

YOU ARE YOUR BONSAI – YOUR BONSAI IS YOU

WERNER BUB

Quantitatively bonsai is spreading rapidly through the world; but qualitatively its development is stunted by Western attitudes towards it.

There are many misconceptions in people's minds about what bonsai is or should be, or how bonsai are treated. Many of these misconceptions are dispelled once you get more involved with the subject. You realise bonsai should thrive so that you can work with them, that their roots are not bound, they are not a species, they grow taller and they need water!

LITTLE AND LARGE

One misconception is the size that they are grown to. The western mind in its logical way will assume that, if the Japanese are reducing trees in the first place, then the height of achievement must be to make them as small as possible. This, of course, is quite right, but what is "as small as possible"?

We have first to look at what we are trying to achieve by creating bonsai. Ideally, we want to grow a miniaturised tree that has all the characteristics of its fully grown counterpart and retains all the same proportions between height and size of leaves, texture of bark, etc. To maintain the relationship between size of tree and size of leaves is the most important one. The size that the leaves are able to reduce to should determine the height of your bonsai. Therefore species of trees with small foliage are suitable for miniature, medium and big bonsai; species of trees with larger leaves are suitable for bigger bonsai – that is, if you want to create a masterpiece.

The smaller the bonsai, the bigger the leaves, the more imagination is needed from the viewer to see it as a fully grown specimen. To

most people, this is not a problem: they will no longer see it as a young, small tree; their minds will readily transform it into something mysterious and magical, their minds performing all the magic.

IN BONSAI THE MAGIC SHOULD BE FOR REAL, NOT JUST SOMETHING IMAGINED

Only when all physical aspects of that tree are right and they harmonise with the feeling it conveys, will it uplift you to the spiritual level – the real magic.

In Japan, Registered Masterpieces tend to be on the large side. The impact created by these trees is just overwhelming. This impact obviously diminishes progressively with the size of a bonsai. Bonsai in Japan are generally on the big side, although many small trees are grown as well. These are for people who are limited physically in power and space, but the bulk of these trees are grown for the westerner who, through his misinterpretation of "as small as possible", created a tremendous demand for them. To grow larger trees is also an economic consideration. With the size of the tree, all expenses will multiply – from the tree itself, to the pot and the tools to work with. Apart from this, growing larger trees is more difficult since more skill is needed to operate these tools and one possibly needs extra helping hands. But this should not deter people who are able to experience this dimension of bonsai.

RYHME AND REASON

Why do we grow bonsai in the first place? The main reason, I think, is to make it physically possible for us to interact with nature on a profound level.

The main reason for the westerner's attraction to bonsai is that he realises that he has lost touch with nature and he wants to re-establish contact by owning his own portable piece of it. But most people's involvement and understanding of bonsai does not go beyond the