



Newsletter

March 2023

SABA Review:

The 1st Quarter of 2023 is drawing to a close and with loadshedding becoming a household phrase with everybody making themselves acquainted with the various stages and times that we do not have electricity. Most households have acquired some basic battery backup or alternative source of power to keep the essentials going and make the dark hours more bearable.

The SABA EXCO has applied for tax exemption for the newly registered Non-Profit Company that was registered for the bid to host the next World Bonsai Convention which was eventually awarded to Asia Pacific to be hosted in Malaysia.

The SABA EXCO managed to streamline communication between SABA and its member clubs with the introduction of a regular newsletter with interesting themes and a What's App group to communicate essential information from time to time.

The updated website has been well supported with membership renewal now being done online on the website and the Facebook page has been active and well managed by the various administrators.

The monthly photo competition was re-introduced but only a few entries were received for the 1st couple of months' competitions. BRAT has also introduced a more informal photo competition and with the poor response for the SABA competition, the EXCO is re-thinking a strategy to see if we should carry on with the competition or give it a different "flavour" to attract more enthusiasm.

A mini convention will be hosted by the Durban Bonsai Society during the last weekend of October or 1st weekend in November 2023 and once the venue has been confirmed, we will make the information available. As in the past a new talent competition will form part of the mini convention and clubs are urged to host their club new talent competitions so the regional competitions can be done to select the regional representatives to partake in the national competition at the convention. Please pencil in the 2 mentioned weekends in your diaries until we have confirmation from Durban Bonsai Society of which weekend it will be.

Executive Committee:

Tola Smit (President), Carl Morrow (Vice-President), Terence O'Flaherty (Treasurer), Dawn Collier (Secretary), Lesley Haw, Phil Levitt, Viky Petermann

The summer season has seen lots of rain and flooding in most areas over South Africa which obviously affected our care of our bonsais. Watering regimes had to be altered and some of the trees had to be kept out of the rain to prevent root rot and all the other pests that come with the constant humidity and not as much sun as we are used to. Hopefully most of us managed to keep most of our trees alive and growing well.

With autumn approaching fast, keep up the end of season fertilizing regime so our trees can prosper again in the Spring of 2023!

Bonsai greetings,

Tola Smit

SABA EXCO President

SABA subscriptions reminder

Subs were due in July 2022 for the year running from July 2022 to June 2023.

Subs are as follows: Club member R40, Individual member R100 and Organisations R200.

Payments are to be made to the Standard Bank account (details below) and please avoid making cash deposits as the fees are exorbitant.

South African Bonsai Association NPC

Standard Bank

Account Number: 140313478

Account: PlusPlan Business

Branch: Brandwag

Branch Code: 055534

ANNOUNCEMENT:

The SABA website is live, and we would like to use it to centralize communication between the affiliated clubs and SABA.

A new process is to be followed for renewing of yearly membership to SABA.

We are asking all affiliated clubs to complete the membership form on the SABA website, to make sure the correct contact email address is on file and that the current number of members is updated so that clubs do not get billed for the incorrect number of members. Please make payment based on the number of members your club has.

SABA Newsletter:

The SABA newsletter is published quarterly. It's aim is to improve communication between the different regions as well as to spread specific local bonsai knowledge to the rest of the country. Information about happenings, events and shows taking place over the country is shared and enjoyed by all who read the newsletter and for those members who travel regularly around South Africa, it offers an opportunity to join events taking place in other parts of the country.

This month, the focus is on indigenous species used regularly in different regions in South African. We have a selection of well research articles to whet your appetite to try and develop a new indigenous species, perhaps new to you or even to your region with some guidance from growers who have grown these trees with regularity.

We hope you enjoy this selection of articles!

SECTION 1: South African indigenous trees

- **A discussion of less known and used indigenous species for bonsai - by Louis Van Der Walt – Pretoria**

INTRODUCTION

The art of bonsai comes a long way since the days of China and Japan a few thousand years ago. Today it is practised by just about all countries around the world. The species used today as well as the styles dates back to those days. I started bonsai in 2007 and my experience is that exotic species are used extensively in all regions of South Africa. There are a few indigenous species that are used. However, they are in the minority and are tried and tested and all information on how to grow them are known. As a South African I have a passion for our indigenous trees. As a result, I use only indigenous species, the well-known as well as less well known.

The latest tree list of the Dendrological Society has 1666 species. We utilise only a very small percentage of them. According to me that figure will not increase if more and more bonsai growers don't experiment and do research to determine the potential of more species.

Over and above the indigenous trees there are shrubs and climbers that also has potential.

Most of the bonsais in this article are still in training and are still in their training pots.

The indigenous species discussed here only requires the normal TLC (Tender Loving Care) as any exotic species. I can only recommend biannual check for rootbound, and repotting accompanied with root pruning.

The year date given at the bonsai image refers the year in which training started on the tree.

LIST OF SPECIES TO BE DISCUSSED IN THIS ARTICLE

- 1 Mountain seringa (*kirkia wilmsii*)
- 2 Fever berry (*croton gratisimus*)
- 3 Blue Bush (*diospyros lecioides*)
- 4 Star apple (*diosperos austro-africana*)
- 5 Koko tree (*maytenus undata*)
- 6 Brittle wood (*nuxia congesta*)
- 7 Septee tree (*cordia caffra*)
- 8 Velvet raisen (*grewia flava*)
- 9 Nana berry (*searsia dentata*)
- 10 Soap nettle (*pouzolzia mixta*)
- 11 Snuff-box (*oncoba spinosa*)
- 12 Yellow bauhinia (*bauhinia tomentosa*)
- 13 Natal bauhinia (*bauhinia tomentosa*)
- 14 Old wood (*leucosidea sericea*)
- 15 Glossy crowberry (*Siersia lucida*)
- 16 Karroo kuni bush (*siersia burchellii*)

1 MOUNTAIN SERINGA (*Kirkia wilmsii*)

Kirkia wilmsii is a fairly hardy, deciduous, often multi-stemmed tree with beautiful, fine, feathery foliage. It has smooth grey bark with scars where the leaves were attached and is most attractive.

The autumn colours are brilliant pinks and reds that set the tree alight. The spring colours are almost as beautiful making this a great foliage and texture plant.



Wild seringa in autumn colours



Bonsai 2014

2 FEVER BERRY (*Croton gratissimus*)

C. gratissimus is a shrub or a small tree that may reach 10 m in height in South Africa, but can grow to 20 m tall further north in Africa. It is a slender tree with fine, drooping foliage and a crown which spreads upwards in a 'V'-shape with drooping terminal branches.



Croton gratissimus tree



Leaves and flowers



3 BLUE BUSH (*diospyros lecoides*)

Diospyros lyciodes subsp. *guerkei* is a deciduous, large shrub or small tree growing to about 5m. Often a pioneer tree on the Highveld grasslands, being first to colonize open areas and then provide shelter to other less hardy tree and shrub species.

Suitable to be used to form an informal screening hedge or pruned up to form a small shade tree. The attractive, edible fruit is tasty and extremely popular with fruit-eating birds.

A very draught and cold-hardy tree.



Blue bush in nature



Fruit of the blue bush

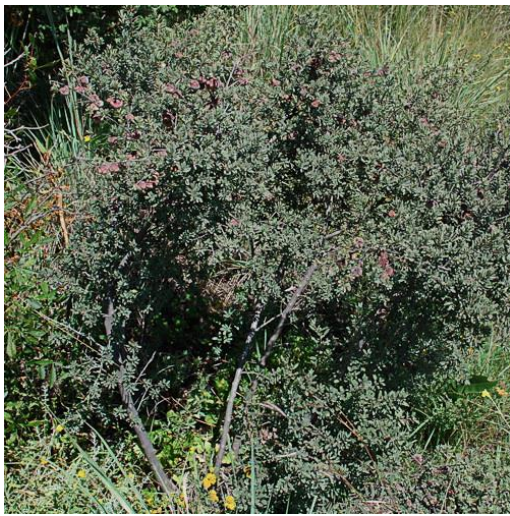


Bluebush bonsai

4 STAR APPLE (*Diospyros austro-africana*)

Diospyros austro-africana is a very hardy, evergreen, attractive small shrub that has small leaves that turn a blackish-red in winter. Tiny red flowers borne from August to November are followed by attractive, edible red to black berries.

Plant *Diospyros austro-africana* in sun or semi-shade. It attracts birds and insects and with its unusual foliage makes an interesting addition to any garden. Keep on the dry side.



Star apple in nature



Fruit of the star apple



Bonsai tree 2013

5 KOKO TREE (*Maytenus undata*)

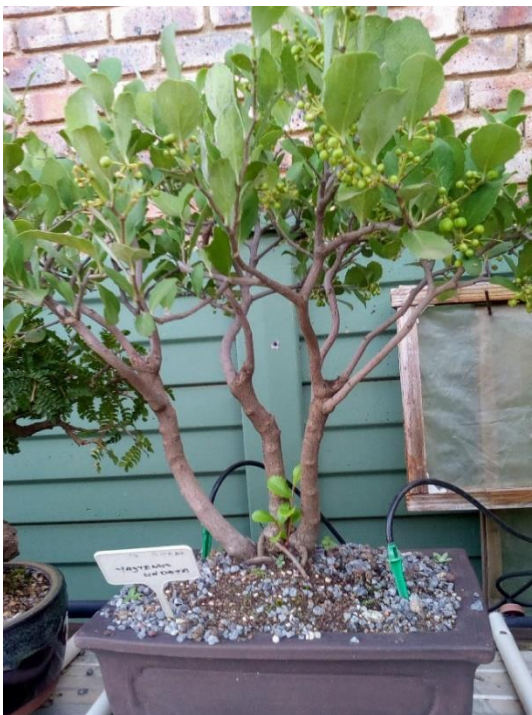
Maytenus undata is a hardy evergreen tree with a variable height depending on the area it is growing, *Maytenus undata* is usually a multi stemmed tree that can grow up to 5m. It can also be single trunked.



Koko tree in nature



Leaves and fruits of the Koko tree



Koko tree bonsai 2015

6 BRITTLE WOOD (*Nuxia congesta*)

Nuxia congesta is a quick-growing, evergreen tree or shrub, 2-20 m high. It has a pale grey-brown to dark brown shedding bark and hairy branchlets. The leaves are hairy, dark green, slightly leathery and variable in shape and size. They are found clustered at the ends of branchlets. Coppice leaves are soft, succulent and dark green with a serrated margin.



Brittle wood in nature



Flower of the brittle wood



Bonsai of the brittle wood 2017

7 SEPTEE TREE (*Cordia caffra*)

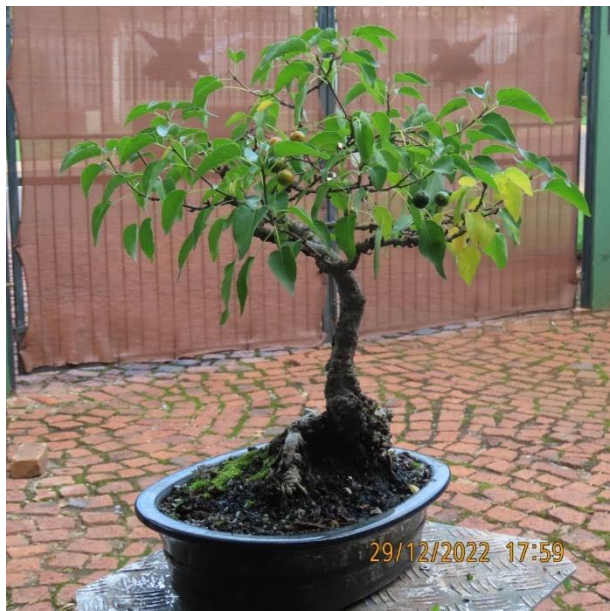
Why this breathtaking tree is so rarely used in the horticultural and landscape trade is a mystery. It possesses almost all the qualities of the ideal city garden tree; very attractive with or without its leaves, small to medium in size, interesting, smooth, light brown bark, its showy deep orange fruit can be eaten by both humans and birds alike and it is relatively frost hardy. What more could you ask for!



Septee in nature



Leaves and fruit of the Septee tree



Septee bonsai 2007



8 VELVET RAISEN (*Grewia flava*)

Grewia flava is a shrub or small tree, 2–4 m tall. The grey bark on the young branches, which is usually covered with thick-growing but quite short hairs, tends to turn dark grey and becomes smooth the older the tree gets; this is also noticeable on the stems. The greyish green leaves are alternately arranged and are covered in fine hairs and it appears to be a lighter shade of green on the underside of the leaves. The apex (tip of the leaves) is rounded, whereas the margin is serrated. Three conspicuous veins from the leaf base is characteristic of this tree; a 2 mm long leaf stalk is also very noticeable.



Velvet raisen in nature



Flower and berry of velvet raisen



Velvet raisen bonsai 2018

9 NANA BERRY (*Searsia dentata*)

Searsia dentata is a deciduous shrub to small tree up to 6 m high, with a smooth, greyish brown bark. The leaves, which are pink when young, turning dull yellow to orange-red in autumn, are trifoliolate, with the two side leaflets smaller than the terminal leaflet, dark green above and paler green below with long hairs; the leaflets are sessile on a slender petiole.



Nana berry leaves and berries



Autumn colours of the leaves



Nanaberry bonsai 2007

10 SOAPNETTLE (*Pouzolzia mixta*)

Pouzolzia mixta is a small tree or multi-stemmed shrub growing up to 4 m high. The bark is dark reddish-brown and smooth; branchlets have a velvety surface. Watery latex present.



Soapnettle in nature



Soapnettle bonsai 2018

11 SNUFFBOX TREE (*Oncoba spinosa*)

The snuff-box tree grows up to 5 m, but may sometimes reach a height of 8 m. The bark of this plant is mottled grey and rather smooth. The young branches are conspicuously speckled with lenticels (a slightly raised, lens-shaped area on the surface of the young stems that helps with the exchange of gasses between the plant and the surrounding air). The spines are straight and up to 50 mm in length.



Flower and leaves of the snuffbox tree



Fruit of the snuffbox tree



Snuffbox tree bonsai 2007

12 YELLOW BAUHINIA (*Bauhinia tormentosa*)

Medium to large shrub to a small tree, up to 4m in height. Leaves are divided into two lobes, light green in colour, with a leathery texture, carried on branches that are often drooping. It produces large bell-shaped, bright yellow flowers with a black to deep maroon coloured centre in mid to late summer (from December to March).



Yellow bauhinia in nature



Flower of the yellow bauhinia

Yellow bauhinia bonsai



13 NATAL BAUHINIA (*Bauhinia natalensis*)

This lovely ornamental, rounded shrub is relatively fast growing and within a few years reaches its mature size of 2.5 x 3 metres.

The distinctively butterfly-like leaves consist of two rounded, almost completely divided, nearly semi-circular lobes and in *Bauhinia natalensis* they are delightful miniatures, being much smaller than any of the other South African species.



Natal bauhinia flowers



Natal bauhinia flowers



Natal bauhinia bonsai 2007

14 OLD WOOD (*leucosidea sericea*)

The ouhout is often a straggly shrub or a dense, small, evergreen tree, which grows up to 7 m tall and 5 m wide.

It is single- or multi-stemmed, and it branches low down. The bark is rough, reddish-brown in colour, and flakes off to reveal a smooth light brown under-bark.

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15 GLOSSY CROWBERRY (*Siersia lucida*)

Searsia lucida is a densely branched, evergreen shrub, 2–3 m tall or occasionally a small tree, up to 5 m tall; erect branches can have a spread of up to 4 m. The rough grey to brown bark is slightly fissured. Young reddish brown branchlets are covered in a shiny resin. The wood is red-brown, hard, tough and durable. Leaves are glossy, trifoliate (have three leaflets) with a larger terminal leaflet, slightly leathery, rather sticky, dark olive-green above and below, with a prominent midrib. Leaves turn an orange-yellow colour before being shed. If the surface of the leaf is lightly scratched the cuticle becomes milky, so leaves often appear to have a white hue.



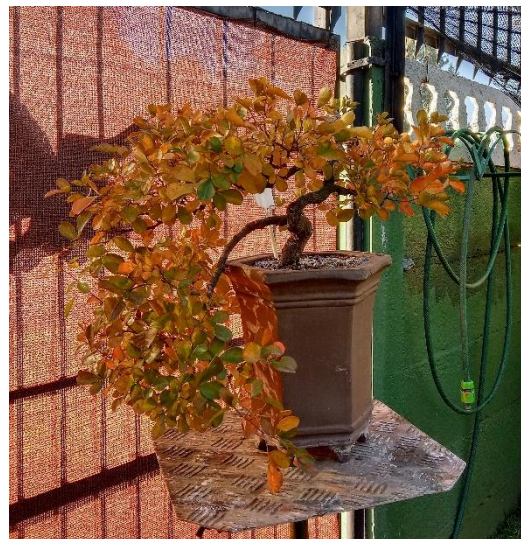
Crowberry in nature



Leaves and berries of the crowberry



Bonsai of the crowberry



Crowberry bonsai in autumn

16 KARROO KUNI BUSH (*Searsia burchellii*)

Searsia burchellii is a much-branched, evergreen shrub or small tree that grows up to 5 m high. Bark is granular, grey brownish. Leaves are small, trifoliolate, glossy, waxy, olive green and crowded at the ends of short, spur-like branchlets. Branchlets are sometimes spine-tipped. Small cream-coloured flowers are borne in loose clusters among the leaves in autumn (April–May). Male and female flowers are borne on different plants and only female plants bear fruits. Fruits are ellipsoid, thinly fleshy, green to reddish brown, drupes, somewhat compressed and flattened, 3.7×2.2 to 6.3×3.7 mm, borne in autumn and winter (May–July).



Kuni bush in nature



Leaves and berries of the kuni bush



Kuni bush bosai 2017

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the indigenous trees discussed here are all suitable for bonsais. The lifespan of the bonsais is not known yet and can only be determined over time if more bonsai artist experiment with them.

- **Ficus Glumosa: - by Tola Smit – Lowveld of Mpumalanga – Nelspruit**

Courtesy of SANBI website

Ficus glumosa Delile (= *F. sonderi* Miq.)

Family: Moraceae

Common names: hairy rock fig, mountain rock fig (Eng.); harige rotsvy, berg-rotsvy (Afr.); umthombe (Xhosa); inkokhokho, umdenda omnyama, umnyaxa (Zulu); inkiwane (Ndebele); inkokhokho, magnyea (Swati); mphaya (N.Sotho); tshikululu (Venda)

SA Tree No: 64

An ideal tree for planting in water scarce areas; it will provide browsing and food to a number of animals, as well as a habitat for a large range of bird species.



Description

Ficus glumosa displays the interesting characteristic of behaving like an evergreen tree in areas where the rainfall is very high and expresses itself as a semi-deciduous tree in arid areas. *Ficus glumosa* can easily grow up to 15 m high; the crown is roundish and may be open or closed; the branches of the tree tends to grow quite low. The bark is pale grey to yellowish grey and has a smooth to slightly rough texture; it often tends to flake off, but creates a nice decorative look. Hairs cover the branchlets. The older leaves fall to the ground and are responsible for leaving large scars behind. The younger parts of the tree, such as the young leaves, branches and petioles, are covered with golden to greyish hairs, or it may show almost a lack of hairs.



Leaves are simple, oval-shaped to oblong, 50–150 × 20–90 mm, dark green and smooth on the upper surface and lighter green on the lower surface.



Clustered, *sessile* (without stalks) fruits (figs) are produced in the leaf axils towards the end of the branches from early spring until late summer (August to March). It has been recorded that the fruits of *Ficus glumosa* trees in northern Namibia are much smaller, less than 10 mm in diameter, than those of the trees growing in southern Africa, from about 8–15 mm in diameter.



Conservation Status

According to the [Red List of South African Plants](#), checked on the 2016/10/13, the conservation status of this plant is Least Concern (LC).

Distribution and habitat

Ficus glumosa is quite widely spread; it is found from Tanzania in North Africa to KwaZulu-Natal in southern Africa. It loves to grow along rocky outcrops, cliffs in woodlands and wooded grasslands.



Derivation of name and historical aspects

Ficus is the Latin name for the cultivated fig, and *glumosa* means 'glume-like', referring to the presence of basal bracts on the fruits (a glume is a small, dry membraneous bract typically found in the inflorescences of grasses and sedges).

Ficus is a large genus of about 1 180 species within the plant family Moraceae. It is distributed mostly in tropical and subtropical regions.

Ecology

The leaves of the tree are eaten by game such as kudu and bushbuck. This tree provides an ideal shelter and a good food supply for a number of bird species.

Uses

The bark of the tree is often used for the tanning of leather. The milky latex of the tree is non-toxic and was recorded to treat eye infections in the past. The fruit of the tree is edible, and can be enjoyed fresh.

Growing *Ficus glumosa*

Ficus glumosa is a fast-growing tree in arid areas and can even grow much faster in areas where a higher rainfall is experienced. This tree does not handle heavy frost well, but it receives quite a lot of credit for coping with the transplanting process.

Dry the seeds before sowing by simply aerating the fruit by placing it on some paper towel. Remove the seeds from the dried fruit and sow them in seedling trays. Prepare the seedling trays by using equal parts of sand and compost to fill up the trays. The next step is to cover the seeds lightly with a layer of sand and water well by keeping the medium moist, but not soaked. Signs of seed germination start from between 10 and 20 days. Seedlings reaching the 3-leaf stage, can be successfully transplanted into bags filled with a mixture of 70% sand and 30% compost.

One can also propagate this tree from cuttings. Take cuttings from semi-hardwood, and make them about 100–150 mm long. Dip the cuttings into a growth hormone to encourage the root development process. A third easy method to propagate this tree is by truncheons. The ideal size of the truncheons is about 100–150 mm in diameter and about 500 mm to 1 m long.

The tree is quite hardy, although the fruit may become infested with insects. For birds and other animals, this is of little or no concern.

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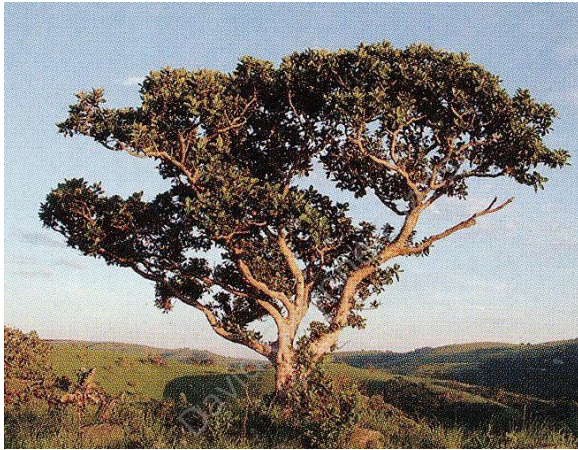
Benjamin Festus

Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden

November 2016

Some specimens in Nature *(taken from websites)*





Ficus glumosa, uncommon bonsai

Courtesy of Bonsaihunk's Blog

An uncommonly found Ficus species, *Ficus glumosa* is from Africa and has nice round, hairy leaves. It is in the grouping of rock-splitter figs. Those that seem to be found growing over and around rocks in the veldt.

Since they seem to enjoy rock growing this seedling was placed over the rock to emulate a root over rock style. It is in a small pot so its growth is quite limited and despite its age, about 12 years, it is still a very immature bonsai design.



Ficus glumosa root-over-rock style

This entry was posted in [Twists and Turns, shaping trunks](#) and tagged [rock splitter](#), [root-over-rock](#) on [October 19, 2017](#) by jerry@bonsaihunk.us.

A post by Jerry Meislik on Bonsaihunk's Blog

Personal Experience

Growing Habit

Although a relative fast-growing tree, growth tends to be coarse and juvenile leaves are sometimes as big as one's hand. Ramification is difficult and is achieved by pinching the growth point on primary and secondary branches once 2 to 3 leaves have formed in spring. This practice also aids in reducing leaf size which can reduce to 2-3cm in diameter.

The main feature of this tree is the greyish green bark which gives off powdery flaking.

As with most ficus species, the tree will produce arial roots in humid conditions although it is not seen in nature except around the base of tree.

Enjoys a free draining soil which should not become too dry and will be deciduous in most regions in South Africa where temperatures go below 8 degrees in winter.

Juvenile Leaf size
for 15+ years



Leave reduction on tree in training



Although slow to develop into bonsai, quite rewarding since not often used as bonsai.

Yamadori takes quite easily and truncheon cuttings of up to 20cm in diameter has been successfully cultivated if taken during early spring.

Bonsai in training



Possibly one of my 1st bonsai; typical triangular shape styling which is not the way these trees grow in nature.

Approx 20 years in training and leave size has reduced quite well as shown in the image above.

If left to grow wild again in spring, leaves will again increase in size but this is necessary for tree to regain vigour every 3 seasons or so.

Can see the leave size on the bottom left branch which has been left to grow this season to thicken up the branch.



In training for about 5 years from cutting obtained from Eddie Janner, one of our club members; more realistic styling if compared to the growth habit in nature.

Have managed to grow the majority of the primary -, and some secondary branches.

Once happy with the structure, I will start with ramification and leave reduction, although leave size is about 30% of juvenile growth as demonstrated above.

As with most ficus, branches stay flexible so wiring throughout the bonsai development can be achieved with success. Wire scarring, if caught early enough, should grow out in the matter of 1 or 2 seasons.

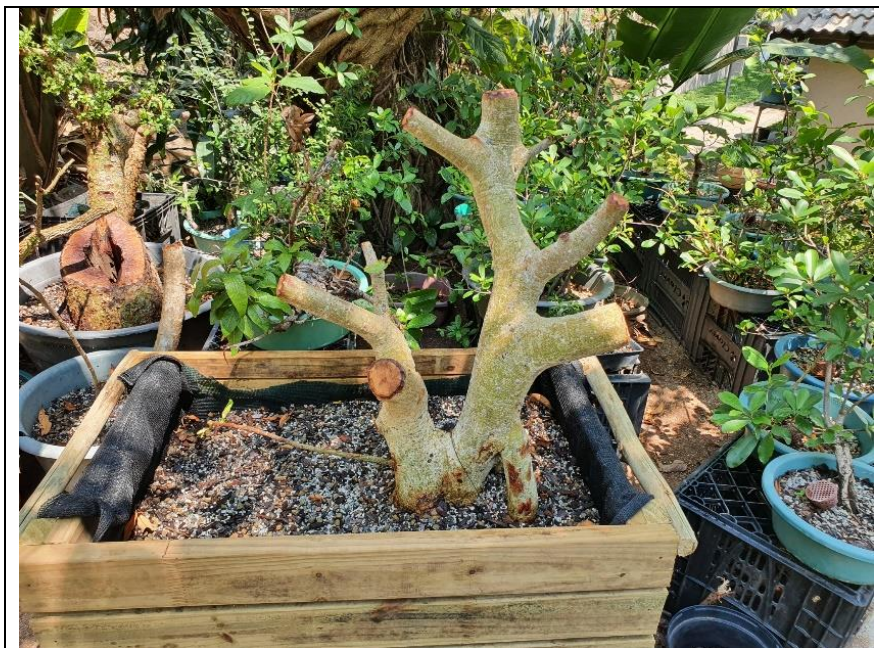


Yamadori material's 1st styling in 2018, collected in 2016.

Sadly the tree died in 2020 over December when the caretaker of my trees did not water it sufficiently when temperatures were above 37 deg for more than 2 weeks.

Have collected a good specimen off a rocky outcrop in Sep 22 which is growing strongly; juvenile leaves shown above in the leaf size comparison, are leaves from this tree. Difficult to photograph the tree now, since it is amongst a lot of potential bonsai material and the growing box built from timber is too heavy for me to handle on my own.

Photograph below when planted. The base of the tree, which is below the soil, nearly fill the wooden box and tree approx. 80cm tall.



Although seldomly used as bonsai, I believe it has its place amongst our indigenous ficus species used for bonsai.

- **History of a tree - Ficus burtt-davyi (“Congo”?) - By Heinrich Kohne.**

Tribute to Prof. Isobel Hofmeyr, Rudi Adam and Tannie Dot Henegan.

I was a bit bemused when I saw a burtt-davyi had won the prize for the best semi tropical at USA National in 2022 and yet not surprised as this specie had made its mark previously over there. I bet the owner of the tree has little knowledge of where this specie came from other than being South- African. The same might be said in a few years about our Grewia occidentalis. The honour of making this specie available not only to us locals but also internationally should be shared by Prof. Hofmeyr and Rudi. Not only have they identified various varieties to the extent that the sub specie “Congo” has been recognised. Thus, I wish to pay tribute to the both of them and we should treasure the stories of the discovery of the burtt-davyi. Our sincere thanks in having the joy of working with this specie and may your contribution to South African Bonsai live through the Ficus burtt-davyi. There might be more stories about the burtt-davyi and that could just fix the legend of the species and I am convinced that it could become one of our iconic species as the Acacia, baobab and olives.



I wish to quote from an article with regard to the history of this specie, written many years ago by Prof. Isobel Hofmeyr. Though possibly incorrect in the sense of binomial nomenclature she mentioned 3 typical varieties or sub species according to the shape and form of their leaves.

Namely a common variety, elongate or "longifolia" and then mini/nana or "Congo" as it was acknowledged by Kirstenbosch. All references and the feature tree will refer to the latter. They are restricted to a small area and in 1978 Rudi Adam discovered some of them in the Oudtshoorn district. From a group of 8 trees only 2 could be collected of which she obtained one. The largest tree was about 30cm in height and 7-8 cm in diameter and he estimated their age between 20 and 30 years. Their size could be due to grazing and frost damage. Prof. Hofmeyr made some cuttings, and they were distributed to clubs who attended the 1991 convention in Cape Town. Some of these also found their way to the USA where they have been distributed.



Some early photos of what has become the now the back of the tree.

My introduction to the specie came when I renewed my interest in bonsai with the 1996 National Convention in Bloemfontein. Shortly thereafter I found myself on a trip to Griekwastad going rock hunting, where I met Prof. Isobel Hofmeyr and Siggy and Dorothy Frantz. It might have been 1997/98 when I visited Rudi and bought several burtt-davyii “varieties”, one of them would be the tree in this feature. In 2000 I moved back to Bloemfontein from Harrismith, and it was during the first half of the year that Tannie Dot and myself did some root- over-, and on rock projects. I moved to a small holding in July 2000 (it became the kai monthly meeting venue since 2001) and in in spring of that year Bloemfontein Kai host their second National Convention at Ilanga Estate. Anybody that knows the rocks in the Griekwastad area will know they are mighty heavy yet brittle when being cut, they easily break along weaker lines. Nevertheless, their colour and texture make it worthwhile in the application regarding tree, root and rock features. When we first established this composition, muck was applied where the base of the tree would be placed and areas where the roots needed to cling to the rock. Roots were then covered with “gladwrap” and placed in a deep container and covered with growing media up to just above the base of the tree. Gradually over the next couple of seasons this was removed with care according to the establishment of the roots. Inexperience prolonged this process and today there are quicker ways and other materials available to establish this type of design.

During a Mini Convention held in Bloemfontein it was suggested by Louis Nel, Duncan Wiles and Hennie Reyneke I should consider changing the front. Sometimes one should acknowledge some good advice from one’s peers!!! Another worthwhile thought is to keep a good photo history of one’s trees, which I sadly neglected or lost some of the earlier photos.



Burt – dayvii proved to be one of our indigenous fig species to be the easiest to grow compared to most of the others in the Bloemfontein area, obviously we need to protect them from severe cold and frost and the occasional scale. But they seem to still thrive with minimum care and maintenance this could be beneficial to the bonsai process compared to other areas where they might be more vigorous. I believe the growing medium to be the foundation of their care as with all other trees. Large part is aggregate of 1 to 5 mm maximum, usually a combination of gravel/sand, Leca, pumice, and perlite and organic nothing else than a good sphagnum peat moss or a bit of milled bark. Compost is a definite no. Fertilizer is used sparingly and usually applied in autumn. Too often indiscriminate fertilizing would lead to coarse growth and bigger leaves. Same could be said with watering, too often we make the mistake to “over” water figs in drier climates because of the lack of humidity thinking this would be beneficial. Where this could easily lead to root rot during seasonal high rainfall. Thus, allowing them to go a bit dry as with junipers and pines will keep leaf size in check. They have all the characteristics to make great bonsai, leaves reduced easily, sprout from old wood readily show age. Once the structure of the design is set, most of the refinement could be done by clip and grow. Occasional wiring will help to refine the design further, but care must be taken to prevent scaring which could remain visible for a while.



They easily grow from cuttings and this can be taken anytime during the growing season except during the high summer heat and best during early autumn. As with most things plant related there are exceptions and sometimes one could be a bit opportunistic with regard to variable weather conditions but then aftercare is key. They strike roots easily even from thicker branches.

I have gradually over the years got rid of all the other varieties I once bought from Rudi and remained with the feature tree and all cuttings are from this one tree.



The tree displayed at ABC 2019, Pretoria. Winner silver merit award.

- **Diospyros - by Hennie Nel - Western Cape**

Diospyros is part of the Ebenaceae family and has about 700 species of which 14 species occur in SA.

The persimmon fruit was named Diospyros kaki in Greek meaning “divine pear”. The diospyros trees all have some form of fruit, not necessarily as ‘divine’ as the persimmon.

I will focus on:

- Diospyros Whyteana

And recommend the following:

- Diospyros austro-africaner
- Diospyros simii
- Diospyros lycioides

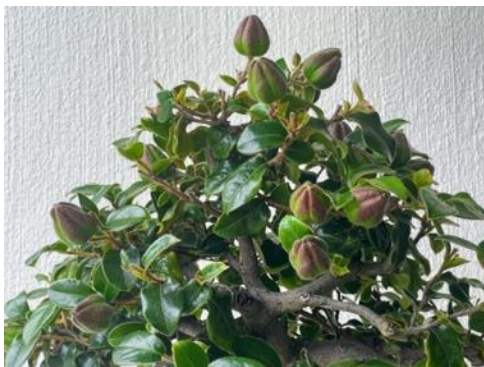
Diospyros Whyteana:

Diospyros is a very attractive species for bonsai. It is widely distributed in South Africa, considered a forest tree, growing in forest on the slopes of mountains to a height of 6/7 meters. It can endure full sun, and is widely used as a hedge, in suburbia.



Whyteana 53cm 25yrs 1

D. Whyteana flowers from October onwards with male and female flowers on separate trees, develops fruit which are visible from January to May. The fruits contained in bladder like sepals, that turn a reddish brown colour before revealing a blood red fruit. Despite the common name “bladdernut” the fruit is not a nut.



D. whyteana fruit 1

It is relatively fast growing, beautiful shiny/glossy green leaves that reduce easily, the wood is very hard, black and textured. It lends itself to carving, revealing a very black interior, contrasting with the shiny green leaves makes it a very attractive bonsai. The carved wood does not really need any treatment as it is very durable. This is one wood that should not be treated with lime sulphur as it will look artificial.

The sub-strata Diospyros is potted in needs to be well draining and does not like to dry out completely. Diospyros need very regular feeding and watering. (Considered prolific feeders) The diospyros has an apical growth habit, and when in development or in the container, the top growth must be controlled to ensure the bottom branches are equally developed. If possible, avoid making large cuts on a developing tree as the scars do not heal easily. The species also lends itself to the clip and grow method as the thinner branches that can be wired often die back. Growing the branch out to 10-15 nodules and cutting back to two, works well. As said before the wood hardens very quickly. The alternative leaf growth makes 'directional' pruning much easier.

Once established root pruning does not seem to be an issue and can be done every 3/5 years.

Field grown: Diospyros whyteana

Seven years ago, Freddie and I decided to grow our cuttings and potential bonsai in the ground on a farm as a project, to get thicker trunks and faster growth.

The challenge for me was that I wanted a tree that was no taller than 30cm, and a substantial trunk. This meant that you could not allow all the branches to grow freely, one needed to do early selection of branches to keep and selecting other branches as sacrifice branches to thicken the trunk. Once the trunk reached the required thickness, I removed it from the ground and potted it in a seed tray.



D whyteana out of ground 2016 1

The next two years I spent growing and trimming the tree on a reasonably frequent basis, to get the required ramification.

It was then potted into its first pot. I needed to grow the canopy to spread. This was done over the next few months.



In round pot 2022 1

The canopy was grown by clip and grow, and the tree was defoliated to increase ramification.



Month after defoliation 2022 1

The bonsai is 30cm tall and has 22cm girth at the base. The clip and grow method were mainly used, so the canopy is trimmed back too two nodules and then grown and repeated.



Figure 1 After defoliation

Diospyros lends itself to defoliation, provided you do it early in the growing season, so it does have enough time to recuperate. The new foliage is a very attractive soft green and takes a while to turn the deep green of the mature tree.



***d. whyteana* Oct. 2022 30cm tall base 22cm 1**

Diospyros Other

It is important for the bonsai community to seek out different indigenous species, for the simple reason it will be easier to obtain stock and the local conditions will not be a challenge. It is also interesting when talking with bonsai people how adverse they are to flowering/fruited bonsai. When I was at the Crespi museum in Italy, I was privileged to have Mr and Mrs Crespi escort us on a tour. They have an amazing amount of fruited and flowering Shohin bonsai. When we discussed the issue, they explained that the bonsai must first be a good bonsai, and then the fruit/flowers can be used to enhance the bonsai. In the following species of diospyros they have wonderful fruit, and two species have very tiny leaves.

Diospyros austro-africaner

This species is made up of 3 different varieties, mainly identified by the area they grow in. They each have very subtle differences, like hairs on the leaves, slightly different colourings on the fruit.

- Dry summer rainfall W.Cape Free State to Gauteng
- Winter rainfall of the W. Cape to Namaqualand
- Occurring in Lesotho Free State to Natal

The wood has the characteristic black appearance, wood is hard, bark can be blistering and peeling long flakes. Grows to heights of 10 m. It thickens well and has the smallest leaves and fruit that vary from red to black.

Freddy has also successfully dug them out of the veld and have matured successfully. He has also collected seed which have successfully grown.



austro- africaner . Right-microphylla

Viky Peterman has grown a sapling in the ground for 7 years. In 2021 the tree was trimmed down in preparation for removing it from the ground and placed in a growing tray.



D.austro -africaner stump V Peterman 2021 1



D. austro- africana tray 2022 V Peterman



Ready for design 2023 V Peterman 1



D.austro-africaner Fruit/leaves 1

Diospyros Simii

This diospyros is not native to the W.Cape but occurs on the coast from Durban to up towards Mozambique. I have grown a specimen for the past 5 years. I find the fruit interesting, the common name is “star apple”



d.simii with fruit

It has bigger leaves but so far they have reduced. The attraction is the very black trunk, contrasting leaves and the fruit it bears, eventually turning bright red. It has repotted into a bonsai pot with no adverse effects. The flowering takes place November to January and the fruit lasts until June. Repotting in spring.

Diospyros lycioides.

The common name is red star apple and grows in most habitats. Bark is dark grey and smooth. The leaves are dull-green or grey green with leaves that are small but reduce even more. Flowers from September to December and produces fruit that turn reddish brown to red. The fruit stays on until the next flowering so repotting will be July /August.

The tree can be grown in any form.



D. lycioides Freddy Bisschoff. flowers and fruit

Conclusion

It is important to experiment with our own indigenous trees, which will also increase the opportunity to grow more “natural” forms as we can observe it in nature.

The above trees are just some that have been tried, the following I am told are also excellent: *D. glabra*, *d. Natalensis* (especially in the Natal area) and *d. scabrida*.

I like to thank Adam Harrower for always encouraging the bonsai community to experiment with indigenous material, and thanks to him introducing many of the diospyros species to us extending beyond *d. whyteana* family.

- **COLEONEMA - by Phil Levitt – Western Cape**

Family :Rutaceae (Citrus) Genus : Coleonema

Coleonema are a very fine leafed indigenous small shrub growing in the wild to a metre or a little larger.

They are rarely found in the wild outside the regions of the Western and Eastern Cape. Their common names are Cape May, Confetti Bush and Fisherman’s Friend. They are very difficult to successfully dig Yamadori due to the long adventitious root systems the plants have in nature. Having said that, there are several stunning Yamadori bonsai in the Western Cape. The *Coleonema album* has white flowers and the *C. pulchrum* has pink flowers. There are other species but infrequently used. There are also several hybrids.



The trunk of the *Coleonema* thickens extremely slowly so work with the thickness you have. The branches are brittle and great care should be taken when bending them. They do break back to hard wood when pruned.

They like a sunny aspect in the en with at least five hours sunlight.

Coleonemas produce a mass of fine roots and do not like root disturbance so be very gentle on root work. I slice a little off all around the root base. In the Cape repotting can take place in Spring (September). Keep in dappled light for a few weeks to recover.

They can suffer from root rot and like a well-drained potting mix. They will be happy in a shallow pot provided they are watered and fertilised regularly. As they are a flowering



bonsai use a 315 organic fertiliser or similar. Do not prune after February as the flower buds are setting.

This belongs to Gail Theron. I am not sure whether it is a Yamadori or nursery material.



This stunning Yamadori was dug by Brett Simon and is one of the few that survived. It is about 60 cm tall.



This Yamadori belonged to the late Rudi Adam.

To conclude; Coleonemas are well worth growing and can be developed into really great bonsai. Even nursery material is well worth growing. They are indigenous and we should be using them more widely.

- **Dalbergia – Dave Mays – Kwazulu Natal**



The dalbergia species is commonly used as a subject for bonsai in Kwazulu Natal as it is found naturally throughout the province. Dalbergia is also referred to as “Thorny rope” or “Hluhluwe creeper.” Many bonsai artists in KwaZulu Natal use it to imitate Acacia “Pierneef” style trees. The advantage is that when smaller they don’t have thorns and the owners don’t shed as much blood as when working with Acacia.

There are various species of Dalbergia found locally:

Dalbergia armata. This species is most commonly used for bonsai. Found in forest and riverine vegetation along lower altitudes in KZN. Essentially it is a climber or vine. Dalbergia have fine compound leaves which are most attractive. They have the quirky habit of folding their leaves in overcast weather. Can be grown from seed, cuttings, air layering or collected in the wild. As it is a climber it is difficult to develop good taper, but this can be achieved with care.

Dalbergia multijoga. Can also be used for bonsai. Found in Southern KZN in riverine and dune bush. Can develop into a small tree.

Dalbergia obovata. This species has larger compound leaves and is only suitable for large bonsai.



Farouk “Dalbergia” Patel, a member of Durban Bonsai Society, probably has the largest and best collection of Dalbergia in the world.



Farouk grows his Dalbergia from cuttings which are started in a greenhouse that is regularly misted and kept warm and humid. Cuttings are taken in September and should be 2mm

thick. The bottom 5mm of the bark is peeled off the base which is dipped in Seradix and pushed into wet Umgeni sand. Leaves should be trimmed or pulled off.

After a year they are moved into shallow trays which contain 3-parts Umgeni sand and 1-part Gromor kraal manure. When transplanted roots are trimmed to a length and placed on a mound of soil to arrange roots radially.

Farouk believes that Dalbergia do not like to be moved and should be left in a good-sized container for a long time. Re-potting is best in spring and summer. Air layering can be achieved within two months in ideal conditions.



- **Zululand tree Species – Zululand Bonsai Society**

Trees in Zululand are subjected to subtropical conditions. Our summers are long and hot. Rain is plentiful and the days are humid. Our winters are extremely mild. Our climate is ideal for growing Figs, Commiphora, Hluhluwe creepers, Baobabs, and Acacias (Vachelias and Senegalia).



Ficus natalensis subsp. natalensis
Natal fig /Coastal strangler fig / Kuswurgvy

Ficus natalensis grows well along the coastal areas of KZN.

In high rainfall areas it grows aerial roots from branches which can become woody trunks once they establish themselves in the ground. These aerial roots can be very useful in bonsai.

F. natalensis makes an ideal Bonsai in the right climate. It is hardy and fast growing. It is a rewarding tree for new Bonsai growers.

F. natalensis grows well from trunk cuttings, root cuttings, seeds and air layering.



F.natalensis as a Bonsai:

- Roots are ropelike, tough and long. Roots often twist around the outer perimeter. Left unattended the roots can fuse and form a mass instead of radiating nebari.
- Roots are suitable for root-over-rock styles.
- Branches are rarely carried below the horizontal line, although it can be wired downwards.
- Leaves reduce well.

The Natal wild fig is suitable for all Bonsai styles, although it is not often seen in a Formal Upright, Forest or Cascade style.



Ficus burtt-davyi
Scrambling fig / Veld Fig / Veldvy

Ficus burtt-davyi makes a really good Shonin Bonsai.

Ficus burtt-davyi are endemic to Southern African coastal and inland forest and rocky outcrops or cliffs, often a rock-splitter.

Their natural distribution is from Northern Natal to the Eastern Cape.

In the wild their growth pattern is a woody vine with small aerial roots. Typically a lax shrub, occurring in coastal shrub or thicket, this same species becomes a robust creeper in inland forests and a small multi stemmed "rock-splitting" shrub in the drier Karoo region.

Depending on the habitat it can be a strangler or a rock-splitter.

It can be propagated from seed, cuttings and air layering.

The *F. burtt-davyi* prefers a well drained, sandy soil and can tolerate some drought. Full sun or light to partial shade.

It will grow back well from a severe pruning.

Fertilize with a balanced fertilizer.

F. burtt-davyi as a Bonsai:

A well developed base/nebari will be created better from a seed grown tree, than from a cutting.

The leaves decrease in size relatively easily. The veld fig are suitable for all Bonsai styles except the formal upright or forest plantings as the roots may fuse.



Commiphora harveyi
Copperstem corkwood / koperstamkanniedood /
Red-stem corkwood / rooistamkanniedood

Commiphora prefers the warmer parts of South Africa. They grow in the bushveld, coastal dune and dry forests.

Commiphora are part of the myrrh family, a family of fragrant plants. The leaves exude a very pleasant aroma. In the wild it grows as a small to medium-sized deciduous tree.

All *Commiphora* species are dioecious - they produce male and female flowers on different plants. The bark is greenish, smooth and peels in large bronze or reddish brown, papery flakes.

Commiphora harveyi makes a good bonsai for the more creative Bonsai artist.

They grow well from cuttings.

Although this tree is known as a kanniedood it does not like too much water so rather under water it.

It prefers light sandy well draining soil.

The trunk often needs encouragement in the form of trunk splitting to thicken.

Leaves reduce well but never become very small. Its leaves reduce to half their natural size making this species well suited to Kifu Sho and Chu size Bonsai.



The *Commiphora* bark heals fast and rolls over well.

The *Commiphora* can be used for any style, and does very well in a Boabab style.

In Zululand we have had good results with trunk splitting during October-November and January-February.

The photo to the left was taken two years after a 4 way trunk split.

After a year, the trunk was chopped right back and allowed to grow.

This year the trunk will be allowed to grow and thicken up to match the base and create taper. We will cut the trunk again next year and choose branches for development.

Bibliography:

Figs of Southern & South-Central Africa, John and Sandra Burrows

Master Bonsai, Rudi Adam

Field Guide to Trees of Southern Africa, Braam van Wyk & Piet van Wyk

Technical and Bonsai information from Celia Gericke and Hassim Gora Khaki

SECTION 2: REGIONAL NEWS:

BRAT: No events information was received from this region.

CENTRAL: No events information was received from this region.

CRAB:

- **A Japanese Affair.....by Dawn Collier February 2023**



The Japanese Consulate of South African's Cape Town office celebrated the Emperor of Japan, Hironomiya Naruhito's Birthday on the 21st February 2023. The venue was the scenic Cape town Hotel school in Granger bay, which overlooks Robben Island with Table Mountain in the background.

This was the first time since covid that the consulate could recommence the celebration which was well attended by at least 300 people consisting of government officials from both Japan and South Africa and distinguished guests. The Bonsai Fraternity in the western cape has always been asked to exhibit trees at this prestigious event. In years gone by, whole sections of the venue displayed not only Bonsai, but Ikebana as well.



The outgoing consul of Japan in South Africa, Jiro Nishimura and his wife, Junko Nishimura.

Willem Pretorius has been attending for over 15 years, as well as Herman Groenewald who was one of the founder members of The Bonsai society of SA. He recalls filling his Toyota Taz with 20 + trees and stands in his boot of the car, and putting together displays within an hour!!



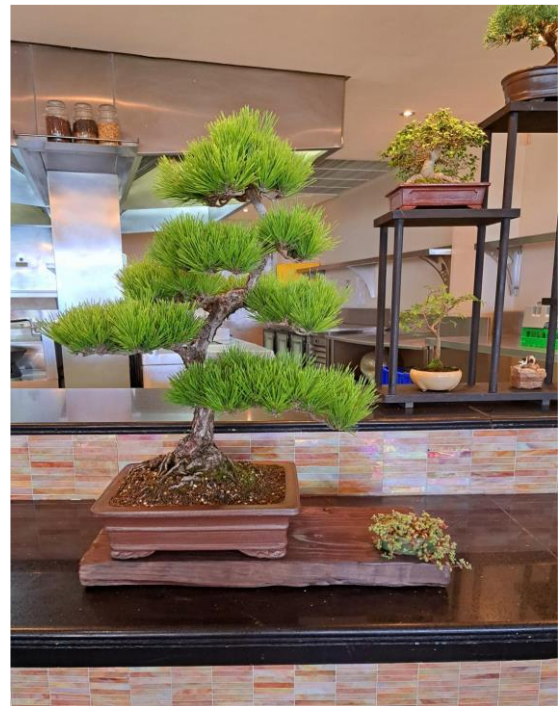
Today CRAB- The Cape Regional association of bonsai has been given the task and each club will take turns to produce the trees for display. It was the Blaauwberg kai's turn this year and without a doubt one of the best displays in Years. And perhaps for the first time out shined the sushi, which is the best I've ever had. The star of the show was without a doubt Hennie Nel's blooming Scotia Afra. She peaked at the right time for us to all admire her beauty.



Hennie Nel with the consul's wife, Junko Nishimura and his beautiful Scotia Afra.



This is a wonderful opportunity to showcase our Art to the diplomatic community as well as representatives of the government, who always attend. Long may it continue.



- **Bonsai Aspirations for 2023 - Andre Swart**

Resolutions are often a way to start a new year, and as we are already in the tail end of the first quarter of 2023, I post this question: What are your ambitions



for your bonsai collection, and are you serious about improving your skills and what do you need to make your bonsai even better?

While thinking about my personal bonsai goals for 2023, I realised that I have an opportunity to inspire fellow enthusiasts to advance their own bonsai game. Of course, everyone's bonsai story is unique, and it is imperative that you remain true to yourself as you are

the artist of your own tree.

1. QUALITY NOT QUANTITY

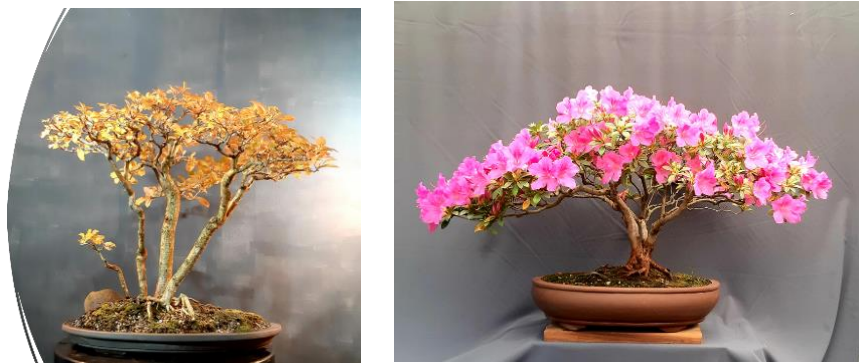
There are benefits to gather and grow many trees of various species when you first begin to develop your bonsai trees. This first-hand experience is invaluable for developing your own skill and approach to style and design. You will inevitably lose a branch or two or even loose the whole tree due to a faulty watering regime. Once your trees have passed the development phase, you might find that your available resources – especially time are strained.

This is the point where I found myself about 5 years ago, I was unable to meet the time required to focus on refining all my trees. So, after 30 years of cultivating, I had to make the conscious decision to start thinning my collection. This has enabled me to focus on specific trees; those with an interesting past and exciting future. Individual and more frequent attention will allow me to increase the overall quality of my smaller collection.

How many is too many? Various factors will influence the number of trees in your collection:

- a. Space: trees need space and take up space and the amount of real estate available to will greatly influence the number of trees you can hold.

- b. Free time: a busy modern lifestyle coupled with a demanding day job will eat away at the free time you have to truly enjoy and maintain a bonsai collection.
- c. Water availability: as water is becoming an increasingly scarce commodity in some regions of the country and we cannot always rely on rain and the collection of rainwater.
- d. Time of year: sometimes a tree is more desirable during autumn or comes to fruition during one season in the year.



In hindsight I have realised that thinning my collection and focusing on quality trees would make my life easier and free up time and space. Currently I am in the process of selling some of my trees, especially once the tree has reached a certain stage in development. This allows someone else the gift of nurturing the tree further, and I invest the income straight back into my collection through buying quality pots, interesting and unique pots curated for specific trees that are ready for exhibition or simply to enhance the aesthetic, as illustrated below:



2. INCLUDE A QUALITY TREE FROM THE START

Years ago, I was among those who were of the notion that it was somehow cheating to buy a mature, refined bonsai tree because it is better to grow from seed, cuttings or collected Yamadori from the wild. But, I soon realised that in buying a bonsai tree at an advanced stage of development, as I did with this Swamp Cypress which I bought from the late Rudi Adams in 2003, is that it allowed me to build on his experience and guidance.

Buying good quality stock or even trees at an advanced stage of development can inspire and encourage you and ultimately increase your enjoyment of bonsai as you further craft the tree.

Invest in quality stock; whether it be a field grown or collected trunk or a partially developed tree from a bonsai nursery or private grower, superior stock can do wonders not only for your enthusiasm, but it can kick start the development of your Bonsai skills.



Buying a quality bonsai may not be everyone's aspiration, but it does hold benefits to beginners and the larger bonsai community. One good tree in a collection can have a spin off effect that could elevate the overall standard of your trees and the trees we see at exhibitions. And better-quality tree will attract more numbers to clubs, bolstering the reputation of the "hobby".

3. DEVELOP HORTICULTURAL SKILLS

We all start with great enthusiasm, and we are eager to pass the developmental stage. What many do not realise is that this **process** is only possible with a **healthy tree**.



This is a big mistake if you have not first learnt the basic requirements of a tree in a pot, because to care for a tree that is in a confined space is totally different to that in "open ground". It comes down to a simple equation – 80% horticulture, 20% art.

I suffered such an unfortunate tragedy when I lost this Azalea through stupidity and ignorance. I acquired this bonsai in 1998 and now it is but a silent reminder in my Bonsai work area.

In my inexperience, I did not watch the **soil properties**. This tree was planted in a mix of peat and some other material, I did not realize the tree was pot-bound, there was no percolation whatsoever and even with regular watering, the centre was bone dry. So, a hard, and expensive lesson was learnt about soil properties and , yes, ordinary peat, if not soaked properly, is not a good idea as it repels water.

Another horticulture skill that is honed over time is **timing**. When is the right time to do anything on your tree? Potting, repotting, pruning, any action that would cause a big change to the tree's equilibrium should be done at the right time.

This is a lesson you need to learn on your trees in your own environment. Each garden has its **own micro-climate** and the stage of development of your trees will tell you when the right time is. The optimized schedule for gardens in the same neighbourhood can differ greatly, not to mention opposite ends of the same town or different provinces in the country.

TIME TABLE FOR THE POTTING AND REPOTTING OF BONSAI												
Botanical Name	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Acacia - before leaves unfurl							x	x	x			
Acer / Maple							x	x				
Azalea / Rhododendron	net na blom											
Bougainvillea			x	x					x	x		
Sacred bamboo												
Cedrus / Cedar			x	x					x	x		
Celtis / Wit strokhou							x	x				
Cotoneaster								x	x			
Crassula / Spekboom								x	x	x		
Eugenia / Syzigium		x	x	x					x	x	x	
Ficus / Fig		x	x	x						x	x	x
Lagerstroemia stryaciflua / Pride-of-India									x	x	x	
Juniperis			x	x					x	x	x	
Dovyalis / Kai appet			x	x					x	x	x	
Ligustrum / Privet								x	x			
Myrtus / Myrtle									x	x	x	
Nandina / Sacred bamboo								x	x	x		
Olea / olive						x	x	x	x			
Pinus / Pine			x	x				x	x			
Punica / Pomegranate										x	x	x
Pyracantha / Fire thorn			x	x					x	x		
Oak			x						x	x		
Podocarpus / Geelhout									x	x		
Schotia / Boerboon									x	x	x	
Serissa	x	x	x						x	x	x	
Taxodium / Swamp cypress							x	x	x			
Grewia occidentalis / Kruisbessie		x	x									
Ulmus / Elm							x	x				
Coleonema / Konfettie bos	net na blom											
Bougainvillea	net na blom											

It is true that general schedules are season dependant but guide yourself by looking at the trees in your area. Train your horticultural skills and instinct and "read" your trees (what, when and how to use for instance Fertiliser, NPK ratios, Soil pH, CEC, Percolation, etc).

Learn to listen to those little nuances the trees are telling you.

4. TRY A NEW TECHNIQUE

Even with all the right knowledge, many of the techniques we use to develop our bonsai will not be common knowledge. If you just started bonsai, then your immediate challenge might be knowing *how* to prune your Chinese maple or your Juniper or to prune your Black Pine. If you've been growing bonsai for some time, you may never have tried certain techniques, but once implemented, you may find they greatly improve and add value to your trees.

Airlayering a common Privet. This tree had good nebari but that is all. So airlayering was used to get taper on an otherwise boring trunk. I can go on with this tree, but the trunk will never improve by itself. So, I am now working on improving the quality of the tree even if I have to sacrifice the nebari. Another option is for the nebari to become a potential second tree.



Figure 10 Airlayering Privet

Figure 11 shows a small bonsai Ficus Ginseng which was received as a gift. However, it is an average tree with overly dominant roots. Yet, due to its sentimental value, I have invested the time for the airlayering technique to craft it into a tree more in accordance with my sentiments. So, let's try and make something out of this tree.



Another technique I find particularly enjoyable is manipulating and crafting dead wood into a realistic and natural appearing shari and jin.



Sometimes, not by choice, your vision of the tree gets change unexpectedly, as was the case when this Privet was attacked by the infamous borer beetle. The result was the die off of some branches and even a section of the main trunk. To work around this problem, I needed to craft the deadwood into a more realistic and natural appearing shari and jin, and it resulted in a simplistic but more intricate appearance with interesting features. What was initially a negative experience with the beetle was turned into a positive outcome by enhancing the appearance of the tree. Now all that is left is to get a suitable flat pot that will emphasise the trunk line and the scarce foliage.



Bending thick branches or trunks to improve the design of the tree is a painstaking technique requiring patience and resilience. Of course, you can cut and remove the straight section of this Juniper and create a jin but I would rather

try bend the branch fist. Bending a thick trunk by small cuts in the main trunk, raffia, thick wires and guy wires to keep trunk line in place.

Being unique and unexpected, in my opinion is what makes Bonsai exciting. The Bonsai is always hidden in your tree, you just must see it. Here the progression of a Juniper I have worked on since year 2016 . By looking at various photos, an image will come to mind and by using wiring, bending, it has been transformed to a far more elegant, unique tree. Now the task is to improve the appearance of the foliage pads.



5. SEE THE POTENTIAL IN GARDEN YAMADORI

I am blessed with a wife who is a keen and knowledgeable gardener, and being friends with the local garden service also helped . Collecting garden Yamadori and pre-bonsai material was very accessible to me like this False Cypress many years ago.



This 'ugly' stump has become my pride and joy over the past 16 years. It is big, a 4 man tree and about 1,2 meters tall and the trunk base 75 cm in a quality Tokonama pot (expensive!).

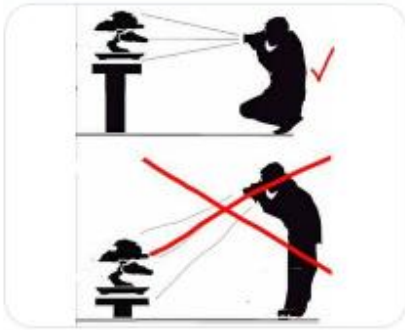
6. TAKE MORE PHOTOS OF YOUR TREES

A progression series is a great way to keep your spirit up, to learn through setbacks and it enables you to look at how you have grown as an artist. Take more photos of your trees in development and even if changes seem to be insignificant, after a few months or even years , you will appreciate your hard work and you will learn from your efforts and even more so from your mistakes, and the end result can be immensely gratifying !



Jerry Meislik

If you wish some helpful styling advice photograph the tree against a plain background from the proper height and of all 4 sides. Then you may get some helpful tips.



(courtesy to Jerry Meislik)

This Jasmine stump was removed from our garden in year 2015. It was a sluggish transformation with the tree nearly ending in the compost heap. The lesson learnt was not to despair, take a step back and allow the tree time to tell you , which way it wishes to go.

When that vision appeared, the bonsai became a floating trophy, but I do feel that I need to change the pot , more graceful and refined and possibly a different colour. What do you think?

refined and possibly a different colour. What do you think?



Another example from my collection, shown below, a Conifer / Juniper Yamadori from my wife's garden. My vision was to create something different. With proper techniques, this Bonsai tree can imitate a natural, windswept effect. The transformation of this tree is truly remarkable, and the evolution captured in the

progress photos is unbelievable. Robert Steven visiting Kat Rivier Kai a few years ago and was impressed with all the windswept trees along the coast of Cape Town. He was quite taken back that we had so few windswept style trees in our collections.



I displayed this Juniper tree at a previous Kat Rivier Kai ABF. Receiving positive feedback from the master himself felt like an immense achievement.



However, learning and honing one's skills remains an ongoing process.

6. CREATE YOUR OWN STYLE

I was stubborn and wanted to create my own style, my own take on what Bonsai is and how I want to express myself through my trees. I wanted the viewer to recognise me as the artist behind the tree. ***I am chasing that dream!*** During my earlier years of Bonsai, I was disappointed in the local club as there was a fixed idea of what Bonsai was with stringent adherence to the boring and dare, I say outdated rules. To produce the typical cookie cutter tree without any imagination and without any appreciation of the dynamics of a living, developing tree telling a particular story. I was not afraid to go against the grain, I wanted to develop my own style without outside influence. And I believe here is where that other 20 % of artistry plays a role in achieving your goal.

Why then do some people progress so much faster than others in honing their craft?

Becoming a master at bonsai, like any other skill you might want to improve, be it a sport, dance, or to play an instrument. takes time and effort. And for some even that is not enough to garner the desired results.

I personally have been doing Bonsai for 30 years. But it is only the last few years of practicing my own skill and allowing myself to learn through a decade of experimentation and research that I can now, for the first time say I am doing Bonsai.

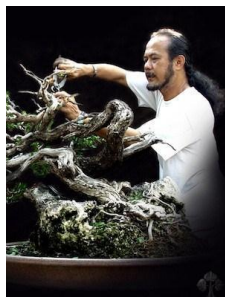
So, the reason why some people improve so much faster in a skill has a lot less to do with how hard they practice, and much more to do with **how** they practice.

It is imperative to understand that behind every accomplishment, behind every success, behind every magnificent tree, there is a process. And by understanding that process, you have more control over the outcome. Yet, most people spend most of their energy and attention on the outer game, the outline of the tree, the execution of pruning etc. Where the focus should rather be on the building blocks of a good Bonsai - a good root system, a trunk with taper, good movement, etc.

“You don’t know what you don’t know” is very true when it comes to bonsai. If you want to see progress and improvement, you need to be committed to continuously improve your practice strategy and develop you bonsai skills.

7. JOIN A CLUB AND IMPROVE YOUR SKILLS

The Internet offers a plethora of opportunities to learn and be inspired across various social media and other channels. You can watch your favorite Bonsai artist online with various courses.



While the availability of all the online information is great, it also has a downside in that bonsai enthusiasts do not feel the need to be part of a local club. This is a sad mistake as one of the many benefits of joining a club is learning from practical demonstrations. The feedback received from other growers who are exposed to similar climatic conditions, working with the same species and have access to the same materials you do, is invaluable. Taking a tree to a meeting for feedback may also help tremendously when you need a fresh set of eyes. Sometimes the level of insights may surprise you, a newbie not burdened down by convention might just look at a tree and be able to provide you with a completely novel story to tell with it.

Being part of a club can be an immense source of inspiration and guidance.

It is true that some clubs might stifle creative spirits as the club clings to old ideas of what it means to be a bonsai. If you are in that situation, be brave and be *the change you want to see*. All it takes is a few creative and confident members to break this stagnation.

Being a club member and regularly attending meetings allows you to retain that spark of enthusiasm.

8. STUDY TREES AND BONSAI TREES

Through constant study of trees growing in nature I firmly believe that this imagery becomes ingrained in one's mind and when called upon, for instance when you are styling a tree, can greatly contribute to the result in a positive way.

I would also encourage you to study images of bonsai trees. Although these images will be of trees which are essentially the artists interpretation of nature using the material, they had available, one can learn much from the work of others.

This is especially the case with a progression series of photos before, during and after styling. Progressions offer valuable insights into how the artist solved various problems and what techniques they employed at each stage.

A simple google image search for a particular species or style is one of the easiest ways to gain insight. Following progressions on YouTube or Instagram is also a great way to study trees. And of course, as mentioned above, take your own photos of your trees on a regular basis.

9. GROW YOUR BONSAI LIBRARY

There are countless books on bonsai available. Many of them contain the same basic information but there are also books dedicated to specific subjects or species. Although bonsai books are usually lovely, illustrated coffee table books, they need to be read and studied and not simply used as decoration.

Try books on specific species, particular styles, different techniques and use the vast resources available on the internet.

10 . CONSIDER THE SECURITY OF YOUR TREES

"How safe are your Bonsai?"

When you have a half decent collection of Bonsai displayed in your back garden, there are plenty of things that might keep you awake at night. Did you remember to water them? Did you switch on the security light? Is the garden gate locked?

The specialist thief may uproot a pre-bonsai in your garden. However, a much easier target would be an expensive Bonsai which is already potted and can

conveniently be lifted away. If you couple this bizarre situation where we leave expensive goods such as prized bonsai out in the open, ready to be carried away with little or no physical security protecting the entrance to the garden, then it is no wonder you can't sleep at night. Luckily the probability of your garden being targeted is not big and with simple precautions, the odds of becoming a victim become much smaller.

The security of our precious trees must take an equal priority to all the other aspects of your care regime, especially given the many potential outlets the average Bonsai thief might utilise. It is now not uncommon for stolen trees to appear at Car Boot sales or on web-based auction sites. The nature of the latter method to "fence" Bonsai has taken on greater popularity over the past couple of years given the apparent anonymity that comes with virtual selling. If you are going to buy trees over the web, then make sure you do so from a trusted source such as a well-known website or someone who is an honest trader.

Top security tips:

- a. Adequate physical security is the best starting point when considering the protection of your property. If you can prevent access to the back of your house through the installation of lockable gates or high fences, then it will be worth the expense.
- b. Maintain hedges, gates and walls in a good state of repair and ensure that they are high enough to deter a would-be intruder.
- c. Don't advertise the fact to strangers that you are an owner of expensive Bonsai trees. Be cautious about where you site and display your trees such that they can't be seen from the street.
- d. Get a big, loud dog. You won't be the most popular person on the street but at least it will deter unwanted visitors. This is not an option for me personally because a well-maintained garden and dogs do not mix.
- e. Invest in an infra-red motion detector security light which throws huge amounts of light onto your garden whenever someone wanders through the beams.
- f. Probably the most expensive option is to install a CCTV system. This might be relevant to you if your collection is outstanding, but for the average collector a lockable gate and stationary cameras are sufficient.

g. Although not a preventative measure, ensure to record the ownership of your trees using photographs. This will also help if you are ever the victim of crime as you can prove your claim to your insurer and the crime itself to the police. It will also help the police to track down your trees if you can show them what they look like.

At the end of the day, you can take control and you can minimise the risks that you take in having a prized collection of Bonsai.

11. LIFE'S A GAME

I see great parallels between the world of bonsai and the game of life. In its purest form bonsai is a process we use to guide and sculpt the life force within a tree to enable it to show its true beauty to the world. Horticulturally speaking there may well be a 'best way' to get things done even though many other regimens will produce passable results.

It is very easy to look at a bonsai and judge the quality of the work that has been carried out upon it. The wiring, the pruning, the daily care and feeding as well as the preparation and presentation all depend upon the skill of the tree's owner. With experience, you will be able to select the quality bonsai amongst the not so good specimens.

Many people will enjoy their bonsai for years on end without worrying about the whims of exhibitions and competition. And that is the way it should be. Looking for success in a competitive sense focuses one's mind solely on the finished result and while we all know that a bonsai is never strictly 'finished' there is a point at which it reaches its best form at the hands of its maker. Once this form is achieved only time and diligent work will add beauty to the tree. After all that is the true beauty of the art; the trees just keep maturing and improving.

However, it does seem that we have missed the mark a little. Owning another show quality specimen bonsai that impresses our mates is not the goal. Owning 'finished' bonsai is nice for our pride and may make others a little envious but it reduces our noble art to a very materialistic level.

Mr Teruhiko Ota, one of Japan's last surviving Khumoso monks played sakuhachi all his life. Into his late eighties he continued to play and studied diligently, forever pushing the boundaries of his own technique and skill forwards through

disciplined practice and creative thinking. Mr Ota never sought or found commercial success he simply enjoyed his music and made it his life's work to be the best that he could. Towards the end of his life he said,



" Practice for its own sake, let progress take care of itself. Do not corrupt the beauty of learning by becoming attached to an end goal".

12. WHAT HAPPENS TO YOUR BONSAI IF YOU DIE?

This is a topic for another day.

So, to conclude my aspirations for 2023:



There will come a point where we all become complacent with our collection, then after some time you see the need to change the style or design of some of your trees and even with all the answers out there, you still find yourself procrastinating.

You have two options; remain stagnant or identify what you want, find out about the process, and do the work to make it happen.

Turn that desired project into reality.

The most important part of the process is getting started. Don't feel sorry for the years that have been invested in a tree that is not going anywhere. Commit to really change your tree for the better and

Keep that forward momentum going.

Your decision, followed by real action; cutting off a problematic branch, changing the preferred view of your bonsai or changing the whole design or style, proves not only to yourself but to your fellow bonsai enthusiasts that you mean business.

New habits are formed, one at a time through ambition and striving for goals.

Welcome to my 2023!

- **Group planting with the late Rudi Adam – by Shaun Gimingham**

Workshop date: 5th September 2014

This was my first one on one session with a bonsai professional. I decided to make an investment in quality time with Rudi to increase my knowledge. We utilised bag stock for the planting which is more affordable. I did not have sufficient stock of my own to make a quality selection. For those that can remember these were from the back of Rudi's home along the wall.



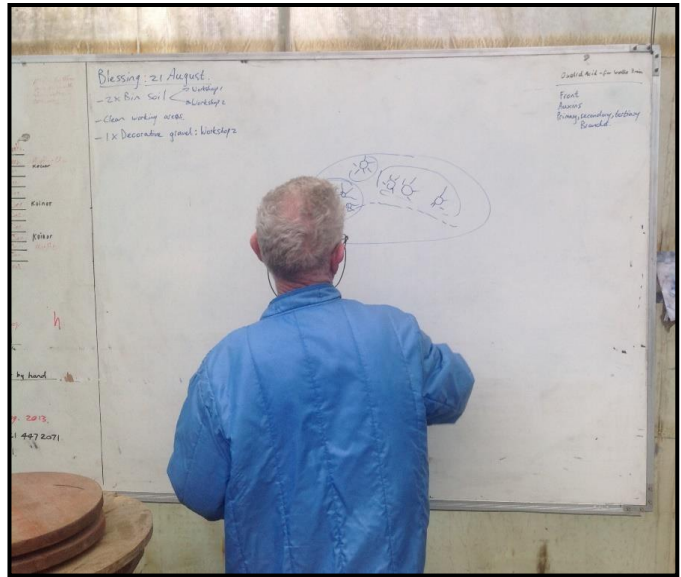
TREE SELECTION:

In some cases, you may have a design as inspiration. In this case we did not and developed the design based on the material available. As there were many of these trees to choose from it was easier as I could be selective and pick and choose

trees of varying sizes to create depth as well as trees with interesting taper to keep the design interesting.

PLANNING:

It all starts with a plan. I had to be patient as I just wanted to GO. However careful forethought is required to ensure a pleasing design. Don't rush this part. By placing a small tree towards the back, you create a sense of depth. The viewer should want to explore the forest as the design draws them in visually.



POT SELECTION:

This pot is too large in depth but was chosen to allow some extra room for the individual trees to gain girth over time.

To date (October 2022) the planting is still in the original pot that it started out in.

I am happy with the shape.



HUMBLE BEGGININGS: THE 1st TREE HAS BEEN POSITIONED



Wire was still required at this time to ensure the correct movement would become permanent. At this stage the potential is not easy to see.

TREES NUMBER 2 AND 3 HAVE BEEN ADDED

Now the vision is starting to take shape. You need to take your time as you try different angles and make slight positional changes. Remember we do not want straight lines as the composition needs to look natural.



TREE NUMBER 4 HAS BEEN ADDED



THE APPRENTICE:

Yours truly seen here doing some clean up and adding the finishing touches. At this point I am feeling very pleased with the outcome



THE FINAL OUTCOME OF AN IDEA BROUGHT TO LIFE:

Photographed with RUDI ADAMS giving his stamp of approval for a job well done.

AT BLAAUWBERG BONSAI KAI-EXHIBIT 30 July 2022 (Starke Ayres) 8 YEARS LATER:

Credit to Rudi Adams for his help and guidance on this project.

Thank you to Juan Van As, member of BLAAUWBERG BONSAI KAI who took this picture for me.



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS:

Pot length: 60cm

Pot depth: 10cm
(incl. Feet)

Height from top of
pot to highest point
of canopy: 31cm

Base diameter-
largest tree: 4cm

Base diameter
smallest tree: 2.5cm

NOTES & FUTURE PLANS:

- Original planting 5th September 2014. Date of above picture (30 July 2022).
- No repotting has been carried out since 2014 (8 years).
- Plan to repot tree in 2023 and replace current pot with one at a reduced depth of approximately 50%.
- Pot shape, length & Width to remain as is or very close.
- Improve root flare with approach grafts.

Improve overall ramification. The plan is to repot in 2023 into a pot with a reduced depth which will improve overall visual balance. The

current pot depth detracts from the trees. (See picture below with a line to illustrate the idea of a shallower pot). Once the repot is completed I will add the new photograph to record the evolution of this planting. It is good to see where you have come from and the progress you have made. This is useful to show others and helps inspire me for my other projects. I welcome any feedback on ways to improve.

EASTERN: No events information was received from this region.

KZN: No events information was received from this region.

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