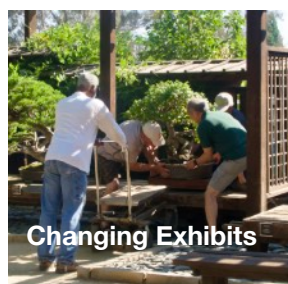


A CENTRAL CALIFORNIA PEOPLE'S CHOICE MUSEUM WINNER!



The Clark Bonsai Museum is proud to have been chosen as the bronze winner museum in the Fresno Bee's Best of Central California People's Choice Awards for 2026.



BONSAI TOMODACHI

THE CLARK BONSAI MUSEUM NEWSLETTER



CURATOR'S MESSAGE

Greetings to all,

As our Newsletter banner proudly proclaims, we have won a **2026 People's Choice Award for Best Museum in Central California**. Although totally delighted and ecstatic that we would be so recognized, it got me to thinking. How do we really stack up as a museum? So, I went looking for some definitions of what a museum is and does and found this one.

"A museum is an institution dedicated to displaying and preserving culturally, historically, or scientifically significant objects. Many museums have exhibitions of these objects on public display, and some have non-exhibited collections that are used by students, researchers and specialists. Museums hold a wide range of objects and often focus on a particular theme, such as art, science, natural history, or local history. Museums that host exhibitions and interactive demonstrations or present participatory experiences are beneficial to the communities they serve and often become tourist attractions that draw large numbers of visitors from outside their region."

As I read this, I began to compare it line by line with how the Clark Bonsai Museum functions. We are, in fact, dedicated to displaying and preserving culturally, historically and even scientifically significant objects. The objects, of course, being Bonsai, but there is more than that to the Clark Bonsai Museum.

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EVENTS:

A Journey in the Fourth Dimension: The Element of Time in Bonsai
June 21-Oct. 24 See Page 6

Four Seasons: An Exhibition of Deciduous Bonsai. October-March

Curator's Walking Tour Previewing the Four Seasons Exhibition for Friends of the CBM Oct. date TBA

Honoring our Heritage: An Exhibition of Legacy, Historical and Generational Bonsai. April-June

Take a Walk on the Wild Side: An Exhibition of Yamadori Bonsai.
July-Sept

Bonsai Making Classes the first Saturday of every month
<https://clarkbonsaimuseum.org/event/make-your-own-bonsai-4/>

BE SURE TO CHECK OUT SHINZEN'S CALENDAR FOR EXCITING CULTURAL EVENTS
www.shinzenjapanesegarden.org/calendar/

Curator's Message.

Continued from page 1

Our holdings encompass five collections; the Bonsai of course, 125 of them, a collection of antique Japanese scroll paintings, a collection of *suishiki* (viewing stones), a collection of artisan signed antique Bonsai containers, many of which are more valuable than the Bonsai contained in them, including two ultra-rare and irreplaceable examples of “camp pots” – hand made in the internment camps, and a collection of Bonsai display furniture and accessories.

The cultural phenomenon of the art of Bonsai swept over the globe at the end of World War II and is now well established in over 70 countries. Outside of Japan, ground-zero for the start of this worldwide proliferation of Bonsai, is California. The Clark Bonsai Museum preserves and presents the California Bonsai Experience that encompasses the earliest examples of Bonsai in California to the most contemporary representations of Bonsai technique and aesthetic theory. We possess two Japanese Black Pine Bonsai that can trace their origins to the first organized exhibition of Bonsai in California in 1915.

The recent acquisition of a 100-year-old Hornbeam Bonsai, originally created in Japan in the 1920's gives us a historical connection to a time when the art of Bonsai was virtually unknown outside of Japan and China. (See Bonsai of the month on page 4.)



The cultural and historical experience of Japanese immigrants, who brought the art of Bonsai to California, is well represented in our *Legacy* Collection, a tribute to these early practitioners. One among them, John Naka, widely regarded as the *Father of American Bonsai*, became famous world-wide as he shared his love and knowledge of the art. We are proud to possess two of his original works, one that appears in a seminal text on the art of Bonsai.



In addition to these connections to California's rich Bonsai cultural history the Clark Bonsai Museum is also home to contemporary examples of the art, featuring exciting and

dramatic creations by internationally celebrated artists.

What about the “*scientifically significant objects*”? Although completely overlooked by many, the art of Bonsai involves a great deal of scientific practice. A Bonsai is, after all a potted tree, requiring an extreme level of container-horticulture. This single factor, combined with all the other aspects of creating art using a living entity as the medium, presents enormous challenges in maintaining health and vigor in plant metabolism. As a result, all Bonsai collections are working laboratories on the science of horticulture and physics of how soil/water/sunlight/nutrients are provided in combination to ensure not only health but aesthetic value. For herein is another little understood aspect of Bonsai. As with all art objects, Bonsai have monetary value, some extremely so. That value is dependent upon maintaining their aesthetics, which is directly linked to their health. Therefore, it is paramount that great care be applied to preserve that value through an acute understanding of the mechanisms of gas and liquid exchange at the molecular level that are the basis for all organic life.

Another area of scientific interest that has captured public attention is the age that some trees attain. While these phenomenally old trees are limited to a few specialized species, it is a common perception that all Bonsai are of extreme age. Many people are disappointed to learn that most Bonsai are less than 50 years old. However, there are some that are hundreds, perhaps even thousands of years old. The Clark Bonsai Museum has several of these very old Bonsai and one that could be considered ancient. Although there are subjective indicators we can consider, establishing the true age of these Bonsai can be elusive. Some empirical research has been done where, in fact, cross sectioning and counting growth rings have been performed on deceased Bonsai created from

very old desert Junipers. With some consistency the data showed that these old Junipers added about 100 growth rings for every inch of trunk circumference, translating to 100 years of age for every inch of girth. We have one such desert Juniper Bonsai that measures 21



inches at the base of the trunk. Is it possible this tree could be 2000 years old? The numbers would seem to indicate it is. So, does the Clark Bonsai Museum *display and preserve culturally, historically and scientifically significant objects*? Yup, have to say we do.

Continued on page 3

The Twaris of Hayward “Amazing bonsai...one of the best bonsai collections we have seen outside of Japan.”

Curator's Message

Continued from page 2

Does the Clark Bonsai Museum “host exhibitions and interactive demonstrations or present participatory experiences”? Well, we host rotating Exhibitions of Bonsai, with each exhibition focusing on a unique aspect of the art. Our visitors are greeted by friendly, knowledgeable docents that are pleased to answer questions, and share information that enhances an understanding of Bonsai. We offer *participatory experiences* like the “Make Your Own Bonsai” classes where people can learn to make a Bonsai. We routinely provide visitors with access to Curatorial work sessions where they can interact with staff engaging in preservation and preparation of Bonsai for exhibition. *Story Time* provides visitors with an opportunity to share the family experience of



hearing Japanese folk tales and Bonsai legends retold by experienced story tellers. Colored pencils, paper, and other materials are provided so that visitors may participate in art

contests using Bonsai on exhibit or just pass the time drawing something that inspires them. Scavenger hunts for young and old wherein participants learn important aspects of the art of Bonsai are a daily activity. Interactive guided lectures upon the opening of each new Exhibition are also part of the rich experience that awaits visitors to the Clark Bonsai Museum.

Lorraine Escandon of Fresno “Thank you to all who’ve donated, cared for and arranged the bonsai displays.”

On a more academic level, we launched two new collaborative learning Programs this year. The *Artist’s Studio* and a partnership with Fresno State University. In the *Artist’s Studio* selected students, led by a professional Bonsai artist and teacher, engage in a rigorous one-year training program to learn the art of Bonsai. After which they are expected to continue their studies as part of the Curatorial staff at the museum or go on to establish themselves as artists. In our partnership with Fresno State, each of 40 undergraduate students devotes 50 hours of on-site Service Learning for college credit as they gain the experience of performing the hands-on tasks required for the day-to-day operation of a working museum and propose, develop and initiate individual projects designed to address and improve museum functions.



Finally, is the Clark Bonsai Museum beneficial to the communities we serve and have we become a tourist attraction that draws large numbers of visitors from outside their region? I’m sure it doesn’t surprise you to learn that we keep statistics on our visitor numbers, over 250,000 since we opened 10 years ago. However, it might surprise you to learn that last month alone we hosted visitors from India, Canada, Israel, Mexico, Japan, China and Great Britain, as well as residents from forty States, and all parts of California.

How do we stack up as a museum? Seems as though we are meeting the challenge to do all the things a museum must do...and doing it well, which has been affirmed by the positive votes of the Central Valley community.

The Liangs “The first time coming here with my family. I feel so amazed and will come back.”

BONSAI OF THE MONTH:**CBCS 42**

Artist/ Maker: Unknown Japanese Artist/
Acquired by Tatamori Gondo 1997

Title/plant species: Korean Hornbeam

Botanical Name: Carpinus turczaninowii

Date Acquired: 5-25-26

Age: Est. 100+ years

Deciduous

Style: Natural? According to Tatamori Gondo: Created by planting 7 small Korean Hornbeams together and letting them fuse over time.

Purchased by CBM from Scott Chadd of Lotus Nursery at a very generous discount

This Korean Hornbeam is currently on display in the Journey into the Fourth Dimension Exhibition. It has several important connections to the element of time. Firstly it originated in Japan where it was created by an artist planting 7 small trees together which merged over time. (Look closely and see if you can see the “seams.”) Tatamori Gonzo, a Japanese bonsai practitioner in California, brought it to the US in 1997 when he estimated that it was 70 or 80 years old, making it over 100 years old today. Another significant aspect of the element of time in Bonsai is that because of their potential longevity, they will be tended by a series of artists over time and in different environments, all of which affects the changing appearance of the bonsai. This is the great difference between Bonsai and other visual art forms. As a living entity, as long as it lives, it is never truly “done,” and each subsequent artist adds his or her own experience and artistic vision.

This bonsai is one of five new acquisitions previewed recently for Friends of the Clark Bonsai Museum at an inaugural event which included brunch, an informative presentation by Curator Bob Hilvers featuring the new additions and a walking tour introducing the new exhibition.

You too can become a Friend of the Clark Bonsai Museum receiving interesting updates and invitations to special events for Friends.:

<https://clarkbonsaimuseum.org/friends-of-the-clark-bonsai-museum/>

You can also 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. Please visit www.gsbfcclarkbonsaicollecion.org/adopt-a-tree.html to find out about the benefits of becoming a bonsai sponsor.

WORLD BONSAI DAY AT THE CLARK BONSAI MUSEUM

The Clark Bonsai Museum celebrated World Bonsai Day on May 3 this year. The garden welcomed over 450 visitors between 10am and 4pm who enjoyed a variety of bonsai related activities. In the open air marketplace located in the tree shaded area in front of the bonsai garden, the Clark Bonsai Museum and six



local bonsai vendors sold a range of bonsai, plant material, accessories and arts and crafts. The Clark Bonsai Museum also sponsored a Silent Auction of higher value bonsai, a few deaccessioned from the Collection. This year the silent auction included an array of bonsai and Japanese inspired art work created by Fresno State Students who had been working with the museum for the entire semester as part of an upper division Art History Service Learning class. Students also worked in the bonsai garden at the hands-on activity tables guiding



visitors of all ages with origami, bonsai coloring and drawing, a bonsai scavenger hunt, a bonsai matching memory game, and miniature Zen garden raking.



Other opportunities for participants to learn about the art of bonsai included engaging with experienced local bonsai practitioners who provided demonstrations throughout the day. Bob Hilvers, co-founder of the Clark Bonsai Collection and Managing Curator of the Clark Bonsai Museum since its inception nearly 25 years ago at the Clark Center for Japanese Art of Culture, conducted tours of the current Exhibition of Forest and Multi-trunk Bonsai.

In the reserve area in the afternoon, there was a Build Your Own Bonsai Class and a Bonsai Clinic which offered the opportunity for the public to bring their own bonsai for advice and guidance from the curatorial team experts.



A special event of the day was a luncheon to honor Vincent and Kathy Owyong who have been enthusiastic supporters of the Clark Collection from its early days. 27 members of northern bonsai clubs from Sacramento and Modesto made the journey to Fresno to celebrate World Bonsai Day and honor Vince for his 60 plus years of bonsai artistry, which has included sharing his expertise with bonsai clubs, as well as GSBF Convention and Shohin Seminar workshops. Vince was further recognized for his many contributions to bonsai with the establishment of a permanent pedestal in the exhibit area for displaying the majestic windswept style juniper that he donated to the Clark Bonsai Museum several years ago. It has become one of the museum's signature trees and one of the most popular subjects for visitors drawing their favorite bonsai.

The day was a joyful celebration of bonsai and a wonderful opportunity to share an appreciation of the art of bonsai with old and new friends. In honor of the occasion, the Clark Bonsai Museum launched its Friends Program for volunteers, visitors and supporters of the Clark Bonsai Museum (Visit <https://clarkbonsaimuseum.org/friends-of-the-clark-bonsai-museum/> for more information)



Alejandro Figueroa and Albert Morales of San Diego "Just moved here, exploring Fresno and found this GEM!"

Bonsai as Time Machines

An Exhibition Exploring Our Fascination with Age

By Bob Hilvers, Managing Curator, Clark Bonsai Museum

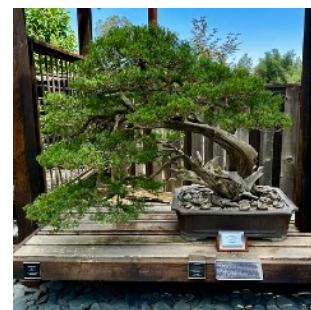
As with many forms of art, Bonsai are three-dimensional objects, but they can also express a fourth dimension – *time*. As living entities, when we look at a Bonsai not only do we see it in a moment of time as we would in a painting or sculpture, with a Bonsai, the moment is just one in the continuum of a life in-progress. In some cases, a life that has existed for centuries, and may exist for centuries more. This fascinates us and because of it, there is a common perception that all bonsai are of extreme age. The reality is that most Bonsai are less than 50 years old. Understanding this paradox begins with the knowledge that all Bonsai are not created equal. Some are propagated from seeds requiring decades of training to produce the image of an aged tree, representing a lifetime of effort by its creator. Others are propagated from cuttings or simply crafted from nursery stock, reducing the time it takes to create them to a few short years.



Then there are those Bonsai that are created from wild trees. Known as *yamadori*, a Japanese term that literally means “taken from the mountains.” Bonsai created from these “wild” trees are often of extreme age, some quite literally hundreds of years old and displaying the natural ravages of time. Yet, most of these *yamadori*-based “Bonsai” have only been a Bonsai for a fraction of their long lives.

So, what then is the answer to the riddle of age in Bonsai? It lies in the art itself and in the hands of those who create it. In the words of one famous Bonsai practitioner, “It’s not how old a Bonsai is that matters, it’s how old it appears to be.” This simple statement encapsulates the essence of the art of Bonsai. It is an artist that uses the medium, a plant, to create a convincing image of a mature tree. This requires the inclusion of visual indicators that convey age. Spreading roots, heavy tapering trunk, a broad canopy of limbs that divide into branches, that further divide into finer branchlets and finally a multitude of twigs. Scarred and twisted trunks, broken and savaged by the elements, wind-shaped and stunted dwarf trees clinging to a rock face; these and more affectations inspired by mother nature, are skillfully and quite intentionally recreated by Bonsai artists to convey the image of “age”

Thus, any given Bonsai can represent many forms of age. Its true age, how long it has been a Bonsai, how old it has been made to look, or yet another aspect of age in Bonsai generational expression. Being living entities with lifespans that can extend much longer than those of the artists that create them, Bonsai are often passed to a new generation of artists who become their caretakers and aesthetic guardians. Thus, the age of a Bonsai can be measured in the passing lifetimes of those who are entrusted with them.



Still, it is the contemplation of a life span that is exceedingly longer than our own that most captivates us. We are enthralled by stories of ancient living things. This is particularly manifested in trees collected from the wild. As we gaze upon a five-hundred-year-old Juniper, we reach out, touching it to confirm it is indeed a living thing. We wonder, could it be that the life I feel was already two hundred and fifty years old when the declaration of Independence was signed? It is inevitable that we compare our relatively fleeting lives of less than a century to these engaging creations and consider an intriguing question, how old do these things get? Well, that depends on how we measure it. A Bonsai that resides in the Japanese Imperial Collection is well documented to have been created more than five hundred years ago. Originally owned by none other than the Tokugawa Shogun Iemitsu. However, as we know, there are Bonsai created from ancient trees collected in the wild, already hundreds, perhaps as much as a thousand years old, before they started lives as Bonsai. Maybe it is simply the enigmatic nature of Bonsai and their complex relationship with time that enchants us most.

You are invited to visit The Clark Bonsai Museum, where art meets nature, to experience the coming Exhibition, “A Journey to the Fourth Dimension: The Element of Time in Bonsai”. Enjoy a stroll among living artifacts that offer us a glimpse into time past, and time progressing...and perhaps, muse on the influence that art and nature exert on our own lives.

Kiyah Corse of Fresno “Perfect place for living in the present.”

MEET AUSTIN COULSON, CBM JACK OF ALL TRADES



How did you first become aware of and interested in the Clark Bonsai Museum?

I first came across the Clark through the local community, and once I actually spent time in the garden, I was hooked. There's something about seeing the trees in person that really pulls you in and made me want to learn more and be part of it.

What is it about volunteering at the Clark Bonsai Museum that attracted you?

It's the mix of nature, art, and people. It's a space that feels calm but also really meaningful, and I liked the idea of contributing to something that brings that experience to others.

Could you provide just a little background about yourself, such as where you are from, education, careers, family, interests, etc? Did any of this play a role in your interest in volunteering in the bonsai garden?

I'm from the area and have been involved in a mix of hands-on work, creative projects, and helping organizations get more organized and functional behind the scenes. Lately I've been doing a lot with digital systems and website work. At the same time, I've always been drawn to things that are more grounded and creative, so bonsai just kind of made sense for me. It balances both sides.

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?

On the Curatorial side, I really enjoy working directly with the trees and learning the techniques. It's rewarding to be part of their care and development. As a Docent, I like talking with visitors and helping them connect with the trees. It's cool seeing people slow down and really take it all in.

What do you see as the benefits of volunteering with the Clark Bonsai Museum?

You get to learn a really unique art form, be part of a great community, and spend time doing something that's actually grounding. It teaches patience and attention in a way that's hard to get elsewhere.

What are the responsibilities of your new job with the CBM?

In my new role with CBM, I've been focused on improving the digital side of things, including website updates, backend organization, systems, and helping everything run more smoothly. It feels good to contribute in a way that supports the bigger picture.

As if all this were not enough, why have you taken on the additional work of participating in the Artist Studio for advanced bonsai training with Julian Tsai?

I'm really excited about it. It feels like a natural next step creatively, and I'm looking forward to seeing where that goes and learning from everyone involved.

Austin has also been instrumental in launching the new Clark Bonsai Museum Friends Program, including creating flyers, social media promotion and designing the logo and the pin that all Friends will receive.



Go to our website to learn more about the benefits of becoming a Friend of the Clark Bonsai Museum:

<https://clarkbonsaimuseum.org/friends-of-the-clark-bonsai-museum/>



The Reeves of Chicago "I was shocked to find a bonsai with a 1000 year old tree."

What's Been Happening at the Clark Bonsai Museum



The first Friends event included a brunch and an introduction to five new bonsai acquisitions by Curator Bob Hilvers, followed by a tour of the current exhibition: *A Journey in the Fourth Dimension: The Element of Time in Bonsai*. Become a Friend and join us for the next special Friends event presenting the popular *Four Seasons Exhibition* in October.



The bonsai garden was the chosen scene of a surprise marriage proposal, pre-arranged by the groom to be. The happy couple commemorated their special day by buying their first bonsai. Working together to care for their bonsai should be good practice for a life time of nurturing, cooperation and patience.



A family enjoys the special activities we offered in the bonsai garden during the Central California Koi Show.



The Curatorial Team took on the major job of replacing all of the aging, sagging wooden benches under the 120 bonsai housed in the Reserve area producing not only stronger benches but creating a better layout.



A summer school group of students learn how to make a bonsai with our team of instructors.



Curatorial Team member Yee Vang works on his project bonsai during a recent Artist Studio Session with Julian Tsai

VISITORS DRAW THEIR FAVORITE BONSAI

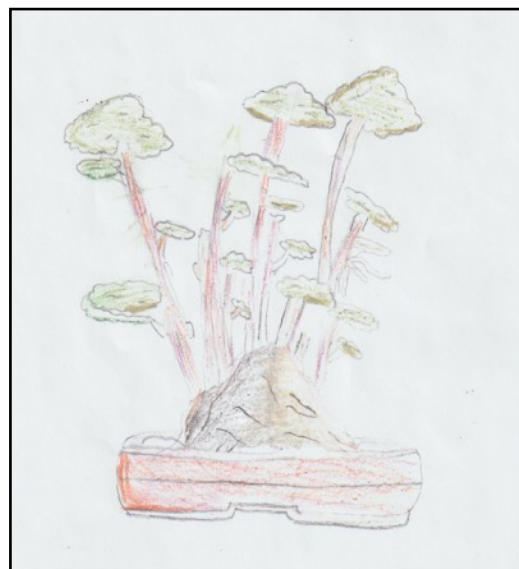
For some time now, Clark Bonsai Museum visitors of all ages have been enjoying the opportunity to Draw their Favorite Bonsai and we have posted their art work on our gallery wall and in an album. For the past few months we have also invited them to enter a Visitor Artist Drawing Contest at Youth (12 and under) and Adult (13 and older) age levels. Winners of the week win a Winner-of-the-Week sticker and at the end of the month, winners of the month are chosen. They win their choice of either a Clark Bonsai Museum pin or Friendship crane. At the end of the year, one of the monthly winners will be chosen as the 2026 Grand Prize Winner who will be awarded a place in a Make Your Own Bonsai Class— a \$75 value. Below are the spring monthly winners.



Charlizz Matias Valddounos
March Adult Winner—A Tie



Drew Miguel
March Adult Winner—A Tie



Aadhya
March Youth Winner



Troy Beckscourt
April Adult Winner



Natalie Herr
April Youth Winner



Eleina Cortez
May Adult Winner

Marlyn Benz of Madera "My kids love it here and drawing the beautiful bonsai."