

## October Program

**Peter Aradi** from San Antonio, Texas was supposed to present our last program of the year: “*Zen and Suiseki*”. However, due to issues of health, he is unable to travel at this time. We are indeed fortunate that **Richard Turner** has graciously agreed to present:

*Steel and Stone: The art of Lee Ufan and Zhan Wang*  
**Richard** will speak about the work of two contemporary artists, **Lee Ufan** from Korea and Chinese artist **Zhan Wang**. Both of these artists work with stones, but in distinctly different ways. The question that the presentation poses is "Are the differences between traditional Korean and Chinese attitudes towards viewing stones reflected in the works of the two contemporary artists"?

See you on the 26<sup>th</sup>. Our best to **Peter**. Get well soon!



Zhan Wang



Lee Ufan

## Stone of the Month

Since this is the last meeting of the year, let's bring in one truly best stone that you feel is a *suiseki*. Be prepared to defend your claim!



Nina's *suiseki* has been on display near the Japanese tea house at the Huntington for decades. It recently came home because the gardens are being renovated. Nina collected it near Dos Rios. 12" x 6" x 6"

## On your mark, get ready...

It's that time of the year. Yes, time to start planning your displays for the 22<sup>nd</sup> Aiseki Kai Viewing Stone Exhibition. The question is, can we do better than we did last year? The answer is, of course we can, but that is up to each of us. Where can we improve? First, for the old timers, let's bring stones that haven't been shown in recent displays – if possible.

Once you have decided on a stone, take a look at the *daiza*. Does it fit into the Japanese tradition? Lately, a lot of the “stone of the month” offerings fail in this category. You see the *daiza* before you see the stone. I know, it is a lot of work to make any *daiza* and you are proud of your work but remember, the stone is the main event. The *daiza* is used merely to hold the stone in the ideal position. Remove as much wood as possible from the bottom and the outer rim. Light tones or colorful wood is inappropriate. It should be stained dark or painted black. Take a look at the “Stones of the Month” in the September 2011 newsletter. All of these *daiza* are appropriate. The stone dominates, not the wood.

We have seen a variety of stone displays from other Asian countries, Chinese, Korean and recently, Vietnamese. All of these stones were beautiful but the one factor that clearly distinguishes the Japanese from the rest, is the *daiza*. That's not to say that the Japanese *daiza* is better- but it is different.

While you are on that page notice that the sand in the *suiban* is appropriate- neutral and leveled flat and close to the rim.

We will have an international table for stones found outside North America for one stone displayed in the appropriate manner for that country. All the other displays, as our name suggests, should be stones found in North America in the Japanese tradition of the art form.

**Lee Roberts** is moving to Seattle in November. The **Horton's** are bringing her to the October meeting, her last. Come and see **Lee** before she moves away. She was an early member of Aiseki Kai and through the years has been a true *suiseki* supporter and friend.

Larry Ragle

### September Meeting Notes *by Linda Gill*

ANNOUNCEMENTS: We welcomed new members **Art Ragazzi**, **Stanley Raposa** and **Carol Upston**. Our guests for the evening were **Christian Hammerl**, **Lee Anthony** and **Jim Ito**. **Charles Kuntzman**, long time member and rare attendee, joined the packed room.

Contact **Nina** ASAP if you wish to buy any of the books that are reviewed on pages 7-8.

**Richard Aguirre** asked that label information be sent to him not later than December 10<sup>th</sup>. Label guidelines will appear in the November newsletter and will be similar to last year.

**Richard Aguirre** talked about his plans for the Tecopa Hot Springs hunt on Nov 5-6. Information was on the handout he provided. **Jim Ito**, who has property in the area, will be our guide. Contact **Richard** for details: [usapounders@yahoo.com](mailto:usapounders@yahoo.com)

Stone of the Month: Mini stones between 2-4"  
This was a very popular stone of the month but because 50 attendees brought so many mini stones of which we photographed only 35, we cannot print them all. Sizes were omitted since they are all between 2"- 4". Enjoy these little gems:



Jim Greaves



Joseph Gaytan



Richard Turner



Bruce McGinnis



Mas Moriguchi



Joe James



Buzz Barry



Hanne Povlsen



Lois Hutchinson



Paul Vasina



Kathleen Fugle



Bill Hutchinson

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



**September Program Notes** *by Linda Gill*

**Larry** showed slides from the Puget Sound Bonsai Association Convention in Seattle where the Suiseiki Interest Group showed their stones. All of the stones were found in the Pacific Northwest and the pictures were taken by their photographer. There was a natural hut stone (see page 9). There was a perfect boat stone about 14" that was found 50 years ago by the father of the person who displayed it (see page 10).

**Larry** then showed pictures of the Aiseki Kai stones displayed at the Bower's Museum in Santa Ana on September 9-11 as guests of Ko Fu Bonsai Kai. **Manny Martinez** arranged for the show at the Bower's. Both **Larry** and **Wanda Matjas** contributed pictures for **Larry's** presentation.

The **Ragle's** display, *Silent Autumn Night*, was in one tokonoma (below) and **Harry Hirao's** tree was in



the other. Five of **Ralph Johnson's** malachite were on display in *daiza* made by **Cliff Johnson** (below).



**Marybel Balendonck** showed 2 stones (below).



**Joe James** showed 3 stones, (above) one from Japan while **Manny Martinez** showed a Lingbi stone and a red mountain from the Mojave (below).



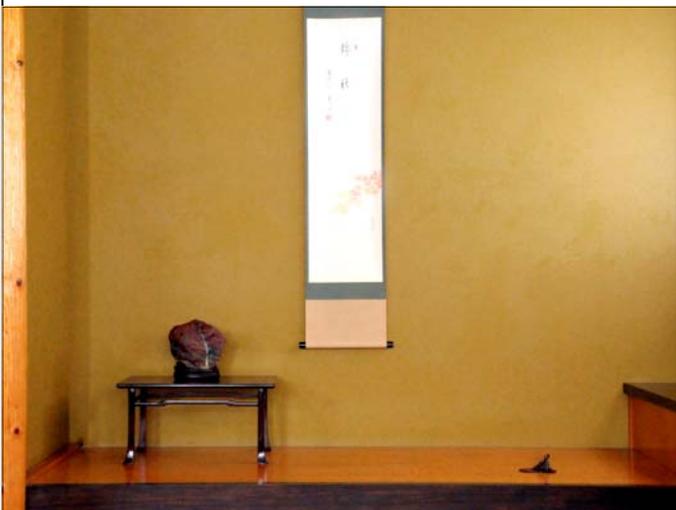
**Hanne Povlsen** brought her display of lovely Mojave desert stones, including this one (above). **Barry Josephson** showed two stones one of which was from the Yuha (below).



# Ask Guy Jim

## Part 2: Continuing discussion of tokonoma arrangements with an autumn theme.

In this month's first *tokonoma* we retain the *kakejiku* (scroll painting) of maple leaves and *suiseki* (waterfall stone) but replace the *okimono* of the hut used last month. Instead, we substitute the small bronze figure of a seated gentleman in the classic pose of a 'waterfall watcher' — a common subject in Japanese painting — thereby introducing a more specific story element and inviting the viewer "to identify himself with the tiny figure, letting his spirit dwell in the imaginary scene so that he too might find peace in the contemplation of nature." (below)



Autumn tokonoma with waterfall watcher on minimal oval

Interestingly, even the selection of the support (*jiita*) beneath the figure had a direct bearing on the composition. The rather beautiful 1 1/2" high antique Japanese *jiita* (below, left) offered the great advantage of taking the form of a promontory overlooking the waterfall as is found in many paintings. Further, its naturally textured surface reprises that of the stone. However, it can be argued that the space surrounding



Bronze okimono: Gentleman with Fan – high irregular slab representing a promontory



– Irregular flat slab



– Smallest round oval

the figure is uncomfortably tight, perhaps a little too much so for the watcher to be at ease at the cliff's edge, especially if he is sipping sake instead of the proscribed tea! Another negative is that with a bit of distance, the figure and *jiita* quickly become a confusion of forms. With regret I rejected this possibility for usage in the *tokonoma*; however, I believe it does work quite well for a tabletop display because the viewer tends to be closer. Again, I ask that you note that using an item that is itself of inherently better quality, whether it be the stone, table, scroll, *okimono* or *jiita*, does not always make for a better total display.

Large irregular wood slabs were overpowering. The small, irregular thin slab is more interesting than a simple oval and thus tempting, but its irregularity still competes with the bronze for attention and renders it more difficult to 'read' at a distance (below, middle). Large flat boards (whether elliptical or rectangular) created less competition for the *okimono*, setting the figure off quite well, but they occupied too much horizontal 'floor' space, tending to 'reduce' the already small figure and adversely affected the dynamic. Smaller flat ovals from 5-7" proved to be more satisfactory. The smallest was eventually selected as the best presentation (below, right). Its shortness killed the tendency the eye had to horizontally track the larger *jiita* and, positively, forced the eye to look upward toward the waterfall. The very small section of minimally thick wood (about 5/32", 4mm) finally selected not only gave the figure more prominence, but actually had the effect of making the waterfall stone appear more majestic. In summary, whether or not you agree with my reasoning, we see that the least important element in the entire display – one that many would treat in an offhanded, just grab something to go 'beneath' manner – may have a noticeable effect on the final total impression.



For the next tokonoma, let us turn to another basic composition with a straightforward Japanese seasonal reference. We will combine a mountain stone having the suggestion of autumnal foliage (below) with a *kakejiku* (below, middle) featuring the favorite of the seven traditional grasses of autumn, the bush clover (*hagi*), a full autumn moon and, if one looks carefully, a cricket (*korogi*), a symbol of early autumn that just so happens to add my desired sound element! Because the

complex scroll already includes so many references to autumn, I felt it would be unnecessary, even distracting, to add still another element such as an *okimono*. [Note that a grass would have been redundant.] Even the mountain stone was selected for its subdued color and simplicity of form (bottom, left).

Our next tokonoma is less traditional, the *kakejiku* repeats the signature autumn presence of the full moon and bush clover, but instead of a cricket we see a *tanuki* (raccoon, dog, ‘badger’) making his rounds (below). This unusually diminutive *tanuki*, being both the only dark spot and placed in the center, is nominally the visual focal point of the painting. Ultimately, however, the main subject seems to be the sense of the moonlight, itself, as it illuminates the ambiguous landscape by lighting up the rather abstract pattern of bush clover – ambience taking precedent over subject.



Yamagata-ishi, Eel River, Steve Yong, AVSRC  
15" W x 5 1/8" H x 10" D (38.1cm x 13cm x 25.4cm) Cut



Shiro-Hagi (White Bush Clover), California, Jim Greaves  
9 1/2" x 3 5/8" x 4 1/4" (24.1cm x 9.2cm x 10.8cm)



Scroll: *Hagi* (Bush Clover), Moon and Cricket

Breaking with current Japanese practice, the stone chosen presents an almost direct repetition of the *hagi* in the painting, (below) including the sense of ambiguity and diffuseness. The stone is of no particular quality and offers only a fleeting suggestion of small flowers in subdued light; nevertheless, it has always been a favorite as it has been moved from shelf to shelf without being cataloged. It just happened to be in the corner of the *tatami* room when I first hung this scroll. The connection was immediate and perhaps a forgone, unconscious decision!



Kakejiku: *Hagi*, Moon, and *Tanuki*



Autumn tokonoma with Japanese composition





Tokonoma, personal presentation

Tokonoma, conventional Japanese presentation

Tokonoma, variant

Here are three variations (above) for your consideration. Example 1 (above, left) with the stone placed a bit off center on a simple *jiita* was my original ‘inspiration’ and, in its unpretentious simplicity, has remained my favorite. Example 2 (above, middle) shows the stone presented on a *shoku* and centered beneath the painting in what seems to currently be the most common Japanese format (although perhaps not when used with such a long scroll). I personally find this arrangement lifeless and lacking in ‘poetry’. Example 3 (above, right) has the same *shoku* placed a bit to one side reprising my initial placement. The arrangement works fine, but I feel that the table adds nothing and, ultimately, detracts from the informal serenity of Example 1.

The final tokonoma in this issue uses American subject matter in a traditional Japanese format. Those familiar with the ‘North Woods’ and the loons of woodland lakes will recognize the quiet, somber setting of dusk and evening. This composition is a reconstructed variation on the display presented at the GSBF Santa Clara Convention last November. [At that time the original bronze loon was stolen while the exhibition was open to the public]. At GSBF there was no provision for the inclusion of the painting (*kakejiku*), so in that case the stone and *okimono* were presented as a *seki-kazari* tabletop display.

I was captivated by this stone many years ago and treasure it as one of my few that I consider to be



Suiseki, Oceanside, California, Steve Yong, AVSRC  
 7 1/4" W x 2 5/8" H x 4 1/4" D  
 (18.4cm x 6.7cm x 10.8cm)

unquestionably called a *suiseki* (left). The stone may be viewed as a distant mountain (*toyama*) or simply as a nearby

hill of the type found surrounding many lakes in the Northeast. When considered as part of a dimly lit landscape, the ambiguity is natural. Obviously, the swimming loon (above) implies the setting of a calm pond or lake. The two elements of stone and bronze are sufficient to tell the story, but within the *tokonoma*, the addition of the painting of a moon (left) that is somewhat obscured by clouds adds specificity and completes the story. The final result is not the sense of a moon-watching party, but of a moment of melancholy reflection ... with the call of the loon, whether mournful warble or piercing scream, completing the composition.



Loon, bronze by Karin Schmidt



Moon and clouds

the story, but within the *tokonoma*, the addition of the painting of a moon (left) that is somewhat obscured by clouds adds



Tokonoma: Autumn Evening, North Woods

## Recent Japanese Publications on Suiseki

by Tom Elias and Hiromi Nakaoji

It is nice to see a steady stream of new publications on suiseki coming from Japan. We are happy to review and comment on three new volumes for California Aiseki Kai members. Some of our friends interested in suiseki dismiss them because they are in Japanese. This is unfortunate because there is much that can be learned from them without knowing a single word of Japanese. For example, the first work, the Fifty-First *Exhibition of Japanese Suiseki Master Pieces*, is the annual photographic album from the Nippon Suiseki Association (NSA) just published weeks ago. Each year, the NSA holds two major stone exhibitions, the Meihin-ten in June and the Sogo-ten in September. Excellent photographs of the stones exhibited in the 51<sup>st</sup> Meihin-ten and the 26<sup>th</sup> Sogo-ten were published in this 54-page, soft-cover book. This is one of the best ways for non-Japanese to learn what constitutes quality suiseki. These exhibits display some of the finest stones in Japan and this association has now published fifty-one books on the Meihin-ten exhibits. Photographs comprise at least 95% of the book, and, if one understands such terms as Kamogawa-ishi or Setagawa-ishi, and know that the measurements are in metric, then you can understand 98% of the contents of this book.

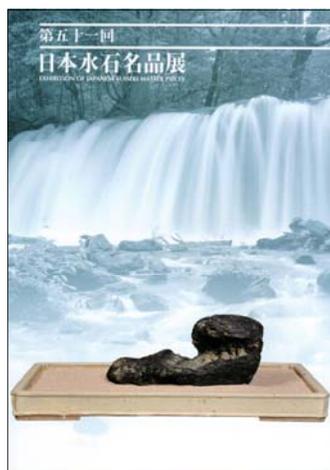
If you are serious about suiseki, you should carefully study this book and earlier volumes. Every stone club or association outside of Japan that claims an interest in Japanese stones should be a member of the NSA. As a member, you automatically receive this book (at right) as part of the membership. The book could then be circulated among members to stimulate interest in stones and help them learn about suiseki. Individuals can be members, too. The annual membership fee for non-Japan based members is ¥10,000 or about \$130. While this may be a bit steep for some individuals, it is a reasonable amount for clubs considering how much members can glean from this quality publication.

It is necessary to mention the All Japan Aiseki Association and their monthly magazine before introducing the next two books. This association consists of approximately 416 active clubs throughout

the country whose members focus on collecting and displaying native Japanese stones. The association publishes an excellent and informative monthly magazine, *Aiseki*, and many of the member clubs hold local or regional stone exhibitions. A short article on where to collect stones was featured in each issue of the magazine for the last several years. These articles were compiled into a single volume *Modern Japan Excellent Stones Illustrated; Volume 1: Japanese Viewing Stones by the Area of Origin*, the next book to be reviewed. A short article about different historically important stones also appeared in some of the monthly issues of *Aiseki*. These articles were assembled and published as *The History of Viewing Stones: People Who Loved Stones*, the last book to be reviewed here.

The second book, *Modern Japan Excellent Stones Illustrated; Volume 1: Japanese Viewing Stones by the Area of Origin*, is a 248-page book from the Aiseki Company published in 2010 (below). **Tatehata Kenji** served as editor. This is a high quality, color illustrated book that identifies forty different locations in Japan where good stones are found. Each of the forty locations is described and has a photograph of the site, often a river, and then illustrated with a number of stones from that site. Start by looking at the outline map of Japan to see where the forty sites are located from Hokkaido to the southern most islands. Then, go to each of the sites featured to see what types of stones are found there. It's a great way to gain a good overview of the range of Japanese stones being collected in Japan. You will see many well known examples of river stones, but you can also see many stones that do not fit the stereotypic image that many people in western countries have about Japanese suiseki.

This book could serve as a great model for stone clubs in California, the Pacific Northwest, and other regions of the U.S., and Europe to emulate. We think that a similar book to this one for the state of California or another one for Washington and Oregon could serve to stimulate and encourage stone



collectors and their appreciation as a hobby. Individuals, especially younger people who may not wish to belong to a club composed mainly of senior citizens, could use books like this to search for new and exciting stones. Books such as this exist for gem and mineral collectors, also for fossil collectors, so why not for viewing stone enthusiasts. Stone collecting and stone appreciation should move forward and be more visionary in its thinking. This soft cover book costs ¥5,800 or about \$75.

The third and last book reviewed here is a modest volume of only 42 pages without advertisements. *The History of Viewing Stones: People Who Loved Stones*, published last year, is generously illustrated with photographs and line drawings and, in a concise manner, tells the story behind many of the most famous stones in Japan. This book consists of short articles that were published in Aiseki magazine in recent years. The author, **Araki Hideichi**, has done a great job in assembling this material and, at a price of only ¥1200 or about \$15. This publication accurately presents some information about the important role Chinese stones occupy in Japanese suiseki history. As we looked at this publication, we couldn't help but notice that we have seen many of the photographs of these stones in another book. If you are familiar with Japanese suiseki literature, you will realize that much of the information for this recent volume came from the limited edition book *Densho-seki* or *Historical Stones* published by Ishi-no-bi-sha in Tokyo in 1988. This latter work is an important and valuable reference for serious students of suiseki, but, many westerners may balk at the price of this earlier, larger format, hard bound edition that sells for ¥18,000 or about \$240. *The History of Viewing Stones* may be of limited value to non-Japanese reading audiences; however, to us, it is begging to be translated and published in English. This would provide the English reading community with a concise, illustrated, and affordable introduction to the history of important Japanese stones. Securing the rights, translating and publishing such a book would be a great project for a stone club and an important contribution.

People interested in obtaining these books or learning more about the Japanese organizations mentioned in this article can contact them via their web sites. They are: [ai-seki.com](http://ai-seki.com) and [suiseki-assn.gr.jp/en](http://suiseki-assn.gr.jp/en). This is NSA's English language site, however, Aiseki's site is only in Japanese.

## September Program

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**Paul Vasina** showed 2 stones, one a 28" black stone from the Eel River (above). Other members whose stones were on display were: **Harley Newman, Joseph Gaytan, Al Nelson, Marge Blasingame, the Ragles** and **Harry Hirao**.

**Larry** also showed a partial version of the talk he delivered at the Bowers on the Illusion of Size. He talked about Mr. **Sudo's** views - A stone represents an endless scene of nature. The empty space around the stone is *ma* - that you fill out in your mind when you see the stone. It's all about nature which is the primer on suiseki. Often you find a stone and later you find a natural landscape that the stone resembles.

**Larry's** example was a cone shaped stone that he collected at Lake Hill (right) and he showed a picture of the Alaskan mountains with the same shape.



For membership in NSA, send ¥10,000 payable to:  
Nippon Suiseki Association  
4-1-17 Takanodai Nerimaku  
Tokyo 176-0033 JAPAN (Email: [info@suiseki-assn.gr.jp](mailto:info@suiseki-assn.gr.jp))

## Personal Reflections

by Rick and Mimi Stiles

### Is This A Good Stone?

When we first got together with **Joel Schwarz** and the late **Wayne Brewer** to found the Suiseki Interest Group under the auspices of Puget Sound Bonsai Association, we hoped to create a new community for stone appreciation in the Pacific Northwest. However, being a founder doesn't mean you are the expert on everything. This became evident early on during our group collecting trips when newcomers would ask the apparently simple question, "Is this a good stone?"

Washington State is blessed with unusually complex geology. Ancient island arcs crashed into the North American continent here and were riven by earthquakes, faults, glaciation, and vulcanism driven by the **Juan de Fuca** tectonic plate, just offshore. We have a marvelous mish-mash of material. Each year the snowpack sets our rivers boiling. They churn through this outstanding terrain to reveal new treasures all the time. This is paradise for primary collectors.

Yet geology is not enough. Philosophers from **George Berkeley** to **Hui-neng** (known as a founder of the Zen school) have grappled with the conundrum of unperceived existence. **Robert Aiken's** translation of the Mumonkan Case 29 captures the **Hui-neng** view, "Gentlemen! It is not the wind that moves; it is not the flag that moves; it is your mind that moves." If a *suiseki* forms in the Pacific Northwest, but no one is there to find it, can it be a *suiseki*? We do not think so. Artistic input is required. Mind and stone combine to produce art. Yet at some deeper level, a "good stone" may only come into being during a private, personal moment of profound understanding.

The "good stone" also requires a social context. When we founded our group, we wanted to set the proper tone. We didn't want the group to be dominated by any single point of view. We wanted to build a big tent. We thought the ideal milieu would be something like a Parisian café where artists could gather to socialize and debate. They love each other. They hate each other. But they also learn from each other and they make progress as a group.

Our little band of artists now seems to be engaged in this form of social process. We don't actually sit around sipping absinthe, but we do interact vigorously and we do learn from each other. We can see exciting possibilities ahead. Maybe we will be able to create a distinctive regional vision here. Maybe we will be able to put the Pacific Northwest on the map.

Rigidity would destroy these possibilities, so we have to be careful about authoritarian judgments. Of course, once in a while, the answer to the question seems deceptively easy. When **Bill Rakos** first went out collecting with us on the Skokomish River in 2009, he picked up a natural thatched-hut-shaped stone (*kusuyashi*) (below). Asian workshops manufacture hut stones



3" w x 4" h x 2.5" d

to satisfy collector demand but good quality, natural hut stones are difficult to find. We saw him collect this one and it was featured in the recent exhibition *Suiseki of the Pacific Northwest* at the Fairmont Olympic Hotel in Seattle. Its provenance has been documented in the show catalog. This colorful stone speaks boldly of the Skokomish with due respect to mainstream *suiseki* tradition.

A "good stone" also requires cultural context, and here inevitably, we Westerners find ourselves entangled in taxonomy -- the science of classification. This inclination comes packed in our cultural baggage. The early 18<sup>th</sup> century Swedish botanist **Carl Linnaeus** set out to classify animals, plants and even minerals. He created Linnaean taxonomy, an encyclopedic system of scientific classification now universally used in the biologic sciences. In doing so, he also shaped Western thinking about how the world should be understood.

We are descendants of **Linnaeus**, so it should be no surprise if some of us try mightily to understand *suiseki* by focusing on classification. Is this a distant mountain stone? Is that a near mountain stone? What makes it one thing and not the other? Classification shapes our notions about which stones are worthy, and

which stones are not. Yet taxonomy is not the whole story – not by a long shot.

Different stone appreciation traditions have different systems. Classification of Chinese *gongshi* seems to lean heavily on geologic material standards. A Lingbi stone is a Lingbi stone because it is made of the same material as other Lingbi stones. Structural forms may vary. However, this connection to geologic essence can be a little fuzzy. Some ancient Japanese stones are said to be Lingbi stones from China although Chinese experts will sometimes say that they are really Ying stones. Some might also say they are 100% Japanese, but so ancient as to make any specific origin obscure. One cannot settle these issues with thin-section petrographic microscopy or anything else in the geologist's toolbox. These are subtle matters of style, interpretation, culture and history.

Chinese experts seem to have high regard for the specific characteristics of individual stones, including surface quality, intricacies of topology, and emotional connections to ancient notions of the ideal scholar-hermit life. They seem to make less fuss about what is natural or unaltered. They are more accepting of stones that have strange or ambiguous appearances.

Classification of Japanese *suiseki* is an entirely different matter. A *suiseki* is a special type of stone. Well-known systems popularized in the United States focus mainly on form. These systems require stones to look like something. Moreover, they have to look like something on the standard list. A stone that looks like a Boeing 787 might be interesting, but it could never be a *suiseki*. The universe of acceptable *suiseki* forms is finite. It is rooted in Japanese tradition, culture and history. Japanese *suiseki* can also be classified by their geographic origin. For example, some stones from Wakayama Prefecture would be identified as *furuya-ishi* and would be associated with this one particular location.

Alas, these elements are merely the outside layers of the onion. *Suiseki* also acquire importance over time if they have been owned by famous collectors, or seen in famous exhibitions. For example, a stone that has been exhibited in the Nihon Suiseki Meihinten will always be highly regarded.

**Dan W. Laxdall** owns a remarkable boat-shaped stone (*funagata-ishi*, above, next column) that was also shown at *Suiseki of the Pacific Northwest*. This stone was collected 50-60 years ago by his father, **Dan Laxdall**, near Mt. Baker in Washington State, making it perhaps the most exceptional historic stone from our region.

When you peel back even more layers of the onion, you leave the realm in which ideas can be easily



13.25"W x 2.75"H x 4.5"D

articulated and classified. The indigenous Japanese Shinto religion attributes the honorific noble, sacred spirit of *kami* to many objects and phenomena, including special stones. Our own understanding of Shinto is quite limited but there are times when we do feel a strong spiritual connection with certain stones. Perhaps we are catching a glimpse of some mysterious ethereal element embodied in the material object.

Such notions are not exclusively Japanese. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, British philosophical debate became entranced with the notion of the sublime, an esthetic quality in nature, but not beauty exactly. The sublime was something grander, more stirring and less easily defined. **Edmund Burke** and **Immanuel Kant** wrote philosophical treatises that sent generations of upper-class Brits off around the world to search for the sublime on mountain peaks, and in misty fjords.

In early 19<sup>th</sup> Century America, transcendentalists such as **Ralph Waldo Emerson** rebelled against the Unitarian establishment at Harvard Divinity School and struggled to find a new ideal of spirituality. They looked to **Kant**. They also looked to nature and personal intuition for insights. **Henry David Thoreau** went into the woods at Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts to look for answers. Unfortunately, there were no examples of *suiseki* available to these New England searchers, since **Commodore Matthew Perry** didn't establish contact with Japan until 1854. However, it seems likely that they would have understood *yugen* and some of the transcendental aspects of *suiseki* quite readily.

When we are in the presence of a "good stone," we often savor a vague melancholy feeling about the transitory nature of human life and the unarticulated mysteries beyond everyday conscious thought. Stones have lifetimes too. They are created, eroded and eventually destroyed by geologic forces. The moment in time when a stone becomes *suiseki* is something of a miracle actually. Man and *suiseki* meet in that one



instant, before each travels onward to a separate destiny. The personal response is unique to each individual. Perhaps this personal element is the core reason for all the difficulty we seem to have in answering the simple question “Is this a good stone?”

Every *suiseki* enthusiast travels a unique path. Some collect only a few. Some feel compelled to acquire thousands. Some try to limit the number by making little promises not to add anything new unless something of lesser merit can be offloaded.

At the very highest level, we have heard some experts say that *suiseki* appreciation should properly be a quiet, private activity involving one person and one stone. We imagine such a place must be a realm of tranquility where the question of whether any stone is “good” or “bad” doesn’t come up much. Perhaps the hypothetical savant inhabiting such a space looks back on his own journey with such universal sympathy that the notion of issuing critiques to others would make no sense.

We’re not there yet, so for the moment, we concede our connection to **Linnaeus**, give a wink to the sublime, cross our fingers, try not to be authoritarian, and do the best we can. When someone asks us the question “Is this a good stone?” we sometimes refer to our own personal appraisal system. This simple grading system can be used for *suiseki* (and also for other stone appreciation traditions) but it has its limitations. When all is said and done, even a Class 4 stone can be a “good stone” if it captures the memory of a perfect day on the river, or if one viewer’s mind moves in its presence, as **Hui-neng** suggests.

- Class 1** Highly desirable  
Fine museum quality  
May have important history or provenance  
A comparable stone would likely be impossible to find  
Outstanding example of the particular tradition and type
- Class 2** Very desirable  
Museum quality  
A comparable stone would be extremely difficult to find  
Very good example of the particular tradition and type
- Class 3** Desirable  
Higher-grade collectable quality  
A comparable stone could be found - but not very easily  
Above average example of the particular tradition and type
- Class 4** Moderately desirable  
Lower-grade collectable quality  
A comparable stone could be found fairly easily  
Average example of the particular tradition and type
- Class 5** Not particularly desirable  
Not suitable for most collections  
Comparable stones are abundant  
Below average example of the particular tradition and type

*Ask Guy Jim* *continued from page 6*

With these *tokonoma* arrangements you will hopefully have found a few things to ponder. Next month I will continue the drift towards incorporating more of our own American subject matter within the Japanese *tokonoma* format. If this was a bit too convoluted for you, retrieve the Vol. 26, October 2008

issue and re-celebrate Halloween!

*Guy Jim*

The views expressed in this column are personal, perhaps irreverent, irrelevant or just plain wrong and do not reflect the consensual view of California Aiseki Kai. Send your viewing stone questions (or comments) for GuyJim to jimgreaves@roadrunner.com or 1018 Pacific Street, Unit D, Santa Monica, CA 90405 (310) 452-3680

**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**

|                                         |              |                           |
|-----------------------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Programs:</b> Larry Ragle            | 949.497.5626 | cfsmail@cox.net           |
| <b>Treasury/Membership:</b> Nina Ragle  | 949.497.5626 | ragle@cox.net             |
| <b>Annual Exhibit:</b> Jim Greaves      | 310.452.3680 | jimgreaves@roadrunner.com |
| <b>Exhibit Set Up:</b> Marge Blasingame | 626.579.0420 | margeblasingame@att.net   |
| <b>Refreshments:</b> Lois Hutchinson    | 714.964.6973 | wlhutch@verizon.net       |
| <b>Historian:</b> Ray Yeager            | 760.365.7897 | ryeager890@aol.com        |
| <b>Webmail:</b> Bill Hutchinson         | 714.964.6973 | hutch@aisekikai.com       |
| <b>Newsletter:</b> Larry and Nina Ragle | 949.497.5626 | ragle@cox.net             |



**Newsletter Committee**

**October Contributors:** Linda Gill, Jim Greaves, Tom & Hiromi Elias, Rick & Mimi Stiles 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  
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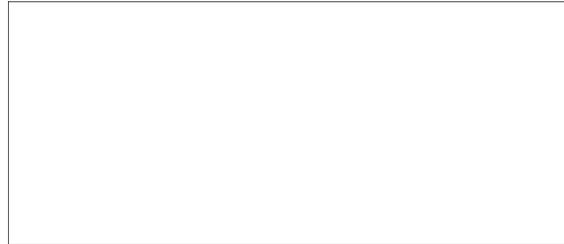
ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED



*Leaves no stone unturned*

See our website:

[aisekikai.com](http://aisekikai.com)



## Coming Events

### GSBF CONVENTION XXXIV

“Bonsai Full Circle” Oct 27-30, Marriott Hotel and Convention Center, 3400 Market St., Riverside.

**Kathy Shaner, Ryan Neil,**

**Pedro Morales, Roy Nagatoshi.**

Demos, seminars, critiques, raffle, vendors, and a suiseki display! Go to: [gsbf-bonsai.org](http://gsbf-bonsai.org)



### CALIFORNIA AISEKI KAI

22nd Anniversary Exhibition, Dec 27 - Jan 1, 2012. Huntington Library, Friends Hall, 10:30 - 4:30.

### CALIFORNIA AISEKI KAI PRESENTS

Chiara Padrini, March 7, 2012. Huntington Library, Ahmanson Classroom. Reception to follow in Banta Hall. Save the date!



### BONSAI-A-THON XVI

GSBF Collection at the Huntington Fundraiser, Feb 25-26, 2012, Huntington Botanical Center, 1151 Oxford Rd., San Marino, 7:30-4:30. This is a fundraiser so bring donations! Please continue to support the Southern California Bonsai and Viewing Stone Collection. **Marge Blasingame** for info: [margeblasingame@att.net](mailto:margeblasingame@att.net) or 626.579.0420

### CALIFORNIA BONSAI SOCIETY

55th Anniversary Convention, April 11-15, 2012, Crown Plaza Hotel, Anaheim. We will participate in a viewing stone exhibition.



**Stone Sales Ken McLeod**

209-605-9386 or 209 586-2881

[suisekiken@sbcglobal.net](mailto:suisekiken@sbcglobal.net) ~ [californiasuiseki.com](http://californiasuiseki.com)

## Refreshments

September's super snacks were provided by **Linda Gill, Marge Blasingame, the Dennises, the Jameses, Joseph Gaytan, Ann Horton, Harry Hirao.** Thank you!



October's treats will be provided by **Bruce McGinnis, Kazue Takada and Don Mullally.**



Always check Golden Statements Magazine Calendar section for additional coming events