

DESIGN

THE FRONT

The design of bonsai is ultimately based upon one's artistic intuition. However, over the past centuries, guidelines, which assist in making decisions, have been developed, and should be respected. The first decision one needs to make in designing bonsai is to select a front viewing position. In selecting a front, always try to work with nature, not against it. However, in looking towards nature, we must remember that our interest is not indiscriminate, but focuses upon the ideal, however elusive it might be. With that in mind, there are certain features of a tree which are important to consider when choosing a front:

1. Surface roots should be spread to the side, not in the front.
2. Trunk should have angles and curves - the most interesting, natural line.
3. Branches should alternate, with the first branch (usually the primary) about one-third up the trunk. The first back branch (for depth) should be between the primary and secondary branches.
4. Branches should angle to the side. Lower branches should not extend out to the front (trunk should be exposed).
5. Overall shape should have the potential of being pruned, generally in a triangular shape, with a good taper and apex.
6. Compromises - do not be a slave to the guidelines. The best bonsai break some rules. Compromises are always necessary.

THE ILLUSION

The art of bonsai generally lies in one's ability to create an artistic illusion of an aged tree in nature. This illusion is based upon the following concepts:

1. Agelessness (young, graceful trees excepted)
2. Simplicity
3. Asymmetry (as in nature)
4. Line and focus
5. Balance and harmony
6. Scale and proportion (for the illusion of an old tree, height should equal six times the circumference of trunk at its base (literati-style excepted))
7. Perspective (depth)
8. Movement (bends or curves)
9. Drama (as suitable)

DESIGN - SOME FEATURES TO AVOID

1. Lateral, bar, and parallel branches
2. Lower branches angling upwards
3. Foliage growing under branches, or straight upward
4. Crossing branches
5. Tree moving or slanting away from viewer
6. Pigeon breast (trunk curved outward toward viewer)
7. Branches in the curve of the tree