



The Midway News

7. Who's who – Johann Espach

This month we have one of the old hardwoods as topic. We all know the quality of trees that Johann owns. His trees have featured heavily in all our recent editions and shows.

How did you start in Bonsai?

The first time I saw a bonsai tree was whilst working and studying in Santa Rosa Ca, in +- 1977/8.

I visited the Japanese Gardens San Mateo Ca. and the local Bonsai Club had an exhibition in the Arboretum. I joined and regular visited the Club in San Francisco, until my return to SA late 1980.

Shortly after returning to SA I separated and due to raising three children on my own I did not have any spare time and did not think about bonsai until 1995 when I visited the botanical gardens in Pretoria. Pretoria Kai had an exhibition at the gardens on the Day. I then Joined Pretoria Kai.

My First Bonsai Tree

Whilst in the USA, I only had a Black Pine that I purchased. The tree was imported into the USA from Japan.

My first trees in SA was a Black Monkey Thorn that I won on the raffle table on my first visit to the club. I sold it about 5 years ago. A Boabab that I purchased at beginners course the weekend after I joined the club and a Juniper Procumbence Nana, that I style in a new talent competition (with second place) on my third visit to the club. I still have both of these trees. The Procumbence Nana in a bad state at present as I nearly lost it last year ago when its dripper blocked whilst on leave for three weeks.

How many trees do you have

Due to space constrains, living in a townhouse, I have reduced my collection at home over the last three years from about 100 large trees, to 5 Baobab's and 20 various other small trees and 4 very large 20 year old baobabs (1,5 to 2m from top of pot to top of tree) at my daughter's house. I am a vivid grower of clivias and orchids and have reduced by collection on all three species at home to only my favoured.

I have +-500, 20+-year-old Juniper Procumbence Nana in various stages of styling, in pots and in ground as well as +- 30, 10 to 20-year-old styled in ground Baobab's on my farm.



To the left: These are two of Johann's Baobab trees. The photos do not do them justice. Just look at the fine ramification.



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How do you Feed and Care for the all?

My Baobab's at home gets watered and fertilised manually, the rest of my trees, clivias and orchids are fertilised and watered by drip irrigation and overhead mist sprayers on timers.

The Procumbence Nana's on the farm are under a 60% shade netting with overhead sprayers and get watered twice daily and fertilised weekly, the baobab's gets watered and fertilised monthly.

Do you use a Special mix of soil, your own mix, or from a specific person?

For my Baobab's in pots, I use 50% homemade well composted pine bark and 50% -6mm crusher stone, baobabs are re-potted ever 4 years, for all other trees in pots I use a 60-40 mix and they are re-potted every second year. I add Bio Char to all my mixes to increase the carbon content of the mix.

The trees planted in ground are quarterly mulched with decomposed horse manure, with the Procumbence Nana's, annually two opposite quarter of the soil around the tree is removed to enable root pruning and replaced with soil mix.

Below: one of his Paper Bark trees (Kanniedood)



Hours spend on your trees

Dependant on family and work commitment I spend about 2 to 3 hours per week at home and 8 -10 hours per month on the farm with my trees, clivias and orchids. I have two trained staff member that spend on average 20 hrs each per week with the trees, clivias and orchids on the farm.

Favourite style in bonsai

I appreciate all styles, but Baobab remain my favourite with informal up right and literati in very close second.

Favourite tree in your collection.

a 20-year-old baobab still in ground (+- 650mm high with an +_ 800mm dia. trunk) on the farm that will be potted next spring, with two Baobab purchased in 1999 that is +-32 years old and first potted in 2002 and a seed grown +- 30 year Olea Africana purchased in 2001 and restyled during a workshop at the ABC1 2002 in Pretoria fighting for second.

Number of Years in Midway

Founding member of Midway and I have been treasurer since founding.



Above: His Spekboom. The roots on this tree is rock-hard.