



January 2022

The Bent Twig

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

Arboreal Abstractions

A Note from the Editor: Thoughts from a beginner (for the last couple of decades).

I've been taken by bonsai for as long as I can remember my grandfather's carefully trained bougainvilleas in a perfectly built shade and mist structure on his three acre homestead in Napa. His trees were the perfect compliment to everything else on the property: strutting peacocks, emus, rabbits, goats, the onion patch, exotic fruit trees like pineapple guavas, and all the canning, smoking, drying, and cooking he did. For years as an adult, I casually bought the standard set of books, started trees from seed, and tried to learn the techniques. I made little progress.

Bonsai is similar to learning music or learning to cook a complex dish. We are often trying to reproduce certain results: a windswept style, a funky jazz piano lick, or a proper wok stir fry, which require a set of unfamiliar ingredients and techniques. There is rarely a clear set of instructions, despite mountains of videos and literature. It is hard to put down the endless google searches in favor of the two best learning methods: 1) finding good teachers 2) practicing. It sounds obvious, but it's worth saying. Many books don't include the whole story or are irrelevant to certain geographies or species. There is a balance to be struck of research versus practice and practice is usually harder.

This is because bonsai, like cooking or music, is a nuanced and difficult art form with many different routes to similar destinations. This is not to say that there are not right and wrong techniques; there are, but it's critical to find the signal in the noise.

My understanding of the art has blossomed over the last two years of involvement with ABAS. Firstly, through excellent teachers, both inside the club and out. Not all teachers are the same. Having technical skills is one thing, being humble, patient, clear, and thorough is another. The best teachers I have encountered so far practice a balance of horticultural science and artistic design. They may or may not have studied under revered masters, but they have all honed their skills through extensive practice.

Second is practice. Committing to a bonsai practice means learning one of the most advanced forms of patience and observation imaginable, especially in this world of immediacy. It's easy to get wrapped up in technical skills, but the core of one's practice should be awareness. The trees have as much to teach as a sensei, but you must learn to look and listen throughout the season. Watering is a good time to do this, but better yet, set aside time to enjoy your garden without an agenda. Take careful notes. Be willing to make mistakes, but also aim upwards when selecting material. Learn to say no to trees (THIS might be the hardest lesson). Be critical and also receptive.

The magic happens when you are able to take concrete learnings from a teacher and understand how they apply to certain species at certain times through observation. I recognize some of the contradictions in what I am saying, but my point is that we are finding a path forward between extremes. It is about finding your own point of equilibrium and truth, while continually pushing forward.

Ian Baker

Yolo Bypass during a stormy, moody sunset



Phong Nguyen

Techniques for bending Black Pines - January 24

Tuesday January 24 we welcome American Bonsai Association Sacramento's very own Phong Nguyen to present on black pine bending techniques. This presentation will be a treat as Phong is deeply experienced with collecting and developing massive conifer yamadori, among other species.

Phong emigrated from Vietnam to the US and is largely self-taught, but has also worked with bonsai masters. He brings a knowledgeable and practical perspective of managing yamadori care with an extremely high survival rate, as evidenced by the trees in his collection. He's inventive and has devised an impressive array of tools and techniques to perfect his bonsai hobby to a professional level.

Phong will bring in trees that he has completed substantial bends on to show us the result and the healing process. He will demonstrate how he bends large trunks and branches during his demo. **Members are encouraged to bring in their own Pines and, time permitting, Phong will perform bends on them.**

Phong will also bend a Japanese Black Pine that will be in the raffle, so make sure you get your tickets! The show and tell theme for this meeting is winter silhouettes, so bring in your best winter trees to share with the club. Also, mention *tempest at the right moment for a free raffle ticket at the next meeting.

Renew your club membership and sign up for any of the upcoming workshops during the break.



Phong Nguyen with one of his gorgeous Junipers



Upcoming Workshops

Tom Vuong's Workshop - Grafting and Bending

A few slots remain open for Tom Vuong's pine bending workshop on Tuesday, February 28 9:00 am - 3:00 pm. \$85 per person. Bring your own trees to practice big conifer bends. This is also a good opportunity to check your local garden centers for good material if you are interested in learning these techniques, but don't have strong candidates in your collection. The Monday February 27 grafting workshop is full, but there is a waiting list if you would like to try your luck. Contact Dodie or sign up during the January 24 meeting; pay Sylvia \$85 to reserve your spot.

Monthly Member Workshop

It's repotting season! The next member workshop will be held Saturday February 11 at the Newman's house. Wire and potting mix are provided and the cost per session is \$10. Contact [Renee](#) to be involved. Future workshops are scheduled for March 18, April 15, and May 13. Morning and afternoon sessions will be held if needed to accommodate as many people as possible.

Dig-In Recap

The second two-day Dig-In program is in progress. Day one was held January 14, instructed by Roger Steel. The group visited High Hand nursery and selected a Spaan's Dwarf Shore Pine to develop, pictures below. The second day will be February 18 and the group will visit Ron Anderson's nursery Dirty Locust in Citrus Heights.

Dig-In is ABAS' new member training program, aimed to introduce newcomers to bonsai basics and teach how to select bonsai material with the most potential. The aim is to help folks fast forward past the early twig phase of collecting that we have all been through and arrive faster at high quality bonsai. On day one, participants visit a garden center to learn how to select high-quality material, with the option to purchase their own nursery stock. In the afternoon, students learn tools and techniques during a styling workshop on the morning's finds.

The second session involves a visit to a local bonsai nursery instead of a garden center, with an additional afternoon styling and teaching session. At \$20 for both days, you can't find a better opportunity to accelerate your skills. Keep your eyes out for future sessions.



Above: Spaan's Dwarf Shore Pine selected from High Hand Nursery before styling. Below: after styling by the Dig-In crew.



Renee and Carmen's demo Shimpaku



Renee and Carmen's demo Trident Maples

ABAS Seasonal Bonsai Series - With Renee Seely and Carmen Scott

Renee and Carmen are developing a yearlong sequence of videos titled *ABAS Seasonal Bonsai Series*.

Our goal for this series is to provide insight into developing structure in bonsai by working on four trident maples and four shimpaku junipers in various stages of refinement over a one-year period. As we do the necessary work at the optimum time of year, we will record it for our ABAS YouTube channel.

From our decades of experience, both good and bad, we hope to minimize and/or eliminate some of the pitfalls of novice bonsai artists.

The series will begin in January. Stay tuned!



Welcome New Members!

Welcome new member Richard Bahr! New members are connected with their area liaison and will receive a welcome letter with a free pass to one of our member workshops.

New Member Liasons

We'd like to remind our new members we have a Mentor Program available for you. The mentors are listed on our website under 'Member Resources, Club Liaisons', with contact information. We can help with specific and general bonsai related questions, setting up your display benches, watering options and anything else that comes to mind. This is a one-on-one opportunity for you to get off on the right foot with this fascinating endeavor. Please reach out.



ABAS T-Shirts & Hats Order Yours Soon

We are in the process of ordering official ABAS swag - T's, polos, and hats! We will take prepaid orders at our January and February meetings, so make sure to get your orders in for 2023 starting this Tuesday, January 24. Contact Gina Chaput with any questions.



In Memorium Jason Butler

With great sadness, we share that Jason Butler, a member of our bonsai family, passed away last Saturday evening. While his body is freed from the chronic pain that he bravely faced for many years, he will be sorely missed.

Jason and his brother Brent became interested in bonsai while still in elementary school and over the years Jason attended many events and amassed a formidable collection. He found solace in his bonsai trees, but his love for his wife, Teresa, daughter, Tea, parents, Colleen and John and brother, Brent kept him engaged in a heroic battle to find a winning treatment.

ABAS has sponsored a grove of 10 trees to be planted in the Tahoe National Forest in his memory. Sympathy cards can be sent to: The Butler family • 8650 Posadera Ave. • Orangevale, CA 95662



Above: Jason and family at the Pacific Bonsai Expo.
Below: Jason



Events Calendar

2023

Tuesday, January 24, Phong Nguyen, Bending Black Pine [In-person + Zoom](#)

Friday - Sunday, February 3-5, 18th Biennial Shohin Seminar, [Santa Nella, CA](#)

Saturday, February 11, Member Workshop [In-person](#)

Saturday, February 18, Dig In Workshop Session 2 [In-person](#)

Saturday - Sunday February 18-19, Annual Mammoth Auction and Sale 2023, [Lake Merrit, Oakland, CA](#)

Monday February 27, Tom Vuong Grafting Workshop [In-person \(Full - Waiting list available\)](#)

Tuesday February 28, Tom Vuong Bending Workshop [In-person](#)

Tuesday, February 28, Tom Vuong, Grafting Collected Junipers [In-person + Zoom](#)

Saturday - Sunday, March 11 - 12, Shepard Garden and Art Spring Sale [In-person](#)

Saturday, March 18, Member Workshop [In-person](#)

Tuesday, March 28, 2023, Jonas Dupuich, Shohin Basics [In-person + Zoom](#)

April 8-9, ABAS' 63rd Annual Spring Bonsai & Suiseki Show, [SGAAC In-person](#)

Saturday, April 15, Member Workshop [In-person](#)

Tuesday, April 25, 2023, Regular Meeting: Club Defoliating Party [In-person + Zoom](#)

Saturday, May 13, Member Workshop [In-person](#)

Tuesday, May 23, 2023 Sam Tan, Post-Spring-push Pruning and Wiring of Pygmy and Monterey Cypress [In-person + Zoom](#)

Saturday, June 10, Member Workshop [In-person](#)

Tuesday, June 27, Belgian Artist Yannick Kiggen [In-person + Zoom](#)

Tuesday, July 25, ABAS Annual Summer Splash [In-person](#)

Tuesday, August 22, Viewing Stones and Geology with Don Dupras [In-person + Zoom](#)

Saturday - Sunday, October 21-22, GSBF Rendezvous, Santa Nella, CA [In-person](#)

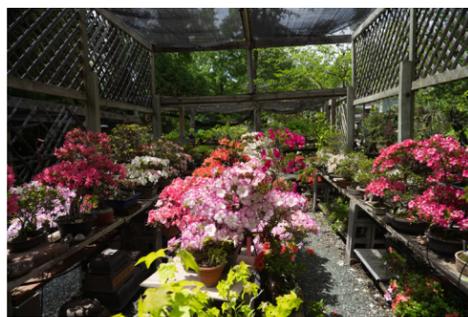


ABAS Annual Member Garden Tour Saturday May 27

The ABAS Annual Member Garden Tour is scheduled for Saturday May 27. We will be visiting the bonsai gardens of: Barb Kelley & Jill Willett, Phong Nguyen, Timm Johnson, and Michael & Linda McCurdy.

The tour will conclude with lunch at the McCurdy's home. Not only is this a fun social event, but it's a great opportunity to see excellent bonsai collections from practiced members. The formal agenda and route details are forthcoming.

Photos from last year's member garden tour



ABAS Spring Bus Trip Saturday April 29

We are tentatively planning on organizing our annual bus trip to visit California bonsai nurseries and gardens for Saturday April 29.

Last year, we visited the Clark Bonsai Collection as well as Ed Clark's Round Valley Nursery in Fresno and Visalia, though we carpoled instead of booking a bus.

This year we are looking at destinations around the Bay Area, including Jonas Dupuich's nursery in Alameda. Keep your eyes out for a survey on the matter so we can gauge interest in this fun event.



Touring the Clark Bonsai Collection in 2022

ABAS x Social Media

What makes ABAS such a wonderful and welcoming community is our passion to share our knowledge and love of bonsai with each other. To reach out into the Sacramento area more we are hoping to kick start a stronger presence on social media. This includes our facebook page, instagram, and twitter accounts.

If you are on any of these platforms, please follow ABAS and use these hashtags to connect all of our posts together as one big community. This can include photos of ABAS workshops, meetings, events, and even your own bonsai as members! If you have photos to share of work in progress, please feel free to post and tag or send to Gina directly to share online.

- #AmericanBonsai
- #ABASbonsai
- #SacBonsai

Our accounts:
Instagram : @american_bonsai_sacramento
Twitter: @BonsaiAmerican
Facebook Group: American Bonsai Association, Sacramento