



The Three R Bonsai Exhibition: *Restoration - Resurrection - Renewal*

by Bob Hilvers

The theme of the next Clark Bonsai Collection Exhibition, to run from April 10 to July 17, is *Restoration - Resurrection - Renewal*. Featured in this newest exhibition are bonsai that have been restored to their original aesthetic concept after languishing in obscurity; bonsai that have been resurrected from near oblivion due to neglect by previous owners or ravaged by time, insects and mother nature; and bonsai that have been given a new lease on life as renewed examples of the art. Long-time supporters of the Clark Bonsai Collection and new visitors alike will find delight and fascination with this exhibition as many of the bonsai have never been displayed before.

Many people are curious about how a bonsai gets to be a bonsai, wondering - where do bonsai come from? Are they conjured out of thin air by Zen mystics? Do they grow from “bonsai seeds” into the engaging forms of miniature trees we so enjoy? Or, seemingly even more amazing to many of our visitors, are these beautiful and mesmerizing images of trees intentionally created by the hand of an artist the same way as other art is? The latter, of course, is how bonsai come to be and is no less intriguing than the other explanations of how bonsai are created. Each bonsai has a story to tell, and the storyteller is the artist who created it.

Yet there is more to understand about how bonsai come to be and that starts with a plant. Among the many sources for plant material used in the creation of bonsai: nursery stock from seed or cutting and the ubiquitous *Yamadori*, native plants harvested from the wild; there is a source that is rarely discussed: many bonsai are created, or perhaps more accurately re-created, from other bonsai. They are recycled. While the Clark Bonsai Collection functions as a museum and original works of art are respected and maintained as the artist envisioned, many times, we receive donations of bonsai that have been neglected so that their original aesthetic value has been lost and they must be restored. Some are degraded so badly that their aesthetic value is destroyed. In rare cases, like the mythical phoenix, it is possible to resurrect these bonsai and give them new life. Often, we receive bonsai that are mediocre in design and have no special provenance to preserve, yet hold the potential to become fine examples of the bonsai art. These are renewed by restyling them into more exciting and contemporary designs.

We invite you to visit the *Restoration - Resurrection - Renewal* Exhibit. Discover for yourself how to interpret the stories of bonsai and the artists who created them and their journeys of restoration, resurrection and renewal.

