



The Ann Arbor Bonsai Society meets on the fourth Wednesday of the month at the U-M-Matthaei Botanical Gardens, 1800 N. Dixboro Road, Ann Arbor. Please join us at 6:30 PM to meet friends and members. Program starts at 7:00 PM.

<http://www.annarborbonsaisociety.org>  
[AABonsaiSociety@gmail.com](mailto:AABonsaiSociety@gmail.com)

**May 2017**  
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## **NEXT CLUB MEETING:**

**May 24, 2017**

Our May meeting will be BYOT – Bring Your Own Tree. Bring a tree to work on, along with tools and wire. Experienced AABS members will be on hand to answer questions and offer advice and suggestions. Whether you are a beginner just learning how to style trees, or a more experienced member with a tree that has you puzzled over just how to proceed, this is an excellent opportunity to take advantage of the many decades of experience and expertise to be found in the AABS.

## **Reminder - Win a spot in a workshop!**

NEW FOR 2017 - One space in each workshop will be filled by means of a drawing. The drawing will take place during the meeting the month before the workshop. Anyone present at that meeting may put their name in the 'hat' for a free spot at the workshop. If the name drawn has already paid for the workshop, their fee will be refunded and their space will become available.

## **IN THIS ISSUE:**

President's Perspective	pg. 1
April Meeting	pg. 2
Up for Debate	pg. 4
Why go to a Bonsai convention anyway?	pg. 5
Club Information	pg. 6

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## **PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE:**

**Ron Milostan**

OMG, that's tech talk for OH MY GOSH very loud. Cold wet weather, however it looks like all my trees are coming around. A bit slow for sure. Lucky for me my Lilac has not opened its flowers yet. I am hoping to take it to Meijer's garden this coming weekend for the All State Bonsai Show.

Having seen many trees coming into Kurt Smith's Bonsai Studio on the 1<sup>st</sup> Saturday of each month. I have noticed a few things I would like to mention. Top dressings on pots have not been cleaned. It's a good practice to remove old debris and replace with fresh bonsai soil especially if you're not repotting; this will keep organics from building up over time. Very few trees need repotting every year so this can be an important step, but be sure to check the security of wires holding the tree in the pot.

Recently, while viewing other collections, I have noticed a slow degradation in the growth of many of the trees. The trees appear to be healthy since there is lots of budding and leaves are beginning to form. But what I did not see was branching from the previous years. The trees had very little ramification and more dead branches than is normal.

If your tree looks the same as when you bought it 5 or 10 years ago than chances are it is only surviving and not thriving. There can be many reasons for a tree not to

thrive. The foremost reason, I think, is a lack of nutrients. Also check under the top layer of soil - If your trees are not growing new roots every year something is wrong. Overheating in the summer months can also be a culprit. Over pruning (pinching is the old term) can also cause this problem. Like trees in nature, a bonsai tree must have new growth in the foliage and roots for it to be healthy.

## April Meeting Notes

Ann Arbor Bonsai Society meeting  
04/26/2017 (73 people present)

Some communications:

- The October meeting is moved one week earlier: it will be on October 18th with Mauro Stemberger's wiring demonstration
- May's meeting will be BYOT - Bring Your Own Tree

## Mixed plant forest by Dave DeGroot

Dave is Curator Emeritus of the Pacific Rim Bonsai Collection/Pacific Bonsai Museum and author of "Principles of Bonsai Design" and in this meeting he demonstrated how to create a mixed-species group design.

First of all, when there is a multiple trees composition we have to distinguish between "forest" and "grove". In a woodland there are always bigger and smaller trees: when we talk about a grove the smallest trees are in the front and all of the trees are easy to distinguish, while in a forest it's not possible to define how many trees are present.

Usually there is one single type of tree, that's because if we put different trees in the same soil there will be problems of management due to different requirements from the trees, like amount of water, type of soil required, and different ways of grow...

For this demonstration Dave decided to put different trees in the same composition but all coming from Asia.

The primary tree is a juniper which is the highest one, a smaller juniper is placed behind the primary one and at its left, it is possible to see them in the following picture:



In the picture the smaller juniper is in front because we're not looking at the composition from the front but from the back.

Some stones are put close to the roots of the trees in order to give an idea of mountain and movement in the composition.

The secondary group of trees is a group of three plants on which he put less attention with respect to the first one that is more important:



The third group of trees is a group of two other trees in the middle between the first and the second group of trees:



and fall, there will be the azalea in flower in spring and the juniper are always green.

The difficult part of this composition is to manage all of these species of trees. The maples will grow with more energy and in the back, so they have to stay smaller than the juniper that have to be the primary tree of the composition, so the biggest and the most trumpety.

After some years, the composition will be transferred to a different pot, it will be necessary to cut the roots because at that point they will be all together like a single tree.

A few more photos from David DeGroot's demo:

The fourth group of trees is a group of maples, they're in the back in order to have depth:



The last tree is a small azalea:



Forests with different types of trees are beautiful in every period of the year: maples have beautiful colors in spring



## UP FOR DEBATE:

By Aaron J. Binns

### A Session with Dr. Freud Von Bonsai

We provide everything our bonsai need to survive: water, nutrition, protection against the elements, health care, and so much more. We obsess over these little trees and sometimes it can be frustrating even heartbreaking. It is difficult to deal with a tree that loses a branch, gets damaged, or dies after years of care. We have all experienced bonsai troubles and the anxiety that comes with trying to care for a tree that has become weak. In an effort to help I have transcribed the following session between a bonsai enthusiast and the renowned Dr. Freud Von Bonsai.

Dr. Von Bonsai: Where were we? Ah yes, you were mentioning some anxiety issues you have been having. How long has this been going on?

Patient: The last several weeks have been very difficult. I have a bonsai that seems to be losing a significant branch.

Dr. Von Bonsai: Interesting... very interesting.

Patient: I don't know what to do. I took the tree from winter storage and everything but that one branch seems fine.

Dr. Von Bonsai: How does this make you feel?

Patient: Pretty crappy. I have had the tree for years and this branch has always been a bit weaker, but I have always managed to have success with it. I didn't change anything.

Dr. Von Bonsai: And how is that working for you?

Patient: It's not. I told you I'm losing the darn branch.

Dr. Von Bonsai: Hmm.

Patient: What should I do? How should I deal with this?

Dr. Von Bonsai: Did you feel loved by your mother when you were a child?

Patient: What? What does that have to do with it? My mother loved me!

Dr. Von Bonsai: Hmm. Is this the first time you have felt like this?

Patient: No. A few years ago I lost a tree for no apparent reason. It was perfectly happy one day and the next it was struggling. I spent weeks wondering what I did wrong. The situation was heart wrenching.

Dr. Von Bonsai: Interesting... when exactly did you start hating your mother?

Patient: I don't hate my mother! She is a wonderful person!

Dr. Von Bonsai: Hmm.

Patient: I do everything that I can for my trees. I water regularly. Not too much and not too little. I maintain a regular fertilization program. I watch the health of the trees closely and apply treatments for insect or fungal infections. I winter protect in a 4 foot deep pit! I work the trees only when they are healthy. I watch to insure they don't become root bound and repot when necessary. Ahhh! Why do bad things happen to good trees? Dr.? Are you sleeping?

Dr. Von Bonsai: Huh? What? No, no. I just had my eyes closed to help me concentrate on what you were saying. What was it that you were saying?

Patient: I can't stop feeling bad about myself when one of my trees struggles or dies. You charge \$200.00 for a 30 minute session, can't you help me?

Dr. Von Bonsai: Hmm... These little trees are just like big trees but you keep them in pots, yes?

Patient: Yes.

Dr. Von Bonsai: And unless I am mistaken trees that are not in pots do die eventually, yes?

Patient: Sure.

Dr. Von Bonsai: Then if God can't keep trees alive forever, why do you think you can do better just because you put the tree in a pot?

Patient: Hmm.

Dr. Von Bonsai: Time is up. Schedule your next session with the receptionist. We still need to understand what is causing this hatred you feel toward your mother.

## Why go to a Bonsai Convention, Anyway?

A message from Steve Moore, Past MABA Vice-President



Late last year, I started talking up the MABA2010 convention, trying to persuade as many as possible of our local members to attend. A question from one lady stopped me in my tracks for a moment.

The gist was: *I don't have much bonsai experience; wouldn't things at a convention be over my head? So what point would there be to my going?*

That rocked me a bit! As I considered her question, I realized that I had not mentioned the great difference my own first convention made to me. My first bonsai convention resulted in a "quantum leap" in my bonsai knowledge, enjoyment, and confidence. (I really don't like clichés, but occasionally a cliché does actually say it best.)

The first convention I attended was the 1992 American Bonsai Society Symposium, hosted by the Susquehanna Bonsai Society and held in Hershey, PA. Even though I had acquired my first tree (a serissa) 2-1/2 years before, I was still very much a beginner, learning as best I could from books and journals. My work schedule at the time kept me from involvement in any bonsai club.

How did the symposium result in a "quantum leap?" Let me give you some specifics.

**First, learning, learning, learning!** Opportunities to learn were all around me:

**Demonstrations.** I saw Bruce Baker, of Ann Arbor, MI, start out with an unkempt-looking collected yew that I, frankly, thought was quite boring, and transform it into a masterpiece. The work took two days, most of it off in a side room; but when Bruce was finished I was very much impressed by the result! I learned how a potter creates an oval pot on a round potter's wheel by watching Max Braverman do it. (He threw a round pot, then cut a leaf-shaped section out of the center and carefully squeezed the sides in to close the gap.) And I grasped some techniques that I had not yet understood from reading, by *seeing* them done.

**Workshops** are of course an excellent chance to learn, as many of you already know. I didn't take any in Hershey, but I was a silent observer in one or two, and even observing I learned quite a bit.

**Exhibit Critiques.** I took one critique at ABS '92, and have been convinced of their value ever since! Vaughn Banting, of New Orleans, led a dozen of us through the convention exhibit, explaining what he found good and not-so-good about each tree. I know I learned more in that one hour than in any other four hours that weekend! Vaughn, by the way, had an encouraging way of referring to a bonsai's "dilemmas" rather than its "problems."

**Private conversations.** Within half an hour of checking in I found myself welcomed to listen in as a serissa's owner discussed design options with a teacher. Several times during the weekend I stopped one teacher or another in the hall, to ask (politely) if he would mind answering a question. My questions then were kindergarten level, but only one man blew me off.

Vaughn Banting was the most helpful of all. After courteously listening to a design dilemma that had me stumped, Vaughn sat down with me on a nearby bench. Taking the pad on which I'd sketched out my problem, he in turn sketched a simple, fairly elegant solution, which was well within my abilities at the time. When I protested that his suggestion broke a basic design rule, he explained that this was a valid exception. ("A major branch *may* cross the trunk, if the tree is a windswept.") It has always seemed to me that the best way to show my appreciation for the helpfulness of Vaughn, and others, is by passing it on. Vaughn died in October 2008, and since then it has also seemed the best way to honor his memory.

**Second, inspiration!** Pictures can be very useful, but nothing compares with being able to see a bonsai directly: you can look at it from different angles, from closer or farther away; you can see more detail, more nuance. I went through the bonsai exhibit in Hershey at least three times by myself, studying the trees, finding new details, new insights. Several times I bent down to put my eyes about at the level of the nebari, and looked *up* into the branch structure.

Sometime during ABS '92, I'm sure, is when I started saying to myself, "I didn't know you could *do* that," in mingled surprise and delight. After 18 years, I still say it from time to time.

What sorts of insights can you gain from studying good bonsai?

**Species.** Would you expect English ivy, or giant sequoia, to make a good bonsai? A convention display is a good place to expand your horizons about species you may not have considered before.

**Style and color matches.** Sometimes we don't realize that a certain style will work well for a given species, until we see an example. The same is true for pot colors and the foliage, fruit, or bark of different trees.

**Ways to handle dilemmas.** One of the trees in the Hershey exhibit had a major trunk-chop wound that was far from being completely closed. The artist put the wound to the rear, and grew a new leader directly in front of it, to conceal it. It was the first time I had seen that. Seeing how others have handled design dilemmas can give us ideas for dealing with the challenges our own trees present.

**Third, community.** This benefit is intangible, but it is very real. Paul Weishaar, President of MABA, approaches this concept from an angle that hadn't occurred to me, in his current "President's Message." Rather than appear to compete with him, I'll just ask you to read his second paragraph, beginning with, "As I write this I cannot help but think of our bonsai community ..." (*President's Message shown below.*)

**Finally,** let me leave you with a 9-year-old's perspective. I asked my daughter what she would say on this point, as I was getting ready to write. I'll quote her answer as closely as I can: *When you go to a convention, you learn a lot about bonsai, and then you find you have a hobby that you will enjoy for the rest of your life!*

Steve Moore, MABA Vice-President; Warsaw, IN  
Fort Wayne Bonsai Club

*This article is adapted from the February 2010 Stuff from Steve, a column in the Fort Wayne Bonsai Club monthly newsletter.*

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## FOR SALE OR WANTED:

**Ads in the Newsletter:** All members can offer for sale any bonsai and bonsai related materials in the newsletter or at the monthly meeting with no sales fee. AABS Society Members' ads are free to publish in the Newsletter. Deadline for submissions to the Newsletter is the 5th of the month.

**Prizes for the Raffle:** We are soliciting donations suitable for prizes to be raffled during each general meeting, and, for the Annual Bonsai Show Raffle. If you have a tree, bonsai pot, tool or anything else bonsai related, that you do not use anymore and is still in good condition, consider donating it to the Society. Please see Bill Struhar at any meeting, email Bill at [wm.struhar@mail.com](mailto:wm.struhar@mail.com) or call (586) 468-7169.

**Club Logo Now Available:** we will embroider the club logo on your garment for \$12 (plus modest additional charge for lined garments).

The logo comes in two forms; light green tree on dark green background, or dark green tree on light green background, with a border on both combinations and AABS lettering and Chinese characters with appropriate contrasting color depending upon the garment color.

Bring your garment in a clear plastic bag to a meeting, select your colors, pre-pay Bill Struhar, and your garment will be ready one or two meetings later. (The vendor may require a minimum of five garments per order)

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## AABS AD-HOC COMMITTEES

The AABS President is an ex-officio member of all committees with the exception of the Nomination Committee.

**Fund Raising:** William Struhar

**Web Administration:** Bob Bauer

**Nomination Committee:**

**Show Committee:** Ron Milostan and Paul Kulesa

**Annual Auction:** Paul Kulesa

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Membership dues are \$25. Please pay by check, written to Ann Arbor Bonsai Society or bring your credit card to the meeting and pay! AABS now accepts credit cards for membership fees and other AABS activities. Please talk with the Treasurer at the next meeting.

## Visit us on the Web:

<http://www.annarborbonsaisociety.org>

## Support Local Bonsai Vendors

Hours: Wed., Thurs. & Fri.: 11:00 am to 6:00 pm Sat., 1:30pm to 5:00pm  
CLOSED: Sunday, Monday & Tuesday

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The Ann Arbor Bonsai Society is affiliated with the American Bonsai Society: <http://absbonsai.org> and the Mid-American Bonsai Alliance: <http://mababonsai.org>