

[Skip to Content](#)



News

Search Cal Poly News

GO

California Polytechnic State University

Jan. 5, 2008

Contact: Professor John Peterson  
805-756-1237 | [drjohncp@calpoly.edu](mailto:drjohncp@calpoly.edu)

## Cal Poly Professor's Pieces of Ancient Chinese Floral Art on Display At San Francisco Conservatory of Flowers

SAN LUIS OBISPO – A collection of classic Chinese “living sculptures” now on display in the San Francisco Conservatory of Flowers in Golden Gate Park will soon be coming to Cal Poly – permanently.



The collection of penjing – dwarf plants set in stone formations – was acquired by the conservatory under direction of current to Cal Poly Professor John Peterson, head of the university’s Horticulture and Crop Science Department. The professor served as the Director of the Conservatory of Flowers before coming to Cal Poly in 2007.

The collection will be acquired by Cal Poly’s Horticulture and Crop Science Department after the display ends April 29. Bay Area and Central Coast alumni, garden lovers and others can get a preview of the penjing collection now at the conservatory’s Aquatic House before it is moved to Cal Poly.

“The art of penjing predates the more well-known art of bonsai by about three centuries,” Peterson said. “They are magnificent miniature landscapes.”

Penjing dates to 700 B.C. China, and the term penjing refers to both the artistry of creating dwarfed trees and plants as well as creating the miniature landscapes with living plants.

Most Western cultures – and gardeners – are familiar with bonsai, the Japanese art of dwarfed plants. But the artistry of dwarfed plants was introduced to Japan by a group of Chinese Buddhist monks around 1,000 A.D., Peterson said.

At the time, the Chinese called the small dwarf plants “penzai.” In Japan, penzai evolved into the Japanese word bonsai, and the Japanese adapted and developed their own versions of miniature plant artistry.

The Chinese term penzai evolved to penjing over the centuries, and the art continued to thrive, but is less known in the West, according to Peterson.

The professor has been collecting penjing pieces for the past 15 years, acquiring many of them from friend Qiao Hong Gen, a master penjing artist in Shanghai, and former president of the Chinese Penjing Society.

The rock and plant sculptures now on display in the San Francisco conservatory’s Aquatic House are miniature landscapes depicting different regions and landforms in China.

“Originally, penjing were fashioned into reflections of the natural beauty of various lands over which the emperor of China reigned. They provided views of the kingdom for the emperor and his court in the royal palace in the Forbidden City,” Peterson explained.

Visitors to the San Francisco Conservatory of Flowers can tour the exhibit Tuesdays through Sundays from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Admission is \$5 for adults, \$3 for ages 12-17, and \$1.50 for children ages 5-11, seniors 65 and over and students with an ID. Admission is free for children age 4 and under.

The conservatory also offers free admission for all visitors on the first Tuesday of every month. Free Tuesdays during the penjing exhibit are Feb. 5, March 4, and April 1.

Peterson plans to display the penjing collection at Cal Poly sometime after it is moved to campus. Future Central Coast display dates have not yet been set.

For more details on the exhibit, visit the San Francisco Conservatory of Flowers Web site at: [www.conservatoryofflowers.org](http://www.conservatoryofflowers.org), or contact Professor Peterson at [drjohncp@calpoly.edu](mailto:drjohncp@calpoly.edu).

###

[CP Home](#) • [CP Find It](#) • [Get Adobe Reader](#) • [Microsoft Viewers](#)

**[Events](#) • [Recent Releases](#) • [Cal Poly Magazine](#)**  
•  
**[Cal Poly Update E-newsletter](#) • [Contact Public Affairs](#) • [Alumni](#) • [Giving](#) • [Athletics](#)**

**Cal Poly Public Affairs**  
California Polytechnic State University  
San Luis Obispo, CA 93407  
805.756.7266  
[polynews@calpoly.edu](mailto:polynews@calpoly.edu)