

The Enduring Contribution of Jack Billet

By James Hughes

The *Melba Tucker Arbor*, in the lower courtyard of the Museum, is an accessible location and a hospitable site for many bonsai events. When the weather is pleasant, weekend demonstrations by the staff are held here. It was also used in May by the Potomac Bonsai Associ-



The Lower Courtyard & Rose Family Garden from the Merritt Gate

ation for presentations during their spring show at the Arboretum. On that occasion the Lower Courtyard was filled to capacity by crowds of interested visitors.

Although the Arbor is an attractive setting for demonstrations, it always appeared a little “forlorn” on those other days when no activities were scheduled for the space. During the late summer we decided to remedy the limited use of that area by the addition of two wooden display pedestals. These stands would allow us to display bonsai or penjing on a regular basis when the Arbor is not being used for demonstrations.

The benches that we designed are made out of a South American tropical hardwood called ipé, which is an incredibly strong and dense wood that is harvested from naturally sustainable forests. It is very durable and is resistant

to splintering and cracking. I used this material myself on my deck at home. Eleven years later, the wood has turned gray, like aging teakwood, but all the joints in the structure maintain their integrity, unlike structures built from cedar or treated lumber.

The handsome stands were installed in late September and now the *Melba Tucker Arbor* is a focal point for visitors to the Lower Courtyard. This important installation was made possible by numerous and generous donations given to the National Bonsai Foundation in memory of **Jack Billet**, NBF director, teacher, artist and a tireless promoter of bonsai. He was an active participant in the work of the Museum and in 2004 we were proud to host an exhibit of *shohin* from his collection and

the collection of **Doris Froning** in the Special Exhibits Wing of the Mary E. Mrose International Pavilion.



Melba Tucker Arbor in the Lower Courtyard with new display benches

Now we are pleased to have these beautifully crafted additions that will honor Jack and his many contributions to bonsai and the Museum. They will be formally dedicated during the NBF Board meeting in May 2007.

Photo: Joseph Mullan

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