RAFT STYLE BONSAI

Chapter 11

NOTES

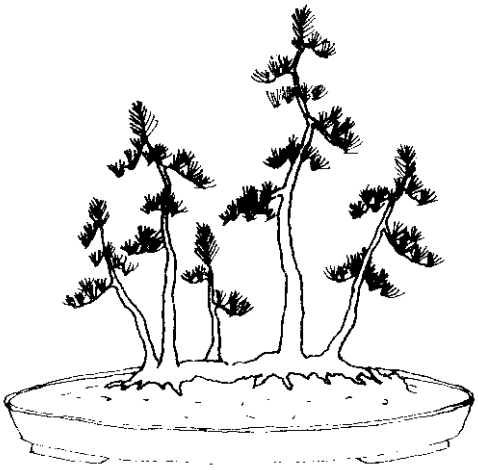
I. OBJECTIVES

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

1. Describe circumstances in which the *raft* style would be found in nature.

2. Describe the three styles of *raft* bonsai (straight, sinuous and clump).

3. Using an appropriate stock plant, create a straight, sinuous or clump *raft* style bonsai in training.



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II. GENERAL

A. A *raft* style may **occur in nature** when a tree because of wind, flood, landslide, avalanche, earthquake or other reason is knocked down and the trunk is flattened against the earth and possibly all or a portion of the trunk is covered with soil.

1. Trunk is not broken from the roots and the trunk and branches continue to receive sustenance from all or a part of the original root-system.

2. The branches on the top side of the horizontal trunk continue to grow and eventually develop as trunks, while roots form along the portions of the original trunk which was covered with soil. The original root system will usually atrophy and decay.

3. As the several new trees develop the original trunk

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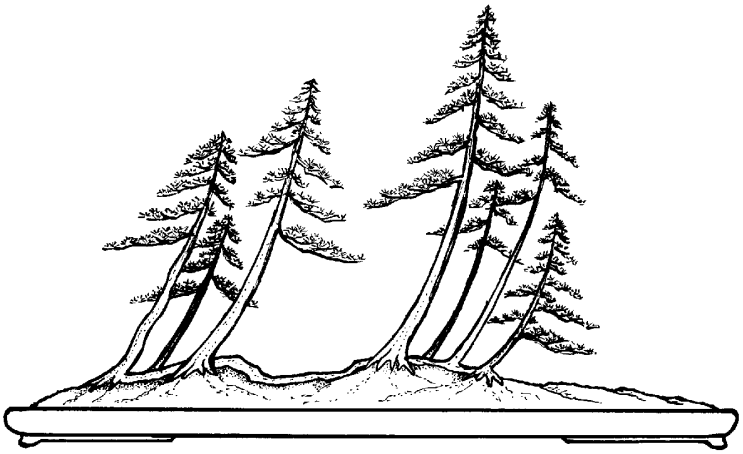
assumes the characteristics of surface or exposed roots.

B. Another type of raft **occurring in nature** is the clump or sprout style in which multiple sprouts from a single root form trunks. Alternatively, several trees may have grown from the same place and have grafted themselves together.

III. RAFT STYLE BONSAI DEFINED

A. One type of *raft* style bonsai is a **straight raft** in which a tree's relatively straight trunk is laid on its side in the soil. Its branches are trained to grow upright directly out of the original trunk. Each is then trained to appear to be individual trees.

B. Another type is the **sinuous raft** in which a tree's original trunk is curved or twisted or wired and bent in a curving (sinuous) fashion and laid on its side in the soil. Its branches are trained upright to appear to be individual trees.



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C. Yet another type of *raft* style bonsai is the **clump raft** in which a plant grows as a clump with three or more trunks growing from a single root system. The bonsai may be styled with the branches growing vertically from a central location or the trunks may be trained horizontal in the

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soil and then upright to appear to be individual trees. Bonsai artist Hal Mahoney of New York has termed this latter technique a **claft** style. “Cl” for clump and “aft” for raft.

D. In each of these types of *raft* style bonsai, the part of the trunk exposed to the soil develops roots. The original root ball is left on or, depending on the type raft, may be reduced or removed after the trunks/branches have generated enough of their own roots to support life.

IV. STYLING A STRAIGHT RAFT STYLE BONSAI

A. **Junipers** do well as *raft* style bonsai. Select one which has a straight trunk and many branches on at least one side of the trunk.

B. Determine how long the **horizontal trunk** will be and obtain a box, pot or nursery flat which is long enough.

C. Remove all branches growing downward or originating on what is to be the **bottom** of the trunk. Also remove remaining branches which will not be used in the design.

D. **Wire** each remaining branch.

E. Remove the bark and cambium along the underside of the horizontal trunk. Dust all scarred areas with a **rooting hormone** powder.

F. **Plant** into general purpose potting soil. Cover everything until only the upright branches are exposed. Secure the tree into the container with wire tie downs. Keep the horizontal trunk covered.

G. Wire and style the **upright branches** to look like individual trees.

H. As roots form on the underside of the horizontal branches, reduce the size of the original root ball.

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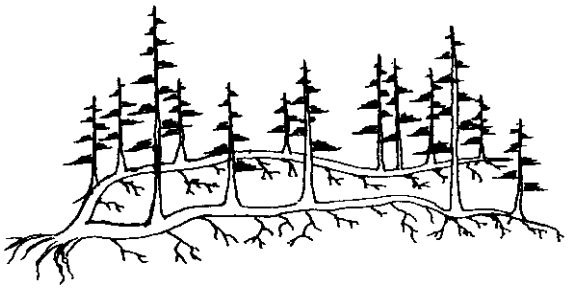
V. STYLING A SINUOUS RAFT STYLE BONSAI

A. Junipers do well as *raft* style bonsai. Select one which has a **curved trunk** or a trunk which can be bent into a series of curves. It should also have many branches on at least one side of the trunk.



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B. Determine how long the **horizontal trunk** will be and obtain a box, pot or nursery flat which is long enough. Remember to allow sufficient length and depth for the original root ball.

C. Decide where the **new "trees"** are to be in the planting. This will determine whether branches are to grow directly out of the trunk or initially horizontal and then upright.

1. If there is sufficient curvature to the trunk, branches forming the new trees can grow upright and be directly above the curved trunk.

2. If either there is not sufficient curvature to the trunk, or if a wider dispersion of new "trees" is desired, branches may be styled to initially grow horizontal from the trunk, making secondary rafts, and then be bent and trained upright as new trees.

D. Remove all branches growing downward or originating on what is to be the **bottom** of the raft. Also remove remaining branches which will not be used in the design.

E. **Wire** the trunk and bend it into the desired shape.

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F. Wire each remaining branch and bend each into its new position. Wire its principal branches to begin the styling of the new "tree".

G. Remove the bark and cambium along the underside of the horizontal trunk and along the underside of any horizontal branches. Dust all scarred areas with a **rooting hormone** powder.

H. **Plant** into potting soil. Cover everything until only the upright branches are exposed. Secure the tree into the container with wire tie downs. Keep the horizontal trunk covered.

I. As **roots** form on the underside of the horizontal branches, reduce the size of the original root ball.

VI. STYLING A CLUMP RAFT STYLE BONSAI

A. The clump or sprout style bonsai has several trunks growing from a single root.

1. Use an odd number of trunks (3, 5, 7).

2. Follow the same styling rules as for a two-tree or twin trunk style bonsai.

B. The "**claft raft style**" is especially useful in creating either a forest (group) planting or a planting among the rocks of a saikei.

C. The plant which is appropriate to be styled into a clump raft style bonsai is one whose branches are not too thick and are flexible.

1. Such a plant may have many low branches like a juniper with a "wagon wheel" of branches just above the root ball, or,

2. One which is a true clump with many trunks

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projecting from the root ball.

D. The various **branches** are

1. Wired and bent horizontal (parallel to the ground)

2. Bent toward the front or back of the composition. Use the same rules of composition and placement which would be used when designing any forest planting (or saikei).

3. Bent upright at the point along their individual trunks where they are to emerge from the ground as individual trees.

4. Stripped of their bark and cambium along the underside of their horizontal portion.

5. Dusted in the scarred areas with a rooting hormone powder.

E. The **root ball** is split in the middle. A cut is made from front to back and the root ball is spread apart and flattened into a training tray. This reduces the depth of soil which will be necessary and it retains most of the roots to support new growth.

1. The root ball is secured into the tray.

2. Potting soil is added to cover the root ball and the horizontal portion of the wired and bent branches.

3. Prune to adjust the height of the new trees.

F. After an appropriate period of time, depending on your growing conditions, **check the wire** on only the upright portion of the new “trees”. Remove the wire before scarring can occur.

G. After a couple of growing seasons check to make sure that there are enough **roots** on the wired horizontal branches

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to consider planting in a shallow bonsai container.

H. Prune and wire each new tree to shape. **Styling** of the trees can be all formal upright, informal upright, slanting, or windswept.

VII. SUMMARY

A. Natural *raft* style trees are found in nature which have been created by one of a variety of circumstances.

B. *Raft* style bonsai may be created using

1. A straight trunk with branches projecting vertically.

2. A sinuous curving trunk with branches projecting either vertically or first horizontally and then vertically to create a forest of trees.

3. A clump whose trunks or low branches project first horizontally and then vertically to create a forest of trees.

C. As the horizontal portions of the trunk and/or branches develop roots, the size of the original root ball can be reduced.