

SHINJI SUZUKI REVIVES A TOKUGAWA FAMILY BONSAI

Translated by Craig W. Risser

The Tokugawa Shogun family ruled Japan (1603-1868) and had a sizeable collection of bonsai. Shinji Suzuki was selected to ensure some of these historically famous bonsai can continue to be passed on for future generations to enjoy.

This Japanese five-needle pine, *Pinus parviflora*, is a very famous masterpiece with the poetic name of "Oogi" which means the folding fan. When Mr. Suzuki received this bonsai for revival it had not been completely transplanted for many years. It was, however, vigorous because it had been repotted into a larger container without disturbing the original root system and had room for root growth. Of course, the branches were long and leggy because they were not correctly trimmed. Many of

the branches did not have any buds.

Pruning in order to revive a famous and old bonsai that had been handed down, no doubt was very stressful for Mr. Suzuki. He did very intricate and demanding modifications of the branches. If this bonsai was not handed down from the Tokugawa Shogun family, we would likely be able to create a new design by changing the front, modifying the

planting angle and bending the trunk. Of course, this was not a bonsai that could be restyled by whatever means an artist wanted to. Particularly with this famous masterpiece bonsai the character of the tree takes precedence. There are some who say that it is alright to improve the styling of such a bonsai while there are others who do not feel this is proper.

A bonsai with such a long background sometimes requires patience on the part of the artist. It is probably a good omen that a bonsai like this has so much majesty and dignity.

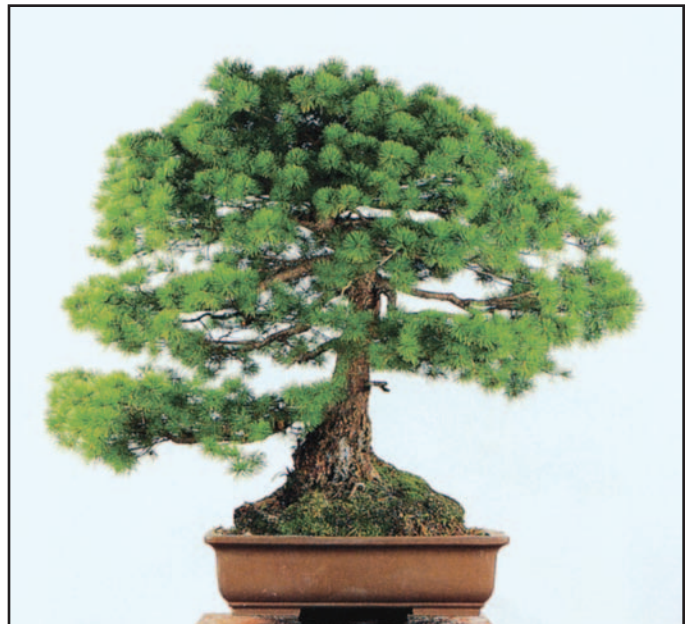
Thus Mr. Suzuki's patient work at this stage amounted to no more than the maximum amount of pruning to shape the bonsai and some wiring. Needless to say, removal of branches

Shinji Suzuki begins his work to revive a famous masterpiece bonsai from the Tokugawa Shogun family for future generations.



Japanese five-needle pine, Pinus parviflora, before shaping by Shinji Suzuki photographed on August 30, 2000. Tree height is 44 inches and the branches are 57 inches from left to right.

Although more than one-half of the branches have been removed, the form has not significantly changed. This indicates how many unneeded branches there were on the bonsai.



to allow light and air to the inner recesses of the tree with the intention of reviving the vigor was also the object of this pruning.

Thus we can see the superior styling of Mr. Suzuki's technique and his sensitivity in modifying the branches in the gently sloping crown and in the placement of the branch foliage masses. This presents the elegance of an aged bonsai that had been passed down for generations. Someday when this Japanese five-needle pine is displayed in the Takagi Bonsai Museum in Tokyo the true value of operations done here will be evident.



Upon closer inspection only a few inner branches with buds were found so branches must be removed for light.

Right-
The branches, large and small, have been wired and their overall placement has been determined. Additional branches have been removed so nearly two-thirds of the branches have been pruned.



The vigor was concentrated on the tips of the branches. This will not develop into a compact shape in the future if left alone.



Nearly two-thirds of the branches were carefully removed by Mr. Suzuki to allow light and air to reach the inner areas.

The Folding Fan

There is no way of knowing what shape this bonsai had that led to its being named "the folding fan". An old handed down bonsai meets with a decisive artist. It is very difficult to maintain and preserve without the understanding of the owner. The people of old liked to let their bonsai grow large rather than cut them back so the size of them always surprises us.

Right-

The Japanese five-needle pine bonsai after initial shaping. The branches were lowered to create a more compact shape. Tree height is 39 inches and the branches are 52 inches from left to right.

Editor's Note: This article has been adapted and reprinted with permission from JTAC. It first appeared in the January 2001 edition of *Contemporary Bonsai*, (Kindai Bonsai) magazine and has been translated and edited for our readers.

Shinji Suzuki is a professional bonsai artist in Japan who has made significant progress in a very competitive field. A profile of Mr. Suzuki can be seen in the 2001/NO. 3 issue.

