

Sensei: An Austrian Pine Forest Bonsai Comes to the Arboretum

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Each dwarfed tree in the Arnold Arboretum's bonsai and penjing collection offers its own unique story. With the recent addition of ten new bonsai to this esteemed group, several interesting tales have been added to our archives. One of the new bonsai, an Austrian pine (*Pinus nigra*) forest, is of particular interest since it represents both a genus and a style that have never before been in our bonsai collection. Created and donated by Martin Klein of Andover, Massachusetts, this group of seven plants, meticulously sculpted over the past twenty-five years, takes its mound-like shape on what is known as a "ciment fondu" (a calcium aluminate cement) slab, also formed by the same artist.

At first glance, one can't help but get the sense that this group of seven struggling stems represents nature on the edge of survival. Clearly competing for the most basic of resources—light, water, nutrients—these tiny trees capture a snapshot of what their full-sized, earthbound counterparts contend with in the wild. This miniature forest receives daily care within the the Arboretum's comfortable urban setting, so it is all the more impressive that Martin's patience and steady hands created the successful illusion of ancient trees subjected to the vagaries of nature.

Austrian pine, also known as black pine or European black pine, has a native range stretching from Austria to the Crimean Peninsula, south to Turkey and west to Morocco and Spain. It has been cultivated in the United States for at least 250 years. This two-needled pine grows 50 to 60 feet (15 to 18 meters) tall in the landscape and has characteristic dark green foliage and dark gray, furrowed bark. Austrian pine is quite adaptable, thriving under various soil and climate conditions (though unfortunately it is susceptible to diplodia tip blight, a fungal disease). It has a variety of uses including windbreaks, remediation plantings, and fast-growing property screens. Its tolerance of dif-

ficult growing conditions makes it ideal for the pressures exerted through bonsai.

The story of this bonsai forest began in 1991 when Martin purchased a bundle of ten Austrian pines from a local nursery for \$25.00. Out of that bundle, seven plants were selected for the project. Emulating the work of bonsai master John Yoshio Naka, whom Martin had trained under during his early years of interest in bonsai, the concept of a forest began to take shape. Naka's famous bonsai, *Goshin*, a forest of eleven Foemina junipers (*Juniperus chinensis* 'Foemina') on permanent display at the United States National Arboretum, inspired Martin to create a forest of his own using his newly acquired pines. The forest bonsai began in a training box where the young trees were pruned to develop trunk taper and wired for early form development. The forest then graduated to a Tokoname bonsai pot, and eventually moved to its final display on the ciment fondu slab. Mosses, lichens, and ferns were batted to the understory and have now all grown together, creating an emerald carpet speckled with many different textures and shades of green.

At over four feet (1.2 meters) tall and with a spread of more than five feet (1.5 meters), this miniature forest creates a massive impact within the collection. On display for the first time this season, Arboretum visitors will find their imaginations challenged: To what distant land does this group of seven beckon them? Is this forest in a secluded mountain valley, or perhaps on a tiny island in the middle of a calm lake? As with all art, part of this bonsai's beauty lies in the perspective of the viewer.

In memory of his former teacher John Yoshio Naka, Martin Klein has appropriately named this bonsai *Sensei* (teacher). As the fortunate recipient of this masterwork, the Arboretum will retain the name in the accession's passport data and proudly display our new treasure in the bonsai and penjing pavilion.

