



Brandywine Bonsai Society

September 19, 2009 - 10:00am

William N. Valavanis on Maples

Brandywine Town Center

Pre-meeting tree counseling: Fred Knobloch

Cookie Person: John Jennings

The September Meeting

We are pleased to welcome Bill Valavanis, world-renowned classical bonsai scholar and artist. Bill is the proprietor of The International Bonsai Arboretum near Rochester, New York, and is publisher of International Bonsai.

Bill became interested in horticulture and bonsai at the age of eleven. It was necessary then to be a pioneer because little was available to an aspiring hobbyist or professional – tools, pots, books, pre-bonsai plant material. He studied ornamental horticulture at SUNY Farmingdale, and then Cornell. He has made more than 40 trips to Japan, and in early years apprenticed with Kyuzo Murata (The Four Seasons of Bonsai), and Kakutaro Komuro in Omiya Bonsai Village. Early in life, he was fortunate to have developed an association of 30 years with Yuji Yoshimura who produced the groundbreaking book, The Japanese Art of Miniature Trees and Landscapes, with Giovanna Halford. Over the years, Bill has won awards around the world for his trees and the artistry of his displays. He is a goldmine of information, and a tireless teacher.

Bill's orientation is to classical bonsai. In an interview online in "The Art of Bonsai Project," he had the following to say regarding the "natural" style of bonsai development that is currently much in vogue:

"People try, and do, create the 'miniature trees' they see in nature and enjoy them. However, they often forget about basic design and try to duplicate the way trees grow in nature. In this way, they copy both the good and bad design elements indiscriminately. It is important to remember that nature is not beautiful; nature is nature. Beauty is perceived by man and imposed on nature. There are an abundance of 'natural' trees which have basic design difficulties and are difficult to enjoy but are nevertheless duplicated by bonsai hobbyists that haven't learned to discriminate and resent being told they need to."

This is food for thought. And here is a further quotation from the same source:

"Many people now consider this type of bonsai [classical style] to be 'old fashioned,' 'boring,' 'traditional,' and some have even labeled them as 'cookie cutter bonsai.' I do think that critics of traditional bonsai confuse technique with artistry. There are many poor examples of both in all bonsai tastes. However, the classical form is what I am studying, enjoy, and teach."

Bill will present a PowerPoint program on maples, and will bring with him a tree for demonstration and raffle. We should bring notebooks and pens.

A Walk through the Garden and Thoughts of a Bonsai -

Many of us probably have the deciduous shrub, *Callicarpa japonica*, beautyberry, in our gardens. Several years ago, Dennis Donald gave us a program featuring this plant that, to say the least, is unusual in most bonsai collections. Since we are entering a period when beautyberry will enter into its glory, maybe you will look at it with new interest, maybe as a root-over-rock, or as a clump style. Following is some of what Dennis presented to us in a hand-out, from "Bonsai Today," # 50:

"This is a deciduous shrub of the Verbenaceae family. It is characterized by the great quantity of suckers that emerge from the base of the roots, permitting easy training as a multi-trunk. The branches grow opposed. From the beginning of autumn to winter, it is decked out with a multitude of small violet-colored berries. It blooms from June to July and the blossoms emerge beside the leaves at the tips of the branches in the form of bouquets. Most of the blossoms develop into berries. In autumn, the berries change from green to violet and last until January. It is a tree that ramifies with difficulty because it has a tendency to lose its shape and branches tend to die back. Normally, during the growing period (from May to June) branches that tend to grow upward have to be lowered. It is also advisable to pinch back the branches that are growing too much while they are still tender. During the dormant period, they have

to be pruned in order to balance the strength of the tree, leaving only 1 or 2 nodes per branch. It will grow well in semi-shade, but it prefers sunlight. However, in midsummer, protect it with shade cloth to keep the leaves from burning. In winter, protect it from frost. This cold season is the best for enjoying the sight of its berries. It is important that it not lack water in the growing season. Fertilize from April to May, and from September to the first of October with bone meal. If you fertilize later, the berries will brown and drop off. Today it is mainly dwarf varieties that are cultivated as small-sized bonsai. Since the branches grow opposed, you either cut one off completely or make one shorter than the other.”

Dennis’s presentation inspired me, and I have been growing several beautyberry “shrublets” since his talk. In the coming dormant period, I’ll be pruning as the article advised. My hope is for a lovely shohin clump. - NGK

Tentative 2010 BBS Program Schedule

January 16: Jack Billet Memorial Meeting, Winter Silhouette

January sometime: NBF: repotting the Yamaki pine. Possible carpooling to DC

February 20: Jim Doyle on when to use a daiza and when a suiban. Maybe something on using stones and trees together.

March 20: Open workshop

March 21: Collecting trip to Nature’s Way

April 16 – 18: MABS Spring Festival, Kerhonksen, NY

April 24: possible speaker from MABS but don’t hold breath

May 8-9: (?) Nature’s Way Spring Open House

May 15: Ski Dombrowski does Wisteria

June 5-6: Brandywine River Museum Show

June 27 (a Sunday): Ted Matson styling blow-out

July 17: Picnic/Auction

August 21: A workshop? Possibly repeat of the recent well-attended one.

September ? : Valavanis symposium, Rochester, NY

September 18: Bob Mahler presents program on azaleas (pines?) and gives brief reviews of trees from Joyce Smith and Henri Vermeulen.

(?) Stone Symposium, Grantville, PA

October 16 or 23: Ron Lang gives us one of his new programs. Maybe afternoon would be Ameriseki and set-up/sale for show at Longwood.

November 6-7, Longwood Show

November 20: Business, anything else

Kusamano in Washington - There will be a special display of kusamono as part of the Autumn Arts Show at NBF meeting, Sept. 26 thru Nov. 29, which gives everyone plenty of time to make a pilgrimage down to the National Arboretum.



Longwood Show - All members should please start thinking about your tree (and stone) displays for the fall show, Nov. 7 & 8, at Longwood Gardens. While final grooming is for the last minute, much can be done from here on.

The October 31st Brandywine meeting is slated for show prep. Any club members who wish to get help with display, or who lack some of the display equipment and want some help there should bring these issues (and trees) to this meeting. Those with extra display tables and supplies will have things there to loan out for the show.

Also, everyone can help with the show and we do need your help even if you do not feel comfortable with displaying something at this time. I will bring sign-up sheets to the October meeting as well as distribute them in the newsletter. Thanks in advance for your help. --- Pat



*O leaves, ask the breeze
Which of you will scatter first
From the verdant trees.*

Soseki