

Building A Rock

By Cheryl Sykora



Figure 1: Above, view from the top of the ponderosa pine looking at the "rock" on the right.

I have a really short needled, mother nature developed ponderosa pine, *Pinus ponderosa*, bonsai that is best shown as a semi-cascade. If everybody remembers the earlier article on ponderosa pine, short needle ponderosas grow naturally in areas of the Rockies. The ponderosa, when tipped sideways to achieve the semi-cascade, exposed a long thinner section which was more likely barked root rather than trunk. This "stalk-like" area was distracting to the overall appearance of the tree.

So how to disguise the "stalk". I immediately thought of some kind of rock. The tree could appear to be growing out of a rock crevice. What to use for the rock? I wanted something that would simulate the layers of multi-colored shale that I see in many sites where trees grow. The rock needed to act as a "collar" around the trunk. Natural stone could be carved or small pieces could be glued together to achieve this but I chose to use a polymeric product to achieve what I wanted. I used ApoxieSculpt[®] manufactured by Aves Studio LLC, www.avesstudio.com. It is a two-part epoxy system



Figure 2: Left top, close up of "rock" detail.



Figure 3: Left middle, shows barked up "stalk" of the tree that I am hiding with the man-made rock.



Figure 4: Left, bottom, view of rock wrapped around the stalk. It is open at the back for easy removal of the rock.

where two "play dough" like materials are blended together similar to kneading bread dough to blend the two parts. The material is sticky and epoxies can be allergenic to bare skin so wear protective gloves. I used non-stick bake paper on my surface to keep it from sticking to the wood surface. Non-stick bake paper is readily available at any grocery store and the material did not stick much to it. After blending they slowly harden as the two parts join to form a hard, polymeric material. Similar to a no fire clay. I used three different colors. I decided the black was too black so blended in white to make it more of a dark gray. I also had a terra cotta color that I blended separately and introduced to my clay ball

as a “colored vein”. Not being used to the product, I tried to mold it into my shape a bit too early. It kept slumping until it became harder. Best wait a few hours until it develops some structure before you attempt to create the final “rock”. Once it stiffened, I could shape it into a collar around the “stalk” of the ponderosa. I designed it so it could be easily removed. I filled the inside of the area with sphagnum moss and



Figure 5: Right, a close up of the stalk and rock detail.



Figure 6: Above, top view of rock.



Figure 8: Above, another view of rock side.



Figure 7: Below, side view showing the brown vein and the simulated rock folds.



Figure 9: Below, a close up of rock.



Figure 10, Left, a close up of the area being hidden after moss was applied.

Figure 11, Below, ponderosa pine with artificial rock. The stand was built by Mark Rhyner and the pot is a Sara Rayner.



covered the top with green moss. The final product looked more like “volcanic” rock than shale but worked well to hide my tree’s defect.

The “rock” is epoxy and incredibly durable to outdoor conditions. It will lose its slight shine and look even more natural as it ages. Generally, the colors are natural minerals so fading is not much of a concern.

The ApoxieSculpt® is also useful for creating holders for stones and for gluing real rocks together to create more natural looking display elements.