



Hannes Fritz

Bonsai Enthusiast

I was born in 1978 in Heidelberg Gauteng where I grew up on a beautiful farm that belonged to my grandfather at the time. From childhood I was fascinated by plants, and I grew succulents with my father who was a horticulturist and an experienced succulent's collector.

At age 12 my father bought me a bonsai book and the very next day I collected my first Celtis tree from our garden. The early days without Google and Facebook I had to learn from books and the horticultural knowledge from my dad.

Luckily, I met Oom Johan Bester who was also living in Heidelberg, and he gave me my first foundation for what was to come.

The year 2000 I went to study Jewellery design at Pretoria tech and that was the time that I joined Pretoria Bonsai kai.

With all the knowledgeable people in the club my bonsai eyes opened for the first time and that's when I really got into the world of master Charles Ceronio. I participated in many of his private workshops at his Pretoria home. Through the club I also met and befriended many bonsai teachers like...Oom Theuns Roos, Louis Nel, Erika Kohler, Hennie Reyneke and many more.

These are the people that inspired me to better myself in the art of Bonsai.

In 2003 Pretoria kai took me on my first Yamadori dig in Rustenburg area, and that day my passion for collecting Yamadori started with a bang.

After a couple of years in Pretoria kai where Oom Charles Ceronio, who was still the president taught me to do demonstrations. First assistance from him and later all by myself. In the years to come I did demo's all-over South Africa and met really inspiring people like Gary Howes, Brett Simons, and Vian Herbst just to name a few.

In 2006 I won the new talent competition for Brat at the Cape Town bonsai convention and had my first encounter with international demonstrators, yes that's when I met master Robert Stevens, the man who changed my outlook on bonsai forever.

In 2013 I started my own bonsai club, Suikerbos Bonsai kai Heidelberg with two other friends. The name Suikerbos comes from the area I grew up in and still lives, called Suikerbosrand and we border the well-known Suikerbosrand nature reserve.

I served as President of Suikerbos for 5 consecutive years and in 2018 I gave the ropes to my best friend and right-hand man Stefann Pretorius. I have taken over the presidency of the club again in 2024.

The ultimate goal of my bonsai journey was when I was chosen to represent Africa at the world bonsai conference in Saitama city Japan. Japan was most likely the best and most frightening experience of my life. To do a demonstration on an international stage with the best bonsai artists in the world is not for the faint hearted!

Would I do it differently if I had the chance.... yes indeed, would I do it again.... I don't think so.

However, till today I believe that I did my best for the time and with the knowledge and training I had.

Did Japan change my outlook on bonsai....no not at all because I knew even before I got on that plane that the trees will be on a completely different level than what I'm use to and that it will be insane to even try to compare it with what we are doing back home in SA.

I came back and I went to my garden and didn't have the need to change anything because we have our own unique styles, species, and environments.

Yes, it was extremely inspiring and educational to walk through the gardens of the Japanese masters like Kimura and Suzuki, but after a couple of days you can't take in anymore and all the trees started to look the same.

The thing that I learned from my trip to Japan was that we as SA bonsai artists are extremely fortunate to have a wide variety of species and diverse climatic regions that create styles that can only be found in SA.

It's time that we stop competing with a country that's completely different from what we have.

I also serve on the SABA committee for 4 years but soon realized that committees and leadership positions are not for me because it takes away the beauty of bonsai and actual reasons for practicing the art of Bonsai. I prefer to train trees and not people.

Today I'm president of Suikerbos Bonsai kai and love to meet with likeminded people who do bonsai for the same reason I started 34 years ago.

I am working as a goldsmith for Rare Earth Creations in Hyde Park, Johannesburg and have recently started to make my own unique bonsai pots as well. First, I started with cement and then moved on to papercrete. It's actually very important to find or to create a pot that will complement a certain tree and style because we have such amazing bonsai material locally. I then moved to ceramic that opened a whole new opportunity. First, I collected my own clay from our farm with great results and unique textures and colours. After seeing a video by Rain Nell from the US I was inspired to build my own wood fire kiln. I did 3 prototypes before I got the final kiln build and operational. Because of my limited time with a full-time job and 300 plus trees in my collection, I divided my time into summer bonsai and winter ceramics.

For any assistance or advice, you can find me on Facebook: [Hannes Fritz](#), [Suikerbos Bonsai Community South Africa](#) or [Hannes Fritz Bonsai pots and Ceramics](#) (which is a newer hobby I started practicing 😊).