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Upcoming Meeting

Date: Sunday, April 11th

Time: 1:30pm

Location: [Zoom](#)



Steve Ziesel : [Winter Silhouette Show](#)

Creator of the NC's popular Winter Silhouette Bonsai Show. Former president of TBS and long time student of bonsai.

Steve lets us into his bonsai garden and opens up about his bonsai journey

Zoom details coming the week of



Find all TBS virtual lectures in our [teachesyouhow ARCHIVE](#)

Message from the President



One of the reasons I am so interested in the bonsai world is that it extends well beyond the trees themselves. While the trees are and remain central to the practice, much like they are in a tokonoma display, there is a whole universe of items and concepts that serve the purpose of highlighting the aesthetic value of the trees. We all know that the right container can make or break the aesthetic value of a tree; most of us know that pairing the tree/container combination with an ensemble of companion plants or objects, the right display table, and the perfect wall art takes the display to the next level. Furthermore, bonsai as an art is deeply rooted in the Japanese aesthetic tradition, which in turn finds an important source in Japanese Buddhism. I was recently reminded of that while hearing from my son of his recent trip to Ekoin Temple in Koyasan, Wakayama prefecture. Koyasan is considered the birthplace of Japanese Buddhism and was at some point in history home to approx. 1,000 temples; it is now down to less than 100 (which is still a lot of temples!).

As all of you know, Japanese aesthetics is based on many concepts, with the most well-known being wabi-sabi. Like many other strictly Japanese concepts, wabi-sabi is hard to translate and even harder to understand, but it is a philosophy of beauty that values the three "I's": imperfection, impermanence, and incompleteness. Japanese culture places great value on the reality that life is never a collection of perfect moments, that it has a beginning and an end, and that the constant flow of change prevents us from ever truly finishing anything. While to the western mind this may sound as a pessimistic approach to life and art, I tend to agree. The secret to happiness is being content and being content means coming to the realization that there are limitations to our abilities and to the degree of impact we can have on the world. We strive to make a difference, but we don't obsess about failures or simply "falling a bit short." We also don't base our appreciation of an object on its "newness" or perfect appearance. There is value and beauty in old things, in broken things, in things whose shortcomings are interesting and charming.

When I hear about imperfection, impermanence, incompleteness, limitations, and loss bonsai immediately comes to mind. What better metaphor for wabi-sabi than our beloved trees? We have heard many experts tell us that "the perfect tree doesn't exist." We know that the only "finished tree" is a dead tree;

capable hands, at the end of the day a bonsai is not going to last forever. So, enjoy your creations for what they are: a beautiful reminder of the fleeting nature of life and of the beauty of imperfection.

Speaking of imperfection, we have recently marked the one year anniversary of the beginning of the pandemic that has gripped the world. While the impact on TBS has been negligible compared to the staggering loss of life and the financial burden this pandemic has placed on so many families, we nonetheless have had to adjust our traditional calendar of programs to follow national and local directives and to ensure the safety of our members. Many traditional events have been canceled, including important shows such as the National Exhibit in Rochester, New York and the Winter Silhouette in Kannapolis, North Carolina. When the TBS Board met earlier this year we discussed a plan to start slowly reintroducing face to face events in 2021. In recent weeks the statistics provided by NC authorities show a slow but steady improvement and some restrictions are being lifted. At the same time, the vaccination drives are in full swing in both urban and rural areas. While the Carolina Bonsai Expo in Asheville has been canceled again, Art in Bloom is still scheduled to take place in June over a period of approx. 10 days. All this points to the belief that we will be ready to get together again during the summer. The current plan is to hold our first face to face workshop in June, followed by the TBS Expo in July, and our traditional summer picnic and auction toward the end of August. As we draw closer to those dates we will provide more precise communication but, suffice it to say, we are all very much looking forward to getting together again.

One last note. Starting with this newsletter we are introducing a new column called "Bonsai Merch." The column will contain short pieces from one of the local or national retailers highlighting a notable addition to their catalog, such as a tool, a new pottery collection, or any other bonsai related merchandise. We start this month with Ken Hallatt of Carolina Bonsai highlighting the availability of a tool that is certain to be added to my toolbox very soon; it was designed by Mauro Stemberger and it holds great promise for those of us who work with species that lend themselves to deadwood features.

As always, stay safe and happy bonsai'ng.

Gabe



In March we were virtually visited by Bill Valavanis. “Where in the world was Bill?” He was in his bonsai studio & garden. I’ve yet to make that bonsai pilgrimage, so it was interesting to see his operation. We were led through his greenhouse, overwintering areas, and studio. Bill always has interesting classical bonsai and excellent displays. In his studio, we saw trees that flower before leaving out, my favorite genre of bonsai at that time of year; signaling spring is just around the corner. Bill showed the difference between winter hazel and witch hazel and even had an autumn flowering cherry that was flowering all over, even with a frozen root ball.

If you’re inspired by and want to start your own early blooming species, Bill offers bare root seedlings and potted pre bonsai through his [online catalog](#). You’ll also find ezo spruce and other varieties suitable for creating beautiful bonsai. As a bonsai practitioner, you probably need another project, right? Bill’s long running [International Bonsai Magazine](#) is now available for free. You can subscribe through the website to be notified when new issues are released. There is such a wealth of inspiration and knowledge from around the world packed into each issue.

Keep up with Bill and his International bonsai world by following his [BLOG](#).

My favorite part of this virtual bonsai world, is the accessibility we have in experiencing the gardens of expert practitioners. Our very own, former TBS president and host of NC’s [Winter Silhouette Show](#), Steve Zeisel is welcoming us into his bonsai garden on Sunday April 11th. We’ll be able to see and discuss Steve’s bonsai journey together. If you’ve ever seen Steve’s trees in person, you’ll know the bar is set high on quality. But what makes his favorites, his favorites? And how did he come to learn bonsai? How have his techniques and aesthetics evolved over his journey.

I hope all your repots, collections, big cuts, refinements, new acquisitions, and

Grow on,
Michael



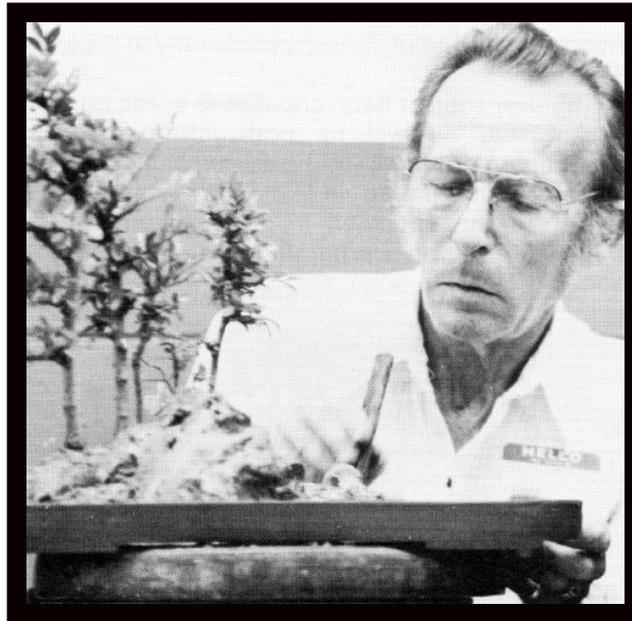
Exposing Our Roots

...bits of TBS history

In Training since 1976

A Special Member of the Triangle Bonsai Society.

Triangle Bonsai Society was fortunate to have had as a member one of the earliest, if not the earliest, bonsai teachers in the Southeast: E Felton Jones.



Felton was a native North Carolinian and a student at Duke for a period of time. From youth on, Felton was interested in plants and accompanied Dr. Coker of UNC on plant collecting trips and he also learned from Dr. H. L. Bloomquist of Duke. What was to be a one-way trip to the West Coast evolved in to a life dedicated to teaching bonsai. When Felton arrived in the Los Angeles area of California in the fall of 1950, by chance he happened upon a California Bonsai Society display of bonsai. Bonsai was the answer to Felton's

about learning more about bonsai and this founding member, Frank Nagata, agreed to accept Felton as a student. To further Felton's study of bonsai Mr. Nagata had Felton study with John Naka, another one of the seven founding members of the pre-eminent bonsai club in America.

In 1960 Felton returned to NC to share his love of bonsai with others. It was difficult to locate others interested in bonsai but fortunately the Charlotte Ikebana Society invited Felton to display his "little trees" as part of their exhibit the 1964 Southern Spring Home and Garden show. Even more fortunate for the bonsai in the Southeast, Elizabeth Lawrence, prominent author of gardening books and a columnist for the Charlotte newspaper, featured Felton's bonsai in an article in the newspaper. Six area residents responded and under Felton's guidance founded the club now known as the Bonsai Society of the Carolinas, the first bonsai club in Southeastern US.

Felton gave presentations, wrote articles and appeared as a guest artist at conventions over the next 20 years making stops in Atlanta and Florida before returning to his native NC in 1984. Internationally known bonsai artist and teacher David DeGroot credits Felton with giving the first bonsai presentation by a professional bonsai teacher David attended.

The culmination of Felton's bonsai journey is found in Asheville at the North Carolina Arboretum and the Bonsai Display Garden. A separate article on the bonsai garden appears in another section.

--Harold Johnson

Beautiful New Jin & Shari (Deadwood) Tool

Kiku Jinshari Knife



international bonsai masters, this improved tool is unique and purpose built for working on bonsai. The tool is made from high quality Japanese Stainless Steel and a very hard Acacia wood handle - built to last and perform. It's also crazy sharp!

If you like to create deadwood as part of your bonsai designs, you'll want to make sure you have this in your tool kit.

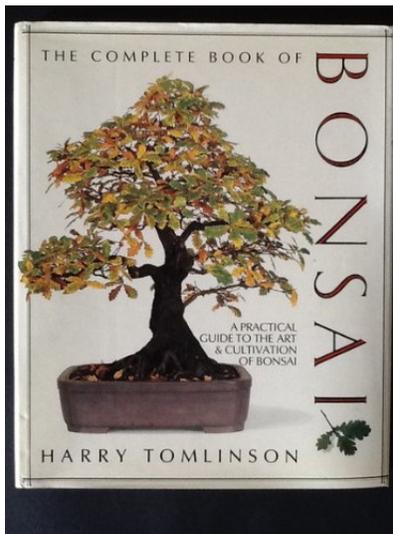
The Kiku Elite Jinshari Knife is available locally from [Carolina Bonsai](#), online from [Superfly Bonsai](#) and other fine retailers.



TBS Library

Now is the best time of year for major bonsai work. But why do we do what we do? Dive into books and videos from the TBS Library to expand your knowledge on horticulture and style.

Recommended reading:



Harry Tomlinson's *The Complete Book of Bonsai* covers it all. Brush up on the basics and be inspired to create better trees.

Visit the [TBS Library](#) to see and check out from our collection.



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