

California Aiseki Kai

Volume 24, Issue 3

March 2006

The March 22nd Program

We are very fortunate to have **Richard Turner** for our speaker on March 22nd, 2006 at 7:30 pm. **Richard's** talk will be "Born in the USA: An American Perspective on *Suiseki* and *Gongshi*".

Richard Turner teaches studio art and Asian art history and is co-director of the Guggenheim Gallery at Chapman University in Orange County. He studied Chinese language and art for a year at Taipei Normal University in Taiwan in 1964. He has traveled in mainland China and Japan and lived in India and Vietnam. His work as an artist has been influenced by his ongoing involvement with the cultures of Asia. He will use examples of his own work to illustrate his exploration of the aesthetics of *Suiseki* and *Gongshi*.

ALERT: There are 5 Wednesdays this month. Come on the 4th Wednesday, March 22nd. If you show up on March 29th, please say hello to the cleaning crew!

March Stone of the Month

Al Nelson suggested this month's featured stone. With so much excitement about the collecting trip it is easy to see why. Please bring your favorite finds from our March 7-8 Yuha Desert adventure. There were 41 of us out there and it seems like everyone found something special, so let's have a show and tell. If you weren't on the trip, just bring in a Yuha Desert stone from an earlier trip. If you have never found a stone at the Yuha Desert, bring in whatever stone you want to talk about.

Social Time Refreshments

Thanks to **Jim Greaves** and **Alice Arbaugh**, **Jack** and **Sachiko Dennis**, **Sara Gyer**, **Larry** and **Nina Ragle**, and **Lily Tamura** and **Olivier Civelli** for the delicious snacks for February!

The March delights will be provided by **Akio Okumoto**, **Richard Turner**, **Joe James** and **Ann Horton**.

Buried in a Landslide of Yugen Part 1

Yugen in Japanese art implies mysterious skills that can be felt but not put into words.
The Many Mysteries of *Suiseki*. Why Aiseki Kai?

The idea of a study group to try to solve the mystery of *suiseki* was born in 1982. In part, it happened because I had been asked to write an article on *Suiseki* for *Bonsai in California*, Vol. 14 (1980) and another article for Vol. 16 (1982). Most of what I had learned was by word of mouth and viewing pictures in Japanese publications. When I read the articles now, I cringe, just a little. We didn't know much, in those days. But then, there wasn't much information available. It's not that I didn't try.

I had located only two articles, in English, describing the basic concepts and definition of viewing stones. One article, beautifully condensed to a single page appeared in Vol.1, *Bonsai in California*, 1967. However, the article, *Suiseki*, gave no credit to its author. It would be almost 20 years before the author was unveiled. More on that later.

My interest in viewing stones began soon after I started studying bonsai, on my own, in 1962. By 1965, I had seen pictures of bonsai with a rock included in the pot. So I placed some rocks I had collected from the Russian River in the pots of some of my trees. When I had my first real lesson with **John Naka**, in 1966, I took one of my combo arrays to work on. I remember saying to my friend as we walked into the class, "Today we find out what **John Naka** really thinks about stones!" It didn't take long. He didn't like it. **Naka** said, "What's that rock doing in that pot? Take it out! Remember, the rock came first. The tree has to be over the rock!"

Nevertheless, **Naka** encouraged all of his students to collect stones, primarily for use as accents or as he advised for "root over rock". He had a nice collection of viewing stones, most from the Kern River.

What happened next played a major role in the creation of Aiseki Kai. This story will continue in the April newsletter.

Larry Ragle

February Meeting Notes

by Linda Gill

February Program Notes

by Larry Ragle

NEW FACES

Phil & Judy Sato, Eric Bosc, Bonnie & Charlie Schwartz, Buzz Berry, Freeman Wong & his dad, Rudi, were welcomed by all. **Linda** apologizes if she missed someone or misspelled any names. Just let her know who you are and she will issue a correction.

MEMORIAL BOOK

There is a memorial book by **Jim Greaves** for **Elmer Uchida** - which will be \$22 if enough people buy it. Elmer was one of the original Aiseki Kai members.

NEW BOOKLET

There was a suggestion [**Ray Yeager** presented an outline for this to **Larry**] to create a booklet that recounts the history of Aiseki Kai and discusses collecting, displaying and classifying stones. As planned it would cost \$1 a copy. We would sell them at our stone show for \$2/3. The booklet would replace our present brochure. We will discuss this again at future meetings.

STONE FOR FEBRUARY - ANIMAL SHAPED STONES

This was a very popular choice with nearly everyone bringing a stone to show. There were the obvious and the vague but *suiseki* tells us that the stone only needs to suggest the creature envisioned and that what you see may not be what someone else sees. We had fish, fowl, mammals and even movie monsters. There was some debate about the definition of 'animal' - do birds and fish qualify? Suggestions for other creatures seen in each stone were plentiful and a good time was had by all.

JACK'S SIGN OFF

Jack Dennis, who has published the newsletter for the last 5 years, thanked everyone who had supported him. He talked about some of the issues that he had faced and how they were resolved and named some folks who had been especially helpful to him in his efforts to improve his work.

THIS WRITER'S NOTE

We've thanked **Jack** before but it won't hurt to thank him once again. It was a great run!

[An expanded version of **Linda's** program notes begins in the next column. **Larry's** program was on display.]

Larry reminded us that the newsletter will be prepared and distributed by a committee. ANYONE who wants to participate will be welcome.

I want to clear up some confusion on how we display our stones during our shows at the Huntington Library. We have a *tokonoma* display, many table top displays and many individual displays. This discussion is intended to help you when you choose the type of display you plan to enter. We have only one formal *tokonoma* and our curator, **Jim Greaves**, usually selects the appropriate grouping, a stone, often corresponding with the Chinese calendar or other seasonal theme, and a bonsai and appropriate scroll to complement the stone or indicate the season. There are as many "rules" for using scrolls or maybe more, than there are for *suiseki* and bonsai. This display often uses three different owners' objects to achieve the best combination to tell the story of the season.

For the other types of displays everyone can choose between a table top display that tells a story similar to the *tokonoma*, but without a scroll or an enclosure, or an individual (single stone display). The plan is for the table top displays to be on the tables that are backed by a drape while the individual stones are arranged on the open tops of the three long arrangements in the middle of the room.

Our show uses 3 types of displays.

1. TOKONOMA

A *tokonoma* is an alcove to display objects of art. A visual conflict occurs when too many objects are used, filling much of the space or volume of the *tokonoma*. The Japanese word, *ma*, describes space, and emptiness is an important element. In the *Kei-do* style, one of many philosophical approaches to display, the emphasis is on open space around the components using 2 or 3 items to tell a story. There may be a stone, a bonsai and a scroll. In the slides used as examples, either the stone or the tree is the primary component, (usually larger or positioned higher on a table). In the slide shown here [on pg 4] in *Kei-do* style there are 2 items.

Choosing the proper scroll can be difficult for people who are not brought up in the Japanese culture. There are at least 26 seasons compared to our 4. For example, each scroll may have an implicit meaning beyond the seasonal reference. Most important and easier to understand is that the subject of the scroll should not be the same as that of the stone or the plant but all should be related to convey a unified theme. For example, certain items would only be displayed on New Year's Day.

Continued on page 4

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



Viewing Stone Display at the Huntington

[The following introduced a terrific display at the Bonsai-a-thon on Feb 25-26. Jim and Alice filled an entire room with 36 beautiful coastal stones and coastal related figure stones.]

By the Sea: Viewing Stones Representing Traditional *Suiseki* Classifications Related to the Ocean

Among viewing stone collectors it has long been a running joke that the category of coastal rocks can always be used as a catchall category for stones that do not readily fit any other classification. One's own experiences along Route 1 or perusal of magazines, books and advertisements reveal that just about any stone, no matter how bizarre, will have a natural prototype somewhere in the world where land meets sea.

With this selection we attempt to do justice to the intent of the more traditional sub-classifications of shore stones. The emphasis is on depicting common archetypal landscape forms, rather than the occasional exotic, odd rock. That said, we must add the disclaimer that we remain confused as to the exact meanings of some of the Japanese classifications and the precise boundaries between them.

You may note that this display is unusual in that almost

all the stones are displayed in *suiban* rather than on *daiza*. We believe that this is the only appropriate way to view stones relating to land forms associated with bodies of water. Consider that an island is actually the top of a mountain surrounded by water, therefore, when 'island' stones are presented on *daiza* they are more naturally seen as mountains than as islands. Throughout the display light grayish sand has been chosen to serve as a uniform, neutral representation of water. Because of the didactic nature of this selection of stones, the presentation is far denser than would be the case with a more traditional *suiseki* display.

By Jim Greaves and Alice Arbaugh



A view of the 'By the Sea' Viewing Stone Exhibit at the Bonsai-a-thon .



Island Stone (Shimagata-ishi) from the Eel River. All 36 stones in this exhibit belong to Jim and Alice.



'Palos Verde' / Cape Stone (Misaki-ishi) from the Eel River. This stone was "found" in the raffle at the Annual Party this year.

February Program Notes continued from page 2



Kei-do style tokonoma display

2. TABLE TOP DISPLAY

This display is 2 or 3 items that also tell a story. There is no scroll with this display. Ideally, the stone is the primary component accompanied by a small *bonsai* or accent plant. Any plant that is used should also relate to the display. For example, a container with moss would accent a rain pattern stone. This type of display is the biggest problem for the curator so future meetings will focus on variations.

A second type of table top display is a stand with shelves, 2, 3, or 5. These stones should also tell a story or have a theme. The number of shelves and items in the stand should be an odd number (Japanese box stands usually have 5 spaces) and the stand should not be so ornate that it draws attention away from the

stones. (One item per shelf) Chinese and Korean stands tend to be more elaborate. The stones on the stand should be placed in the order they occur in nature. For example, a water pool stone might be on the bottom level, a boat stone next, then a hut stone, a mountain stone and at the top a celestial stone. The stones may relate to a season, come from a certain area, be of the same classification, etc.

3. INDIVIDUAL STONES AND ACCENT ITEMS

The show also displays individual stones with scattered accents, bonsai or plants. *Saikei*, natural miniature landscapes, that include stones and plants are appropriate in this group. It is best if the items are not too crowded so that viewers can look at each stone independently. The number of stones offered for viewing, here and even in Japan, sometimes appear overcrowded.



Table top display

Kaz Yoneda Honored

His Imperial Highness, **Prince Katsura** awarded **Kaz Yoneda** the Green and White Medal, for his contributions promoting and teaching the art of bonsai and design of gardens. This is the highest honor awarded by the Agricultural Society of Japan to a non-citizen. This award was established in 1881.

Kaz and **Kiyo** are founding members of Aiseki Kai.

Congratulations **Kaz** and **Kiyo**!



Have a viewing stone question? Ask GuyJim

Dear GuyJim,

My sister and I discovered viewing stones at the Huntington library in December. She is enthusiastic to begin a hobby that she sees as offering so much beauty for so little cost. To my eye the carved wooden bases, crafted stands and ceramic sand trays look custom made and anything but common, suggesting considerable hidden expense to me. Who is right?

Hesitant from Huntington Beach

Dear Hesitant,

Your sister is correct in her assessment of beauty for good value; but you are perhaps more correct in your astute observation that there are significant hidden costs. While picking-up her first stone(s) might be 'free' as long as she were going to be wading in that creek anyway, it is unlikely that she will be able to exhibit her stone to the public without some expense. Unless she also happened to pick-up the perfect piece of natural driftwood upon which to display her stone she will require a *daiza* (custom carved wooden base) or a *suiban* (shallow ceramic basin) and either a *jiban* (finished wood board) or *dai* (table stand) to place beneath.

Consider a common 10" stone. If time is not money to her and she just happens to have some quality wood and several exotic tools around, she might make a *daiza* for free and use a simple *jiban* made from a painted piece of tempered Masonite®. If not, tools are expensive and hardwood for a 10" stone might run \$10-40, depending on depth. To have a professional

daiza made could quickly exceed \$150 for an irregular shaped natural stone; while a *daiza* for a cut stone would cost less, the cutting would add \$15-25. Once mounted, an underlying *jiban* could cost an additional \$25-45; a table stand: \$45-125.

A ceramic *suiban* (sand/water basin) would have the great advantage of being reusable for other stones. The 10" stone would generally require a 20" *suiban* at a cost of \$125-175 or more. The larger *jiban* required would then run \$40-80; a table stand, \$125-250.

Your sister's 'free' stone is now on display as a *suiseki* with \$200-400 worth of improvements! In fact, a more complex *daiza* and/or finer display accessories can cost many hundreds of dollars; antique display accessories, thousands! Remember, all this is to display one stone. Once one is hooked on collecting, one can multiply the expense by three or five stones per show and exponentially thereafter, as stones and display refinement dictate. Also, once you begin trips directed towards stone collecting you can add in the cost of lodging, gear, grub, and gas ... but, it will all be worth it for, at least while collecting, *it is you who will be free!*

I promise, 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 jim-greaves@adelphia.net or 1018 Pacific Street, Unit D, Santa Monica, CA 90405 (310) 452-3680



In a suiban, this is an island stone (shimagata-ishi) in a sea of sand. Eel River. Size 10 1/4" W x 3 5/8" H x 4 7/8" D. Cut.



In a diaza, this same stone is presented as a near mountain stone (kinzan-seki).

A California Odyssey

by Mary Bloomer

The first stop on the Bloomer odyssey was the Aiseki Kai annual dinner – a good place to start. From there it was on to Northern California and our cabin at Clearlake. We were very curious and anxious to see what the rains we'd heard so much about might have done to the river banks in the north, but first we took in the California Shohin Society's biennial convention at Santa Nella. Then we were free to visit the northern rivers, particularly the Eel, and satisfy our curiosity.

A rancher friend, whose family ranch straddles the Eel, told us that the river had risen to 28 feet above normal. We had to see what this kind of water would do to river banks and were amazed at what we found.

Photo 1, taken further downstream from his ranch, shows the flood's incredible power. Whatever kind of heavy equipment this once was, and where it came from, it is now totally unrecognizable. We estimated



that the waters had risen as high as 35 to 40 feet above normal, and was still running above normal. Smaller stones littered the beach, but the larger, heavier ones were still under fast-moving water. With these kinds of floods this should be a banner year for river collecting – just not quite yet.

Nor was our *suiseki* journey quite over, for we headed for home by way of Southern California again and a lovely reception at Ralph Johnson's home. From there, having met with John and Pat Palmer, we headed home by way of Dumont Dunes. It seemed perfectly logical. With all the rains this winter, surely new stones would have been cleansed and revealed by water and wind, and that is exactly what we found.



Chelsea, our dog, who had been very patient up to now, went right to work digging for *suiseki* with the enthusiasm of a dedicated *suisseeker*. Here's what she found for Mary.



[Thank you, Mary. Mary and Peter Bloomer are two of our long distance members and although they have attended only a few meetings, they always turn up when we need set-up help or docents for our show, when we are going rock hunting or whenever we have a party. We like their priorities.]

A Letter from Chiara Padrini in Italy

Dear *Suiseki* Friends,

Last year the first "Vacation and *Suiseki*", one week long, was a great success and I propose to you the 2006 initiatives. Two different stages, one for beginners and one for advanced, to spend in Italy to improve your knowledge of *suiseki* and for collecting trip and to improve your collection.

The September stage will finish the last day of CRE-SPI CUP CONVENTION, one of the main exhibits in Italy for bonsai, *suiseki* and pots. The *suiseki* course will end with critique exercises and a round table on *suiseki* arguments with public and participants.

Italian Instructors will collaborate to this special day and my school: Angelo Attinà, Ezio Piovanelli and Andrea Schenone.

I hope my proposal of an unforgettable vacation in Italy that you can spend also with your family, will be agreeable to you.

JUNE Session for beginners
www.padrini.it/vesgiugno2006.htm
 SEPTEMBER Session for advanced
www.padrini.it/vessett2006.htm

Chiara www.padrini.it

Thanks for the Memories

With this March 2006 issue of the Newsletter of California Aiseki Kai, let us take a moment to thank the helmsman and mate who five years ago launched it and set sail into the fathomless Sea of *Suiseki*, skirting its treacherous currents and bringing all safely and smiling to port -- while holding a camera high in one hand to document the adventure! Indeed, Jack and Sachiko Dennis, your effort will truly make us all thankful for the assistance your candid photos and observations will provide to our own memories.

Anyone who has tried one's hand at writing understands the time, effort, and sacrifice demanded in order to meet a relentless, recurring monthly deadline. Their achievement is all the more remarkable when it is known that even in the face of repeated bouts with serious illness (which they kept to themselves), the Newsletter never failed to arrive with its load of humor and information. Everyone, take a moment to consider how much dedication was required to drive a couple hundred miles a night to attend, take notes, and photograph virtually every meeting for five years

We hope that Jack and Sachiko will now have a bit more time for the 'other' things in life, especially the freedom to travel and, by golly, even collect *suiseki*. Perhaps in time, after a few too many margaritas and becoming a tad bored with lying around in the sun, they will periodically return with some salty observations, say 'From the Crow's Nest' or, maybe, 'The Poop Deck'! And remember, Jack and Sachiko, we may have granted you liberty, but we won't permanently excuse you from galley duty ...you make one powerful chili!
Bravo Zulu, Captain Jack!

Jim Greaves

This color newsletter was made possible due to the generosity of **Faye and Ralph Johnson**. Thank you!

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

CALIFORNIA AISEKI KAI

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED



Leaves no stone unturned

www.aisekikai.com

Coming Events

CALIFORNIA BONSAI SOCIETY

49th Bonsai Exhibition, "Bonsai-Welcome the Emerging Spring" will be held March 25-26 in Friends Hall at the Huntington Library and Botanical Gardens, 1151 Oxford Road, San Marino. 10-4:30. Reception March 25th, from 7-9pm.

SAN DIEGO BONSAI CLUB

41st Annual Spring Bonsai Show will be held April 29-30. Casa del Prado, Room 101, Balboa Park. Open 10-5. Sales Area. Demos 11:00 am and 2:00 pm each day. Free admission and parking. For information: **Joanie Berkwitz** 760-431-1014 or email mold40@adelphia.net or see www.sandiegobonsaiclub.com

SAN PU KAI

Annual Spring Show will be held May 20th at the Japanese Cultural Center, 150 Cedar Road, Vista 10-4. Free admission and parking. For information: **Joanie Berkwitz** 760-431-1014 or email: mold40@adelphia.net or www.sanpukai.org

SANTA ANITA BONSAI SOCIETY

Annual Bonsai Exhibition will be held May 27-29 in Ayers Hall at the Los Angeles County Arboretum, 301 N Baldwin Ave. Arcadia. 9-4:30. **Kathy Boehme** will be selling *suiban*. This is a wonderful opportunity. Don't miss it.

SAN FRANCISCO SUISEKI KAI

25th Annual Exhibit will be held August 19-20 at the Miyako Hotel in SF. 11-5 both days. More info next month.

REDWOOD EMPIRE BONSAI SOCIETY

The 23rd annual Bonsai Show will be held August 26 & 27 in the Santa Rosa Veterans Building at 1351 Maple Ave. in Santa Rosa. **Yasuo Mitsuya** will be giving demonstrations on both days at 1:30 pm. For information: **Bob Shimon** (707)8844-4126 or shimon@mcn.org. www.rebsbonsai.org

CA Aiseki Kai meets on the 4th Wednesday of each month at 7:30 pm at the Nakaoka Community Center located at 1700 162nd St, Gardena, CA. Second Floor.