



### President's Report

Matt Sharp

Yay Spring! It's a busy time in my backyard right now, Ash trees and Chinese Elms are pushing out new shoots, pines are putting energy into candles, olives are waking up and various flowers are keeping the bees busy. Eucalypts and tea trees are budding out, buds are swelling on the hawthorns and all the trees that I haven't repotted yet are reminding me that I need to get my skates on. Maple seeds from the crisper and *Leptospermum* seeds from envelopes have been planted out and are already poking their first leaves out from under the soil, because I somehow convinced myself that I don't have enough trees. I also recently bought a few native trees as tubestock from the State Flora Nursery in Belair National Park, partly due to the inspirational trees I saw at this year's National Convention in Melbourne and partly from watching the fabulous demonstration from Quentin Valentine at September's meeting.

The three trees I bought were based on trees I saw growing in the wild during our recent dig in the Onkaparinga park and on a few drives earlier in the year. The first was a Silver Banksia (*Banksia marginata*) which in the Adelaide hills can grow into a medium sized tree with graceful upright branches and fine ramification. The second species was a Sticky Hop Bush (*Dodonaea viscosa*), a medium sized open shrub with rugged, sinewy trunks and topped with long glossy leaves. These are really common and if we can find some private land could be a good candidate for future digs. Lastly I bought a Gooseberry Mallee (*Eucalyptus calycogona*), a lovely smooth barked Mallee often seen around Strathalbyn with characteristic graceful multiple trunks topped with sparse foliage. I've often thought that the classic Mallee shape would make for a beautiful clump style bonsai, in a pot to reflect our local colours. These are all young trees but by starting with seedlings I should be able to control the growth and slowly build the shapes I already have in my head. All three have been planted into larger pots and the *Dodonaea* has already put on strong growth and is biting into the wire I wrapped around it!

When I first started with Native trees (*Eucalyptus*, *Callitris* and *Casuarina*) I styled them all into classic Japanese bonsai styles, a choice I have since regretted. Now, as with all species, I try and convey the growth patterns and outlines as they appear in the wild. Looking at existing Bonsai is a great way to learn techniques but for styling it's better to study trees as they grow in nature. At the recent World Bonsai Masters event in Canberra, Mr Kunio Kobayashi emphasised this by outlining his changing approach to styling. As a Bonsai Master working for over 50 years, he stated that in his younger years he was driven to create trees that won prestigious awards (which they did) and were worth a lot of money (which they were). He now laments the overly stylised trees clipped into what he called "boring Japanese triangles", and now strives for a much more open and natural look, more reminiscent of bonsai styles seen in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

My modest bonsai collection is a multicultural affair made up of native and exotic trees, and like most of us I cut my teeth on the exotics as there is a wealth of information on growing them as bonsai, but I'm convinced that there is an opportunity for us to create unique Australian bonsai if we study the trees and landscapes just outside our back door.

Tell me what you think. See you at the next meeting.

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## Andrew Sellman – visiting demonstrator

Andrew commenced his demonstration event at the July meeting with highlights from his time spent in Japan and emphasised the value of these experiences to the development of his practice. As a qualified horticulturist with fifteen years involvement in bonsai, Andrew has made eight trips to Japan and spoke of his stay at [Fujikawa Kouka-en](#) as being most significant.



*Fanning the branches*

As an unknown within the nursery, he was initially only permitted to work on very ordinary material although the images on screen looked impressive to us, particularly following Andrew's efforts.

He talked about the preference for flat bottom pads that dome slightly higher at the back, closer to the main branch and he also stressed that when looking from the top or a plan view, making sure to fan out the smaller branches into a shovel shape with all shoots of the pad going in the same direction..



*Shimpaku before and after Andrew's work.*

To enhance the sense of age in conifers branches should bend down at an acute angle rather than bent to a softer bowing look.

Andrew also spent time working at the Taisho-en in Shizuoka at the foot of Mt. Fuji. This nursery is run by Nobuichi Urushibata and specialises in Shohin bonsai.

Andrew [created a video](#) which illustrates the impressive work required of him to rejuvenate a stunning Shohin.

For the demonstration segment of the meeting Andrew worked on a 'club' juniper that had been nurtured by Janet and Matt for an occasion such as this.



*Completion of the juniper*

Andrew had prepared the tree prior to the demonstration so that he could properly take advantage of its potential and complete the task of wiring and shaping within the time constraints. The final result was most impressive and Andrew kept the audience attention throughout the process.

## **The Weekend Workshops**

Despite the cold, wet weather all who attended the weekend workshops under Andrew's tutelage, valued the experience and were prepared to tolerate any discomfort.

Once again Heidi Timpano generously hosted us and it was good to see some new members take advantage of the invitation to attend as observers.



Matt's shimpaku (before and after)



Greg's ficus (before and after)



Annie's quince (before and after)

### Reflection from Don Napolitano

The Andrew Sellman workshop was an opportunity for me to gain further knowledge and understanding of the principals of bonsai and apply them to one of my juniper specimens. Andrew did not disappoint!

Don's juniper (before and after)

While the one-on-one evaluation, design and planning were personalised, further knowledge was there for the taking by listening to Andrew's discussions and planning with other participants about their plants. Learning about the principals of direction and negative space and their application in the creation of flow was invaluable and paramount in completing my first major juniper styling.

Regardless of whether you bring your own plant or just attend as an observer, the opportunity to listen, discuss and interact with knowledgeable bonsai artists provides for an incredibly engaging and rewarding experience that no enthusiast should miss out on.



## The history of a Luke's *Pinus radiata*

*We were all little in awe of the *Pinus radiata* that **Luke Swalling** worked on during the Andrew Sellman workshops. The tree is quite impressive and as Luke explained its humble beginnings and successive iterations, I realised how interesting the story might be to those new to bonsai and to those of us who needed a reminder that achieving a worthy bonsai takes time and persistence. His story follows:*





*After collection 2011*

I collected this pine in September 2011 on a club dig at Mount Crawford Forest. This was my first club dig as I only joined the club in August 2011. If I remember rightly there were only a few who turned up – Matt Sharp, Kelvin Rodrigues and Eric Bouvet – which meant more trees for us.

Kelvin took me under his wing and helped me find this tree. He told me to be careful with the root-ball when digging as we needed it intact and undisturbed if possible. He instructed me that once home, I put it in the shade for a few weeks and not water it – just mist the needles twice daily. I actually collected three trees at this dig (two radiatas and a Maritime pine) however the two other trees didn't survive.



*Before and after the Stemberger workshop 2013*

I took this tree to the Mauro Stemberger workshop in July 2013 and we pulled the needles, changed the angle and wired it up for its first styling.

I re-potted the tree in 2014 in to 100% diatomite back into a foam box. I bare rooted the tree and soaked in Rhizotonic whilst bare rooted and once potted up. I made sure to put some of the mycorrhiza in amongst the roots when repotting. I have since been told pines don't like being bare-rooted so I think I was lucky here.



*Before and after the Stemberger workshop 2015*

In July 2015 Mauro came back and I took this tree back along and we re-wired it again. It had put on a lot of branches since the first styling so much more work was needed. We did discuss cutting off the first right hand side branch but decided to leave it for now. Once it is gone you can't put it back on. Either 2015 or 2016 I put it in to its first bonsai pot which was a drum pot thinking this was more of a literati style. Once in the pot I realised it didn't really suit it.

Fast forward to 2018 and I took it along to Bonsai Mujo for a pine workshop. Kelvin and I re-wired it and talked about pot choice. I purchased a new pot and put it in to that in September 2018.



*Before and after the Sellman workshop 2019*

Then in June 2019, I went along to the Andrew Sellman workshop. I had booked the whole day and took along a couple of trees as I wasn't sure what he would like to work on. When he walked in I think he was a little excited to see my monstrous pine. After a quick introduction he said "I would remove this branch and this branch, change the angle slightly bring this branch down here." It was refreshing to hear the excitement in his voice as he looked

at the options with my tree. Andrew was not the first to suggest removing the right hand branch with both Mauro and Kelvin talking about it previously so I got out my branch cutters and off it came.

We jinned the branch I removed as it had lovely movement close to the trunk and a smaller side branch off of this too. We removed a back branch as there was still quite a few branches coming from the same level in a typical pine 'wheel' branch formation. I had already removed a few of these over the years, and will most likely remove another in the future too. We wired the first left branch and Andrew set the 'pads' in place and I was floored at how good it looked. I knew then that this tree was going to be amazing when we finished let alone in a few years' time. I then set about wiring the rest of the tree and I was chasing daylight to get the last little bit finished off. Unfortunately I ran out of light as it was really hard to wire around the needles without breaking them but we positioned what we could. Andrew gave me some pointers on what to do style wise in the coming years as it back buds and fills out more.

I feel he has really brought this tree up a few notches and revealed its true potential. I can't wait to see it progress further and bring it along to Andrew's next workshop.

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## Seasonal Notes – Spring

*Matt Sharp*

Ah, Spring at last. This is the busiest time of the year for you and your bonsai. Your main activities will be repotting, pinching new growth and watering. Luckily it's a good time to be outside!

Ash and Elm trees are usually the first to start budding so hopefully you took last month's advice and you're ready to repot if necessary. If the buds are starting to swell then the time is right, although if you miss this and a couple of shoots have already opened you can still get away with it.

How often a tree needs repotting depends on its age, size and species so older established trees are often root pruned every 3 to 5 years while younger vigorous bonsai can be repotted every year. If you're not sure then knock the tree out of its pot and have a look at the roots. If the roots are tightly spiralling around the base of the pot then you'll need to root prune. Another sign is if water pools on the surface of the pot when watering.

There are plenty of articles on how to root prune and repot your bonsai so I won't go into details here but remember to take the time to work on the root structure, especially around the nebari (surface roots). An even radial spread of roots is highly desirable in any tree so remove or untangle crossing roots and cut off any roots growing directly down from underneath the trunk. This will ensure that the base of the trunk will flare out as it grows so the sooner this is done the better, and the tree will continue to improve over the years, which is a good thing.

The other important consideration when repotting is balancing the root growth with the branches. The ratio of roots removed to branches removed has an effect on this season's growth. If you heavily prune the roots but only lightly prune the branches, the tree will be robbed of most of the stored nutrients and the tree will respond in spring by producing small leaves with small internodes. Obviously this is a good if you are looking at improving the ramification once you've finished growing the frame. On the other hand, if you lightly prune the roots and heavily prune the branches, there will be a lot of stored food going into fewer buds so the tree will produce fast, coarse growth with large leaves which is perfect if you are developing the major features of the tree and thickening the trunk and branches. Use these principles to build your bonsai appropriate to the stage of its development.

Look after recently repotted trees by keeping them out of the wind and a little on the dry side until you see new growth. Same goes for any trees that have been dug from the wild.

Conifers can also be safely root pruned now but you have to be more gentle with the roots than you are with deciduous, removing no more than a third of the roots. Other evergreens like olives can be repotted now too but don't touch the heat loving species like ficus and jade as they cope better when root pruned in the hot months of summer.

Watering now becomes an important task as the evaporation rate starts to climb during the warmer days. It's easy to get out of the habit over winter so be keep an eye on the soil.

Try and maximize the amount of sun your trees get before the harsh summer sun starts and don't forget to turn your pots around every couple of weeks so your trees get an even dose of sunshine.

Fertilizer can be applied to growing trees at the recommended rate on the packaging. If a tree is well advanced and you are looking to improve ramification, make a weaker solution so that the initial growth isn't too coarse.

There's lots of work to do but you'll also be rewarded with plenty of healthy vigorous trees looking at their best and reminding you why you spend so much time with them.

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## Putting on a good Show

### **Selling bonsai, plants and bonsai related items at our October show**

*(derived from an original article by Andrew Ward)*

Many visitors to our annual show make a bee-line to the sales table because they derive pleasure from browsing through the offerings and are hopeful of finding something unusual or perhaps even the perfect bargain. For this reason, the sales table should be a source of good quality plant material that is healthy and free of weeds and disease. Plants should not be pot-bound and neither should they have been recently potted. It is vital that the items offered for sale represent The SA Bonsai Society positively and encourage others to engage in bonsai. Nothing is more frustrating than to take a plant home, only to discover that it was very recently potted up, perhaps it was a cutting with little or no roots, or even worse ... diseased. While perhaps only costing a few dollars, an incident such as this is not a positive reflection on our society. If the novice bonsai enthusiasts' motivation is to be encouraged, then it is important that the plants we sell through our trading table have a high chance of thriving, not just surviving.

Members who volunteer for the sales area have an important role to play in assisting would-be purchasers. They need to discuss and assess the 'customers' horticultural experience and give useful advice about the care of the newly purchased 'bonsai'.



To help ensure that only quality material is offered for sale in clean, proper containers, we have allocated two 'stewards' to oversee the placement and quality of the material brought in for sale. This initiative is also intended to keep order over the sales area during the two days of the show given that new stock is able to be brought in on the Sunday morning.

It is expected that items for sale will be labelled correctly with the name of the plant species, the price and the member's sales code.

Labels must be soundly attached to the plant/pot so that they are not easily dislodged or lost.

The by-laws to our constitution explicitly outline the protocols to be observed in the sale of items at bonsai shows. These are as follows:

- financial members offering items for sale are also expected to provide assistance during the weekend of the show;
- items offered for sale will be quality, well-established and offered in acceptable containers (if sold in 'growing boxes' such as polystyrene or wooden crates, these must be sturdy and sound);
- members should not advise buyers on the purchase of items that they have personally offered for sale;
- members may not offer merchandise for sale outside of the show trading area or in the proximity of the show venue whilst the show is open to the public.

Coincidence occasionally pops up in our lives. The basis for this story goes back to February this year when I was in Japan at the Kokofu-ten. As I marvelled at the displays of trees large and small, it was the small that created within me the opportunity for an article.

That article formed one of two I wrote for the BCI magazine and whilst one was published in the very next edition about the Kokofu-ten, the second article was held over and is in the next magazine to hit letterboxes across the world.

The second part of the coincidence came in the form of a presentation that Luke Parsons gave to all in attendance at one of the South Australian Bonsai Society meetings on accent plants back around the time I returned from Japan.

This in itself is more than enough coincidence. However, with the show (both the Royal Show as well as the SABS annual show) held around this time of the year, we need to keep in mind the ways to support tree presentation and accent plants can be an easy way to enhance that three point display as well as making a satisfying creation in itself.

All too easy – well yes and no, as my research for the article led me to find out.

Obviously in Japan the art form takes on a serious note for all Bonsai shows and there is like Bonsai, a very serious learning curve to create the end result similar to that when learning how to Bonsai. Instead of just the single category all accent plantings each on turn is sorted into at least six different styles.

Briefly they are as follows:

**1. Kusamono**

Kusamono are traditionally potted arrangements of wild grasses and flowers in unique pots or trays.

**2. Shitakusa**

The closest cousin to Kusamono, Shitakusa is the correct term for plants exhibited with bonsai or similar displays.

**3. Kokedama**

Kokedama literally means "moss ball," and it is merely a ball of soil, covered with moss that has plants growing in the medium inside the ball.

**4. Nearai**

Not heard or seen much outside of Japan. It relates to plants grown to root bound level then removed from the pot and displayed on a flat surface showing the roots as part of the presentation.

**5. Wabi-kusa**

The plants are placed directly into a small glass container with some water and allowed to grow naturally as part of the display.

**6. Suiseki**

Suiseki. The use of stone to convey a story.

In the western society Bonsai community the majority of those we are exposed to are Kusamono, Kokedama and Suiseki with the first and latter probably the easiest to put together.

Kokedama are reliant on a good mix and dampness given they are mostly a moss ball and in our climate where hot days can be a problem, Kusamono are easily put together and like our bonsai easily moved to a cooler spot on those hot days.

As for Suiseki – the hardest part is finding suitable stones in the first place.

In keeping this to a more simple level we address the following:

Kusamono: (also Shitakusa)

- can be a single plant or mixed plants, in or out of the container.
- can be displayed with either a scroll, figurine, or suiseki, but these items will be subservient to the kusamono.
- Kusamono are usually displayed on a mat, flat board, flat ceramic tray, or, rarely, a formal bonsai stand.
- Kusamono should conform to the seasons.
- Kusamono can be a combination of seedling trees, flowers and grasses.

Plants used are typically moss, grass, lichen, small flowers, bamboo, or bulbs that may heighten the beauty or reflect a certain season. While traditionally in Japan, plants gathered from mountains contributed to the bulk of companion plantings, modern use has extended to more creative and artistic design. Having no access to any mountains here in Australia means we need to be a little more creative as well as reflective of our climate and



natural environment so even succulents and cacti are seen as more than suitable as long as combined with your tree together it tells a story and is pleasing to the eye.

## Growing Containers

Some serious fun can be had with the choice of container used to plant your Kusamono/ Shitakusa into. Remember the scale of the container, pot or slab is generally quite small so it is quite normal to use bolder coloured glazes, containers with patterns or drawings on and even more adventurous shapes. Accessing your favourite internet search engine it is easy to view all manner of glazed containers as well as unglazed containers suitable for Kusamono/ Shitakusa.

## Growing Medium/soil mix

You can use just about anything to grow your as Kusamono/ Shitakusa in, however you should remember that as the container is rather small and sometimes many plants are tightly growing in it you should try to use as little inorganic material (eg stone) as possible as this will further reduce the available space for the roots to grow. Treat them as you would mini Bonsai. Whatever you choose it should be similar to your regular mix in that it is free draining but at the same time rather water retentive.

## Three Point Displays

At the Kokofu-ten as well as most Bonsai shows setting a tree by itself is fine however, an accent planting and maybe a wall hanging will create that three point display limited only by one's imagination. With the SABS annual show limited space may mean having just two elements when displaying your tree and the accent planting would be the way to go. Seasonal availability of plants including moss will dictate what can be created but once put together they can take on a whole new interest for you and soon they will be popping up on your benches at home as well as part of any display that goes with your tree at our show. With the festive season fast approaching dare I add that they would make great gifts also.

To show what is possible these images were all taken at the Kokofu-ten held in February in Ueno, Japan.









## 5 things you (probably) didn't know about... English Yew

**Ruth Creedy** found this for us and thought it might be of interest to anyone with English yew as bonsai.

- Yews have one of the longest lifespans of all European plants. The Fortingall Yew in Perthshire is thought to be between 2,000 and 5,000 years old.
- At more than 300 years old and more than 40' high, the tallest yew hedge in Britain can be found in Cirencester Park, Gloucestershire.
- The wood of *Taxus baccata* was used extensively in the manufacture of longbows, owing to the elasticity of the timber.
- The red berries of the yew are harmless, but the seeds and needles can be lethally poisonous.
- Despite its toxicity, yew is being used increasingly in cancer treatment. Chemicals known as *taxanes* are concentrated in the plant's needles in the summer months. Once extracted, they can be used to help prevent new cancer cells from forming.



**Meeting Venue:** Goodwood Community Centre, Rosa St. Goodwood

**Postal Address:** PO Box 159, Goodwood, SA, 5034

**Patrons:** Dorothy Koreschhoff, Carlien Walter

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