Saikei

58

INTERNATIONAL

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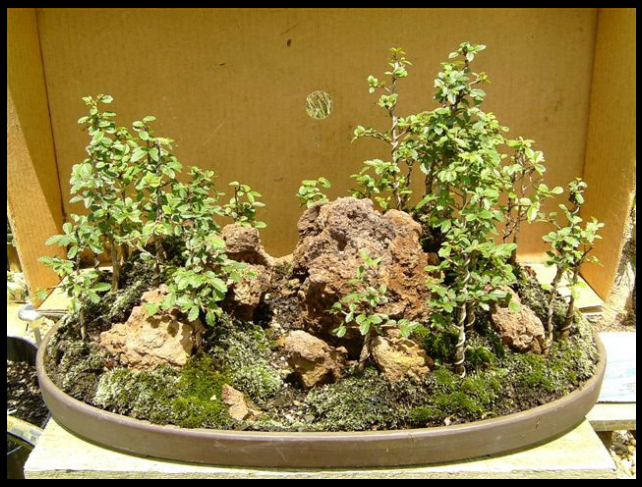
Recently Completed Saikei



Australian Saikei

Member Receives Certificate in Saikei

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Welcome to Saikei International 58, following the pandemic we have decided to re launch this publication it is our aim to produce 2 editions a year for the first year so we can build up our contributors.

If you feel you can contribute to this magazine please make contact with us and we will be delighted to talk to you about what you can write about. We are seeking writers of all levels and expertise to cover a wide range of Saikei related subjects.

Please contact us at: education@saikei.org

Editor

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Good Saikei

I was asked recently 'how do you make a good Saikei', I had to admit that the answer eluded me at first then I quickly answered 'the answer must be found in the question what makes a good Saikei' we then had a discussion about what makes a good Saikei and in essence this is what we concluded.

A Saikei must:

- Be able to reveal to the viewer a larger landscape than that contained in the pot.
- Reflect the features of the chosen style.
- Be pleasing to look at.
- Be in scale so that it is 'realistic'.
- Be peaceful and harmonious.
- Be interesting so that it holds the viewers eye but it must not be too complicated.

There were others but these were the key ones. This really got me thinking about how I prepare to do a Saikei and what I have done in the past that allows me to draw on experience and knowledge. To do this I had to go back over 30 years to when I saw my first Saikei and got 'hooked'. I was at the UK Bonsai Convention in 1989, hosted by the Sussex Bonsai Group at the University of Sussex in Brighton. I was wandering down the rows of many Bonsai trees admiring their beauty when I came across 2 plantings of trees, rocks and moss, I looked at the labels and it told me the species, variety and age of the trees but not the style. Later I asked Mitsuo Matsui, a Japanese bonsai master demonstrating

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at the convention, through his interpreter, what style these plantings were, and he replied that they were landscape style and after further questions discovered that this style is called Saikei in Japanese.

That started me on a fruitless search through bookshops until I discovered a book Living Landscapes in Miniature by Toshio Kawamoto a full 6 months after the convention in a second hand bookstore in Hastings on the south coast of the United Kingdom.

This book which I still rate as the best book became the bible of Saikei to me; through it I learned the basic principles of tree and rock placement, design as well as the care aspects. I found that the book opened my eyes to the landscapes that I passed by on my travels and these became my future inspiration. One of the key things I have learned is that you cannot create a photocopy of a landscape you have seen, be warned, you will always be disappointed because you will not be able to incorporate the distant mountains, sea, sweeping hills, etc… so what we always say to those new to Saikei is, try to capture the feeling and mood of, or a key feature of the landscape. In reality there is no landscape that can't be captured in a Saikei in some way, perhaps that would be a fun challenge for a future issue, I have even seen a Saikei done with cacti to represent a desert scene which was very effective.

To my mind the key to good Saikei is observation, you need to look at landscapes on your travels and through doing image searches on the computer. If you study these landscapes and commit to memory the key features that make the landscapes what they are, you can incorporate these into your composition (subtly) to give your Saikei that natural feel. Pay particular attention to details but do not lose yourself in them, to do that loses sight of the whole. I find that if you try too hard and think too much your Saikei will not be as good, relax, and let your hands move freely and a Saikei will be formed, even a beginner will be able to tell you something is not right with their Saikei but they won't always know what. Never try to create using an image in your head, start out with a concept say a windswept coastal landscape then start to place rocks and let it form naturally. It must always be remembered that the purpose of technique is to make creativity possible it should never become the focus.

DAVID PENNY

Member in Japan

I was fortunate enough to have recently travelled to Japan, most specifically to Tokyo and Kyoto and one thing that struck me was the care, love and understanding the Japanese have with regards to trees and landscapes.

In Toyko and Kyoto this love of trees and the enhancement and beauty of their shape and form shows itself in the shaping of trees everywhere from parks to roadsides to tiny gardens. The vast majority are pines but also include Ginkgo Bilbao (often used as roadside avenue trees) In ***IMAGE 1*** you will see how carefully trees are looked after

As we travelled from Tokyo to Kyoto the landscapes varied but photography is a little tricky at speeds of 150 to 180mph!!!!

However, it is easy to see how inspiration can be obtained from such views as that in ***IMAGE 2*** – Shosenkyo Gorge near the city of Kofu and of that in the ***IMAGE 3***.

BRUCE SCRIVENS

IMAGE 1

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IMAGE 2

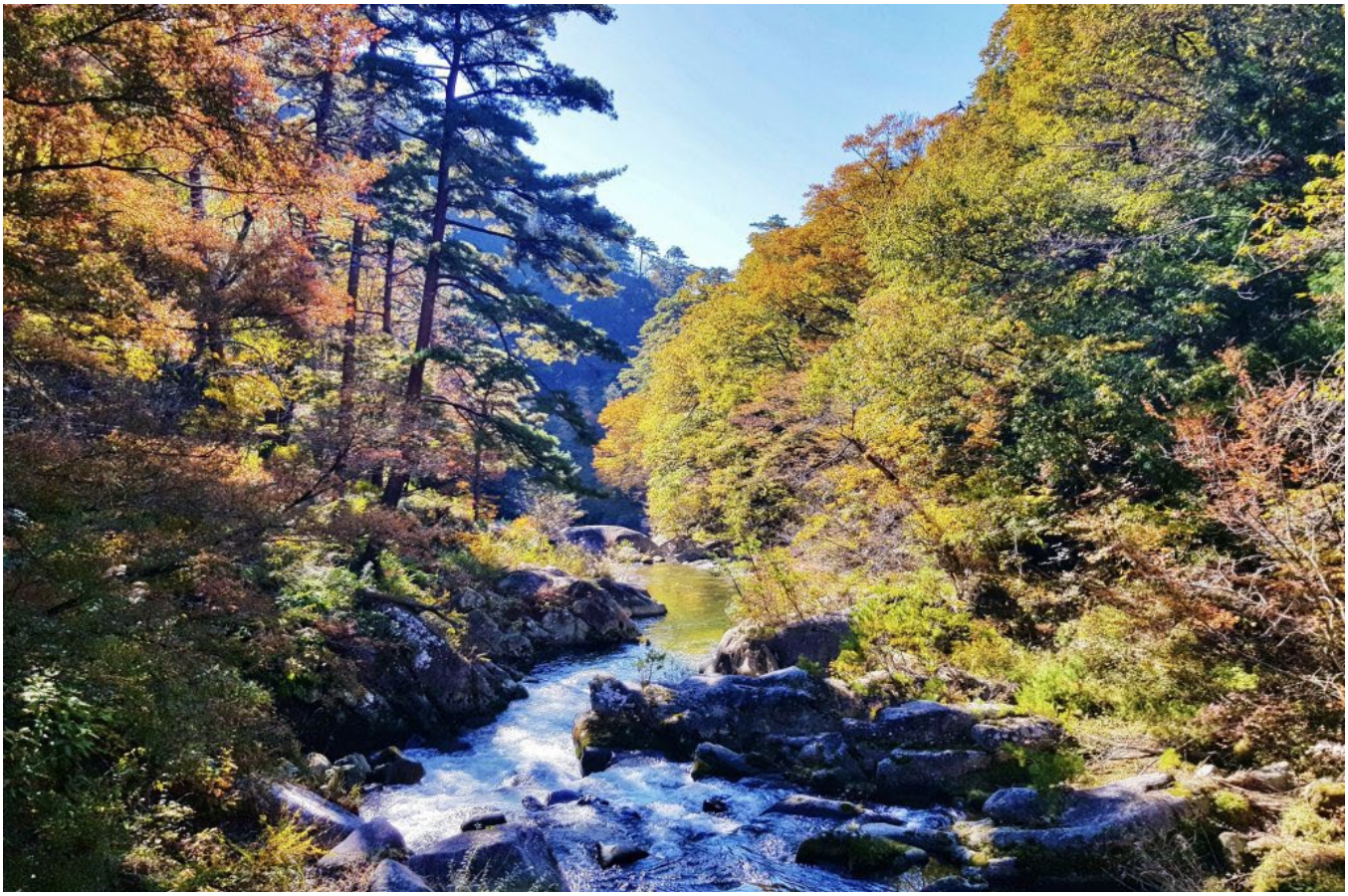

IMAGE 3

Surrey Heath Bonsai Society

I was recently asked to give a demonstration to the Surrey Heath Bonsai Society, this society is a very active group with around 40 individuals attending that evening.

After introductions I gave a brief history of Saikei and showed the members my books on Saikei from Japan, I also spoke about the role of Toshio Kawamoto Sensei in the development of Saikei.

Toshio Kawamoto Sensei

Following the history we then moved on to talk about materials for Saikei and sources for rocks. During this time I started to place and stabilise the rocks with my natural clay mix, explaining the mechanical importance of stabilisation and visual stability to a Saikei. I related some personal experiences of Saikei that I had witnessed where stones were simply layed on the soil surface rather than being properly stabilised, and why this inevitably led to a feeling of imperminence, this generated some discusion about the layers of bedrock and soil in nature.

The discusion moved onto soils for Saikei and I explained why I personaly dont use Akadama in Saikei due to its nature of breaking down over a period of time, the conversation moved on to repotting of Saikei and how this is achieved with the large and heavy compositions we produce as Saikei Artists. During this conversation I started to add soil explaining how the soil stabilises the clay by pulling moisture out of the rock stabilisation media.

It was a convenient place to have a break for Tea and Coffee. During the break a number of members came and had discusions with me about Saikei.

Following the interval I talked about tree selection and placement, I explained that the trees used in Saikei had charecteristics that suited one of the key principles of Saikei that of scale, and that trees with small folliage were better for Saikei. A member then asked about root triming before placement and I spoke about only removing what is absolutely necesary to place it into the planting area, a few eyebrows were raised at this point and so I explained that we avoid placing the trees under stress wherever possible. Root work for root work sake slows development.

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Folllowing placement of the trees I then proceded to place soil around the roots and firm the soil into the spaces around the rocks and tree roots with a chopstick. I then landscaped the soil and sprayed the surface with water in preperation for the moss.

We had a conversation about the right mosses to use and I explained about the purpose of moss and how to use certain moss types to stabilise the soil and then replace these mosses with more apropriate species when the compositions soil structure has become more stable and established. I was then asked to give advice on the correct mosses to use.

Following this advice I started to add various mosses to the soil surface. A member then asked about why I was using certain mosses under the trees and I explained that these mosses were darker in colour and so lent themselves visualy to “shady” spots.

Once the moss was placed I brushed off the excess soils from the rocks and sprayed the entire composition.

In conclusion I explained that the trees would not be styled until the summer to establish the root system. We then had a brief period for questions and I thanked the group for their attention and the demonstration of Saikei ended.

Thank you to all the members who made me feel so welcome.

DAVID PENNY

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ABOUT SAIKEI

Reproduced by kind permision of David Penny from his upcoming book.

WHAT IS SAIKEI?

Saikei literally translates as living landscape although the term has become widely accepted as a living landscape in a tray.

WHAT ARE THE ELEMENTS THAT MAKE SAIKEI?

A Saikei will include rocks, trees, aggregates, mosses and other suitable plants.

WHAT MAKES A SAIKEI?

Toshio Kawamoto who was the bonsai master that rediscovered the art of Saikei stated that the art differs from its nearest cousin Bonsai in that rocks are a requirement in Saikei and that the trees, rocks and soil level is always above the level of the pot

WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF SAIKEI?

Saikei is a derivative of Japanese Bonsai but has its roots in the Chinese art form of Pen Jing. When we look back at the scrolls depicting bonsai in Japan in the early periods we see that they were planted with rocks as you can see when you look at the picture below.

FIGURE 1

c. 1309

Gradually over a period of time the rocks used as additional elements were removed from Bonsai however 2 styles remained where rocks are a material part of the planting:

- **Root over rock where the roots spread over and cling to the rock and enter the soil at the base.**
- **Root on rock where the tree is planted on the rock with no direct contact with the soil at the base.**

The practice of planting more than one tree in a pot was also refined to provide bonsai with the forest or multiple tree style.

Saikei differs from bonsai in the way that it is approached.

In bonsai the artist will approach the material as a tree or trees and so the point of concentration is the tree, its shape and the pot in which it grows.

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In Saikei the artist will create a landscape with rocks, trees, soil, moss and aggregates; the focus in Saikei is on the combination of these elements in a harmonious way to create an image of a landscape.

There are in principle 5 elements that a Saikei must contain:

- Harmony
- Consistency
- Scale
- Interest
- Balance

WHAT ARE THE MERITS OF SAIKEI?

Students often say that what they like about Saikei is its ability to take you out of yourself, to provide a place of peace in a frantic world. It can be argued that through Saikei it is possible to visit places without leaving your back garden, for some it is a reminder of places they have visited on holiday.

What I love about Saikei is a mix of the technical and artistic challenge with the peaceful presence of these compositions. It is true though that Saikei is different things to different people.

WHAT KIND OF PLANTS ARE SUITABLE FOR SAIKEI?

Like Bonsai, you will not need any special plants for Saikei and most material will be able to be sourced from your local garden centre at reasonable cost. You will need to adjust the sort of material you use to the climate that you live in, but apart from this, you just need to bear in mind some basic principles discussed later in this book and you will be fine.

WHAT ARE THE RULES OF SAIKEI?

There are no rules, however there are guidelines that have been developed for teaching, which will help you when you first start in Saikei. As Saikei is an art form there are no restrictions to what you can and can't do, you are free to explore what has been achieved in the past and what will be possible in the future. Saikei is as boundless as your imagination.

ARE SAIKEI DIFFICULT TO CARE FOR?

The answer to this is a definite NO, putting it simply if you are able to care for a planted tub, potted plant, etc... you will have no problem with keeping a Saikei. The techniques can all be learned through this book and by a bit of practice.

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HOW MANY YEARS DOES IT TAKE TO MAKE A GOOD SAIKEI?

The answer to this varies based on the type of landscape you wish to create but in most cases students and audiences are amazed that after just a few hours work you can have a composition that is very reminiscent of the landscape used as inspiration. You can see this in action in the photo projects.

HOW LONG DO SAIKEI LAST?

A Saikei with proper care can last for a very long time, however they do have a finite point because the trees will eventually grow too big for the composition. That said I have Saikei that were originally created 20 years ago and they will probably be ok for a further 10 years without becoming too large for the composition, so Saikei are not temporary by any means. Of course, the trees used in the Saikei will outlive me and can continue to be transferred to larger Saikei compositions or trained on as Bonsai.

SIZE

Size is irrelevant in Saikei although they should be in a tray or container and so this might limit how large your composition could be. The other thing to keep in mind is the weight, Saikei use rocks and can be very heavy. I have created a number of 2 man Saikei which got fondly nicknamed Hernia 1 and Hernia 2 by the members who helped us out on the stands.

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SAIKEI STYLES

We have been asked to repeat this article from a previous issue but there are some additional parts to it and it is important to be fully aware of the styles of Saikei.

There are 3 main styles of Saikei.

Alpine

Lowland

Coastal

I have included a brief description of each one.

Alpine - Yama

We will be looking at the most dramatic style in Saikei that of Alpine (mountains to you and me). This is my favourite style in Saikei as it gives the most scope for interpretation.

The secret to good alpine compositions is the position and aspect of the rocks, to truly explain rock placement and aspect would probably use up this magazine, but a tip would be to think of the rock as a mountain side or as a part of a mountain and to study how mountains look, as with all Saikei it is important to find the harmony within the placement of rocks.

To make an alpine Saikei you will need a tray, rock and trees suitable for the variation of alpine style you have chosen. The trees will need to be thin in width to

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give the impression of an alpine tree (I saw a lot of alpine larch and spruce in the Alps and they all had the same shape, tall and thin).

Prepare the pot by covering the drainage holes with large grade net.

Put in clay or sand where you need to place the rocks (remember if you are going to do a ravine or mountain side they must be secure)

If you are creating a ravine or mountainside and you have more than 1 rock forming a cliff you may wish to place clay between the rocks to stabilise and prevent soil from falling out of the gaps.

Now place a layer of soil so that when you place the trees they are level with the top of the cliff and put the trees in place. You may like to place trees in the side of the cliff and at the bottom particularly for a mountain side.

Now mound the soil around the trees and place moss on the surface of the soil.

Often a small amount of grit placed at the base of cliffs can be affective to represent rock falls.

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Lowland - Tani

I am going to start this article series on Saikei Styles with Lowland Style the reason behind this is simple the lowland style is one of the easiest to create this is because the composition concentrates on movements in the soil rather that impressive rock formations.

To start a lowland Saikei you will need to get a variety of small trees and plants I often find that looking at pictures of lowland scenes helps in the arrangement stage. Try to focus on Certain elements in the scene that will create harmony and naturalness.

Begin by placing netting over the holes of the pot, then introduce the stones into the composition. The stones provide visual anchors to the composition so be very careful about the arrangement.

Bed the stones with either sand or natural clay to avoid excessive movement in the pot. Then add a layer of soil avoiding the parts where you will be adding aggregates to represent water.

Then gradually add soil around the trees and plants and contour the soil to give a natural impression. Use plants like thyme to represent shrubs in your landscape and use light moss in the spaces and dark moss under the trees and shrubs. This will give a better impression of light and dark contrast in the landscape.

Remember in lowland styles there should not be a dramatic rise and fall in surface levels but use the soil and mosses to vary the level in small amounts.

Now start to place the plants starting with the largest first and then reducing to the moss.

Coastal - Kaigan

In the Saikei style of Coastal the position and aspect of the rocks is very important, for instance in the headland sub style rocks are normally placed on the 2/3rd line of the pot with the trees planted in the 2/3rd space and the last third is gravel to represent the beach, but a tip would be to think of the rock as a cliff.

To make an Coastal Saikei you will need a tray, rock and trees suitable for the variation of Coastal style you have chosen. The trees will need to be either low and windblown for an exposed coast or tall for a sheltered cove or headland.

Prepare the pot by covering the drainage holes with large grade net.

Put in clay or sand where you need to place the rocks.

If you are creating a headland and you have more than 1 rock forming a cliff you may wish to place clay between the rocks to stabilise and prevent soil from falling out of the gaps.

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Now place a layer of soil so that when you place the trees they are level with the top of the cliff and put the trees in place. You may like to place trees in the side of the cliff but these should always be weathered and have the impression of clinging to life.

Now mound the soil around the trees and place moss on the surface of the soil.

Now place gravel where the beach and water is to be.

You will have spotted that the Coastal style is very similar to the alpine and that the major difference is the use of gravel and the position of the rocks.

Conclusion

In conclusion be very careful about restricting your vision to certain styles;

"if the artist gets too focused on technique or style then the composition will be all the worse for it"

These words were said by our International President David Penny at a demonstration to the Solent Bonsai Group. When he was questioned about this statement he revealed that he beleived that the mindset that the artist enters when thinking about style or technique inhibits the ability of the artist to work freely.

AFFILIATED CLUBS

Dai Ichi Bonsai Group (Essex)

01277 625 298

Shenfield Village Hall

1st Monday of each month call

Eastleigh Bonsai Club (Hampshire)

01489 789 962 or 07795 187 632

2nd Monday of the Month

Kent Bonsai Club kentbonsaiclub@blueyonder.co.uk

Dunkirk Village Hall

2nd Wednesday

www.kentbonsaiclub.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk

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