



Thank you, Wil

Last month we suggested *sugata-ishi* for the Stone of the Month. As part of the description we said that these stones can include “stones with shapes that resemble birds, or other animals, religious icons such as the Buddha” or some “manmade objects such as boats, bridges, or small huts.” That narrative inspired an interesting conversation and we wondered if we needed to publish a retraction. The opinion expressed was that *sugata-ishi* only refers to *human* shaped forms.

Because we do not consider ourselves to be experts we reached out to the man who is, Wil in Japan. We are over the moon that Wil agreed to write about the subject. You will be, too. Please see pages 3-7.

Stone of the Month

Last month the decision to make *sugata-ishi* the Stone of the Month was wholly inspired by a gift from Diane Winters, John Naka’s granddaughter. Diane reminded us that John’s Kannon appears in ‘Bonsai Techniques II’ on page 412. John’s father-in-law made the daiza and it is signed by John and dated 10.16.66. John collected it (see pg 12) from the Kern River and we are thrilled to have it and the conversation the theme induced.

This month let’s share stones that suggest coolness. Send me uncropped photos of your water based stones, lakes, pools, waterfalls, waves crashing on the shoreline, *mizutamari-ishi*, *taki-ishi* and *iwagata-ishi*, but, let’s save island stones, *shimagata-ishi*, for August. Below Jim Greaves’ display of his coastal rock and wave.



Panamint Valley, 5 x 3 7/8 x 3.5 (12.7 x 9.8 x 8.9 cm)

Suiseki in California

The following was published in Aiseki Magazine in May 2014.

Our Trips to Japan, Part 2

We made it to Tokyo a day before the strongest snow storm in 45 years giving us a day to travel to Ueno Park to view the 88th Nippon Bonsai Association Exhibit. Their display is the epicenter of all bonsai. Nowhere on earth could one see such a collection of bonsai, large and small. And of course, we travelled to the Green Club to see what was for sale. I was immediately taken by a shohin size bonsai pot. The price, written in chalk on the bottom of the pot, read 30 something. I figured \$30 or maybe \$300 dollars (American). The vendor, Tomohiro Masumi, explained what the mark meant. It was \$3,000, a bit too precious for our wallet. We just looked.

By the next day the blizzard had shut down Tokyo. We are not used to snow. In the winter, on a clear day, we may see snow capped mountains 60 miles north of Los Angeles but not in Laguna Beach where there was an inch of snow in January, 1949. Blizzard or not, that evening we left the hotel and walked a few blocks in the storm to enjoy our first meal in Japan. By morning all the roads were open allowing us to travel back to Ueno Park to view the first ever Japan Suiseki Exhibition and see our stone, once owned by our teacher’s teacher, Katayama Ichiu, on display (below). 14 x 4.5 x 5



Hopefully, you were at the show and understand, somewhat, the flood of emotion that poured out with each step one took entering the first room. Stones you may have seen only in books, inches from your eyes, one after another, some in tokonoma

The answers from June's quiz, page 12

- 1) Garnet Hill
- 2) Garnet Hill
- 3) Panamint Valley
- 4) Saddle Peak Hills *
- 5) Yuha
- 6) Saddle Peak Hills *
- 7) Lake Hill *
- 8) Salt Spring Hills

*Specific site, Dumont Dunes, now in Death Valley

Stone of the Month: Sugata-ishi (figure stones) Measurements are in inches, w x h x d



John Mortensen: 7 x 13 x 5 Kern River



Peter Bloomer: 2.5 x 1.5 x .4 Garnet Hill, CA



Butch Buddingh: 9.5 x 7 x 2 China



Butch Buddingh: 4.5 x 4 x 1.75 Maybe China, source unknown



Jack Levy: 8 x 6 x 4 Yuha Desert



Linda Gill: 3 x 2.5 x 3 Yuha Desert



Jack Sustic: 9 x 7 x 4.5 Jeju Island, South Korea

The 1 inch wide inner margins are designed for use with a 3 hole punch.



“Tomayto Tomahto – On the Fluid Nature of Tradition”

by Wil in Japan

In the last newsletter *sugata ishi* were called for as July’s “Stone of the Month”, citing Matsuura’s text, “these are stones with shapes that resemble birds or other animals, religious icons such as the Buddha” or some “manmade objects such as boats, bridges, or small huts.” Some readers identified this as a mistake, as it did not adhere to the definition featured in *The Japanese Art of Stone Appreciation* by Covello and Yoshimura, first published in 1984 when there was little else available on the subject in English.

On page 42 of the first edition of their book, Covello and Yoshimura have a category called “Object stones” in their classification section on *suiseki*, which they translate from the Japanese term *keisho seki* (形象石). They present eight sub-categories, including “Human-shaped stones”, which they call *sugata ishi* (姿石). Herein lies the confusion – why does Matsuura use *sugata ishi* to refer to all types of figure stones, and not *keisho seki*?

The *Kojien*, the foremost Japanese language dictionary published by Iwanami shoten (like the Merriam-Webster Dictionary in the US, or the Oxford English Dictionary in the UK), defines the word *keisho* as follows:

- 1) A form that appears on a surface. *Sugata*.
- 2) The form of an object as perceived by humans, or the concrete form of an idea or concept.

There are two important things to note here. One is that in the very first definition, the word *sugata* is given as a synonym. Two is that the second definition is quite abstract. In fact, the word *keisho* is used very rarely in Japanese, and the dictionary only lists three terms in which the word *keisho* is commonly used in compounds:

1) *Keisho shingo* – a conical or round signal light used in maritime navigation in places where passage is difficult. (Literally, “shaped signal”, because a particular shape is prescribed for the function.)

2) *Keisho haniwa* – a type of *haniwa* [earthenware tomb figure from Japan’s Kofun period (approx. 300-538 CE)] in the shape of a house, vessel, human, animal, etc. (Literally, “shaped *haniwa*”, because they were concrete representations of things.)

3) *Keisho moji* – hieroglyphs, and ancient *kanji* characters from Chinese. (Literally, “shaped letters”, as

these characters used in written language had pictographic forms.)

The word *keisho* can have other uses, but it is rare, and when used, usually it is for something incredibly specialized, and applicable only in fields that require specialist knowledge.

Let us now consider the word *sugata*. The same dictionary offers three definitions:

1) The overall, outward appearance or look of a physical body or any object with form. Appearance. Look.

2) The overall state or condition of a thing (including abstract things).

3) In discourse on Japanese poetry, the overall form of a poem as opposed to its content or word use.

Important to note here is that the definition is broad, and can be used to refer to the appearance of anything with a form, whether abstract or concrete. The examples provided of its usage in compounds are too numerous to list.

Bilingual Japanese/English dictionaries translate *keisho* as “shape, figure, image, form”; and *sugata* as “figure, form, shape, appearance”, so what is the difference? And more to the point of this discussion, which is correct?

Neither *keisho seki* nor *sugata ishi* are listed in the *Kojien* as common terms in Japanese, but nonetheless, they both do exist in the *suiseki* world. Covello and Yoshimura define *keisho seki* as stones that “typically resemble an object or subject closely associated with nature”, naming house-shaped stones, boat-shaped stones, and other typical shapes, yet use the term *sugata ishi* to refer specifically to “human-shaped stones” alone. Matsuura’s usage is different. Having understood the definitions of *keisho* and *sugata*, let us now do a survey of Japanese *suiseki* literature to see how these terms have been used to describe the types of stones we are talking about. A chronological survey of both influential and minor texts will help to formulate the best understanding (summary of key points indicated by * at the end of each entry).

In the earliest modern book on *suiseki*, that which helped give rise to the stone boom of the 1960s and 70s, Murata Kenji lists *kuzuya ishi* (hut stones) among the basic shapes of *suiseki* (all others being landscape forms). He states that in the *suiseki* world of his day stones shaped like human figures and animals



were also appreciated, but they were not mainstream, and were considered *kiseki*. This is consistent with Chubachi Yoshiaki's teachings from the 1930s, and the Meiji period "Koseki shi" from 1910 (for more on these writings, see "The Nature of Suiseki in Japan", CAK newsletters nos.6 and 7, 2017). "Figure stones" (as we will call them here in English) were classified as *kiseki* at that time, and only nominally recognized as an unconventional type of suiseki by Murata (*Bonsai Pots and Suiseki*, 1959, pp.142-146). *Neither *keisho seki* nor *sugata ishi* are used. Figure stones of this type are not considered suiseki. Hut stones are considered separate.

Three years later his son Murata Keiji published his first book on suiseki, and created a separate category for *sugata ishi*, which he defines as "[...] those that resemble the shapes of Buddhist figures, birds and animals, etc. They are also called *kiseki* or *chinseki*, but in terms of how the word feels, calling them *sugata ishi* seems to be the most appropriate way to classify them by shape for our contemporary approach." (*Suiseki – Everything about Scenic Landscape Stones*, July 1962, p.17).

**Sugata ishi* appears as a new classification. The word *keisho seki* is not used. Hut stones are still considered separate.

That same year Ito Shunji, who was a prominent leader in the field in the late 1930s and early 1940s, describes the category *katachi ishi* ("shape stones") as those that resemble "animals, human figures, boats, Daruma, Buddhist figures, etc.", and adds, "these are also called *sugata ishi*". (*The Hobby of Stones – How to Find and Create Suiseki and Daiseki*, September 1962, p.46).

* The term *katachi ishi* is used for the category, and *sugata ishi* is offered as a synonym. The term *keisho seki* is not used. Boat stones are specifically included, hut stones are not mentioned.

Takahashi Teisuke, author of the great book on Japan's historical stones *Densho seki*, co-authored a book with Murata Keiji in which the terms are used more or less interchangeably. They write, "*Keisho seki* have shapes of birds, animals, fish, or saintly figures whose shapes in and of themselves are enjoyable. In the past they were called *kiseki* or *chinseki*, but they are also called *sugata ishi*." This is their broad definition of stone types. A few pages later, in a separate description of various stone shapes, they label the classification *sugata ishi*, and write, "Stones that resemble Buddhist figures, saints, human figures, animals, and so on, are called this (*sugata ishi*). Broadly speaking, this can be used as a general

grouping for *keisho seki* other than hut stones." (*Suiseki for Beginners*, 1965, pp.47, 53).

*Terms are used more-or-less interchangeably, but *keisho seki* has a broader scope. Hut stones are considered a type of *keisho seki*, but not a type of *sugata ishi*.

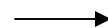
Murata Keiji differentiates still further in his next book, where he writes about the category of *sugata ishi*, "Stones that naturally have the forms of Buddhist figures, saints, human figures, animals, etc. are called *sugata ishi*. To be specific, we can generally group all *keisho seki* apart from the previously discussed hut stones and boat stones in this way. If anything, compared to the world of poetic landscape scenery, these belong more to the worlds of man and animal. Rather than large or grotesque in feel, small, simple, charming stones that have a sense of elegance are more enjoyable." (*How to Look at and Enjoy Suiseki*, 1966, p.42.)

**Keisho seki* is used in a broad way for all non-landscape stones of a recognizable shape, and *sugata ishi* is used for all figure stones except boat stones and hut stones.

The Muratas, Ito, and Takahashi certainly represented the orthodoxy of the time, but what did lesser-known people have to say? Hayashi Mitsunori, from the Okutama area, writes in a more colloquial fashion that *sugata ishi* are stones with the shapes of, "animals familiar to us, charming little birds, and the buddhas of the fields." (*Talking About Stones – The Beauty of Suiseki*, 1966, p.52).

*The term *keisho seki* is not used. Hut stones are in a separate category.

Ei Saburo, who worked as an illustrator for *Juseki* magazine, published a book with an introduction by Murata Keiji in which he goes out on a limb. He terms the category of stones we are discussing *keisho seki*, and in the first line of his explanation he writes, "These are also called *sugata ishi*." He includes religious figures, birds and animals, and for the first time in our survey, he includes *inyo seki* ("yin-yang stones"), which resemble male and female reproductive organs and are known in Japanese stone literature from at least the 18th century. HOWEVER, Ei maintains that suiseki can ONLY be landscape stones, so he classifies *keisho seki* (*sugata ishi*) as *chinseki*, NOT suiseki. This contradicts the common teaching of his time, and relates back to the early 20th century writings of the "Koseki shi" and Chubachi that were referenced earlier. Interestingly, however, as hut stones were so prevalent in bonsai display and have thus far been treated separately by many authors, Ei classifies hut stones as a



type of *iwagata ishi* (crag-shaped stone) in order to bring them under the *suiseki* umbrella. He writes, “Going by their shape they are *keisho seki*, but they feel like features of literati landscapes, so it is acceptable to put them in the *suiseki* category.” (*An Introduction to the Hobby of Suiseki*, 1967, pp.86, 116-122).

**Keisho seki* and *sugata ishi* are synonymous, but NOT considered *suiseki*. The classification of hut stones gets fudged to make them landscape stones.

One year later the same author, this time writing under his real name Nagase Kahei (Ei Saburo was his artist’s name, and the name he was known by in the *suiseki* world because of his work with *Juseki*), did an about face. He clearly classifies *keisho seki* as a type of *suiseki*, and broadens the examples to include “hut stones, boat stones, bridge stones, Buddhist figures, animals, flowers, fruit, human figures, etc.” (*How to Enjoy Suiseki*, 1968, pp.28, 56.)

**Keisho seki* are considered *suiseki* again, and the category includes all shapes. The word *sugata ishi* is not used.

Yoshimura Toshiji, the father of Covello’s co-author Yoshimura Yuji, contributed a two-page essay called “The Appreciation of *Suiseki*” to one of the largest *suiseki* publications of his day, by Onuki Chuzo. He lists examples of *sugata ishi* as, “figures of Kannon, figures of arhats, huts, various animals, etc.” (*Suiseki*, 1967, pages not numbered).

* The term *keisho seki* is not used, and hut stones are considered a type of *sugata ishi*.

Murata Keiji’s next introductory text expands upon the definition somewhat. “*Keisho seki*: Also called *sugata ishi*, these are stones that naturally express the forms of birds, small animals, saintly figures, etc. Unlike *kiseki* and *chinseki*, they do not merely have rare shapes, but they have something that connects them to the poetics of landscape scenery. In other words, *keisho seki* shaped like houses, boats, or wild rabbits can be appreciated as *suiseki*, but *chinseki* that look like Godzilla or Hitler’s face are in poor taste.” Interesting examples! (*Suiseki Hobby Encyclopedia*, 1969, p.31).

**Keisho seki* and *sugata ishi* are treated as synonyms, with hut stones and boat stones specifically named as types within the category.

Katayama Teichi, founder of the Keido school of display more commonly known by his pseudonym Ichiu, repeats a common pattern that seems to be agreed upon by most of his generation: “Up until now, *sugata ishi* have fallen into the categories of *kiseki* and *chinseki*, but to make it easier to understand for beginners, they have recently been classified as *sugata*

ishi or *keisho seki*.” He specifically names Kannon stones and hut stones as distinct types. (*The Appreciation of Suiseki*, 1971, p.96).

**Keisho seki* is given once as a synonym, but *sugata ishi* is used to describe the category throughout the text.

Fast forward a decade, and Murata Keiji edits and contributes commentaries to a book that contains various essays written by his father, Kenji, who opens with an introduction lamenting that the stone boom was slowing down. In the section where he describes these stones, the son Keiji uses only the word *sugata ishi*, and nowhere uses *keisho seki*. However, his father Kenji explains that when he was just getting started with *suiseki* after the war, there was no set nomenclature in place. He notes that *keisho seki* literally means “a shaped stone”, has a broad meaning, and while other words like “hut stone” and “arhat stone” were used, there was little else at the time. He then makes the key statement, “I don’t know who said it first, but eventually the word *sugata ishi* became common.” He explains that in his work to try and systematize the language, he attempted to consolidate all “stones of shape” under the umbrella of *keisho seki*, but he could not deny that the word felt somewhat crude, and he didn’t necessarily even think it was the most appropriate. However, he could not find a better word that encompassed hut stones, (human) figure stones, and all other forms.

Murata Kenji here admits that even though he knew it wasn’t the best term, he attempted to consolidate all of the stones we are discussing into a category he called *keisho seki*. However, the word *sugata ishi* caught on and became common. (*Suiseki – The Poetic Sentiments of Landscapes*, 1981, pp.89, 133, 134).

**Keisho seki* is promoted by the older generation, but *sugata ishi* is used by the younger generation of the same family.

Fast forward yet again to more recent memory, and the age of Matsuura Arishige’s leadership of the Nippon *Suiseki* Association. Matsuura’s first contribution is the largest and most extravagant Japanese *suiseki* publication to date, co-authored by Yoshimura Kin’ichi, and published by the well-known company Kodansha. They borrow directly from the past in their classification scheme, and describe hut stones and boat stones first, as distinct types of *suiseki*. Then they write, “*Sugata ishi* (*keisho seki*): As the name implies, *sugata ishi* are named for their form or shape. If it does not resemble the form of something, it cannot be called a *sugata ishi*. Common forms are cranes, turtles, and other animals, human figures,



or Buddhist figures like Kannon. The previously discussed hut stones and boat stones are also of this type.” (*An Overview of Suiseki Masterpieces*, 1988, p.247).

**Keisho seki* is offered once parenthetically as a synonym, but *sugata ishi* is used throughout the text. Hut stones and boat stones are given special attention, but considered types of *sugata ishi*.

** Note: The text in this section of Matsuura and Yoshimura’s book is identical to that in a set of books edited by Nippon Bonsai Association and also published by Kodansha only two years earlier (they were both contributors to this publication as well: *Overview of Bonsai and Suiseki Masterpieces – Suiseki I*, 1986, p.109).

By the 1990s, the stone boom was largely over, publications on the subject had greatly decreased, and Matsuura had become the leading authority as the Chairman of the Nippon Suiseki Association. In his next book, he dedicates a separate section to hut stones, but not boat stones, and notes that both are types of *sugata ishi*. (*An Invitation to the Beauty of Suiseki*, 1993, p.59).

* The term *keisho seki* is not used, and hut stones are a type of *sugata ishi*.

Matsuura’s next publication is the same, hut stones are given their own description, but clearly stated to be a type of *sugata ishi*. The word *keisho seki* is not used in the text. (*Suiseki Introductory Manual*, 2003, pp.125, 126).

Matsuura’s English book that Nina quoted, giving rise to this study, is consistent: the word *sugata ishi* is used, and though hut stones are given special treatment because of their ubiquitous presence in the suiseki world, they are said to fall into the *sugata ishi* category. The term *keisho seki* is not used. (*An Introduction to Suiseki*, 2010, pp.48-57).

SO, after careful consideration of the definitions of the words *keisho* and *sugata*, and a reasonably extensive survey of 15 books written over the course of over 50 years by significant leaders in the field and enthusiasts alike, what can we conclude about the “correct” or “incorrect” usage of the terms *keisho seki* and *sugata ishi*?

Was the category of *sugata ishi* created in the early 1960s? Neither the words *keisho seki* nor *sugata ishi* appear in texts from before that time, and in fact, stones other than hut stones with non-landscape shapes were not even considered suiseki. In 1962, Murata acknowledges that these stones had been considered *kiseki* or *chinseki* in the past, but suggests *sugata ishi* as a new term that seems to fit the bill, ushering them

into the fold of what he calls “contemporary suiseki” (which also includes “pattern stones” now for the first time). That same year Ito uses the term *katachi ishi*, which does not seem to catch on, though he offers the term *sugata ishi* as an alternative with the same meaning. *Keisho seki* thereafter appears as a broad-reaching category for all non-landscape stones with allusive shapes, and *sugata ishi* is used within that category for all figure stones except hut stones and boat stones. But the usage is inconsistent: some authors, including Yoshimura Yuji’s father Toshiji, do not use *keisho seki* at all, using *sugata ishi* instead; some authors use *keisho seki* as a broad category, much in the same way that Covello and Yoshimura do, but they use *sugata ishi* in a much less restricted way to include animals, birds, and so on; for still others, *keisho seki* and *sugata ishi* are completely interchangeable synonyms, or the term *keisho seki* is not used at all, and *sugata ishi* is the over-reaching classifying term for all non-landscape forms.

Murata Kenji himself, in 1981, claims that he promoted use of the term *keisho seki* in an attempt to systematize a set of vocabulary that had previously never been agreed upon, but admits the term was clumsy and less than ideal. In the meantime, the term *sugata ishi* had become commonly used. Three years later Covello and Yoshimura published their book in English, and the die was cast for the West. Matsuura, however, primarily a product of Murata Keiji’s generation, continued to publish, teach, and evolve in Japan. In his early work he acknowledges the term *keisho seki* as a synonym for *sugata ishi*, but with time drops the use of *keisho seki* altogether, and eventually publishes a book in English in 2010, using only the word *sugata ishi*. It is important to note that this was perhaps the first English publication on the subject NOT to depend on Covello and Yoshimura as its primary source, like Benz, Rivera, and countless online resources. Its content was not based on what Covello and Yoshimura wrote in 1984, but on what Matsuura was teaching in 2010.

Naturally, not every Japanese book on suiseki has been included in this survey, so more evidence could always be added. However, I do not believe the conclusion would change. Having attempted to leave my own judgement out of this analysis, allow me to offer a personal insight or two. Non-native speakers of any language often have difficulty recognizing the nuanced differences between similar words, like *keisho* and *sugata*. In English for that matter, can most of us easily describe the difference between “shape” and “form”? That is what we are dealing with here.



Consider this: What is the difference between, “send a package”, and “dispatch a parcel”? They mean the same thing, right? Which one might you be more likely to use in conversation, or even in writing for that matter? One is smooth, more colloquial, and more natural perhaps; while the other is more rigid, and more formal – you might use it in an official report, but probably not in speaking with your friends. This is the difference between *sugata ishi* and *keisho seki*. *Sugata* is a common, everyday word that people use in all kinds of contexts, while *keisho* is a more technical term used almost only in specialized circumstances. Both are correct, and both can, and HAVE BEEN used in the modern world of Japanese suiseki. But one felt more natural, one felt smoother than the other to many people, and over time, one became more widely used. Attending exhibitions, visiting collectors and dealers, and learning under a number of people in Japan now for over 20 years, my experience has been that people say *sugata ishi* very frequently in the way that Matsuura uses it, and *keisho seki* is heard far less. Neither is exclusively “correct” or “incorrect”, it is more a question of “often used” vs. “occasionally used”.

So, where do we stand in the post-Matsuura age? *Juseki* magazine (originally created by the Murata family) has lost its influence, and *Aiseki* magazine has come to the fore, as many California Aiseki Kai members and newsletter readers know. New suiseki publications are few and far between in recent years, but in 2013 they published the *Aiseki Dictionary*, in which they introduce a new, elaborate classification chart. Here, *keisho seki* and *sugata ishi* are separate, and they introduce even MORE new vocabulary. In parenthesis, after *keisho seki* they include the word *gusho seki*, which literally means “concrete stone” or “embodying stone”, meaning that stones in this category are “concrete representations” of something. They list four examples: hut stones, hut stones on rocky crags, boat stones, and vessel stones (that look like pots or jars). *Sugata ishi*, on the other hand, are human figures, buddhas, Kannon, Daruma, and animals. (*Aiseki Dictionary*, 2013, p.6). For all we know, the next person to publish a book will have even newer ideas that they want to promote, and the list of possible terms and classification strategies may diversify even further. For the record, I have NEVER heard anyone use the word *gusho seki* in conversation, and I do not expect it to catch on, as it is far too abstract and conceptual a term.

Significant as their contribution to the field has been, Covello and Yoshimura’s publication is a

snapshot taken from a very specific angle nearly 40 years ago, of a world that was changing at the time, and continues to change today. As we have seen through this examination of the use of only TWO WORDS over the course of many decades, different individuals have presented different interpretations and explanations for the same things, time and time again. How much different would the first suiseki book in English be if it had been authored by Covello and Murata? Or Covello and Katayama? Yoshimura, after all, was a bonsai professional living and working in the United States, not a suiseki authority at the forefront of what was happening in Japan.

It is a case of *tomayto* or *tomahto*. I wish there were a straightforward, definitive answer to the question of which term was correct, but unfortunately, we can only go with tendencies and flow with the times. Both could easily be acceptable, and perhaps Matsuura’s approach could be best understood as a simplification, a sort of shorthand, for easing the understanding of a convoluted vocabulary whose usage was never truly set in stone.

[And, since we are on the subject, if I may just get something off my chest here in the name of comedy at the end of all this. For those of you who have access to the Covello and Yoshimura book now, please refer to the page where discussion of “object stones” appears. They say there are “eight *traditional* categories”. Not one of the books mentioned above (and these are important books!) lists eight categories, much less *those* categories, and there is nothing “traditional” about a classification system that wasn’t even agreed upon at the time they wrote the book in the 1980s. The first category they list is “house-shaped stones (*yagata ishi*)”, which is not a common word or category used in ANY of the Japanese books named above. And sixth, “insect-shaped stones (*mushigata ishi*)”? What? I have never seen a single insect-shaped stone in any exhibition or publication, and have never even seen the word in print in a Japanese book (granted, I have not memorized them all). Even if one forced the existence of such a category by finding one stone that might fit into it, it would definitely not be a “traditional” category. You cannot just add *ishi* to the end of any random noun and invent a new category of classification!]

~Thank you to all patient enough to read to the end!

Ask Guy Jim

Beyond the Stone – Considerations for presenting viewing stones within a thematic concept, Part XIII: An Introduction to Box Stands

In my exploration of multi-stone displays we have now reached the point of discussing presentations with four or more stones. This is a broad subject for which I have found no singular logical approach; at every starting point or stage the next comparative step could be well served by continuing in multiple directions, i.e., do we use the same stand to illustrate its use with a different thematic display; do we present the same stones on a different stand; do we retain the theme but vary the stone selection or arrangement; do we explore variations using 4, 5, 6... stones now or revisit the theme later? Facing this multitude of options and limited space, I ask your forbearance as we introduce the familiar box stand with a display of five stones.

The Chinese and Koreans often crowd several stones into furniture stands with multi-tiered shelves, usually in a horror vacui approach. In Japan one rarely encounters multi-stone stand displays in major exhibitions. In *suiseki*, appreciation is focused on each individual stone presented in its own relatively isolated space. Multi-stone displays are more frequently encountered at less formal club level exhibits; these often seem to lack coherence, the stands primarily serving as a means to display small stones that would otherwise be 'lost' on exhibition tables. However, some of these stand groupings may share a common thread, e.g. stones representing a figural type or from a specific river. Landscape stones may adhere to a sense of vertical perspective, but just as frequently are randomly placed where they fit. Less often, one will encounter an arrangement of two or three stones that present a formulaic 'story' such as a human figure with a moon, hut, etc. In most examples, one detects little or no attention to how the stones interrelate with each other or of concerted attempts to create a display that is, in itself, aesthetically harmonious.

A 'Classic' Arrangement

Elmer Uchida, an original CAK member, friend and my sensei, introduced me to the use of stands and this general format for arrangement in particular. He said simply that it was a standard arrangement, and with my limited background in art history, I recognized it as being classical in the sense that it follows the basic structure of traditional Chinese and Japanese landscape painting as typically found on



kakejiku (hanging scrolls). This display observes the basic format: the most distant mountain (or highest) element is at the top; intermediate landscape features – here a near mountain and more closely viewed water fall – in the middle distance; at the bottom we have foreground details: a thatched hut and boat. (That small huts, boats, along with bridges and some diminutive humans were elements commonly incorporated within Chinese painting is the reason that these figural stones have been included with 'landscape' *suiseki* in Japan.)

The standard display of *shohin* bonsai – from which we borrowed the common box stands – follows a similar hierarchy based on a tree's elevation of growth with the pine at the top. Therefore, the logic that there would also be a comparable standard arrangement for *suiseki* went unquestioned by me for years. However, with more extensive exposure to Japanese sources, I have come to believe that while one can occasionally find examples with a loose awareness of such a format, in Japan there appears to have been few attempts to actually create refined compositions. It is likely that Japanese interest in multi-stone display has simply been insufficient to warrant any thought of standardization. Therefore, this arrangement should be seen as a personal interpretation within what might be considered a 'classic' display format, one ultimately harkening back to spatial arrangements in traditional Chinese painting.



Scenic Landscape Stone, Trinity River, California
 Jim Greaves / Ken McLeod
 11.8 W x 2.125 H x 2.5 D (30.2cm x 5.4cm x 6.4cm) cut



Two-peaked Mountain Stone, Stony Creek, California
 Frank English (AVSRC)
 6.8 W x 3.5 H x 3.4 D (17.5cm x 8.9cm x 8.6cm) Cut



Thatched Hut-shaped Stone, Mokelumne River, California
 Jim Greaves
 3.6 W x 3.6 H x 2.25 D (9.2cm x 9.2cm x 5.7cm)



Thread-waterfall Stone, Eel River, California
 Shigema Kitamura (AVSRC)
 4.6 W x 6.5 H x 3 D (11.7cm x 16.5cm x 7.6cm)



Rush-thatched Boat Stone, Thomes Creek, California
 Jim Greaves
 8.8 W x 3.5 H x 2.25 D (22.5cm x 8.9cm x 5.7cm)

Observations:

In addition to the desire to create a pleasing display relating to East Asian artistic tradition, this selection of stones was intended to help one introduce various aspects of stone appreciation to new gallery visitors. The selection includes a variety of materials, textures (degrees of wear), and colors: smooth, gray toned distant mountain; slightly textured and more colorful near mountain; sharp, angular cliff face of the waterfall; and smooth surfaced hut and boat, both reflecting the taste and specific forms of Japanese

suiseki. (Although one could have selected a near mountain with more dramatic autumn colors, I chose to retain a more balanced, subtle experience.) You might also note that beyond their part in the composition, and illustration of basic categories, these stones represent five significant rivers in Northern California.

As we continue our exploration it will become apparent that creating your display may never be quite done; there is always the possibility of continued refinement through substitution or the need for a rearrangement to meet specific external factors such as your audience and physical exhibition parameters. I consider such re-engagement with one's stones to be an essential part of the enjoyment of stone appreciation. However, because of its own historic use, at the moment, this 'classic' remains my 'go to' introductory group.

Guy Jim

A Tokonoma Display for July

The watering of the stone in the suiban gives us a fresh feeling during the hot days .

This is a purple tamagawa ishi pool stone that I found in the river; I made the daiza from Rosewood.

Because there is hardly any moving direction in the scroll or in the stone, the scroll can be placed right over the stone without any problems, although the direction in both scroll and stone have to be right. I made sure the water darkened the stone in the right amount in the left side to balance the dark tent in the scroll.

~Yvonne Graubaek from Denmark

Tranquility in the summer evening ...



Stone of the Month continued from pg 2



John Mortensen: 5 x 7 x 2 Kern



Jack Sustic: 4.5 x 12.5 x 5 China



Jon Reuschel: 7 x 16 x 4 Mojave



Linda Gill: 2 x 7 x 1 Yuha



Peter Bloomer: 17 x 13 x 6 Van Duzen River, CA

Suiseki in California from page 1

that were a perfect marriage of stone and scroll. Still in awe, the second room offered other groups of tokonoma and others on stark white pedestals rising to eye level approachable from all sides. The trail led to another room of wall to wall tokonoma and more pedestals in the middle of the room. And finally, a long room with 4 rows of hirakazari displays, one being our stone.

As I mentioned last month, it has been my habit to come home with a stone from Japan each time we have been there. This time it was different. We went to the Japan Suiseki Exhibition and once I was surrounded by all those beautiful stones, my focus changed. It was suiseki heaven and all thoughts of purchase simply vaporized.

~Larry Ragle

California Aiseki Kai meets on the 4th Wednesday of each month at 7:30 pm at the Nakaoka Community Center located at 1670 W. 162nd St, Gardena, CA. Second floor. We do not meet in Nov-Dec.

Contact People

Programs: Larry Ragle 949.497.5626
Treasury/Membership: Nina Ragle 949.497.5626
Annual Exhibit: Jim Greaves 310.452.3680
Exhibit Set Up: Marty Hagbery 909-257-9559
Refreshments: Janet Shimizu 310.822.6012
Beverages: Jack Levy 626.794-4572
Historian: Ray Yeager 760.365.7897
Webmail: Chris Cochran 804.918.4636



crimescene@cox.net
 ragle@cox.net
 jimgreaves@avsrc.org
 janet.shimizu46@gmail.com
 jnlevy@earthlink.net
 ryeager890@aol.com
 sashaichris@gmail.com

Newsletter Committee

July Contributors: Wil in Japan, Jim Greaves, and Larry Ragle.
Mailing: Flash Partch
Editor: Nina Ragle

We hope you will participate. Please send any submissions to ragle@cox.net no more than 10 days following our monthly meeting. Thank you!

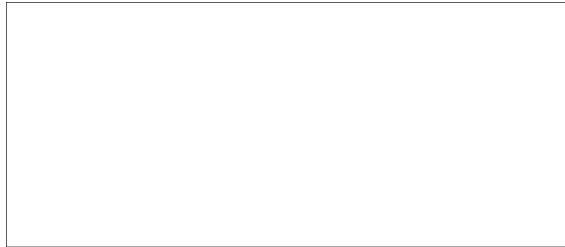
Ragle
P.O. Box 4975
Laguna Beach CA 92652

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED



Leaves no stone unturned

See our website:
aisekikai.com



Coming Events

With so many events being postponed or cancelled it is safe to assume that it may be a while before you can expect to see any “coming events” posted here. We remain hopeful, of course, and we will do our best to keep you in the know.

Stone of the Month

continued from page 11



Carol Mortensen: 9 x 5 x 4.5 Klamath River



Buzz Barry: 2.25 x 4 x 1.35 Yuha



Larry and Nina Ragle: 8 x 19 x 6 Kern River. This is John Naka's Kannon, goddess of mercy.