

CALIFORNIA AISEKI KAI



Volume 29, Issue 1

January 2011



January 26th
Help set up at 5:30
Party begins at 6:00
Dinner at 6:30
Raffle after the meal

Come, help celebrate the end of another amazing year and the beginning of a new one. Remember this is a potluck so bring a favorite dish to share and utensils with which to serve it. The club will provide all the soft drinks, plates, napkins, flatware, etc., but please bring your appetite and....

Party Raffle



Don't forget, this is our annual fundraiser. Please donate anything you think will be appreciated by your fellow club members and be ready to buy raffle tickets. This is a great way to help support our club activities. And speaking of supporting our club activities....

Dues are Due

This is a request to you folks who get the hard copy of the newsletter who have a computer and could be *e~subscribers* to please rethink your membership needs. The more of you who are *e~subscribers*, the better for all. We hope you will consider going green. We really appreciate your support. Thank you.

Please send \$10 to California Aiseki Kai
c/o Nina Ragle
P.O. Box 4975
Laguna Beach, CA 92652-4975

It's All About You

This is your club. Have you thought about how you can more fully participate? Would you like to present a program or do you have an idea for a program? Do you have a question for *GuyJim*? Can you write an article for the newsletter? Do you have photos you would like to share? Do you have an idea for Stone of the Month? It's all about you so let's get more involved in 2011.

The Essence of California Aiseki Kai

There are many qualities that define California Aiseki Kai as a group. No single word could describe our year long activities but in regard to our show this year at the Huntington I believe there is an appropriate single description – effort. Congratulations to every member who prepared a display and to every member who wore the red scarves. Your effort stood out.

The single most important observation, to me, was the quality of many of the stones. Your overall effort showed, in the choice of stones, your hand made stands and the preparation of sand in your trays.

As usual there is that group of extra special people who never get enough “points” who repeatedly make this annual event happen. To **Marge Blasingame**'s ‘before’ team - **Ray Blasingame, Kathy Boehme, Joe James, Jean Horton, Harry Trieu, Marty Hagbery, Linda Gill, Phil Chang, Ken McLeod, Don Kruger** and **Jim Greaves** and the ‘after’ team, **Kathy Boehme, Ray Blasingame** and **Jean Horton** - we all owe our gratitude. And a special thanks to **Linda Gill**, the queen of security (there everyday) and her numerous deputies and the new kid on the block, printer's block that is, **Richard Aguirre**, who prepared all the labels. And thank you **Jack** and **Sachiko Dennis** for ‘chili Sunday’.

We are all indebted to our host, **Jim Folsom**, the Director of the Huntington Botanical Gardens and his staff, **David MacLaren, Danielle Rudeen** and **Evie Cutting**. They were working in Friends Hall before anyone got there, setting up the tables and those special lights.

The impact of our shows - “Awakening the Soul”
Our collective efforts, the impact on our guests, cannot be quantified to any degree beyond the new members who joined Aiseki Kai during the show. Nevertheless, I feel confident that we have “awakened” many of our guests to the beauty of natural stones, and perhaps the beauty of nature in general. How many times have you heard a guest say, “I’ve collected stones all my life but I never thought of displaying them like this”, or “I’m going to pay more attention the next time I’m at the river.” Our shows change people and I’m good with that, as long as they don’t get to the river before I do.

We all send best wishes for a speedy recovery to our friend, Willi Benz. Larry Ragle

Yuha Desert Trip ~ Nov 13 -14

29 members of Aiseki Kai met in the Yuha Desert for a little fun. **Joe James** led the group on Saturday and **Bruce McGinnis** did the same on Sunday. In between trips we had a pizza/potluck/beer/wine party. What's a rock trip without a party? Thank you all for the fine food and camaraderie and **Ralph Johnson** for the adult beverages. Below are a couple of early finds along with **Peter Bloomer's** flower stone and his hut stone [no, he did not find it with the *daiza*, that came later.] We all had a wonderful time but...once the food was gone, so were we.



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





[Above] One lone seeker on the horizon. There's lots of room to spread out in the Yuha. [Below] Food and fellowship makes the day complete. If you didn't make it this time, join us for the next trip. You won't be sorry...it's all the fun!



Ask Guy Jim

Dear GuyJim,

We are preparing an exhibit at the U.S. Bonsai & Penjing Museum. I plan to begin the exhibit with winter and end with verdant spring mountains. In between, there will be shochikubai ('Three Friends of Winter' theme), first dream, first sunrise, Daruma doll, firecrackers and dragon dance to drive away evil spirits, Chinese symbols of prosperity and luck (kumquats, mandarin oranges, narcissus, plum blossoms, peach blossoms, etc.). And, of course, as many rabbit stones and rabbit accessories as I can pack in! Are you aware of any appropriate stones available for loan?

Kathleen Emerson-Dell, U.S. National Arboretum

Dear Kathleen,

At this year's annual California Aiseki Kai Exhibition at the Huntington Library rabbit stones were proliferating like, well, rabbits! I've rounded up a selection from our recent exhibition plus a few that escaped the show. There may be a decided lack of *suiseki gravitas*, but after all, they are rabbits! While it may be difficult to conceive of a profound rabbit, the stones in our recent show (figs 1, 2, 3, 4) clearly engaged the public. Many a parent and child were very attentive and persistent as they went through the show having been tipped off that there were rabbits to be found!

Certainly, these stones are far removed from what I would consider to be serious *suiseki*. My term, 'silly-seki', might be more applicable. They are perhaps best considered under the large umbrella of *mimetoliths* (stones that look like something). As with landscape stones, one ultimately finds that a more ambiguous stone (figs 4, perhaps 6) is more satisfying than others that can be immediately apprehended.

[For those less acquainted with Asian folklore, the hare/rabbit has long been associated with the moon. Where we in the West perceive the 'Man in the Moon', those in the East are more likely to focus on the Rabbit. The moon-rabbit association has many variants, probably all going back to the Indian origins with the Jeweled Hare that pounded the herbs to make the elixir of life and another story of the rabbit that willingly sacrificed itself to feed the Buddha and was rewarded for its devotion by being transmigrated to the moon to live for a thousand years. The Chinese and Japanese retain the view of the rabbit mixing/grinding/pounding the elixir of immortality and thus the hare is a symbol of longevity. Japanese often modify that vision to perceive the rabbit as pounding *mochi* (rice cake) for the Goddess of the Moon.]

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

Note that several of these stones will be on loan to:

Year of the Rabbit: A New Year Stone Exhibit
National Bonsai & Penjing Museum,
U. S. National Arboretum, Washington, DC
January 29 to March 27, 2011



1. Northern California; Chung Kruger



2. 'Strawberry Rabbit', Trinity River, CA; Ken McLeod





3. Palm Springs, CA; Bonnie McGinnis
The animated *daiza* carved by Bruce McGinnis was 'slipped' into the show to engage new viewers.



6. Moon-gazing Rabbit, Eel River, CA; Elmer Uchida (AVSRC)
10¼" W x 11¼" H x 4½" D (26cm x 28.6cm x 11.4cm)
Many Asian myths say that rabbits procreate by gazing at the moon.



4. 'Peter', Baja, CA; Joseph Gaytan
In the end, this ambiguous bunny retains our interest more than immediately identified images.



7. Rabbit with spring flowers and moon



5. Palm Springs, CA; Jim Greaves (AVSRC)
2¼" W x 1¼" H x 1" D (5.7cm x 3.2cm x 2.5cm)
A small, bright mimetolith.



8. Rabbit and moon

Suiseki, the Personal Art

by Sean Smith

Several months ago in Japan I was viewing a *suiseki* displayed in a *tokonoma*; it was your typical formal display with table, accent and a scroll. It was explained to me as a distant mountain; the scroll showed a few birds that migrate at that time of year in Japan, and the accent plant was one that grows in the bogs below the mountains.

It was wonderful so I thought; it was very elegantly done and I was very grateful for the time and effort that this person spent preparing this display for me. Then I scratched my head and thought to myself do I really understand what this display really means....then it came to me, why should I, this is not my *suiseki*. This was created by one man's thoughts and to him it was wonderful and meaningful.

Why is it that the western approach is always to point out the negative and not the positive? I came away feeling bad having only focused on me! I should have asked many questions about the *suiseki* and the display, and what his approach was about the stone. That way we both could have shared our feelings for the display.

For me *suiseki* should invoke a feeling, almost like a personal relationship so to speak, a sensation that gives me pleasure or sadness, something that stirs my heart of a recollection good or bad.

Suiseki should have an importance to the enthusiast in some way, a connection that gives an emotional feeling. Even when one purchases a *suiseki* from a reputable dealer, it should move that person in some way.

Quality is of the utmost importance; never say it's just good enough. Always look for quality.

Stones of high quality, either purchased or found, have the ability to move a person; they are of high aesthetic and emotional value. For me, a quality stone is one that in a sense is perfect, without blemishes, cracks or chips; it's the quality of the *suiseki* not the quantity that counts. This recalls the story from Japan that you will only find three *suiseki* in your life time. This art is very difficult.

Not only is finding good, high quality *suiseki* hard, but so is displaying them.

There is an old story from Japan that tells of a samurai returning from battle stopping at a river to water his horse. As the horse was drinking, the samurai looked into the water and saw a stone that looked like a mountain. He reached for it and picked it up looking at it, it reminded him of the mountain valley in which he had just done battle. We all know that war is pain and

suffering, bloodshed and loss of comrades; when looking at this stone it invoked just such a place, where he lost his comrades and inflicted pain and death onto others.

He took the stone and slipped it into his kimono sleeve and returned to his village and shared his experiences with others. How many people would really understand this stone without being at this battle? No one. However, for this samurai it moved him emotionally and reminded him of what happened that one day. He would remember everything of that day by viewing this *suiseki*. Even by sharing this story with others and explaining what happened could they obtain the same feeling from the stone as he would? Although they could try to empathize and perhaps develop their own interpretation of the stone, is it likely?

To help share his feelings, there would perhaps be some kind of written record about the stone in order to help tell its story. This is something we also overlook; keeping a written record about a stone we find and keep. I have gone to bonsai/*suiseki* enthusiasts estate sales and so many of the items that they have collected for many years have a heritage which is unknown. Often the person passes away and no one knows where the item came from or when it was collected. For *suiseki*, these facts could be preserved in the traditional way with *kiri bako* (wooden box) where the information about the *suiseki* is written on the back side of the lid or just on a sheet of paper kept with it. Another way would be to have exhibition catalogs where stones are photographed for publication. This would provide a valuable record of the *suiseki*. Our *suiseki* will certainly out live us so we need to preserve this information for generations to come and by doing so we will have a *suiseki* history in the West.

Too often here in the West, we collect with no feeling or emotion; we look for that *doha* or *toyama* along the rivers... why? Because we have seen photographs of them in Japanese books? Sure we do, because this is a Japanese art form; we are copying them just as we do in bonsai. There is nothing wrong with that, we enjoy it and it brings pleasure to us. There is however a more important aspect to collecting than simply accumulating a massive quantity of Japanese style rocks.

I shared a story with a good friend the other day, it's nothing special to anyone but me. A few summers ago I was vacationing with my family in Atlantic City,



New Jersey. My daughter was 7 years old at the time, swimming at the pool after a long day at the beach. Show-off Dad was jumping into the pool trying to impress his daughter with big splashes. I slipped jumping into the pool and unknown to me I had torn a ligament in my knee. Despite being in great pain I continued to play with my daughter without letting on, so as not to ruin a family memory. The next day I flew to San Juan, Puerto Rico to do a demonstration. The following day I was collecting stones on the beach and in immense pain, I came across a magnificent *sugata ishi*. I carefully bent down and picked it up. Wow this is very nice I told myself, but my pain was too much to bear and I had to return to the car to rest. As I looked at the only stone I picked up, I realized that this stone had all the great Japanese guidelines. It was not until I returned home, and had my knee operated on that I realized that this stone had a story behind it. However, in the same way as the returning Samurai, it was just my story, special to me, and when I display this stone I remember all the pain I was in, my daughter telling me to, "Jump higher Daddy, make a really big splash this time."

Yes, I know this story may seem lame for some, nevertheless to me it means the world and I will never forget that time.

Another story is about my late father in the early 90's. As we walked in the forest together I came across a little stone that followed the Japanese guidelines for a good *suiseki*. I picked it up and showed my father the stone and he said it's just a black stone. I laughed and slid it into my pocket, returned home and placed it outside with many other stones where it blended in like all the rest of my "nothing special" stones.

7 years later my father passed way from cancer. That day I looked at the stone and cried for hours holding it in my hand; again, to others it may look like just another stone, but to me it brings back memories of my father and that day we were together. It moves me every time I see it or touch it and for me this is what *suiseki* should do, invoke an emotion, a personal feeling. However, displaying it and conveying that feeling could be almost impossible as the stones power and history only relates to me. As time passes and I give this *suiseki* to my daughter and tell her the story, perhaps she will take it and cherish it as I have.

Display is a deeply personal act that I feel should not be criticized in a negative way. We have to keep in mind the personal feelings suggested by that display. We should ask questions to help get a better understanding of the *suiseki* and the intentions of the person displaying it. Some displays are obvious scenes in nature, others slightly more abstract. Even the obvious scenes can have a hidden, unique and personal depth to them which can only be appreciated through an open minded approach to the art. Rather than take a detached attitude to your *suiseki*, I urge you to attach a personal importance to it and look to record it when important; strive for quality over quantity and above all else, do it with an open mind. And enjoy what someone else is giving.

Sean Smith is a co-founder of the International Stone Symposium and a master *daiza* carver and owner of Custom Oriental Wood-Craft in Marysville, PA. We are so grateful to him for taking the time to share his feelings with us. See his website at bonsai-suiseki.com

All Eyes On the Show

Hundreds of visitors were excited by our "found art". We welcomed 6 new members who joined at the show.



The 21st Anniversary Show

Attendance was excellent in spite of the weather. It was another beautifully curated show thanks to **Jim Greaves**. Thank you **Marge Blasingame** for the beginning and end and **Linda Gill** for everything in between. Thank you members for your participation. Here is a sample of the 171 displays. More next month.



Marybel Balendonck



Don & Chung Kruger



Karen Higgins



Peter Bloomer



Sam Suk



Janet Shimizu



Brent Wilson





Ken McLeod



Harley Newman



Ann Horton by way of Cliff Johnson



Bill Hutchinson



Barry & Sandy Josephson



Marty Hagbery



John Palmer



Linda Gill





Phil Chang



Sarah Gyer



Jean Horton



Don Mullally



Ray & Shirley Yeager



Al Nelson



Sharon Sommerfeld



Joseph Gaytan





In Memory~ Mas Moriguchi



John & Carol Mortensen



Harry Hirao

[BELOW: International Table]



Jim & Alice Greaves

Stones from Italy, Japan, China, Zaire, South Africa, Korea, Viet Nam, and Indonesia.



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
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Annual Exhibit: Jim Greaves	310.452.3680
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Refreshments: Lois Hutchinson	714.964.6973
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Newsletter Committee

January Contributors: Jim Greaves, Sean Smith and Larry Ragle.
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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

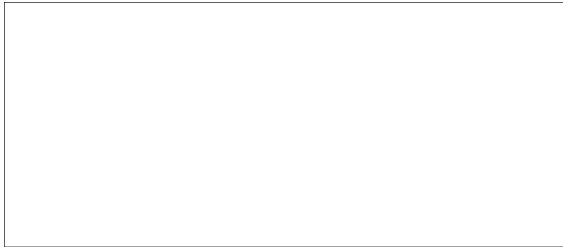
ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED



Leaves no stone unturned

See our website:

aisekikai.com



Coming Events

BAIKO-EN BONSAI KENKYUKAI

Winter Silhouettes, January 15-16 at the LA Arboretum, 301 N. Baldwin Ave, Arcadia. 10-4:30. Demos both days. Beautiful deciduous trees. Sales. One Aiseki Kai display. Reception Jan 15th, 6:00. *Taiko*-drums, food and raffle.

BONSAI-A-THON XV

GSBF Collection at the Huntington Fundraiser, Feb 26-27, 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. Contact **Marge Blasingame** for information: call 626.579.0420 or email her at: margeblasingame@att.net

CALIFORNIA BONSAI SOCIETY

54th Bonsai Exhibition, March 26-27, Friends Hall, Huntington Library and Botanical Gardens, 1151 Oxford Rd., San Marino. 10-4:30 both days. Reception on the Garden Terrace, March 26th, 7-9pm.



Always check Golden Statements Magazine Calendar section for additional coming events

Stone Sales

Ken McLeod

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californiasuiseki.com

YEAR OF THE RABBIT: A NEW YEAR STONE EXHIBIT

January 29 - March 27. National Bonsai & Penjing Museum, U. S. National Arboretum, Washington, DC



Dues are due. Become an e~subscriber and save a tree: Send \$10 to CA Aiseki Kai c/o Nina Ragle, P.O. Box 4975, Laguna Beach CA 92652-4975.

Refreshments

Thank you one and all for the delicious dish you will bring to our annual holiday party. You are what makes it a gourmet's delight. Bring your favorite dish, a serving utensil and your appetite. Please sign up with **Lois Hutchinson** for the coming month's meeting snack-break buffets.

