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Bonsai Books for SA

This issue I am going to briefly discuss books on bonsai. There has been a bit of a dearth of local bonsai books in recent years. Many of the good books had gone out of print and were almost impossible to get hold of. Well, the good news is that some of them have been updated and reprinted, and they would make a wonderful addition to somebody's Christmas stocking this year.

I feel that it is essential to have at least one or two really good books in one's collection. Studying photos of really top-notch trees can often suggest solutions to one's own styling issues. The technical knowledge gained from reading is invaluable, and I often find myself re-reading explanations on complicated issues like grafting, plant biology and styling methods. I also quite often find myself saying something like "Gee, I wish I had read this before I hacked my prized acacia!" Anyway, like all true bonsai growers I bury my mistakes and get on with life.

Understanding Bonsai – The Revised Edition (ISBN 1-4120-5895-3) by Pieter Loubser is due for re-release in a month or two. This is a superb book covering many of the intricate technical issues in a manner that makes it easy for the novice to understand.

The recently updated Bonsai Styles of the World by Charles Ceronio (ISBN 0-620-32677-8) is also high up on my list of local books and is already on the shelves. As the title implies this book deals almost exclusively with styling issues and has a comprehensive section on African styles.

The above two books would be a great beginning but they do not cover all aspects of bonsai. Actually, in researching this article I have read and paged through more than a dozen books loaned to me, written by both local and foreign authors. All of them are worthy of reading. Each author has their own, personal and unique approach, and even though they may all deal with similar issues they have different ways of presenting the information.

Of course almost all of them have photographs of stunning bonsai and these serve as inspiration to all of us.

Other local books to look for:

Bonsai for Pleasure and Profit – A.C.P. Bultink ISBN 0-620-21164-4

This "book" consisting of loose leaves in a binder might be hard to get hold of but is well worth the effort. Lots of technical stuff and many line drawings, this is a very good hands-on bonsai manual.

Bonsai Success in Southern Africa – Carl Morrow and Keith Kirsten ISBN 0-7981-4399-1

A recently published book by two well known horticultural personalities, this is a good book for the novice, it has some really good photographs and lots of relevant information.

If you can't find the local books on the shelves then email Lynn on mistymoon@mweb.co.za. She stocks them all and can advise you on your purchase.

Don't discount the overseas books! Don't forget that our art originated in China thousands of years ago, migrated to Japan, and in the last 100 years has spread throughout the world, largely due to the writings of the wise and sometimes not so wise. We may use different material and style trees in a different way in Africa, but many of the principles and techniques are still very applicable.

We must pay homage to the Eastern roots of our art, and understand that our art form is Japanese in essence. Reading works by the masters makes us more aware of the vast store of knowledge and cultural heritage of which we are a part.

A comprehensive listing of all books available is beyond the scope of this article but below is a short list of some I have looked through. If you have access to the internet, it is very easy to get hold of these books. Simply enter the ISBN number into google and do a search. You will be directed to the publishing company or agents who stock the book. Actually one company, Sterling Publishing Co., seem to stock most of them and at very reasonable prices too.

Bonsai, Its Art, Science, History and Philosophy – Deborah Koreshoff ISBN 0-88192-389-3 Australia - Highly recommended.

The Living Art of Bonsai – Professor Amy Liang ISBN 0-8069-8781-2 – Chinese/USA Highly recommended.

Bonsai, The Art of Living Sculpture – Jack Douthitt ISBN 0-8478-2320-2 USA.

The Creative Art of Bonsai – Isabella & Rémy Samson ISBN 0-7063-7024-4 France.

The Spirit of Bonsai Design – Chye Tan ISBN 1-84340-021-9 Japanese/Dutch.

The Four Seasons of Bonsai – Kyuzo Murata ISBN 4-7700-2120-8 Japanese.

The Art of Bonsai – Peter D Adams ISBN 0-7063-6837-1 British (It's old but good).

The Bonsai School – Craig Coussins ISBN 1-856056-82-1 Scottish Recommended.

The Art of Bonsai Design – Colin Lewis ISBN 1-4027-0070-9.

