

FORMAL UPRIGHT STYLE BONSAI

Chapter 3

NOTES

I. OBJECTIVES

As a result of studying this section of the *Intermediate Bonsai Syllabus*, viewing audio visual presentations, or participating in other activities provided by an instructor, you will be able to:

1. Describe the principal identifying feature of the several types of **upright style** bonsai which distinguishes upright style bonsai from other bonsai styles.
2. Define and describe the *formal upright* style of bonsai.
3. Using an appropriate stock plant, create a *formal upright* style bonsai in training.

II. GENERAL

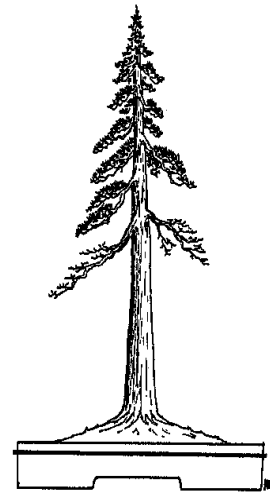
A. There are several reasons for identifying a bonsai by a named style:

1. Naming a style provides a graphic description of the tree.
2. When one person is talking to another about a bonsai and identifies its style, a mental-visual image of that style is evoked in the mind of the listener.
3. A style provides a direction of purpose when structuring a bonsai.
4. It is a shortcut to understanding.

- B. A bonsai is usually classified by the tree's most prominent design characteristic. One may be classified according to its:
1. Trunk angle or lean (its attitude), which may be *upright*, *slanting*, or *cascading*, and/or the number of trunks such as *two trunks*, *clump*, or *forest*.
 2. Roots such as *roots over rock* style or *exposed root* style.
 3. Branches based on shape like a *broom* style, *weeping* style, or *windswept* style.
 4. Unusual characteristics such as dead wood or miniature.
- C. The straight, vertical trunk *formal upright* style bonsai is one of several styles which have relatively upright trunks. The other upright styles are:
1. *Informal upright* bonsai which grow vertically and have curved trunks. (See Introduction to Bonsai - A Course Syllabus and Chapter 4 of this Syllabus.)
 2. *Slanting* style bonsai which are upright but lean to one side or another. (See Chapter 5 of this Syllabus.)
 3. *Broom* style bonsai have a short, fat and straight trunk from which branches grow predominately from its top, giving it the appearance of an upside down broom. (See Chapter 6 of this Syllabus.)
 4. *Literati* style bonsai have a relatively tall and slender trunk with few branches. (See Chapter 13 of this Syllabus.)

III. FORMAL UPRIGHT STYLE BONSAI DEFINED

- A. The *formal upright* style bonsai is almost always a conifer depicting the stately redwood, cryptomeria or pine found in nature. It imparts a feeling of ancient age and strength.
- B. The **essential attribute** in the *formal upright* bonsai is the use of straight lines within the design. It has a straight trunk with clear taper from base to apex. The apex is directly above its base. It is a style of bonsai which presents an image of strength and power.



Illus. 3-1

C. Trunk

1. Is absolutely straight when viewed from the front and from the side.
2. There is significant taper from base to apex; thicker at the base, thinner at the top.
3. The apex does not lean towards the front as it does in other styles.
4. Surface roots radiate evenly around the base of the trunk.

D. Branches

1. Conifers have downward sloping branches, as on a sequoia, and are relatively short. Their limited length accentuates the trunk, giving it the appearance of being taller than it is.
2. Deciduous trees may have either downward sloping or horizontal branches.
3. As branches approach the top they may become more horizontal and those in the crown may rise slightly.

E. Container

1. Is usually oval or rectangular and shallow to emphasize the trunk with straight lines and feet which are not ornate.
2. Placement of the tree within the container, slightly offset to one side and to the rear, is noticeable because of the economy of other elements.

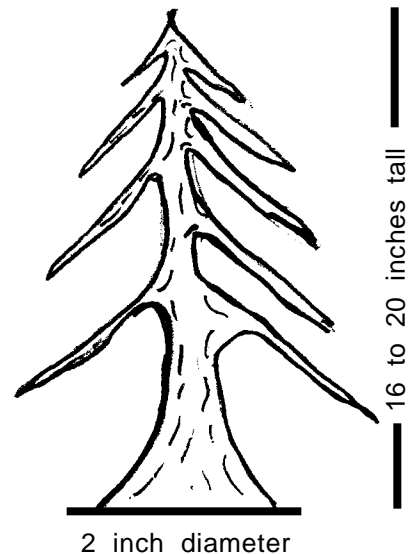
IV. STYLING THE TREE

A. Roots

1. Several earth-clinging surface roots should be visible from the front.
2. Wire, bend and position roots as necessary to avoid any coming directly toward the front of the tree and to distribute others about the base of the tree.

B. Trunk

1. Is vertical without any side leaning. Wire and bend as necessary to straighten. If the trunk cannot be restyled with wiring, consider applying a bending device called a bonsai **jack** to correct unwanted bends. If none of the above are appropriate, consider training the material in another style.
2. The **relationship** of trunk diameter to trunk height creates either an impression of great age or relatively immaturity. Adjust the height of the trunk to get a ratio of trunk diameter at the base to 8 or 10 of height of the trunk.
3. May be hollowed out with any nearby branches styled as dead wood.



Illus 3-2

C. Branches

1. **First branch** should be positioned above the base of the tree at a point $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ the height of the trunk, depending on the style and slant of the branches.
2. First branch should be the longest and the thickest.
3. **Second branch** should be shorter than the first, higher and on the opposite side of the tree.
4. **Space** between successive branches should be smaller toward the apex to give the illusion of great height.
5. No branch should be directly above another.
6. **Placement and spacing** of branches is more important than in most other styles of bonsai. The sparseness of the branches and the high visibility of the trunk emphasize the branch-trunk junctures.
7. Branches should be **straight**, not serpentine, to complement the straight trunk.
8. **Front branches** are necessary for conifers, but must be short.
9. Each branch should be a **different length**, usually getting shorter as they get closer to the top.
10. Branches should be **angled downward** with the tip flaring slightly upward.
11. **Outline** of the tree should be an asymmetrical triangle.
12. **Apex** may be rounded or pointed, live or dead wood.

V. POTTING THE TREE

- A. Prepare the correct size and style container.
1. Generally an oval or rectangular unglazed container with little or no ornamentation is best to harmonize with the style of the tree.
 2. A formal upright bonsai with a tall and thin trunk may look best in a shallow, round container.
 3. Its **depth ratio** should be between 1 and 2 times the diameter of the trunk at its base.
 4. **Container length** should be equal to $2/3$ the height of the tree.
 5. Container may be a slab.
- B. Prepare appropriate soil mix.
- C. Install **screening** over drain holes and one or two tie down wires to hold the tree securely in the pot.
- D. Decide on the tree's **location** in the pot. The base of the trunk should be slightly off-center to the rear and to the left or right of center, depending on branch location and visual mass. Place the greater mass over the wider expanse of soil.
- E. **Remove soil** and roots from the rear and from the left or right side depending on placement.
- F. Remove soil and roots from the remainder of the root mass to permit placement in the pot.
- G. Remove no more root mass than necessary to get the tree comfortably into the new bonsai container.

- H. Put a thin layer of soil in the bottom of the pot and a small **mound of soil** at the point where the base of the trunk will be located. Adjust the height of the mound so that the finished soil surface will slope away from the trunk toward the container edges.
- I. Position the tree in the container to the rear of the center line and either left or right of the center, wiggle the root ball into the soil and secure the tie down wire(s).
- J. Complete the potting process as described in Chapter 9, Introduction to Bonsai - A Course Syllabus.

Note: Potting details discussed above will apply to most of the other styles described later and will not be repeated.

VIII. SUMMARY

- A. The formal upright style bonsai is defined as one having a straight vertical trunk with its apex directly above its base.
- B. The trunk is tapered, the branches are straight, relatively short and angled downward and the silhouette is asymmetrical.
- C. The container is usually shallow and oval or rectangular in shape.