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NOVEMBER NEWSLETTER 2007

Dear Members,

Over the past couple of months a few of our members have explored the beaches south of Sydney and spent some leisurely time with family and friends.

Of course in true suiseki style they couldn't help themselves when perusing the lovely beaches along that stretch of coastline and came home with 'you-know-what' in their pockets – stones, beautifully coloured and shaped stones that were tumbled free of charge by Mother Nature herself on the beaches pounded by centuries of waves, wind and sandblasting to produce beautiful specimens in the most brilliant colours I have seen. These were displayed at a couple of our meetings and they are very reminiscent of the Rain Flower Pebbles of China.

At one of our earlier meetings Dr. Yuru Chen came to show us his collection of these small but very artistically 'designed' stones and they are certainly a marvel in nature especially when displayed in a shallow tray of water to highlight their dimensions. Unless seen for yourself they are very difficult to describe in writing. Dr. Chen, while working in Brisbane for 12 months, organized a display of his collection in Brisbane together with some traditional Chinese paintings by talented local painters originally from Taiwan and Hong Kong, and several stones collected from Australia.

As this will be our last newsletter for this year you will now have some light reading for over the Christmas break. I thought I would include an article by John Menadue and in this article he describes the stones so exact that I couldn't do them this much justice. Also if you were interested on reading more about these marvels you can search the internet and type in 'Chinese Rain Flower Pebbles' and then 'search' and you will be amazed at learning more on this art form. I wouldn't say it is suiseki but I think we are all interested in stones in general that it will broaden our outlook and appreciate other arts associated with stones.

So enjoy,
Happy Hunting,
Brenda

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

'To observe, study, and collect rocks allows one to marvel at the natural beauty and complexity of our planet.'

- Anon

Hello 'Rock Hounds'

As we approach the next few months and hopefully your spring bonsai chores have been attended to, you will have more time available to get stuck into some serious woodworking. With Christmas only a matter of weeks away (8 or so), now is the time to start preparing your Santa wish list. Perhaps a bigger and better rotary tool, some accessory that has caught your eye or a set of tungsten carbide bits, the list is endless.

This month we'll talk about some rotary tool attachments and techniques.

If you have a routing or driwall attachment, you'll know how easy it is to remove waste material to an even depth. Some things to remember when using these attachments with router bits or other carving bits are:

1. **Direction of Travel (DOT):** *In which direction should the tool be moving, left or right?*

All rotary tools rotate in the same direction. If you're looking at the bit from above the work, the bit will be rotating in a clockwise direction. The **DOT** should be against the clockwise rotation of the bit. In other words, the **DOT** will be anti clockwise to the cutting edge of the bit. If you were routing an edge on the outside of your Daizas, you would be moving in an anti clockwise direction, right to left against the timber. If you were removing waste from the inside of your Daizas, you would be moving left to right against the timber. I know, left to right is clockwise but it is anti clockwise to the rotation of the bit, ok? Why does this matter? If you move anti clockwise against the rotation of the bit, the cutting edges of the bit will pull it into the timber; you will have more control and get a cleaner and easier cut. If you move clockwise with the rotation, the bit will tend to push itself away from the timber making it more difficult to control and more likely that it will jerk and cause some damage to the Daiza.

If all of this sounds a bit complicated think about a power saw. You always push the saw through the timber. Have you ever seen anyone pulling a power saw through a piece of timber or drilling a hole with the drill in reverse? The principals are the same for routers.

2. **Tool Speed:** *How fast should the tool go?*

Ok, so you have 10 daizas to make and one workshop a month, so you'll crank it up and rip through them in no time at all. Not the way to go.

There is no set speed for every type of bit available. The general rules are:

* For routing / carving / sanding the speed should be set between 2 - 6 on the tool.

The speed of the tool should not slow too much once you have started using it. If the tool starts to slow noticeably, don't use as much force or increase the speed a little.

3. **Effort :** *How much force is required to move the tool?*

The effort will depend on the type of timber (hard or soft) and the type of bit you are using. For example, if you are routing a piece of western red cedar with a small diameter bit, you would move the tool fairly quickly without laboring the tool. If you were hesitant and moved too slowly the bit could start to overheat and you would get some burning of the timber and bit. If you were using a larger bit on the same piece of timber, you would move more slowly.

Generally, it is a matter of trial and error between the tool speed and the effort required to do the job efficiently.

Main points are;

1. Don't use a higher speed than is required, you will overheat the bit and possible burn the work.
2. Don't use too little speed, the bit will tear rather than cut with poor results.
3. Don't use too much effort, you will overload the tool and get poor results on your work.
4. Don't use too little effort, you will burn the bit and the timber and you will be wasting time.

As in all aspects of wood working, if you are unsure, practice on a scrap piece to get the correct feel for the job you are about to do. A few minutes spent doing this could save you some grief further down the track.

Finally, you need to make sure that your bits are kept clean and sharp. Check while you are using them and if you see that they are clogging or burnishing, stop and clean them. This is particularly important with the tungsten burrs as they can clog quite quickly and will not work effectively. A good way to clean them is with a small metal brush (available most hardware shops) or a dentist type probe. If they have become hardened with tar and pitch (caused by overheating) they can be cleaned by soaking in oven cleaner and then brushing out with a toothbrush and clean water (wear gloves), spray with WD40 or similar after cleaning.

Next newsletter more about the different types of bits and how you can use them.

So long till next time,
G&J

IMPORTANT NOTICE

As mentioned earlier, this will be the last newsletter for this year and we will resume again in February, 2008 ready to start another exciting year in stone collecting. We will endeavour to bring you more news of what is happening overseas and any new techniques on how to prepare and display our stones.

On the business side of proceedings this year we offered all of our members free membership, but unfortunately from February next year a membership fee of \$15.00 per person (or group) for a yearly subscription will be issued due to the rising costs of printing and postage.

If this year was your first year with us a \$5.00 joining fee will also be applicable together with the \$15.00 (Total \$20), and for original members it will be \$15.00.

I trust you have enjoyed our newsletter in the past 12 months and we have tried to bring you the best information and hints that we could possibly bring you.

You can forward your **cheques or money orders payable to Suiseki Australia, P.O. Box 4510, North Rocks, N.S.W. 2151** no later than the 31st January, 2008 to be eligible to receive the first newsletter in February.

Looking forward to welcoming all of our members back in the New Year.

P.S. Don't forget to put your name and address on the back of your cheques or money orders.

CHINESE RAIN FLOWER PEBBLES

By John Menadue

As the ancient Chinese legend goes, when Master Monk Yun Guang was expounding the texts of Buddhism, Heaven was so moved that it rained colourful flowers down onto the earth. When those flowers fell on the ground, they turned into colourful stones.

Recently, I attended a gemstone exhibition at Redeemer College, Rochedale in Brisbane. It was presented by the Friendstone Xuan Viewing Stone Art Workshop, a project run by Dr. Yuru Chen. Dr. Chen, who is on a 12 month stay in Australia, is a visiting scientist at Griffith University. The exhibition of more than 250 stones gave him a chance to share his interest of rain flower pebbles and viewing stones with the Brisbane community. I am grateful to Dr. Yuru Chen, who (despite our language differences) introduced me to a truly beautiful and unique Chinese treasure.

Rather than the beautiful fairytale, geologists have a different explanation for the stones' formation. It is believed that rain flower pebbles were formed 12 million years ago. Natural agate contained in volcanic rocks around Nanjing were washed by the Yangtze River for millions of years and gradually developed into colourfully patterned pebbles.

Rain flower pebbles abound in the conglomerate stratum at Rain Flower Terrace. This stratum is thought to have been formed between three and twelve million years ago. Around that time the ancient Yangtze River (and others) flowed through Nanjing carrying pieces of weathered rocks and minerals from its upper reaches and nearby mountains. Through water action, with rock rubbing on rock, different shaped pebbles were formed. They were deposited in the ancient river bed and formed a conglomerate stratum. Nanjing is situated at the lower reaches of the Yangtze River, and all kinds of pebbles gathered here to form the stratum. Due to movement in the Earth's crust, this stratum was raised 50 to 60 metres higher, with most of it exposed on the earth's surface, allowing the pebbles to be easily found. Other stratum (similarly formed) may lay buried deep underground elsewhere. In recent years a new conglomerate stratum has been discovered about 200 metres underground at Shanghai.

The Rain Flower Terrace occupies around 153 hectares, and is located in the south of Nanjing. The platform on which the Monk's preaching took place became known as the Rain Flower Platform and later the name extended to the whole mound. This mound was about 60 metres high and 2 kilometres wide. The colourful pebbles found around the Rain Flower Terrace have therefore been called Rain Flower Pebbles, although normally that name is only applied to those pebbles that are considered worthy of appreciation and collection. In China they are referred to as Yuhuashi. The Rain Flower Terrace is a very beautiful spot that is rich in historical monuments as well as natural scenery. Rain flower pebbles have become an important symbol of Nanjing, forming part of its culture and tradition.

The pebbles have a remarkable array of different colours as well as a lively translucent appearance, meaning that they appear to transmit light yet are not transparent. They are considered to be a national treasure of China. The Nanjing Museum of Rain Flower Pebbles collects and researches these agate-like stones, one of which was taken to the 24th Seoul Olympic Games as the "Peace Lucky Stone" by the delegation of China. In 1990, 651 exquisite rain flower pebbles specially chosen from thousands of pebbles belonging to 200 collectors in Nanjing were exhibited in the China Modern History Museum and praised as pearls of the East. These picture stones have also been described as opals of the orient. While these descriptions are admirable, to my mind rain flower pebbles seem to be most closely aligned with agate. Chinese scholars agree, however China opal (component: SiO₂ + H₂O) also belongs to the rain flower pebble family. Sometimes called protein stone, this China opal has a different colour and appearance when compared with Australian opal.

Rain flower pebbles, or yuhuashi are a curious combination of agate, opal, jasper, quartz, flint, etc. Those pebbles containing agate are called agate stones or rain-flower agate. They are the outstanding specimens amongst all rain flower pebbles. Given the wide assortment of these pebbles, their formation and chemical composition are varied and complicated. As far as the agate stones are concerned it is generally believed they came from primary agate formed by the remnants of magma. These remnants filled the small openings of basalt or rhyolite, and became agate balls or agate veins according to the shape of the opening. Up to this point we could be describing Queensland agate, except that now the primary agate

material is separated from the basalt by natural forces and becomes agate stones through the action of flowing water (over a very long time).

Rain flower pebbles are visually striking stones with beautiful naturally occurring designs. They are reputed for the natural beauty of their vein and colour. The stones fall into two categories – monochrome, which are several variations and tints of the one colour, and multicoloured. Colouring is determined by the chemical composition of the minerals within the stone. Australian agate enthusiasts will know that primary agate is mostly silicon dioxide, with small traces of chemical compounds. The elements within these compounds have different colours – iron is red or yellow, copper is blue or green, manganese is purple or pink, and silicon dioxide is white or colourless. Various shades of colour appear in the veins depending on the quantity of the element present. It is the colour and veins of the pebbles that interplay to form an infinite variety of pictures and designs.

Every stone is unique – a different picture or design, limited only by one's imagination. Dr. Chen's display included a set of stones, each a representative picture of the four seasons. Nature is a common pictorial theme with images of the sun, moon, mountains, valleys and rivers visible on pebbles. One neat trick that is used when displaying these pebbles is sometimes to combine two or more individual stones to form one picture. One example I have seen is a 3-person family (6 stones), each person represented by two stones, the top stone being the head with detailed facial features (hair, eyes, smiling mouth) with the bottom stone being the body complete with appropriate clothing. Another example, which I photographed at the exhibition, was of an angry monkey and an owl. The variety is infinite and unfortunately any photographs that are published with this article will not do justice to the collection.

Many readers may be familiar with the colour and beauty of agate, particularly those found around Agate Creek in far North Queensland. These originated about 150 million years ago (some earlier) and were associated with volcanic activity. Given that Queensland arguably has some of the best agates in the world, why my interest in these Chinese agate stones? Queensland agates (and probably most other agates around the world) get their beauty from within the stone – i.e. the stones must be cut and polished, cabochon, tumbled, sliced, or even sometimes carved into cameos to reveal the inner beauty of the agate. Fossickers will know that most agates look more like a mouldy old potato when they are first found. Agates vary in size from a small bird egg to a football. When fossicking, the only time you may actually see the beautiful colouring is if you stumble upon a chip or broken piece, revealing the beauty within and allowing the piece to be easily spotted. Even then, these broken pieces still require cutting and polishing, etc.

Most rain flower pebbles are not cut, polished, tumbled, carved, or sliced. They are found with their beauty already revealed. If you only found rain flower pebbles, your gem club equipment would remain unused. The pebble surface has a high degree of luster as it has been polished naturally by water action over millions of years. The stones are best presented for viewing by placing them in a small white bowl of water. When the pebbles are placed in clear water, tiny cavities on the surface are filled with the water molecules, producing deflected light that turns the natural colour mosaics into various pictures and patterns such as animals, plants, landscapes, celestial objects, and human figures.

The stones are best appreciated individually or in small groups for their truly unique and aesthetic beauty. Lesser quality stones have been used in quantities in ornamental gardens and as aquarium stones.

I have read that water worn agate pebbles are found in alluvial gravels around the Beechworth area (Vic) and some streams of the Dandenong Ranges near Melbourne. Perhaps readers with knowledge of these areas could comment on how this water worn agate material compares with the Chinese rain flower pebbles? One can only speculate that if North Queensland's Agate Creek (usually dry) were similar to the mighty Yangtze River, then Queensland may have had their own version of rain flower pebbles.

Acknowledgements:

1. Thanks to Dr Yuru Chen for his time and assistance with information.
2. Thanks to Redeemer College, Rochedale for providing the exhibition venue.

References:

1. Stones City Website: <http://www.friendstone.com> (Chinese language only)
2. Jiangshu Ancient Books Press/Hong Kong. Jiabin Press, Album Rain Flower Pebble Treasure, 1989. Nanjing/Hong Kong, P.R. China

NEXT MEETING

Our next meeting will be held on the 21st November, 2008 at the North Rocks Community Centre, North Rocks Road, North Rocks again to start by 7.30 p.m. sharp.

Our theme for the night will be water pool stones, so bring along those fine examples along to share with all of us.

Xmas message

On behalf of suiseki Australia, I would like to wish each and every one of you and your families a very happy, healthy and safe Christmas and holiday season.

looking forward to hearing from you all in the new year.