

Demonstration by Juan Cruz - Blue Atlas Cedar Literati

On September 22, 2022, professional bonsai artist and instructor Juan Cruz performed a demonstration for the Redwood Empire Bonsai Society (REBS) members at the Rohnert Park Community Center, Rohnert Park, California. Juan worked on a Blue Atlas Cedar literati style.

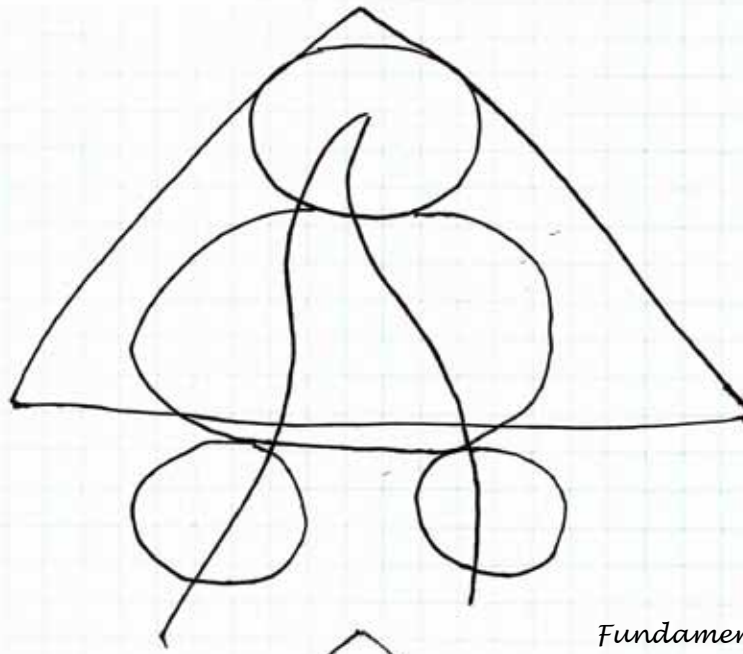
Juan started his love for bonsai in Sacramento, California and then moved to the San Francisco Bay Area in 1995, where he joined the Midori Bonsai Club. While in Sacramento, his first workshop was taught by the renowned Kathy Shaner. He became enamored with the art of bonsai. Juan had the opportunity to study in Japan at the Mansei-En bonsai nursery, located in the Omiya Bonsai Village near Tokyo. There he got a better understanding of what the "Art of Bonsai" truly means.

Juan started off defining literati (or Bunjin) style bonsai. Bunjin is from the Japanese word bujin-gi (bunjin bonsai or tree). However, the form is rooted in Chinese culture. Whether called literati or bunjin, it is a free form style or shape of bonsai. It may appear to be collected from the wild or yamadori, but that is not the case. Creating literati takes into consideration aesthetic principles. Literati is characterized as tall, thin trunk with sparse top or foliage.

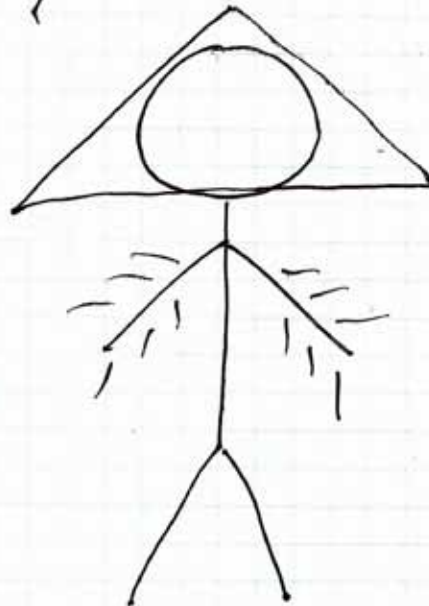
Styles of bonsai can be described in masculine or feminine terms.

Bonsai sketches were recreated below illustrating two styles of trees, Sumo masculine style and feminine style. Of course, there are bonsai fundamentals in the approach to bonsai styling. But, Juan emphasized there are no rules for taking on artistic forms. He said there are considerations to styling trees, such as strength (feminine vs. masculine), flow (weak and strong), family (parent and child).

Sumo style



Feminine style



*Fundamentals
No rules*

*Strength
Flow
Gender Artistic forms
Family*

Demo sketches by Juan Cruz

Each style has artistic values to consider when purchasing pre-bonsai or established bonsai trees. It is best to train the eye when purchasing bonsai trees. Consider “energy balance” always. Energy balance is described best by member Michael Murtaugh from the audience, who stated all parts of a single plant are of equal strength. All growth at the top to the bottom and from inside to outside are of the same vigor and size proportions. Juan added that energy or spirit of the tree is balanced evenly throughout. No part is overly heavy or sparse compared to all of its parts.

Energy balance exists not only in the bonsai tree, but also in displaying your bonsai tree using the correct or energy balance of strong, weaker and delicate in pots, stands and companion trees or articles.

Juan stated that in styling bonsai it is best to train your eye to see strengths and weaknesses for the tree. The key parts of bonsai trees are visible surface roots or nebari and tachiagari or trunk section above the nebari. Branches are important, but branches can be created almost anywhere. Ramification of branches takes time and can be produced fairly quickly in years by division of two, four, eight, 16, etc.

Each bonsai has a front or face for the viewer. Juan used some members in attendance to identify their fronts on the demo tree. Each member pointed to potential fronts. Juan refrained from identifying his front until the conclusion of the demonstration. This was an interesting experiment.

An ideal front view for the bonsai takes into consideration five elements, roots, trunk rise, branches, crown, and age. Rise and crown are key points for identifying the front. One can use for illustrative purposes a sumo fighter ready for a match and facing his opponent.

Juan also used members to demonstrate proper wiring of branches. With practice, one can learn to correctly wire various sizes of branches. He indicated that the gauge of wire to be used on branches is always best to test the wire to the branch to be wired versus trying to rely on 1/3 of the branch size to gauge the wire as referenced in many bonsai text books. He said removing wire from branches can easily cause damage. The removal of small gauge wire should be done by reversing carefully the method used for wiring the branch. The wire should be close to the branch but not contacting the branch. Wiring must be removed from the branch when it appears to be cutting into the bark.

Juan wired the demo tree in order to place branches and foliage in downward directions. He also made sure the branches contained movement from side to side.

In conclusion, Juan removed foliage and created more jin at the very top of the demo tree. He considered the branch and foliage as too heavy for the literati style. He also marked his front of the tree showing several key elements, crown, trunk rise and nebari.

Juan's presentation was informative, lively with member participation and insightful on the art form of literati bonsai.



Blue Atlas Cedar (*Cedrus atlantica* 'Glauca') demo tree



Juan Cruz with the demo tree



Juan wiring the demo tree using copper wire



Member participation in wiring technique



Juan with demo tree at conclusion



Blue Atlas Cedar demo tree at conclusion