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MARCH NEWSLETTER 2012

Dear Members,

[Inspiration for this article was written with the kind permission of Tom Elias.]

In southern China is where the finest wax stones are found and have been revered by the Chinese for many generations. These stones are very lustrous, silky and have a wax-like surface texture and are found mainly in colours of yellows and browns; however there are some that are found in white, red, brown and some that are a rarer colours of green, purple and black.

These stones register 6.5 to 7.5 on the Mohs scale which is similar to the hardness of jade and are composed of varying high levels of silica in the form of quartz. It is the impurities that have filtered through the quartz over many years that give the different colours.

These stones can be found in southern and northern China and are also found in countries like Malaysia, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and as far west as India. It is though that in China, the better stones are found of great quality and are found in Guangdong, Guangxi, Fujian and Yunnan Provinces.

For several hundred years it was the Yellow Wax Stones that were collected and displayed as artistic objects in China. These stones were first mentioned in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644); however it wasn't until the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) that wax stones were added to the stone appreciation culture.

For hundreds of years very large wax stones were displayed in gardens and the smaller ones were often displayed indoors as art objects. In the high-end jewellery trade these stones are elaborately carved and they are also used for carving beautiful pieces of sculpture.

In recent years there have been five books published wholly and solely on these stones and one in particular is the 348-page 'China Chaozhou Yellow Wax Stone Encyclopedia'. There are 5 main grading categories just on the texture of the stones and they are:

Frozen Wax (Dong La) has a surface texture that resembles frozen fatty pork.

Mastic Wax (Jiao La) has a transparent or semi-transparent texture that looks like congealed wax.

Smooth Wax (You La or Xi La) has a smooth texture and the stone is often thick and appears slick with a simple elegant appearance. This is the most popular among Chinese collectors.

Crystal Wax (Jing La) with a high percentage of quartz it has a very crystal-like appearance.

Rough Wax (Cu La) has a texture that looks and appears soft and rough. These are usually the larger stones used as garden stones.

In southern China quality wax stones are often displayed in very elaborate carved daizas and are typical of the way these stones are displayed.

The local farmers dig in the mountains or in the sand along river beds to find wax stones. They are naturally worn and shaped by being continually tumbled in the river beds. The upper reaches of the Lisong River produces very large wax stones often weighing several tons, while the lower reaches of the Mawei River produces stones as small as a fist. Most of the stones are collected in the winter months when the river levels are at their lowest. To me, this description reminds me of the stones we have collected over the years at the head of the Shoalhaven River which we call *Chert. There are many fine examples of Chert within our club in the varying colours as described earlier.

It doesn't matter in which province in China where these stones are found, they still remain one of the most sought after viewing stones in China. The famous modern Chinese writer Lu Xu described the wax stone as "The most honest and the most profound art in its unpolished condition".

Speaking to Tom, he says that we should look more to China and North America for examples of good viewing stones because Australia has more in common with these two countries than with Japan. He says that the arid areas of Australia should have some nice *ventifact stones that may be similar to those found in the vast Gobi Desert. During the dry season, the stream beds in the Kimberleys should yield some very nice stones.

All I can say is, "when are we going there?"

Happy Hunting,
Brenda

**Chert - a cryptocrystalline variety of quartz. Composed of interlocking grains generally not discernible under the microscope. A compact siliceous rock of varying colour composed of microorganisms or precipitated silica grains.*

**Ventifact – A general term for any stone or pebble shaped, worn, faceted, cut or polished by the abrasive or sandblast action of windblown sand, generally under desert conditions.*

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

'Stones add more effect to the scenery by erosion and weathering,
And form the basis of the natural harmonious beauty together with vegetation.'
- Onuki Chuzo

George and Johns 'Timely Timber & Tool Tips'

March 2012

Hello 'Rock Hounds'

So much for summer, we did have one, it happened last Friday when it didn't rain and the temperature soared to an almost unbearable 31c. On the upside, once the water has subsided from creeks and streams there should be an abundance of new stone material to be collected.

Just before Christmas our local council had one of their regular cleanups when all sorts of 'collectables' can be had by the discerning scavenger. I spotted a couple of wardrobes and on closer inspection discovered that although the doors were made from solid timber boards with a 50s / 60s style light coloured veneer, the drawers were made from solid silky oak. The side and back panels were made from plywood which also had one silky oak side. This was a real find and after getting them back home and disassembling the pieces I could see a lot of potential for daizas and bonsai tables. All that's required now is to get to work on some carving and joinery.



Grevillea Robusta bonsai - displayed on a Silky Oak stand

Silky Oak (Southern Silky Oak / Australian Silver-oak).

Botanical Name; *Grevillea Robusta*

Silky Oak is the largest species in the genus *Grevillea*, growing to a height of between 18-35 meters, with trunks in excess of 1 metre. It is a native of the eastern coast of Australia in riverine, subtropical and dry rainforest environments. It is fast growing with dark green delicately dented fernlike leaves, 15-30 cm long with greyish white or rusty undersides. Its flowers are golden orange toothbrush-like blooms, 8-15 cm long; flowers can be used for honey production.

Silky oak cannot be grown in a colony / plantation situation and most timber that is available now is either recycled or collected from old growth forests. There are severe restrictions on the harvesting of this tree now as the number of trees has been depleted. A common substitute for silky oak is *Cardwellia sublimis* or Northern Silky Oak. This tree is a member of the proteaceae genus but is not a grevillea. The timber is similar in appearance but the grain is not as pronounced, also, the leaves and flowers are different.

Silky Oak is used widely throughout Australia as a specimen / street planting (hopefully not under power cables etc.). It is also used extensively overseas.

The wood has a natural resistance to rot and was used for external window frames and other joinery before the advent of aluminium. It was also used in cabinet and furniture making, also for casks, butter boxes and milk buckets.

The timber is light and easy to work and finishes well. It's high point (as far as daiza / table making goes) is its beautiful grain. This can be either long or spotted, depending on how the timber is milled.

The colour is light to dark honey. Our recommended way of finishing is to seal the grain with sanding sealer, sand till smooth and then oil and buff with Organoil or similar.

That's it for now, so long till next time,
G&J

THIS MONTH'S ROCK FEATURE: Limestone

Limestone is a common marine sedimentary rock made of calcium carbonate. It forms when precipitating calcite or microscopic fossils accumulate on the sea floor, or from cemented shell material, or even entire ancient coral reefs. Limestone is immediately identifiable as it fizzes when a drop of acid is placed on it. Limestone displays a variety of attractive colours and patterns, and is often polished and used for decorative purposes, such as tiles, bench tops, and building facades – its use as a building material dates back to ancient times. Limestone will metamorphose into marble when subjected to heat and pressure.

Daiza making workshop dates for 2012

(These workshops are held at Nesci's Bonsai Nursery, 26 Sagars Road, Dural, from 9.00am to 5.00pm. Tea and coffee will be supplied and all you have to bring along are your power tools, stones and wood pieces, and of course your lunch and something for morning and afternoon tea).

The invitation is out to all stone collectors at the various bonsai clubs who would like to come along on these dates to see how wooden carved daizas are made for our stones. If you happen to be visiting Sydney on any of these dates please come visit us. You don't have to be a member of Suiseki Australia you just have to love stones, so come along and join us at any of the following dates. You will be very welcome – come and share the passion!

10th March

21st April

12th May

16th June

21st July

11th August

22nd September

13th October

NEXT MEETING

Our next meeting will be on the 21st March at the Don Moore Community Centre, North Rocks Road, North Rocks commencing at 7.30pm.

Please bring along a well displayed stone and any show-and-tell items. George will be bringing along some meteorites for us to see from his collection in line with the very popular television series – “Meteorite Men” on their vast travels around the world chasing these one of a kind treasures from outer space.

Attached is a great article by Frank Kelly from Canberra on his recent trip to Japan.



A couple of examples of daizas made at the workshops at Nesci's nursery.

