

SCAPER *mag*

Aquariums Information Magazine

5 EXCLUSIVE
INTERVIEWS

TOP
AQUASCAPER

THE AQUARIUM
CHEMISTRY
PH KH & GH

HARDSCAPE
ROCKS & WOODS

DR. GREEN THUMB

SECTION

FISHES

HYPHESSOBRYCON

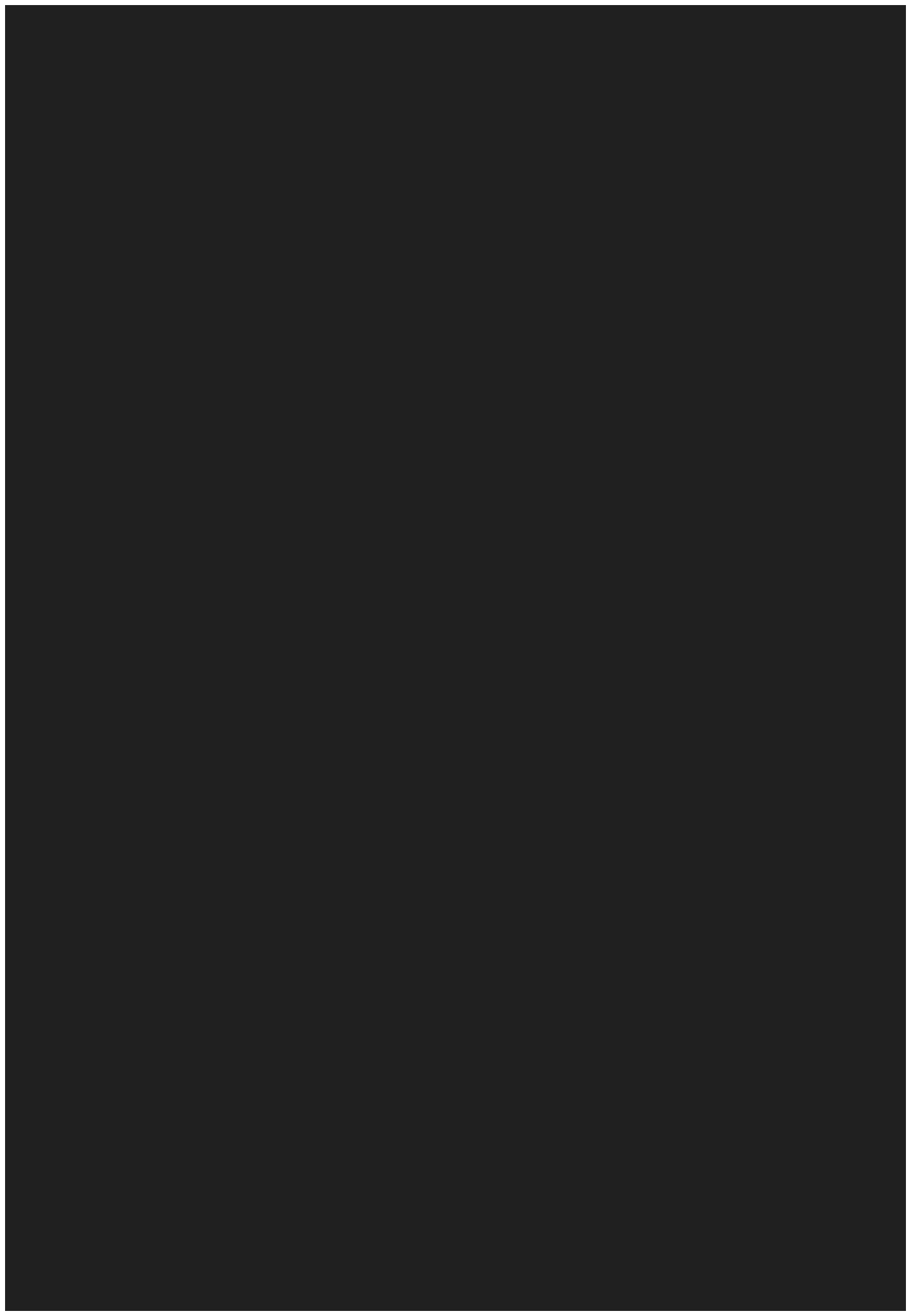
AMANDAE



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STEVEN CHONG



IAPLC 2020 #2 World Ranking – UNDYING – Dimensions 120x50x50 (cm)

Steven Chong,

American aquascaper (Hawaii) living in Tokyo, 36 years old, official member of **TAU (Tokyo Aquascape Union)** and **The Aquascaper's Collective**.

Over 17 years of experience in the aquarium world.

He reached 2^o at IAPLC 2020, 37^o in 2021, 15^o in 2019 and 5^o in 2018.



William: Kon'nichiwa! Steve how are you? Thank you for giving me the opportunity to interview you, for me it is a real honor to meet you!

Steven: Thanks William, Kon'nichiwa. Always glad to speak with passionate enthusiasts in our hobby.

William: Tell us about yourself, When did you start approaching the world of aquariums?

Steven: Certainly. I'm an aquascaper focusing on International Competitions, a member of the **Tokyo Aquascaping Union** in Japan and **The Aquascaper's Collective** based in North America.

I work as a digital marketer in Tokyo, but I'm originally from Hawaii and represent the US in contests.

I kept aquariums as a kid, but really got into Aquascaping after seeing a full planted Aquascape for the first time in high school (18 years ago?).

I was so inspired by this scene of glistening plants and vibrant fish, coming from landscape painting I was really impressed by this vivid natural art form and dived in from there.

I owned Amano's books and was neck deep in the hobby a month after that!



AGA 2019 #4 World Ranking – AMANO'S RIVER / MILY WAY GALAXY – Dimensions 120x45x45 (cm)

William: What fascinates you most about the aquascaping world?

Steven: At first it was the sheer impact/connection one can make with the form art that one makes with nature and really captures the mind and imagination when you walk into a room with a beautiful aquascape.

Now after many years, the most fascinating part is the **depth of the art** from biology, to photography, to nature study, and even spirituality for me...

It's like an endless onion of layers ever deeper.

What really keeps one in the hobby though is the community, the network of tight connections and friendships easily made across the globe.



AGA 2018 Most Innovative Work- BUTTERFLY HIDEAWAY - Dimensions 120x45x45 (cm)

William: Who or what inspires you when you create an aquascape?

Steven: It's cliché, but the inspiration always comes from Nature. I think each aquascaper has their own approach... whether they enjoy imagining a new world for themselves, recreating nature's forms, or telling a story... for me, I really enjoy the process of researching a theme. Not just choosing a theme from nature, but discovering what truth that theme speaks to me.

To that end, I pour my heart into learning from **nature, form, and feeling**. These 3 also loosely map onto the "who" of my inspiration, of **Great Teachers, Takashi Amano (Nature Study), Takayuki Fukada (Form), and Hiroshi Tagami (Feeling)**.

Though the first of these, while I've deeply read Amano's books and was inspired in meeting him in-person, it's the 1st generation master of the **Tokyo Aquascaping Union, Masashi Ono**, who more intimately taught me nature study through the same lens of photography as **Amano-san**, and helped me train my eyes and learn to appreciate what I could now "**see**". **Fukada-san's** influence is impact, to me, to the aquascaping contest, to the world and it's no wonder that for the last two years all the top works are influenced by his teaching of Form.

The last of these will not be familiar to an Aquascaping Audience, but **Hiroshi Tagami** was a master painter from Hawaii, and the greatest root influence on my path as an artist.

Tagami was a deeply spiritual man, and I am still trying to train in myself the same sensitivity he had to the feeling of place, the feeling from nature, and the feeling in myself to give greater voice to my art.

William: How long does it take to create a hardscape?

Steven: I prefer to take my time for this as well when it comes to the contest. While things get faster and easier with accumulated experience, I still prefer to save at least 2 months to do the major work of hardscaping. In 2018, my first rank-in to the **TOP 7** when I was still largely immature in technical skill, I took 3.5 months to complete it and still did major composition changes only 2 weeks before the photo shoot.



Dettaglio Hardscape della vasca – SILENT POOL

William: How do you choose the plants for a hardscape, by following your feelings or is everything designed in detail?

Steven: For me the plant choices mostly flow from the research. The theme, and nature study, dictates which plants are most important. Placement I think is better informed by instinct generally while there are some general good rules and it requires good nature study, this study should be to inform your instinct rather than analytical understanding. Instinct can sometimes help me choose plants as well.

William: Since many fans and hobbyist think that aquascaping is a relaxing and not tiring hobby, Tell our readers fourth constancy, effort and passion do you need to be able to cure and maintain a tank that will have to participate in the **IAPLC**?

Steven: It's the people, and the passion we share.
Competing at the **TOP** of the **IAPLC** this is the dream I've had since the beginning, and it means all the more when my greatest rivals are also valued friends.
The will to win, and my respect, appreciation for them these feelings are deeply connected.

William: What advice can you give to those who would like to attend the **IAPLC** for the first time to have an impact aquascape?

Steven: Set 2 clear goals, one for the level you want to achieve and one of the story you want your scape to tell.
For the first goal, studying closely the works from the previous year that achieved your goal will teach you a lot about the measure of your motivation.
For the 2nd, this is what will lead you through the work.



IAPLC 2021 #37 World Ranking – AGA 2021 #2 World Ranking – SILENT POOL – Dimensions 120x50x50 (cm)

William: What's your favorite tank and why?

Steven: Without a doubt, "**SILENT POOL**" from 2021.
While the rank is the lowest of my recent works, I feel like I achieved something deeper with it for me.
Not about technique, though it was technical; but about bringing forth my own voice, and vision of emotion in an underwater scene.

William: Is it easy to find the correct material for hardscapes in Japan?

Steven: To be honest, not really... my wood is mostly Manzanita from the US, and the El Jefe stones in **SILENT POOL** are also from California. My plate lava stones are Japanese, though not from the aquarium hobby.

William: Your favorite aquatic plants?

Steven: Myriophyllum. That's all I'll say for now.

William: Your favorite fishes?

Steven: Favorite Aquarium Fish: **Corydoras** species. These charming fish are what brought me back to the aquarium store where I saw my first aquascape.

Favorite Fish from my Competitive Layouts: **Barilius bakeri** (2019), just so much power, attitude, presence to these fish. Absolutely mesmerizing, the perfect fish for a river scape.

The Best Fish: **Amami Hoshi Zora Fugu**. Puffer Fish come with inflation and poison as almost insurmountable defense mechanisms, and low speed doesn't matter with those defenses and when your prey is clams/crabs/snails/sea urchins, etc and you got the beak to smash all their armor.

Clearly, Puffers are Reef King S-Tier among Fish Strats, even coming with high intelligence which the Amami Hoshi Zora Fugu uses to make its own absolutely brilliant artwork. Need to see it to believe it. (Also I watch too much Tier Zoo)

The Best Tasting Fish: Still the Puffer Fish. As I said, true S-Tier.



KIAC 2022 #34 World Ranking – DANCING SPRING WATER – Dimensions 120x50x50 (cm)

William: Your favorite substrate?

Steven : ADA SUBBRATE SYSTEM

William: Your favorite rocks and woods?

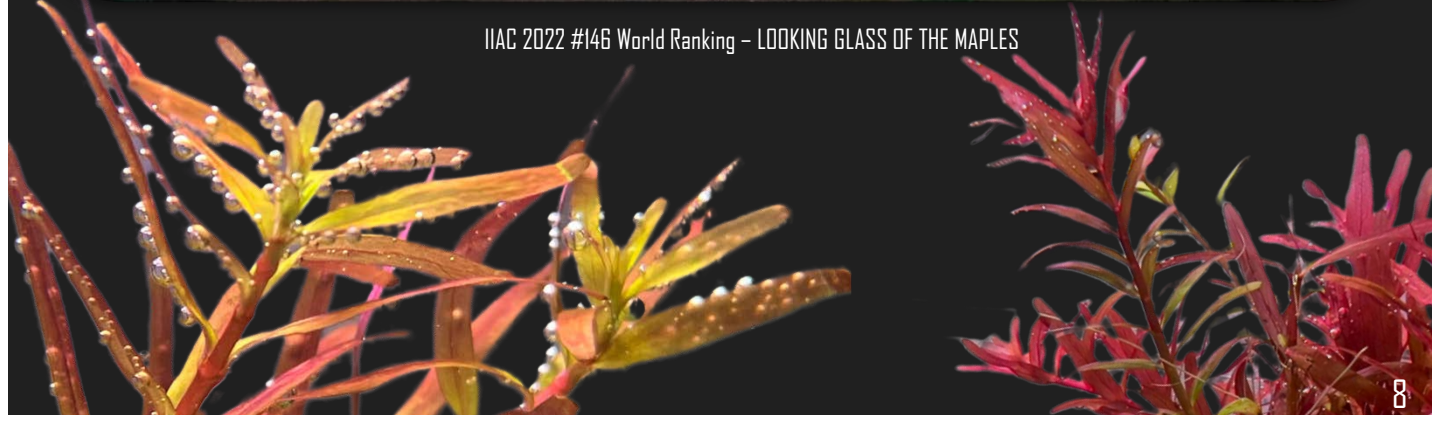
Steven : Favorite Wood would be Manzanita (USA, USA, USA...), my dream stones are Manten. I wish I could get a truly high quality collection of these one day, as I already have a nice collection of Hakkai stones.

William: What advice can you give to a newbie?

Steven: Getting into the hobby, be clear with yourself on your goals. Whether you want to just have a great layout, or learn about nature, or be a competitive aquascaper fighting it out at the top soul searching to find your north star and your true motivations is the first best step. And regardless, remember that this is a hobby where it's very easy to make very, very good friends around the world.



IAC 2022 #146 World Ranking – LOOKING GLASS OF THE MAPLES



ANGELO COLOMBO



Angelo Roberto Colombo,

Italian aquascaper, entered the TOP 100 at IAPLC 2021 ranking at #96 with his tank ROAD TO HEAVEN, this year he ranks at #24 at RFLAC 2022 with the tank IN MEMORY OF AN "ANGEL".

William: Ciao Angelo, how are you? Tell our readers a little about yourself?

Angelo: All goes fine, thank you for interviewing me and giving me the opportunity. I'm going in order...

My name is Angelo Roberto Colombo and I am 29 years old, I live in Aragona a small town in the province of Agrigento.

I approached the aquarium world about six years ago thanks to my best friend Salvatore Scifo who, like me now, shares a passion for aquascaping...

It all began with a 100 liter commercial aquarium, after work, we spent whole evenings in his garage to set up, discuss and study.



William: What fascinates you most about the aquascaping world?

Angelo: What fascinates me most about aquascaping is the fact that create landscapes through the use of rocks and woods using different techniques of composition and glueing.
It's like playing with lego but with natural materials of mother "Earth".

William: Who or what inspires you when you create an aquascape?

Angelo: For my creations I do not follow a specific rule, it depends on the availability of materials available.
Sometimes I try to compose something without an idea already planned and others instead I am inspired by layouts already seen that have somehow impressed me. When I make new aquascape, surely my inspirers are people like **Josh Sim, Luis Cardoso, Juan Puchades and Pavol Kulanda.**



William: How long does it take to create a hardscape??

Angelo: To finish a hardscape use the time necessary depending on the technique used but especially the size of the tank.
My 2021 **IAPLC** tank for example was built in about 3-4 days but only in the evening hours after work.
However, I almost always change the layout while the tank is running.



William: How do you the choose the plants for a hardscape, by follow your feelings or it's everything designed in detail?

Angelo: I personally always choose the plants according to the layout I want to get and Now knowing their shape, color and speed of growth I can more easily place them when I start a new tank.

William: Since many fans and hobbyist think that aquascaping is a relaxing and not tiring hobby, Tell our readers fourth constancy, effort and passion do you need to be able to cure and maintain a tank that will have to participate in the **IAPLC**?

Angelo: This is a very long and difficult point to explain..
Most, if not all the works of the various competitions, are immediately dismantled once the final photo is taken; this is because trimming the plants every two days to keep the layout always cut is a very tiring task, so it is unthinkable to be able to manage it for a long time.
The last 2-3 weeks before the final photo I myself pass from **2-3 hours a day** with my hands in the tank, sometimes I did not even go out on Saturday night.
It must be said, however, that the experience of participating in the various contests and achieve good results and a bit of fame gives you a good and healthy shot of happiness.

William: What advice can you give to those who would like to attend the **IAPLC** for the first time to have an impact aquascape?

Angelo: My main advice is always to study the quascapers that arrive at the top positions and also analyze and focus on the judges' comments.
Recently, creativity and innovation are often rewarded (without exaggerating).

William: What is your favorite tank and why? Can you describe it better including the technique?

Angelo: My favorite tank is my first contest, **AGA 2020**.
I participated with a small tank 35x25x22 and I arrived third of category.
The tank was bought in a shop run by Chinese,
The lighting was managed through a **Chihiros wr gb 2, filter eden 501, CO2 30ppm, Prodibio soil, seyriu rocks**.
I do not remember fertilization well because I often used products of various brands, but anyway the first two months I dosed only Potassium, then I started dosing Nitrogen and Phosphorus, sporadically also Micro.
The parameters in which the tank turned were pH 6.5, Kh 4, Gh 8, the conductivity was around 450. I made 30% water changes twice a week.



AGA 2020 TOP 10 World Ranking - THE CORNER OF HARMONY - Dimensions 35x25x22 cm



IAPLC 2021 #96 World Ranking - ROAD TO HEAVEN - Dimensions 80x45x40 (cm)

William: Is it easy to find the correct material for hardscapes in Italy?

Angelo: This question touches me right up close. No in Italy unfortunately nothing is easy. But there is more, in northern Italy, it is much easier to find well-stocked shops than in the south.

I bought at least 90% of my materials online without knowing what was coming. Sometimes it went well, sometimes I lost my money unnecessarily.

William: Your favorite aquatic plants?

Angelo: My favorite plant is the Ludwigia mini super red. Always been in my tanks.



William: Your favorite fishes?

Angelo: My favorite fish are the ramirezi even if I never had the chance to breed them.

William: Your favorite substrate?

Angelo : I don't have a preferred substrate I found myself well with both prodibio and tropica.

William: Your favorite rocks and woods?

Angelo : My favorite woods are the ADA Hornwoods while the rocks are the Frodo Stones.

William: What advice can you give to a newbie?

Angelo : My main tips are:

- 1) Invest as much as possible in the technique because I myself have found that better products give you better results with less effort.
- 2) Read, watch videos, look for as much material as possible from which to draw information or tricks from the most famous aquascapers to succeed in this hobby. I am referring to the various YouTube channels, Instagram pages or various online sites.
- 3) Know how to be judged and accept criticism.
- 4) Never give up as soon as a problem arises.
- 5) Seek the solution to the problem by doing one test at a time.







pH, KH e GH

pH (Potential of Hydrogen)

pH is a value that measures the acidity or basicity of a solution by the concentrations of hydrogen ions.

Water (H₂O) is composed of the union of two ions: positive ions called cations H⁺ (hydrogen ions) and negative ions called anions OH⁻ (hydroxyl ions).

The pH does not have any kind of measurement unit but it is in a scale ranging from 0 to 14. (see table 'A')

In a solution where the concentration of the H⁺ and OH⁻ ions is identical, the pH will be considered neutral and will be assigned a value equal to 7.

If hydrogen ions (H⁺), prevail in water, the solution is defined as acidic; if water will have more hydroxyl ions (OH⁻), the solution is defined as basic.

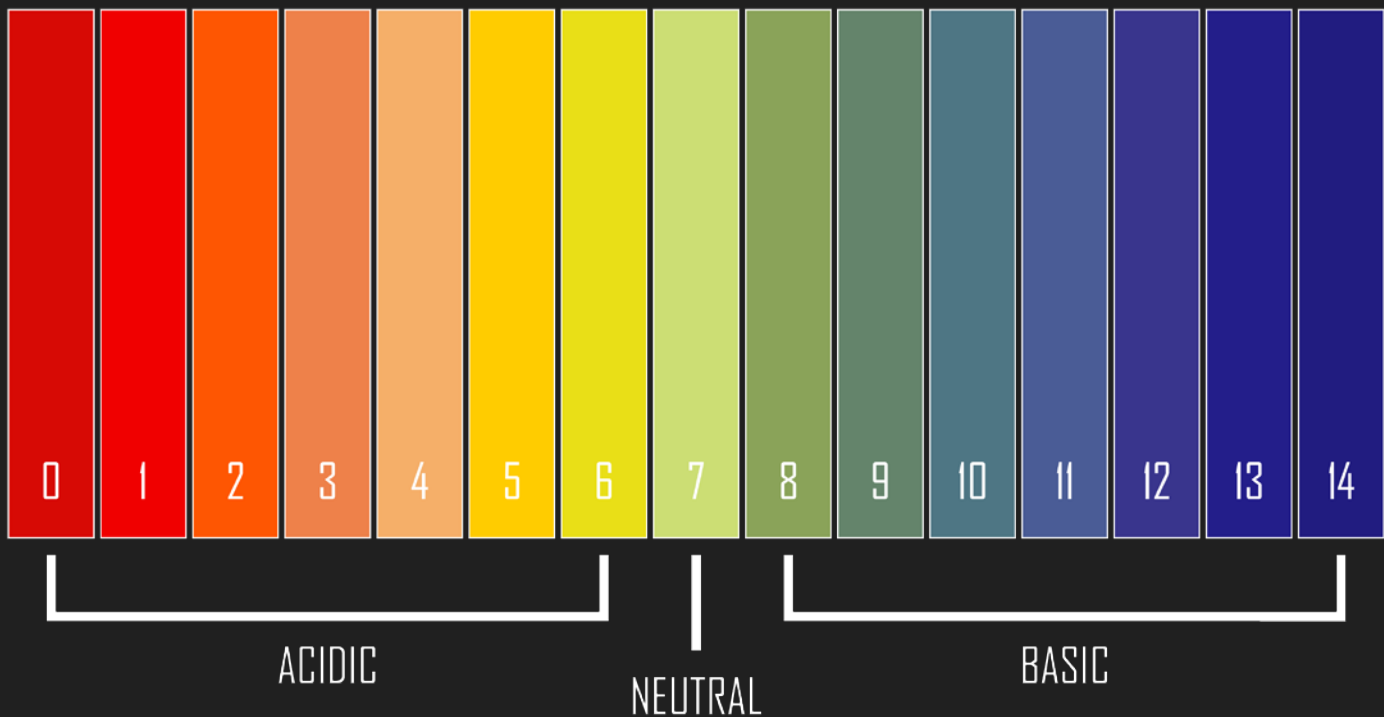


TABELLA 'A' - Scala del pH

The so-called soft waters are those at acidic pH, while the defined hard waters are those at basic pH.

The aquarist must always ask himself the question what is the best pH for the fauna to keep in his aquarium.

The different varieties of fish in their natural habitats populate waters with different pH values, there are those who proliferate in soft waters such as *Paracheirodon innesi* (Neon),

Pterophyllum Altum (Altum), *Hyphessobrycon Amandae* etc. and those who live in hard waters such as *Xiphophorus helleri* (Sword-holder), *Xyphophorus maculatus* (Platy), *Poecilia sphenops* (Molly), cichlids of the great lakes of the Rift Valley (Tanganyika, Malawi, Victoria).

In nature, pH fluctuations, resulting from changes in carbon dioxide concentrations, are very common in most rivers and lakes.

CO₂, accumulated overnight due to organic decomposition, causes a drop in pH.

By day, however, when the sun's rays reach the water, the plants will begin their process of photosynthesis chlorophyll absorbing the CO₂ dissolved in water, thus causing a progressive increase in pH.

In nature, fluctuations up to 1 pH point can be observed, these fluctuations occur quite quickly, in a period of time ranging from dawn and noon.

KH (Karbonathärte)

The pH is closely related to the carbonate hardness (KH) that measures the amount of carbonate (CO₃²⁻) and hydrogen carbonate (HCO₃⁻) ions in the water.

Carbonate hardness is commonly measured in degrees (dKH).

The KH value also represents the total alkalinity, that is, its ability to neutralize acids and corresponds to the sum of all the bases titratable by an acid.

The amount of carbonates and bicarbonates present in water is directly proportional to the pH resistance to its lowering.

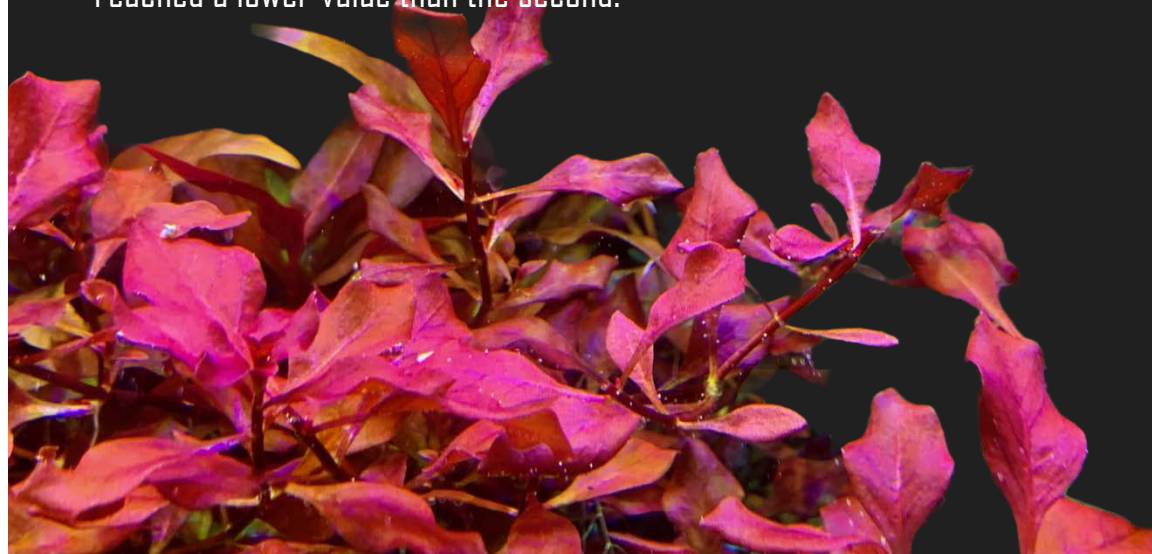
The greater the amount of carbonates and bicarbonates present in water, the greater the pH and its resistance to lowering.

It is necessary to imagine the KH as a force that is opposed to the lowering or the raising of the pH when an acidic or basic substance is introduced in the tank.

Example:

In one tank we have a value of KH equal to 1 (dKH) while in another tank we have a value of KH equal to 8 (dKH).

Adding an equal amount of weak acid, we will notice that in the first tank the pH will have reached a lower value than the second.



Increasing or decreasing the KH always involves a corresponding increase or decrease in pH, on the contrary, it is possible to change the pH level in a tank without significantly changing the level of KH.

The fluctuations of the KH affect the fauna present in our aquariums because the variations of the carbonate salt concentrations affect their osmoregulation.

Rapid fluctuations of more than 3 dkh can cause problems and also the death of the fauna present in our aquariums.

pH changes due to KH changes will affect the fauna, but pH fluctuations due to acidifying introduced in the tank without changes of KH will not.

Having a stable KH is what matters in the aquarium rather than the pH stability.

For the reasons listed above, the main method to decrease the pH value without changing the carbonate hardness level (KH) of the water is the diffusion of CO₂.

GH (Gesamthärte)

The GH value expresses the amount of calcium ions, magnesium and other bivalent cations.

GH is the total hardness of the water present in our aquariums and is composed of the temporary hardness (KH) and the permanent hardness quantity of calcium salts, magnesium remained unchanged after a prolonged boiling.

In aquariology it is referred to for the total hardness to the content of Ca and Mg as they are the main and most abundant elements linked to the solid state to different anions



MASASHI ONO



Masashi Ono, Living legend of aquascaping.

He finished second at the IAPLC three times and won the Honour Prize 18 times (Ranking between 27-8)

William: Kon'nichiwa! Masashi san, thank you for giving me the opportunity to interview you, it's a real honor to meet a legend of aquascaping. Tell us when you approached the world of aquascaping.

Masashi: Thank you William! I had started to create aquascape for participation to contest on Aqua journal of ADA before 24years ago.

William: What fascinates you most about the aquascaping world?

Masashi: The Harmony of beautiful aqua plants and cute fishes.

William: Who or what inspires you when you create an aquascape?

Masashi: **Mr. Takashi Amano san** and beautiful Mother Nature.

William: How long does it take to create a hardscape?

Masashi: Case by case. But usually within a month.



IAPLC 2017 #25 World Ranking – THE GARDEN OF BRUNEI BEAUTY – Dimensions 90x45x45 (cm)

William: How do you the choose the plants for a hardscape, by follow your feelings or it's everything designed in detail?

Masashi: Always follow my feelings and habitats of fishes.



William: What advice can you give to those who would like to attend the **IAPLC** for the first time to have an impact aquascape?

Masashi: Pay much attention about shadow. It give impact to your scape.

William: What's your favorite tank and why?

Masashi: The tank shown below was created to show Amazon feelings.
I love angel fish as main character.



IAPLC 2004 #02 World Ranking - DREAMED AMAZON LANDSCAPE - Dimensions 114x52x52 (cm)

William: Could you describe this tank including the technique?

Masashi: Echinodorus angustifolius is key plants.
It combined and harmonized front and back scenery.
Choose plants and fishes of Amazon to create there feeling.
Another setting is so normal for planted aquarium.

William: Tell us about your water parameter: Kh, Gh and so on?

Masashi: Sorry I didn't check yet.

William: Is it easy to find the correct material for hardscapes in Japan?

Masashi: If we can visit famous aquarium shops where collected material for aqua scaping, it is easy. But they are expensive!



IAPLC 2014 #1 World Ranking – BEAUTIFUL AUTUMN – Dimensions 114x52x52 (cm)

William: Your favorite aquatic plants?

Masashi: Eriocaulon sp. or Cryptocoryne.

William: Your favorite fishes?

Masashi: Betta macrostoma or Pterophyllum altum.

William: Your favorite substrate?

Masashi: ADA AMAZONIA.

William: Your favorite rocks and woods?

Matthew: Manten Stone and Horn Wood.

William: What advice can you give to a newbie?

Masashi: First of all, **to be clear your purpose what you wish to express in your tank.**

FILIFE OLIVEIRA



AGA 2010 #03 World Ranking - ON THE WINGS OF AN ANGEL - Dimensions 55x35x35 (cm)

FILIFE OLIVEIRA, well-known aquarist and aquascaper world-renowned professional, photographer, PR manager and Designer at **AQUAFLORA AQUARIUM B.V.**

He has carried out workshops and seminars all over the world.

He worked alongside Master **Takashi Amano** to create the 'Florestas Submersas', the largest natural aquarium in the world in the Lisbon Oceanarium.

Prizes obtained:

2006 - 1st place AGA category Large

2006 - 2nd place AGA category Small

2007 - 1st place AGA category Small

2009 - 1st place AGA category Small

2007 - 10th place at IAPLC



William: Olá Filipe! Tell us about yourself, When did you start approaching the world of aquariums?

Filipe: My name is Filipe Oliveira, I'm from Oporto, Portugal and I'm in aquarium hobby for a long, long time.

My first steps in aquascaping were around **1999/2000** and by that time we didn't have so much offer in aquariums, technical equipment, hardscape and even knowledge...

The most valuable source of information were forums where the most experienced guys shared their experiences and works.

Since most of the things were difficult to find and extremely expensive, we had to use a lot of DIY, unless you could afford to pay what nowadays is really affordable because of hobby's globalization.

Besides aquarium hobby, I love photography, mostly landscape photography that helped me a lot improving my photography skills to better show my aquascaping works.

Since 2011, I had the chance of doing this professionally, it was a life choice that I don't regret and I'm doing it till date.

I consider myself a very privileged guy by doing this for living!



AGA 2009 #01 World Ranking - ENCHANTED FOREST - Dimensions 55x35x35 (cm)



RED BONSAI TREE - Dimensions 150x60x80 (cm)

William: When did you decide to open your youtube channel? Was there a particular event that made you think that you could open it?

Filipe: For those that follow me on social media, know that Youtube is not the platform where I'm more active.

I created the YouTube channel long time ago and it was not my purpose to become a YouTuber... And I'm not.

My channel was created to mostly upload some of my videos because with time we end by loosing lot of content and at least there, I knew if I would need it, I would find it.

This is why I have there lot of raw content without any editing.

Later when I started to travel more for seminars, workshops and private customers, people started to ask me why I don't publish more content there since I'm quite used to talk to an audience, and it was when I started to publish regular content on my channel.

Unfortunately now and due to a sudden health condition, I'm not doing it anymore and I'm not so active in social media as before.

But I will be back as soon I recover my voice back and my health condition gets better.

William: What fascinates you most about the aquascaping world?

Filipe: I think it's the fact of you be able of create something at your image or interpretation, let it evolve and shape it at your own taste.

The creative process is definitely the most important, it is where you will leave your signature as an aquascaper.

William: How long does it take to create a hardscape?

Filipe: It depends of what you want to create and the purpose.
Usually and since I'm not in competition anymore, I don't spend too much time creating a hardscape. It can take 30min...
Basically, I try to get the best I can from what I have and make it look more natural as possible.
I prefer to improvise, let things flow normally and disguise something that didn't went so well with plants later.
If the purpose is to submit the work to a contest, this can take months of preparation, from getting all material we need, till start assembling everything and make it work, because we are creating something based in one idea, a concept.

William: Who or what inspires you when you create an aquascape?

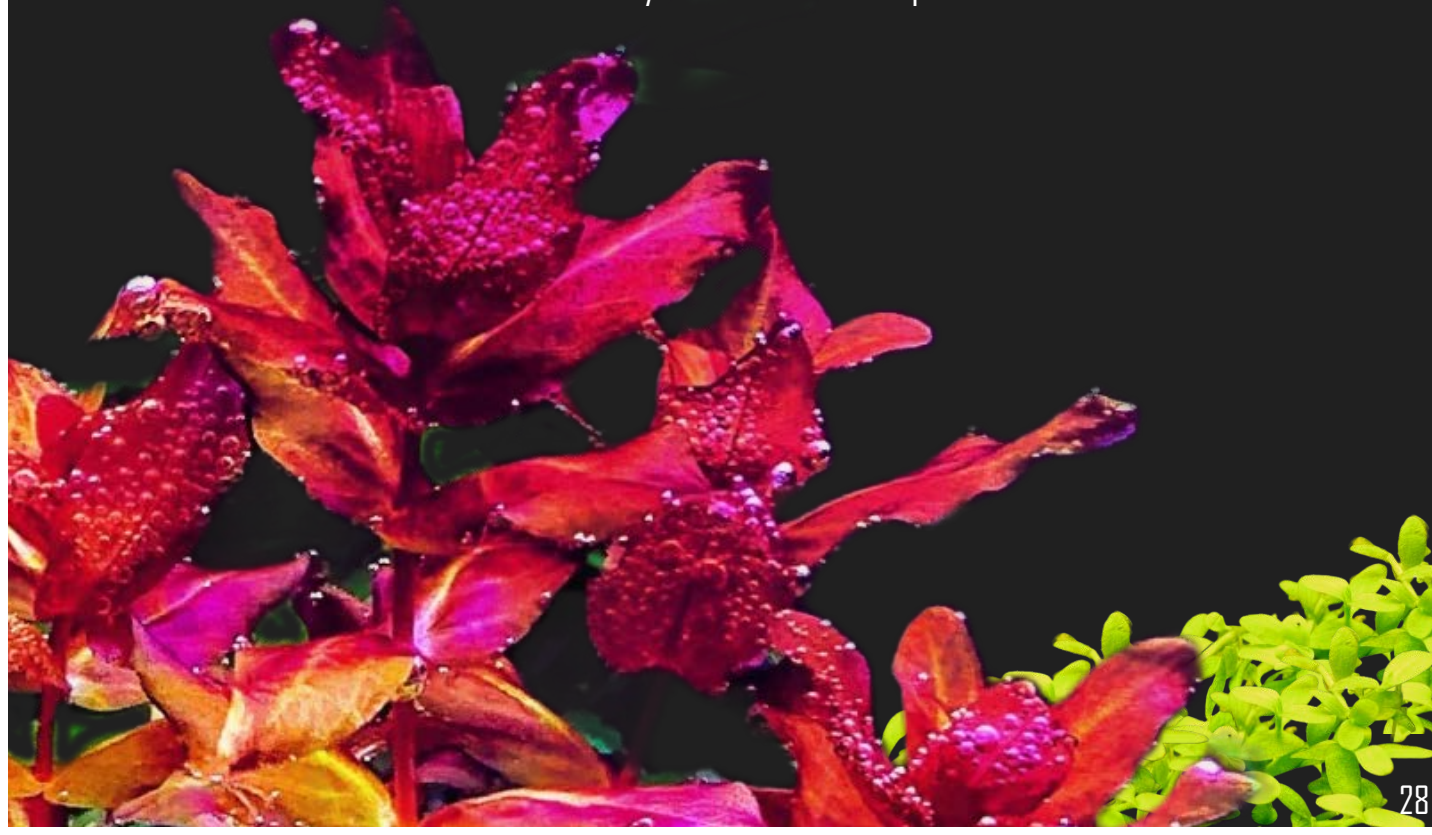
Filipe: I try to stay away from other's work and not use them as inspiration because somehow and even without knowing, intencionally we will end to copy.
I prefer to get my inspiration from nature, observe and try to understand why. Shadows, highlights, textures, why some parts struggle more than others to grow.

William: How do you the choose the plants for a hardscape, by follow your feelings or it's everything designed in detail?

Filipe: It depends of the style and purpose.
If I'm scaping live or preparing a tank for an exhibition, usually I have a list of plants that I can use and when I'm building the hardscape, I need to make both things work.
I know exactly where I'm going to use them and the quantity I need.
If we are talking about a contest tank or something more specific, I prefer to take my time and carefully select the plants later that I will use, in this way the plants choice will not limite the creative part during hardscape process.
The nature aquarium style gives you a slight margin for mistake, in diorama if you do it wrong, you will probably ruin your scape because all details matter and it's better you select your plants wisely.

William: Since many fans and hobbyist think that aquascaping is a relaxing and not tiring hobby, Tell our readers fourth constancy, effort and passion do you need to be able to cure and maintain a tank that will have to participate in the **IAPLC**?

Filipe: Each planted tank is different and depends of the style you go for. If you decide to go for a diorama style aquascape, the more detailed it is, the more difficult and demanding will be. You definitely need to be on **TOP** of that and you can't skip maintenances at all. It's very important we keep the plants in shape, don't let them thrive so much to don't loose the control. If we decide to go for a nature aquarium style, maybe you will need to start a little bit early, so you can mature it and have a much better natural feeling. But it's definitely more relaxing and less demanding than diorama. Plants can thrive a bit more, maybe a slight wild than it was supposed, but in the end will be just a normal planted tank to keep... It's better you don't skip the maintenances anyway but it doesn't mean you need to be on **TOP** of it all the time. It's indeed much more relaxing to keep and the style to go if you can't afford to spend daily time to your aquascape. What I suggest if you are not used to prepare tanks for contest is to start with a nice time in advance, have time to fight unbalances, algae issues, get the trimmings right, do the photo shoot with time and during different stages to pick the one that better shows your idea and concept.



William: What advice can you give to those who would like to attend the **IAPLC** for the first time to have an impact aquascape?

Filipe: Definitely the most important factor is the first impression, mostly if you aspire to achieve the **TOP 100**.

Usually **IAPLC** has **2000+** works every year, and if your work doesn't stand out in the pre-selection, will be just one more in the remaining **1900+**.

Then you can nicely get a good score or stay down in the scoring table, because **only the TOP 100 is sent to the judges**.

Find a theme, be objective and have a clear message.

Sometimes the more you want to put in, the more confusing will be.

The more simple the aquascapes are, the most difficult are to achieve, but are the indeed the most impressive ones.

Be sure you spend some time to shoot the picture, wait for the perfect time for the fish align and be on the position you need.

This can be nerve-racking and time consuming, because we can spend a few hours and after 1000 shoots, none is good...

So, repeat until you get what you are looking for.

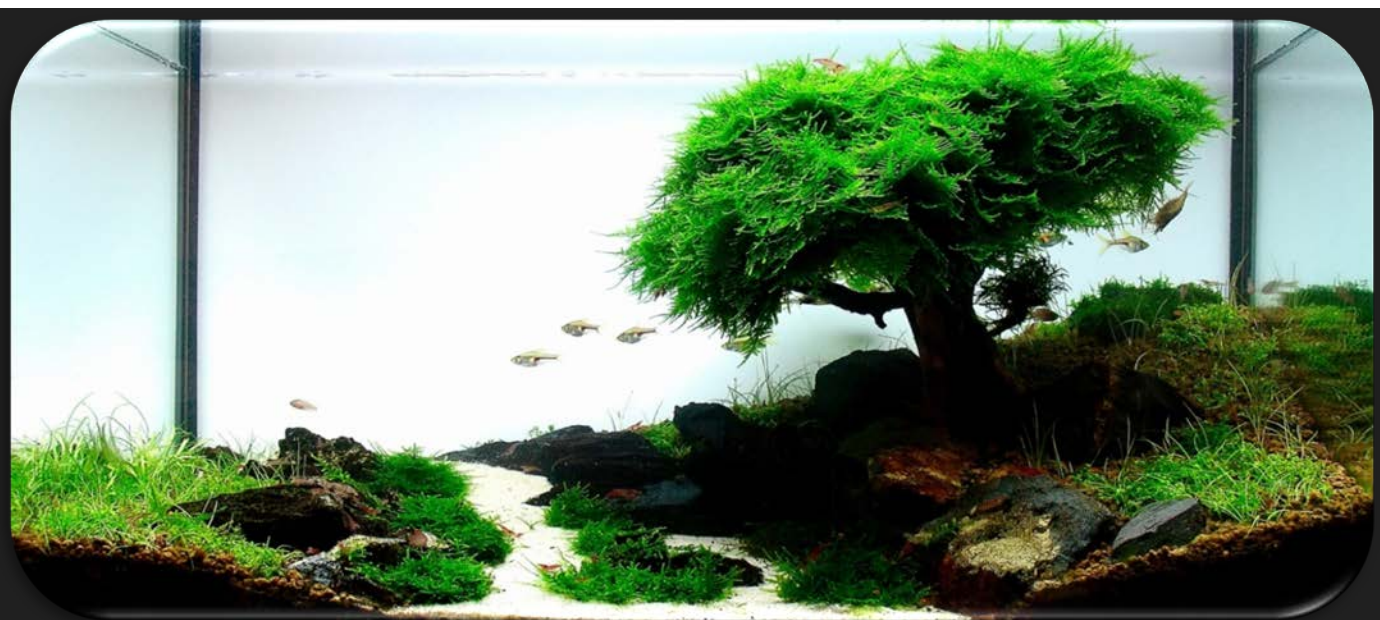
Always raise your standards, average is not acceptable, if you are not 100% happy with what you see, change it until it is perfect, because in a contest a lot more people is submitting and we never know what they have...

It's like a poker game, 'the best hand wins!' and don't do bluff (cheating) or you will get caught!

My last advice to you, always have in mind, **the more effort you put in, the biggest will be your reward**.



Hardscape: Rocce di basalto nere e grigie - Piante: Cyperus helferi, Helanthium tenellum, Juncus repens - Dimensions 90x50x50 (cm)



IAPLC 2007 #10 World Ranking – AGA 2007 #1 World Ranking – SYRAH – Dimensions 56x35x30 (cm)

William: What's your favorite tank and why? Could you describe this tank including the technique?

Filipe: This is my best scoring tank but doesn't mean it's the one I like most. **This is indeed the tank that changed completely how people look to diorama** nowadays because that created love and hate, and most of the times was disrespected and misunderstood by lot of people. Maybe because it was just different, and people are not used to changes and they need time to adapt, I have got a lot of bad comments but with time, it turned into a reference in the aquascaping community. As I mentioned before, people needs time to assimilate, to understand a new concept, and as soon it started to look normal it was accepted by the aquascaping community and being replicated. This work got the **10th** position on **IAPLC** in **2007**, it was the first tank less than 60L reaching the **TOP 10** and the first **treescape** ever made. I have used a non conventional aquascaping tank of 56×35×30cm, HOB filter Aquaclear 25 and 3x24w T5 8000k lightning system. Since on that time we didn't have access to lots of aquascaping material, I remember of visiting so many shops to find the most suitable piece of wood to use on the tree. It took me months to find what I was looking for. Nowadays we use super glue for almost everything, but on that time I had to improvise and make hole on the wood to fix the branches, plus tie the moss on each of those branches. Keeping the moss in shape, trimming and mostly with that volume without getting lose from the base was definitely very challenging, but the effort and paid off.



Vasca preparata per Interzoo 2016 - Dimensions 200x80x90 (cm)

William: Tell us about your water parameter: Kh, Gh and so on?

Filipe: Where I live, I'm a very lucky guy regarding the water parameters. I have very soft water, so I don't need to use extra equipment to filter my tap water, this turns my maintenances really easy, fast and balanced. The gH and kH are around 3-5° in a pH of 7.1, low nutrients, almost no chlorine and chloramines, no silicates... The water coming from my tap is almost reverse osmosis with small amount of nutrients. Just perfect!

William: Is it easy to find the correct material for hardscapes in Portugal?

Filipe: At the moment, yes. In the past when I started was very, very difficult mostly to find quantity and at an affordable price. Now most of the specialized shops have tons of hardscape.

William: Your favorite aquatic plants?

Filipe: Juncus repens but I guess everybody knows that by now.

William: Your favorite fishes?

Filipe: Mikrogeophagus Ramirezi German Blue

William: Your favorite substrate?

Filipe: No preference... I have used so many by now and most of them are great. **ADA Amazonia, Prodibio, JBL, Neo soil...** They are very similar.

William: Your favorite rocks and woods?

Filipe: If I go for an Iwagumi style, I prefer landscape made by Ryuoh, Seiryu but if I use wood, I prefer to Black and detailed lava rocks and my favorite wood is Entwood.



PINHEIRO MANSO- Dimensions 55x35x35 (cm)

William: What advice can you give to a newbie?

Filipe: **Don't be afraid of trying! You aren't pleased, repeat!** Practice will turn you into a better aquascaper. The more you try, the better you will be. **Learn with your mistakes.**

RAUL ALBULESCU



Raul Albulescu, Aquascaper of 45 year old Romanian origin. He participated for the first time at the IAPLC in 2020, finishing at #635 in 2021 placing at #211.



William: Buñal! Raul, how are you? Tell us a little about yourself, at what age and how did you approach the world of aquarium and aquascaping?

Raul: Fine thanks! I was about 8 years old when I first came in contact with an aquarium. It was a 100liter aquarium owned by my grandfather, full of plants and fish.

I never had an aquarium until 2016 when I received one as a gift. Of course I put everything in it and it was a total failure, but that raised questions for me: why did the fish die, why didn't the plants grow, and so on. I started looking for information about aquaristics and aquascaping on the internet.

Then I saw **Takashi Amano's** masterpieces and was amazed by the naturalness of the aquariums he created.

Takashi Amano is the source of my aquascaping inspirations.

I also have a passion that is closely related to aquarium, it is about **Wabi Kusa**. I began to love this along with aquaristics.

William: Who or what inspires you when you create an aquascape?

Raul: When I create an aquascape I don't plan anything, I let everything flow by itself, I let the inspiration of the moment dominate that creation.

William: How long does it take to create a hardscape?

Raul: In general, I created an aquascape for the competition in about 5.6 hours, without plants.

William: How do you choose the plants for a hardscape, by following your feelings or it's everything designed in detail?

Raul: The planting, the choice of plants depend on the result of the hardscape, following the feelings.



William: Since many fans and hobbyist think that aquascaping is a relaxing and not tiring hobby, Tell our readers fourth constancy, effort and passion do you need to be able to cure and maintain a tank that will have to participate in the **IAPLC**?

Raul: To create and maintain an aquarium for a competition like **IAPLC** you need inspiration, and trust yourself, love aquariums, fish and nature, take care of them to keep them clean. **This requires daily observation.**

William: What advice can you give to those who would like to attend the **IAPLC** for the first time to have an impact aquascape?

Raul: Those who want to participate in **IAPLC** for the first time can tell them: trust yourself, let the feelings guide the creation, not be interested in the result after participating but first of all like what you created.



William: What's your favorite tank and why?

Raul: My favorite aquarium is '**GENESIS**' which participated in the **IAPLC 2021** ranking **#211**, because I managed to create a pleasant environment for fish and because this is the first time I have participated in aquarium competitions of this size (120x50x50).

William: Could you describe this tank including the technique?

Raul: Plants:
Rotala rotundifolia green, Rotala H'ra, Rotala sp.colorata,
Hemianthus callitrichoides Cuba, Micranthemum Tweediei Monte Carlo,
Micranthemum Umbrosum, Hydrocotyle Tripartita, Hygrophila polysperma,
Myriophyllum sp.guyana, Myriophyllum aquaticum, Bolbitis heudelotii,
Anubias nana bonsai, Anubias barteri var nana, Anubias nana petite,
Microsorium pteropus 'Narrow', Microsorium pteropus Petite, Weeping moss,
Bucephalandra kedegang, Bucephalandra wavy green, Bucephalandra red mini e
Cryptocoryne Parva;
Fishes:
Melanotaenia praecox, Paracheirodon innesi e Crossocheilus oblungus
Substrate:
Tetra complete substrate ,Tetra active substrate e sabbia.
Filter: Tetra EX 1200 plus x2
Lightings: Life Aqua Prime Pro 1200
CO2: Cylinder 5 kg , Life Aqua regulator and inline diffuser, 6 bps



IAPLC 2021 #211 World Ranking - GENESIS - Dimensions 120x50x50 (cm)

William: Tell us about your water parameter: Kh, Gh and so on?

Raul: Usually, the parameters of the water in the aquarium are as follows:
GH4, KH2, Po4 2, pH 7.

William: Is it easy to find the correct material for hardscapes in Romania?

Raul: Hardscape materials are usually easy to find in Romania, but they are quite expensive.

William: Your favorite aquatic plants?

Raul: My favorite aquatic plants are Rotala, Bucephalandra and mosses.



William: Your favorite fishes?

Raul: *Hyphessobrycon herbertaxelrodi* e *Pristella maxillaris*.

William: Your favorite substrate?

Raul: Tropica e Prodigio.

William: Your favorite rocks and woods?

Raul: As for the rocks my favorite are the Seiryu Stone while for the woods are definitely the Red Moore Woods.



William: What advice can you give to a newbie?

Raul: I could give the following advice to a novice aquarist: document yourself in magazines or on the internet about the quality of water in the aquarium, compatible fish types and their habitat.



dr. Greenthumb



Hygrophila pinnatifida

Hygrophila pinnatifida is a plant that, in recent years, is spreading more and more inside our aquariums and is particularly suitable for aquascapes.

It belongs to the family of the Acanthaceae, a family that boasts over 220 genera and 4000 species, most of them widespread in the tropical or subtropical zone of the globe.

It can be considered a unique plant of its kind and differs from other species of Hygrophila because it has some particular characteristics that make it decidedly more interesting and attractive than its similars.

This particular plant has been known to science for over 150 years, however it was cultivated and introduced as an aquarium plant only in the first decade of the 2000s, thanks to some enthusiasts who, after its discovery in India, they tried to grow it in aquarium successfully.

It is a plant of medium difficulty and needs, like all aquarium plants, a good ratio of nutrients and CO₂ to grow strong and lush.

Hygrophila is derived from the Greek ὑγρός (hygròs) meaning 'wet', and from φίλος (philos) meaning 'friend': who prefers humid environments.

Pinnatifida comes from a fin that means 'pen', and from findo that means 'slit': leaves divided like a pen.

Already from the etymology of this plant we can guess that it is a plant that loves to live in humid environments with pinnate leaves.



Thin, creeping rhizome plant. It is a marshy plant with erect shoots that can reach a height of 30cm.

It has petiolate, decussate leaves. From emerged it has a linear foliar lamina lanceolata, pennatifide or pennatosette 5-10 cm long composed of 6-8 lobes on both sides with a more or less bright green colour.

The submerged leaves are considerably longer and narrower and can have 11 lobes.

Hygrophila pinnatifida is an endemic plant from India.

Its range occupies the western coastal zone at the foot of the Western Ghats (Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu).

It's a swamp plant, it lives partially submerged or completely emerged depending on the seasons, producing a slightly different foliage depending on the conditions.

In its natural habitat it grows and proliferates forming thick bushes inside rivers or streams with crystalline water.

It thrives in semi-shaded or sunny open places and very often can be found anchored to rocks in the middle of a river.

The plant is characterized by short but strong roots capable of anchoring firmly to the substrate or to the rocks, it propagates forming lateral shoots, similar to stolons.

Hygrophila pinnatifida, can also be considered a rheophytic plant as it was found in the midst of the strong currents of the Nangartaas waterfall, near Amboli.

The pinnate lobed leaves, in fact, are suitable to oppose the least resistance in the middle of strong currents.

In all habitats where the *Hygrophila pinnatifida* proliferates, the river bed is composed of pebbles and rocks while the substrate consists of laterite containing coarse sand and gravel. These plants have remarkably adapted to the rapid changes in water level because they keep their foliar morphology unchanged even when they have emerged.

Outside the water the foliar lamina becomes shorter and stocky, develops a more or less accentuated pubescence depending on the humidity but, as mentioned above, the shape remains identical.

In nature I can reach a height of about 60-70 cm and propagate for several meters in width.

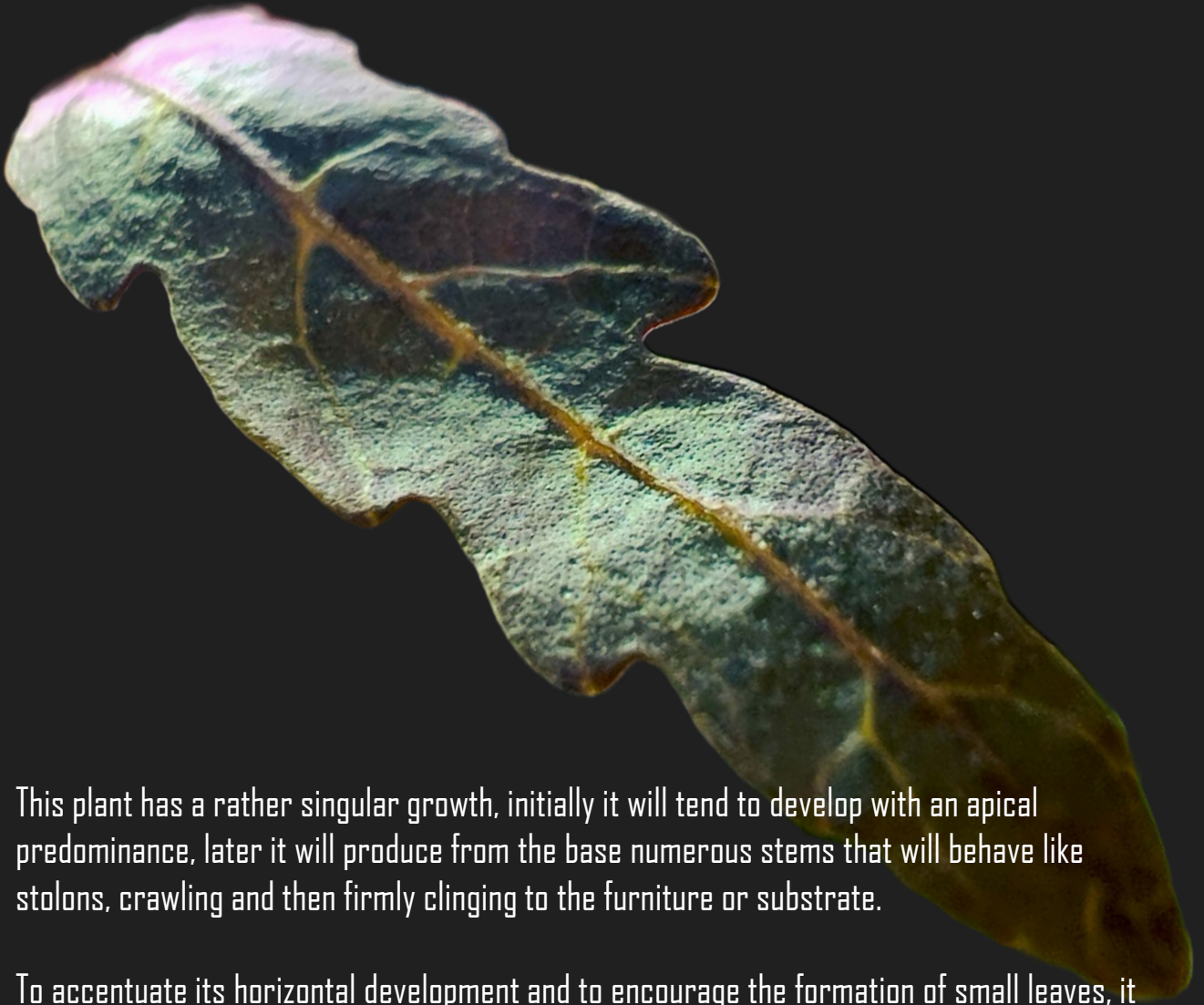


The *Hygrophila pinnatifida* has a sessile flower, solitary, sprouting between the leaf axils. It has pubescent bracts 6-9mm long.

The flower is about 1.3 cm long, light purple in color, has 5 sepals, ciliates.

The corolla consists of 2 lips; the upper lip has 2 lobes, the lower one has 3 lobes.

The leaves of the *Hygrophila pinnatifida* sommersense take on a very attractive color reminiscent of some varieties of *Cryptocoryne*, the upper foliar lamina turns from brown to olive green with light yellow ribs that bifurcate starting from petiole, the lower one instead, tends to a burgundy red while its resistant stems are brown in color.



This plant has a rather singular growth, initially it will tend to develop with an apical predominance, later it will produce from the base numerous stems that will behave like stolons, crawling and then firmly clinging to the furniture or substrate.

To accentuate its horizontal development and to encourage the formation of small leaves, it will necessarily be necessary to regularly prune the dominant apical stems.

The plant tolerates a wide range of water parameters and is an easy plant to grow if CO₂ is released.

The growth rate is closely related to the conditions of luminosity and fertilization in which the plant is maintained in its development phase.

Under a light of medium intensity and a limited intake of Micro, Macro elements and CO₂, will develop rather slowly, on the contrary, under intense lighting and dosing more nutrients, will tend to develop much faster, More compact and its shoots could quickly reach the surface. In open tanks they can quickly develop beyond the waterline and enter the flowering phase after a short time.

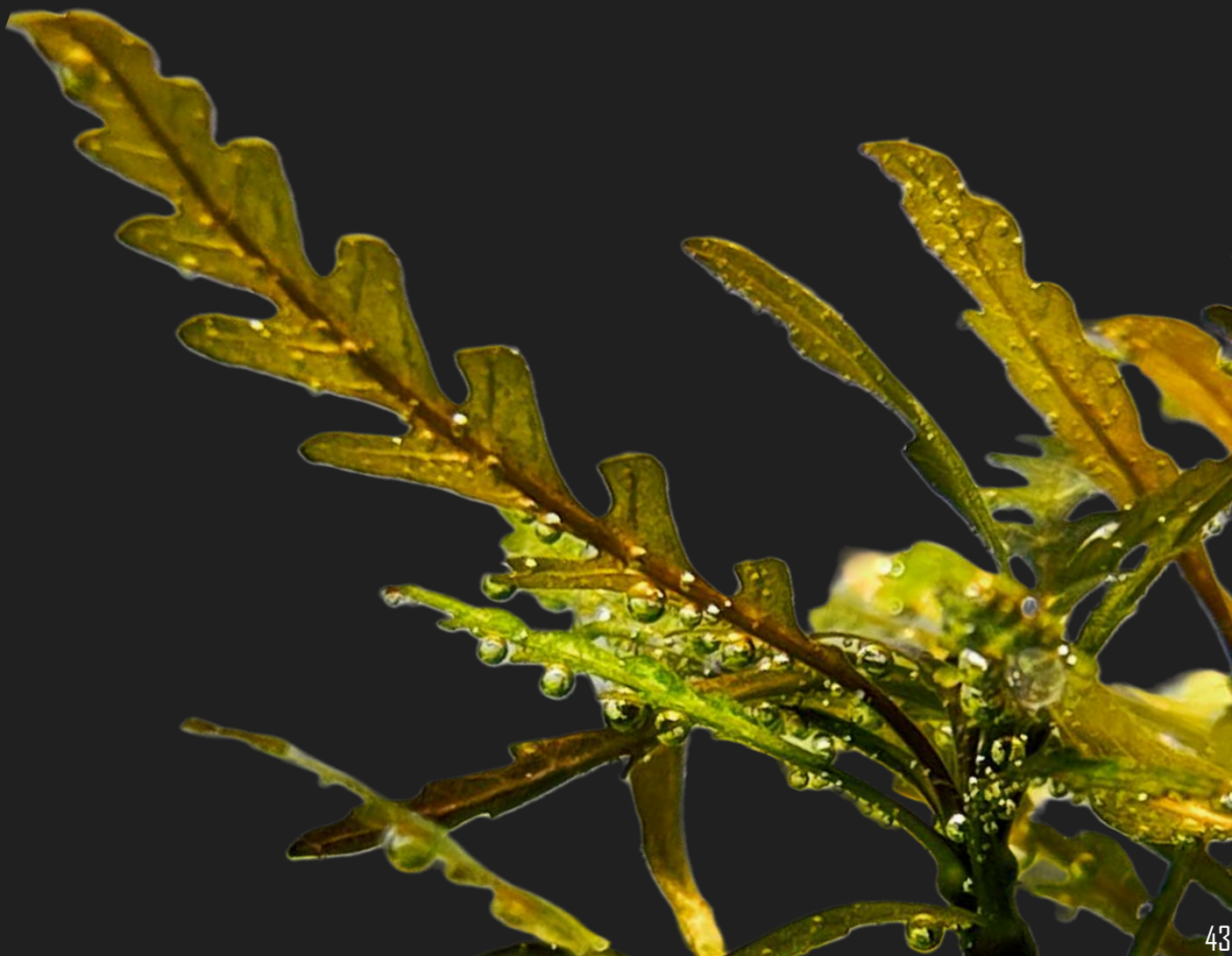
The type of substrate to be used instead is of little importance because it is a plant that has a rather reduced root system that does not penetrate deeply, in fact it is very often used as an 'epiphyte' plant tied or glued on rocks and/or woods.

If used as 'epiphyte' it will be necessary to remember that the plant will produce aerial roots that need to draw nourishment from the water column or will have to sink the roots into the soil to feed.

For propagation I recommend using the side shoots.

It has been observed that cuttings taken from apices grow with greater difficulty.

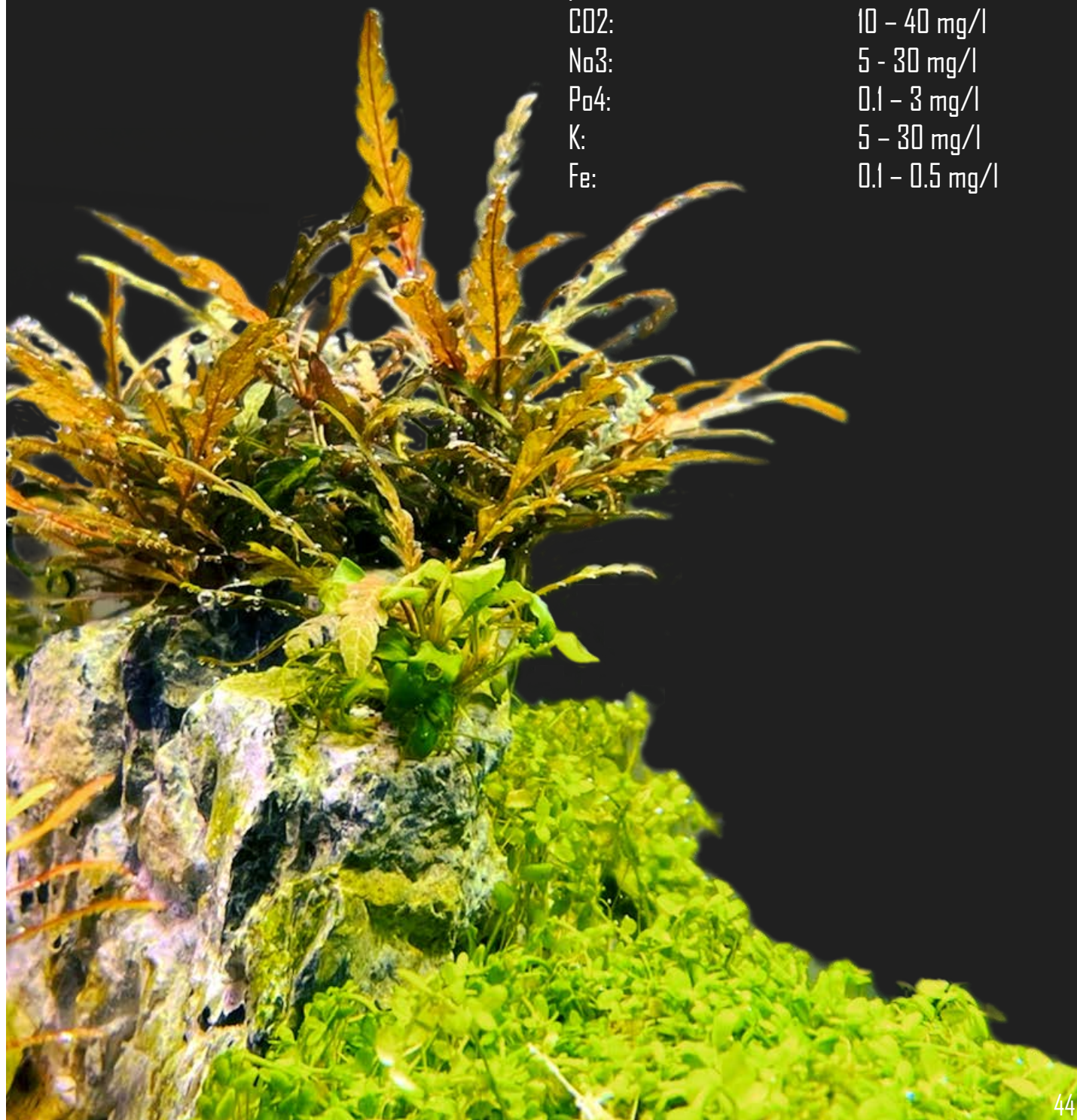
Plants already rooted or those derived from emerged cultivation will tend to stabilize and settle faster in the aquarium than cuttings without roots.



SCHEDA TECNICA

ORDER:	Lamiales	POSITION:	Front - Middle
FAMILY:	Acanthaceae	DIFFICULT:	Medium
GENUS:	Hygrophila	GROWTH RATE:	Medium
SPECIES:	Hygrophila pinnatifida	PROPAGATIONE:	Cuts - Runners

HEIGHT:	4-40 cm	LIGHT:	Medium - High
WIDTH:	10-30cm	OPTIMAL TEMPERATURE:	18 - 28 °C
TYPE:	Stem, Epiphyte	KH:	2- 12 °dKH
		pH:	5 - 8
		CO2:	10 - 40 mg/l
		No3:	5 - 30 mg/l
		Po4:	0.1 - 3 mg/l
		K:	5 - 30 mg/l
		Fe:	0.1 - 0.5 mg/l





HARDSCAPE

ROCKS
&
WOODS

OKHO STONE – DRAGON STONE



DESCRIPTION

Okho Stone or Dragon Stone are brown-reddish rocks of clastic sedimentary origin composed of clay minerals and other small pieces of organic matter that sediment.

Thanks to its clayey component it is a type of 'light' stone compared to the other types of rocks used in the installations.

The appearance of this stone will vary depending on where it was collected and the part of the structure from which it was removed.

It is particularly appreciated for the typical alveolature present on its surface, the latter will be an excellent hiding place for the smaller inhabitants of the aquarium as well as being good holds where to house epiphytic plants.

Okho Stones are crumbly stones that are easy to break and work with.

Given their origin it is advisable to wash them thoroughly especially inside the holes using a jet of water and light brushes.

They are inert stones and do not alter water values.

DATA SHEET

NAME:	Okho Stone – Dragon Stone
ORIGIN:	Japan, US, UK, Canada
COLOR:	brown-reddish
DENSITY:	1.83 – 2.45 g/cm ³
HARDNESS:	2 – 3 Mohs
TYPE:	Sedimentary rock



MALAYSIAN DRIFTWOOD



DESCRIPTION

Malaysian Driftwood is probably the most used wood in aquariums around the world. It's a typical, indigenous Malaysian wood and it's taken from a plant called *Diospyros Ebonasea*. This perennial plant produces some of the densest and darkest woods in the world and is used in many sectors as well as in aquariums.

Ebonasea is part of the genus *Diospyros* which is a group of plants of the Ebony family that produce a much appreciated wood called Ebony.

It has a dark brown color with black streaks that run through its surface, is a very heavy wood with singular shapes and has a slow rate of decay.

This wood will release moderate amounts of tannins in water, this will make the water assume a yellow-amber tint accordingly, before using them, it is advisable to leave them to soak for several weeks if not months.

DATA SHEET

NAME:	Malaysian Driftwood
ORIGIN:	Malaysia
COLOR:	Dark brow, Black
TYPE:	<i>Diospyros Ebonasea</i> - Ebony



Hyphessobrycon amandae

The *Hyphessobrycon amandae* also called Ember or fire tetra falls into the category of nanofish, a category to which belong small freshwater fish such as *Danio margaritatus*, *Rasbora Brigitta*, *Microrasbora kubotai* and many others.

Its species was discovered in 1987 and named after **Amanda Behler** who was the mother of the famous researcher **Heiko Bleher**.

The *Hyphessobrycon amandae* is part of the family of the Characoids and belongs to the genus of the *Hyphessobrycon*, currently the genus containing over 150 different species of small characoids. Many experts agree that a complete revision of this genus will be necessary, with the probable result that many species will be inserted in new or different genus.



The *Hyphessobrycon amandae* populates the waters of South America but its geographical distribution is still being deepened by the scientific community.

They were found in the **Rio das Mortes**, about 100km before its confluence with the **Braço Maior** of the **Rio Araguaia** in the state of **Mato Grosso**.

The **Rio das Mortes** is a major tributary of the **Araguaia**, in turn the main tributary of the **Rio Tocantins** in the lower Amazon basin in central and western Brazil.

It seems that they prefer small tributaries, ponds and oxbows, rather than the main river channels.

The habitat in the basin of the **Rio Araguaia** is typically composed of fresh and acidic waters where the substrate is covered by a thick layer of fallen leaves and twigs.

The *Hyphessobrycon amandae* thrives in acidic waters with a pH range ranging from 5.5 to 7 and temperatures ranging from 22 to 25 days c.

They are gregarious fish so they should be kept in a small group of 10 or more specimens as they are rather shy fishes and few specimens will be hardly visible.

They are very small fishes, their length in fact stands on the 2 cm.

They are recognized thanks to their bright livery, their eyes assume the same colouration of the body, but are outlined by a thin black line.

They have a relatively small dorsal fin and a large caudal fin.

The dorsal and caudal fins have a shaded colouration tending to pale grey or black.

The males are slightly smaller than the female which appears with a more rounded belly.

In the wild these fishes nourish of small invertebrates and of zooplakton, in captivity they like all kinds of feed even if they may have preferences for some types of feed type high quality granulates, but also live or frozen food like artemia, cyclops, daphnia, mosquito larvae, tubifex and flakes.

DATA SHEET

CLASS:	Actinopterygii	DIMENSIONS:	1 - 2 cm
FAMILY:	Characidae	TYPE:	Gruppo
GENUS:	Hyphessobrycon	TEMPERATURE:	22° - 25°
SPECIES:	Hyphessobrycon amandae	pH:	5.5 - 7



THANKS

I thank my family, my wife and my two daughters for having endured and supported me in these months;

Special thanks to all the interviewees, Steven Chong, Angelo Colombo, Masashi Ono, Filipe Oliveira and Raul Albulescu; they were all kind, helpful and super professional;

I dedicate a special and great hug to Filipe Oliveira in the hope that he can return as soon as possible in strength and ready to set up aquascape again with all of us.
Aquascaping needs you... #gofilipego

CONTACTS

To send feedback, requests for collaboration and any advice on what to treat in the next issues send the email to: scaperroom@hotmail.com

I invite you to follow all my social channels to stay updated on future projects:



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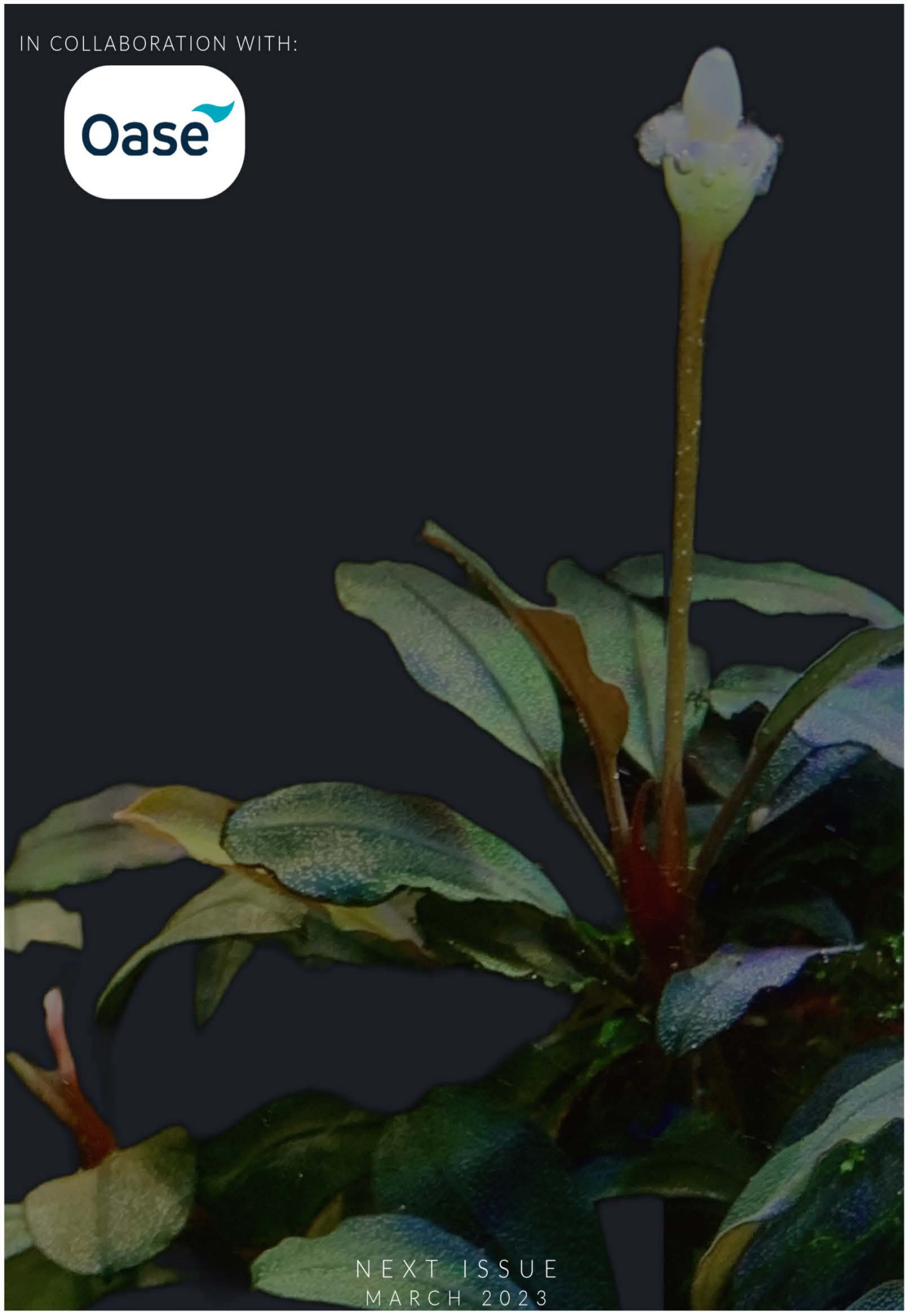
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The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that every entry, no matter how small, should be recorded to ensure the integrity of the financial data. This includes not only sales and purchases but also expenses and income. The document provides a detailed list of items that should be tracked, such as inventory levels, customer orders, and supplier invoices. It also outlines the procedures for recording these transactions, including the use of specific forms and the assignment of responsibilities to different staff members.

The second part of the document focuses on the analysis of the recorded data. It describes various methods for identifying trends and anomalies in the financial performance. This includes comparing current data with historical trends and benchmarking against industry standards. The document also discusses the importance of regular reviews and audits to ensure that the records are accurate and up-to-date. It provides a step-by-step guide for conducting these reviews, from the initial data collection to the final reporting and corrective actions.

The final part of the document addresses the communication of the findings to the management and other stakeholders. It emphasizes the need for clear and concise reporting that highlights key insights and recommendations. The document provides a template for these reports and outlines the best practices for presenting the data in a way that is easy to understand and actionable. It also discusses the importance of ongoing communication and collaboration between the accounting department and other parts of the organization to ensure that the financial data is used effectively to support business goals.

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MARCH 2023