

The Art of Bonsai Display



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An Introduction

Many elements of good bonsai display are based on the elements of Keido. Keido is the Japanese school of formal bonsai display. As bonsai enthusiasts once followed the Japanese rules for creating bonsai, they also followed their rules for display. However, things are changing around the world in the art of bonsai. Contemporary display is being used in more and more exhibits. However, many of the elements of Keido are applicable to all good display and that is why we should all be familiar with these elements.

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Why Formal Display?

- **Enjoy and celebrate seasonal changes**
 - **Visualize and use space in new ways**
 - **Celebrate auspicious occasions**
 - **See common items in uncommon ways**
 - **View a bonsai at the peak of its perfection**
 - **Honor and please a visitor to one's home**
 - **View nature in miniature using living things**
 - **Enjoy the beauty of less, beauty with style**
-

Kei Do - The Art of Bonsai Display

In KEIDO we fill our space with elegant staging to recreate nature in miniature.

In a limited space we express our appreciation of nature and living things.

Display imitates nature



Kei Do - The Art of Bonsai Display

Bonsai display is one area often overlooked by the bonsai hobbyist, yet it is one of the most critical aspects of the elements that make up bonsai appreciation.

Elements of **theme, balance, season, placement, harmony, and emotion** each deserve some thought when preparing a bonsai display. Failure to do so may leave the viewer with the elusive feeling of “something’s not quite right”.

Elements of Display

- **Theme**
 - Balance
 - Season
 - Placement
 - Harmony
 - Emotion
-

Theme (style)

Formal bonsai display consists of three themes.

- 1. Shin - formal - squareness and dignity**
Formal - bonsai with a straight or slanted dignified trunk which gives an elegant impression. A moyogi conifer is acceptable.
 - 2. Gyo - informal - softness and gentleness**
Usually deciduous bonsai, such as maple, hornbeam, and elms.
 - 3. So - very casual - flexible**
Bunjin style bonsai -also grass plantings, suiseki, or accent plantings
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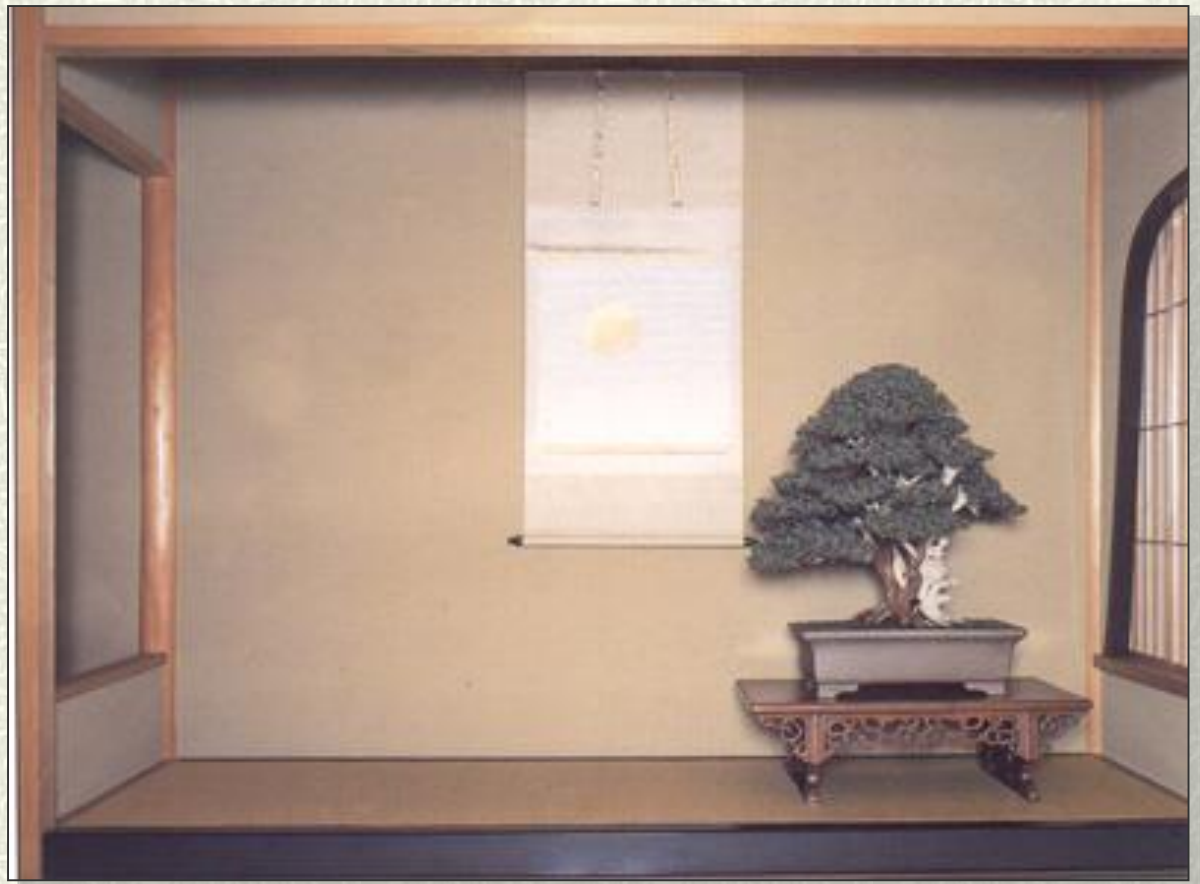
Shin style - (formal)



A massive pine with a powerful trunk is characteristic of a shin style display.

Shin style - (formal)

The formal structure of the branches, as well as the straight, strong trunk, exemplify the shin style of display for this juniper.



Gyo style - (informal)



Perhaps due to the straight, strong trunk, this display could be placed in the shin style, even though the tree is deciduous.

Gyo style - (informal)



The gently rounded form of this broom-style zelkova, and the rounded style of the stand's feet contribute to the Gyo style.

Gyo style - (informal)



The rounded forms of each object in the display exemplify the Gyo style.

So style - (casual)



This bunjin style bonsai lends itself well to the So style of display.

Note the birds in the scroll and the bird on the tansu.

So - (casual style)



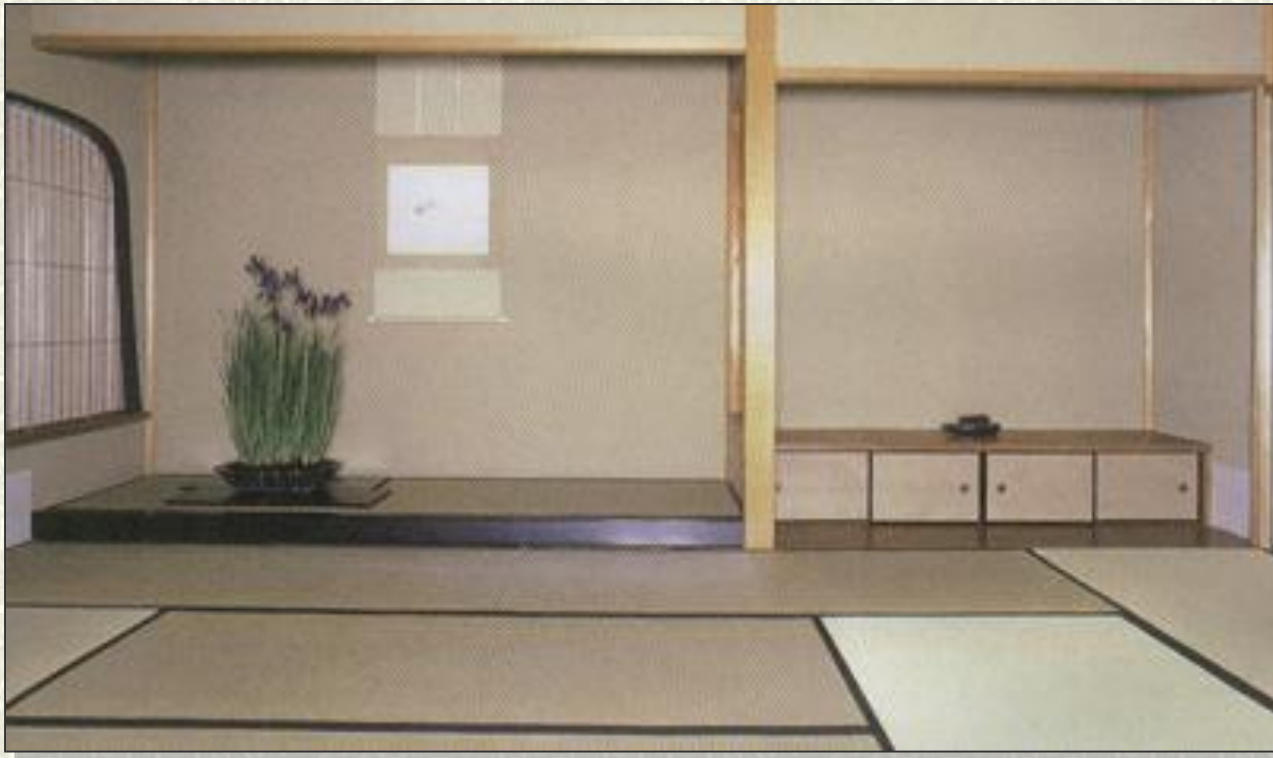
Another bunjin, or literati bonsai. The scroll most likely is a poem appropriate to the season.

So style - (casual)



Suiseki may be used
in this style of
display.

So style- (casual)



An arrangement of irises is appropriate for this style.

Elements of Display

- Theme
 - **Balance**
 - Season
 - Placement
 - Harmony
 - Emotion
-

Balance



The use of space is called “**Ma**”. Ma is a feeling, a sense that the space is as important as the objects placed in it. Negative space is another definition of Ma.

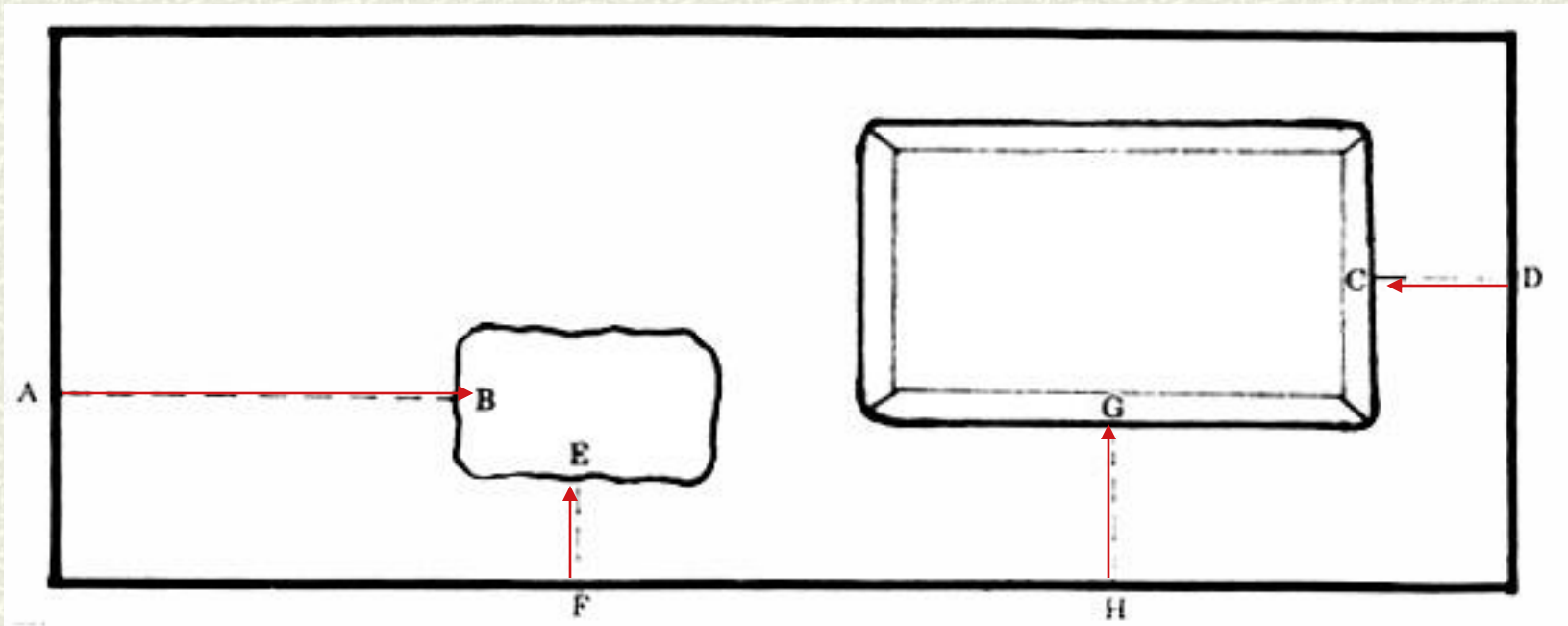
The perfect display

The perfect display in the
Tokonoma
should give you the space where one
can play with time:

Near

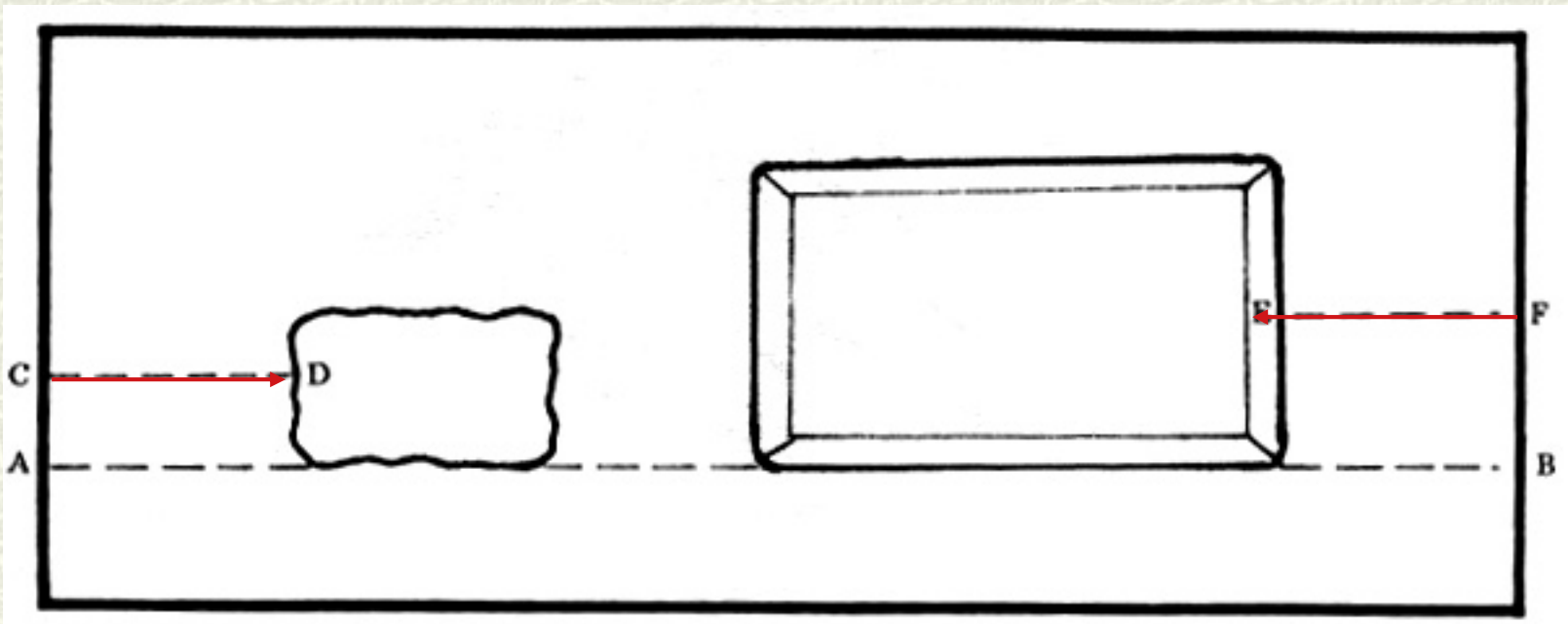
Far

Balance



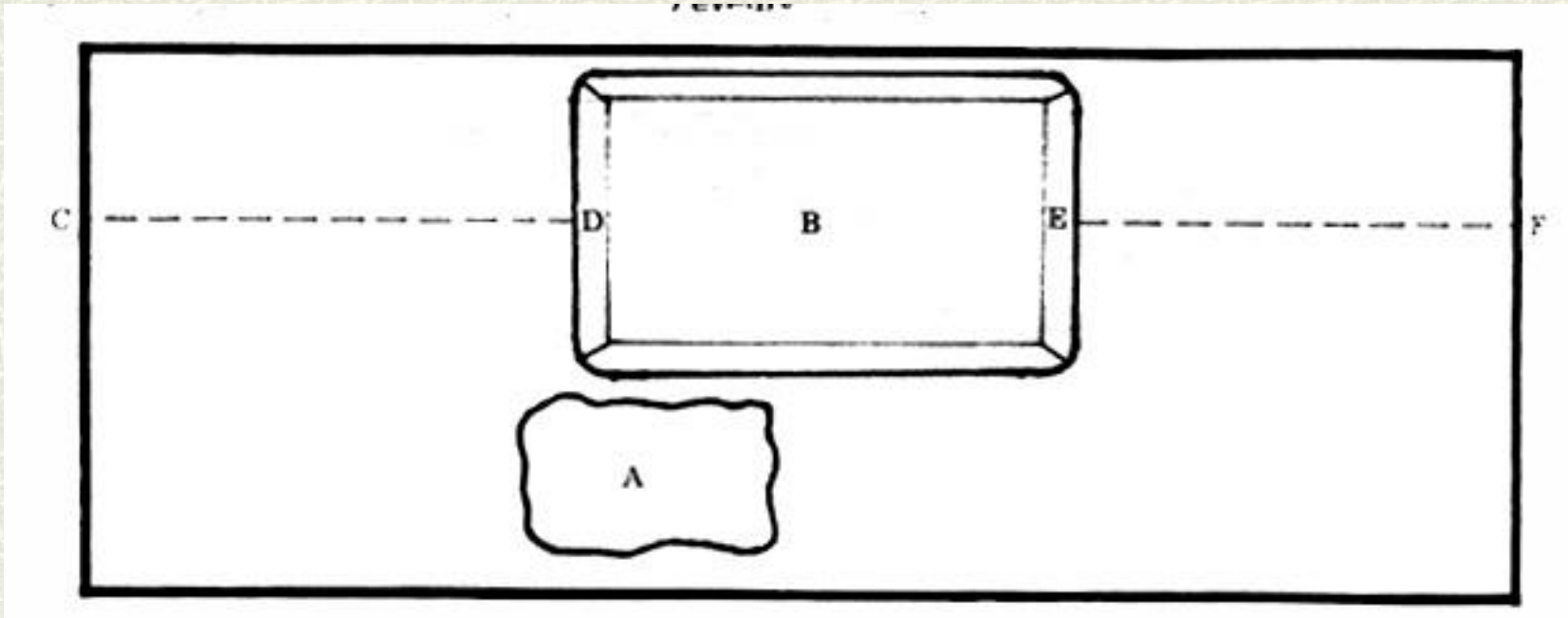
The space between AB and CD should be uneven as well as the space between EF and GH.

Balance



Do not place both the main tree and the accent in a straight line
The spacing between CD and EF is too even.

Balance



Never place the accent plant (A) directly in front of the main tree (B). The main tree should either be to the left or the right of center.

Elements of Display

- Theme
 - Balance
 - **Season**
 - Placement
 - Harmony
 - Emotion
-

Season

Each of the seasons, Summer, Winter, Spring, and Fall may be represented in the display. Often one of the objects in the display (either a scroll or an accent plant) will celebrate the coming of the next season. An example could be a bonsai in winter silhouette, an accent of dried grass, and a scroll showing bamboo in leaf (anticipating spring).

Summer

A bright
summer's moon
shines upon the
leaves of this
maple.



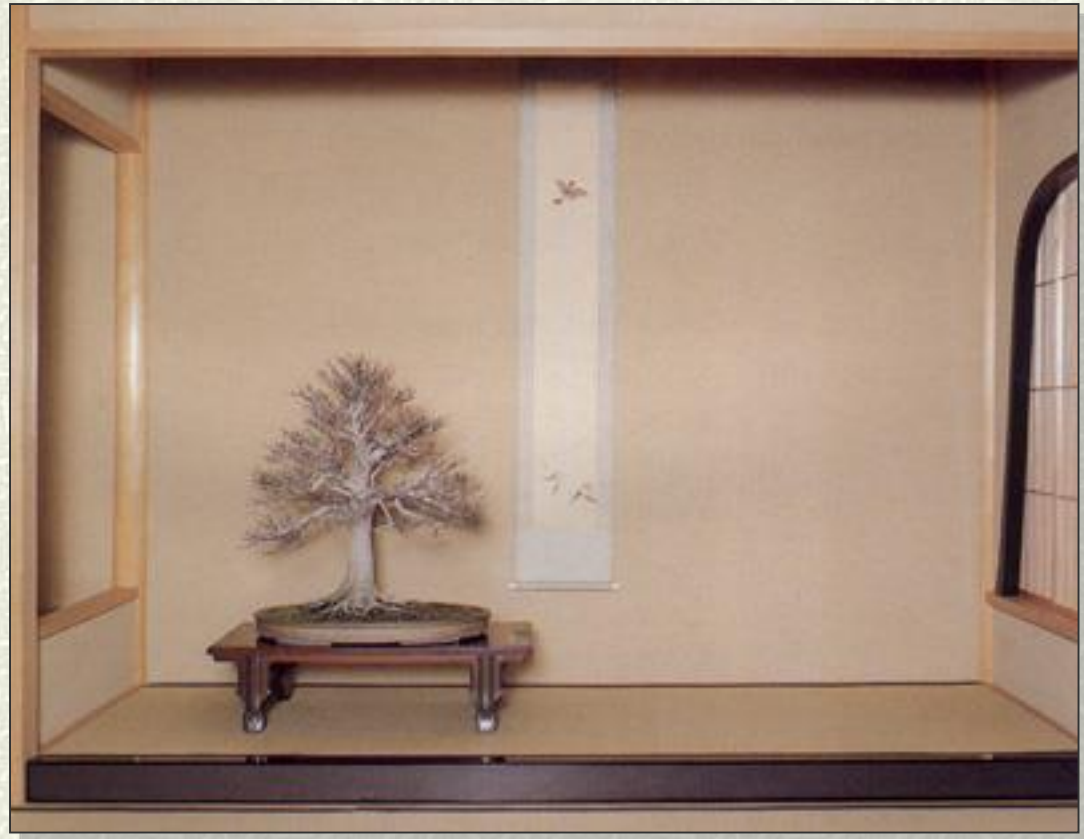
Winter



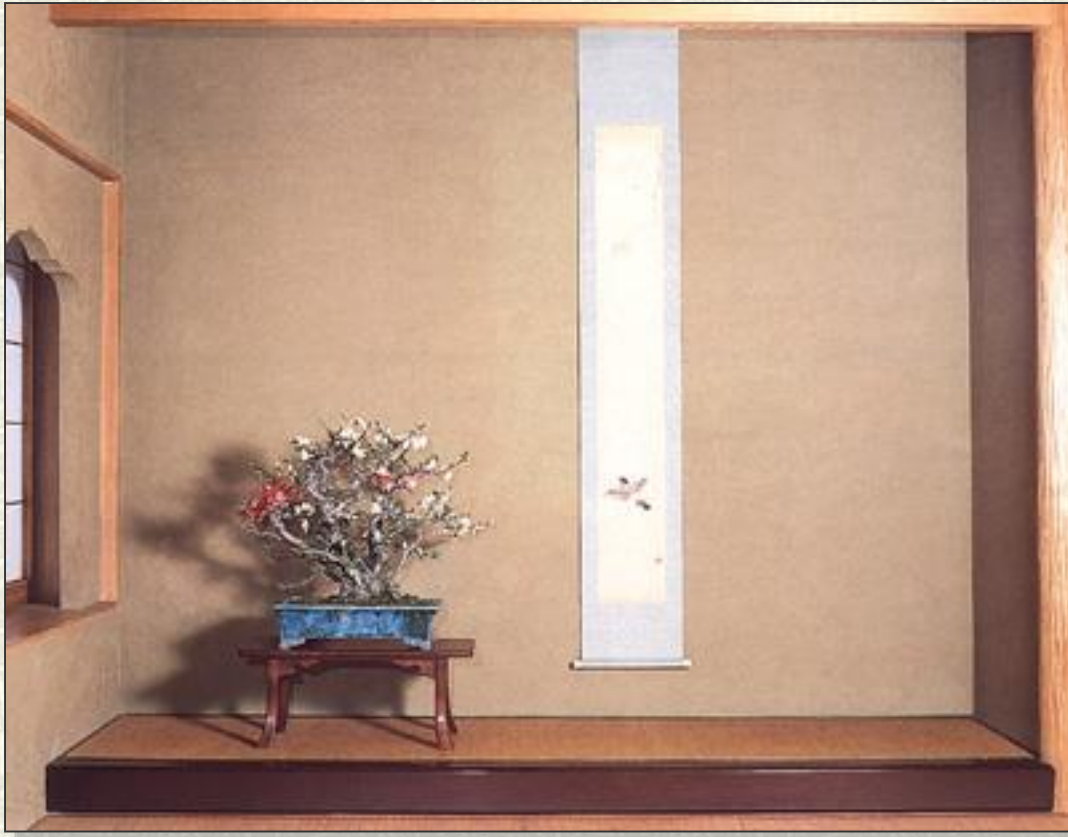
The scroll describes the cold winter wind in a poem.

Late Winter

The scroll contains a migrating bird, in anticipation of the coming spring.



Late Winter - Early Spring



The quince
blooms very early
- spring may be
just around the
corner.

Spring



The flowers on both the azalea and the accent have just begun to emerge.

Late Spring-Early Summer



Summer

A summer hawk soars over fields and flowers.



Autumn

A grass planting -
the seed heads
indicate that fall
has arrived.



Elements of Display

- Theme
 - Balance
 - Season
 - **Placement**
 - Harmony
 - Emotion
-

Placement (location within the visual frame)



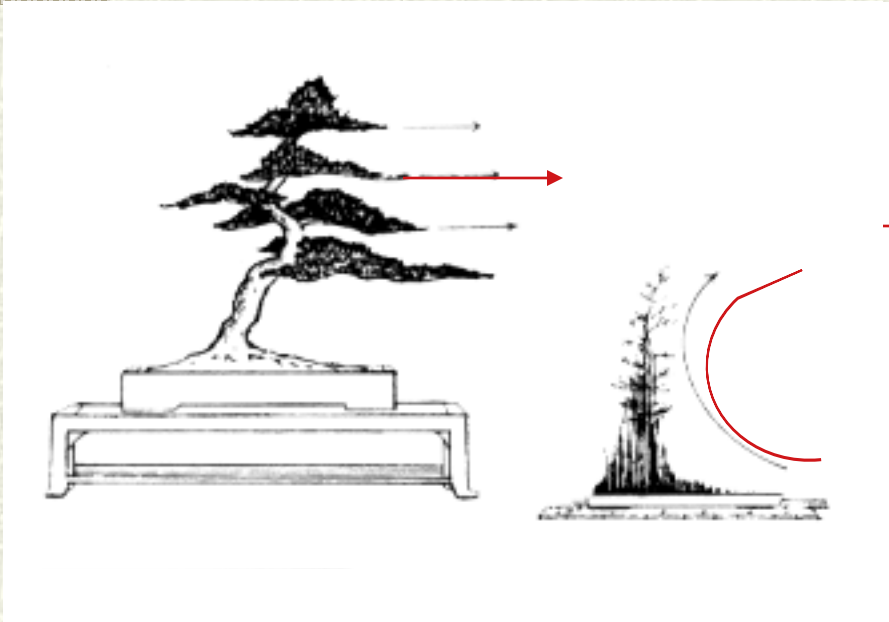
Is a triangle formed in the composition?

Are the earth and sky present?

Is the ratio of empty space and occupied space sufficient?

Are objects placed appropriately to one another?

Placement



An example of proper placement - the branches point to the right, and the half circle movement of the grass is going away from the main tree.

Elements of Display

- Theme
 - Balance
 - Season
 - Placement
 - **Harmony**
 - Emotion
-

Harmony (visual balance)



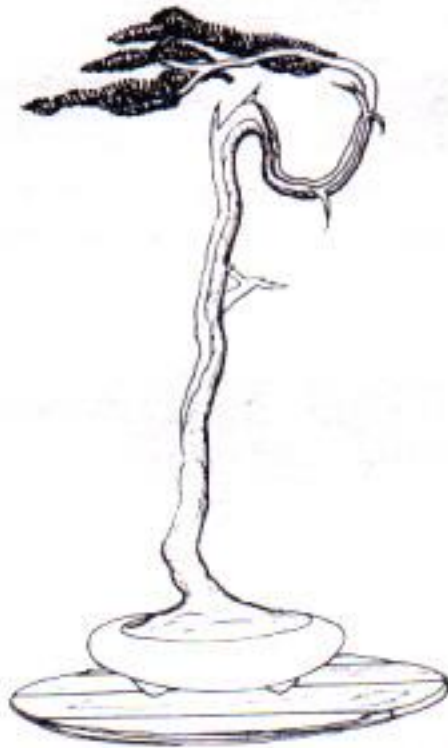
Do each of the objects in the tokonoma compliment one another?

Is the main focus on the tree?

Is there a pleasing relationship between empty space and occupied space?

Is each stand's style appropriate for the composition?

Harmony



A tall slender Bunjin on a heavy slab looks overpowered. A tall graceful Bunjin bonsai planted in a Kurama stone type slab will need a thin natural slab. A round, simple, rustic old stand is more suitable. An old wine barrel bottom makes an unusual one.

Harmony



Which stand is appropriate for this bonsai?



A strong stand supports the massive tree. The lines of the stand compliment the silhouette and are stable.



Elements of Display

- Theme
 - Balance
 - Season
 - Placement
 - Harmony
 - **Emotion**
-

Emotion (color and motion)



The flowers of the scroll and those of the accent planting add contrasting colors to this display.

Emotion (color and motion)



This stark winter display shows the land bare and lifeless.

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Sources for this presentation:

Bonsai Techniques II: by John Naka

International Bonsai Magazine: Various Tokonoma Displays

Bonsai (BCI magazine)- “Keido: The Way and Appreciation” by Jerald Stowell

Kei Do - The Art of Bonsai Display

A footnote.

One of the cultural differences concerning the display of bonsai trees is, very basically, that traditional Japanese homes are architecturally and characteristically designed so as to contain within the structure itself a tokonoma or - a place of honor - where bonsai are arranged and displayed on a seasonal and celebratory basis throughout the year; while in a typical Western style home, a bonsai display would, more likely than not, be arranged outside or in an outside setting, because bonsai - and the practice of displaying bonsai - is not culturally traditional in the West (.yet!).

Contemporary Display

Contemporary display, or informal display, is not as "rule-bound" as we ascribe to Keido, or formal display.

Successful contemporary displays do however, utilize the basic elements of display; *theme, balance, season, placement, harmony and emotion.*

Contemporary Display #1



Contemporary Display #2



Contemporary Display #3



Contemporary Display #4



Contemporary Display #5



Contemporary Display #6



Contemporary Display #7



Contemporary Display #8



Contemporary Display #9



Contemporary Display #10



Contemporary Display #11



Contemporary Display #12



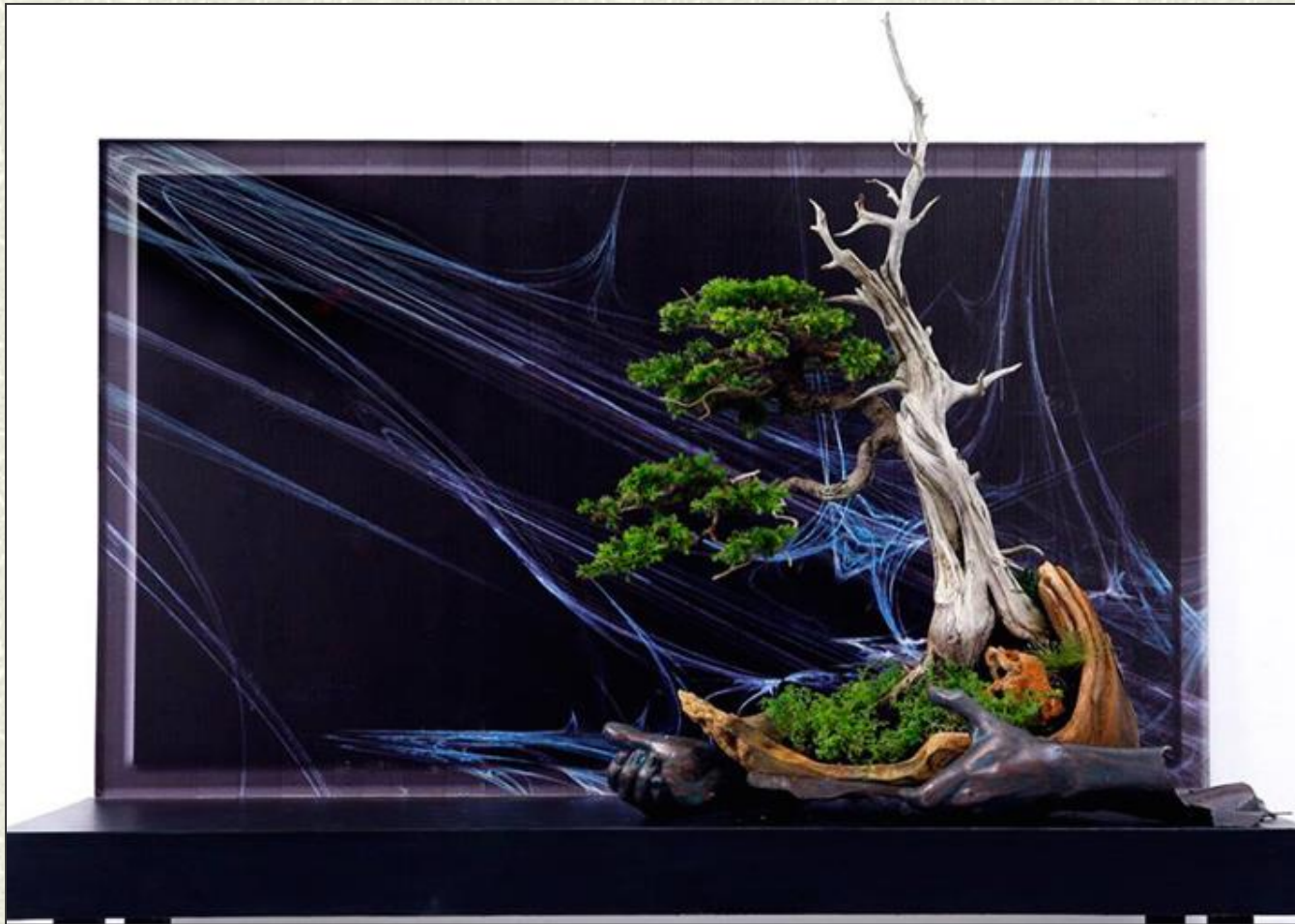
Contemporary Display #13



Contemporary Display #14



Contemporary Display #15



Contemporary Display #16



Contemporary Display #17

