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### *The Ficus. Root Over Rock*

I think every bonsai artist should try the Root Over Rock style once in their lifetime. It is one of the most impressive styles and yet again, is very easy to achieve if one knows how.

Think back to your last trip to the Kruger Park or any nature reserve in KZN. Remember seeing those huge fig trees with enormous buttress roots clinging to the cliff faces, or on river banks. As the roots seek out any crevasse that may hold soil or moisture, they spread out and form a vast network which holds the tree firmly on the rock.

This is the inspiration for the Root Over Rock style.

Probably the most difficult part of this technique is deciding on a suitable rock. Avoid the smooth, round, featureless rocks one finds in riverbeds. The rock one uses should itself be a miniature cliff-face or ? mountain? . The size, shape, colour and texture should all compliment the tree itself, which will be the focus of the composition.

Now for the fun part. It is important to note that roots do not develop in sunlight. They must be buried under the soil to grow properly. The following process is quite a lengthy one so it is best done on a cool day. This will reduce the stress on the plant.

You have decided on a rock. Clean it thoroughly. You already have a fairly well developed ficus plant with healthy well established roots. You will also need a large pot, big enough to bury the entire rock, and a roll of cling wrap.

In brief, what you will do is remove the fig from its container, spread the roots out and over the rock in its desired position. Position the roots in the grooves of the rocks. Take time to do this with design and style in mind. Try and achieve some level of realism as this is the essence of this style.

In reality you will find it a bit of a challenge. Initially I hold the roots in place by packing them with slightly moist soil. This gives the roots some nutrients to feed off until they have developed.

Once all of the roots have been packed you should end up with something that looks like the Christmas pudding from hell with a fig tree on top of it.

NB!!! The roots must lie on the rock surface at all times. Do not simply take a root over the little gullies in a straight line. These are called cables, and are unrealistic and very distracting to the eye.

Roots must be forced into the grooves by placing little blocks of wood (preferably), or stone between them and the binding which is to follow.

You will now wrap the Christmas pudding up with elastic bands to keep the whole mess in place. I also use hatband elastic or stocking for this. Whatever you use it must be slightly flexible to allow the roots to swell.

Now wrap the entire lot up with the Cling Wrap. Leave the top open to allow for watering, also leave a bit of a gap at the bottom to allow the bottom-most roots to escape to the rest of the soil in the pot. The Cling Wrap will form a barrier forcing the roots to cling to the rock. It also creates a greenhouse effect, capturing the heat from the growing roots and the sun, making them grow even faster.

The last step is to bury the entire thing up to the base of the tree trunk in the pot. You can also plant it straight into your flowerbed for even faster results.

Just treat it like any other plant, water it, feed it and after a couple of seasons slowly remove the Cling Wrap. You should see a remarkable difference in the root structure. If you feel it needs more time then just leave it for longer. If the roots appear to have set in position then dig it up and remove all of the Cling Wrap and elastic bands taking care not to pull the roots away from the rock. Wash some of the soil off and admire the marvel of nature.