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SPRING NEWSLETTER 2015

Issue 14

I have been increasingly interested in Japanese style pruning and have started growing a selection of trees and shrubs that lend themselves to this type of work. Over the last three years I have been experimenting with a Pine in our garden which I expect to shape up over the next five years or so. Last October I went to Japan as part of a small group to look at Japanese trees and pruning techniques.



Japan:

I thought I would be prepared for what I was going to see on arrival in Japan from the books I had read but even the journey from the airport to Osaka made me realise this landscape was going to be something very special. I was lucky enough to be part of the Niwaki tour organised by Rob Knott of Canopy Spirit along with John Darter, Mark Merrit and Nigel and Miv Fagg to look at Japanese trees and pruning techniques. We were met at the airport by Rob, who had arrived the previous day, and Jin-san of Arbor Japan, who is dedicated to improving Japanese awareness of tree care and pruning. As we drove through the suburbs of Osaka trees pruned in the niwaki style were abundant in gardens and open spaces. Niwaki means garden tree and are pruned in a way to encourage the features of age and maturity such as gnarled stems and long heavy branches and growth distorted by harsh conditions. Traditionally trees showing these features were removed from mountainsides and placed in shrines and gardens and this connection with nature still appears to be important in Japan. Japanese Red Pine/*Pinus densiflora*, Japanese Black Pine/*Pinus thunbergii* and Japanese White Pine/*P. parviflora* are the three Pines most commonly used. *Podocarpus macrophylla* which are called maki in Japan with yew like foliage are pruned into dense shapes. *Juniperus chinensis*, *Cryptomeria japonica* and more unusually *Sciadipteryx verticillata* are also pruned in this way.

and new replacements selected maintaining the all important uneven number of stems and uneven stem height.



Maintenance of mature Niwaki pines usually takes the form of Momiage which is done in October—thinning of summer growth leaving two shoots on branch tips to form a v shape. The thinning is done by hand picking the old needles and leaving the new ones. Midoritsumi is the pinching out of candles that arise from the retained buds in early summer by only pinching out half of each candle gradually allowing side growth to expand outwards. The process of candle pinching is carried out each year and consolidates the density of foliage. While we were there we noticed Niwashi—Japanese gardeners—on tripod ladders and pruning going on in gardens and shrines and also came across a yard with trucks and equipment ready to go with interesting trees heeled in for planting alongside rocks and monuments for moving into landscape schemes.



On our first full day we drove into the hills near Kyoto to a small Shinto monastery to see some ancient Japanese cedars *Cryptomeria japonica* 400 years old grown in the daisugi style, where the tree is pollarded at the desired height with some side branches left with sprouts. Over the following years new growth is thinned and new straight upright growth selected, removing weaker shoots. When they become too tall stems can be removed



Jin-san had arranged for us to be shown around the Kadji temple by Mr Kitayama who is an eminent garden designer whose work can be seen in Holland Park London in the Kyoto garden. He arranged a demonstration by two

experts on Pieris and Maple pruning who were called in and paid to show us. They demonstrated how to thin and shorten back to give a more open and layered appearance typical of Japanese pruning. At the Tenryuji shrine there were some good examples of Japanese Red Pines *P. densiflora* and Black Pines *P. thunbergii* with raked gravel representing water and Sogen Garden with a lake with overhanging Pines and a background of autumn colour which was best viewed through the frame created by the open screen of the nearby drawing room. Camphor *Cinnamomum camphra* trees were the main attraction for us at Kotai Jingu, a Shinto shrine in Mie prefecture. There were some massive ones near the temple of 30m plus and a circumference of 20m. They are broadleaf evergreens with a broad arching crown and have many medicinal properties and can live for 1000 years.



As we travelled to the Wakayama district it became evident that Japan has a large amount of woodland. About 67% of its land area is covered, mostly steep mountain-side covered in *Cryptomeria*, high pruned on the lower slopes for use in construction, but also some deciduous trees giving streaks of autumn colour. The shortage of level land has resulted in densely populated villages and towns in the lower land at the foot of the mountains with houses close together but often with niwaki Pines, *Podocarpus* and shrubs such as *Ilex crenata*, *Crateagus rotunda* and *Phillyrea latifolia* fitted into seemingly small spaces. A typical scene is a house with a welcome branch of Pine or *Podocarpus* over the entrance. Jin-san told us this is a form of status symbol and dates back to when the well to do had tiled roof over the entrances to their houses.



We stayed at Koyasan, a town built around the shrine of Kobo daishi a Buddhist deity who is believed to be alive 1200 years after going beneath ground to meditate. The monks have brought Kobo daishi food every morning during this time and many pilgrims travel great distances to worship there. We had a torch light tour down the 2km path to the shrine which has 250,000 tombs amongst thousands of Japanese Cedars some of 50m—a logistical nightmare to dismantle! The town has 50 Buddhist monasteries devoted to Kobo daishi. We stayed in two experiencing the Buddhist way of life including prayers at 6am, a fire ceremony devoted to descendants and vegetarian food. The next stop was the Furukawa tree nursery near Todayashi which was established 70 years ago and specialises in niwaki as well as other landscape plants, exporting to Europe. Here we saw broadleaf trees Hornbeam *Carpinus sp.* That had been lifted in another part of the nursery and rootballed in string and jute and moved to another area where they were heeled in. Holes for heeling in were

dug by mini digger and the trees lifted off the back of a truck by a small crane into the hole which was backfilled by the digger and perlite spread on top. The holes were not covered with soil until watering had taken place. The site for each tree seemed to be completely random giving an almost woodland appearance but I was told the boss knew where to find each one. The trees are ready to be sold and can be lifted out and delivered quite easily. After lunch at the directors' house we saw rows of neatly pruned *Ilex crenata* and *Podocarpus* ready for sale. Root balling and under cutting is done by hand. The trees being moved every three years to ensure a compact ball of roots is formed and also to keep the needles short as required.

Ono is the town where axes have been made for many years and is now the home of Silky Fox saws. We were taken around by the owner whose grandfather started the business and shown where sheets of steel 2m x



500mm were laser cut to the shape of the blade and then stacked by a remote controlled magnetic arm. The blades are then polished by two automatic grind wheels, one on either side. A diamond disc is used to cut the blades teeth with two cuts to form the top cutter and two the sides. After all the automation I was surprised to see that assembly of the handle, packing and quality control were all done by hand. We moved to Nara for the last day and saw the largest statue of Buddha -15m- in a shrine and deer park where there was a sacred *Cryptomeria* with a sucker growing through a wall of the nearby building and out of the roof.

Over the week we saw many places and met people that would not have been possible without the local knowledge of Jin-san and Rob Knott. We met some of Jin-san's friends and people he works with, some of whom travelled for four hours to see us and showed us great generosity and enthusiasm for trees and arboriculture. We felt very welcome in Japan and I would like to thank all the people who gave up their time for us.