Me being a dork at the Friday introductions.

Next Meeting

Coast Redwood Development
w/ Sam Tan

This coming Tuesday November 25, Join Sam Tan for a deep dive into the art of coast redwood bonsai, where he will share techniques for developing redwoods from raw nursery stock into refined bonsai. The presentation will include a lecture on species-specific strategies for developing redwood bonsai, as well as a discussion about redwood design and aesthetics. Attendees are encouraged to bring their own redwoods for a show-and-tell segment and come prepared with questions—whether you're just starting out or refining a tree, this session is a chance to learn, share, and connect over this iconic California species.

Sam is the previous president of the Bonsai Society of San Francisco. He is a passionate practitioner who enjoys creating bonsai from native North American species. Sam studied bonsai under Ryan Neil at Bonsai Mirai, where he interned in 2019. He exhibited his work at the 2022 Pacific Bonsai Expo and again in 2024, at which time he also served as a demonstrator. He regularly posts his work on Instagram at @samtanbonsai.



Above: Sam Tan





What to Work on November

Just about everything in our collections can be worked on now! Keep in mind the stage of development, what work has already been done, and tree health. Deciduous trees have reabsorbed chlorophyll and nutrients from their leaves and are providing beautiful fall color. Trees showing robust fall color is a sign of health versus leaves that senesce directly to a brownish-dead color. This could be a sign that something is wrong with summer shade, heat, nutrients, etc. Trees that are defoliated during the growing season, i.e. with “younger” leaves, will turn color and drop later in the season than if not defoliated.

After leaf drop (or removal) silhouette pruning and wiring may be done. If you are eager to begin work and keep your bench clean, you may prune off deciduous leaves rather than let them drop. Broadleaf evergreens can also be cut, thinned and wired. Save heavy pruning, like trunk chops, for May/June when trees are actively growing. Remember to plan for grafting and allow unpruned runners for thread grafting. All conifers can be cut, thinned and wired at this time. The type of work will depend on the stage of development and what work has already been done this year. Double flush pines, if decandled this summer, can be thinned to two shoots, old needles plucked, and wired.

Monitor plants for standing water on roots as rain becomes more frequent. You can tilt pots to help them drain better, depending on the location of drainage holes. As you work through your trees, it is also a good time to clean soil of weeds, algae, and muck, unless you know you will be repotting soon. Evaluate each plant for akadama decomposition and root growth, and mark for repotting if needed.

Remember that there is no one-size-fits-all recipe for any bonsai technique. Learn to read your trees and think critically before doing anything listed here or elsewhere.

Dormant spray oils and lime sulfur should not be applied until all deciduous foliage has dropped, so it's early still.

Last Meeting - Deciduous Development w/ Peter Tea

At our last meeting on October 28, we welcomed Peter Tea to present techniques of deciduous tree development. Peter did an amazing job at libbing at the start of the meeting with his example trees while the A/V crew wrangled some serious technical difficulties. Once that was finally solved, he proceeded to discuss photos of deciduous trees from shows in Japan, while explaining the techniques and background behind them. He also shared some excellent examples of trees in his own collection and their progression of development before and after studying in Japan, which was very informative to see.

Peter's system is optimized to spend time only working on relevant parts of the tree throughout development to arrive at a highly ramified and correctly proportioned tree without wasting time and effort. This presentation was highly effective in explaining this, as well as the background and context for why or why not to employ specific techniques.

The key raffle prize for the evening was a great Sharps Pygmy Maple in a drum pot that was won by Bill Pettis.



Above, Left: Scenes from Peter Tea's Oct presentation



Membership Renewal

Membership renewal season is upon us! Renew early so that you can have it checked off your list at the start of the new year. Dues can be paid by cash, check, or card at meetings or online. Checks may also be mailed payable to:

ABAS
PO Box 161767
Sacramento, CA 95816-9998.

While we happily accept cards, cash or check is preferred so we can avoid card fees. Dues are \$50 for individuals and households or \$25 for students. Members who have not renewed by March 2026 will be removed from the roster and mailing list.



2025 GSBF Rendezvous

The biennial GSBF Rendezvous was held the weekend of October 24-26 at Hotel Mission De Oro in Santa Nella, CA. The event, held every two years, is organized by a tireless volunteer crew, uniting clubs from all over California, Nevada, Arizona and Oregon in a weekend of everything bonsai. Friends, professionals, and vendors from across the West took over the hotel to participate in workshops, presentations, sales, auctions, demonstrations, competitions, revelry, and more over three days. The dual headliners this year were Suthin Sukosolvisit and Mauro Stemberger, who did an excellent job in their demos, workshops, and critiques, as well as making everyone laugh with their comedic chemistry.

Saturday evening, a banquet dinner was held with presentations of various awards. The Circle of Sensei award was presented to Bob Hilvers, NorCal President's Award to Bob Shimon, SoCal President's Award to Doyle Saito, and the Joshua Roth Rising Star winner was Daniel Martinez. The winners for the All Club Bonsai Show were Best Conifer: East Bay Bonsai Society - Shore Pine; Best Shohin: Baikoen Bonsai Kenkyukai; Best Broadleaf Evergreen - Orange County Bonsai Society - Silverberry; Best Deciduous - California Bonsai Society - Cedar Elm.

The event wrapped Sunday after a final, intimate demo with Mauro and Suthin styling junipers in parallel. It cannot be overstated how much time and energy was devoted to organizing the Rendezvous by GSBF leadership and the volunteers, so make sure to let them know! Hint hint..



Bonsai five card draw?



Mauro critiques Rising Star trees



The All Club show



Debbie working with Suthin



Saturday Banquet



The vending space was busy all weekend



Rising Star Itoigawa material



Suthin and Mauro's Sunday demo



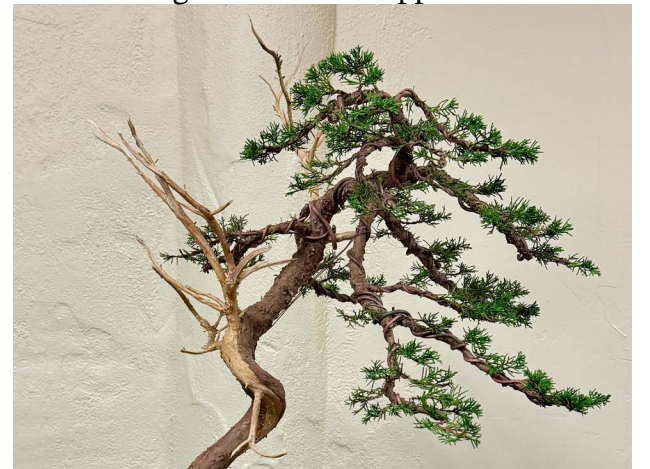
Phil working with Mauro's apprentice



Bob Hilvers wins Circle of Sensei award



Suthin leads an All Club critique



Danny Martinez's winning tree



☐ **Welcome New Members:** Matt and Alena Stone - New members are connected with their area liaison and will receive a welcome letter with a free pass to one of our member workshops. Liaisons are listed on our website under ‘[Member Resources, Club Liaisons](#)’.

Member Workshop

There will be no Member Workshop in December. We are taking the month off! The next workshop is **Saturday, January 10.** This begins the 3 months (January, February and March) in which we focus on repotting. The club provides bonsai soil and aluminum wire. Members bring trees, pots and tools. In preparation for repotting, refer to our [ABAS slide show on the basics of re-potting](#), available on the Bonsai Resources page of the website.

Contact Renee Seely, breadcrust@comcast.net to reserve a spot for the **January workshop.** Please specify morning, 8:30 am - 12:30 pm or afternoon 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm. Each workshop session is \$20 payable to ABAS. Reminder that the club owns a set of tools for more advanced work like grafting. Don’t forget that we have the tools to do this, wood carving, and heavier bending.

ABAS 2026 Calendar for Sale

The *second* run of the ABAS calendar sold out, but one more order is on the way. The calender features photos of our show 2025 Spring Show trees and includes a set of stickers based on the seasonal care calendar we all know and love. Of course, you can use this calendar anywhere convenient to you, but we love the idea of keeping one of these in the workshop along with a set of stickers with cues for things like “decandling black pines” or “fertilize conifers.” This last run of 2026 calendars will be available for sale at coming meetings and you may also email [Dodie](#) if you would like to secure one now. Each calendar is \$20 - get yours today!

ABAS Holiday Party

The ABAS Holiday Party is just around the corner on Thursday December 18 at 6:00 PM. As per tradition, the board will provide the regular holiday staples like turkey, ham, rolls, mashed potatoes, dressing, non-alcoholic and adult beverages, etc. Members are encouraged to bring their favorite side, salad, or dessert to share. Members should also bring their own plates and utensils.

There will be a decorated holiday tree contest, so get creative with a bonsai and trimmings, and bring it in to show off. Finally, we will have a gift exchange, so bring something bonsai, horticulture, or suiseki related, of about \$25 value and wrapped to be included in the exchange.

Japanese Garden Cleanup

We have scheduled a Japanese garden cleanup party on December 13 from 9:00-12:00. Mark your calendars and come prepared with tools to prune, weed, and otherwise make the ABAS Japanese garden in the courtyard look its best! Gloves, rake, broom, pruners, knee pads, and a work bucket are recommended. To Sign Up or questions contact Dodie at dodienewman@gmail.com. Mention the word service for a free raffle ticket. Please help us keep this Japanese Garden beautiful. Many hands make work lighter.

Bonsai Wire Recycling

Reminder that ABAS has a wire recycling program every month, so remember to bring in your sorted and debris-free aluminum and copper wire to be collected by Debbie and Steve Ballanti. The wire is recycled for scrap and all money earned goes back to the club.



2025 Events Calendar

Tuesday, November 25, Redwood Developmentw/ Sam Tan [In-person & Zoom](#)

Thursday, December 18, Holiday Party [In-person](#)



Snacks - nom nom nom!

Club members are encouraged, as always, to bring snacks or drinks for each monthly meeting. The selection of available food depends on the generosity of each of us, so please step up and bring your favorite snack. You may also provide larger quantities of longer-lasting snacks to store at the garden center. Home made items are always deeply appreciated by all, but please consider portability and food safety. You may leave your food items on the back table with Carol Greenfield at the meeting start. Thank you Carol for coordinating snacks and drinks and thank YOU for contributing!



Above: The ABAS 2026 Calendar. Buy yours today!

DOING OUR PART
AND
FUNDRAISING
TOO!

WIRE RECYCLING PROGRAM

BRING YOUR USED, CLEAN, SEPARATED
ALUMINUM & COPPER WIRE TO THE
MONTHLY GENERAL MEETING. THERE
WILL BE LABELED COLLECTION BOXES
AVAILABLE.

Email Debbie Ballanti at juno@pacbell.net with
questions.

Sponsored by ABAS



Scenes from the November
member workshop

