

# Bonsai Project

# Pinus sylvestris Yamadori

Peter Foele  
Started 2015

## Positive points

- This is collected material from the Scottish mountains. This means the trunk has some signs of aging (old bark) and a natural character.
- The movement of the bottom part of the trunk (about 1/4<sup>th</sup>) is interesting and the two remaining branches are suitably placed to design an interesting tree.
- The root base is interesting and all-round considering the species and material. This increases the (artistic) value of the tree

## Negative points

- This is collected material from the Scottish mountains. This means the foliage is relatively far away from the trunk, thus needing a long time to develop this tree into a mature Bonsai.
- The middle part of the trunk has little interesting movement. The person that collected it also removed all the branches halfway up the trunk (see arrow), reducing the styling options prematurely.
- Initially the tree was potted in poor soil (cat litter). This was replaced with a well-draining soil in spring 2015



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- This is a Scots Pine. Found growing naturally across a wide habitat in the northern hemisphere it reacts positively to pruning techniques. It has the growing strength of a Japanese Red Pine, but has the elegance and femininity found in the Japanese White Pine's foliage. This makes it a very popular species for Bonsai.
- I acquired this tree in spring 2015. The person that had collected the tree had (rather unsuccessfully) attempted to style this tree along a classical styling. It was also planted in a very poor soil (a type of cat litter very popular in some Scottish clubs).
- My first step was to ensure the health and strength of the tree, so I immediately re-potted it in a different soil mix (1/3<sup>rd</sup> Akadama and 2/3<sup>rd</sup> Bimps (a type of pumice)). I made sure all old soil (both the cat litter and the original mountain soil) was replaced with this mix. When re-potted I also incorporated some left over mycorrhiza from another Scots Pine I re-potted earlier.
- The tree was left to grow freely after this, so it could recover from the re-potting.
- After 1 growth season the length, colour of foliage and strength of the new growth indicated that this tree appears ready for first styling – an activity that may mean a significant stress for the tree (depending of the severity of styling) - so starting with a strong and healthy plant is adamant for a short recovery period, thus the possible shortest route to a mature Bonsai.
- I normally like to observe the tree for some years before starting work on it, but the combination of the foliage being very far away from the trunk and the rather unsuccessful attempt of styling made me chose to start styling earlier than naturally inclined.

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- It was used as demonstration plant at an exhibition held in Glasgow by my School on October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2015. During this demonstration I explained my preferred way of working with Bonsai – slow, steady and continuous.
- This demonstration consisted of a ‘first styling’. During this styling I only focus on determining the shape and character of the main branches – 1<sup>st</sup> generation (leaving the trunk) and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation (growing on the 1<sup>st</sup> generation branches). These branches are the ones that will stay on the tree regardless of future growth, and will be visible throughout the trees’ life. On occasions such as this one I find it useful to leave two or three possible future ‘options’ open during this ‘first styling’.
- All branches where a severe bend was anticipated were wrapped in raffia. This is my preferred medium to protect branches, as it naturally deteriorates over the course of a few years. All other media (such as electricians’ tape or self-amalgamating tape) may appear easier to apply, but is much more difficult to remove. In some cases it has to be cut away, which increases the risk of damage to branches when doing so. Such cut marks can be visible for a very long time – in some cases even remain visible on a permanent basis.
- The tree was wired using specialist Japanese copper wire. This wire is heat treated to allow for ease of application, but work-hardens very quickly. It also has the benefit of oxidizing close to the natural colour of the bark. Leaving it almost invisible for the time it remains on the tree.

# Pinus sylvestris

Yamadori starting  
material

- foliage far away from the trunk
- apart from the bottom few inches the trunk is not so interesting



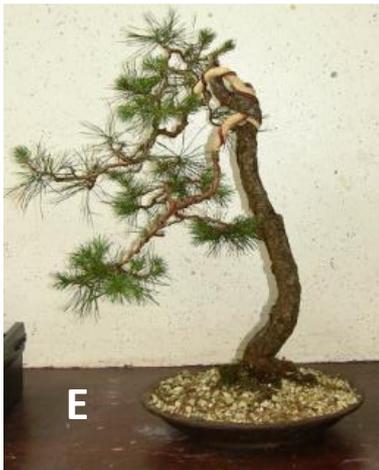
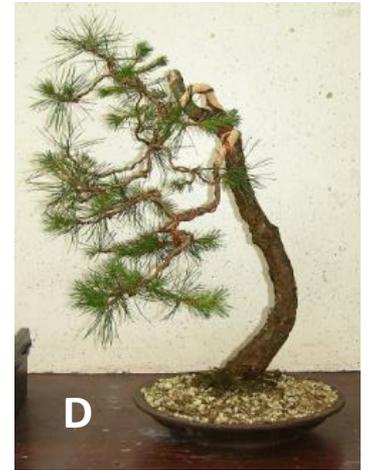
18 / 10/2015

Before initial styling



# Pinus sylvestris

Yamadori starting  
material



14 / 05 / 2016

After initial styling

**Before styling**



**After first styling**



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## First styling

- In this styling multiple future styling options were left open. All branches were used to create an overall 'triangle' in the foliage.
- The tree was styling in a literati of Bunjin type of style – At this stage it is wise to leave some future options open. The foliage needs to mature for about 3-5 years before the decision can be made as to which of those options offer the most attractive tree.
- The middle of the trunk does not quite fit the style. More interest needs to be added there.

This can be done by grafting on young plants onto the trunk with a view to turning them into jins (dead branches) at a later date

- Wire and shape primary branches – note: when shaping branches it is important to bring character into these that matches the overall 'feel' of the trunk. That way future stylings are simplified, as interesting movement and character will be present in the main branches.



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- With only two branches, this tree had many few options regarding styling. The first key is to find that viewpoint where the trunk and root-base appears most attractive. There is one relatively short horizontal angle (about 20 degrees) where the movement in the trunk was most attractive. The middle of this angle was chosen as provisional front view.
- In trying to keep this trunk line attractive, I felt that it would be interesting if all foliage was placed on the right hand side. Some of the foliage on the bottom branch could 'hide' some of the less interesting part of the trunk to brake up the 'boring' line of this trunk.
- None of the branches were shortened, and none of the needles were removed. This choice was driven by a horticultural reasoning. Had I removed needles during this styling, the growing strength of next years' buds would be compromised – more needles = more evaporation = more sap-flow = more growth. Having the new growth as strong as possible will increase the development of back-budding when the appropriate techniques are applied at the correct time.
- In other words, removing too soon would have resulted in needing a lot more time for future development of the foliage that will be used for more detailed and final styling.

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- The exact time of cutting is determined by the development of the new candles. Close observation throughout the growing season will indicate when the time for pruning them has arrived. It is this cutting of the new candle that will encourage the tree to develop new buds – provided that the sap-flow through the branches is at maximum strength, hence the leaving of all the old needles.
- The next step in this phase of development will be the following:
  - 1) Letting the new candles develop to full length. Their length compared to this years growth will determine which of the next steps will be applied at what time.
  - 2) Young Pine plugs will be used to graft new branches onto the trunk. The idea is to let them fuse with the trunk first, then remove their roots (once they are receiving all their sap via the trunk). Those new ‘branches’ will be wired to fit the character of the tree and left to grow until they are deemed sufficiently thick to be turned into jins.
  - 3) Encouraging strong growth of all the branches for the next 3-5 years before pruning the new candles at the correct time. Doing this will provide me with many small young ramifying shoots to wire, so that I can start the next phase in the styling of this tree (= more detailed styling of the individual branches) and reduce the current 3-4 options to a maximum of 2.
- The wire that is used in this phase will be allowed to ‘bite in’. I usually wait until the thickening of the branches has reached a point that the exposed bark in between the wires is reaching half the thickness of the wire (e.g. if wired with a 2mm wire the ‘wire scar’ has to be 1mm deep before I remove the wire).

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- I do this so that the new growth is capable of taking over the function of the wire, i.e. countering the internal stresses caused by bending the branch.
- This point can be reached within 1 to 2 years of strong growth. Since this is the first styling, I am not worried by the occurrence of the scarring, as the new growth that is needed to reach phase 2 and 3 of the development to mature Bonsai will easily heal over these scars, leaving only a fine, barely visible line once the tree is fully developed.
- Doing this allows me to have the tree mature fully, with branches capable of holding their shape and the weight of the foliage pads with a maximum of 3 wiring sessions.
- There is one danger with this method, and that is that this scar will leave a permanent weak line in the branch. It is therefore important to only allow this to happen when you are certain of the shape and character brought into the branch. Smaller adjustments will be possible in the future, but major changes in shape of branch will most likely result in unexpected breakage.

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## Some comments relating to the short-comings of this tree

- As mentioned earlier, the trunk line is interesting for the bottom 5<sup>th</sup> of the trunk, after which the trunk line loses a lot of character. It is always useful to consider what can be done to improve this shortcoming – even if this means a long-term plan.
  - Grafting on young plants with a view to turn them into dead branches will increase the character of the ‘boring’ part of the trunk. By grafting living material first, then killing it off at the right time rather than ‘gluing on jins’ will result in a far higher quality of material than we have here at present.
  - There is also the dead part of a trunk that starts just above the emergence of the top branch. At present this lack character in line with that of a Bunjin. If a suitable dead branch with adequate movement could be found, than this could be fitted with a hidden joint to add interest in the overall look of the tree
    - When I obtained the tree, this stump was alive – about twice as long, dead straight with a T-branch (two branches at opposite side of the trunk at exactly the same height. These were removed when re-potting the tree, since there was little possibility to creating adequate movement in that part to suit the envisaged Bunjin style. Any movement brought into such a thick branch would be very restricted and not improve the character by much – one bend was possible, two was pushing (and would be too regular to be attractive).
- A more suitable pot will be chosen once the tree has developed much further, and the current ‘styling options’ have been reduced to a single – the one with the most promising future. This can be 10-15 years in the future (particularly since the foliage AND the root system (that is those roots underneath the soil surface) is at this present stage severely underdeveloped).

# Evolutionary overview



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