

February Program

We will review our show in slides and discussion at our meeting on the 25th. This is always fun and occasionally informative. This is also a nice chance to meet and greet our new members. Bring your thoughts on the show and your stones of the month to this first meeting of the year.

Stone of the Month

Bring in 2 stones that relate to each other in a specific way. They may have come from a single source or they may be composed of the same material. For more ideas on what might constitute a related pair of stones, please read this month's *Ask Guy Jim*. Let's have fun with these non-traditional yet innovative displays!



Don Kruger's display, *Autumn Bluster*, has a seasonal theme. His display includes a near mountain and an embedded pattern stone of a rolling sky and an accent of ginkgo leaves askew.

Swap meet at the February meeting!



Come early and bring in anything you wish to **trade** or **sell**. This has been a popular event at 2 previous meetings. As always, please be prepared to conclude your business no later than 7:20.

Don't let this be your last newsletter

Is there an "X" on your address label? That means you have forgotten to pay your dues. We will miss you. Please send your \$10 (payable to Aiseki Kai) to:
Nina Ragle, P.O. Box 4975, Laguna Beach CA 92652
Be sure to include your email, snail mail and phone number. **Please note any changes.** Thank you all for your continued support. ***Become an e-subscriber***

The New Year of Sharing

Welcome new members (all 12 of you!) and first time visitors to our website. Aiseki Kai is a study group, originally sanctioned by John Naka and the California Bonsai Society, to learn what we could about *suiseki*. This is our 27th year of monthly meetings. We presented our 19th Annual Exhibition at the Huntington Library and Botanical Gardens at the end of 2008. We have more than 200 members from around the world while 30 to 50 attend our meetings.

Our primary focus, since our first meeting in 1983, has been to study the Japanese traditions of stone appreciation and apply these principles to material found in the Americas. Fortunately, if you are interested reviewing it, much of the information we have learned from Japanese authorities, **Uhaku Sudo**, **Arishige Matsuura**, **Seiji Morimae**, **Keiji Murata** and **Saburo Ei (Kahei Nagase)** as well as our members who studied in Japan can be found on our website starting with newsletter Volume 24, Issue 3, March 2006.

This year we have three main agendas:

- 1) recognizing those qualities that distinguish a great stone from the ordinary,
- 2) selecting the best approach to displaying specific stones,
- 3) improving our over all show displays.

While a number of our meetings will continue to feature some event, a show or a member's trip for example, some of our meetings will involve group discussions. We may have an entire evening centered on what our members see in each "stone of the month", or an evening solving the puzzle of how best to display a stone. All of us have a stone that we love but can't explain why. Such a stone could be what the Japanese describe as *chusho obuwei suiseki* or abstract stone. However, since each one of us has different life experiences, an open discussion of such a stone might evoke all sorts of recognitions (or it might explain your secret life).

Most importantly, we need to know if there are stone related questions, subjects or experiences you feel need exploring at our meetings. Let me know.

Larry Ragle

Holiday Party Notes

What a great party! 56 of us celebrated with loads of beautifully prepared calories and an abundant raffle. **Bill and Lois's** daughter, **Nancy Bell**, visiting from Pennsylvania, sold tickets and collected \$755. The **Bloomers** never like to miss out on festivities. They drove from Arizona. New members, **Joel and Jan Schwarz**, came from Washington and were rewarded with lots of raffle prizes. We also welcomed 2 other new members: **YS Farn** and **Marie Luise Fischer**.

We honored the following members for their exemplary service to the club this year: **Marge Blasingame, Ray Blasingame, Kathy Boehme, Jack and Sachiko Dennis, Linda Gill, Jim and Alice Greaves, Bill and Lois Hutchinson** and **Hanne Povlsen**. Where would we be without the support of these wonderful volunteers? And to all our members, thank you for making Aiseki Kai the outstanding club it is.

Larry and Nina



Holiday revelers
Winners all
Party on

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



Ask GuyJim

Dear GuyJim,

Does my display have to be done in the ‘seki kazari’ format to be acceptable for the outside tables at our show at the Huntington Library?

Many Mixed-up Members

Dear Members,

After the October meeting in the weeks leading up to the recent 2008 Huntington Exhibition, I was often asked about *seki kazari* and whether or not a given non-traditional style of display would still be acceptable. California Aiseki Kai was founded with the goal of learning and emulating the Japanese practices of stone appreciation. *Keido* practices reflect the most refined level of contemporary Japanese suiseki display. *Keido* is primarily concerned with formal presentation of bonsai, and to a lesser extent, suiseki, within the architectural setting of a *tokonoma* (and related secondary spaces) and usually includes a scroll with a simple painting or calligraphy. *Seki-kazari* is non-*tokonoma* display, an abbreviated style of *Keido* presentation suitable for less formal tabletop presentations.

A *seki-kazari* tabletop display consists of a primary subunit including a stone properly mounted on its *daiza* or placed within a *suiban* that is then presented on a *shoku* (table) or some type of flat board (*ji-ban*, *ji-ita hira-ita* – note that these specific terms for various types of boards will be discussed in a future [Ask GuyJim](#)). This primary unit is then balanced with a secondary supporting unit consisting of an appropriate accent plant [fig.1] or decorative object such as an *okimono*, for example, a small bronze figure [fig. 2].



Figure 1, above, Nina Ragle's *seki-kazari*
Figure 2, below, Jim and Alice Greaves stone with an *okimono*



Creating passable *seki kazari* is relatively difficult; creating absolutely ‘correct’ presentations is nearly impossible. A myriad/morass of arcane rules govern relationships between correct plants and seasons, plants and pots, style of *suiban* and stone, table style and stone – even the species of wood or its finish may be specified by seasonal considerations. The least complicated displays require accessories that, for whatever reason, club members simply do not have. Employing inferior auxiliary display items is a disservice to the tradition one is supposing to honor: for instance, the use of an ill-proportioned or ‘wrong-colored’ *shoku* to comply with the requirement for a table is worse than having none. Consider too, that with regard to our exhibition as a whole, the public would likely find numerous attempts at creating *seki kazari* to be redundant, perhaps even a bit silly, given the limited types of acceptable plants that are likely to be available. Simple is difficult! Rather than diminish the effect of *seki-kazari* display by several weak, half-hearted efforts, I personally believe Japanese tradition is better served by emphasizing a few largely correct displays and then allowing for more variety throughout the remainder of our exhibition as a whole.

Before our show, I gave considerable thought to the question of our ‘formal’ tables and concluded that we should retain the more encompassing, flexible approach that has been a hallmark of our annual exhibition. To that end, I subsequently made an effort to include several types of ‘formal’ tables to serve as examples for further club discussion and consideration:

The first of these I will call the “Traditional Japanese American Display”. In the past, the inclusion of bonsai has added greatly to the balance and beauty of our Huntington Exhibitions. While the use of landscape stones with bonsai may be incorrect for *seki kazari*, the juxtaposition makes complete sense to our Western audience ... and perusal of Japanese publications will quickly reveal that bonsai and stones have been combined by the Japanese in the past, even if the practice may be a bit out-of-favor today. It has occurred to me that we should rightly and consistently retain such usage because it is specifically this relationship of stones and bonsai that created much of the Western and international interest in stone appreciation.



In the United States we first learned of suiseki from seeing stones within the Japanese American's bonsai displays. Therefore, there is a consistency in acknowledging this through the continued inclusion of bonsai-stone displays in our exhibitions. When discussing styles of presentation, perhaps, we should consciously honor that origin with the designation of 'traditional Japanese-American display'. For regardless of the fact that bonsai and stones have been similarly displayed together in Japan and subsequently wherever an interest in bonsai has developed internationally, it will always remain true that it is the bonsai-stone displays by Japanese Americans that were the source of our own awareness of stone appreciation [figs.3, 4, 5].

In addition to the Japanese influenced *seki kazari* and displays of stones with bonsai, we have for several years included and promoted what I identify as Thematic Displays. These consist of two to several stones that are shown in some organized fashion, not merely sharing the same table! The stones are carefully selected to create 'relational' assemblages or the thematic ('story') approaches. Such displays may also include an accent plant, bonsai or object. In all cases, a certain restraint is in order; the quality of materials, spatial relationships, and general approach to thematic presentations should parallel or echo the Japanese (or occasionally other) traditions.

A Relational Display consists of an assemblage of stones with a unifying concept. The relationship may be one of classification(s), such as a general sampling of mountain forms or a more specific selection such as a comparative group of *doha-ishi* or *hanagata ishi* [fig.6].



Figure 3, Suiseki and shohin bonsai as accent, display by Larry Ragle



Figure 4, Murphy stone with bonsai display by Harry Hiraio



Figure 5, Marge Blasingame's bonsai with John Palmer's suiseki



Figure 6, Chung Kruger's flower stones from British Columbia

The relationship might be strictly geographical, either general such as by country(s) [fig.7] or states, or more specific, such as by a particular desert [figs.8, 9] or river.



Figure 7, International stone display

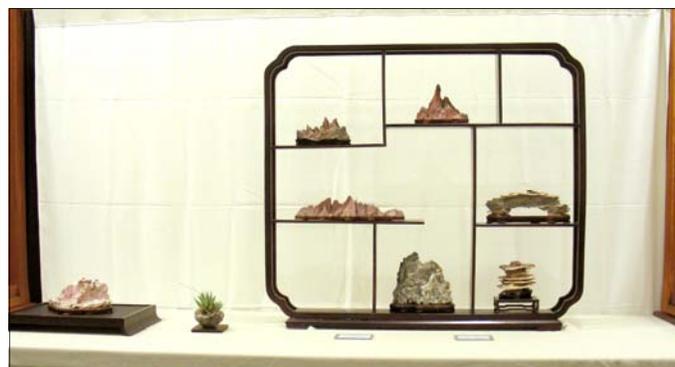


Figure 8, Desert stones grouping from the collection of Hanne Povlsen





Figure 9, a grouping of stones all found in the Palm Springs area from the collections of Ralph Johnson, Cliff Johnson and Linda Gill

The relationship might be one of similar rock composition, such as Murphy Stones or jasper [fig.10].



Figure 10, Lois Hutchinson's collection of stones from a single composition and source which in this case is Murphy

In another direction, the relationship may be to a collector(s): an *in memoriam* or other tribute; an historical grouping [fig. 11].



Figure 11 is a display in memory of Kaz Yoneda

It can be seen that many of these categories have the potential to be combined into further, very specific selections.

Story Displays consist of an arrangement of stones to convey a thematic relationship with an environmental or seasonal ambience, a mood, or the presentation of a 'story' [figs. 12, 13]. The story can be quite literal, but more often it is simply suggestive, requiring that each viewer internalize and integrate the elements, then draw upon their own experience for completion.



Figure 12, Jim and Alice Greaves display, *Evening at the Pond*



Figure 13, *Mediterranean Memories* by Jim and Alice Greaves

Whether of Japanese origin or non-traditional, each of these approaches to 'formal' display has the potential to increase member's involvement and satisfaction in the art of stone appreciation. Together they can provide stimulating variety for the general public and still allow the spotlighting of traditional practices. Regardless of what type of formal table displays prove acceptable to the Club, I conclude by encouraging all to strive to create them. You will benefit by getting a better understanding of your own stones and our Exhibition will benefit from your efforts. The expansion of active California Aiseki Kai membership is approaching a point when we may have to choose between including fewer, but more refined displays or abandoning the current spacious presentation that has characterized our exhibitions to make room for more rows of more stones. [See display summary next page.]



Summary of table display designations for consideration with 2008 Show examples:

1. Formal Japanese *Seki kazari* [7 displays]

A landscape stone on a *shoku* or *ji-ita* with a simple accent plant [6 displays]:

Nina Ragle -2 / Jim & Alice Greaves -4

A landscape stone on a *shoku* or *ji-ita* with accessory figure (*okimono* or *tenkei*) [1 display]:

Jim & Alice Greaves -Kame stone and Jurojin bronze figure

2. Traditional Japanese-American Display [5 displays]

Any viewing stone, including a landscape stone, with a bonsai and possible optional third element:

Larry Ragle -2/ Jack & Sachiko Dennis -1/ John Palmer -1 / Marybel Balendonck -1

3. Thematic Display - Relational- an assemblage with a unifying relationship [5 displays /8 tables]

Memorial Display for **Kaz Yoneda -1**

Classification-**Chung Kruger -1** Flower Stones*

Geographic Source [3 displays]

Geographic Source, General [3 tables] of mixed International Stones

Geographic Source, Specific [2 tables]

Hanne Povlsen - Scenic Desert Stones from Death Valley area

Ralph Johnson, Cliff Johnson and Linda Gill -Palm Springs Desert Stones

Mineral Composition [1] **Lois Hutchinson's** selection of Murphy Stones

*Note that **Chung Kruger's** flower stones perfectly illustrate the possibility of multi-faceted relationships as the stones are also related on the basis of geographic site (Vancouver Island, B.C.) and mineral composition (gabbro porphyry).

4. Thematic Display ('Story') A formal arrangement of stones to convey a thematic relationship [4]

Environmental ambience [2]

Jim & Alice Greaves - Evening at the Pond

Don Kruger - Seacoast

Season-**Don Kruger - Autumn Bluster**

'Story'-**Jim & Alice Greaves - Mediterranean Memories**

Note that displays of this type may also include bonsai, accent plant or objects.



Accent plant



Okimono



Jack and Sachiko Dennis's island stone combined with a bonsai by Marge Blasingame



Formal *seki-kazari* by Nina Ragle



Formal *seki-kazari* by Jim and Alice Greaves

As readers' questions have been lagging, I may fill-in some of **GuyJim's** allotted space for 2009 with more expansive discussions of approaches to creating formal stone presentations.

GuyJim

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

Baikoen Show Participation



Kiyo Yoneda and the family of our dear friend, **Kaz**, made a generous donation to Aiseki Kai in his memory. We were comforted to see his memorial display at our show and grateful for the donations of *shoku* at our holiday party.

On December 6th, we lost another long time member of Aiseki Kai, **Sally Gilmore**. Because Sally lived in Santa Barbara she did not attend meetings but she was always a great supporter, exhibiting at our show for many years and joining us on our collecting trips. She was a talented woodworker and made many *daiza* for her stones. Sally's son, **Jim**, made a generous donation to Aiseki Kai in her memory. He said that he thanks our members for providing his mother with many years of enjoyment. Our thoughts are with Sally's family.

Jim Greaves paid tribute to **Elmer Uchida** (top) and he represented Aiseki Kai at this years show (left). **Nina** was also a guest exhibitor (bottom right).

Refreshments



Thank you all for the fantastic buffet at our holiday party. By any standards, this was a fantastic table of goodies.

The February festivities will be provided by **Joe James, John Nielsen, Harry Hirao** and **Pavel Vasina**. Thank you last minute "volunteers". You guys are the best!

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

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Newsletter Committee

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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!

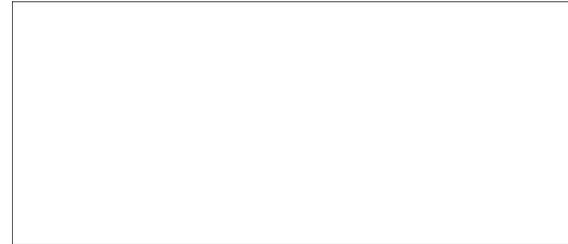
**Ragle
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Laguna Beach CA 92652**

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED



Leaves no stone unturned

See us on the web
aiseikikai.com



If there is an "X" on your address label, you have not paid your dues. This will be your last newsletter.

Coming Events

AMERICAN VIEWING STONE RESOURCE CENTER

Thematic Exhibit: *Eternal Rhythms: Seasons & Time*
Melba Tucker Gallery at the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum, U.S. National Arboretum, Washington, DC.
Continuing through June 2009 (29 stones)

BONSAI-A-THON XIII

GSBF Collection at the Huntington Fundraiser, Feb 28 and March 1, Huntington Botanical Center, 1151 Oxford Rd, San Marino. 7:30-4:30. **This is a fundraiser so bring donations!** Early bird specials, breakfast, lunch, auctions, raffles, vendors, children and adult novice workshops. There will be tours both days with **Jim Folsom** featuring the opening of the new Bonsai Court. On Sunday, **Larry Ragle** will give a special lecture on the display of trees and stones at 2:00. Demos both days and demo material will be auctioned. **Please continue to support the Southern California Bonsai and Viewing Stone Collection.** Contact **Marge Blasingame** for information: call 626.579.0420 or email her at: blasmrjr@aol.com

CALIFORNIA BONSAI SOCIETY

52nd Bonsai Exhibition, "The Soul of the Tree"
March 28-29, Friends Hall, Huntington Library and Botanical Gardens, 1151 Oxford Rd, San Marino.
10-4:30 both days. Reception in Friends Hall, March 28th, 7-9pm. All Aiseki Kai members are invited to this really nice event. You will enjoy it!



RALPH JOHNSON MALACHITE EXHIBITION

In addition to the 52nd California Bonsai Society Show at the Huntington Botanical Gardens on March 28-29, (above) there will be a stunning display of selected pieces from Mr. Johnson's extensive collection of malachite in the Overseer's Room next to Friends Hall. 10-4:30 both days. **Jim Folsom** invites all Aiseki Kai members to the reception in Friends Hall on March 28th, 7-9PM. Save the date. This is a rare opportunity to not only see the bonsai but also the **Hidden World of Green.**

Always check Golden Statements Magazine Calendar section for additional coming events.

Happy Birthday, Harry Hirao, who will be 92 on March 12th.