

CLARK BONSAI MUSEUM

INTRO TO BONSAI



**ONE OF AMERICA'S
PREMIERE
BONSAI
MUSEUMS**

ISSUE NO.01

Bonsai's Ancient Journey

From China, through Japan, and
into America

The Unique American Style

A flourishing of two cultures

Our Museum

The history of the museum and how
it came to be

Table of Contents

ANCIENT BONSAI HISTORY	03
INTRODUCTION TO JAPAN	04
DEVELOPMENT OF JAPANESE STYLE	05
HOW TO VIEW BONSAI	06
HISTORY OF BONSAI IN AMERICA	07
AMERICAN STYLE	08
CLARK BONSAI MUSEUM	09

ANCIENT BONSAI HISTORY

Bonsai's origins in ancient China:

Bonsai is the traditional living art of creating a realistic, natural-looking miniature tree. The kanji for bonsai (盆栽) translates to something like “Tray Planting.” Bonsai traces its roots back to China 3000 years ago, where naturally dwarfed, wild trees were taken to create miniature landscapes and displayed.

This is known as pénzāi (盆栽), a more literal translation, like tray plant, or penjing, denoting the artistic composition of the scene. Penjing was later influenced by Taoism, leading to an emphasis on concepts like reflecting nature's essence, embodying balance, harmony, and life energy, and capturing the spirit of ancient, enduring trees.





INTRODUCTION TO JAPAN



Over 1200 years ago, the practice of bonsai was brought to Japan by Buddhist monks migrating from China. During this period, the art form was adopted by Zen Buddhist monks who began to use it as a spiritual discipline emphasizing simplicity, balance, and the symbolic representation of nature's essence. This again shows bonsai's connection to Taoism, which Zen Buddhism was likewise heavily influenced by.

Japanese pots were initially deeper than the Chinese types. Originally, the art of bonsai was practiced by clergy and nobility; its popularity increased and was well established by the 16th century. The practice of yamadori (山取り - literally "mountain" "take"), where naturally dwarfed trees were collected from mountains, became popular among samurai during the Tokugawa Shogunate (1603)

DEVELOPMENT OF JAPANESE STYLE



The Japanese began shaping bonsai with bamboo and twine to achieve the desired look, and began using wire around 1800.

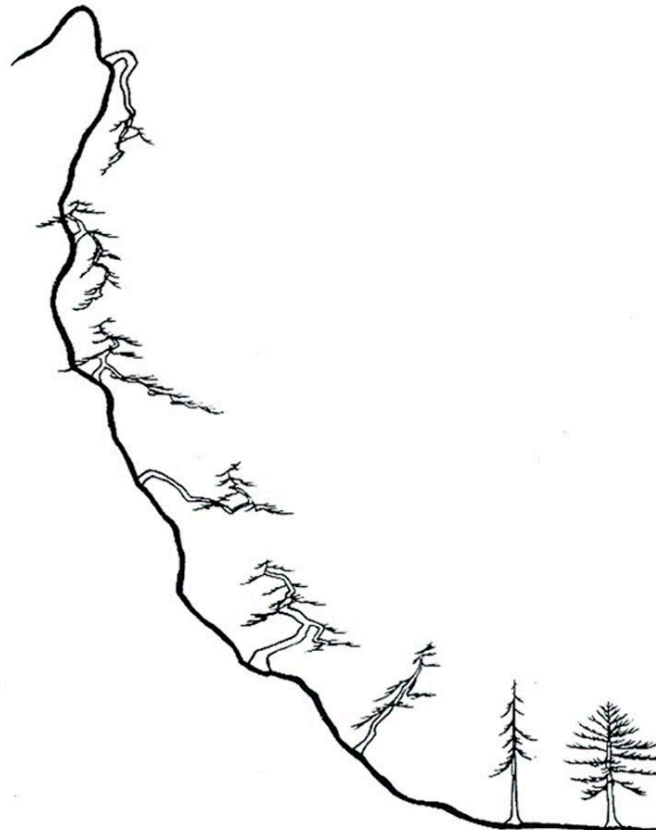
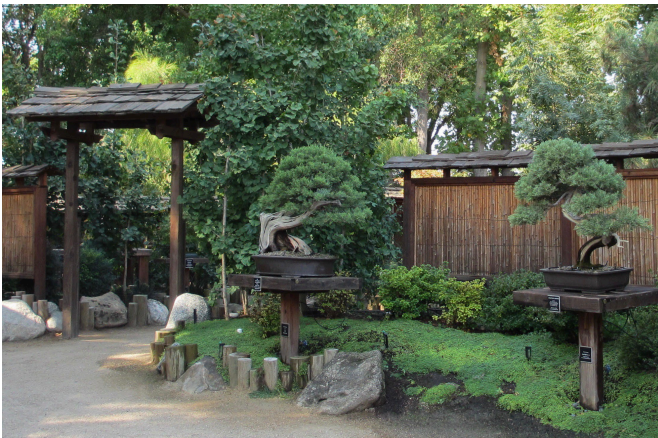
At the same time, a group of scholars of the Chinese arts gathered in Osaka and renamed their practice as “bonsai,” compared to the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese style, “pun-tsai.” This was also done to differentiate the more artistic, skillful practice using shallow pots from the common hachi-no-ki with deeper pots. Bonsai was now a matter of design, rather than the traditional mystical/religious approach.

HOW TO VIEW BONSAI

Bonsai is unique as a living art, as it is never “finished,” constantly growing and needing attention.

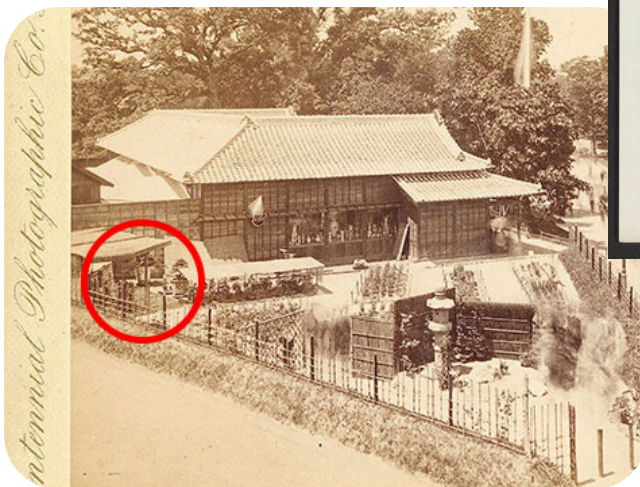
One must know the individual tree, its growth habits, and a 2-5 year plan to design the bonsai.

Bonsai should be viewed at eye level from the most pleasing angle.

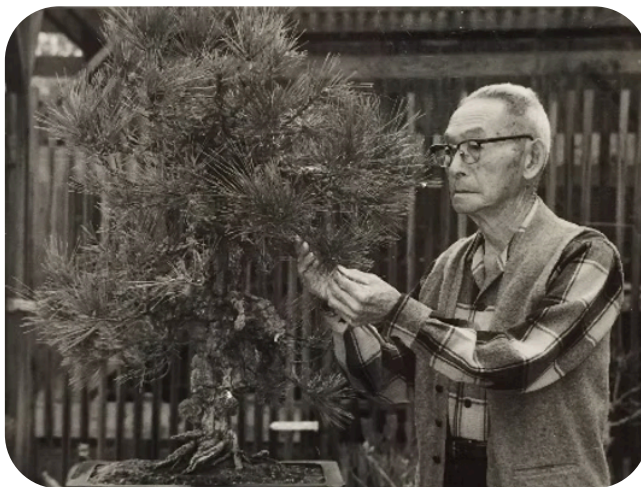


HISTORY OF BONSAI IN AMERICA

Photo showing a bonsai being grown at Manzanar War Relocation Center.



Bonsai captured in a photo at the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia.



Frank Fusaji Nagata, one of the five founders of the California Bonsai Society.

Bonsai was introduced outside of Japan at the US's 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, then to Europe at the Paris World's Fair in France in 1878. Japanese immigrants brought the art of Bonsai to the United States in the late 19th century, however it did not gain widespread popularity until after WWII.

Following WWII, US servicemen discovered the art and brought it home, where it began to become increasingly widespread.

Bonsai exploded in America during the 50s and 60s with the establishment of the Los Angeles Bonsai Club and the California Bonsai Society.

Since then, bonsai has steadily increased in popularity in the United States, with interest added recently thanks to the internet and social media.

AMERICAN STYLE



Display at the Clark Bonsai Museum showing various styles of bonsai, including native California trees.

Although difficult to describe, there are a few distinct differences between Japanese and American styles of Bonsai. Japanese bonsai typically reflect the skill of the artist, showing exaggerated features, highly refined bonsai, and perfected aesthetics intended to show great technical ability. This can be seen in things like avoiding scarring on deciduous trees, pancake nebari, etc.

American-style bonsai have typically leaned towards more naturalistic looks, meant to represent full-sized trees as they are in the wild. Additionally, the incorporation of local species, like California Junipers and Monterey Cypress, is a significant regional distinction, often collected through yamadori. In some ways, this marks an unexpected return to bonsai's ancient Chinese origins!

The Clark Bonsai Museum reflects the styles and techniques throughout the history of bonsai. One mission of the Collection is to preserve and display a spectrum of styles from traditional to contemporary.

The Clark Bonsai Museum at Shin Zen Friendship Garden was donated by the Clark Center for Japanese Art and Culture.

The Clark Center for Japanese Art and Culture was a museum in Hanford, CA, created by Bill and Libby Clark, which featured one of the largest collections of Japanese art outside of Japan. It featured paintings, ceramics, textiles, calligraphy, and much more, including its bonsai collection.

Eventually, the Clark Center was shut down due to Bill's age, and the Bonsai exhibit was donated to the Golden State Bonsai Federation in 2013. Most of the structures in the Clark Bonsai Museum, including the surrounding walls and Tea House, and the multitude of bonsai, found a home at the Shin Zen Friendship Garden.

In keeping with the Collection's origins as part of the Clark Center for Japanese Art and Culture, we display 27 of our bonsai in changing exhibitions every 3-4 months, illustrating a theme as part of our museum philosophy.

**Photo of the Clark
Center for Japanese
Art and Culture.**

CLARK BONSAI MUSEUM



BONSAI FEATURE

This issue's bonsai feature is a favorite at the museum: Our Bald Cypress Bonsai. This tree was collected from a swamp in the Sunshine State, a generous gift from Bill Clark. The artist is Bob Hilvers, our museum curator.

Endemic to the Southeastern United States, the bald cypress typically grows to 35 to 120 feet, and has a trunk diameter of 3 to 7 feet, making our small specimen even more impressive.





BECOME A FRIEND!

YOU ARE INVITED!

**Become a Friend of the Clark Bonsai Museum
for a deeper way to experience the garden,
the collection, and the art of bonsai.**

**Friends support the museum's ability to remain open,
maintain its collection, and continue offering meaningful
programs and experiences.**

**In return, Friends receive invitations to gatherings,
educational opportunities, and behind-the-scenes
experiences throughout the year.**

SUPPORT THE CLARK BONSAI MUSEUM AND OUR MISSION

DONATE

**Become a
friend of the
museum!**

**Your contribution helps
fund:**

- Professional Advisor Program
- Museum & Education Program
- Volunteer & Outreach Program
- Infrastructure & Bonsai Husbandry