

LOOKING BACK: The Bonsai Garden from Start to Finish in 2015



Dismantling the Clark Center Bonsai Garden, the new space in Shinzen, dredging irrigation lines and reconstruction of the new bonsai garden in time for the opening October 2015.



BONSAI TOMODACHI

THE CLARK BONSAI COLLECTION NEWSLETTER

CURATOR'S MESSAGE



Greeting My Friends,

You may notice a few changes in this issue of *Bonsai Tomodachi*. From this issue forward we will be adding articles by contributors, offering new fresh perspectives regarding the art of Bonsai and the Clark Bonsai Collection. We will also be adding new editorial staff that will offer welcome assistance in organizing and preparing the Newsletter.

We are featuring in our Banner Panel a look back at the early days of the Clark Bonsai Collection. It provides some perspective on the seemingly insurmountable obstacles presented by moving an entire Bonsai Collection, bonsai, exhibit area structures, landscaping (rocks and all) from the old Clark Center for Japanese Art and Culture and establishing its spirit of *Yamato-damashii* (heart and mind) in a new home at the Shinzen Friendship Gardens.

When we think back on those early days, we take pride in our accomplishments. It comforts us as we look ahead to an uncertain future. The journey we started over 20 years ago when Bill Clark asked, "What would it take for the Clark Center to have a Bonsai collection?" has by no means reached its destination. We have struggled and succeeded in maintaining Bill Clark's dream of creating a major Bonsai collection. We now must find a way to **Continue the Legacy by Investing in our Future**. Our challenges are many. We must find new leadership, develop new resources, establish new partnerships that will allow us to continue the never-ending quest to improve.

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UPCOMING EVENTS:

Yamadori: Nature's Gift to Bonsai Exhibition July 1-Oct 22 (page 2)

Music in the Shinzen Garden
July 18

Shinzen Toro Nagashi Aug 12

GSBF Rendezvous in Santa Nella
Oct 20-22

Fresno Bonsai Society Fall Sale
TBD

Shohin Seminar in Santa Nella
Feb 3-5, 2024

As you read the newsletter, look for Visitor Comments from the bonsai garden guest book.

IF YOU HAVE ENJOYED YOUR OWN VISITS TO THE GARDEN, PLEASE CONSIDER SHOWING YOUR APPRECIATION AND SUPPORT BY MAKING A DONATION:

gsbfclarkbonsaicollection.org/donations/

The Davis Family of Clovis. 'Love the bonsai exhibit. We visited Shinzen 15 years ago. What a beautiful change.'

Curator's Message Continued from page 1

As you might expect those of us dedicated to Continuing the Legacy and Investing in our Future are not sitting on our hands waiting for something to happen. We are actively working to re-invent ourselves. We are diligently developing new and better resources and laying the foundations of partnerships and alliances that will assure our future. Herein lies our greatest challenge. We few who have toiled ceaselessly to bring the Clark Bonsai Collection this far have given our best. Soon we will be asking for your help to continue the journey. When we do, consider our mandate to preserve a California cultural and historical treasure. Realize the value a major Bonsai Collection brings to the community it serves, and the importance of providing a forum for those interested in pursuing the art of Bonsai with a world class venue in which to study. Help sustain and advance our efforts to create a museum of Bonsai that provides all the opportunity to be enthralled and inspired by the beauty and serenity of nature captured by the art of Bonsai.

YAMADORI: NATURE'S GIFT TO BONSAI
An Exhibition of Clark Bonsai Collection Yamadori
July 1-October 22, 2023

In Japanese, "yamadori" translates to "collected from mountains," referring to the practice of collecting trees and plants from the wild for use in creating bonsai. In the twentieth century, the term "urban yamadori" was coined to describe plants that were collected in urban locations such as construction sites, parking lots, road sides and the like.

Yamadori hearkens back to the origin of what would become known in Japan as bonsai. Almost 3000 years ago in China, trees dwarfed and intriguingly twisted and shaped by harsh natural environments were collected for display in Chinese villa and palace gardens. This practice evolved into the art of "penjing" or "tray landscapes." Zen Buddhist monks brought the practice of creating bonsai to Japan about 1200 years ago.

Yamadori continue to be some of the most highly prized bonsai because of the stories they tell of their life in the wild. While in Japan that was in the mountains, in the United States, yamadori have also come from deserts, rocky coastlines, swamps, or forests.



At about 1000 years old, this **California Juniper** is the oldest of the 13 featured in this exhibition. All were collected in the high Mojave desert which has produced their distinctive twisted and contorted trunks and branches and the predominance of deadwood bleached by the sun.

The Big Owyong Juniper is an "urban yamadori" that was collected from an estate in Sacramento in 1991 and made into the bonsai you see today over a period of 30 years. It began as a very large bush and through the artistry of Vincent Owyong and four other well-known bonsai artists has been transformed into the impressive windswept style you can see today.



The Texas Cedar Elm: Interestingly, about half of all Texas Cedar Elm Bonsai have large scars running down one side of the trunk. It is believed that grazing cattle strip foliage and bark from smaller trees growing in the wild, producing dead wood that can be ravaged by insects producing the hollows and bore holes you can see along their trunks.

This **Coast Live Oak** was collected in the Del Monte region near Pacific Grove on the central California coast. In studying this tree we are intrigued by its gnarled, scarred trunk. What happened? It appears as if the trunk was broken off at the base in some past catastrophe. The tree then regenerated a new trunk around the stump leaving a prominent scar that tells the story of its struggle to survive.



Martin Rodriguez of Selma "It is a very beautiful garden with trees that have amazing stories & backgrounds."

BONSAI OF THE MONTH: BALD CYPRESSBy **Brian Brandley** (See page 6)

2018



Fall 2022

I recently moved to Fresno, and it was an unexpected pleasure to find a bald cypress (BC) in the Clark Bonsai Collection. This tree, affectionately called Swamp Monster on intake due to its size and origin was donated to the collection by Bill Clark in 2010. I went to college at the University of Miami and learned ecology in the everglades. Seeing a bald cypress takes me back. The bald cypress is the iconic swamp tree, and who doesn't love a good swamp? It feels like a college reunion to me. I knew bald cypress would bonsai well when I saw the dwarf BC forests in the Everglades National Park. These are the same species, but growing in thin soil over a limestone bedrock. Instead of the 50 – 100 ft trees in deep soil, these trees max out at 5 – 10 ft. It's a natural bonsai forest! BC survive collection well, so many outstanding specimens are available, mostly in the southeast as one might expect. It's fairly rare to see nice specimens out here.



Bald cypress are one of the few conifers, losing their needles each winter (hence the "bald" moniker). The other deciduous conifers are dawn redwood (in the bald cypress family) and larch.

They don't have to live in a

swamp but they become predominant there because they can out-compete nearly all other trees in an often-flooded environment. They're also associated with warm environments, with a native range from south Florida to Virginia, west along the Gulf Coast to Texas, and up the Mississippi to southern Illinois. Their native range is limited by the success of their seedlings, which require saturated but not flooded soil for a couple of months after seed drop, and no ice. The adult trees are much more hardy and can tolerate drier and colder conditions. They are popular landscape trees throughout much of the eastern US and up into Canada. The trunks generate a great, buttressed base that is thought to stabilize the tree in wet soils against

Our bald cypress has the great buttress feature, with the added bonus of deadwood that highlights the base. It's also an impressive size for bonsai, at 53 inches. It loves our heat, as long as it gets plenty of water. It is monocious, which means it can pollenate its own cones. It would be a fun project to try to germinate seeds from this one!

How the "Swamp Monster" Became "Diana Ross"

For docent Tessa Cavalletto, it was love at her first sight of the bald cypress. She hated the "Swamp Monster" nickname the bald cypress had initially acquired when it was added to the Collection. So as its sponsor, she re-dubbed it "Diana Ross" because it reminded her of the silhouette of the Afro hair style and elegant gown at her famous concert in Central Park. Tessa "adopted" her favorite bonsai in support of the Collection, and her devotion has included spending five hours working with the curatorial team when they last transplanted "Diana" in a larger pot and



Tessa posing with the Bald Cypress in its new pot at a slightly new angle, between curator Bob Hilvers and team member David Soho.

subtly shifted the angle of the "front" to maximize the view of its stunning trunk and "knees" which make it a one of a kind bonsai. (See the picture at the top of the left column to see the before and after looks.) Visitors who visit the bonsai garden when Tessa is the docent on duty will have the pleasure of hearing her animated detailing of her beloved adoptee's history. It has become one of our most popular bonsai and people ask after it when it is not on display

Imarin Conway of Harlingen, Netherlands "I have never seen so many varieties of bonsai before."

You can support the Clark Bonsai Collection and its many world class bonsai such as this one currently on exhibit in the bonsai garden by becoming a sponsor too. Please visit www.gsbfcclarkbonsaicollecion.org/adopt-a-tree.html to find out about the benefits of becoming a bonsai sponsor.

What is the Value of a Public Bonsai Collection?

Biopic, narrative, and philosophy on the art of bonsai

by Julian Tsai, Professional Bonsai Consultant

It's midday in the central valley. Following a record and uncharacteristically wet California winter, temperatures are beginning to rise. The air feels dense, and seeking respite from the heat an older gentleman sits beneath a deep pavilion. His name is Bob Hilvers, who curates the Clark Bonsai Collection located in the Shinzen Gardens. His hands and body, having weathered a long career prior to and within bonsai, bears signs of age. His expression is stern, but even so there is a great eagerness and passion emanating from Hilvers, who has dedicated over 20 years cultivating and curating these trees. Surrounding Bob is a team of volunteers, of varying backgrounds and ages, but all bearing wide smiles sharing a passion for the art of bonsai. The atmosphere is energetic and lively, quite the juxtaposition against these seemingly timeless and unchanging trees.

I asked long-time volunteer Linda Jacobsen about her feelings working at this collection. She replied, "Having been a docent for the Clark Collections of both art and bonsai since 2010, for me personally, I feel proud of continuing the legacy of the Clarks. Their mission was to preserve and promote the art and culture of Japan. Every day in the bonsai garden it is a great pleasure to witness the delight of our visitors experiencing the garden and the beauty of bonsai of this great variety and quality for the first time." All the volunteers seem to share similar thoughts to one extent or another and are compelled by these small trees.

From this one layer of value we can infer from a public bonsai collection is engagement with the community—professionals, volunteers, and visitors. It is a very human aspect to share passion for common goals and interests. But I think the value goes a bit deeper than this, because community engagement is obtainable in all manners of interests, and perhaps more easily done with other mediums.

After talking with visitors, who may have little to no knowledge about bonsai, a common observed sentiment to bonsai is some sense of awe and even bewilderment. I believe there are two layers to this. First from not being knowledgeable about the art of bonsai and curious as to where the trees came from and how they were made.



The second aspect, especially for the very attuned or "present" visitor, is this inexplicable attraction and beauty. On the surface, one can easily agree that the bonsai are beautiful. But is there more than meets the eye? It may be presumptuous of me but let me infer the second aspect.

Bonsai is a unique art form with no equal—that is, as a living art. We are contending with nature, to borrow her beauty, but also subject to her whims. A tree is forever growing, forever changing, despite what intentions we have planned. While one may visit a gallery to witness an artist's work in its immutable greatness, a bonsai is quite literally alive and will change for better and worse.

There is a concept called "wabi-sabi" in Japan which in simple terms describes imperfections and qualities brought about by age. Think of a weathered stone pathway, whose once sharp edges are now soft and further covered by lichen and moss. Or perhaps the patina on an antique watch or set of tools. Wabi-sabi finds beauty in impermanence, in acceptance of the natural flaws and passage of time in this world.

Bonsai embodies the values of wabi-sabi and gives us a unique opportunity to appreciate age. We value the weathered trunks, fine branches, and fissured bark in a life that is often older than ourselves. There is an expression of seasonality throughout the year (think fall colors, bare branches in winter, and the green vigor of spring and summer), but also a broader story of how the tree developed and changed overtime. As we celebrate bonsai, more than just an art, we are celebrating life. No different than in a person who similarly ages and changes over time.

I'd like to imagine that unknowingly, as a visitor gazes upon and appreciates a bonsai they in turn appreciate themselves. Or maybe that is just my hope. In an increasingly fast paced world with all manners of media and medium, bonsai offers a unique opportunity to slow down, to engage with art, nature, time, and ourselves. A public collection such as the Clark Bonsai Collection creates a space for this engagement where not only trees, but people can be cultivated.



Brandon Rice of Clovis "Excellent specimens and very informative plaques!"

HOW THE CLARK BONSAI LEGACY BEGAN: A Personal Perspective BY JAMES BRUMM

I grew up in Fresno but left in 1965 after graduating from Fresno State. While growing up I knew very little about Japan and Japanese culture. By chance, at the law firm I joined in New York City, I came to work for a Japanese American lawyer and began to develop an interest in Japan. I decided to move to Tokyo in 1973 and lived there for three years working for a Japanese law firm, and that began my love of Japan and all things Japanese. On one of my trips to visit my parents in Fresno about fifteen years ago I read in the New York Times travel section about the Clark Center for Japanese Art and Culture in Hanford. I was surprised I had never heard of it. My wife being from Japan and a maker of ceramics, we visited it and met Bill Clark, who was so welcoming and generous with his time to two complete strangers. I marveled that there was this hidden oasis of Japanese culture in the Central Valley. At that time,



Bill and Libby Clark

I also discovered the Shinzen Friendship Garden and found that I had two wonderful places to visit whenever I was in Fresno.

In 2011 I was invited to join the Clark Center board of directors and through my board activities I came to know not only Bill's Japanese art collection but also his bonsai collection.

As Bill got older, he realized he needed to take some action if his contribution to Japanese art and culture was to remain with the public and not be sold off to private collectors. Although we decided to donate the art collection to the Minneapolis Institute of Arts as there was no alternative



The opening of the redesigned bonsai garden at the Clark Center for Japanese Art and Culture in 2010.

institution in the Central Valley, we recognized the Shinzen Friendship Garden provided an opportunity to keep the bonsai collection in the Central Valley and preserve Bill's legacy.

Through the leadership of Bob Hilvers and his great team of bonsai volunteers including Linda Jacobsen, Sid Mukai, John Wright, Bob Boro, Ray Thieme, Gene Nelson and key supporters at Shinzen like Sally Ramage and Dwayne Berrett, in 2014 and 2015 the entire bonsai collection of more than 100 bonsai, the fences and all, were taken down and reassembled at the Shinzen Garden. I remember how proud Bill and his wife Libby were to see their legacy commemorated with the Clark Bonsai Collection at Shinzen and I so happy it happened in their lifetimes.

I have visited the Clark Bonsai Collection many times since then. My visit to Fresno wouldn't be complete without seeing it. What has amazed me is how the collection has grown over the past eight years, not just in quantity but more importantly in quality. Also, at each visit it is so heartwarming to see the many dedicated volunteers curating and caring for the bonsai. Fresno should be proud that it has one of the three public bonsai collections in California and in my opinion one of the best in the U.S. I know how proud Bill and Libby Clark would be of all that has been achieved and how happy they would be that their legacy continues.



Sally Ramage, Jim Brumm and Bob Hilvers in the reserve area of the Clark Collection in Shinzen.



Jerome & Stephanie Nunnally of Fresno. "Lovely, peaceful, heavenly~we love it here."

AN INTERVIEW WITH NEW VOLUNTEER BRIAN BRANDLEY

How did you first become interested in bonsai? I was given a bonsai as a gift and promptly killed it. I got a nearly identical replacement to avoid embarrassment, then started learning how to care for it. Step 1, junipers live *outside*. My martial arts instructor at the time thought I could use some lessons in patience, so he encouraged the hobby.

What is it about volunteering at the Clark Bonsai Collection that attracted you and keeps you motivated to continue to volunteer?

My wife and I moved to Fresno very recently in anticipation of retiring near the grandkids. I need to stay active, and I am easily bored. We've moved more often than anyone should while trying to maintain bonsai, so I'm always checking out the bonsai opportunities. The Clark collection fits the bill, and allows me to learn about more advanced care and styling techniques on higher quality trees than I have. Bob Hilvers is a great mentor.



Brian demonstrating bonsai tending to visitors attending the Spring in the Garden event in Shinzen.

You have been working both as a member of the Curatorial Team and as a Docent. What do you most enjoy about each of these important jobs? I started with the Curatorial Team, and have had a few days as Docent. I find the Curatorial Team easier because all I have to do is follow instructions and absorb the knowledge. The docent activities are also fun when someone wants to engage about bonsai in depth. Most people just want to look, but occasionally one gets to pass on some in-depth information and passion about the little trees.

Could you provide just a little background about yourself? Born and raised in Indiana, just south of Indianapolis. BS, MS from the University of Miami. PhD from the University of Sydney. Most of my career has been in drug discovery research, mostly in start-up companies. I've been married for 46 years and have two grown kids and so far one granddaughter. My wife and I have moved 15 times, all over the country and Australia. I've moved 6 times since I started bonsai, to 6 very different climate zones. This is not something I would recommend for this hobby. I trained in martial arts for 25 years (mostly kempo, some aikido and jujitsu) and hold a 3rd degree black belt.

Did any of this play a role in your interest in bonsai and volunteering? I'm looking forward to retiring in the next couple of years and to enjoying bonsai in a single location for a change. My travels have given me a view of how others practice this art, and how other clubs and organizations serve their members.

MEET MOYIN OYINLEYE

Youngest Member of the Curatorial Team

Hello, my name is Moyinola Oyinleye. I attend Clovis North High School and am a junior. I am from Nigeria. My mother and I came to the United States four years ago. I initially learnt about the bonsai garden after asking a family friend about volunteer opportunities. She originally recommended a pet shelter, but then she informed me about the bonsai garden. She explained that a friend of hers volunteered there, so she could schedule an interview for me to go check it out. When I arrived, I was astounded by what I saw. I was anticipating something quite different when I heard about this garden. I was so taken by the beauty of the trees during my tour of the garden that I had to learn more about the lovely trees. I was worried on my first day of volunteering since I didn't know who or what to anticipate, but I was exposed to some fantastic individuals. Everyone was extremely kind, and I felt so fortunate to have been exposed to such a wonderful bunch of individuals who are committed to caring for the plants. Volunteering at the bonsai collection has introduced me to a new world in which trees are art forms and we are the artists who guide the art to reveal the beauty that exists inside. I had never considered the beauty of cutting, pruning, and wiring trees until I began helping. One of my favorite volunteer activities is cutting the wires after wiring since we get to show the world the effort we've done on the tree. I am really grateful for learning about the bonsai garden and meeting some great individuals, as well as learning about the beauty of nature and the art that exists within it.



*Jess, Tracy and Morgan of Liberty Lake, WA
"Awesome, friendly volunteers."*

Whether you are already a bonsai practitioner or are interested in becoming one, you can learn about the art of bonsai and share what you have learned with our many visitors. Visit our website to find out more about volunteering.

<https://gsbfcclarkbonsaicollecion.org/get->

WHAT WE HAVE BEEN UP TO THIS SUMMER...SO FAR

Many Hands Make Fast Work

By John Wright

The Clark Bonsai Curatorial Team and volunteers from the Fresno bonsai society joined with Missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints to temporarily relocate many of the trees and benches in the Collection to allow for major tree trimming by Fresno City arborists on two large stone pines within the bonsai garden. Temperatures were forecast to be well over 110° on that Saturday afternoon. This large group of dedicated volunteers allowed us to make quick work of the move, finishing in about an hour and a half. That was welcome news to the older volunteers who were otherwise looking at a very long back-breaking day.



These young missionaries have

come to the garden on numerous occasions to help us move very large trees when we are changing exhibitions. They always bring a cheerful disposition and a hard-working spirit. The missionaries do volunteer work across the community in a number of areas serving both in care, facilities, food banks, clean-up projects, and assisting those that may not be able to do household or other work themselves. This is part of their weekly schedule and clearly they enjoy serving in the community and serving others. They always come with great smiles on their faces. Thanks to all who participated in making this happen. The trimming of the stone pines a couple of days later will insure that a

major broken branch won't be dropping from the tree, damaging these wonderful bonsai or the structures in the



bonsai garden.

A couple of days later, the Youth Missionaries, still bursting with energy and cheerful smiles, returned to assist the team in returning the bonsai to the relocated benches. Thank you everyone for a hard job well done.

“Glamor” Photoshoot

Those striking pictures with the black background and perfect lighting of Clark Bonsai Collection trees you may have seen on our website or in the newsletter, require extensive work of a team of people. These “glamor shots” are produced in our very unglamorous work shed with a makeshift backdrop and a trio of lights. In the days before the photoshoot, the curatorial team remove the irrigation harness, meticulously



prune, scrub bark, weed soil, clean and oil the pot and when possible replace the moss or apply new finishing soil to prepare each chosen bonsai for its close-up. Team members also heft what are sometimes very heavy bonsai onto a hydraulic cart and move them to the “stage.”

The most important element in the process is our talented photographer,

Michael Baldwin, who has been doing our Glamor Shots since the early days of the Collection in its new home in Shinzen. He was also in our first bonsai docent class. He sets the lighting and adjusts his camera for that perfect exposure. The bonsai are then hoisted back on the cart and transported back to the bench. There the vital irrigation tubing is replaced. The next tree is already moving toward the photography stage.



We have developed a system and with practice, greatly improved our efficiency, but the photos still require many hours of the patient and careful teamwork of six or eight volunteers. Revealing and capturing the beauty of this art form is what makes all the effort worthwhile.

Just to give you an idea of the difference this photo process makes, right is a picture of a Korean Hornbeam bonsai taken while on display in the bonsai garden. Next to it is the recent glamor shot.



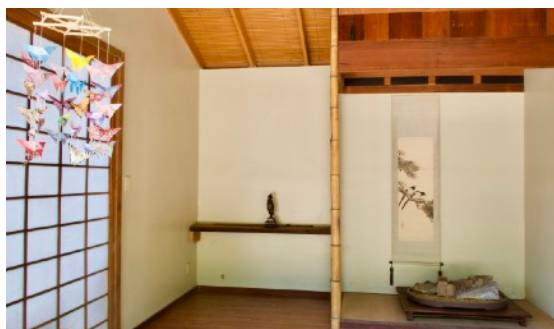
Jack and Cheryl Shiflett of Clovis “Thank you for all your work and care.”

SUMMER GALLERY...Continued



The bonsai exhibition is changed every 4 months, which means moving some very heavy bonsai from the display area back into the reserve area and installing the bonsai for the newly themed exhibition. Each bonsai also needs to be cleaned and groomed for display. The preparations include creating an exhibition book and new informational plaques and scavenger hunt.

Each month Julian Tsai, our Professional Bonsai Consultant, comes to the garden for a two-day workshop with the curatorial team which can include focused lectures and demonstrations of technique.



The tokonoma display is changed seasonally. In the summer, we feature a suiseki (viewing stone) rather than a bonsai which needs to be watered 2-3 times a day. This is not feasible in the tokonoma.



A highlight of a visit to the bonsai garden for many of our visitors is the scavenger hunt, but even more prefer creating their own art by drawing their favorite bonsai. These activities were developed for the youngsters, but many adults enjoy getting in on the act.

Our out-of-town and out-of-state visitors seem to increase in the summer. They have often come to see the national & state parks in the region and discover the Clark Bonsai Collection as one of the top sights in the area. They often ask, "Which is the oldest?" Here they are admiring a California juniper over 1000 years old in the Yamadori Exhibition.

Darlene, Vance & Vanessa of Westbrook Maine
"We came to see the Sequoias and now the
bonsai. From largest to smallest!"