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OCTOBER NEWSLETTER 2007

Dear Members,

I thought I would like to share with you some of my thoughts on suiseki, not on the styles of stones or the way we display them, but the step before this all happens, on how the stones on this planet first came about. They didn't just appear. Mother Nature has played a huge part at shaping and colouring the stones that are around today and this has taken (and still happens) over millions of years to create.

I got my inspiration from a book that is very informative and easy to read, that is also a very handy tool in helping children with their school projects. The book is by Allan Fox and is called "Amazing Facts about Australian Landforms" and I purchased it from a well known book store for around \$10. On reading this book you get to realize just how marvelous and wondrous these treasures that we revere are, and when next you stub your toe on a stone, you will actually appreciate how it got there in the first place.

To my way of thinking if everyone in the world appreciated and loved stones, nature, trees and the environment as much as we all do the world would definitely be a better place than it is today. I still marvel at the beauty, both the delicacy and fury of our planet, the wonders on it and in it and to think it has taken millions of years to create still fascinates me. We are here just for a mere split second to appreciate it, explore it and admire it. To touch base with nature, whether it be collecting a stone, closely studying a flower, or by just taking in the views from a mountain top, would certainly change our priorities and we would become at one with ourselves and with nature, to become better people.

The following facts are reproduced from "Amazing Facts about Australian Landforms" by Allan Fox, and I was given permission by Steve Parish Publishing Proprietary Ltd.

FACT - The age of the earth is approximately 4,600 million years.

FACT - Limestone is a special sedimentary rock, and so is coal. They are fossils of coral reefs and swamp vegetation.

FACT - When granites weather, the silica breaks down to sand, and the mica into tiny shiny flakes, then with the feldspars becomes clay.

FACT - Most of the rock-making materials in the earth's crust occur in sands.

FACT - Metamorphic rocks are rocks changed by heat and pressure. These changes produce new minerals, new textures and new structures.

FACT - Metamorphosis changes sandstone to quartzite, limestone to marble, shale to slate, schist to gneiss, and granite to gneiss.

- FACT - Some of the oldest surface rocks in the world are gneissic granites in Western Australia and Canada.
- FACT - Metamorphic rocks and igneous intrusions make up about 85% of the continental crust to a depth of at least 20 kilometers.
- FACT - The whole process, from metamorphosis within the roots of a mountain range to the time when the rock reaches the surface may take several hundred million years.
- FACT - Rocks from every geological period are represented in the area (Tasmania), the oldest rocks being formed 1100 million years ago.

On reading articles from other suiseki countries from around the world I have found that we all hold the same sentiment on our outlook toward this ancient art form. Most of us do have bonsai collections and most of us do collect suiseki in tandem with each other. We go out on trips to search for that elusive special work of art shaped by nature – some of us are successful and some of us still arrive home empty handed but we still wait and hope that our next trip out will be successful. Here’s hoping anyway!

Happy Hunting,
Brenda

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

‘Nature reveals its wonders only to the one who keeps bonsai and suiseki in his heart.’
- Old Chinese Proverb

George and Johns ‘Timely Timber & Tool Tips’

October 2007

Hello ‘Rock Hounds’

Attending some of the bonsai club spring shows, we’ve noticed that a lot more Suiseki / Viewing Stones are being displayed, some in their own section. Much interest is shown by members of the general public and this can only be a good thing for promoting interest in our art form.

This month we’ll go back to the start and try to give newcomers a basic list of equipment that you’ll need to start creating your Daizas.

1. *Pencils*: For marking the outline of your stone.
 2. *Sharp blade*: Utility knife or better still, a scalpel type knife with various blade shapes. This is very good for cutting the penciled outline for a clean edge to work to, also ideal for keeping the above pencils sharp.
 3. *Sandpaper and steel wool*: Various grades for smoothing the work prior to finishing.
 4. *Carving Tools*: Traditionally, these would have been small woodworking / carving chisels and these tools are still very useful for removing material quickly. These are available in many different shapes e.g. flat, curved, angled etc. Good quality chisels will cost from \$25.00 to \$40.00 each.
- The modern equivalent of the chisel is the Rotary Tool. If you are serious about making Daizas, this is a must for your tool box. Rotary tools are priced from as little as \$10.00 for a battery powered unit, up to \$300.00 for a stand mounted ¼ HP model.
- Battery powered tools may be convenient to use but tend to suffer from low power and short battery life. There are a few brands available, Ozito (about \$40.00), Triton (about \$100.00),

Dremel (\$95.00 to \$150.00). These brands are generally available from hardware stores such as Bunnings, Mitre 10 etc. More powerful (expensive) units are available from specialized wood tool suppliers, Carba-tec and Timbecon.

If you are thinking about purchasing a rotary tool, shop around before you buy, prices vary considerably between stores. *More about Rotary Tools & accessories in future newsletters.*

5: *Chalk:* This is needed to mark the bottom of your stone if it is irregular in shape and not (god forbid) sawn flat. By chalking the bottom of the stone and placing it your Daiza with slight pressure, you can more easily see where the high spots are.

6: *Grip Mat & Bench Hook:* These are ideal for holding the work in place while carving / sanding etc. Grip Mats available from supermarkets, hardware shops etc. Bench Hooks can be made from offcut timber pieces.

7: *Fret or Coping Saw:* If you don't have access to a scroll or band saw, you will need this saw to cut your Daiza from the piece of timber.

8: *Safety Equipment:* Don't forget the dust mask and glasses / goggles, earplugs and an apron are other worthwhile additions to the toolbox.

9: *Storage:* Last but by no means least; you will need somewhere to store all the above gear. Tool boxes with trays and storage compartments are available in many shapes and sizes. Things to consider when buying a tool box are;

How much do I need to store?

Do I need to carry my gear from place to place (workshops etc.)?

Am I going to add to my tools in the future?

Will one large box be suitable or do I need 2 or 3 smaller units?

My personal choice is a large, mobile multi storage unit. These will hold many small pieces of equipment with larger storage areas for power tools, electrical leads and other bits and pieces that you will accumulate. They can be wheeled about like a suitcase or carried if required. Prices range from about \$35 to \$100.00

There are many more items that you may want to add as you become more involved with Daiza making but the above list will start the newcomer on the road to making their own quality Daizas.

Next month we'll bring you some tips on Rotary tool accessories and some hints and techniques for using them.

So long till next time,
G&J

WHERE AND WHEN

Our meetings are held at the Don Moore Community Centre, North Rocks Road, North Rocks, N.S.W. on the third Wednesday of every month except at school holiday time to start at 7.30pm sharp.

You can contact me at brendap7@bigpond.com if you require any further information. Alternatively you can contact me on my mobile 0412 384 834 or at (W) 02 9522 9399.

VIEWING STONES: SUISEKI

The Ancient Art of Rock Appreciation - by Terry McKenna

For many centuries the Chinese and Japanese have been avid rock collectors, with people from all walks of life participating in the fascinating search for unique or unusual natural rocks or stones. The motivation behind this somewhat strange Oriental activity is buried deep in history and has its roots in the ancient teachings and philosophies of Taoism and Buddhism and the search for inner contentment and oneness with nature.

The quest for stones and rocks with inspirational qualities and the subsequent development of the artistic study and appreciation of individual stones is endemic to China and Japan. It has evolved along with their cultural development and appreciation of the arts and is based on a love of nature and the outdoors.

In Japan this is exemplified in the natural arts where simplicity, naturalness, tranquility and inner appreciation are paramount in conveying their meaning and intellect. The simple arrangement of flowers in IKEBANA, the subtle profundity of the TEA CEREMONY, CHA-NO-YU where host and guests share a sense of oneness, with the garden providing an important dimension in capturing the spirit and serenity of the occasion; and in BONSAI where one can contemplate the beauty, serenity and peace of nature in the form of miniature trees.

This simplistic approach to the Arts combined with the teachings of Zen and Buddhism has shaped the nucleus of Japanese aestheticism which is reflected today in their search for innate beauty in nature, especially in rock form.

The discerning art of appreciating collected rocks and stones dates back to the ancient Chinese who revered the natural beauty of the landscape and can be traced back to the Tang Dynasty 618-906 AD.

Stones or rocks were used abundantly in landscape garden design, as rocks symbolized mountains, which to the Chinese, was the embodiment of virtually every mystical and aesthetic experience imaginable.

The Chinese expression for landscape in the context of painting and gardening is SAN SUI, which translates as “Mountain and Water”. The stones and rocks used in their garden designs were known as SAN SUI-SEK i.e. “stones used for landscape”, which over the years became abbreviated to SUI-SEK or “water stone”.

SUI-SEK spread to Japan via Korea during the 13th and 14th centuries, where it developed and flourished during the MUROMACHI ERA (1440-1550) and through the EDO ERA (1600-1867) under the influence of the cultural elite and the literati painting school.

During this period THE WAY OF SUISEKI was born and is epitomized as the expression of the Japanese aesthetic attitude of seeking natural beauty in rock form.

The Japanese word SUISEKI means “WATERED ROCK”, the expression being derived from the practice of slowly dripping water on a rock and viewing the colour changes as the rock is alternatively moistened and dried.

Stones or rocks which evoke some deep inner appreciation of nature are used for many artistic purposes including miniature rock landscapes – BONSEKI; miniature landscapes – SAIKEI; tray landscapes – BONKEI; bonsai root-on-rock ISHI ZUKI; bonsai root-over-rock – SEKI JOJU.

The difference between “SUISEKI” and these other art forms, is that SUISEKI represents the world as created by nature and is usually viewed and appreciated as a single rock, by itself. Two or more rocks can be arranged to add perspective or a hanging scroll used to help convey its meaning, but the prime objective is to have a single rock express its beauty in solitude.

The WAY OF SUISEKI provides one method for man to commune with nature. The stone represents the universe and its viewers feel the mysterious and wonderful power of nature. The elapse of untold aeons is believed to have given each stone a “spirit” of its own. Since SUISEKI represents the eternity of heaven and earth, created by nature and born of fire and carved by the erosion of wind, water and sand, it must exhibit certain physical properties. It must not be too soft that it cannot withstand handling without crumbling, nor too hard so as to give it a cold feeling. It must also possess two additional fundamental characteristics namely, harmony and elegance. Each line and plane of the rock must relate harmoniously to every other line and plane as well as to the whole and surface colour, texture and hardness should contribute towards the relationship. This combination of harmony and elegance gives the stone the power to move a person whose eyes are drawn upon it and provoke one’s innermost thoughts and imagination.

The WAY OF SUISEKI incorporates several classifications and sub-classifications depending on the shape, colour, texture, pattern, naturalness or intrinsic beauty of the stone. For a rock or stone to be classified as SUISEKI, it must first be in its natural shape. It must not be artificially carved although the base may be cut to provide stability for display.

It may also be washed clean but the patina of time should not be destroyed. A good natural rock which attracts and moves people will always have a good shape. Hence, shape becomes all important when choosing SUISEKI.

Two of the classifications of SUISEKI given by the Japanese are MONYO-SEKI and SHIKISAI-SEKI, patterned and coloured rocks. The patterns in MONYO-SEKI may be realistic or abstract in design but primarily they are attractive and interesting while SHIKISAI-SEKI or coloured rocks feature beautiful colours and surface texture. These surface characteristics, pattern colour and texture are possible on one rock but without a good natural shape the true character of the rock is lost. It is the shape which puts life into the surface and consequently stirs the aesthetic mind.

This has led to the classification of rocks and stones according to their shape and relationship to the landscape. SANSUI-KEISEKI or scenic landscape rocks represent natural scenic landscape objects and as many as forty-seven different classifications have been listed in detail by the Japanese. Several of the more popular SANSUI-KEISEKI shapes to be identified in seeking SUISEKI are:-

TOYAMA: “Distant Mountain” – rocks having the shape of distant mountains.

TAKI-ISHI: “Waterfall Rocks” – rocks showing the beauty of a deep ravine.

DOHA: “Hills or Slopes” – rocks expressing tranquil hills or slopes.

TAMARI: “Pool or Lake” – rocks expressing the scenic beauty of a pond or lake.

SHIMA-GATA: “Island shape” – rocks conveying the feeling of an island in the vastness of the ocean.

Additional to these scenic landscape rocks are SUGATA-ISHI which represent rocks or stones that bear a close resemblance in shape to a figure or object. They could resemble human, animal or bird shapes or inanimate objects such as fruit or trees.

A fine SUGATA-ISHI not only has a close resemblance with an object or figure, but has an aura of refined simplicity, consistent with shaping by the natural elements and time. A rock or stone with these qualities is viewed with great admiration. There are historical rocks or YURAI-SEKI so called because of the historical significance connected with their collection. Most YURAI-SEKI are classified as SANSUI-SEKI. Once in a while a truly outstanding example of SUISEKI is discovered which embodies all the spiritual qualities of nature. This rock would then qualify as MEISEKI (fine piece) and is highly prized and sought after.

In addition to the SUISEKI mentioned above there is another separate classification, BISEKI or BEAUTIFUL STONES. BISEKI are stones which have been altered by man, carved and polished to show colours or to expose crystals or flower forms which otherwise would not be visible. The alterations should be done in an artistic manner, much as nature might do it by natural forces and erosion. Chrysanthemum stones or NIKUKASEKI are a typical example of BISEKI.

SUISEKI are generally displayed in shallow ceramic or metal trays called SUIBAN, or on a quietly carved wooden base, whichever is in keeping with the stone. The container or base should always be secondary to the stone. It should enhance or complement, but never overpower or detract from it.

The collection of stones or rocks suitable for SUISEKI is not always easy. One may search for days, months or years before finding a stone or rock suitable to be classified as SUISEKI. It is important to remember when selecting a stone; it must say something or be something to the collector. It takes time to educate the eye to see and the mind to decide and over a period of time, with constant vigilance, the senses will become more discerning and appreciative of what constitutes good SUISEKI. One cannot select any stone, place it in a SUIBAN and call it SUISEKI. A stone is a stone, but a stone that inspires and transforms the senses of the viewer, rises above itself, figuratively and becomes SUISEKI.

Quiet or subtle stones have much to offer, especially if they have a spiritual quality. A fine SUISEKI is more suggestive than realistic, leaving one’s imagination exposed to the full enjoyment and oneness with the stone.

NEXT MEETING

Our next meeting will be held on the 17th October, 2007 and the theme for the night will be coastal stones. Please bring some examples along with some thought of how you may display them. On the following Saturday 20th October, 2007, there will be another daiza making workshop at Ray Nesci’s Bonsai Nursery, Sagars Road, Dural. We will start at 9 a.m. and finish at about 4.00 p.m. Please bring your lunch, stones, wood and tools you will need to create some masterpieces. Coffee and tea will be kindly supplied by Ray.

See you all then,
Brenda