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'Suiseki Australia'

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The next suiseki workshop will be on the 21st March 2026 starting at 9am at Ray Nesci's Nursery

Dear Members,

I hope you have all survived the very hot, humid and wet few weeks. At our last meeting in February, we all packed up and left early at lunchtime as the humidity and heat was unbearable and it was very hard to knuckle down and work on our daizas. I just couldn't wait to get home and turn on the air conditioner. I can't remember having such a long period of heat, humidity and torrential rain during these summer months. Usually, we have a couple of days and that would be the end of it. But this year would have to be the worst I have experienced that lasted for a much longer period. I even got up early every morning to go outside and check on my bonsais to make sure that they didn't shrivel up with the heat, then give them a quick water and then hibernate inside in the cool and there I stayed until it was necessary to go out.

This month we will be revisiting how to display our stones in a suiban. It is always a good idea to re-visit rules on how to display stones. This is important for us when we put them on display at our bonsai club shows. Here in Australia we don't have the huge number of stones that appear at overseas bonsai and suiseki shows and conventions. So, if we learn how to display them properly, then the few that we put on display will be appreciated by the visitors that attend our shows.

So read on for more information on using suibans in our displays.

Enjoy!

Till next time, Brenda

QUOTE FOR THE MONTH

'Usually bonsai people love stones – it seems to me all over the world people's taste is similar. We love nature. We love to hold natural things in our hands.'

- Anon

USING A SUIBAN

A suiban tray is a shallow watertight container filled with sand, water, or both. The stone should always take precedence over the container – a suiseki that is poorly displayed loses much of its beauty and suggestive power – the smaller the stone the shallower the container for instance. Stones should be left as found in nature but brushing to enhance the surface and some grinding to level an uneven base is permitted.

Here we find it difficult sometimes to source very shallow suiban trays with no drainage holes. Alternatively, we can source shallow bonsai trays with holes in them and then the holes can be covered with masking tape and then filled with fine sand to complement the stone. Nobody would know when they are on display.

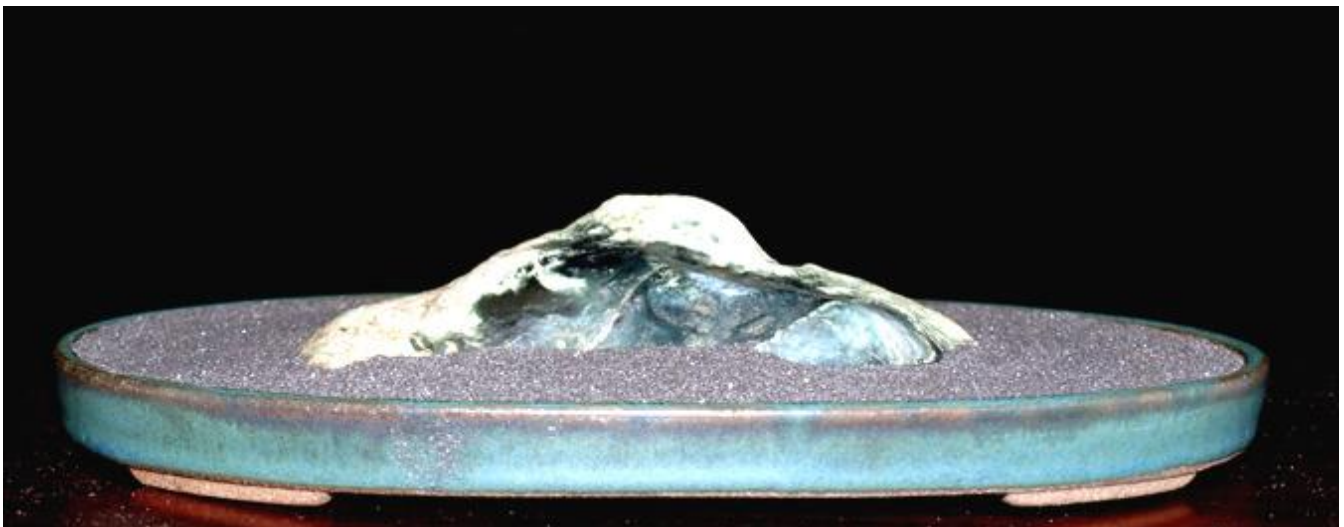
When we display them on stands it is not proper to place a suiban on an upper shelf. Generally, they are used with water or with river sand. With river sand they symbolize either the ocean or a flat plain. If they are located above eye-level, all that symbolism is lost.

The most suitable and the most used shapes are oval and rectangular, but they must be quite shallow. It is also very important that the stone not fit too exactly in the suiban. Ideally, the suiban is two to three times the width of the base of the stone. With more space the plane or ocean is better conveyed and the stone blends in more harmoniously. When displaying the stone with sand use a colour that harmonizes with that of the stone. Only fill the suiban up to 80% with sand. Then situate the stone in the proper position and put it on display.

ROCKS IN CHINESE BONSAI

The skilful use of rocks by Chinese bonsai artists, has been unashamedly copied by the Japanese. In fact, the Japanese fascination for suiseki, or Viewing Stones, is of Chinese origin.

Chinese rock plantings come in various shapes and sizes, ranging from a few centimeters high to one, or even two meters high. These exquisite, and very realistic creations can be planted with small trees, or with other accent planting material. They are intended to convey the impression of natural landscape scenery, rather than to highlight beautiful trees.



An example of a snow-covered mountain displayed in a suiban



The Bonsai Association of Belgium have awarded Gudrun Benz (above) with the Bonsai Angel Award for her tireless work to bonsai and suiseki.

I am sure all of us here in Australia all send their hearty congratulations to you Gudrun on awarding of that special award to you.

I was very fortunate to have met Willi and Gudrun when they visited Sydney back in 1999 and 2001.

Gudrun very kindly exchanges newsletters with me and it is always lovely to read on what is happening at their shows and conventions in Europe.

Gudrun has also kindly sent me photos of her collection and each month I will send a few at a time to our members, this is all about sharing.

So, for now, enjoy, and stay tuned in the next few newsletters for the other photos that Gudrun has kindly sent me.



Above:

Bridge shaped stone, place of origin: Australia, already donated to Bonsai Museum Dusseldorf, Germany.



Above: Cave stone, place of origin Australia. Already donated to Bonsai Museum, Dusseldorf, Germany.



Above: Bridge shaped stone, origin Italy, Ligurian Alps, already donated to friends.



Above: Another bridge shaped stone, origin Italy, bridge shaped stone, origin Italy. Already donated to friends.



Above: Cave stone: origin Italy, Ligurian Alps, already donated to Bonsai Museum, Dusseldorf.



Above: Cave stone: origin Italy, Ligurian Alps.

HOW TO PREPARE STONES

When you acquire new stones, it is always advisable to leave them out in the elements so that the rain can give them a good washing down in a natural way. I found a couple of stones hiding out of site under a bench and I quickly put them out in the elements to receive the torrential rain. Already, it has made a difference to the surface of the stones. Nothing that I could have achieved by washing them. I will leave them there to receive the rain and sun until I am ready to place them in a daiza. In doing this, within a year the appearance of the stone will be almost the same as that of the 'authentic suiseki'!

Many years ago, we were told that stones needed to be treated with olive oil, glycerine and/or baby oil and massaged into the stone for hours on end, and the body oils e.g. from the forehead and rub the stone with the palms of your hands.

I think with all the stones we all have we would never get anything else done in our lives. To me, leaving them out in the elements is an option that would certainly help our very heavy and busy schedules!!

See you all on the 21st March at Ray's and hopefully the weather will be kinder to us!!
