



New Talent Evaluation Criteria

Before actually start the exercise, one should clearly dissociate the Judging of Bonsai - whatever stage of development these trees might have reached - and the Judging of the NTC-trees as the latter once are not the result of many years of careful cultivation, but rather a first styling of a tree that might become a bonsai in a distant future.

Indeed, the criteria to judge NTC-trees must take into account that:

1. The candidate did not have the choice of material as he had to take one of the trees offered for the contest. As such, defects as for instance the absence of nebari, an inverse taper of a trunk, cannot be overcome because he could not refuse to work on that material.
2. The candidate had to style the tree in a short lapse of time without having the opportunity to further work on his tree in order to correct some basic defects.
3. The trees are not potted and an important aspect of bonsai - choice of pot and balanced placement of the tree - can't be judged.
4. Other circumstances to work in, might not be ideal, but as each of the candidates is working in the same rather difficult circumstances, it will influence the work of each candidate in the same way.

For several of these criteria, the judges should not evaluate the NTC-trees as severely as if it were "normally" styled bonsai. Hence, this does not mean that judges should totally drop the requirements they normally observe when judging bonsai or potensai.

In the case of the NTC-trees, one should always keep in mind that the trees to be judged are at the very beginning of their life as a potential bonsai. It must however show that the candidate's choices in styling will allow the tree to develop into a fine bonsai if properly cared for over the next years.

This also implies - and here we cannot lower our criteria - that the future life of the tree may not be jeopardised by excessive work in styling. Indeed, it is the very first and most important option for any bonsai-ka to keep his tree alive and well. There is no point to demonstrate an extremely high degree of artistic talent if the tree's survival in whatever way is put into danger.

Some demonstrator might have given the impression in the past that they can do anything, anytime, just to show "what they can achieve in styling a tree". This seems, however, the worst kind of the so called artists that should be removed without further ado from the stages where serious enthusiasts try to learn from the artist: the real art is to obtain a bonsai which implies, without any concession, a living tree.

As one tries to recognise the best bonsai talent, one should observe the correct use of all the different techniques as high artistic achievements can only be reached if all techniques are fully mastered. Of course, the artistic potential in styling is crucial.

Following points will be observed and marks given out of 10:-

Nebari	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surface roots: the most important factor to observe for styling a good tree, and also the one that is difficult to correct. It plays a crucial role in defining the front of the tree. • Where crossing roots and visible fine fibre roots on the surface itself properly removed? • It is very well possible that the material of the candidate does not have any surface roots or even show some taper at the base of the trunk. The candidate should have made in any case a serious attempt to search for it and look for possible surface roots deeper in the pot. No attempt at all = 0! • If the material is poor, please apply an average figure for this item in order to avoid punishing the candidate for the lack of quality of the tree.
Tachiagari	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower trunk: was the front of the tree chosen while showing the trunk to its best? • Was it a second best choice because of a nice nebari or a better branch placement? • Was the trunk at least cleaned if needed? • If the material is poor, please apply an average figure for this item in order to avoid punishing the candidate for the lack of quality of the tree.
Branches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the sashi-eda (primary and largest branch) and the uke-eda (counterbalance branch) well defined? • Are the main branches correctly placed without interfering or covering each other? • Is there enough negative space between the branches? • Does the form of the branches logically coincide with the style and the trunk movement? • Is the apex well defined?
Techniques Wiring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correct wiring, not excessive • Strong enough to hold branches in place • Without damaging the bark of the tree.
Techniques Pruning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correctly pruned, no stumps, finished pruning cuts • Enough pruning or not?
Other techniques (Jin, Shari, Uro)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If any, well defined jin, shari and uro, no excessive carving or marks of revolving tools • Natural aspect of the work • If too much bark must be peeled off in one go, just indicate the area with chalk!
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was the health of the tree, through excessive work, put in danger by the candidate? • Can the tree normally survive its first styling? • Excessive work must be marked down.
Aesthetics Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the respective volumes compared to each other in harmony and are these volumes in proportion to the tree?
Aesthetics Depth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was the tree styled in such a way that it gives a strong impression of depth? • Verify branch structure and form of back branches.
Aesthetics Natural appearance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Styling a tree might cause an artificial appearance. Is the work on the tree done in such a way that it still gives the impression that the artist merely interfered in the natural appearance of the tree.
Aesthetics Balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In two aspects to be observed. Although the tree is not potted, it must be presented in the correct angle as if it were properly planted, thus showing that the balance of the tree is correct.