The Texas State Bonsai Exhibit

presents our 31st annual seminar featuring:

Randy Bennett

Taper and Proportion: The Keys to Transformative Bonsai Design

November 6 - 8, 2026

It is our pleasure to introduce Randy Bennett, recognized nationwide for his expertise and his warm, engaging approach to bonsai education. His biography appears below.

Randy Bennett's bonsai journey began in 1971 when, as a high-school student fascinated by Japanese gardens, he received his first bonsai from his father. That gift sparked a lifelong pursuit that would eventually shape him into one of the Gulf Coast's most respected bonsai educators. A retired middle school principal from Metairie, Louisiana, Randy originally studied education and visual arts before becoming a teacher. Outside of bonsai, he is also a dedicated martial artist, holding a 4th-degree black belt in Sibpalgee kung fu with a specialization in classical weapons.

Randy's bonsai foundation was built through extensive study under Vaughn Banting, complemented by instruction from masters such as John Naka, David DeGroot, Ben Oki, Warren Hill, Dennis Makishima, and Mauro Stemberger. In 1980 he joined the Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society, where his skills deepened and his artistic voice took shape. Two years later, he founded Bennett's Bonsai Nursery, which he operated until 2005. During those decades he taught widely, wrote numerous articles, managed private collections, led study groups, and served the New Orleans club as newsletter editor and multiple-term president. He also contributed to Indoor Bonsai, published by the Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

Hurricane Katrina was devastating, wiping out Randy's collection of more than 200 trees and forcing him to close his nursery. After a brief pause, he began rebuilding—returning to the craft with renewed focus and a deepened sense of purpose. Today he continues to write, teach, and refine his personal collection. He is an active member of Bonsai Clubs International, the American Bonsai Society, the Lone Star Bonsai Federation, the Gulf Coast Bonsai Federation, the Louisiana Bonsai Society, and the Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society.

Although he enjoys working with all species, Randy's greatest passion lies in deciduous bonsai — especially bald cypress. His book Bonsai Design: Bald Cypresses, dedicated to his mentor Vaughn Banting, remains a respected resource for artists working with this iconic species. Now fully retired from the school system, Randy devotes himself to bonsai as a traveling

artist, offering lecture-demos, workshops, educational programs, and study groups. He is currently developing a new book focused on advanced bonsai techniques and design.

Randy's seminars are known for being accessible, engaging, and richly informative—ideal for both beginners and seasoned practitioners. His approach to refinement emphasizes shape, energy balance, and the creation of age and character, making his programs rewarding from start to finish.

Objective:

A bonsai reaches its highest expression when taper and proportion work together to create age, power, and visual harmony. The core idea: a thick, stable base that narrows gradually toward a refined apex, with branch and trunk proportions that feel inevitable rather than engineered.

Design Philosophy:

- You get the most from your bonsai when trunk taper, branch proportion, and overall silhouette reinforce each other—creating flow, age, and natural authority.
- This is achieved through deliberate growth cycles (sacrifice branches, trunk chops), species-appropriate strategy, and disciplined refinement.

What is a "Good Taper":

- A gradual reduction in trunk diameter from nebari → apex.
- A trunk that guides the eye upward in a smooth, unbroken flow.
- A silhouette that conveys age, stability, and natural growth.

Proportion: The Other Half of the Equation:

Taper alone isn't enough - proportion determines whether the tree feels believable.

Key proportional relationships:

- **Trunk height vs. base thickness**
  - A trunk too tall for its base looks unstable; too thick for its height looks stunted.
- **Branch thickness vs. trunk thickness**
  - Primary branches should be significantly thinner than the trunk at their origin.
- **Nebari vs. trunk**
  - A strong root flare amplifies taper and anchors the composition.
- **Apex refinement**
  - The apex must be the thinnest, most delicate part of the tree—this is where many designs fail.

Techniques That Maximize Taper & Proportion

- **Sacrifice Branch / Sacrifice Leader Method**

  The most versatile and beginner-friendly technique.
  - Grow a strong branch or leader to thicken the lower trunk.
  - Remove it once the desired girth is achieved.
  - Repeat in stages to sculpt taper.

- **Trunk Chopping & Regrowth Cycles**

  For dramatic taper or correcting poor material.
  - Chop above a node.

- Let a new leader grow aggressively.
- Repeat to create multi-stage taper and movement.

- **Wiring & Subtle Bending**

  Refines the upper trunk and transitions.
  - Gentle bends create natural flow.
  - Avoid sharp angles that break the taper illusion.

- **Pruning for Balance**

  Strategic removal of branches that thicken the wrong areas.
  - Reduce upper growth to prevent reverse taper.
  - Encourage lower growth early in development.

Species-Specific Strategy Matters

Some species naturally develop better taper:

- **Pines (Pinus)** - excellent for sacrifice-branch tapering.
- **Ficus** — fast growers, ideal for aggressive taper building.

Each species has different growth habits, so taper development must be tailored.

How Taper & Proportion Work Together

Think of taper as the structure and proportion as the aesthetic logic.

When both are aligned:

- The tree looks older than it is.
- The silhouette feels balanced and inevitable.
- The viewer's eye moves smoothly from nebari to apex.
- Even a small tree carries presence and authority.

When they're misaligned:

- The tree looks young, weak, or artificial.
- Branches feel out of scale.
- The trunk reads as "manufactured" rather than grown.

A Non-Obvious Insight

Most taper problems come from refining too early.

If you start wiring, pruning, and ramifying before the trunk is fully developed, you lock in a lifetime of mediocre proportion.

The best bonsai artists spend years building the trunk and only then begin refinement.

Randy will help us decode the challenges that come with these trees, working with material brought in by registrants.

Participants are encouraged to bring **up to 2** bonsai to the seminar. You may bring in material at any stage of development, but the more refined the material you bring in, the more beneficial Randy's advice will be. Randy will try to select at least one tree from each person and discuss the tree, possibly styling or wiring the tree, depending on the material.

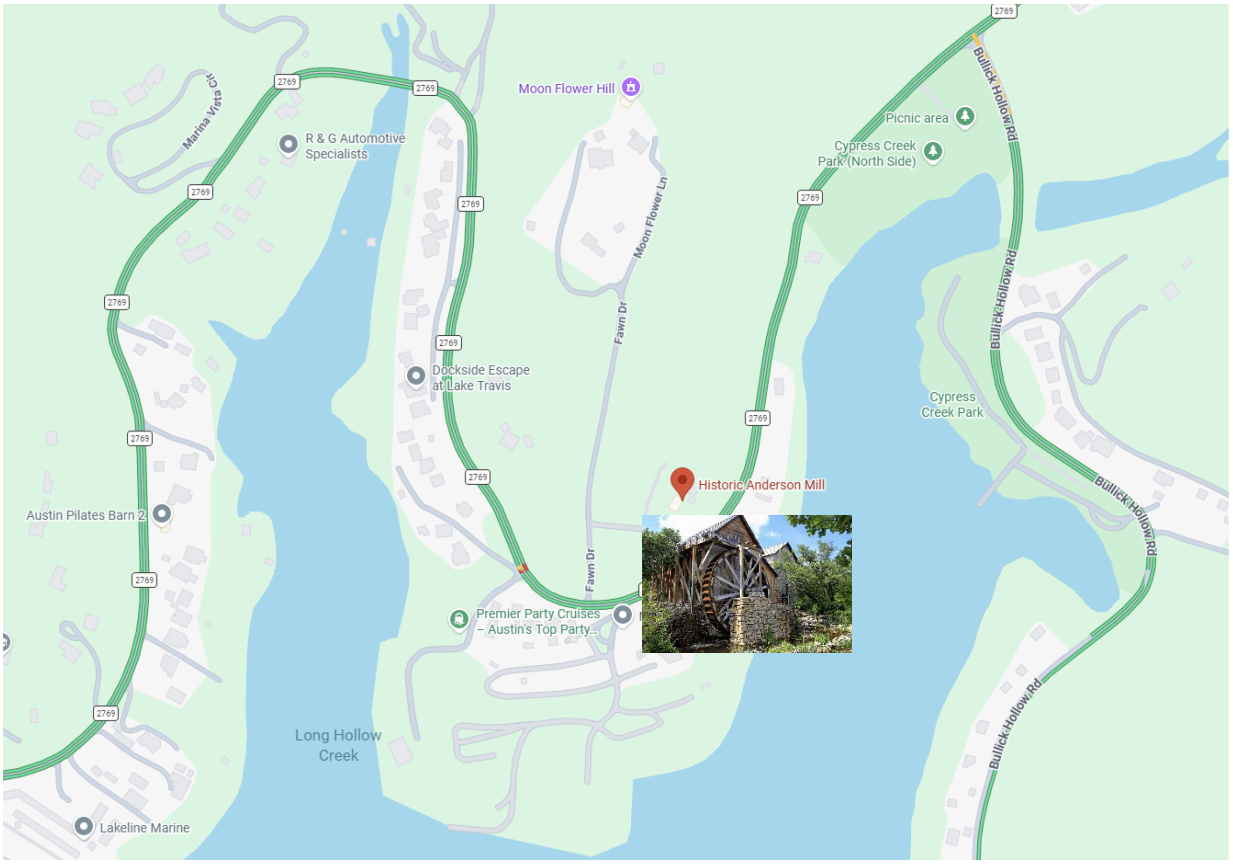
This year's optional Friday workshop will be Bring Your Own Tree (BYOT) with an emphasis on Taper and Proportion: The Keys to Transformative Bonsai Design. We often edit branches or trunks from our bonsai and then struggle to make it look natural. There are many ways to remedy these problems, and Randy will show participants how. Each participant can bring **up to 2** trees (Randy will work on at least one tree from each participant). This special workshop is limited to **10 people**. *Observation of this workshop is not available.*

Location: **Historic Anderson Mill (Anderson Mill Garden Club)**
Address: 13974 Farm to Market Rd 2769, Volente, TX 78641

Randy's optional Sunday afternoon workshop is Bring Your Own Tree (BYOT) and is limited to 6 participants on a first-come, first-served basis. Work on any size material you like...styled or rough. *Silent observation of this workshop is included with registration.*

Location:

The seminar (Saturday and Sunday) will be held at the Historic Anderson Mill (Anderson Mill Garden Club), 13974 Farm to Market Rd 2769, Volente, TX 78641. Map Street View



Schedule:

***** PLEASE ENSURE YOU ARE REGISTERED FOR EACH EVENT *****

<table>
<tr><th></th><th>Friday, November 6th</th><th>Saturday, November 7th</th><th>Sunday, November 8th</th></tr>
<tr><td>9:30 AM</td><td></td><td rowspan="14">9:30 AM – 5:00 PM
Bonsai Seminar (Day 1)

Where:
Historic Anderson Mill (Anderson Mill Garden Club)
13974 Farm to Market Rd 2769, Volente, TX 78641

Lunch included

* Please share your dietary preference on the registration form so we can plan accordingly. *</td><td rowspan="2">9:30 AM – 12:00 PM
Bonsai Seminar (Day 2)

Where:
Historic Anderson Mill (Anderson Mill Garden Club)
13974 Farm to Market Rd 2769, Volente, TX 78641</td></tr>
<tr><td>10:00 AM</td><td rowspan="9">10:00 AM – 4:00 PM
BYOT Workshop*

Where:
Historic Anderson Mill (Anderson Mill Garden Club)
13974 Farm to Market Rd 2769, Volente, TX 78641

Lunch included

*Limited registration (first 10)</td></tr>
<tr><td>10:30 AM</td></tr>
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<tr><td>1:30 PM</td><td rowspan="6">1:30 PM – 4:30 PM
BYOT Workshop*

Where:
Historic Anderson Mill
13974 Farm to Market Rd 2769, Volente, TX 78641

*Limited registration (first 6)</td></tr>
<tr><td>2:00 PM</td></tr>
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<tr><td>5:00 PM</td><td rowspan="3">5:00 PM
Anderson Mill Garden Club
Refreshments provided</td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>5:30 PM</td><td></td><td></td></tr>
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No-host dinner
Each guest will be responsible for their own tab.</td><td>6:30 PM
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Schedule Details:

Friday:

- **10:00 AM – 4:00 PM** The optional styling workshop. Limited to the first 10 people to sign up. You may only bring up to 2 trees. More details will be provided for the registrants. **Lunch is included**.
- **5:00 PM** Anderson Mill Garden Club opens for refreshments and nibbles for registrants and guests.
- **6:30 PM** No-host dinner at a restaurant. **Each guest will be responsible for their own tab.**
- *You can register for the workshop and dinner on the registration form*.

Saturday:

- **9:30 AM – 5:00 PM** Bonsai Seminar (Day 1). You may bring up to 2 trees.
- **6:30 PM** No-host dinner at a local restaurant (additional details will be shared later).

- Look forward to having some casual downtime. Again, **each guest will be responsible for their own tab**.
- *You can register for the seminar and dinner on the registration form.*

Sunday:

- **9:30 AM – 12:00 PM** Continuation of the Bonsai Seminar.
- **1:30 PM – 4:30 PM** Optional BYOT workshop. Any size or kind of tree may be worked on. Limited to the first 6 people to sign up. You may only bring up to 2 trees.
- *General registration includes observing Randy's workshop. You must register separately to participate.*

Workshop & Cancellation Policies:

Registration for both workshops is on a first-come, first-served basis. There is a maximum of two trees per person for each workshop. Workshop status will be in the registration acknowledgment. There will be a waiting list.

In recent years, both workshops have filled up quickly and have had waiting lists. Early paid registration will guarantee a seat for the workshops.

Cancellations received on or before **June 30th, 2026** will receive a complete refund. There will be **no** refunds on cancellations received after this date.

Important General Information:

Registration includes the seminar, Friday social, Saturday lunch, and observing the Sunday workshop. Seminar and workshop registrations are entered only upon receiving the registration form and payment. Working with bonsai tools is a hazardous activity. To participate or observe the seminar or workshop, a release form liability agreement must be signed.

The TTSBE Seminar was originally founded by the late Sheila and Terry Ward. The Texas State Bonsai Exhibit has been given the honor to carry on this wonderful tradition and we are excited to continue with various bonsai masters who will enhance our skills. Proceeds beyond Randy's expenses will fund the expansion and upkeep of the Exhibit at Zilker Botanical Garden. Thank you for your continued support of the seminar as well as TTSBE!

Please register early. Space is limited. Questions? Contact You can reach our Registration Concierge at webmaster.ttsbe@gmail.com or 512-825-4210 (call or text). We hope you will join us and be a part of the 31st annual seminar. It is a wonderful opportunity to have a fantastic bonsai weekend!

Sincerely,

TTSBE Board of Directors

SEMINAR REGISTRATION FORM

Name(s): _____

_____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Seminar: ..... ($200.00 per person) ..... Total $ _____
(Includes seminar, Friday social, Saturday lunch & observing Sunday's workshop)

Bring-Your-Own-Tree Friday Workshop: ..... ($160.00 per person) ..... Total $ _____
(Bring your own trees and tools, **lunch is provided**. Must be registered for the seminar.)

Bring-Your-Own-Tree Sunday Workshop: ..... ($120.00 per person) ..... Total $ _____
(Bring your own tools, wire, turntable, and trees – maximum 2 trees. Must be registered for the seminar.)

I/We will attend the Friday no-host dinner. (No. of people .....)

I/We will attend the Saturday no-host dinner. (No. of people .....)

Food Allergies/Preferences:

Vegan ☐ Plant-based ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Lacto-vegetarian ☐ Ovo-vegetarian ☐ Lacto-ovo-vegetarian ☐

Pescatarian ☐ Others: _____

Grand Total Enclosed..... $ _____

Please make your check payable to:

TTSBE

(Contact webmaster.ttsbe@gmail.com for mailing details)

Or payment may be made through PayPal by clicking "donate" at:

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