

GOLDEN STATEMENTS



Marin Bonsai Fall Show

Satsuki Azalea Development

The Marin Bonsai Fall Show Extravaganza

By David Eichhorn

Photos by Pete Hopkins

The Marin Bonsai Club (MBC) has certainly carved a niche for itself with its Annual Fall Show. Most North Americans think East Coast or Canada when they think of Fall colors, but the Marin Bonsai Club has set out to show that California is colorful, too. With a beautiful Fall display, an entertaining and educational program of events, including a unique Friday night opening complete with dinner, the MBC Fall Show is truly a feast for the senses. The 2013 show marked the 7th year of an event that has been so consistently good that it has gained a loyal following, and judging from their pleased faces, it's safe to assume the fans will be back again next time.

The MBC Fall Show owes much of its character to the venue, the Marin Art & Garden Center (MAGC), in the small, charming town of Ross. For a day and a half, the Marin Bonsai Club transforms the MAGC Livermore Pavilion into a cavalcade of bonsai fun and spectacle. The ambience contributed by the Pavilion begins with its large stone fireplace, which opens onto an enclosed patio overlooking the beautiful MAGC grounds. The enclosed patio is where a stupendous lasagna dinner, supplied by Kentfield's Ambrosia Restaurant and coordinated by Daniel Keller, was served on Friday, and the patio was opened up for general lounging and refreshments on Saturday. The romance created on that patio over Friday's dinner was one of the major highlights of the show. The entire location was the perfect backdrop for the beauty inside, where the Pavilion was divided into two sections: the main area with all the trees and the demonstration area, where the special events took place.

Upon first entering the show, visitors were immediately welcomed not only by smiling members of the Marin Bonsai Club, Frances Nolan and Art Wasserman who worked the door almost all Friday night, but there were also trees lining the entryway

perfectly chosen to beckon show goers further into the venue. The one and only person in charge of tree placement at the show was the club's Vice President of Shows, Jay McDonald. Jay did his usual excellent job of selecting and placing trees for the show. Most notable at the entry was a giant (for a bonsai), over 60 year-old, Chinese Wisteria opposite the door. It's mostly coincidence that this is Jay McDonald's tree. There is no denying that it made an excellent envoy for the show, with its large canopy and unique Fall display. This was the first time Jay ever displayed the tree at this growth stage. The seed pods were left intact and the few remaining green-gold leaves had their petioles cut down to just a few leaflets. The overall effect was both welcoming and spooky at the same time. Some were heard to comment that the tree was "dancing" because the branches, bowed under the weight of the seed pods, tended to bounce a bit. This one tree introduced many of the thematic aspects of the show: it exhibited stimulating Fall-colored leaves, the starkness of nearly bare branches, and the dormant fertility of Fall fruit.

The other Fall staple is a good selection of conifers. And those were certainly on hand at the MBC Fall Show. Not far from the welcoming Wisteria, along the entryway to the main area, there was a stunning cascade Green Atlas Cedar that is over 60 years old, belonging to Tim Burke, and just beyond that, at the entry point to the main viewing area, was an 80 year-old White Pine, another tree of Jay McDonald's. These two trees, and a graceful Japanese White Pine belonging to Roger Lion, were the handsomest in the conifer class, and that's according to the members of the Marin Bonsai Club. As part of the ongoing process of learning how to assess and judge trees, club members were invited to vote for four awards for the best trees in the categories of Large and Medium Coniferous and Deciduous, plus an award for Best Shohin. This allowed members to practice skills honed at recent meetings and made for more lively

conversations about the trees. One additional award went to the single tree with the Most Potential, a prize our guest demonstrator, Peter Tea, had the honor of awarding. Tim Burke's cascading Green Atlas Cedar won that award. Jay's White Pine won Best Large Conifer and Roger Lion's Japanese White Pine won Best Medium Conifer.

The Best Large Deciduous award went to Tim Burke's impressive 40 year-old Trident Maple. This was prominently displayed near the middle of the room, immediately visible as one turned the corner from the entryway, and offered what was arguably the best traditional Fall color display of the entire show. The other trees offering incredible Fall color displays were the winners of Best Medium Deciduous and Best Shohin, both trees belonging to Alison Seaman.

The deciduous was a beautiful Ginkgo Biloba in full lemon-yellow Fall color. This tree has a delightfully fat, gnarled trunk that gives this relatively small tree a strong presence. A few leaves laying upon the soil added the perfect additional autumnal touch to the piece. The shohin was a flaming red, broom style Euonymous capable of catching the eye from across the venue. The voting probably wasn't even close on that one; there were plenty of fine shohin on hand, but in terms of Fall dazzle, the Euonymous was every bit as breathtaking as the Trident Maple.

The award winning trees, photographed as part of a

first-time MBC project to photograph as many of the show trees as possible, appear here on these pages. There was a professional photographer, Pete Hopkins, on hand throughout the setup of the show and some sixty trees were photographed just prior to Friday night's festivities. Members with photographed trees will be able to order an on-demand magazine-style

publication featuring all of the trees.

The entertaining series of events in the demonstration area kicked off Friday night after dinner, with the headline guest artist for the show, the Honorable Peter Tea. Peter brought a good-sized, rather shaggy San Jose Juniper, apparently collected from the wild the year before, and proceeded to prune and wire it into a masterful work of art. The tree's bushiness had been hiding a nicely curved, hefty trunk with various areas worthy of future jinining. As if watching him work and hearing what he had to say about the tree and junipers in general

weren't enough, Peter found ways to further engage the audience, for instance by getting various opinions on the possible front of the tree before beginning the styling process. The tree was raffled off at the end of the demonstration to many eager ticket holders. The silent auction items that had been out all night were also awarded at that time, rounding out an exceedingly well-executed evening of bonsai.

After a casual Saturday morning; with small groups of people trickling through the exhibit, enjoying



Trident Maple; Tim Burke



Top Left: *Ilex integra*; Frances Knoles
Top Right: Chinese Wisteria; Jay McDonald
Bottom: Japanese White Pine; Roger Lion

the modest refreshments in the transformed lounging area of the patio, and watching John Doig's impromptu outdoor tree styling; the day's scheduled demonstration, billed as a "Style-a-thon," began in the mid-afternoon. This featured two trees, a Hinoki Cypress and a Common Boxwood, two bonsai artists, John Doig and David Eichhorn, and the event's knowledgeable and eloquent Moderator, Chris Ross. Chris did a great job of engaging and educating the audience regarding what the artists were doing to their respective trees and keeping the energy of the event going, all while finding time to give encouraging asides to David, the less experienced of the two artists. Having a less experienced person up there styling a tree may have helped pique the audience's curiosity, perhaps making the art form feel that much more accessible. They watched John expertly shape his tree on one side, with mostly descriptive comments from Chris, contrasted with David wrestling with his tree and getting more exploratory, and occasionally pointed, discussion from Chris on the other side. The audience was also included in more of the decision making with David's tree. There were certainly a lot of good questions and comments from the audience, which quickly swelled to capacity by the end of the demonstration. At that point, John's tree, the Cypress, was a sight to behold, already a work of art, and although David's Boxwood may have looked a bit more battle weary, it was certainly worthy of the raffle of both trees that followed.





Top Left: Chinese Elm Forest; David Stern

Middle Left: Coast Redwood; Jay McDonald

Bottom Left: Cork Bark Black Pine; Jay McDonald

Top Right: Korean Hornbeam; Tim Burke

Bottom Right: California Buckeye; Jay McDonald

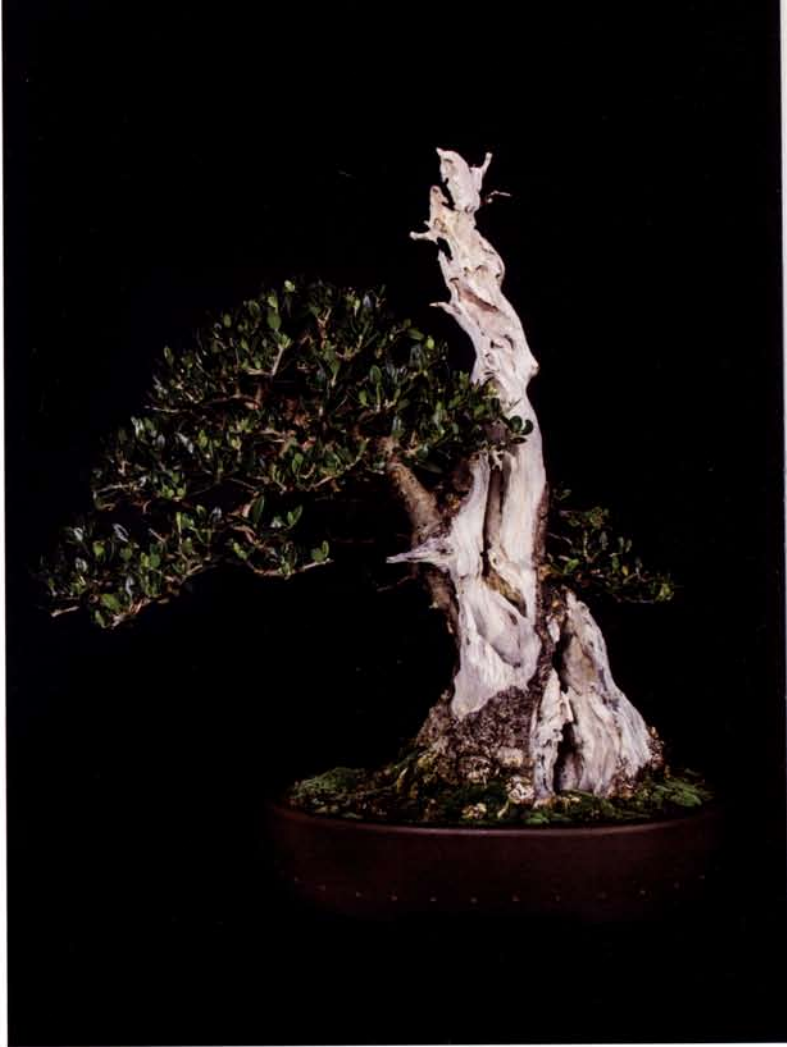
Top Right: Chinese Elm; David Stern
Bottom Right: Trident Maple; Tim Burke
Top Left: Ginkgo; Alison Seaman
Bottom Left: Pomegranate; Jay McDonald

Throughout the second half of the Style-a-thon, there was a raffle of the items that had been lining two of the demonstration room walls throughout the show. All of the silent auction and raffle items were gathered and raffled by Candace Key, who expertly coordinated these cornerstone events. The Trident Maple donated to the raffle by Lone Pine Nursery of Sebastopol was particularly memorable. Other indispensable show volunteers included Jeanette Arnold and Michael Jaffe. Jeanette's beautiful accent plants always enhance show displays, bringing them closer to the Tokonoma ideal, and she also decorated and kept an eye on the outside tables both Friday and Saturday. Michael was one of many club members who descend like worker bees upon the show setup and breakdown, doing both at a mind-boggling pace,



but Michael was particularly important as Daniel Keller's right hand in the smooth-running kitchen.

Everything went so well with the show, and the weather Saturday was particularly nice, it was almost sad to see it end. The Marin Bonsai Club hosted a beautiful day and a half of bonsai art and education and left all visitors with a fresh appreciation for Fall beauty and a sense that they had been a part of something they won't experience anywhere else. That is part of the charm that brings them back every year, to see a truly unique bonsai show experience



Above: Zinfandel Grape; Craig Thompson

Right Top: Wild Olive; Jay McDonald

Right Bottom: Pyracantha; Candace Key

Left Top: Shimpaku Juniper Shohin; John Doig
Left Bottom: Shimpaku Juniper; Jay McDonald
Right Top: Japanese White Pine; Jay McDonald
Right Middle: Cotoneaster; Jeanette Arnold
Right Bottom: Apricot; Jay McDonald





Left Top: Golden Hornet Crab Apple; Craig Thompson
Left Bottom: Euonymus Shohin; Alison Seaman
Right Top: Blue Atlas Cedar; Tim Burke
Right Middle: Seiju Elm; Craig Thompson
Right Bottom: Japanese Maple; Dan Keller