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BELOW: Mike preparing to remove a damaged scale the proper way.



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LESSONS IN KOI

Mike Snaden visits Denmark to share his Koi wisdom

Mike showed us how to look for good Sumi by carefully bending a young Omosako Shiro Utsuri slightly

MY FIRST MEETING with Mike Snaden was in a hotel lobby in Okayama City, Japan in 2007.

It was by coincidence, and when I recognized him from pictures in English Koi magazines, I went to talk with him. At that time I was the editor of a Danish Koi magazine with four publications a year, and I had used some of Mike's material in it. So during the last couple of years I had frequently talked and corresponded with Mike.

The reason I was in Japan, was that my husband works at Koi Team Denmark, one of the biggest koi shops in Denmark. They were on a buying trip to Japan, so I took the opportunity to come along to visit koi breeders and see some beautiful Japanese gardens.

Panic in a private pond!

Our world crumbled in 2008. The very short version of the story is this: my husband and I had big problems with our koi. We had a bottom drained, filtered 44,000-liter/9,678UK/11,622US gallon pond built in EPDM-liner, with 25 Japanese koi of different sizes and quality. Some of the koi began to develop ulcers that spread rapidly and

after a period of time, a few of them died. Our fish vet tried, amongst other things, injecting with antibiotics and also took samples of ulcers and sent them for resistance testing to the European Community Reference Laboratory for Fish Diseases in Denmark. After a couple of weeks without any improvement, the vet advised us to remove all the koi and disinfect the pond, filter and pipes. Half the koi went into our 4,000 liter/880UK/1,057US gallon inside quarantine tank, and the other half were put in a 5,000-liter/1,099UK/1,320US gallon temporary pool on our terrace.

After a couple of days of disinfecting the pond, we cleaned it up and started to put fresh water back in it. The first 5,000-liters/1,099UK/1,320US gallons or so were filled by midnight, but then the sky opened. The rainfall was very heavy and lasted for a couple of hours—and then it happened! One side of the pond with all the huge granite stones nearest our house collapsed and went down into the pond. It was dark, it was raining and there were nothing we could do about it at that time. The morning after, we called Koi Team's owner Soeren Markussen (my husband's boss) and told him we had to rebuild the pond in a hurry and this time, in concrete and fibreglass – better safe than sorry.

Four weeks after the crash, the new pond was rebuilt and ready. At this time I emailed Mike and told him about



FROM LEFT: Going over TDS readings in the water quality portion of the lecture. **RIGHT:** Just a slight bend will help reveal the Sumi quality.

Mike Snaden is a great man with a twinkle in his eye and a good sense of humor

much enthusiasm, about some of the Japanese breeders he normally visits on his trips and which variants are especially good to grow big, whilst maintaining high quality.

Mike talked about and showed us pictures from different breeders' ponds on the widescreen projector—there were also many pictures of beautiful koi with special focus on the development from Tosai to Nisai, Sansai and further on.

He talked a great deal about each koi's potential and showed pictures of some of the koi he bought as Tosai, to highlight the growth and quality potential. Wow, a lot of breathtaking koi! Mike spoke a lot about all the important issues: growth, body condition, skin quality, Sashi, Kiwa and so on, while he showed us what to look for on each koi. It was a seminar with a lot of good and usable information, which was delivered in an easily understandable way.

After a couple of hours the participants were filled with information, and were split into two groups. One group stayed in the room to learn about how to take a mucus-scrape and how to use a microscope, looking for parasites. And the other group followed Mike into the koi shop where he told us about the quality of each of the Koi he had pre-selected in a bowl. There were good quality fish as well as lesser specimens and all different price ranges. Mike showed us how to look for good Sumi by carefully bending a young Omosako Shiro Utsuri slightly. He looked into and between the scales to see how deep the Sumi was developing in the tissue—in this way he could recognize the quality (or lack of it).

Throughout the seminar we were taught some practical rule of thumbs, for example: if you bowl some Shiro Utsuri, keep an eye on the ones where the Sumi decreases in this stressed situation—don't buy any of them! This is because this type of Sumi is often too weak to grow to a big size successfully and still retain its quality.

Another important quality issue Mike really appreciates is the growth-rate on each koi he brings back to the UK. Mike constantly offered a lot of usable information on what to look for regarding growth, specifically the bone

our problems with the koi—he asked me to send him some pictures, so he could maybe see what was wrong. Instantly he wrote back to say it was holes disease, and he told us what we need to do about it. But, we simply couldn't cope with more problems and new challenges, so I wrote to him..."I wish you were here".

Mike mailed us back and asked which Danish airport he should arrive in. He was willing to take a flight to Denmark and stay with us two or three days, to help us out of our problems. We were so happy. He is an amazing guy and we are so thankful for all his support and help.

We lost some of the 25 koi (sadly also a couple of our European show winners too), some of the koi we have left, didn't get the hole disease, others now look like "old warriors" with scars, but they are alive and in general, healed up fine.

When Mike first visited Denmark, on a "working-holiday" in autumn 2008, the company Koi Team also developed strong bonds with him. That's how the seminars about koi and water quality first came up as a possibility. Danish people want to hear wise words from a specialist. And Mike is, judging by all his serious articles in Koi magazines, a well-known and highly reputed Koi keeper/dealer among the Danish Koi keepers. Here is an overview of the seminar he gave on his visit in April 2009:

Seminar, day 1: Koi quality

Mike's seminars at Koi Team's premises took place over two days with a limit of 25 participants, per day. The topic the first day was koi quality and growth rate. He told us, with

LEFT: Mike looking at one of the many RO units the plant has to offer. **RIGHT:** Mike and his yellow baby.



structure, the height of the body, the length of the head, the distance between the eyes, mouth width, the height and size of the caudal peduncle, and of course the total impression of the body.

As well as all the other information he covered issues like development of Sumi on Sanke, development of Hi and pattern on Go Sanke, breeders' parent Koi and a lot more very interesting things to consider, when choosing and buying new koi. After two very exciting hours, the two groups swapped places, and he started all over.

Seminar, day 2: Water quality

The second day's lesson was: "It's all about water quality" and of course a little bit of koi quality. Most of the participants from day one were back again with some new ones too. Mike is well known as one of few people who is able to grow koi of the same quality and with the same growth rate as Japanese breeders. The background for this is his fantastic ability to select the very best koi, and his own way of managing ponds, running with a very high water quality, with very low total dissolved solids (TDS) levels, by using reverse osmosis (RO) equipment to get rid of high levels of dissolved minerals—nearly identical with the water in Japanese mud ponds.

For the purpose of measuring the water chemistry, he had different samples with demineralized water, tap water, salted water and water from different ponds. He told about the importance of measuring TDS, KH and pH and all the other relevant things).

He also talked about pond-building principles, both a normal pond with bottom drains, and the idealistic "streamflow" pond with airlift drains. The latter was

requested by one of the participants who had read articles about it, in UK Koi magazines.

Towards the end of the day he talked about how to remove damaged scales from koi. The worst thing to do is just pull the scales out. Instead you have to cut them loose in the fukurin, so you don't damage the tissue and the new scales beneath. Some of the participants asked if it was possible to see how it was done. Koi Team netted a big Momotaro Sanke for demonstration purpose, so Mike could show how to cut out a scale.

After the seminar, one of the participants took Mike on a tour of a factory, Silhorko Water Treatment, where they produce RO-equipment (used in the production of processed water). Mike was guided throughout the whole factory, so he could see all the production levels of RO-equipment. On the tour he fell in love with a "tube" and he mumbled something about, "nice yellow baby, follow me home"

In praise of Mike

Mike Snaden is a great man with a twinkle in his eye and a good sense of humor. He's also a good teacher and knows much of what's worth knowing in the Koi hobby, and Mike is not afraid to pass it on to others. All the participants were very satisfied with his seminars—in fact, a couple of them have written stories about the seminars and Mike, on their private homepages.

On behalf of all the participants on the seminars, the owner of Koi Team, my husband and myself, I would like to say many thanks to Mike Snaden for his visit's to Denmark, and sharing all his knowledge and friendship with us. — by Laila Lange