



## Dennis Donald – “The Art of Bonsai and Suiseki Display”

Brandywine Town Center

Saturday, March 15, 2014, 10:00 am

Pre-meeting tree counseling by experienced members will be available

This meeting was originally scheduled for February but is now being run in March after the initial attempt was canceled due to snow. The March styling workshop that was to have been run by Howard McNeal is being replaced.

Dennis has pursued an interest in bonsai and suiseki for many years and is well qualified to give a program on the display of bonsai. We will be viewing a vintage video on the art of bonsai and suiseki display that, while nearly two decades old and out of print, still applies today. Keido is a famous school for the aesthetics of tokonoma display founded by the now deceased Katayama Ichiyu, sensei, with lasting influence on today's bonsai and suiseki display. His teachings are continued today by Susumo Sudo who is still esteemed as the number one bonsai display artist in Japan. We are going to see a vintage film on the subject and are fortunate that Dennis can supply this film because it is hard to find.

### Dues Reminder

March is the deadline for renewing or initiating membership in BBS. Spring is our time to clean out that old membership roster and bring in the new, so if you want to keep receiving our informative newsletters and participate in auctions, please send your dues payment and membership form to:

Steve Ittel

7 Barley Mill Drive

Wilmington, DE 19807

To those of you have taken care of this annual chore long ago, we thank you.

### MidAtlantic Bonsai Societies Registration

A batch of MABS Spring Festival fliers just went out to all registered members. More will be available at the March meeting. We provided some details about the meeting in the January BBS Newsletter. There is additional information available at their website:

<http://midatlanticbonsai.freeservers.com/>

If you wish to attend this high quality regional meeting, and want to take advantage of the pre-April 1 cost reductions, time is getting short so act now.

A number of BBS members will be showing trees and BBS also has some organizational responsibilities during the meeting. We would hope to turn out good representation at the meeting. There are lectures, workshops, a display of member trees and a display of trees by bonsai professionals. In addition, there will be a large vendor area and auctions of various bonsai-related materials.

### What is Bonsai?

Bonsai is an art form that blends horticulture and artistic design in three-dimensions. To qualify as a bonsai, the miniature tree growing in a pot should be both a representation of nature and a creative expression – living artwork

The word bonsai is derived from two Chinese characters, meaning a tree planted in a shallow container. The word is pronounced "bone-sigh," -not banzai, the Japanese battle cry meaning “long life to Japan.”



The history of bonsai is long, originating 1700 years ago in China with collected mountain trees. Other ancient civilizations

have grown container plants, but no society has as much documented historical background in artistically-potted plants and horticultural practices as China. Their name for the art form is penjing, the Chinese precursor of bonsai.

With the parallels of eastern culture, especially religion, Japan borrowed potted tree culture some 800 years ago. The Japanese began to change the craft by altering and improving the design perspective through observing the forms and characteristics of trees in nature. As a result, the Japanese elevated potted tree culture to the art we enjoy today.

The most common question about bonsai is, "How old is it?" but a bonsai can be any age. The artistic techniques, when properly applied to their development, will produce the "look of age" in a relatively short time. Since the techniques are meant to develop and emphasize age, the actual age of a tree is not important - ask instead, "How old does the tree look?"

### **Bonsai Is Not a Mystery – It Is a Challenge.**

Creating a bonsai from woody plant material requires learned techniques, as is the case for any art form. Therefore, techniques such as appropriate branch selection, followed by pruning and shaping utilizing aluminum or annealed copper wire are fundamental. This must eventually be followed by potting in a bonsai pot that compliments the design – another learned artistic aspect of the many techniques of this living art form. The size of the bonsai is maintained by seasonal trimming of new growth and periodic root pruning and repotting.

Most bonsai must live outdoors in the same environment as their full-scale siblings except many require special protection during the winter months, depending on the growth zone and the plants' hardiness. Tropicals and subtropicals are adaptable to indoor conditions, but during the summer growing season almost all trees should be kept outdoors.

### **Can Less Be More?**

I present two versions of a single sketch. A portion of the tree has been digitally erased in the second version. Or else, I took a pair of clippers to the lower branch in the second picture.



So which is the better tree? Or which tree would you rather have? Of course, there is a bit of unfairness, because the second picture has been blow up more because both sketches fill the same horizontal space. But this is not totally unfair because your eye will take in as much of the tree that exists. Thus, even though the two trunks are the same size, the one with less tree will have the feel of a bigger trunk.

The point of this discussion is that we are often too shy with our clippers during styling. Or we sometimes do not think enough about trees as they mature and grow. Can we cut more off and end up with a bigger, better tree? Or, if you liked the first tree better, you don't need to do anything.