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## **APRIL NEWSLETTER 2012**

Dear Members,

When I first started collecting and appreciating stones, I was just a small child and every time we went on family picnics I would always come home with a collection. This collection always included different types of coloured stones, driftwood and shells. To this day I still have a few stones from those collecting trips. Our family picnics were often held at Hallett's Cove in Adelaide which I have since found out was discovered in 1837 by John Hallet whilst he was searching for some missing live-stock.

The cliffs to the north of the beach are part of the Hallett Cove Conservation Park and here there are several significant geological features. These include glacial striations on the cliff top, which was first discovered by Professor Ralph in 1877, which provides evidence for the \**Permian* glaciation of southern Australia. There are also a number of large \**glacial erratics* on the beach.

\**Permian* – The last of seven periods (six outside of North America) of the Paleozoic Era; also the system of rocks deposited during that period.

\**Glacial erratics* – Those large water-worn and ice-borne boulders which are scattered so generally. A transported rock fragment different from the bedrock on which it lies, either free or as part of a sediment. The term is generally applied to fragments transported by glacier ice or by floating ice.

When I look back on my love of stones, it seems so long ago (giving my age away here), and when I think how long ago the scribes and scholars in China were collecting stones it seems my memories are just a drop in a bucket of water. These ancient stones are what we all know as Scholars' Rocks – for years I couldn't appreciate them because in my mind they didn't represent anything I could recognize e.g. a mountain, an animal, a human or an object. To me they just looked like rocks with unusual shapes and holes in them. How wrong I was and now I can fully appreciate them so much more. Was it my lack of knowledge in my earlier years, coupled with the lack of information about them? I think so!

In ancient times the Chinese believed that rocks were the bones of the world, and what a romantic way of looking at them. It was in the beginning of the Tang dynasty (618-907) that natural rare stones were collected and displayed in their gardens. The Tang dynasty marked the beginning of stone collecting in China. It was also in this dynasty that a set of four aesthetic qualities for the rocks were set down: thinness, openness, perforations and wrinkling.

Even before the Tang dynasty there is scant recorded evidence that in the Han dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD) that large stones were also used as garden decorations. One of the first garden designs built was by Han emperor Wudi (Liu Che, 156-87 BC; or 140-87 BC) and consisted of a large pond with four island-mountains. Later emperors also built similar gardens.

It was in the Song dynasty (960-1279) rare stones reached new heights. Scholar-officials began placing small stones in their studios and referred to them as *gongshi* a term written with the characters for “respect” and “stone”. The Song dynasty is known as the golden age of stone collecting.

Even though collecting these stones has spanned many centuries, it was during the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) that collecting stones became popular among the common people and was no longer limited to the more cultural elite. Over the centuries some stones were buried in their collectors’ tombs to be lost forever but because of the legacy of the many paintings, poems and essays by the scribes, these stones will ‘live’ forever.

It was interesting to read that these scholars’ stones are “ancient” but that doesn’t mean because of their geological age, but rather the possession of them by connoisseurs during China’s dynastic periods. After all, all stones are old!

Lin Youlin (1578-1647) published The Suyuan Stone catalogue in 1613 and a 20<sup>th</sup> century stone collector, Zhang Lunyuan compared Lin’s collection to that of Song dynasty stone collector Mi Fu and observed:

‘Lin owned fewer stones than governor Mi. But judging by the paintings, all of Lin’s stones were first-class. He studied paintings all day and so was able to understand them.’

There are many types of Scholars’ stones including Yongning Stones, Kunshun Stones, Taihu Stones, Ying Stones and Lingbi Stones and these are named mainly from which area they are found. They are all usually dug up from the depths of the earth and it is the Lingbi Stones that are the most sought after. Wang Shouquan of the Ming dynasty wrote, “I think Lingbi Stones are the best *gongshi* for appreciation. Their peaks and caves are naturally made, with holes linking one another, black in colour, and resonant.” Wen Zhenheng, also of the Ming dynasty wrote, “Among *gonshi*, Lingbi stones are the best, while Ying stones are the second best.”

With reference to Lingbi stones being resonant, means that when one of these stones is lightly tapped with a small piece of metal the stone makes a ‘ringing’ or ‘chiming’ noise. Over the years, slices of these stones were used for musical instruments and used for religious ceremonies.

I think I am just starting to understand these stones and their complexities and it is only the tip of the iceberg as far as they are concerned. I hope I have helped in some way for you to understand them a little as well? Their shapes and colours are complex and it has taken many millions of years for them to be formed in this way with the many curves and holes formed when the softer surrounding materials in the stones were eroded away. This erosion all happened underground and then they were dug up during the many centuries of the dynasties. These are very important stones indeed with many historical ties to the great notable scholars and scribes.

I came across another interesting notation whilst researching this subject and in it I read that rocks with no artificial carvings are preferred, as we all know, but rocks would sometimes be carved and then thrown back into a river or lake so that many of the marks could be washed away! Of course it would be wonderful if all the perforations, holes and curves were done wholly and solely by the forces of nature but for the sake of art many are drilled, ground and polished to enhance their beauty. This should not of course detract from the finished product as we should still appreciate these stones as a work of art in its own right. To quote Tao:

“The essence of the principle of the ‘uncarved rock’ is that things in their own original simplicity contain their own natural power, power that is easily spoiled and lost when that simplicity is changed.”

My memories of collecting stones in my early childhood years now seems so insignificant but it gave me the good grounding to appreciate them even to this very day and I will continue to do so.

Happy Hunting,  
Brenda

*Reference: 'Scholars' Rocks in Ancient China' – Kemin Hu.*

*(Ms. Kemin Hu is the author of three books, The Spirit of Gongshi: Chinese Scholars' Rocks, and Scholars' Rocks of Ancient China – Suyuan Stone Catalogue, as well as Modern Chinese Scholars' Rocks – A Guide for Collectors.*

*Many praise her as the most renowned female connoisseur of Scholars' rocks in 400 years)*

*'Beyond Suiseki – Ancient Asian Viewing Stones of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' – Manette Gerstle*

### **THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH**

'I once said that fine specimens of calligraphy, famous paintings, inscriptions on ancient bronzes and stone tablets, are all capable of helping people to find detachment.'

- Mi Fu



Some examples of Scholars' Stones displayed on their very decorative daizas. Don't forget to visit the [vsana.org](http://vsana.org) website for more information on more stones like this and of the Lingbi stones.

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George and Johns 'Timely Timber & Tool Tips'

April 2012

Hello 'Rock Hounds'

With The recent passing of Willi Benz I thought I'd revisit his book '*SUISEKI- The Asian Art of Beautiful Stones*'. I bought this book when I first became interested in the art of Suiseki and read it at the time. I was suitably impressed with the images of the stones- most likely from his own collection - but at the time, a lot of the text seemed to be very technical. I'd gone back occasionally for a quick perusal but hadn't really read it through for a second time. Now that I have a little more experience with Suiseki, I find that the technical side of the book makes a lot more sense. I feel that this book is one of, if not the, best western publications for understanding the aesthetics and the practicalities of Suiseki collection.

Many of us have bought stones on line, or from retail outlets that came with crude, mass produced daizas. Alternatively, you may have a stone that you made a daiza for some years ago and now feel that, with your acquired expertise, it could be better displayed in a new daiza.

Willi has posed some questions to consider when thinking about a daiza for a stone, whether it be newly acquired or a remake of an old daiza.

**Question: what does the stone suggest to you?**

Think about how it would be best displayed. Perhaps a Suiban (tray) would be a better choice. Some stones lend themselves to display either in daiza or suiban, why not have both?

**Question: what colour is the stone?**

The colour of the wood should be complimentary to the stone. This will increase the overall power of the stone. Use the wood grain to accentuate the stone i.e. wood grain running horizontally to enhance the length as in a mountain range or wood grain running vertically to enhance the height as in a scholar stone.

**Question: does the stone create a powerful, rugged image, or a more delicate impression?**

As in the colour, the daiza style should be complimentary. A heavy, chunky design would be suitable for a large stone, whereas a simple, understated daiza is more suited to a delicate stone.

**Question: is the base of the stone larger than the top, or does it have an inverse taper as in some scholar stones?**

Regardless of the shape of the stone, the finished work should have harmony and balance. This is relatively easy with stones where the base is larger than the apex, particularly if the stone has a flat bottom. With vertical stones, especially scholar type stones where the weight of the stone is towards the top, more care has to be taken to ensure that the balance is right (think of a gymnast doing a one-handed hand stand). The stone should appear to be stable and not in danger of toppling over. There are ratios to determine the height of the daiza in comparison to the stone – as in bonsai and the pot), but these are only guides.

There are other considerations to think about such as style and number of legs, how simple or ornate should the daiza be and what finish should be used. As in bonsai, the daiza is complimentary to the stone and shouldn't be the focal point of the display. There are some ordinary stones out there with beautifully worked daizas, but surely this is missing the point!

More of Will Benz in forthcoming newsletters, thank you Willi.

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

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## PICTURE GALLERY



Kiama Sunrise – sunrise over Cathedral Rocks at Kiama on the south coast of New South Wales about 1 ½ hours south of Sydney.



Wave Rock located near Hyden in Western Australia. It is about 14 metres high and 110 metres long and is composed of granite formed 2700 million years ago. The grey, red, brown and yellow vertical stripes are chemical deposits of carbonates and iron hydroxide brought about by rains.

See you all at our next daiza workshop on the 12<sup>th</sup> May or at our next meeting on the 16<sup>th</sup> May.