

Bonsai Basic Design

Bonsai

Artistic representation of a mature tree in
nature

“A story in the telling”

Goal of Bonsai Design

To create an arrangement of visually pleasing artistic components:

- Roots, trunk, branches, foliage, negative space
- Pot and accessories.

Visual Elements of Design

- Line
- Form
- Texture
- Color

Line

- Expressed by movement of the trunk
- Defines the style of the tree:
 - Formal upright
 - Informal upright
 - Windswept
 - Cascade, etc.

Formal Upright



Formal Upright



BALD CYPRESS
JUNIPERUS FLORIDAENSIS
IN "MUSEUM OF THE CITY"
CULTURAL CENTER, TAMPA, FLORIDA

Formal Upright



Informal Upright



Informal Upright



Semi Cascade



Semi Cascade



Cascade



Slant Style



Broom Style



John Tachio Naka
August 18, 1914 - May 28, 2004
Father of American Bonsai
Breeder and Designer

John Tachio Naka

Form

- Branch position, length & arrangement
- Outline or shape of the tree

Texture

- Quality of bark and foliage
- Defines character of masculinity or femininity

Masculine



Masculine



Feminine



Feminine



Color

- Defines a trees character
- Tree health

Principles of Design

- Proportion
- Balance
- Movement
- Space
- Emphasis
- Simplicity
- Contrast
- Unity

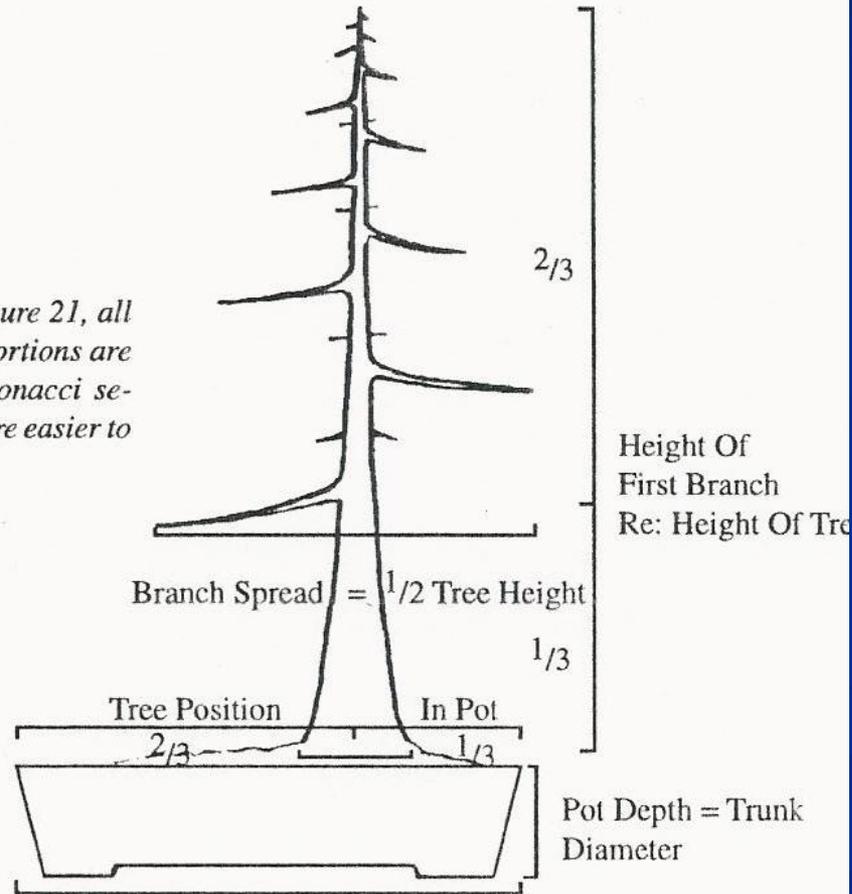
Proportion

- Fibonacci sequence 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, etc.
- Golden ratio 'Rule of thirds'

Golden Ratio of thirds

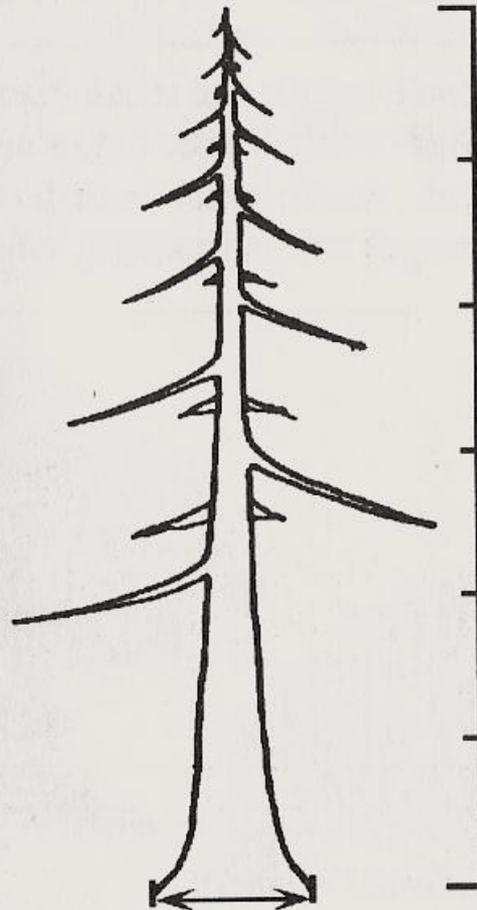
Figure 22

Like Figure 21, all of these proportions are from the Fibonacci sequence, but are easier to perceive.



Trunk Height

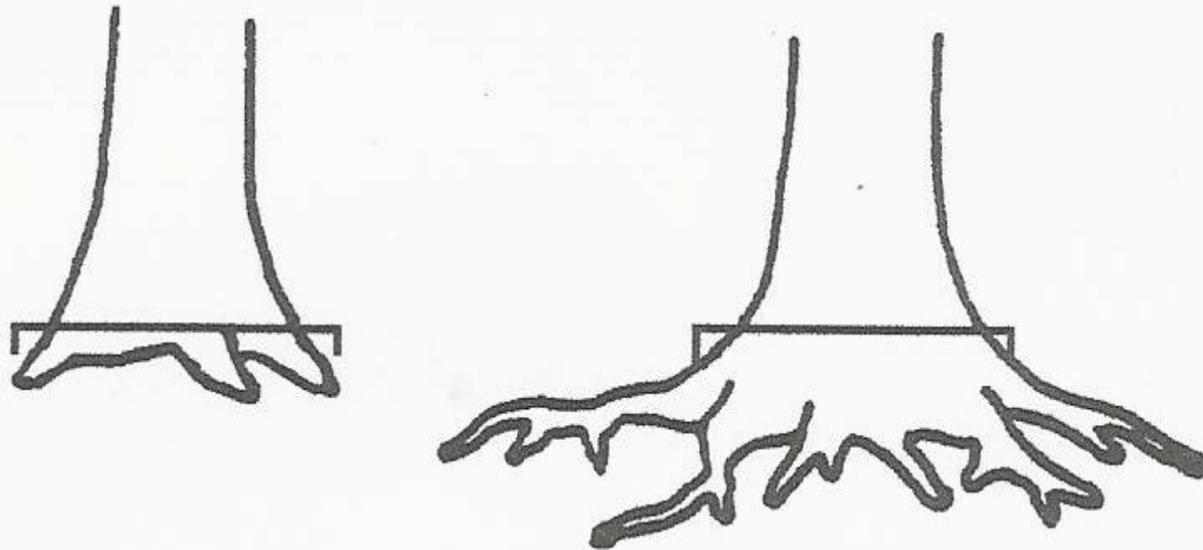
Figure 17



A diameter to height ratio of 1:6 makes a pleasing appearance.

Trunk width

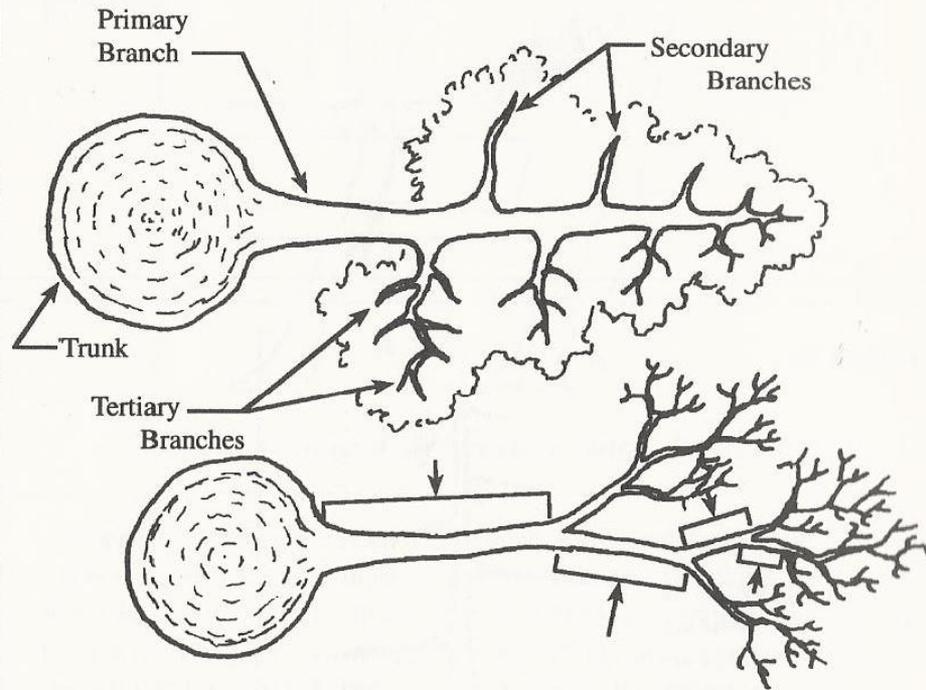
Figure 18



Trunk diameter is measured at the soil line, or where the surface roots divide.

Branch ratios

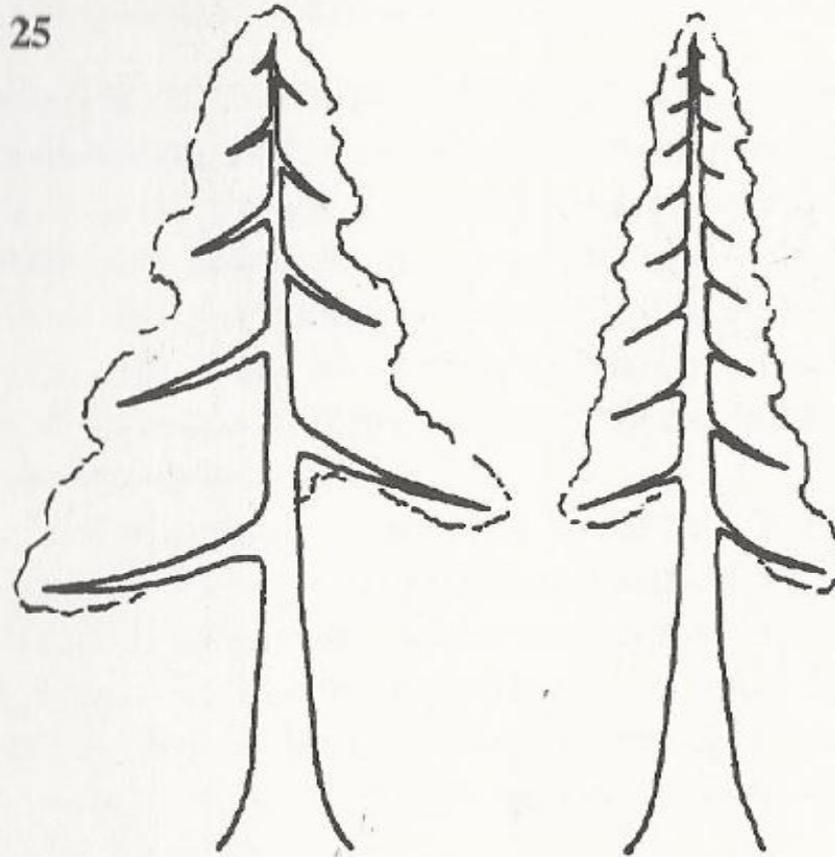
Figure 23



Two branches, top view: In the upper sketch, secondary and tertiary branches are in the same arrangement as primary branches on the trunk. Lower sketch—internodes that get shorter as the diameter of the branch decreases are desirable.

Branch Length

Figure 25



Balance

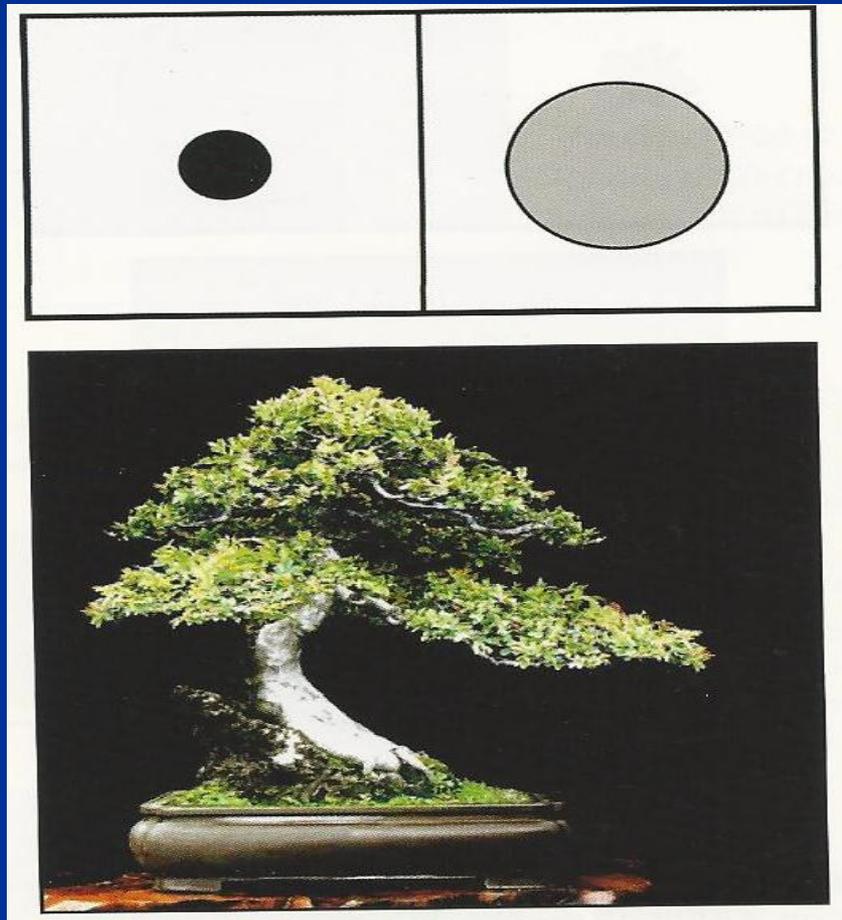
Visual balance may not have physical balance

Asymmetrical balance more dynamic/interesting

Consider effects of value, color, shape, texture and
position

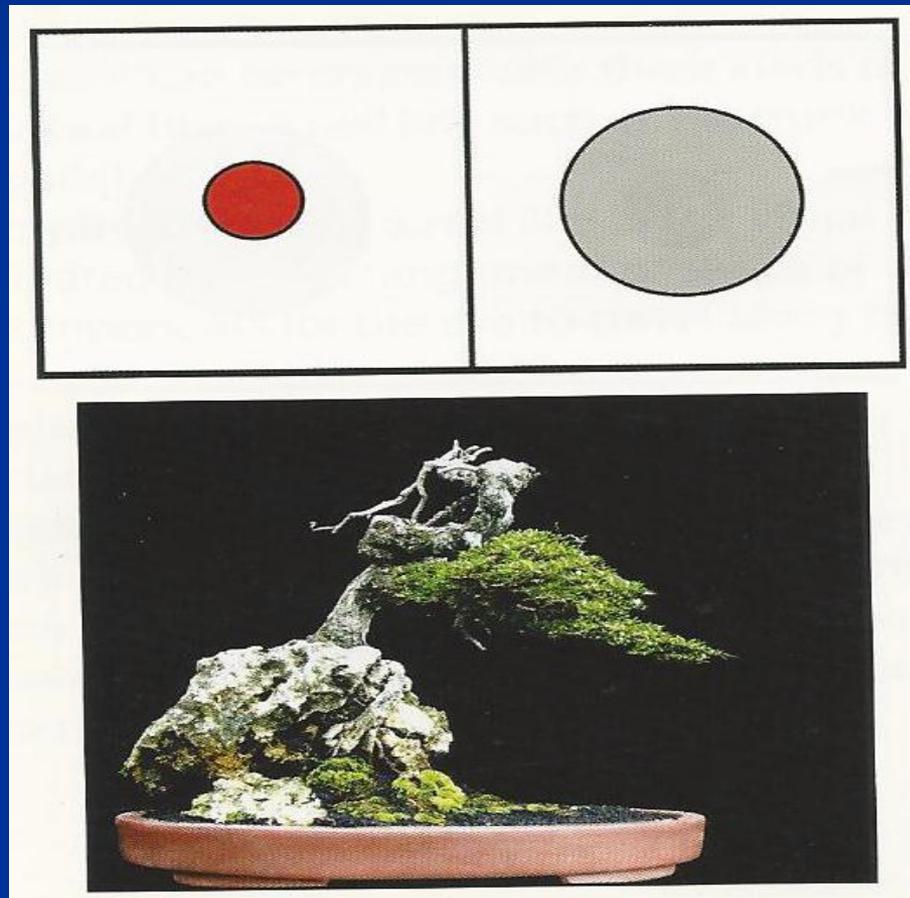
Balance by value

- Smaller darker can balance larger lighter



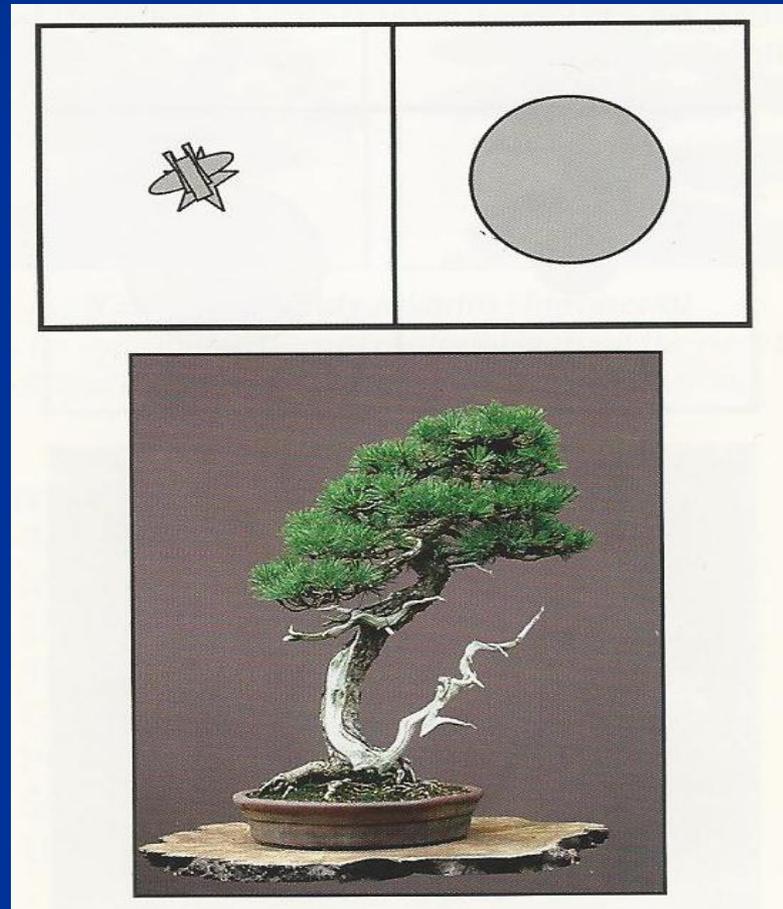
Balance by color

- Smaller brighter can balance larger more neutral colors



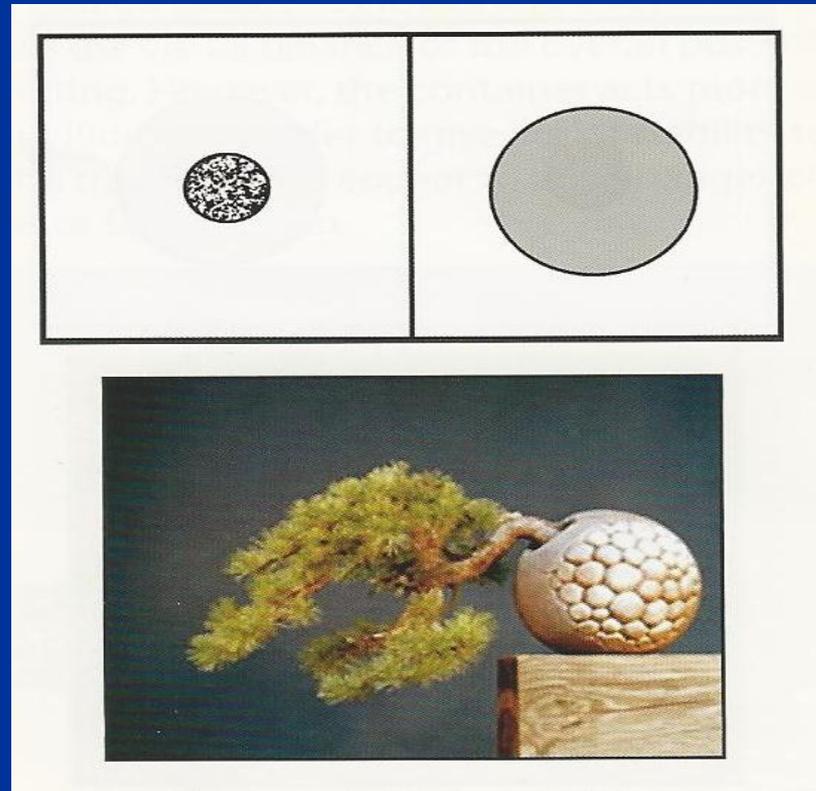
Balance by shape

- Smaller complicated shapes can balance larger simple shapes



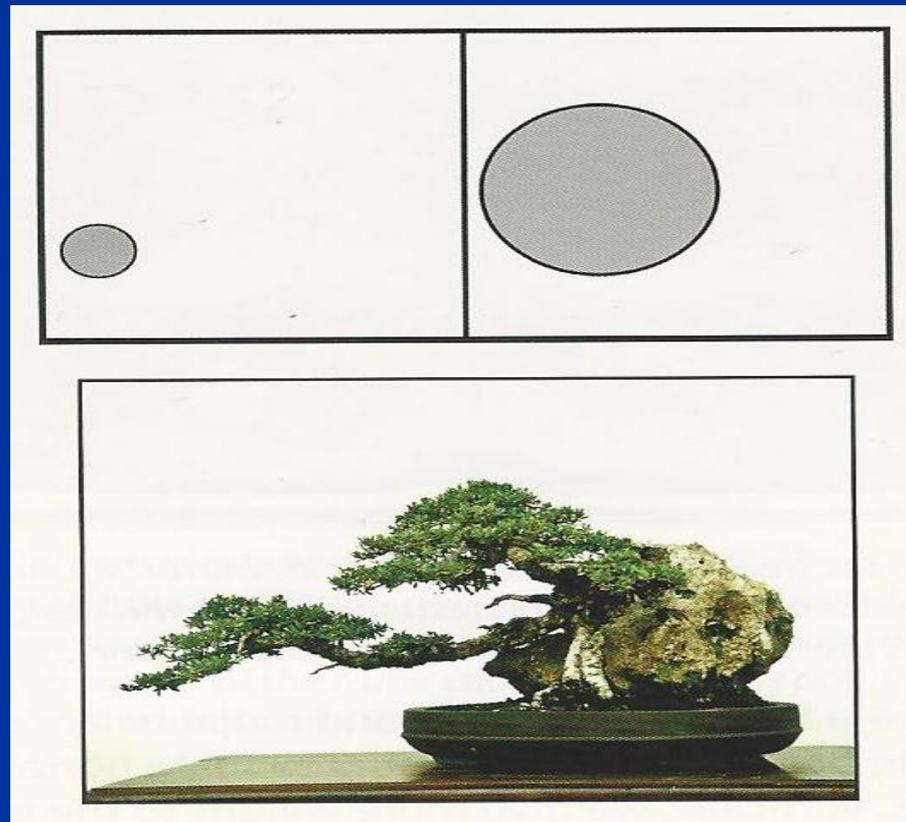
Balance by texture

- Smaller rougher, complex surfaces can balance larger smoother surfaces

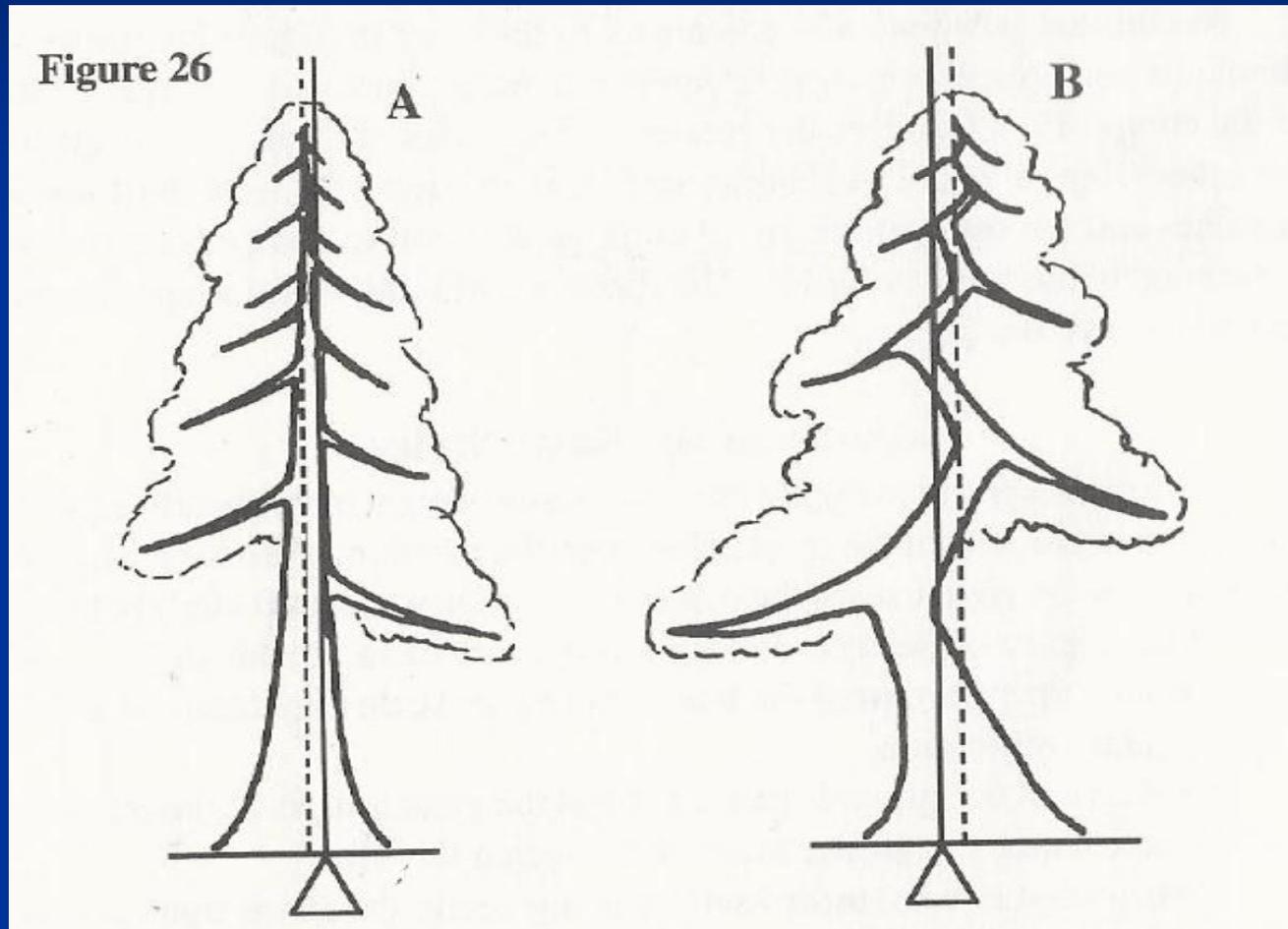


Balance by position

- Small object far from center can balance larger object nearer to center

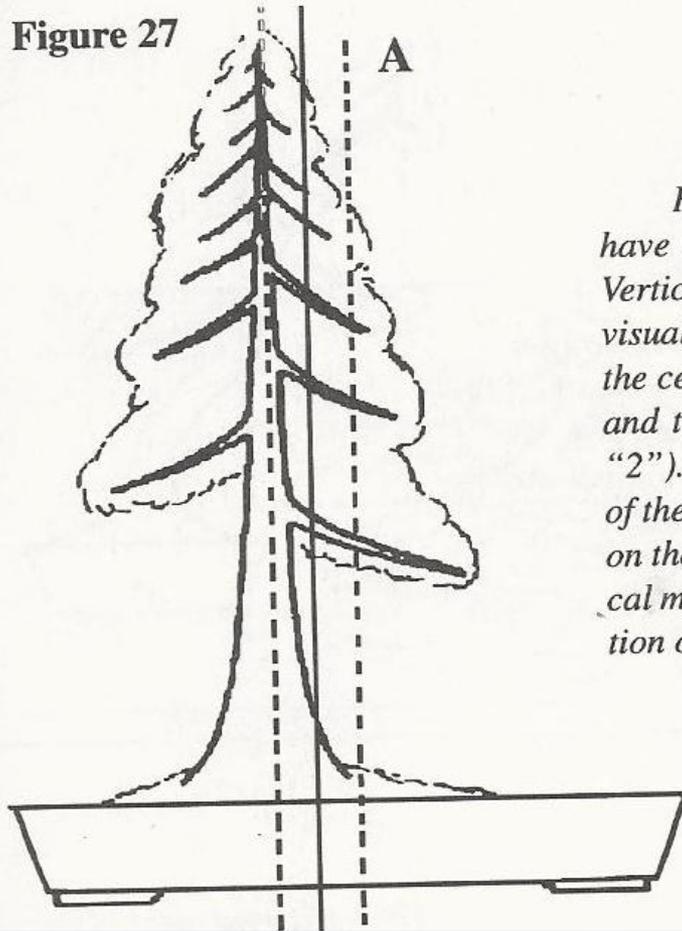


Balance of visual mass



Balance in a container

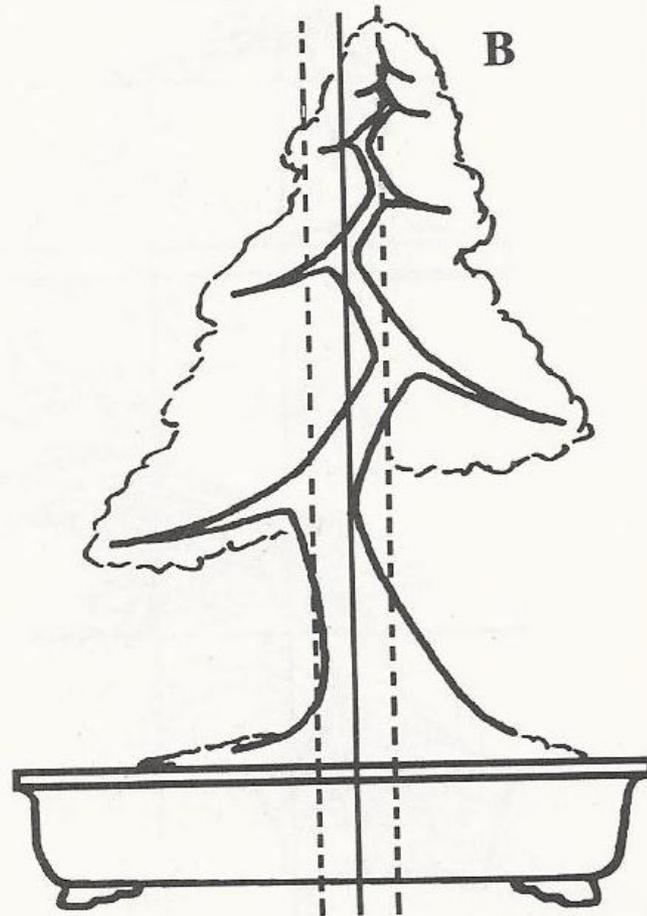
Figure 27



Here, the 2 trees from Figure 26 have been placed in containers. The Vertical line representing the center of visual mass is located midway between the center of the tree (dotted line "1") and the center of the pot (dotted line "2"). In A, the greater horizontal mass of the pot and the lesser portion of tree on the right balances the greater vertical mass of the tree and the lesser portion of the pot on the left.

Tree Position in Container

The informal upright in B has the same relationships, but left and right are reversed. Trees with pots in A and B are perfectly balanced.



Movement

- The directional path of our eyes
- Usually trunk and/or branch line

Space

- Interval or distance between elements
- Negative space an important design component
 - Has weight and mass
 - Adds to the illusion of depth
 - Principles of balance apply

Emphasis

- Intended focus of the design

Simplicity

- Removal of distracting or non essential design elements

Contrast

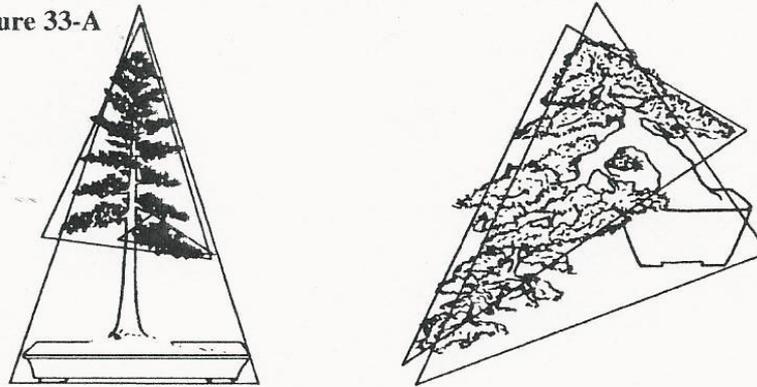
- Branch line and trunk movement
- Color difference of foliage and trunk
- Textures difference of trunk and deadwood
- Surface: difference of trunk and stone, moss and top dressing

Unity

- Repetition of similar elements creates rhythm
- Triangle most common element
- Continuity of trunk style
- Continuity of trunk/branch relationship

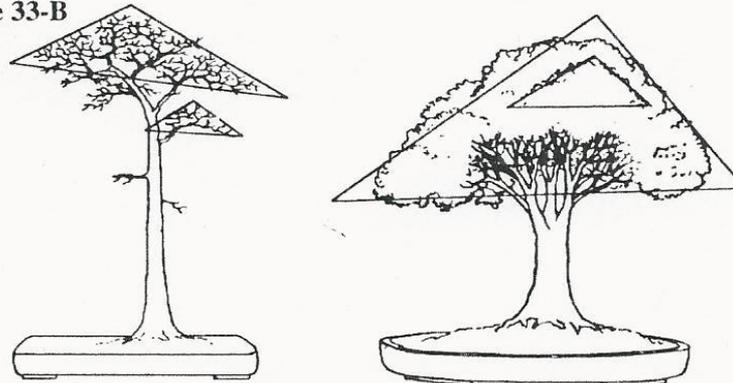
Repetition of the triangle as the visual element

Figure 33-A



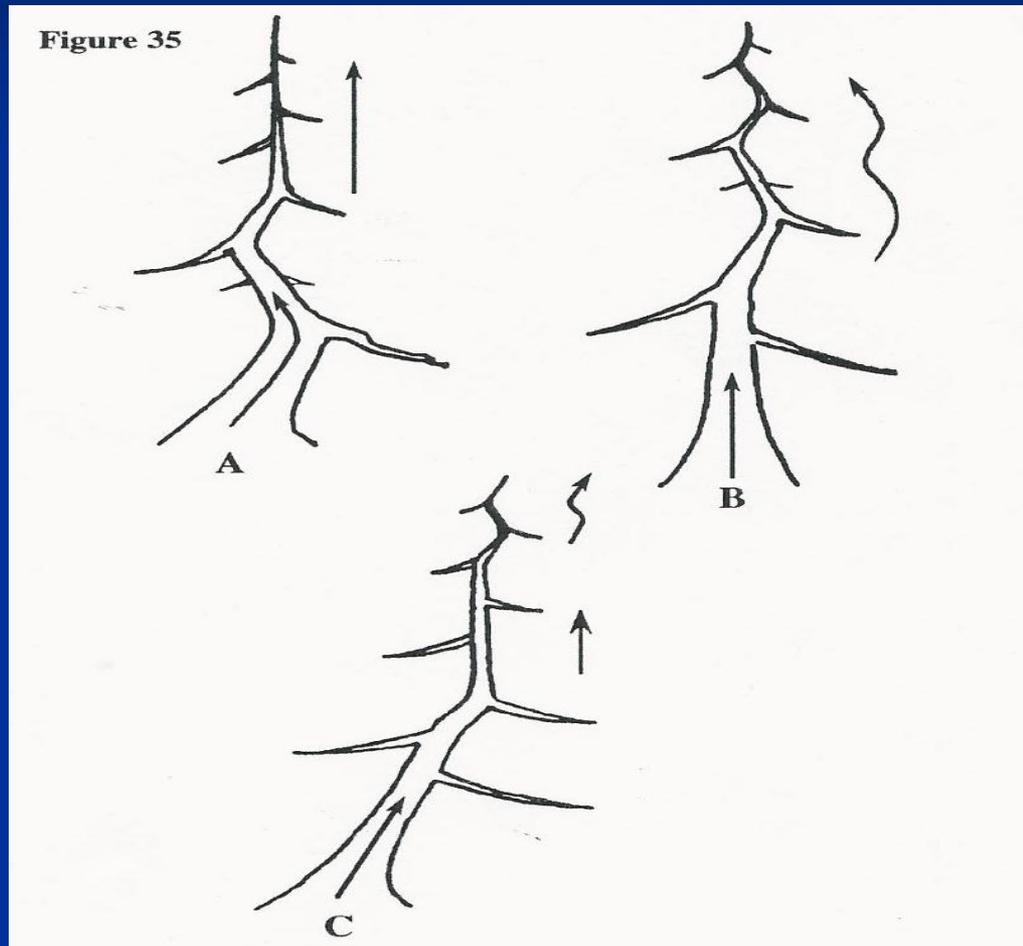
In these illustrations, we see that the triangle shape may be found in individual foliage masses, the entire tree, and the complete composition of tree with pot.

Figure 33-B



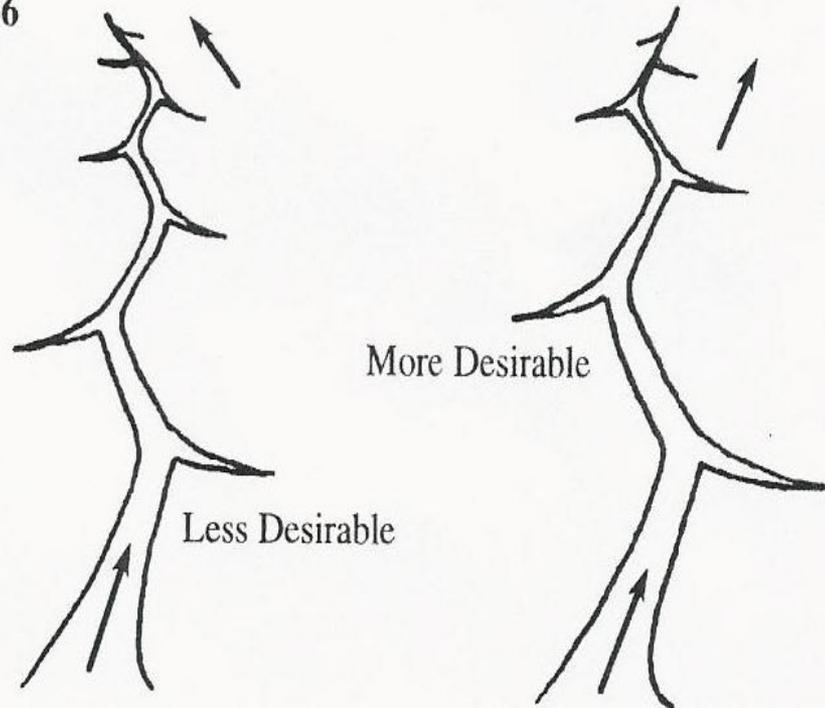
These trees show the triangle in a more subtle way, but triangles are present and are repeated throughout the compositions.

Discontinuity of trunk line



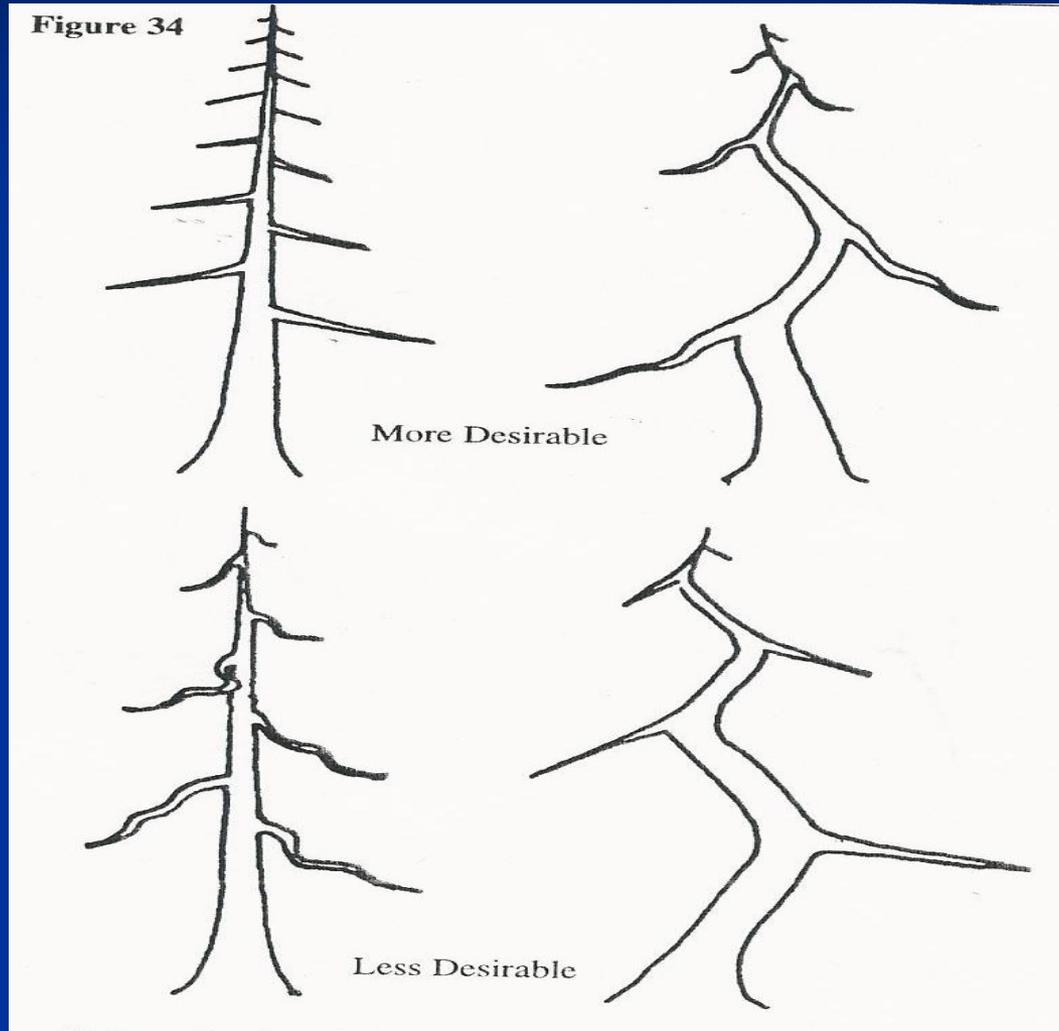
Continuity of trunk line

Figure 36



Trees that have lateral movement in their lines (informal upright, slanting and cascade) will be more satisfying if they move in the same direction at the top as at the base.

Continuity of trunk/branch



Unity of trunk movement

Figure 38



The tree on the left is logically arranged; the tree on the right is not.

In any event, the trunks should not cross, nor move in opposite directions (Figures 39-A and B), unless the artist has a specific purpose in mind.

Figure 39



References

- Bonsai Techniques I, John Yoshio Naka
pp. 15-28
- Basic Bonsai Design, David De Groot
pp. 1-37
- Journal of the American Bonsai Society,
Vol. 42 #4 pp. 20-26,
Vol. 43 #1 pp. 15-15