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# August 2024

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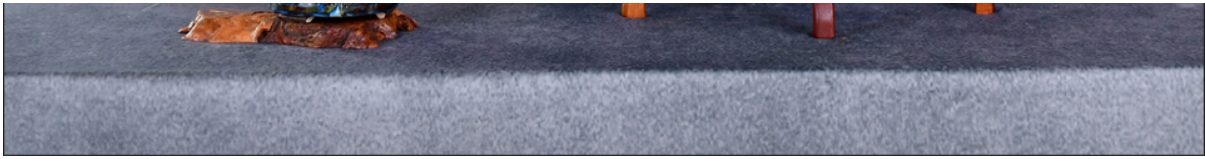
## Storytelling with Accents

*By Samantha Holm, RMBS Vice President*

Our bonsai shows are not only a time to celebrate the trees that we have worked hard on throughout the year, but also an opportunity as artists to visually tell a story to the viewer. A bonsai is stylized nature in miniature, and if done well it can transport the viewer to a memory or an idea of a wild place. To do this an effective display uses non-verbal cues to communicate information about the environment the wild tree would be growing in, and as a bonus, give hints as to the current season. The way bonsai artists accomplish this is with the use of appropriately complementary accents.

### Accent Plants





*Shitakusa* (literally “grass below”) are herbaceous companion plantings that visually represent the understory vegetation that would be growing under the bonsai tree species in nature. *Shitakusa* are composed of usually 1 or 3 plants that are found in the same habitat as the bonsai being displayed, and that share the same light and water needs.

*Ponderosa pine tree displayed with forked spleenwort accent, both native to the Rocky Mountains.*  
Artist: Mike Britten.

For example, companion plants appropriate to use with a Ponderosa pine tree bonsai might include native perennials and grasses like: bee balm, penstemon, prairie coneflower, Indian Ricegrass, or little Bluestem, to name just a few. (The CSU Extension office has a list of “Low-water native plant garden guides for Colorado” for different regions that can act as [guides](#) for which native perennials/shrubs/trees are growing in different habitats.) If you utilize plants that are also “showy” (flowering, fruiting, or showing fall color) in the season that they are displayed, they can help suggest seasonality.

### **Secondary Bonsai**

A second, smaller bonsai can be including in the display, but it should contribute to the story about the environment by also being from the same habitat as the primary bonsai. For example, with a Ponderosa pine as your primary bonsai, you could consider using a shrub like currant, rabbitbrush, or wild rose (to name a few) as a secondary bonsai.





*Ponderosa pine displayed with shrubby cinquefoil accent.  
Artist: Mike Britten.*

## **Figurines**



Figurines are small sculptures made out of bronze, ceramic, brass, or wood that symbolize animals, people, or inanimate objects (e.g. a hut or a boat). These can be added as a third element in a display to help further suggest the environment. Think about what animals might be living in the same habitat as your tree species.

*Ponderosa pine displayed with elk figurine.*

*Artist: Dan Wiederrect.*

If we continue our example with Ponderosa pines, which grow from the foothills to the lower montane (6,000-9,000 feet), we could include deer, elk, bear, mountain lion, bobcat, coyote, and fox (just to name a few mammals). It is important to keep relative scale in mind, the use of larger animals as figurines (e.g. a bear instead of a chipmunk) will prevent your tree from appearing small.

### **Suiseki**

Viewing stones that symbolize a landscape, a figure, or an animal can also be used as a third element in a display. Landscape suiseki that evoke mountains can be very useful in representing the Rocky Mountains and displayed with many of the native bonsai species that grow there.





*Colorado blue spruce displayed with suiseki.  
Artist: Matt Wright.*

Suiseki can also be utilized to highlight the season. For example, red colored stones or chrysanthemum stones when shown in autumn, a time when the leaves are changing and chrysanthemum flowers are in bloom, help to suggest the fall season.

## **Scrolls**

The traditional images on many scrolls (e.g. red sun, willow branch, bamboo, mantis, etc.) have their own wordless vocabulary that can represent seasons, concepts or feelings. These scrolls can work well with traditional displays featuring Japanese tree species. Outside of Japan these images lose much of their hidden meanings and may not be as useful when trying to communicate to an American audience. Scrolls are not often used by our club as they are difficult to hang from the shoji screen backgrounds we use in our shows, but if you want a scroll for your display consider painting or commissioning one that evokes the landscapes, plants, animals of where your bonsai species grows.

## **Other Display Themes**

Contemporary displays can be more abstract and might utilize accents to artfully highlight a specific characteristic of a tree, to be whimsical, or even to comment on society. As there have been different movements and styles in other forms of visual arts, there is room in bonsai for people to play with alternative styles while they find their own artistic voice.

As the artist it is up to you what story you want to tell with your bonsai display, but remember to use your accents to help you effectively tell that story. I'm excited to see what you create this year!



*Ponderosa pine displayed with "lunar" quartz crystal sphere.  
Artist: Samantha Holm*

## RMBS Board Opportunity

The Nominating Committee is seeking members to join the RMBS Board. There are several positions open at a leadership level and others at an entry level position. If you have interest contact David McPeters, Dan Kingery, or Bravo Moore, and they can provide more information about each position. Additionally, you can speak to the current position holder of a specific position.

Please reach out to David, Dan, or Bravo, if you would like to nominate yourself or another member to join the RMBS Board.

[DLMcPeters@msn.com](mailto:DLMcPeters@msn.com)

[dankingery@msn.com](mailto:dankingery@msn.com)

[brantmoore@hotmail.com](mailto:brantmoore@hotmail.com)

## Event Highlight

A few photos from the garden tour/workshop at John Ragatz' home!











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**Don't forget to order your shirt soon so you have it before the annual show!**

**We just added a hoodie and a onesie for our coldest and smallest bonsai artists as well!**

We're recommending you order by the 8/5 meeting to allow shipping time. Reply to this email if you have any questions about ordering!

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## Upcoming Events

[Schedule](#)



## August Meeting

**Monday, August 5**

Gates Hall, DBG

7:00 PM

Show Prep Feedback

-*Todd Schlafer, First Branch Bonsai*

Subscribe to the RMBS Google Calendar to stay up to date on upcoming events!

Instructions for: [Outlook](#) [iPhone](#) [Mac](#)

[View Calendar](#)

## Membership

Individual: \$50/year

Family: \$75/year

[rmbonsai.org/join](http://rmbonsai.org/join)



**Welcome to our new members!**

*Patricia Harvey - Denver  
Abby Wainwright – Arvada  
Emmett Wainwright IV – Arvada  
Ethan Bernhard – Arvada  
Linda Clark – Denver  
Philip Hembree – Morrison  
Andrew Norman – Morrison  
Charlie D'Attilo - Erie  
Garth D'Attilo - Erie  
Hilary D'Attilo - Erie*



**Rocky Mountain Bonsai Society**

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