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## SOMERSET BONSAI SOCIETY

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Bonsai Newsletter August 2024



Richard M's Literati Lodge Pole Pine

Welcome to our August meeting report. I hope you are all making the most of the challenging weather and coping with the demands of watering twice or three times a day. This month we had a workshop specifically around the techniques of wiring. To some bonsai practitioners, the subject of wiring trees is met with the same attitude as witchcraft or flying saucers! Well perhaps I am being a bit over dramatic; however I have had many conversations that revolved around the sentence "I don't know the first thing about wiring"! So, we felt it was time to tackle this thorny subject and get some of our "wire adverse" members wrapping wire like a professional.

Ade and John kicked off the proceeding by critiquing a Scot's pine that has been purchased for our yearly raffle. The tree itself is a nice, medium size collected tree with a good selection of branches and healthy foliage. However, it has undergone some "enthusiastic" wiring and currently defies any attempts to place it in a "bonsai style".

John started by explaining a few of the guidelines of wiring. But first, a question? Why do we wire? Well wiring is a quicker way to achieve the desired shapes and styling that we look for in bonsai and in some cases, like collected pines and junipers it will be the only way that you will correct any problems. Therefore, wire to set the basic shape of the tree, then use other methods to refine the design.

So, guidelines; firstly, try to use as small amount of wire as possible. Use one wire for the leader and then one wire for each branch. If one piece of wire is not holding the trunk/branch in place then use a stronger gauge. On rare occasions you might need to use several pieces of wire to achieve the correct hold however this may lead to future problems with wire biting in and damage to the bark. So, consider other methods like guy wires or tension bars.



Our latest Raffle tree. Or is it?

When wiring branches the gauge of wire should decrease towards the tips and the wire should be applied at a 45° angle to the trunk/branch. This 45° angle means that the interval between each coil of wire will automatically adapt to the thickness of the trunk/branch that you are wiring – thinner branch shorter interval/thicker branch longer interval. When wiring opposing branches try to run at least one turn of wire around the trunk/branch that they are growing off, as this will anchor each branch and make positioning them easier, see diagram below:



Never wrap the wire in a circle, as this will kill the tree/branch if it is allowed to bite in - always keep to the 45° rule. Try to put all the wire on before you start to style the tree otherwise you will find yourself undoing all your good work, as you knock branches out of alignment when trying to put wire on other branches.

A common question around wiring is "how long do you leave the wire on"? This is not easy to answer, as it depends on several factors; how extreme was the bend, how healthy is the tree, what is the growth rate of the tree, how much water and feed are you giving it, as well as the age and species of the tree. You may also find that different parts of the same tree react differently to wiring. Some areas will bite in quicker than others and some trees will have wire on for years without it ever biting in. How do we avoid the wire damaging the tree? Look at the wiring every time you water the tree and be ready to unwire some or all of it at a moment's notice.



Pam 'the apprentice' contemplates her Spanish Olive.



My literati Scot's pine waiting my attention



A close up of "how not to wire"!

Back to the "Raffle tree". John went on to look at some of the issues that our new acquisition was demonstrating. Firstly, the wiring was not put on at 45°, so was not actually holding many of the branches in position. Wires were crossing and encircling parts of the trunk and branches. Heavy gauge wire was being used on thin branches and several thin wires on thicker branches. In several areas, the wire was so loosely coiled that it was not touching the bark and thus not providing any support. Finally, there was no real design to the tree. Branches were pointing in all directions and there were several branches growing from the same point near the apex, always a recipe for disaster in bonsai.



Tony leaping into action on one of his trees whilst new members; Frances, Tony and Mike work on theirs.



Zac and Michael putting John's advice into practice



Raffle tree "sans" wire.

After an hour or so, Ade and John had managed to remove all the wire without damaging any of the branches. As you can see from the image above, the tree has great bark, it also has a good nebari (root crown) which is rare in collected pines and plenty of branches to work with. If you look closely, you can see both the areas where three branches are emerging from the same point on the trunk. Another common problem with collected trees, is that branches often lack ramification close to the trunk. Scot's pine does back bud, but this will take a few years. Until then we will have to find a way of shortening those overlong branches.



That's a lot of wire for such a sparse tree!



Nigel, Hilly and Dave hard at work on their trees

### Tree of the Month competition 2024 – "President's challenge".

During tea break, our President, John Trott, stepped into Ade's shoes and undertook the judging of the President's Challenge. Every year John sets a challenge for our members, related to bonsai design. This year the challenge was to create a Literati/Bunjin style bonsai from scratch. This followed John's excellent talk on Literati bonsai, which can be found [here](#).

As usual members had risen to the challenge and there were seven entries for John to peruse. Before giving his verdict, John asked each entrant to talk through how they had created their tree.



Bob's entry – Chinese juniper.

Bob explained that he had found the tree in the bargain area of a nursery, where it was growing horizontally and not doing so well having several broken branches.

Pam's entry – collected Larch.

Pam explained that the tree was originally collected somewhere in Wales and that she had purchased it a year ago and styled it in a windswept literati style. The pot is a vintage mica "rock pot" stolen from my pot collection!



Richard M's entry – collected Lodge Pole pine.

Richard thought that the tree, which he had collected, was a Scot's pine but John explained that it was a Lodge Pole pine.



My entry – European Larch

I had started working on a collected Larch, from the same vendor as Pam's, but at our summer show I purchased this tree from Zac and decided that it would make a better literati than my original one. Zac had styled the tree as a sort of semi cascade tree and planted it in a pond basket. I repotted it and wired the top of the tree to raise it up. The branches have been refined and wired over the last three months.

Nigel's entry – Japanese maple

Nigel explained that he had used John's favourite book on Literati bonsai - Literati Style Penjing: Chinese Bonsai Masterworks by Zhao Qingquan, as inspiration for this unusual Maple Literati bonsai.

The tree was grown from seed and had languished in the garden until John issued his challenge.



Ade's entry – Sabina juniper

Ade's entry started life as part of a collected tree that he purchased at the Trophy show in Belgium.

A branch from the main tree had rooted itself in the pot and as Ade did not need it to style the main tree, he decided to remove it and use it for the challenge.



Dave's entry –A pine!

Dave's tree was a three year old seedling that he had wired and styled with inspiration from some of John's own examples of Literati bonsai.

John thanked everyone for their entries and stated that with a bit more work, they could be included in the Society's entries for other shows. You don't always need big trees and in the right display these trees would look good. John then went on to announce the winner and present Richard with a

bronze sculpture of a Nuthatch climbing on the side of a trunk. Well done Richard, I expect to see that tree in our next summer show.

And finally, what have they done to the raffle tree I hear you ask? Well John rewired everything, following the guidelines and ended up styling it as a windswept. This follows the line of the trunk and the nebari and with a bit of back budding, ramification and plenty of water and fertiliser should make a nice tree in a few years. I wonder who is going to have the lucky ticket?

Next year's Chairman's Challenge will be to put together a show display of a tree, with a suitable stand and some sort of accent – plant, rock etc. Tune in next August for the winner.

Well, that's all for now. Next meeting is on the 11th September and will be a talk by Caz Scott.

The tree of the month will be back, with "Pines and Junipers" as the topic.

Till the next time, stay safe and "keep doing bonsai".

Alistair



*Windswept style Scot's pine ready for the raffle.*