

Inland Empire Bonsai Society - Bonsai Style Summary

Marty Weiser, February 2024

Formal Upright – *Chokkan*

- Straight trunk from the front
- Overall triangular shape
- A good *nebari* is critical
- Straight, horizontal branches
- Branches have a triangular shape
- Conifers are most common species, but there are some deciduous formal uprights
- Generally, a hard style to do well



This legendary formal upright Japanese white pine that was restyled by Kimura in 1997, is strongly reminiscent of the towering specimen in the museum US. The straight trunk with its magnificent taper, as well as its superbly balanced branching and well developed nebari, make it one of the few near perfect formal uprights known. Estimated height 42" (107 cm).



Informal upright – *Moyogi*

- Trunk with side to side movement
- Branches on the outside of the bends that form pads
- What most people think of as a bonsai
- A good *nebari* is desired, but junipers rarely have a good one
- Nearly all species can be used for this style
- A good style to display flowers

Broom – *Hokidachi*

- Broadly spreading crown above a straight trunk
- Most branches start from the same point in one version
- There is a central upright trunk in the other version
- A good *nebari* is desired
- Elms and other small leaved trees are often used



Spreading Upright

- Not one of the traditionally recognized styles – either an informal upright or broom
- Represents many trees growing in nature
- Trunk can be straight or gently curved
- Often splits into multiple large branches, too low for a broom, too high for a clump
- Can have a very broad canopy
- A good nebari is desired
- Mostly deciduous, but some conifers also spread



Clump/multiple trunk – *Kabudachi*

- Multiple trunks that share a common base – most often 4 or more
- The outer trunks normally reach outwards to find light
- Ideally the nebari of the trees are fused together
- The trees are normally styled as if the branches were part of a single tree
- Made from multiple trees or a large tree cut off very short

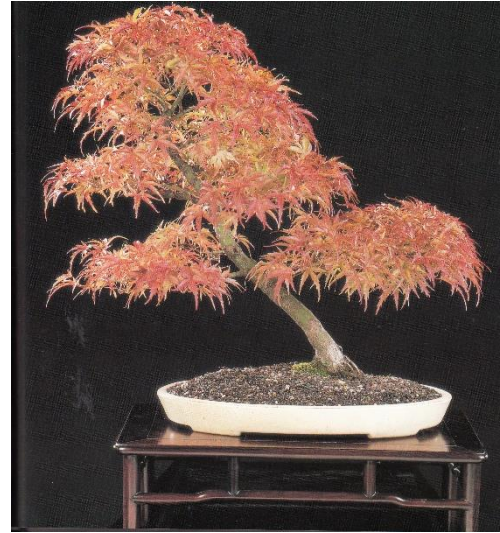
Twin trunk – *Sokan*

- Two trees planted close together
- Often seen as a mother-daughter arrangement, the larger tree is often sheltering the smaller one
- Trunk movements complement each other
- Triple trunk is closely related and seen as a family group



Slanting – *Shakkan*

- The trunk leans to one side like a tree that has partially fallen over
- The apex is often at the edge of the pot or beyond
- Strong roots on the side away from the lean are needed to anchor the tree and make it look stable
- The branches below the trunk are shorter than those above due to lack of light



Cascade – *Kengai*

- The trunk descends below the bottom of the pot
- A sharp bend starts the descent of the trunk
- The two-line cascade has foliage above the sharp trunk bend
- The one-line cascade does not have upper foliage - a tree growing from a cliff face
- Branches are arranged along the top and sides of the trunk

Semicascade – *Han-kengai*

- Similar to a cascade, but the trunk terminates above the bottom of the pot
- The height and width of pots for both cascade and semicascade are often about the same
- Round, square, and hexagonal pots are used for both styles



Forest – *Yose-ue*

- A group of trees with separate bases
- Normally 5 to 20+, but there are large forests with over 100 trees
- Most are a single species (often from cuttings) and have a range of sizes
- Mixed forests of species that have similar growth requirements can be made



Raft – *Ikadabuki*

- Multiple trunks like a forest, but they have a common root system
- Created by laying a trunk on the ground and training the upright branches as trunks
- The trunk normally lies along the ground, but sometimes there are gaps under the trunk

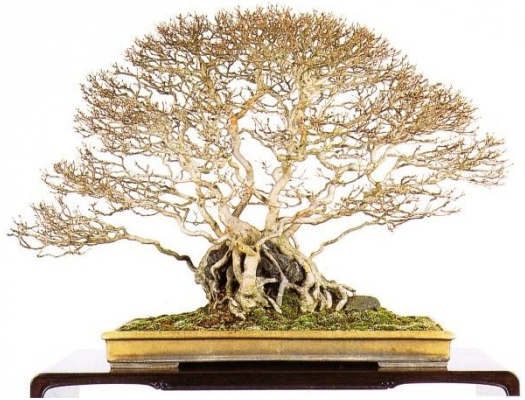
Windswept – *Fukinagashi*

- Most branches on one side of the trunk – the downwind side
- Trunk is often slanted
- Horizontal branches show the tree between storms
- Lifting the tips of the branches shows the tree during the storm
- More difficult than it looks



Root over Rock – *Keki-juju*

- The tree grows over the rock
- The image is a of a tree where the soil washed away from the base of the tree
- The roots should cling tightly to the rock with minimal gaps
- Maple and pines are most common
- Trident maple roots will often spread and fully encase the rock

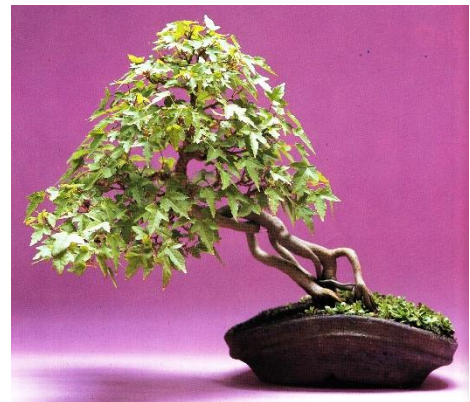


Root in Rock/Root on Rock – *Ishisuki*

- The tree is planted on the rock
- The rock serves as the pot
- It can range from flat to nearly vertical. Flat and somewhat concave like a pot is easiest.
- Any pot is merely to support the rock(s)

Exposed Root

- The soil has been washed away from the roots
- The roots should twist and turn as they go from the trunk to the soil
- Several roots are more valued than one or two major roots





Flat top and Pierneef

- Unique American and Southern African styles
- A tall trunk that with spreading branches at the top
- Bald cypress flatten as the tree reaches max height and storms strip the lower branches
- South African styles are based upon trees where the lower branches have been browsed by wild life
- Some are truly flat top while the pierneef has a broad umbrella shaped crown.

Literati or Bunjin – *Bunjin-gi*

- Sometimes referred to as “scholar’s trees” used to motivate philosophical discussion
- Generally a long, thin trunk with little taper
- The branching is fairly sparse and placed towards the top of the trunk
- Dramatically dropping branches are fairly common



Images are from a variety of sources including Bonsai Today magazine, International Bonsai magazine, and Instagram and Facebook postings.

Glossary

Some Key Terms

- **Nebari** – The trunk flare and spreading roots at the base of the tree.
- **Jin** – Deadwood at the end of a branch or trunk that does not have a live vein.
- **Shari** - Deadwood along a branch or the trunk that also has a live vein.
- **Yamadori** – A tree collected from the wild for use as a bonsai. Urbandori is a western variation for a tree collected from the urban landscape for use as a bonsai.
- **Shin** – Pronounced “sheen” is heart in Japanese and is the area under the trunk in many bonsai where the roots that maintain the health of the tree are located. It is critical to keep this part of the root mass healthy. The exception are trees like maples with very

broad spreading nebari where all of the functioning roots are at the edges and the shin is basically a dry soil zone.

- **Primary Branches** – The major branches that originate from the trunk. They along with the trunk set the basic style of the tree.
- **Secondary Branches** – The branches that originate along the primary branches. Creating there serve as the transition from the development to the refinement stage. Sometimes referred to as the scaffolding.
- **Tertiary Branches** – The branches that originate from the secondary branches. These are developed during the refinement phase and are the start of true ramification.
- **Ramification** – The development of fine twigging where a branch splits into 2, then 3 or 4, then more and more until one branch from the trunk becomes 10s or a 100 or more fine branch tips.
- **Development** – The phase of growth when the trunk and primary branches are developed. This often results in rather coarse growth with long internodes.
- **Refinement** – The phase of growth after the primary structure of the tree has been developed and the goal is to create fine ramification.

Bonsai Sizes

Size is measured from the rim to the top of the tree. For trees that extend below the rim of the pot the height is from the lowest to the highest part of the tree. This includes any jin or shari. There is some inconsistency in the terms, but these seem to be the ones that are most accepted in the western world.

- *Mame* – under 4" (10 cm)
- *Shohin* – under 8" (20 cm)
- *Kifu* (Kifu sho) – under 14" (35.5 cm)
- *Chuhin* – under 18" (46 cm)
- *Dai* – under 40" (1 m)
 - *Some western groups are splitting this into larger (<30-32" height and/or width) and very large (perhaps even larger than 40")*

In the west these are often taken as absolute measurements while they are often strong guidelines in Japan. For example, a 14.2" tall tree might be considered a *Chuhin* in some places but allowed in the *Kifu* class in others. *Mame* and *Shohin* are often displayed as groups of 3 to 11 trees (7 is most common) and as long as the trees are similar in size and fit together, they are classed in that size category.