

Bonsai Process:
experience,
knowledge and
a little help from
a master

RECAREDO

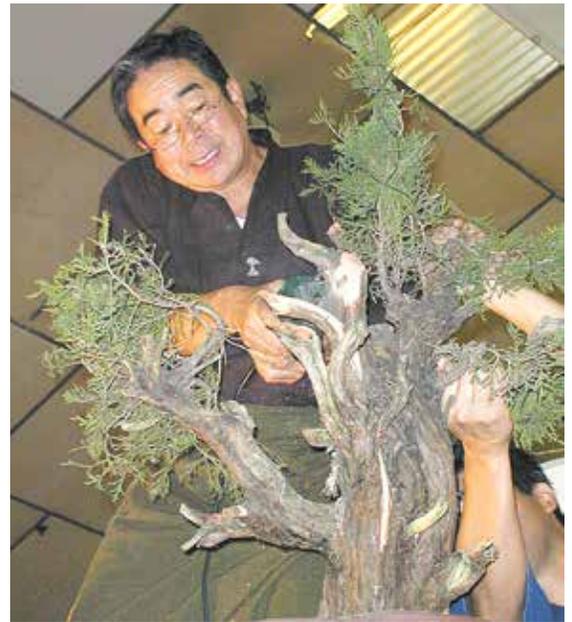
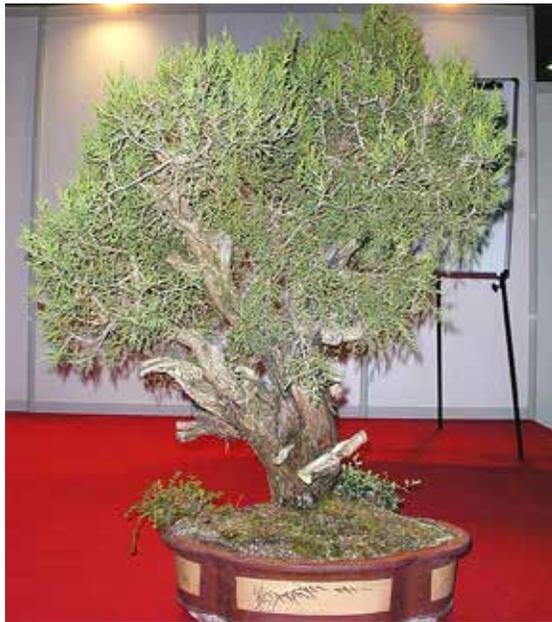
**a manifesto for
a contemporary bonsai**

By Massimo Bandera, Italy

Translation by Joe Grande, Canada

“When you happen to find exceptional material to make a nice bonsai, an inexplicable special bond can occur between the artist and the end client, leading to the formation of a masterpiece. In reality this is rare, but in the history of this bonsai it is precisely what happened: A Phoenician juniper that we have called Recaredo, after the Visigoth King of the seventh century, in memory of the force that expresses this bonsai that seems to have fought a thousand battles.”

Kunio Kobayashi first worked on this juniper, a yamadori from southern Spain collected by club Ullastre of Palma de Mallorca, in 2003. The result of the first styling was an informal upright with much deadwood features. Note the first main branch on the right side. These are the only photos showing the first work by Kobayashi.



The simultaneous work imposes a considerable technique to create a perfect bonsai that reflects the strength of nature with a particular harmony that conceals a great balance between the signs of near death seen up close and the rigorous growth of a profuse and impetuous canopy. The carved parts of the old and ancient trees are impressive, and most green parts must be lush.

The strong and victorious contrasts are a wish for a long life for the viewer.

The images of nature and the human world are seen through the eyes of nature itself.

The contemporary bonsai raises art to where the expression becomes an impression.

The result separates items in a two-dimensional abstraction: asymmetry and simplicity are natural keys to confront the observer. The visual experience becomes an emotional moment that evokes memories and deep feelings of the spirit without being limited by the subject and the formal beauty of classicism.

The detail is freed from its subject from which it no longer comes: a contemporary form, as a “design object”, which expresses the purity of the essence of the object.

The simplicity emerges from freeing nothing superfluous, not only in physicality, but also in the way that the viewer is fascinated by the challenge: nature is the real teacher of beauty!

The aesthetic experience becomes an intimate and profound emotion, not only enjoyable, not only artistic, but also spiritual.

Recaredo, like any great contemporary bonsai, is impressive for its aesthetic power, uncommon, but which captures one of the great secrets of nature, one of its most intimate truths: the beauty of asymmetry leaves empty spaces and frees the big energy of the movement. As in a spiritual path there remains nothing superfluous, but only what is truly natural, from the vacuum “everything” and “nothing”.



Above; After Kobayashi worked on this juniper, the original owner sold it to one of my clients, who seeing it as a difficult job, asked me to work on it. When I saw it for the first time I fell in love, for I could see the grand bonsai hidden in the bush it had become, neglected for eight years. The photos above show the condition of the juniper when I acquired it.

The real beauty and uniqueness of the true avant-garde bonsai is the “emptiness,” but it does not mean the absence of something (a sculpture is empty when you miss the person who it should represent). It means absolute reality, empty of determinations and identifications. In fact, all that is determined and qualified has a relative existence and not absolute.

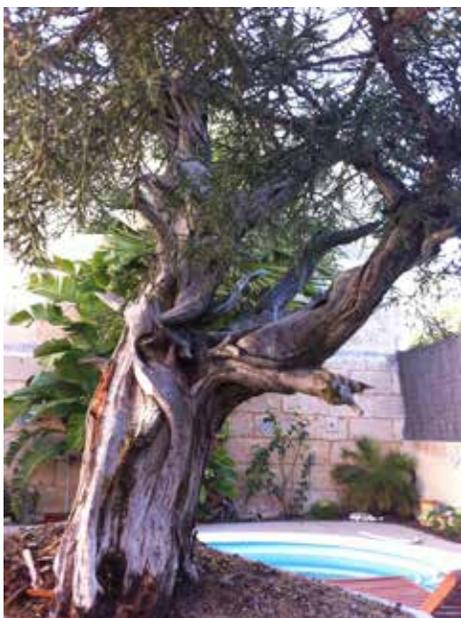
This is the meaning of this bonsai: the absolute reality is empty of every determined shape and as such limited and conditional.

The observer can thus reach the absolute reality of nature emptying the mind of all preconceived idea, of every thought...

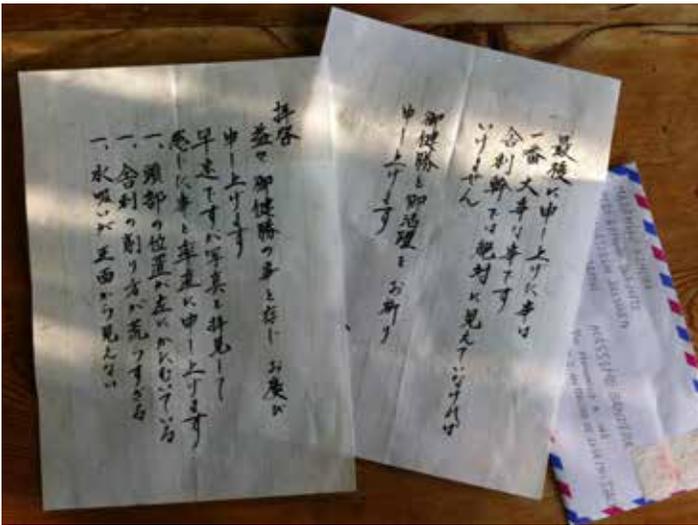
The void is the profound essence of the image: Its aesthetic experience, its beauty. 🌲



Left; Work starts anew on the Phoenician juniper I named Recarado, after the Visigoth King of the seventh century. The details below show the refinement of the deadwood and the decision to eliminate the first branch to feature the sculptural drama of the trunk.







Facing page shows four views of Recaredo after I finished the second styling. This is when I wrote to my sensei, Masahiko Kimura, to ask for his advice and opinion. Kimura's has been my teacher since 1993. I study with him on my trips to Japan and seek his advice on the more difficult work, something I have done for twenty years, and the teacher is always very helpful. The photo above is his handwritten response and roughly translated, he says;

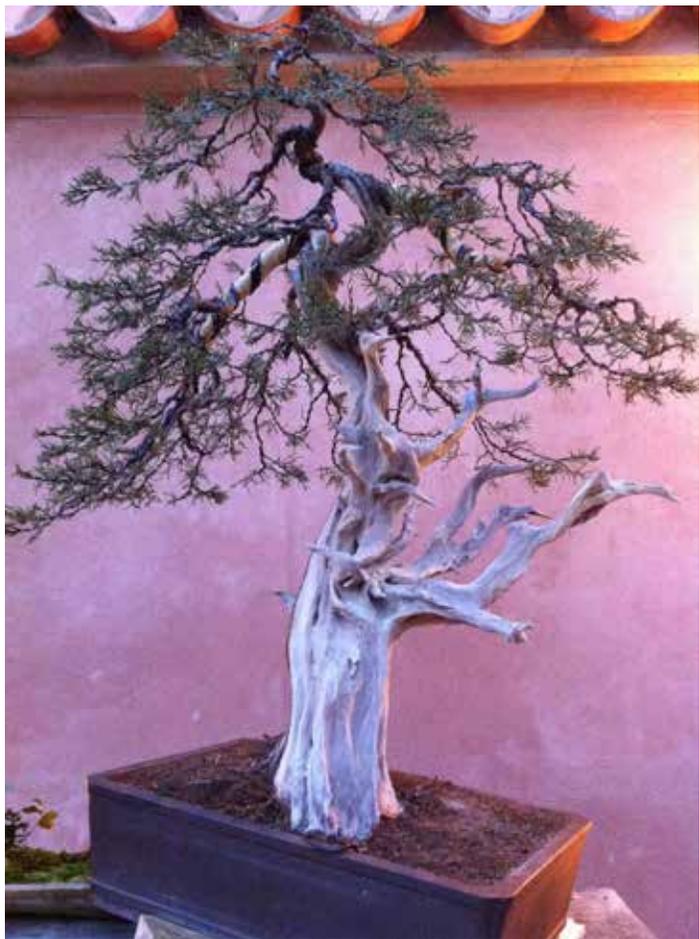
"Massimo Bandera sama,
 Congratulations for your work and I'm glad you're well and healthy.
 I come to the point.

I express my suggestions to improve the work from what I can see from the pictures:

- 1) The position of the vertex is too tilted to the left, position slightly to the right;
- 2) Surface machining of the shari is too chiseled, best to work it more;
- 3) Live vein is not visible enough from the front, turn a little. This third point is the most important because, for a trunk with a shari, the live vein should absolutely be seen.

I give you all the best for your business and wish you good health.
 Masahiko Kimura"

The photo, *top right*, shows the third styling, following the advice of Masahiko Kimura. The photo on the bottom right shows Recaredo repotted in a temporary pot and after a season's growth. The pot is rotated to show the live vein on the left side of the shari. The tree is now ready for a special pot with this position in mind but first, the new pot (*bottom left*) needs a little work. Note the chip and crack on the bottom left.

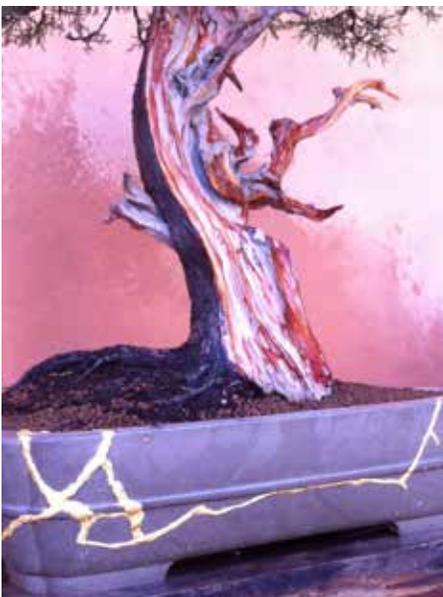
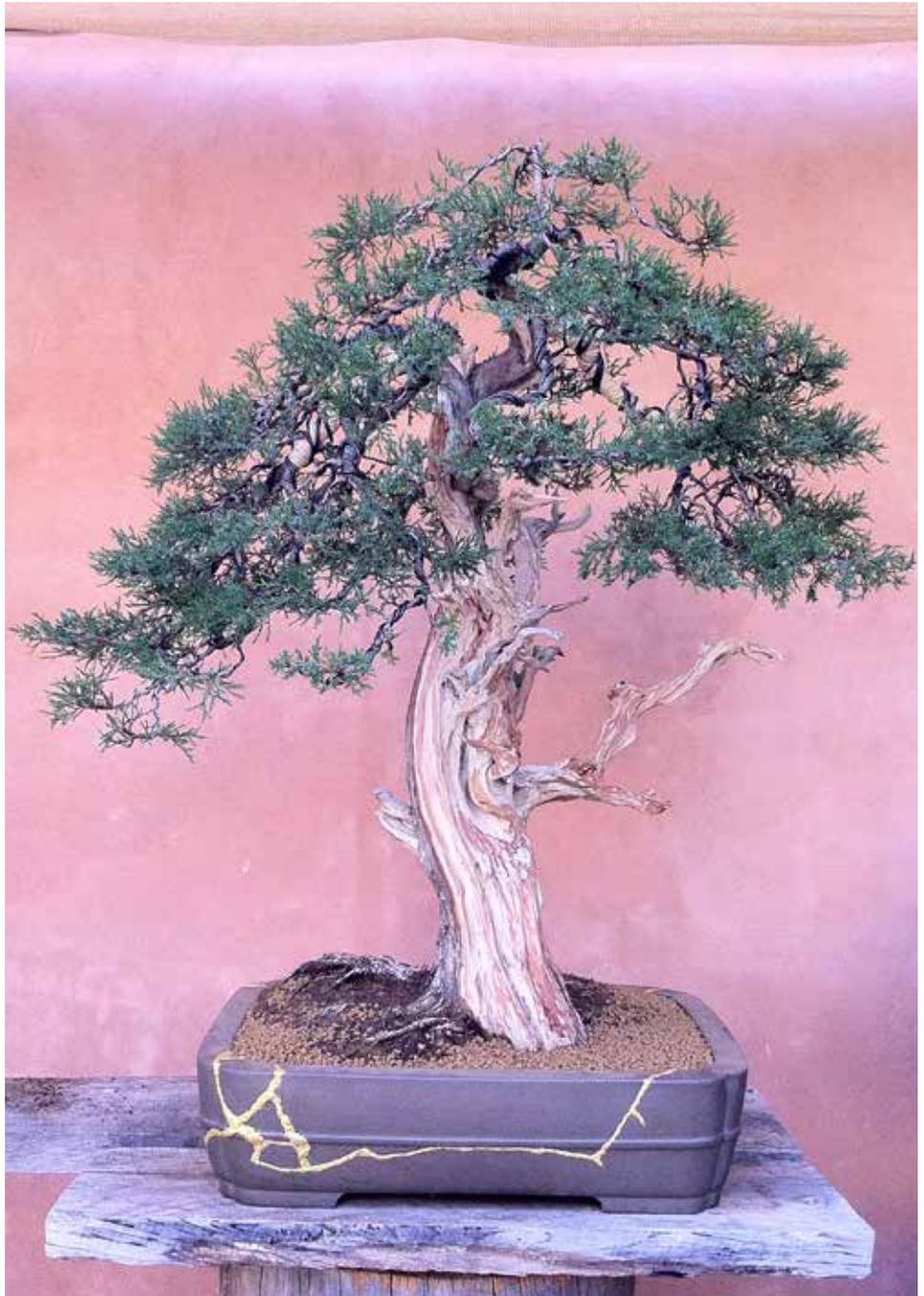




Above; I broke the damaged pot so that I could restore it using an ancient Japanese technique called *Kintsugi*, meaning "golden joinery," that involves gluing together the broken pieces with lacquer resin and gilding the surface with powdered gold to highlight the breaks and to express *wabi* and *mono-no-aware* (literally "the pathos of things"). This creates an awareness of impermanence, or transience of things, and a gentle sadness (or wistfulness) at their passing. *Kintsugi* dates back to 15th Century Japan. Collectors became so enamored of the new art that some were accused of deliberately smashing valuable pottery so it could be repaired with the gold seams of *kintsugi*. *Kintsugi* became closely associated with the ceramic utensils used for Japanese tea ceremony.

Bottom left; The carving on the shari is further refined.
 Bottom right; Recaredo after repotting into its new kintsugi container

Facing page; Recaredo as it is today.





Recaredo, *Juniperus phoenicea*, h 100 cm.
photo courtesy Estudi Ramon