

LITERATI STYLE BONSAI

Chapter 13

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. Define and describe the literati style of bonsai, especially how and why it is different from other styles of bonsai.
2. Describe the characteristics of a *literati* style bonsai.
3. Using appropriate stock, style a single line *literati* style bonsai.

II. GENERAL

- A. The *literati* style bonsai may be in the informal upright style, slanting style, or multiple tree style.
- B. Pine species exhibiting characteristics of the *literati* style may be found in nature.
- C. A brief history of the *literati* style of bonsai may be found in **Appendix F** to this Syllabus.

III. LITERATI STYLE BONSAI DEFINED

- A. *Literati* style bonsai may reflect most of the usual bonsai styles as long as the trunk is not straight. *Literati* is often said to be the style of bonsai which breaks all the rules; which has no rules. This is not true, *literati* bonsai have rules, guides or characteristics, but they are different.

Literati Style Bonsai, Continued

NOTES

1. The trunk is bare for 60% to as much as 90% of its length.
2. There may be a single branch or jin somewhere along the trunk, preferably near the middle.
3. Branches are confined to the upper third or quarter of the trunk.
4. The trunk is elongated and there is no quick taper.



5. Trunks may be curved or have a sudden dramatic change of direction. There is no such thing as an absolutely straight trunk.
6. A trunk may ascend and then abruptly descend. It might even ascend a second time.

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Norman Haddick, '94



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7. A branch may cross in front or behind the trunk.
8. A branch can sweep downward at an angle as great as 90 degrees.
9. Containers are small. No wider than 25% of the length of the trunk. They may be shallow, round, or round and fluted. They may have feet. Colors are soft and muted.
10. Species are generally conifers or evergreens.

B. In most styles of bonsai there is a generous ratio of foliage to space, considerably more foliage than space. In *literati* bonsai the ratio of foliage to space is reversed.

- C. A *literati* style bonsai should portray a simple, abstract scene. Its shape or form is a result of the weather, but it has a graceful ruggedness.
- D. There is no great concern about rootage, trunk tapering, trunk size and height proportion, branch placement or style of apex as in other bonsai styles.

IV. STYLING THE TREE

- A. *Literati* style bonsai may have one branch or several branches. They may be relatively horizontal or they may droop severely. Following is a suggested method of creating only one of the various styles.
 1. Obtain a reasonably mature juniper with a long and gracefully curved trunk or a major branch which can be used as the new trunk.
 2. Identify either a branch or the flexible top of the trunk which is about 12 to 18 inches above the roots. This will become the foliage mass.
 3. If a branch is to be used, consider creating a dead wood jin for an apex at the end of the trunk.
 4. If the branch is on the left, lean the tree to the right, wire the new major branch and bend it downward on the left of the tree, counter balancing the lean of the trunk.
 5. Style this branch as a relatively flat plane with secondary and tertiary branches projecting to the left and to the right of the primary wired branch.
 6. When satisfied with the styling of this major down-sweeping branch, either remove all the others



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completely or create dead wood jin and shari.

V. POTTING THE TREE

- A. Choose a container, preferably round or irregular, relatively shallow. The diameter of the container should be about the same as that of the largest foliage mass on the tree.
- B. Pot the tree at the angle used when the trunk and major branch were designed.
- C. The tree is viewed with the trunk slanting to the right and the downward sloping branch on the left.
- D. Complete the potting process.

VI. SUMMARY

- A. *Literati* bonsai may reflect nearly any of the usual bonsai styles; informal upright, slanting, cascade, etc. However, they also abide by a unique set of rules or standards.
- B. The usual ratio of foliage to space is reversed in *literati* style bonsai; there is considerably more space than foliage.