



## The Bonsai Industry in Japan

By Aarin Packard

Traveling to Japan has been a lifelong dream for me. Even though my interest in Japanese culture originated with four mutant turtles and a kid trying to learn karate, it has been concentrated for the last 15 years on the art of bonsai. I had come to a point in my studies that seeing bonsai in Japan was essential to my understanding of the art. I knew there were things to learn that were not in any of the books. So, I was very excited to have this dream realized earlier this year when I was able to spend three weeks eating, breathing, and sleeping bonsai in Japan.

My trip was timed to coincide with the 88th Kokufu-ten, Japan's national bonsai exhibition. Furthermore, I would be staying at the historic **Daiju-en bonsai Nursery** under the care of 3rd generation bonsai professional, **Tohru Suzuki**. Mr. Suzuki and his nursery are major contributors to *Kokufu-ten* so I would be exposed to the highest level of bonsai practice.

Since my return home, many have asked what the biggest "takeaway" was from my trip. No doubt it was getting to appreciate fully the sheer scale of the bonsai industry in Japan. In the U.S., bonsai is primarily practiced as a hobby. But in Japan there are two distinct sides to the bonsai community. On one side bonsai is practiced, as it is here, as a hobby. The other side, which is not mirrored in the U.S., is

the bonsai industry. The difference between the two is that there are hundreds of professionals in Japan who are able to make a living in bonsai.

The best analogy to explain this is to think of the different bonsai nurseries as car dealerships. There are the "used" car dealers who handle lower-quality bonsai that your average hobbyist buys. Then there are Mercedes dealers that have mid-range bonsai which would be very nice according to American standards. Finally there are the Ferrari dealers whose bonsai and prices are at the highest level.

Another aspect of the bonsai industry is not just how bonsai are bought and sold but how they are created. The "we can do it" spirit of America means that bonsai enthusiasts want to be responsible for the entire development of their own bonsai. From collecting, to styling, to refining, we want to do it all from start to finish.

This attitude is also present among some enthusiasts in Japan or they can chose to skip decades of growth and purchase bonsai material at any stage of development. This is possible because there are professionals growing bonsai at each of these stages. One individual could be growing Japanese Black Pine from seed, the seedling then goes to another professional who field grows the tree to develop its

*continued on page 4*



*Daiju-en, the Ferrari dealer of pine bonsai.*



*Placing the bonsai on exhibit at Kokufu is the culmination of years of planning and hard work.*

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## President's Letter



August 16th of this year marks the 100th birthday of **John Naka**. Most appropriately, American bonsai enthusiasts throughout the land are thinking about John's enormous contribution to the development of bonsai in the United States. Here at the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum, we celebrate his legacy every day through the display of North American bonsai in the John Y. Naka North American Pavilion. His gift in 1983 of his most famous bonsai, "Goshin"—the first bonsai chosen for display in this pavilion—underscored that bonsai was becoming an American art form, offering Americans a way to enjoy and appreciate the beauty of our natural world.

We now even have a special day each year, **World Bonsai Day**—the second Saturday of May, on which we rejoice in the universal appeal of bonsai. First inaugurated at the Museum by Jack Sustic in 2011[check?], World Bonsai Day is now celebrated at other public bonsai collections throughout the United States, including the **Morikami Bonsai Exhibition** in Delray Beach, Florida, the **North Carolina Bonsai**

**Exhibition Garden** in Asheville, North Carolina, the **Rosade Bonsai Studio** in New Hope, Pennsylvania and the **Pacific Rim Bonsai Collection** now called the **Pacific Bonsai Museum**, in Federal Way, Washington.

I am delighted that NBF is planning the **3rd National Juried Bonsai Pot Exhibition** to be held at the Museum beginning on June 12, 2015, and thank NBF Director **Ron Lang** for his tireless efforts in organizing this important event. NBF and the Museum held the first two bonsai pot competitions in 2001 and 2002. Given that the number of American potters making quality bonsai containers has increased significantly, we have been eager to host another one. Next year seemed ideal, as we have planned the opening of the pot exhibition to coincide with the American Bonsai Society Learning Seminar taking place in Ellicott City, Maryland June 11–14, 2015.

In order to thank John Naka for all he has done to make bonsai an American art form and pursuit, NBF has created a special **100th John Naka Birthday Card**, available on NBF's website at [www.bonsai-nbf.org](http://www.bonsai-nbf.org). Please sign the card with your best wishes and photos, and NBF will present the card to the Naka family on August 16 or shortly thereafter.

*Felix*

## GIFTS TO THE ANNUAL FUND

Basic	\$35 up to \$99
Sponsor	\$100 up to \$249
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Foundation Steward	\$10,000 and above

The Charter Donation level (\$25) remains an option for those who joined in 2004 or before. If you have not yet donated for the year 2013 please do so now. You can either send in a check (envelope is enclosed) or donate online at the NBF website [www.bonsai-nbf.org](http://www.bonsai-nbf.org)

*Thank you for your support of the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum!*

*NBF is now accepting donations of used cars, trucks or boats. These vehicles can be donated anywhere in the country and will be picked up free of charge. NBF will receive a cash donation and your donation is fully tax-deductible. If you have a donation to make please call Johann Klodzen at (202) 396-3510 or send an email to [jkloedzen@bonsai-nbf.org](mailto:jkloedzen@bonsai-nbf.org). It is easy to do and it will be of great benefit to the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum.*



## Warren Hill's Trees

**Warren Hill**, the second Curator of the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum, now residing in Greeneville, Tennessee, donated two magnificent forest plantings to the Museum in 2013.

One is a Chinese quince (*Pseudocydonia sinensis*) that Warren created in the *Yose-ue* style during 1975. The original tree was purchased from a California grower as a whip in a one gallon container. After the tree fruited the seeds were harvested and the mother tree was used as the #1 tree and the seedlings were planted as the subordinate trees. The styled planting is in



Norway spruce (*Picea abies* 'Nana').

an oval unglazed Japanese pot and measures 46 inches long. Among its many attributes is the beautiful fall foliage.

The second planting is a spruce (*Picea abies* "Nana"), which was created by Warren in 2003 by using 28 dwarf Norway spruce that were grown from cuttings. Each tree was individually styled and then bare-rooted and planted on a slab. It has grown into a dense and evocative forest created in the *Yose-ue ishi tsuki* style with a height of 17" and a width of 48".

Both of these wonderful forests are now on display in the *John Y. Naka North American Pavilion* and we are very grateful to Warren for his generous gift that will live on in his honor.



Chinese quince (*Pseudocydonia sinensis*).

## Summer Interns

Both the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum and the National Bonsai Foundation have interns for the summer of 2014.

**Alesha Burk** is the third intern to hold the *First Curator's Apprenticeship* named in honor of **Robert Drechsler**, the Museum's First Curator. Ms. Burk is from Baltimore, Maryland and has a B.F.A. from the Maryland Institute College of Art with a major in Interdisciplinary Sculpture and a concentration in Curatorial Studies and Art History. Bonsai has been a hobby for her in the past



Alesha Burk, Museum Intern.

but this summer she will be immersed in caring for the real objects.

NBF has hired **Avery Anapol** as a media intern for the 2014 summer. A sophomore at The George Washington University in Washington D.C., she is majoring in Journalism and Mass Communication. Ms. Anapol, a native of Wisconsin, has worked as a Communications Assistant and she is currently a reporter for the GWU campus paper *The GWU Hatchet*. During her time with NBF she will be working on the NBF website as well as creating and sending out email notices about people and events connected to NBF and the Museum.



Avery Anapol, NBF Intern.

## The Bonsai Industry in Japan—

Continued from page 1

trunk. Once the trunk is developed it goes to a grafter for better foliage; then someone else develops the grafts into new branches; and then finally it is styled by a bonsai artist. At each stage bonsai are available for purchase. And in addition to the bonsai there are sub-industries of artists that produce and sell pots, stands, and scrolls and figurines to be used in formal displays.

The question then is what is the driving force behind this industry? To answer that all I had to do was remember why I had decided to go to Japan in early February.

It is because of the *Kokufu-ten*, the oldest and most prestigious bonsai exhibition in the world. To have a tree exhibited at the *Kokufu-ten* is like having a racehorse in the Kentucky Derby. Bonsai are groomed for years with this one goal in mind, to win a *Kokufu* award. The amount of time and money invested to achieve this goal was staggering at first but I realized that this bonsai industry existed as a result of the emphasis on competitive exhibitions.

Due to my limited time in Japan I only saw a small part of the whole process but I was able to observe the enormous amount of manpower and expense that is required to put on this exhibition. Over the course of 10 days we drove bonsai to and from Tokyo three separate times, totaling over 1100 miles. For each trip, in addition to the physical effort invested, there was the cost of fuel, tolls, lodging and meals for our crew of 6. And *Daiju-en* represented only one of the many nurseries bringing trees to the show! There obviously has to be a high value put on bonsai exhibitions for this amount of resources to be spent in support of it.

My experience of this side of the bonsai community in Japan has also reinforced my belief in the importance of competitive bonsai exhibitions. In order for the American bonsai commu-



Bonsai in various stages of development, from seedlings to refined trees, were on sale at the Green Club.

nity to grow as an art form, there needs to be a strong emphasis on high level exhibitions at both the regional and national level. Currently there are some exhibits that attain this level. At the regional level there are the exhibits put on by *Bay Island Bonsai* and *Redwood Empire Bonsai Society* and at the national level there are competitions such as the *U.S. National Bonsai Exhibition* in Rochester, New York and the upcoming *Artisans Cup* in Portland, Oregon.

I believe exhibits like these are laying the foundation for the future growth of the American bonsai community. If there is one country that understands the value of competition it is the United States. The desire to win motivates us to improve and at times enlist the services of professionals to help us do that. Now that we are seeing more high quality exhibitions in this county I think there is an opportunity for us to view bonsai not just as a hobby but as a competitive art form. My hope is that American bonsai will not only be known for its vibrant community of enthusiasts but also for its robust economy that is able to support our increasing number of very talented professional artists.



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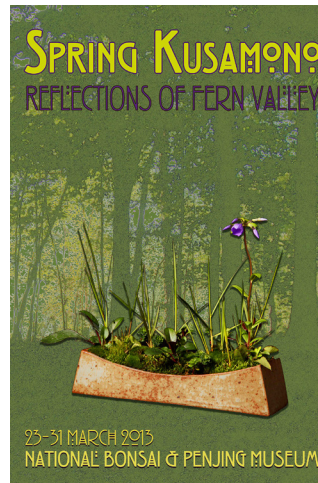
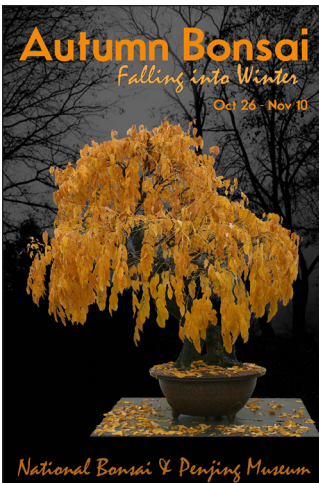
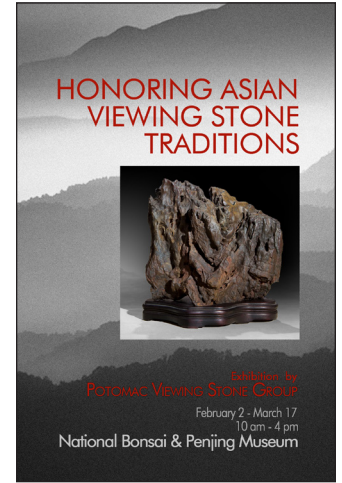
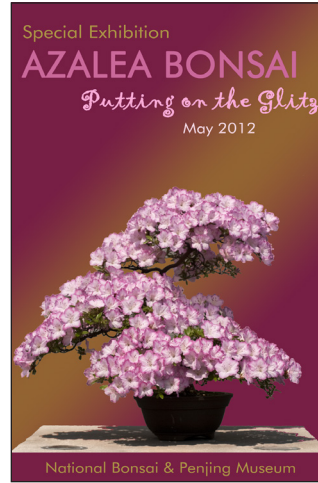
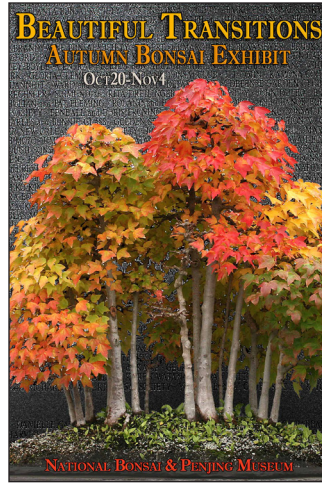
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**4<sup>TH</sup> U.S. NATIONAL BONSAI EXHIBITION**

## Museum Posters from Kathleen Emerson-Dell



## Bonsai Pot Exhibition


In June 2015 the *American Bonsai Society Learning Seminar* will meet in Ellicott City, Maryland. In conjunction with this event the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum, the National Bonsai Foundation, The Kennett Collection, and Bonsai Shinsei New York will sponsor the *3rd National Juried Bonsai Pot Exhibition*. NBF Board Director, **Ron Lang**, is the organizer of the event.

The Exhibition will solicit entries from potters in the United States and

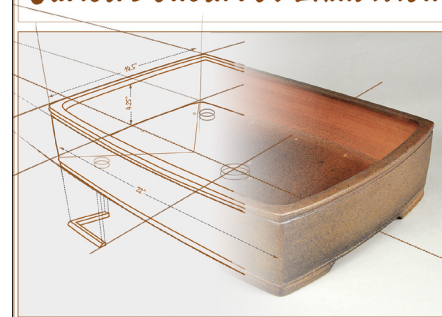
prizes will be awarded in specific style categories as well as experimental design. The jurors for the exhibition are noted ceramicists **Deborah Bedwell**, and **Sara Rayner**, and bonsai teacher and ceramic artist **Michael Hagedorn**.

The winning entries and other exceptional bonsai pots will be on display at the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum from June 12–August 2, 2015.

For more information or to submit an entry please visit the NBF website at [www.bonsai-nbf.org](http://www.bonsai-nbf.org)



### 3rd National Juried Bonsai Pot Exhibition



The National Bonsai & Penjing Museum  
at the US National Arboretum, Washington, DC

Sponsored By:  
The National Bonsai Foundation  
The Kennett Collection  
Bonsai Shinsei New York

Exhibit Dates: June 12, 2015 to August 2, 2015  
Visit: [www.bonsai-nbf.org](http://www.bonsai-nbf.org) for entry forms and more information

Visit NBF's Website: [www.bonsai-nbf.org](http://www.bonsai-nbf.org)

## Departed Friends

**Mary Holmes Bloomer**, of Sedona, Arizona and a former Board Director of NBF, died in October



Mary Holmes Bloomer.

2013. Mary and her husband **Peter Bloomer** were the authors of *Timeless Trees* (1986), the first book about the National Bonsai Museum's Japanese Collection.



Mary Kay Doyle.

**Mary Kay Doyle**, of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, died in May 2014. She and her husband, **Jim Doyle**, of *Nature's Way Nursery*, have been long-time vendors and ardent supporters of the annual *Bonsai Festival*.

**Michiko Hansen**, of Silver Spring, Maryland, died in July 2013. She was a vibrant and devoted volunteer in the Museum and had been on duty



Michiko Hansen

just three days before her untimely death of a stroke.

**Kiyoki Kay Komai**, of Los Angeles, California, died in October 2013. The daughter of **Frank Nagata**, a teacher of bonsai and the wife of **Khan Komai**, founder of *Komai Bonsai Nursery*, she was active throughout her life in the bonsai community of Southern California.

The National Bonsai & Penjing Museum and the National Bonsai Foundation are deeply indebted to friends like Mary, Mary Kay, Michiko and Kay. Without their contributions the work of promoting bonsai in the United States could not continue. We extend to their families our deepest condolences. They will be missed, but their work will live on.



Kiyoko Kay Komai.

## The Renovation of the Japanese Pavilion

As this issue of the Bulletin goes to press, the Department of Agriculture contracting officer responsible for the renovation of the Japanese Pavilion has selected a general contractor and is in the process of negotiating a contract. If all goes well, the contract should be awarded by July 15, 2014, with the actual construction work to be commenced later this summer.



Japanese trees in the Vanzant Courtyard during the renovation.

For the time being, as recent visitors to the Museum have noticed, Jack Sustic has moved the Japanese bonsai out of the Japanese Pavilion and placed them, in a very pleasing display, on benches in the center of the *Marie Vanzant Upper Courtyard*. These bonsai will be moved back into the Japanese Pavilion once the renovation is completed.

As indicated in the enclosed summary of contributions received to date for this project, we still need to raise \$235,014 to reach our fundraising goal of \$2,000,000. Donations can easily be made by going to the NBF website at [www.bonsai-nbf.org/current-projects](http://www.bonsai-nbf.org/current-projects), and printing the tax-deductible donation form. Please be sure that your name is on the list!

**NBF is now sending out "Email Blasts" on Museum activities. If you would like to be added to this list please send your email address to: [aanapol@bonsai-nbf.org](mailto:aanapol@bonsai-nbf.org)**