

**EUROPEAN BONSAI ASSOCIATION CONGRESS 2018**  
**ARCO, ITALY: 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> May, 2018**



Arco, a delightful small town in Northern Italy, close to the shores of Lake Garda, is located in a mountainous area of great natural beauty, well known to tourists and climbers alike. On this occasion, it hosted the annual European Bonsai Association (E.B.A.) Congress in conjunction with the Italian “Unione Bonsai Italiani” (U.B.I.) and the European Suiseki Association (E.S.A.).

On that weekend around twenty British arrived here from all parts of the U.K. The weather was delightfully warm and everyone was prepared for an excellent bonsai weekend. There were some 75 traders covering all aspects of bonsai and accessories together with other horticultural and floral areas, displayed in rows, either on the extensive veranda or under square white gazebos placed around the ornamental gardens of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Municipal Casino in the centre of Arco. Heavy mountain rains on the Saturday morning made this a strange sight as umbrella-carrying enthusiasts shopped around, undeterred by the sudden storm.



Within the Casino itself, three halls were given over to an extensive exhibition of quite extraordinary bonsai of a quality rarely seen in the U.K. all but for a very few were immaculately prepared and displayed with quality stands and accent plants. I know the Italians have a better climate for growing their bonsai but they have excelled themselves in terms of the preparation and display of their trees, attaining a standard that compared well with bonsai normally seen in Japan. Congratulations to U.B.I. regarding the standard of their exhibition. Although the majority of the bonsai displayed were from the Italian societies, there were also a number of specimens, again of a very good standard, displayed from other European countries that were members of E.B.A.



On the other hand, for a country with such a range of quality stones, the suiseiki display was small compared to such displays seen in the past. Amnon Paldi of the Chiltern Bonsai Society had one of the stones on display, for which he received an award.



The Friday afternoon saw the Opening Ceremony taking place. Among those present were Marc Noelanders, President of E.B.A., Gabriele Sbariani, on behalf of the organising body U.B.I. together with other dignitaries.



The next two days were spent enjoying the exhibitions, regretting in one instance the poor lighting and visualising long hours of photo enhancing before being able to present images of the exhibition trees to my local bonsai society. One morning included watching fourteen competitors struggling with their trees in the E.B.A. New Talent Contest Final; looking longingly at the amazing potensai and trained trees at very acceptable prices in the trade areas – bitterly regretting Ryanair and their regulations with regard to baggage; it would cost as much to put a 20kg suitcase in the hold one way than the price of a return ticket! So, no purchases! Enjoyable lunches in the bar or on the veranda; time spent watching Hotsumi Terakawa demonstrating on a large juniper – immaculate work and quickly carried out. Hotsumi is now a world-renown bonsai master, teacher and demonstrator. Malcolm and I have fond memories dating back to 1987 when we first brought this very young and new demonstrator, freshly out of Japan, accompanied by his equally young, delightful English-speaking Dutch-Japanese girlfriend, Hannako Lodder to the National Exhibition Centre near Birmingham for the first E.B.A. Convention to be held in the U.K. Now, 30 years later, he is an experienced demonstrator with more than adequate English, a wife and two sons, sharing his time between two homes, one in Japan and the second near Amsterdam.



After two intense days of bonsai, the evenings were split – first the Friday evening with a welcome dinner on the ferry boat “Bescia” sailing on Lake Garda where the food was excellent and the wine freely flowing – a very good evening.



The Saturday evening was classed as a banquet but not in the form many would recognise. It was under cover in a large marquee pavilion set out at the Arco Tennis Club. Some 400 guests were seated on benches at trestle tables. Beer (not wine) was freely available whilst the food comprised some unidentifiable meat with fried mashed potato and shredded cabbage doused in olive oil – a strange fare for a banquet. The Italians present obviously did not arrive with our expectations as they came prepared with large quantities of salami, other Italian sausages, Parma ham, and a range of assorted cheeses which they then generously shared with their unsuspecting non-Italian guests; it was an experience unsurpassed in my many years of bonsai travel – it really lightened up the evening.

The evening ended with presentation of awards, various long speeches (no change there), music and dancing and the consuming of large amounts of beer with the resulting induced joviality. There were, I suspect, a few hangovers the next day.

Next years' EBA Congress is to be held in Albi, about one hours drive from Toulouse, France. May 10<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup>.

Kath Hughes May 13<sup>th</sup>