



For Immediate Release

Sonoma Botanical Garden presents
Living Sculptures: The Art & Science of Bonsai

A special exhibition on view January 5-March 22, 2024

(Glen Ellen, CA, Nov 6, 2023) Experience a world of serene beauty and intricate craftsmanship as Sonoma Botanical Garden (SBG), in partnership with the Redwood Empire Bonsai Society (REBS), presents *Living Sculptures: The Art and Science of Bonsai*.

More than 15 miniature masterpieces will be on view, meticulously nurtured and shaped by the skilled hands of local expert bonsai artisans. The perfect marriage of artistic vision and horticulture expertise, these living sculptures are a celebration of the beauty of Asian and California native species and a testament to the patience, dedication, and creativity of the practitioners of this contemplative art form. Exhibition signage throughout the Garden's indoor gallery illuminates the intricate roots of this timeless practice and digs into the science that is critical to the survival of these tiny trees.

Visitors can then stroll the Garden's paths to see some of the full-sized species showcased in the exhibition. With a diverse collection of Asian and California native trees, the Garden celebrates the beauty and importance of these two biodiversity hotspots.

"We are excited to launch the Garden's brand-new arts and nature exhibition program this winter with a stunning display of bonsai," says Jeannie Perales, SBG Executive Director. "Bonsai is the perfect seasonal feature for the Garden's unique Asian woodland setting, where East meets West. We hope that guests will appreciate the intricate artistry required to shape these miniature masterpieces."

"Bon-sai" is a Japanese term meaning "planted in a container," though the actual art form originates from an ancient Chinese horticultural practice, penjing, later redeveloped under the influence of Japanese Zen Buddhism. Meditative and disciplined forms evolved to emphasize more specific techniques and shapes to create exquisite specimens. Today, bonsai is globally celebrated with a fusion of ancient techniques and modern sensibilities.

Living Sculptures features a fusion of modern and classic forms from graceful formal uprights to dramatic windswept styles – each a testament to the dedication and skill of their creators. Several local bonsai artists will loan their specimens to the show including Alan Murakami, president of REBS, and George Haas, honorary member of REBS.

Murakami's interest in bonsai began about 40 years ago and he has been a member of REBS since 1987. He studied under many talented bonsai artists, currently learning from Adam Toth, who recently finished an apprenticeship in Japan. "Bonsai is a rewarding art where learning new things is a constant," Murakami states. "Working on your tree in a Zen like state and seeing its beautiful transformation is magical."

Haas, who was instrumental in initiating this collaboration with SBG, started doing bonsai after retirement from the military in 2003. A Japanese American friend believed he needed a hobby and bonsai turned into much more than just a casual enjoyment. Haas is also a volunteer docent and the marketing manager for the Golden State Bonsai Federation (GSBF) Bonsai Garden at Lake Merritt, Oakland, CA. "I belong to the bonsai community at large and enjoy the living art. I appreciate the learning and friendship gained through bonsai," Haas says.

Bonsai demonstrations and special interpretive tours will be offered throughout the run of the exhibition. Led by knowledgeable Redwood Empire Bonsai Society volunteers, these programs will take a deeper dive into the practical care and maintenance of bonsai as well as the artistic process.

About the Redwood Empire Bonsai Society

The Redwood Empire Bonsai Society was founded in 1981 for bonsai enthusiasts. The club is a nonprofit organization for the purpose of educating and making the public aware of the ancient living art form of Japanese bonsai. The club promotes the bonsai art through the conduct of monthly meetings, expert demonstrations, workshops for all skill levels, newsletters, and its annual bonsai show. Meetings are the fourth Thursday of the month, 7:30 to 9:30pm with some exceptions. The annual bonsai show is the fourth weekend in August and an opportunity for members to display their specimens. Free admission and parking with daily demonstrations, a silent auction, and fun for all ages.

Join the global celebration of bonsai on the second Saturday in May. World Bonsai Day is sponsored by the World Bonsai Friendship Federation.

About Sonoma Botanical Garden

Sonoma Botanical Garden is a woodland experience where East meets West by celebrating the beauty and importance of Asian and California native plants. The former quarry is home to a 25-acre Asian woodland garden, 22 acres of California native oak savanna, and a small Cabernet vineyard. Whether hiking up to expansive winter vistas, enjoying a leisurely walk through spring blooms, finding the perfect picnic spot in a shady summer oasis, or marveling at the riot of fall colors and textures, the Garden always offers delights for the senses. A different experience – every season, every time, for everyone.

Founded in 1987, Sonoma Botanical Garden is deeply rooted in a love for biodiversity and commitment to nature conservation with meandering gravel trails throughout the Asian garden that welcome guests to immerse themselves among the trees and the new California trail which provides a leisurely stroll through California native oaks. For more information, please visit sonomabg.org.

General Information

Open 9am – 4pm daily, closed Tuesdays and some holidays. Garden admission is \$12 for adults, \$10 for seniors, \$8 for teens, students, and active military. Children under 12 get to enjoy the Garden for free. The Garden is a proud participant in the Museums for All program with qualifying individuals receiving \$3 admissions. Groups of 8 or more are asked to make a reservation in advance. Visit at 12841 Hwy 12, Glen Ellen, CA. Call 707-996-3166 or email info@sonomabg.org for questions.

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