Demonstration by Samuel Tan – Mendocino Pygmy Cypress

On January 26, 2023, at the Rohnert Park Community Center, Rohnert Park, CA, home of the Redwood Empire Bonsai Society, Samuel (Sam) Tan performed a demonstration on a yamadori (collected in the wild) Mendocino pygmy cypress.

The demo tree was collected by Bob Shimon of Mendocino Coast Bonsai <Mendocino Coast Bonsai | Redwoods, junipers, cypress, and oaks (mcbonsai.com)> about one year ago. The native species is found a bit inland on the Mendocino coast in northern California.

Sam began his demonstration by displaying his own bonsai specimen of the Mendocino pygmy cypress, pictured below:

He described bonsai specimens show a coarse bark and elongated thin trunk. The foliage and branch pattern is seen as lateral, typical of the coastal Monterey cypress located on the Presidio of San Francisco and the Monterey and Carmel regions. Sam's bonsai specimen was collected in the wild sometime in 2020. It was styled by him in 2021 and completely wired and potted in 2022.

Sam described the potting of the collected pygmy cypress as being careful to leave the core soil intact. He found the roots to be coarse when removing the outer sandy clay like soil. These coarse roots weren't cut except to remove any dead roots. A fresh bonsai soil mix would surround the core soil to generate new root growth.

He indicated that key to his success in transplanting the pygmy cypress was to stie down the tree in the growing pot. He would drill three holes in the bottom of the growing pot located very close to the trunk size. He did not trust normal tie down procedures since the sandy clay like soil and coarse roots in combination with the small diameter of the trunk made those procedures impossible to secure or anchor the tree. Wiring close in to the trunk prevented the tree from moving and this kept the new growth hair like roots from tearing apart and rotting.

Bob was asked to share his experiences with transplanting collected pygmy cypress. Bob described his method of taking three years in removing native soil by one third per year. He would remove the native soil around the outer edge, one third at a time, keeping the core soil around the trunk intact as well.

Sam said he does not pinch the foliage of the pygmy cypress as in most conifer specimens. Instead, he advised to let the foliage grow, harden off and prune with a scissors. The collected pygmy cypress needs fertilizer to recover and grow. Sam recommended NPK numbers of 5-5-5 and to use 30 to 70 percent of the recommended dosage by the manufacturer. He cautioned to be careful in trying to grow the tree faster with higher than the NPK 5-5-5 numbers. Fast growth tends to impact adversely the appearance of the tree’s bark and will cause unwanted elongated growth of the foliage.

Sam moved from his bonsai specimen to the demo pygmy cypress. First, he experimented with the angle of the tree in its growing pot. Moving the long and skinny trunk into various angles from formal upright to semi-cascade and cascade. He was looking for the choice of a front view with the most interest and movement in trunk and branches. In addition, he wanted to highlight the natural Shari or deadwood feature along the trunk. The life line was present in almost any angle. He wanted the apex to bow towards the front or viewer. Sam decided on an angle making the tree a semi-cascade style bonsai.

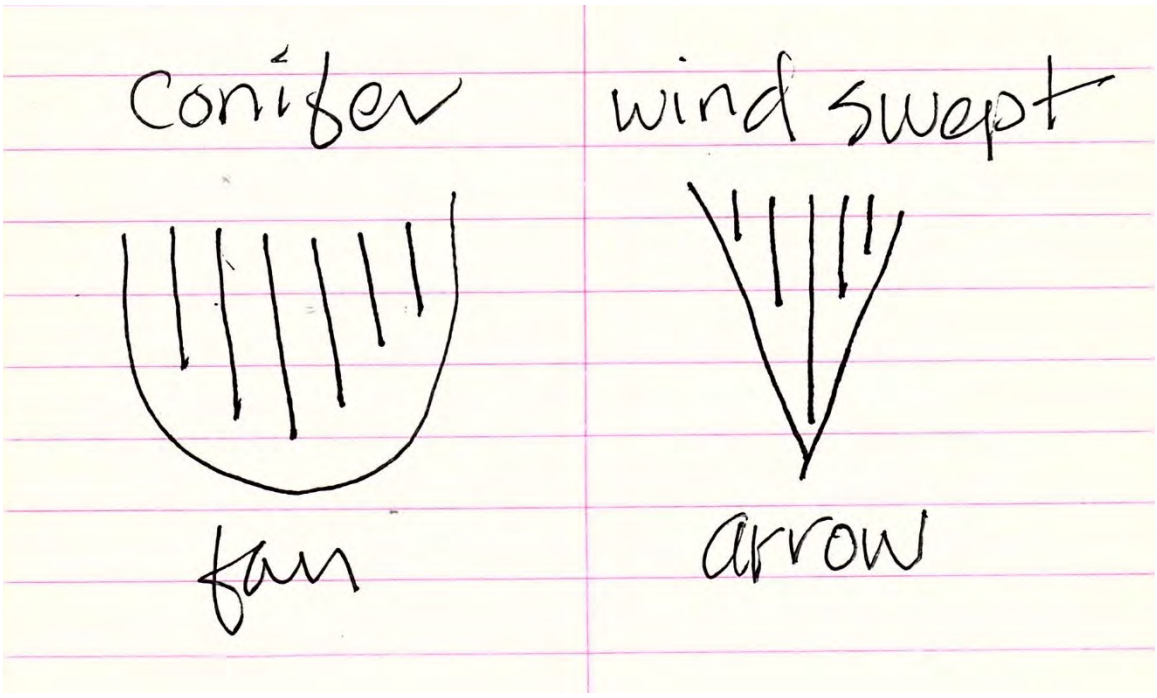
Sam proceeded to examine the branch configuration and found the extended branch coming from the trunk made a U-turn, folding back onto the trunk. He wanted to extend this primary branch away from the trunk to complete the cascade design. There was a whorl of four branches. To allow this whorl to remain would cause the branch joint to thicken resulting in a potential unwanted reverse taper. Sam would select one branch to remain as the extension, removing the other three.

Sam said the pygmy cypress seemed to like being watered. However, both Sam and Bob cautioned not to let the tree dry out.

Sam began to wire the demo tree. He used #8 copper wire to wire the branch that needed to be extended away from the trunk. Sam wanted to wire out unwanted growth patterns in the tree. He described classic wiring of conifers involved a downward direction; whereas for the demo pygmy cypress in nature you find branches growing laterally or even upward. Sam emphasized wiring long lines in the foliage and branches. He said wiring branch to branch and moving upward in the tree as you go. Wiring is a guide for establishing the long lines character of branch growth and creating negative spaces.

Sam suggested a semi-cascade or cascade pots were suitable for the demo tree. Round or square pots are conventional; whereas he recommended a half moon or crescent pot being more naturalistic and rustic in appearance. He said deep pots are somewhat old fashion and difficult to repot, and so he preferred a shallow pot.

Sam wrapped up the demo by wiring secondary branches and creating pads with the foliage. He described pads in conifers are usually shaped into a fan. For the demo pygmy cypress, he wanted the wind swept shape of an arrow.



In conclusion, Sam recommended letting the foliage grow out and save energy in the tree for the transplanting from growing pot to bonsai pot next year.

The Mendocino pygmy cypress was raffled at the conclusion of the demonstration. REBS member Michael Murtaugh purchased the winning raffle ticket and went home with the demo tree.