



PENJING GUIDE

Penjing 盆景 or penzai 盆栽, has a long and rich history with numerous styles, schools, and meanings. Penjing has been practiced in China since at least the Han dynasty (206 B.C. – 221 A.D.). In penjing, trees and landscapes are often shown in miniature and suggest a place in nature. They are sometimes called “three-dimensional paintings” (Yunhua, 1987). Penjing can suggest moods and even ideas. At Lan Su, visitors can enjoy many forms of this art and learn about its diversity and history. This guide will present a few of Lan Su’s penjing and describe this ancient art.



(1) Ponderosa Pine 松樹

(Pinus ponderosa)

This pine is trained in the literati style. Chinese Scholars are also called literati, making this style a suitable inclusion in this Chinese Scholars Garden. In the literati style, sparseness and a curving trunk give a feeling of lift, austerity, and transcendence. Poetic images of trees from literati paintings are often used as examples for styling this type of penjing. This pine is from the Pacific Bonsai Museum in Federal Way, WA. It was donated by Ellen Bartholemew and Michael Babbit in 2022.

(2) Spruce 雲杉, Juniper 圓柏, and Fern Bush 樹蕨

(Picea, Juniperus, Chamaebatiaria millefolium)

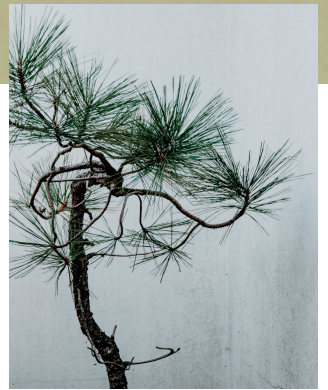
This landscape depicts two friends meeting under an old tree. Three trees are grown on a large stone, giving the landscape a feeling of old age. It is an example of a Shumu penjing, 樹木盆景, a penjing with trees as the main design element. This Shumu penjing was donated by Jim Duffy in 2022.



(3) Yulan Magnolia 玉蘭

(Magnolia)

Yulan Magnolias are native to central and eastern China and were associated with purity by Chinese Buddhist monks. Their tulip shaped flowers range in color from white to purple and yellow and emerge in early Spring. This Yulan Magnolia was donated in 2022 by Jim Duffy.



(4) Kingsville Boxwood 黃楊木, (5) Chinese Elm 榔榆, and (6) Ponderosa Pine 松樹

(*Buxus microphylla*, *Ulmus parvifolia*, *Pinus ponderosa*)

This Kingsville Boxwood (left) is styled in the Yangzhou style, characterized by twisting branches, “Roaming Dragon Curves,” and foliage pads, “Cloud Layers”. It is estimated to be 44 years old. The Chinese Elm (center) is estimated at 46 years old and is trained in the windswept style. Both trees come from Stanley Chinn, who immigrated to the United States after working at his uncle’s penjing nursery in China. His penjing now help make up the core collections at the National Bonsai and Penjing Collection in Washington D.C. as well as the Montreal Botanical Garden in Canada. The trees were donated to Lan Su by his friend Tony Meyer in 2022. The Ponderosa Pine (right) is in training in the literati style, it was donated by former Lan Su Curator of Horticulture, Justin Blackwell.



(7) Alberta Spruce 雲杉
(*Picea glauca*)

In the penjing artist Zhao Qingquans book, Forest Penjing, he writes that of the different penjing types, forest penjing possess the strongest vital energy and offer the most realistic impression of nature (Qingquan, 2022). This forest of eleven trees was introduced to the garden around the gardens beginning, about 2000, by the local artist Mark Vossbrink. Its age is estimated at 30 years old.

(8) Zelkova 光葉榉
(*Zelkova serrata*)

Penjing is often used to express emotions through miniature representation of natural scenes. In this scene an old tree that has fallen but is still vigorously growing and reaching towards the light. Its estimated age is 30 years old, and it was donated by Jim Duffy in 2022.



(9) Wisteria 紫藤
(*Wisteria floribunda*)

Penjing often show opposites side by side, and the harmony of opposites give a feeling of wholeness. In this penjing, the old tree blossoms in new flowers every Spring. The flowers are abundantly fragrant purple cascading clusters. It's styled in the hollow trunk style and its estimated age is about 75 years old. It was introduced around the beginning of the garden, year 2000, by Mark Vossbrink.



(10) Dwarf Fan Leaf Bamboo 竹子

(*Pleiblastus distichus*)

This bamboo penjing is in the shuihan or water and land style. Miniaturized landscapes are a very old form of penjing, occurring since the Han dynasty (206 B.C. – 220 A.D.), and were often magical representations of heaven 天 in Taoist and Buddhist practice (Stein, 1987). The penjing was created by Lan Su gardeners Zach Stanley and Yasmin Mayer in 2022.



(11) Dwarf Fan Leaf Bamboo 竹子

(*Pleiblastus distichus*)

This bamboo penjing is in the shuihan or water and land style. Empty space and filled space are balanced in harmony and natural materials; stones, plants, and water, are used to depict this miniaturized landscape. The penjing was created by Lan Su gardener Zach Stanley in 2022.

(12) Chinese Elm 榔榆

(*Ulmus parvifolia*)

The poetic name for this penjing is Thinking of Home. In this miniature landscape we can imagine we hear wind in the trees, the gurgling of water, and the chirping of birds. The trees are Chinese Elms and are trained using the Lignan school technique “clip and grow,” instead of using wire or other means of styling. It’s created in the shuihan style, with water, shui, and land, han. The stones are Yingde stones from Guangdong province. It was created by Lan Su gardener Zach Stanley and Robert Cho from Asia Pacific Gardening in Kent, WA in 2022.





(13) Trident Maple 三角楓

(*Acer buergerianum*)

Trident maples, native to Eastern China, are one of the most frequently used deciduous trees for Chinese penjing and Japanese bonsai. Although the two arts can look similar, there are differences emerging from different cultures and histories. The introduction of dwarfed tree culture to Japan from China was perhaps during the Southern Song dynasty (1280 – 1368), or the late Heian period in Japan (794 – 1192), (Qingquan, 2015). This penjing has an estimated age of 50 years old and was donated by Jim Duffy in 2022.

(14) Dwarf Fan Leaf Bamboo 竹子

(*Pleioblastus distichus*)

These three small bamboo penjing sit in the scholar's hall where, as bamboo, they make up one of the Four Gentlemen 四君子, with Orchids 蘭花, Plum trees 梅, and Chrysanthemum 菊花. They were donated by one of Lan Su's gardeners, Zach Stanley, in 2022.





(15) Hazel
(*Corylus avellana*)

This Hazel is grown in root over rock style. Including plants as part of a larger landscape, in this example root over rock style, is a common design theme in penjing. Another common theme is storytelling. Here it's as if the tree has grown for so long, that the ground has eroded from beneath it and left it perched upon a rock. Its estimated age is 35 years old and it was donated by Jim Duffy in 2022.

(16) Weeping Silver Birch 垂枝樺
(*Betula pendula*)

This forest penjing depicts a scholar reclining and drinking tea. The forest is made of Silver Birch, native to China's western provinces. The trees are characterized by smooth silver bark and golden fall color. The penjing is grown on a piece of slate rock from Eastern Washington. Its estimated age is 30 years old and it was donated by Jim Duffy in 2022.



