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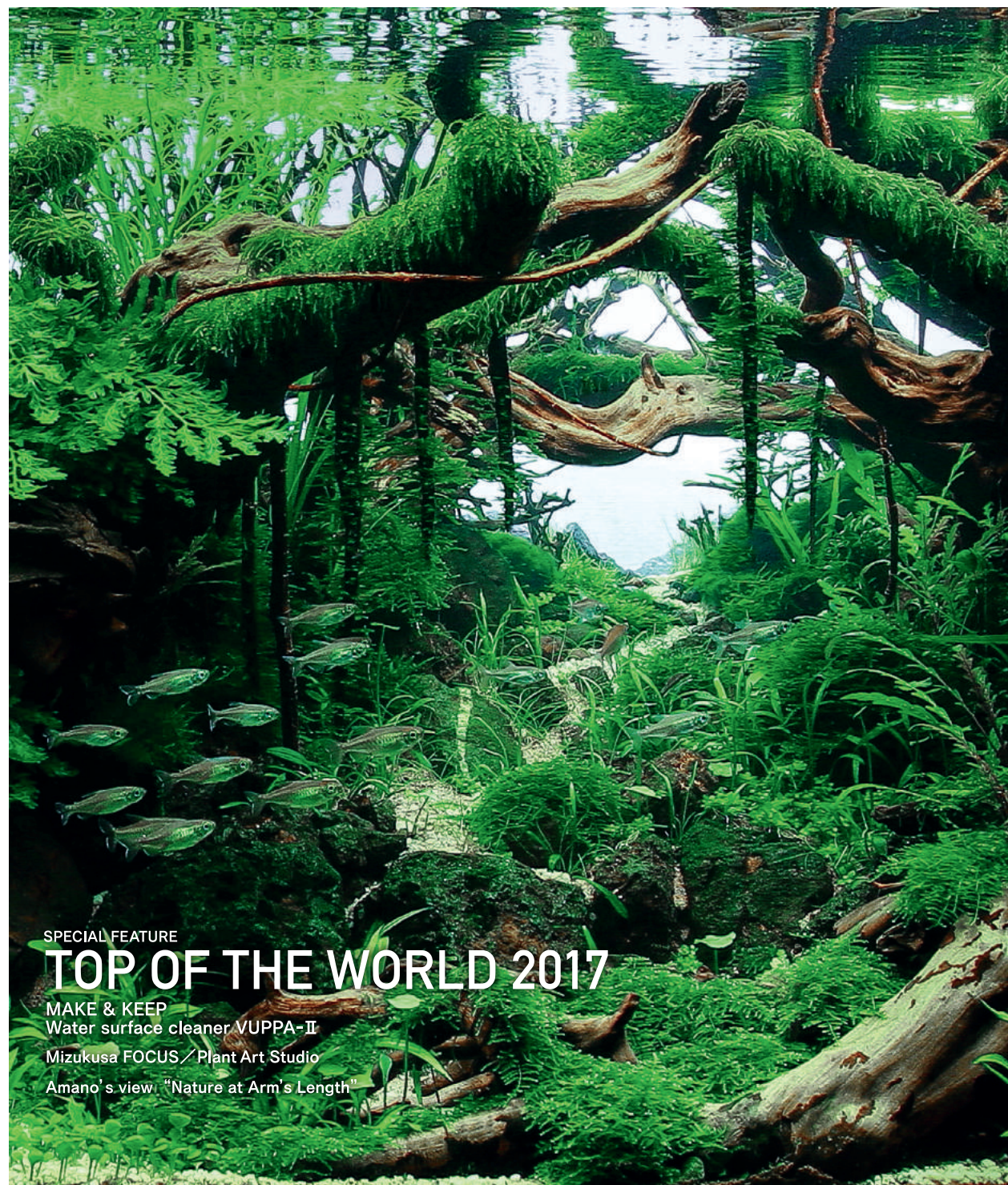
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# AJ

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## SPECIAL FEATURE TOP OF THE WORLD 2017

MAKE & KEEP  
Water surface cleaner VUPPA-II

Mizukusa FOCUS / Plant Art Studio

Amano's view "Nature at Arm's Length"

JOSH SIM

JUNMIAO XU

YOYO PRAYOGI

LUIS CARLOS GALARRAGA

ROGER GOH

JIN LIANG

TRUONG THINH NGO

# TOP OF THE WORLD 2017

**AQUA**  
**JOURNAL** vol.266

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This is a layout with a story,  
not a story created for this layout.

TOP  
OF THE  
WORLD  
2017

World Ranking 0001  
THE INTERNATIONAL AQUATIC PLANTS LAYOUT CONTEST 2017

GRAND PRIZE

JOSH SIM

MALAYSIA

Title

Congo

Total Score

1,439



Aquarium Size W150xD60xH50 (cm)

*Aquatic Plants*: Anubias barteri var. nana / Bolbitis heudelotii  
Bucephalandra sp. / Cryptocoryne parva / Eleocharis sp.  
Hygrophila angustifolia / Hygrophila pinnatifida / Hydrocotyle vulgaris  
Hydrophila balsamica rafinesqjue / Lilaeopsis novae-zelandiae  
Marsilea hirsuta / Vesicularia dubyana / Vesicularia ferriei  
*Fish & Invertebrates*: Phenacogrammus interruptus (Juvenile)  
Dermogenys pusillus / Otocinclus affinis / Caridina multidentata  
Caridina sp. malayan

Each year, many different types of works are submitted to the International Aquatic Plants Layout Contest. Although the evaluation factors vary from judge to judge, this piece received the highest total score among all the works submitted this year. This demonstrates the excellence of the artist's skills and composition in the layout as well as his artistic expression. Despite its lack of impact and flamboyance, this is a fascinating piece of work having many positive aspects as a Nature Aquarium layout in terms of overall composition, creating a sense of depth and a natural feel. There is also plenty of open space where the fish swim in schools.



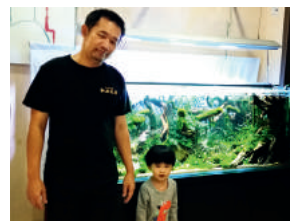
Age/ 44 years old  
Occupation/ General Manager  
Years of experience in the aquarium hobby/ 10 years  
Record of awards in the past IAPLC/  
IAPLC2009 World Ranking 4  
IAPLC2010 World Ranking 151  
IAPLC2011 World Ranking 21  
IAPLC2012 World Ranking 49  
IAPLC2013 World Ranking 4  
IAPLC2014 World Ranking 119  
IAPLC2015 World Ranking 6  
IAPLC2016 World Ranking 25  
Other hobbies besides aquarium/  
Photography, Cooking, Gardening, Reading

Interview with the Grand Prize Winner

**“It was clear from the beginning what I wanted to create.”**

**AJ** Please describe the moment when you first found out your ranking in the IAPLC2017. This year, the process of waiting for IAPLC result was even more nerve wrecking than all the previous years as I went through a fair bit of roller coaster ride! Unlike most of the top7 contestants who had already received EMS notification before the online result announcement, I did not get my EMS notification due to some local postal delivery issue. So I was still in the dark about my ranking before the official online announcement. It was scheduled to be released at 5pm but I was already sitting restlessly since morning and the clock did not seem to move as fast as I would like it to be. Finally at close to 5pm, before I managed to download the result from IAPLC website, I received a WhatsApp message from my aquascaping friends that said “WOW”, I did not know what

it meant so I proceeded to click on the downloaded PDF file with my shaking hand. In the past, I had the habit of checking my name from ranking 100 upward one by one, but this year, for some unknown and unexplained reason I straight away went to the top ranking in the list and when I saw my name there, to be honest I did not know what to say or how I felt, everything just went blank and silent. I was not really emotional at that point (yet) as I still did not know what exactly happened. I stared at the ranking for some seconds with a totally confused feeling, until my phone started to ring with calls and messages from my friends and family, only I realized, “YES, it is really happening!! I am the World Champion of 2017!” At that moment I started to get very emotional when I talked to my friends and family members about the result and I ended up replying messages until 2am that night! It was an incredible journey, really! This feeling of “walking on cloud” lasted a few days – for some funny reason I was still a bit worry that I might wake up from a dream that never really happened. Only after I received my EMS 2 days later, I could finally breathe a sigh of relief! I would like to



Enjoying aquascapes with my son is the best way to relax.

thank everyone that has made this possible, especially to Mr Takashi Amano for the inspirations. Believe in your dream and don't give up.

**AJ** Tell us what you wanted to express with your layout work; layout theme, Motif, ideas behind your winning work.

The story behind this layout is slightly different from my past layouts. I have decided the title “Congo” even before I started the tank set up – this has never happened before, as the titles of my past layouts were normally created seconds before I submitted my work to the contest. But this year, I followed the “Congo” concept right from the start and it was clear from the beginning what I wanted to create. It is about an underwater version of Congo forest – a dark and mysterious place which is kind of dangerous but also booming with energetic vibes of wild lives. My past layouts were never created with any specific type of fish in mind, and the selection of fish was normally made few weeks before the final photo was taken. But in my layout Congo this year, it was very clear since the planning stage that Congo Tetra would be my fish! My sense of purpose in this layout was very strong, it was like following a well

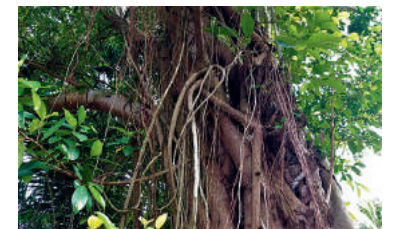
written script and my direction was clear. This is a layout with story, not a story created for this layout.

**AJ** What was the most difficult aspect of creating and maintaining this layout work?

There were a few challenging aspects in the process of creating this layout. The first one is concerning the lighting requirement for this aquarium. As this layout is created with a lot of driftwood and it is densely planted, I can not depend on 1 set of aquarium light to provide the necessary lightings to all the plants. So I have to use 3 different sets of aquarium lighting in order to get the lights to some shaded areas that are blocked by the driftwood. The consequence of using so much light is that I have to do water change 3 times a week just to make sure that I do not have algae problem. The second challenge is during the maintenance stage, as I have a lot of sharp pointing wood in the layout, they cut my hands easily if I am not careful, therefore I have to carefully maneuver my hands whenever I put them in my tank or I will risk getting cuts and bruises from the sharp wood inside. The 3rd and most challenging one is to create the depth. I have modified the layout 3-4 times just to



The vines used as an important layout material for this work were collected in the jungle.



get the depth I wanted and it was not really that easy to modify a densely planted tank which is full of driftwood.

**AJ** Tell us about the layout materials (rocks and driftwood) which were used for this layout work.

The main driftwood and rocks used in this layout were not something special, the most special material used were the vines in the layout, which I collected from our local forest in Malaysia. I have to find the suitable vines which can last at least 4-5 months underwater and flexible enough to create the natural feeling. Another interesting item I used in this layout was the slim and sharp driftwood that I glued to the main wood. These were normal Malaysian driftwood but I cut and carved them into the shape I wanted and

**“I am grateful to Mr. Takashi Amano for his inspiration.”**

tied moss on it to make it look more natural.

**AJ** What fascinate or attract you the most about the planted aquarium hobby?

This hobby enables me to recreate "nature", which is something very exciting and fulfilling. We are creating something from scratch and watching our creation "grow" day by day, and this is a beautiful feeling.

**AJ** Do you have tips for winning in the IAPLC?

2 main aspects in IAPLC are creativity (ideas) and technique (skills). We need to combine these 2 aspects in order to do well in the contest. Over the years, I see more people emphasize on the wood and rock arrangement, while using very little aquatic plants or very few species of plants. Although I believe that wood and rock arrangement may still determine 70-80% of your fate in this contest, we cannot forget about the fact that aquatic plants are equally important, and I think if we want to go far in the ranking, we have to strike a good balance between the plants and wood / rocks.

**AJ** What are your favorite ADA products and Why?

ADA Aquasoil Amazonia is the best soil for this hobby by a far stretch. I have not come across any other soil that is anywhere near the quality and performance of Amazonia. It is not only the best soil for the plants, I believe due to its buffering ability, it also provides a very stable water condition that is taking a lot of the headaches away from the hobbyist.



The collected vines. They were carefully wrapped in moss before being used.

Another ADA product that I can't do without is the Pro-Scissors Wave. I have been using the same scissors for 8 years. Besides their superb durability, I think its design has taken perfect consideration of the size and weight of the tool to make the trimming job become so enjoyable!

**AJ** What kind of aquascape do you want to create in the future? Do you have any dreams relating to the aquarium hobby?

Good result and good ranking aside, I hope to create a layout that people will remember me for. Something that people will relate it to me not due to the result but the uniqueness of the layout. I want to create a style which "belongs to me" that people will talk about for a long time.

**AJ** If you belong to any circles or clubs,

please tell us about their activities.

I belong to a small aquascaping club called Little Green Corner. It is a private club with only 4 members. All 4 of us are coming from very different geographical location (Malaysia and Singapore) so it is not easy for us to meet each other in person, however, we try to gather once or twice a year for discussion or doing aquarium related activities. Whenever possible, we also gather for outdoor excursions where we can collect driftwood or rocks. On normal days, we discuss aquascaping and non-aquascaping related topic in our Whatsapp group chat. We have been together since 2010.

**AJ** What do you think about the IAPLC?

IAPLC is not only the world most prestigious aquascaping contest but it has also become a

**"I want to create a style which 'belongs to me' that people will talk about for a long time."**



This is the basic structure of the composition.



The vines were attached to the branches of driftwood.

culture or even a religion to aquascapers around the world. I believe it is the main driving force that pushes many aquascapers to improve year in and year out with no limitation.



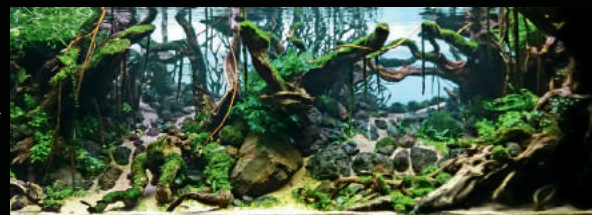
The main attraction of this work. It provides a feel of nature and successfully creates a sense of depth.



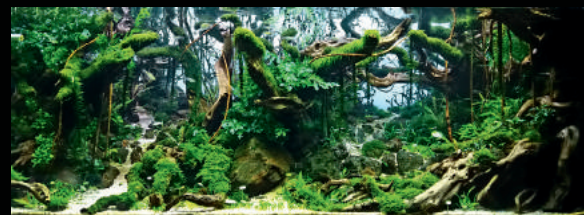
The Congo tetra was the only possible centerpiece for this layout.



This is how it looked after plants were planted.



Moss and ferns began to grow thick and green.



The balance between the aquatic plants and the driftwood were appropriate.



The 'Congo forest' was formed as originally conceptualized.

# TOP OF THE WORLD 2017

World Ranking 0002  
THE INTERNATIONAL AQUATIC PLANTS LAYOUT CONTEST 2017

GOLD PRIZE

## JUNMIAO XU

CHINA  
Title Seclusion  
Total Score 1,434

Interview with the Gold Prize Winner

**“The life force creates art and makes us feel close to nature.”**



Age/ 27 years old  
Occupation/ Shop Manager  
Years of experience in the aquarium hobby/ 2 years  
Record of awards in the past IAPLC/ None  
Other hobbies besides aquarium/ Traveling,  
Reading ancient poems

**AJ Tell us what you wanted to express with your layout work; layout theme. Motif, ideas behind your winning work.**

The concept of this work is based on a scene from a movie. A quiet forest is suddenly hit by a storm, large trees are completely pulled out and branches blown everywhere. The exposed roots and fallen trees provide a vivid contrast with the surrounding landscape. In line with this theme, I rendered the scene with trees and branches in the aquarium tank. However, a month after the production, although the plants were growing steadily, the driftwood used to render the fallen trees began to look unnatural. I therefore changed the composition to improve the balance of the whole work. It illustrates how a new life is born in the passage of time and the withered branches become covered with green leaves again to create new scenery in the forest, and how the arrival of the rainy season gives plants strong life force.

**AJ What was the most difficult aspect of creating and maintaining this layout work?**

I tried different combinations of more than twenty types of plants to improve the balance of the whole view and design the aquascape I wanted to create. I started trimming every week a month after creating this work, and it took me three months and a half to complete it. I closely adjusted the

lighting and liquid nutrients according to the growth conditions of plants until I was finally satisfied with my work. The hardest part was when I had to change the composition a month and a half after starting this work because I was not happy with the overall balance. I asked for my friends' opinions and finished the adjustment in ten days. This process was the most difficult part.

**AJ Tell us about the layout materials (rocks and driftwood) which were used for this layout work.**

I structured the composition mainly with driftwood. Yamaya stones were used to support driftwood. I created details with Branch Wood.

**AJ What fascinate or attract you the most about the planted aquarium hobby?**

The most fascinating part is the creation of a layout. It is the part where you arrange driftwood, stones, and plants in a coherent way with your own hands to create different scenes of nature. All the ideas are found in nature. The life force creates art and makes us feel close to nature.



The first idea sketch.



Aquarium Size W120xD45xH45 (cm)

**Aquatic Plants:** Glossostigma elatinoides / Ceratopteris thalictroides / Bucephalandra sp. / Cryptocoryne wendtii (Green) / Vesicularia sp. / Fissidens

Riccardia chamedryfolia / Moss sp.papua

**Fish & Invertebrates:** Hemigrammus ocellifer ocellifer / Paracheirodon axelrodi

# TOP OF THE WORLD 2017

World Ranking 0003  
THE INTERNATIONAL AQUATIC PLANTS LAYOUT CONTEST 2017

SILVER PRIZE

## YOYO PRAYOGI

INDONESIA  
Title Forest "curug cipendok"  
Total Score 1,432

Interview with the Silver Prize Winner

**“IAPLC gives aquascapers a chance to pour ideas and creativities into the aquascape design.”**



Age/ 38 years old  
Occupation/ Aquascape Designer  
Years of experience in the aquarium hobby/ 8 years  
Record of awards in the past IAPLC/  
IAPLC 2016: World Ranking 6  
Other hobbies besides aquarium/ Exploring nature

**AJ Tell us what you wanted to express with your layout work; layout theme. Motif, ideas behind your winning work.**

When I visited the cipendok curug forest in Banyumas, Cental Java - Indonesia, I was so inspired by the beauty of the surrounding nature. I tried to port r ay the image of beautiful natural rain forest into the aquascape design by creating a scenery of a big tree and small rivers.

**AJ What was the most difficult aspect of creating and maintaining this layout work?**

The most difficult part was to express characteristics and the structure of one big tree by putting small roots together. I cut and placed plants to cover the hardscape. Creating details and coherence of the small roots to form a big tree was really challenging.

**AJ Tell us about the layout materials (rocks and driftwood) which were used for this layout work.**

I used only 'Senggani' roots.

**AJ What fascinate or attract you the most about the planted aquarium hobby?**

I can depict the natural beauty of the tropical rain forest in the form of aquascape in an aquarium. Just looking at it can ease and relax my mind.

**AJ What kind of aquascape do you want to create in the future? Do you have any dreams relating to the aquarium hobby?**

My future dreams are creating an aquascape of rock cliffs and caves and building an aquascape gallery.

**AJ If you belong to any circles or clubs, please tell us about their activities.**

Discussion about aquascape, conducting local aquascape competitions.

**AJ What do you think about the IAPLC?**

IAPLC, the international contest held every year gives aquascapers a chance to pour ideas and creativities into the aquascape design. I hope the coming IAPLC will have more aquascapers who bring greater ideas in their aquascape designs.



The structure of the composition.



Aquarium Size W120xD50xH45 (cm)

**Aquatic Plants:** Riccardia chamedryfolia / Fissidens fontanus / Vesicularia montagnei / Bucephalandra sp. / Najas sp. "Roraima"

Ammania sp. "Bonsai" / Ludwigia sp. "Super Red" / Hygrophila polysperma "Sunset" / Marsilea crenata

**Fish & Invertebrates:** Hemigrammus Ocellifer (albino head and tail light tetra)

# TOP OF THE WORLD 2017

World Ranking 0004  
THE INTERNATIONAL AQUATIC PLANTS LAYOUT CONTEST 2017

SILVER PRIZE

## LUIS CARLOS GALARRAGA

BRAZIL  
Title Summertime  
Total Score 1,411

Interview with the Silver Prize Winner

**“The planted aquarium is so dynamic, so evolving, and so natural.”**



Age/ 50 years old  
Occupation/ Architect, Shop Owner  
Years of experience in the aquarium hobby/ 20 years  
Record of awards in the past IAPLC/  
IAPLC 2011: World Ranking 18  
IAPLC 2012: World Ranking 18  
IAPLC 2013: World Ranking 20  
IAPLC 2014: World Ranking 43  
IAPLC 2015: World Ranking 10  
IAPLC 2016: World Ranking 50  
Other hobbies besides aquarium/  
Plastic models assembling.

**AJ** Tell us what you wanted to express with your layout work; layout theme. Motif, ideas behind your winning work.

My layout for this year was inspired by my friend Adriano Montoro's 2016 layout, who achieved the 5th position in IAPLC 2016. I tried to rescue the essence of the planted aquarium, where the plants play a very important and determining role. For sure the placement of stones was also done with extremely care, thinking in cause a great deep impression, but my bet was mostly in the planting plan. I wanted to achieve a healthy and colorful planting, the “Brazilian Style” as some people say... When I saw the final photo, the warm colors reminded me of Summer. So, “Summertime” was my choice for the title.

**AJ** Tell us about the layout materials (rocks and driftwood) which were used for this layout work.

For this layout I used only Sansui Stones. It is not an easy material to work with because they don't have much details. In a first view you think it is a poor material to work with, but its dark color is good to create great contrast with the vivid plants, and also is easy to create good shaded areas.

**AJ** What was the most difficult aspect of creating and maintaining this layout work?

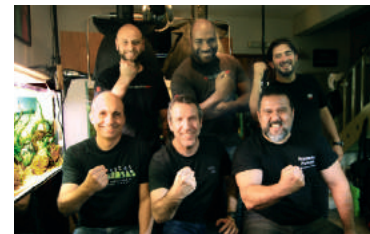
At first, I rubbed mosses in the ADA Sansui Stones, which are very porous. But mosses took a long time to develop. So the biggest challenge was to coordinate growth of plants and keep them healthy and bushy until the final photo day.

**AJ** What fascinate or attract you the most about the planted aquarium hobby?

I always have aquariums, but without plants they become boring. The planted aquarium is so dynamic, so evolving, and so natural ... it is running in my veins, forever and ever!

**AJ** What kind of aquascape do you want to create in the future? Do you have any dreams relating to the aquarium hobby?

This year my dream has come true. I can't ask for more in a such high level aquascaping world!



He shared his joy with Aquabase Layout Team!



Aquarium Size W120xD60xH45 (cm)

**Aquatic Plants:** Rotala sp. Hra/ Rotala indica / Rotala rotundifolia / Rotala macrandra (Green) / Rotala wallichii / Rotala nanjenshan/ Scrophulariaceae sp. Blyxa japonica / Myriophyllum sp. Red / Myriophyllum sp. Guinea / Hydrocotyle tripartita / Hygrophila pinnatifida / Eleocharis minima / Callitriche sp. Micranthemum sp. / Hemianthus callitricoides "Cuba" / Bucephalandra sp. / Penthorum sedoides / Echinodorus tenellus / Marsilea angustifolia Vesicularia dubyana / Fissidens fontanus  
**Fish & Invertebrates:** Microgeophagus ramirezi / Hyphessobrycon flammeus / Hyphessobrycon elachys / Hyphessobrycon montagi Oryzias woworae / Nannostomus eques

# TOP OF THE WORLD 2017

World Ranking 0005  
THE INTERNATIONAL AQUATIC PLANTS LAYOUT CONTEST 2017

BRONZE PRIZE

## ROGER GOH

SINGAPORE  
Title BREATH OF THE WILD  
Total Score 1,409

Interview with the Bronze Prize Winner

**“IAPLC is possibly the best thing that could happen for all aquascaping hobbyists.”**



Age/ 32 years old  
Occupation/ Aquarium Trade Business Owner  
Years of experience in the aquarium hobby/ 12 years  
Record of awards in the past IAPLC/  
IAPLC 2013: World Ranking 561  
IAPLC 2014: World Ranking 243  
IAPLC 2015: World Ranking 56  
IAPLC 2016: World Ranking 11  
Any other hobbies besides aquarium/ Nil

**AJ** What was the most difficult aspect of creating and maintaining this layout work?

The most difficult aspect of creating the layout has to be the stacking of rocks to make the “base pillars”. It was a challenge as the height of my tank was 55cm. I used a total of 5 pillars to create my layout base. For maintenance, I had to be careful of the tight detailed areas, just in case my hands knocked on them. Creating the “Amazon bridges” was very challenging as it was the most important aspect of my scape; where I divided the upper and lower part of my layout. It was really tough to create “platforms” in a “nice and natural flowing manner”. I did so by attaching moss to multiple stainless steel wire mesh to create these platforms.

**AJ** Tell us about the layout materials (rocks and driftwood) which were used for this layout work.

I used multiple layout materials, including grey river rocks, black lava rocks, old driftwood, spider wood, tree roots and branches to create the entire layout.

**AJ** What fascinate or attract you the most about the planted aquarium hobby?

I strongly believe in what Mr. Takashi Amano had shared; the most attractive part of a

planted aquarium layout is to be able to understand nature and the biological cycle in an enclosed environment, where little lives strive and to recreate the most ideal environment for them. The mystery of every individual's hand is the most powerful tool in a planted aquarium layout; nature can be recreated in many ways and best expressed through a planted tank.

**AJ** What do you think about the IAPLC? Possibly the best thing that could happen for all aquascaping hobbyists. The contest itself is generating much interest all around the world. It is something that people can look forward to every year. It gives people a reason to keep their tank in good condition, also to re-scape and participate again. Let's keep it going on strong!



Many different types of layout materials were used.



Aquarium Size W150xD60xH55 (cm)

**Aquatic Plants:** Micranthemum sp. / Eleocharis acicularis "Mini" / Eleocharis vivipara / Fontinalis antipyretica / Bolbitis heudelotii / Bolbitis SP. difformis Staurogyne repens / Fissidens fontanus / Fissidens sp. / Taxiphyllum sp. "Spiky moss" / Riccardia chamedryfolia / Vesicularia sp.  
**Fish & Invertebrates:** Danio choprai / Hyphessobrycon amandae / Otocinclus sp. / Caridina multidentata

# TOP OF THE WORLD 2017

World Ranking 0006  
THE INTERNATIONAL AQUATIC PLANTS LAYOUT CONTEST 2017

## BRONZE PRIZE JIN LIANG

CHINA  
Title Dryad's Ladder  
Total Score 1,399

Interview with the Bronze Prize Winner

**"It is fascinating that the planted aquarium makes you feel cheerful and relaxed."**



Age/ 35 years old  
Occupation/ Aquascape Creator  
Years of experience in the aquarium hobby/ 8 years  
Record of awards in the past IAPLC /  
IAPLC2015: World Ranking 36  
IAPLC2016: World Ranking 9  
Other hobbies besides aquarium/ Traveling

**AJ Tell us what you wanted to express with your layout work; layout theme. Motif, ideas behind your winning work.**

I like virgin forests with tangled vines and branches. Being attracted to their primitive and mysterious landscapes, I produced my work with the theme of virgin forest two years in a row. I decided to continue working on a series with the theme after my work titled "Forest of Dreams" was awarded for excellence in IAPLC 2016. The piece I produced in 2016 represents the entrance of a virgin forest. This year, my work will take the audience deeper into the forest.

**AJ Tell us about the layout materials (rocks and driftwood) which were used for this layout work.**

This time I decided to use Branch Wood and Ryuoh Stones. I collected many twigs of Branch Wood in advance to create an atmosphere where vines and branches are tangled.

**AJ What was the most difficult aspect of creating and maintaining this layout work?**

This year, I paid careful attention to the arrangement of driftwood on both sides of the upper part of the layout to make the audience feel as if they were looking up in the forest. I also had to consider how to block the light. At the same time, I made the

driftwood movable so as to facilitate maintenance. For these reasons, the main challenge in this work was how to lay out the driftwood.

**AJ What fascinate or attract you the most about the planted aquarium hobby?**

I think it is fascinating that the planted aquarium makes you feel cheerful and relaxed when watching it.

**AJ What do you think about the IAPLC?**

The International Aquatic Plants Layout Contest gives opportunities for enthusiasts from all over the world to get to know each other and provides a place for interactions as well as a stage for them to demonstrate their talents. Every year we become closer to one another through the International Aquatic Plants Layout Contest.



The layout composition was designed carefully.



Aquarium Size W120xD50xH50 (cm)

**Aquatic Plants:** Bucephalandra sp. / Bolbitis heudelotii / Hemianthus micranthemoides / Lilaeopsis novae-zelandiae / Aegagropila linnaei  
Vesicularia sp. / Riccardia chamedryfoli  
**Fish & Invertebrates:** Hyphessobrycon heterorhabdus / Gyri노cheilus aymonieri

# TOP OF THE WORLD 2017

World Ranking 0007  
THE INTERNATIONAL AQUATIC PLANTS LAYOUT CONTEST 2017

## BRONZE PRIZE TRUONG THINH NGO

VIETNAM  
Title Memories  
Total Score 1,398

Interview with the Bronze Prize Winner

**"I have crated a layout style that combines the traditional Iwagumi and modern aquatic plants layout trends."**



Age/ 49 years old  
Occupation/ Shop Owner  
Years of experience in the aquarium hobby/ 15 years  
Record of awards in the past IAPLC/  
IAPLC 2008: World Ranking 27  
IAPLC 2009: World Ranking 9  
IAPLC 2011: World Ranking 26  
IAPLC 2012: World Ranking 7  
IAPLC 2013: World Ranking 1  
IAPLC 2014: World Ranking 8  
IAPLC 2016: World Ranking 16

**AJ Tell us what you wanted to express with your layout work; layout theme. Motif, ideas behind your winning work.**

On top of local landscapes and Impressionist paintings, my work this year was greatly inspired by Son Doong Caves, which left a pretty strong impression on me. So I called my work "Memories". My layout, the main theme is rocks that I put continually from left to right side to create a panoramic view of Son Doong Caves. The background, I use Rotala, my favorite aquatic plant that has bright colors to balance out the heavier elements such as rocks in my tank. Shadows of aquatic plants reflected on water surface also shimmer in the underwater landscape. In general, I have crated a layout style that combines the two styles, the traditional Iwagumi and modern aquatic layout trends.

**AJ What was the most difficult aspect of creating and maintaining this layout work?**

I do not use any special technics to create my layout so I didn't face any difficulties. However, I spent months trying to find and get the rocks to complete my layout. And, I can say that this year was an unbelievable year! I have been facing a problem of Eczema on my both hands and fingers. I must avoid contacting the water with my bare hands, so I am unable to do routine aquarium maintenance for a year.

This is the only difficulty I have at present.

**AJ Tell us about the layout materials (rocks and driftwood) which were used for this layout work.**

The rock that I use in my tank called Shale rock, it is quite popular in my country. Shale are typically composed of variable amounts of clay minerals and quartz grains and display quite diverse color patterns. Although it is not too hard, the stone can be broken easily into smaller pieces, but does not increase the hardness of water.

**AJ What fascinate or attract you the most about the planted aquarium hobby?**

Mr.Takashi Amano fascinated me with his Nature Aquarium. Whenever I'm standing in front of his Nature Aquarium, I feel like I'm being in another world - a beautiful and peaceful world.



Natural landscapes like this stimulate our creativity.



Aquarium Size W120xD45xH40 (cm)

**Aquatic Plants:** Anubias barteri var.nana "Petite"/ Pogostemon erectus / Rotala rotundifolia / Rotala sp. "Green" / Vesicularia ferriei / Fontinalis antipyretica  
Mini fissiden fontanu  
**Fish & Invertebrates:** Hyphessobrycon Amandae/ Golden Paracheirodon Innesi var

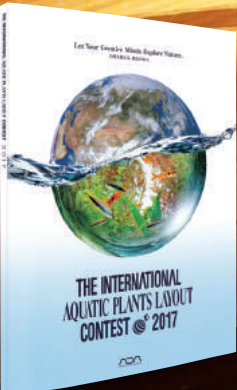




Looking back on the International Aquatic Plants Layout Contest 2017

# Learn from Nature, Create Nature

Presentation of submitted works and the award ceremony were held at the Nature Aquarium Party in Niigata on October 21. All the prize-winning works are beautiful and they were undoubtedly created carefully with utmost effort. Those who see them for the first time would be amazed at the fact that they are artifacts created inside aquarium tanks. In contrast, there were less surprises and discoveries for experienced hobbyists at this year's contest than previous ones. You may wonder why. It is probably due to a combination of several factors, including the current evaluation method, but the primary cause must be the fact that the works submitted for the contest are becoming more and more similar every year. Getting ideas from the works in the past is a good way to improve layout skills, but the increasing number of entries just "cherry-pick" the most attractive features of the past works. As a result, many people may feel that a large number of submitted works lack uniqueness and originality. The contest gathers hobbyists from over 60 countries and areas around the world. This worldwide contest will be more meaningful if more entries showing hobbyist's personality and sense of nature unique to each area are submitted. In other words, their challenge in future contests will be to break away from conformity. We hope that entrants will take this opportunity to try new and different ways of expression. "Learn from Nature, Create Nature"; Takashi Amano's philosophy of creating aquascapes may also be a clue as to how to address the challenge.



"The International Aquatic Plants Layout Contest 2017 Booklet" is scheduled for general release in December. The booklet contains the work trends and evaluation details in 2017.

# MAKE & KEEP

1

Keep the water surface clean  
by removing the surface film.

## MAKE & KEEP

This section of each issue introduces useful knowledge and product information for creating and maintaining Nature Aquarium or Aqua Terrarium. This time, we explain the new features of VUPPA-II, which is coming out in January 2018, and improvements from the previous model, VUPPA-I. Keep the water surface clean with VUPPA-II.

### Features and improvements of the new VUPPA-II which is simpler and more effective than the previous model.

VUPPA-I is capable of efficiently removing surface film by manually adjusting the water level. It works effectively when the water outflow from the submersible pump is balanced with water inflow into the cleaner. However, when it becomes imbalanced, problems may occur, such as air cavitation of the pump due to the low water level and a performance failure caused by overflow water. Therefore, frequent adjustment of the water level is necessary to maintain the high efficiency of surface film removal. The new VUPPA-II solves this problem by incorporating a float switch. Since this new model automatically optimizes the balance between the amount of water taken in and the amount of outflow, frequent

adjustment is no longer necessary after installation, unlike with VUPPA-I. This new mechanism prevents air cavitation even when the water level in the tank drops due to evaporation. In addition, having a monoblock filter sponge and simplified inner structure, VUPPA-II is easier to clean and maintain than VUPPA-I. Since VUPPA-II's submersible pump has a higher flow rate and filtration efficiency than that of the previous model, VUPPA-II demonstrates outstanding performance in removing the oil filter and can be used as an internal filter for a small size tank. With the new VUPPA-II, you can enjoy beautiful aquascapes in a variety of sizes without surface film.

### VUPPA-II System



VUPPA-II is made of stainless steel, same as VUPPA-I. While the former model has a cylindrical form, the new version has a shape close to a rectangular and a solid design to avoid impairing the aesthetic qualities of aquascapes.

Controlling the operation of the submersible pump with the float switch solves the problem of air cavitation.



### For the creation of more beautiful aquascapes. The background of the development of the water surface cleaner.

The charm of the Nature Aquarium is beautiful aquascapes with thriving aquatic plants. In order to maximize the beauty of Nature Aquarium aquascapes, the designs of tanks and other equipment have been kept simple. However, some of the factors harmful to the aesthetic appeal of aquascapes may arise during the maintenance of aquarium tanks such as algae and surface film. As for algae, the use of physical methods such as scrubbing it off with tools like Pro-Razor and Pro-Brush or biological removal methods including keeping *Caridina multidentata* and *Otocinclus* in the tank

have been used as common practice. However, there was no definitive way to remove surface film. As a result, the water surface cleaner VUPPA-I was developed. Before VUPPA-I, oil films were cleaned by siphoning the film out with a hose at water changes or drawing it into the water stream of Lily Pipe during nighttime aeration. However, neither methods were effective as surface film was easily formed again. VUPPA-I has made it possible to keep the water surface always clean by continuously filtering the oil film along with water through the filter sponge, using a small submersible pump. (VUPPA-I has obtained a patent for its unique mechanism.) VUPPA-II was developed as an improved version of VUPPA-I.

How do you like the new AJ with the different format and content? We hope you will enjoy this page after having enjoyed the photographs of the prize-winning aquascapes. This section discusses aquatic plants from various angles and provides information. Let us present to you the Wabi-Kusa Mat at the start of this column.

## Moss variation

It has been four months since the launch of the Wabi-Kusa Mat Series. Fiber thickness and weave density of the mat were carefully designed to help moss and aquatic plants grow easily and firmly on vertical spaces by passing an adequate amount of water through the mat. Although the series currently offers four different types of moss, some of you may think they all look the same. When compared side by side, you will notice the differences in their colors and appearances. If you take a closer look and observe them carefully, you will see the unique characteristics

of each variation. We thought that plants rooted in uneven surfaces, such as walls and stones, normally grew in the horizontal direction to efficiently receive the light from above, but it seems to vary depending on the type of plant. It may be a bit rude to say, "They all look the same," when they are adapting to their habitats for survival by changing their shapes and ways they grow. It is something so small that you cannot tell the differences unless you take a very close look, but why not pay attention to those slowly growing plants and watch them grow?



The name of the product is indicated on the front of the package. Humidity is maintained at an adequate level by sealing the product with a lid.

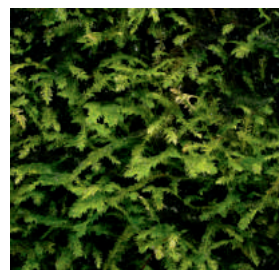
The base mat developed by ADA allows plants to grow and has excellent water permeability.

Base Mat



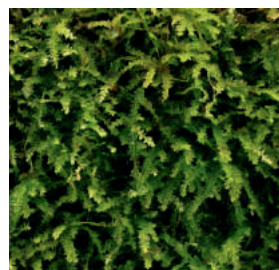
Wabi-Kusa Mat / *Taxiphyllum barbieri*

It is a moss commonly called Willow moss (*Taxiphyllum barbieri* is a generic term and there are several kinds). It does not branch finely above water and each branch grows thin and long. When grown vertically on a Wabi-Kusa Wall, it receives the light from above and attempts to grow horizontally while hanging.



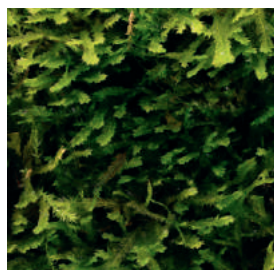
Wabi-Kusa Mat / *Vesicularia ferriei* 'Weeping Moss'

As its name suggests, *Vesicularia ferriei* 'Weeping Moss' grows with weeping leaves in the underwater scene, but it also grows above the water without fighting gravity. Each plant does not grow very thick and small leaves develop finely. It glows slower than other mosses.



Wabi-Kusa Mat / *Vesicularia montagnei*

*Vesicularia montagnei* also develops downward first when grown vertically on a Wabi-Kusa Wall, and it starts to grow faster and horizontally with time. Since the plant is thick and its leaves grow in the same direction, its green color looks deep and vivid when seen from the front.

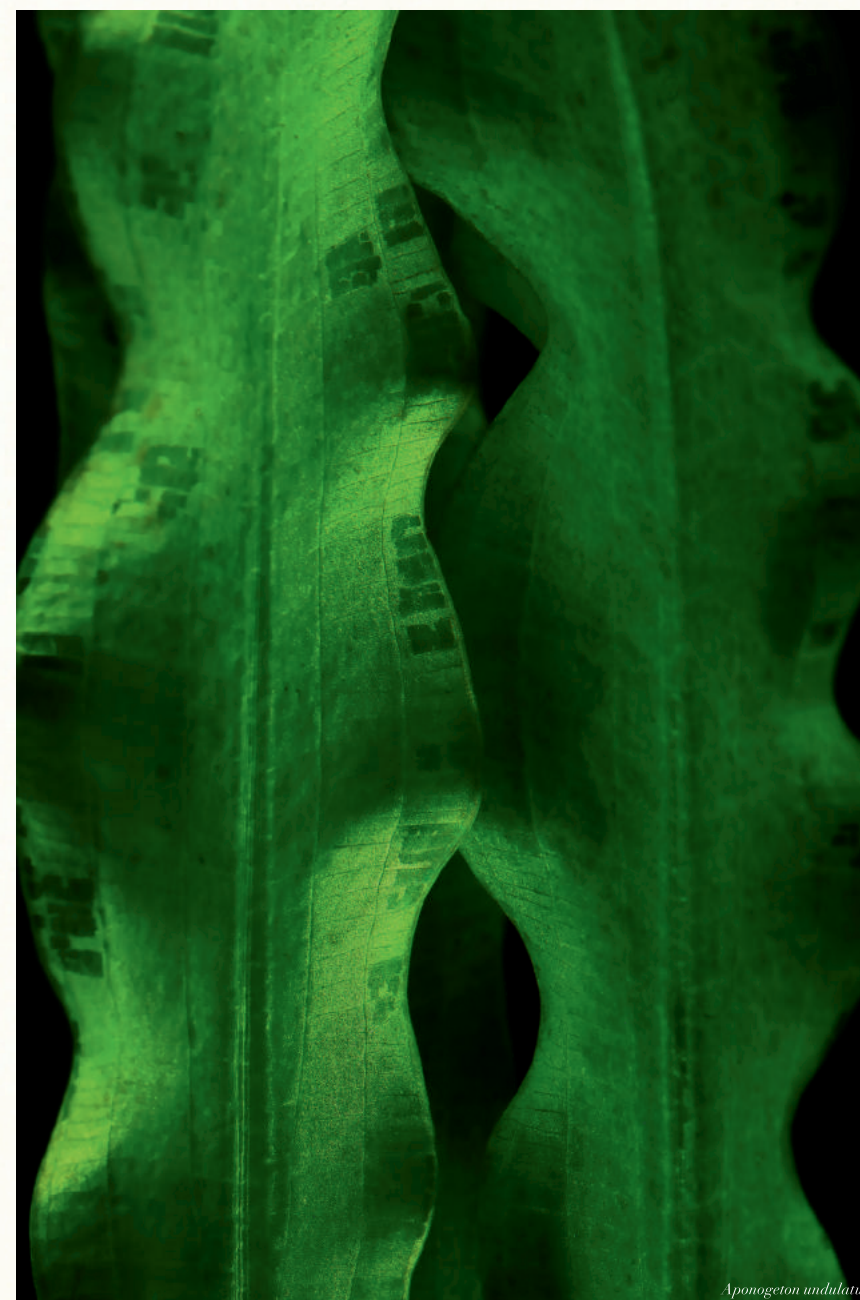


Wabi-Kusa Mat / *Taxiphyllum* sp. 'Peacock Moss'

Leaves grow densely on finely branched short stems. Since this light green moss grows upward, it creates a three-dimensional and voluminous bright green wall. Its clouded short leaves seem to prevent the leaf tips from getting dry.

## Plant Art Studio

Leaves of aquatic plants come in various shapes and colors. They are artistic creations of nature. This section explores the stunning beauty of aquatic plants.



*Aponogeron undulatus*

01

"Nature creates curved lines while humans create straight lines" – Hideki Yukawa\*

Curves hovering in an open space separated by straight lines. The heart that sees their vague outlines remains calm. We are attracted by the beauty of curved lines created by nature.

Photo / Yusuke Homma



\* Japanese theoretical physicist

This is the essay Takashi Amano wrote for his planted aquarium collection book *Glass no Naka no Daishizen (Nature Aquarium World)* published in 1992. It gives the opportunity to understand Amano's unique views of nature and his experience.

考  
[Amano's view]  
Nature Aquarium World

Nature at Arm's Length Photo&Text/ Takashi Amano



A certain American psychiatrist recommends watching guppies as a therapy for depression. Rather than taking some kind of medicine, the sight of the small yet vital guppy should pull the patient out of his or her dark shell. Not just depression and hypertension, but ulcers and all stress-related disorders that arise from the complexity of our lives are on the increase, even, most disturbingly, among grammar school children. When I see the damage these pressure cause, I cannot help but lose confidence in the social system.

Japan has become a great economic power, and a country where we have cultural freedom. We have come to want the good things in life, and we don't waste our time with low-quality products. We certainly are much richer economically than our ancestors in the Edo Era, but how about spiritually?

Though surrounded by sullied nature, the pet industry boomed in the Edo days, with much success gained in breeding quality dogs, birds, and goldfish. The Meiji writer, Yakumo Koizumi was impressed by the Edo merchants who built thriving businesses by specializing in sales of grasshoppers and crickets. That age's love of small creatures is impressive.

With this kind of past, Japanese people should have a special feeling for living in and with nature. As environmental destruction continues, I believe that more and more people will instinctively realize the need for coexistence with the natural world and will also want to have a bit of nature within arm's length.

*Nature Aquarium World* (TFH, 1992)

INFORMATION

# 天野尚

Takashi Amano

*A man who dedicated his life to creating aquascapes.*

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ギャラリーアモ  
TOKYO DOME CITY

2017.11.8 WED - 2018.1.14 SUN  
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