

# Spring 2020

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## SA Bonsai Newsletter

### President's report

Matt Sharp

Hi Everyone

As this strange year rolls on I look back and it seems an eternity since the last newsletter back in May. Back then we had cancelled our regular meetings and were relying on Zoom sessions to keep in touch but even in lockdown we were able to provide for our members.



The dig in the Onkaparinga gorge was great fun and well attended, and we managed to make a very small dent in the feral olive population.

Both our scheduled visiting tutors put on fantastic demonstrations over Zoom, with Neil Padbury showing us his methods for field growing to maximise growth and Andrew Edge discussing styling techniques on deciduous species as well as giving us a glimpse of his backyard.

We were finally able to get our meetings and workshops happening again in July where it was great to be able to see bonsai people in the flesh. Meetings have been modified but they are increasingly well attended and are adding a bit of normality to these odd times.

We had a huge success in our annual show, and given the fact we weren't even sure if we would hold it at all, it was a testament to the hard work put in by our committee and members. The show was simplified and fewer trees were displayed, but the public responded, numbers were up and the sales table was quite bare by the time we finished. An influx of new members will add to the enthusiasm and energy of our meetings, and I look forward to meeting them all.



*Penjing display on the stage.*

I'm feeling quite optimistic about the rest of the year which is surprising given how the year started out. Our meetings are gathering momentum again and we'll continue to hold demonstrations over Zoom on the first Saturday morning of each month.

We can't predict how or when this COVID situation will end but right now it's spring and our trees don't care about human affairs, so enjoy the fresh growth and the regular tasks of watering, feeding and trimming, and make the most of the mild weather and warmer evenings. The club will still be promoting the world's greatest pastime and endeavouring to pass on as much knowledge as possible to its members, so enjoy what we have to offer in a

way that best suits you.

Continue to stay safe and take sensible precautions, and I look forward to seeing you all.



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## October Bonsai Show 2020

**Luke Parsons:** I am very pleased to say that our Annual Show held over the weekend Oct 10/11th was a roaring success.

I spent much of the weekend speaking with members of the public visiting our Show, and our own members, who unanimously agreed that it was one of the best Annual Shows yet.

The display area, despite having fewer trees than usual, was of a very high



standard. The sales area had a fantastic selection of plants and related items available, which had to be restocked due to the demand from the large number of people visiting the Show and making purchases. There were a good number of our members volunteering their time in a multitude of ways to make the Show a success – speaking with visitors, providing information, staffing the sales area, acting as stewards, conducting demonstrations, and a multitude of other tasks including setting up and packing up at the end of the weekend. And whilst some of our members may have chosen to avoid the Show due to social distancing requirements, rest assured that all are absolutely more than welcome to return to our regular meetings and workshops when you feel ready to do so – we miss you!

The Annual Show's success has also ensured the financial stability of our Society, and should provide for an exciting programme and opportunities for our members to experience over the coming months. I look forward to hearing any suggestions you may have. Well done to all!



**Gail Richardson:** 2020 has been an 'unprecedented' year with everyone and everything impacted by the pandemic. Our club has not been immune. Meetings and workshops have been held via Zoom and our annual show was in jeopardy of being cancelled like numerous other celebrations in our State. Fortunately we were able to hold our Show but within Covid rules which limited the number of exhibits and visitors. Kitchen facilities were not to

be used, Covid Marshals had to be present and card facilities available rather than the use of cash. All of which dictated how the Show was run.

Brian and I spent time at the entry, counting the number of people coming in and going out to ensure the allowed number in the hall was not exceeded. This was a whole new experience for us but one which kept us on our toes. We also greeted those entering and offered a bucket for the gold coin entry donation. A surprising number of people had no cash at all on them so raided the bottom of purses looking for change, went to a nearby shop so they could get cash, or went to their cars looking for any spare money that used to be used for parking. They asked for card facilities to be available at the door in future.

People commented on how beautiful the trees were and commended the club and the members. They enjoyed it all, with special appreciation of the range and quality of the plants on sale.

They did say that they missed the raffles.



**Alan Jabs:** No one will doubt the world has had a difficult year in 2020. In fact, we all have many friends who are still doing it hard across Australia and the world. Closed or locked down since earlier in the year and the decision to defer club meetings taken in line with recommendations to protect us all, Saturday Zoom sessions became the norm.



Success in reducing the impact here in SA gave rise to the possibility of holding our annual show and so it came to be with a few modifications to comply with requirements but also to demonstrate to the public you can be out and about and be safe as well.

Friday set up was all done and the last few trees came in late but were included, including mine which were under prepared to my mind as a week in the Flinders Ranges a week earlier meant I was not there to spruce

them up. A quick drive into the Adelaide hills to get the moss however and they were passable and set up on the Friday.

Saturday morning and the line up went all across the carpark ready to come in at 10am. The sales tables groaned under the weight of plants/trees for sale. Not by the end of the day though when most were all gone! And the same happened Sunday. Those members who could bring in more to sell to fill the sales tables did so and we were rewarded by the fact that we had just one tree left and the sales area all packed up early well



before closing on the Sunday.

Must have been a new record to the speed of pack up as well. We were given 2 hours but by my reckoning we were done in 45 minutes...

And it doesn't finish there. I have received a letter from Tony Zappia MP (Federal Member for Makin) offering personal thanks to me for volunteering at the show. Seems one of his senior staff attended and was impressed with all we offered, the exhibition, the care and consideration we showed to those in attendance, the knowledge and passion we have for what we do.

I see this as a recognition of all who volunteered over the weekend for a job well done, I was just the lucky one who got noticed.

So to all – a wonderful 2020 show and a job very well done!

*Show photos courtesy Alan Jabs and Ehsan Omaraa*



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## Bonsai articles by Ian Barnes

Ian Barnes is a longtime member of Bonsai Northwest in Victoria and he has very generously given us access to three of his articles:

[Styling Shimpaku Junipers](#)

[Japanese Black Pine Flowers](#)

[Scale Juniper \(Itoigawa\) Workshop with Ryan Neil](#)

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## Zoom demonstration sessions

During the covid lockdown which began in April, Matt Sharp began a series of online bonsai demonstrations that proved invaluable to those of us keen to continue learning and wanting stay in touch.

If you don't already have the list on file, here it is.

[Matt's May 29th demonstration – working with Hackberry group and native Cypress](#)

[Matt's June 6th demonstration on refining junipers](#)

[Luke's demonstration with the Western Myall – June 13th](#)

[Neil Padbury's June 16th demonstration](#)

[Matt's June 20th demonstration with Olives](#)

[Matt's July 4th demonstration on a Pear, Zelkova and English Elm](#)

[Matt's July 11th demonstration on repotting a Chinese Elm](#)

[Luke's July 18th demonstration on the Desert Ash](#)

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## Janet Sabey and the art of illusion

We can all look back and identify those bonsai practitioners who were most influential in assisting us to develop our skills. The doyen of our club, Janet Sabey, always sites Dorothy Koreshoff as the person who had most impact on her.

*Dot stayed at my house on many occasions and of course we talked bonsai, bonsai, bonsai. Needless to say it was a wonderful learning experience and for some years whenever we attended National Conventions, I would ask her to walk me through the trees on display and help me to learn more about design and styling.*

It was Dorothy Koreshoff who always said bonsai was the art if illusion and this was a major focus of Janet's presentation at our October meeting. Janet began by stating that creating the illusion of an old tree in a pot

makes the question of the tree's actual age irrelevant. Creating the illusion of age requires the practitioner to concentrate on:

- Trunk
- Roots
- Main branch or most important branch
- Apex

To assist with exaggerating the illusion of age it is important to also consider design principles such as direction, depth, balance, harmony etc.

### Working with the trunk

The only trunk which should come directly out of the ground vertically must be the *Formal Upright* design. Pines and junipers are good species to work with in this style whereas maples, elms and olives would be more difficult.



*John Naka's Goshin*

Perhaps the most famous formal upright is John Naka's 'Goshin' (protector of the spirit/forest) which is now exhibited in the Washington Arboretum. Naka, who was the forerunner of bonsai in America began training the eleven Foemina junipers (*Juniperus chinensis*) in 1948 and donated it to the National Bonsai Foundation in 1984.

A perfectly straight trunk should ideally have a perfectly placed root at the base, supporting the most important branch. The apex should be wired to reflect the upright direction.

However, if the defining root is missing one can always resort to Plan B and fake it. Roots can be created from another piece of wood or rolled up clay placed where the root should be. Another method is to mound the soil and cover it with moss. And so the art of illusion continues!

If the trunk comes out of the ground perfectly straight but begins to meander it will never make a formal upright. Such a trunk should be replanted on an angle and all other bonsai styles considered. Most importantly, always consider the most appropriate style for a tree by looking from the bottom up and this is done by first exposing the roots which will give an indication of direction and the distance to the first branch. There is no point wiring and shaping a tree only to find there was another stretch of hidden trunk and a huge root pointing in the opposite direction to the rest of the tree.

The main root of a tree and also its main branch should never point towards the front, but instead off to one side.

No portion of the trunk should be horizontal and if any portion of it has no movement or taper for up to 7 or 8 cm, then this should be disguised as much as possible with foliage. If this is not possible, it may need to be cut off and the tree redesigned.

It is also important to choose a style that suits the nature of the tree – figs would look ridiculous as a *literati* and neither are they found in windswept areas.

### The main branch

The main branch does not have to be the first, second or third branch, although it is never the back branch. It is the one that defines the movement and shows the tree's direction. Mark Noelanders, an international demonstrator at the last Brisbane convention, suggested that it is acceptable to see through into a tree and view its trunk but there should be depth at the back of the tree so that you can't see straight through it. This is where back branches are important.

Except for weeping styles such as willows and peppercorns, the underside of branches should be kept clean of leaves with nothing hanging down.



We know that it is important to have taper in the trunk to give the illusion of age but it is equally important to have it in the branches. Cultivating sacrifice branches is the way to create taper but the position of the sacrificial branch is crucial. It's never at the end of a branch as this will thicken the entire branch, resulting in no taper. The sacrifice branch might be a third the way along to thicken only the first third of the branch.



Finally, an example of a bonsai successfully expressing the illusion of age. The main root of this juniper is to the right, as is the most important branch and the apex. Most of the trunk can be viewed from the front and the depth of foliage at the back prevents a clear view through to the other side. The trunk width is similar to the pot depth which creates a good balance between the tree and its pot. The height of the tree is in proportion to the trunk width and the apex is rounded, not pointed – all adding to the illusion of age. Of course this tree has a false trunk (known as a Phoenix graft in America or a Tanuki trunk in Japan) which is a tricky method of further enhancing the illusion of age.

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**Meeting Venue:** Goodwood Community Centre, Rosa St. Goodwood  
**Postal Address:** PO Box 159, Goodwood, SA, 5034

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