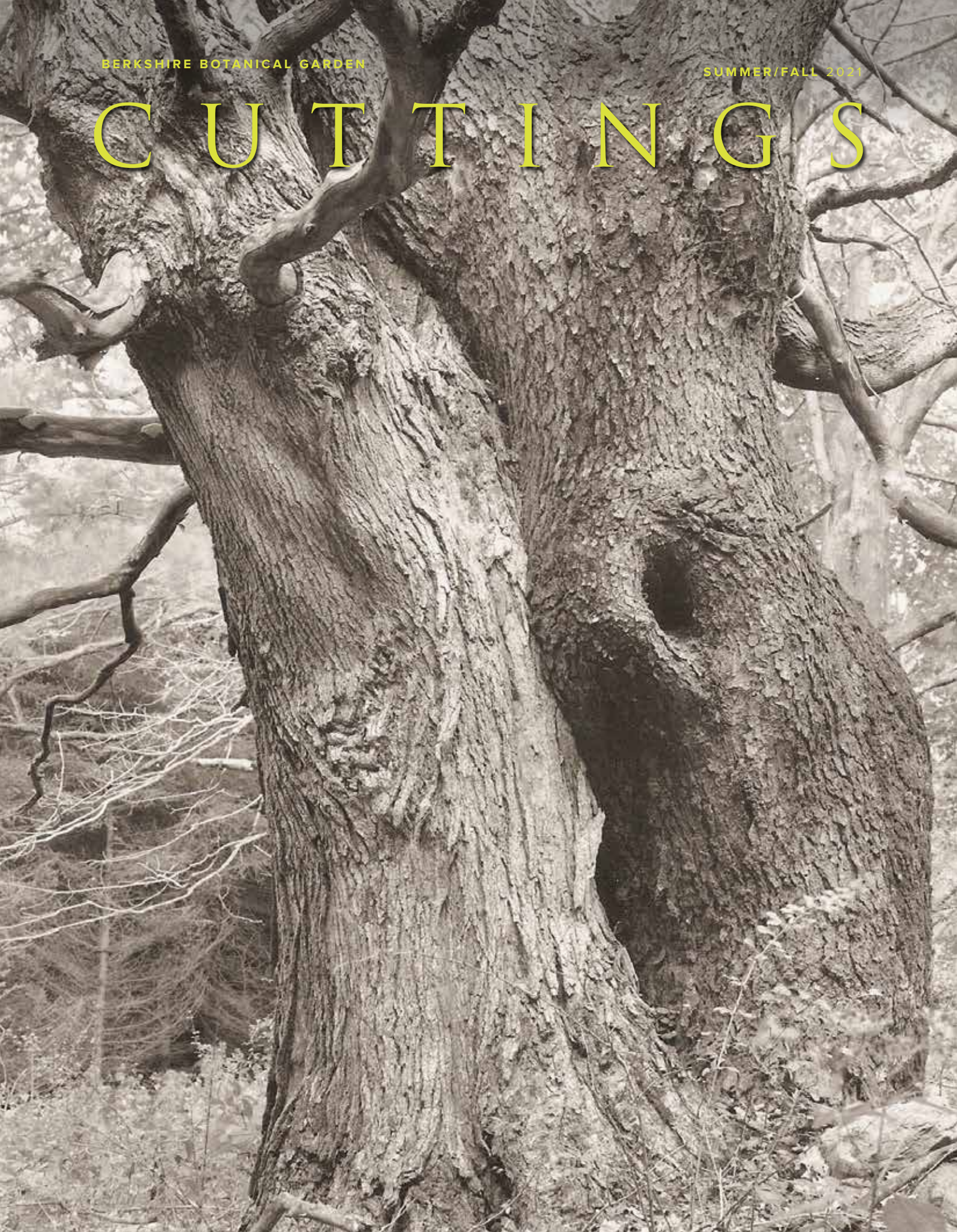
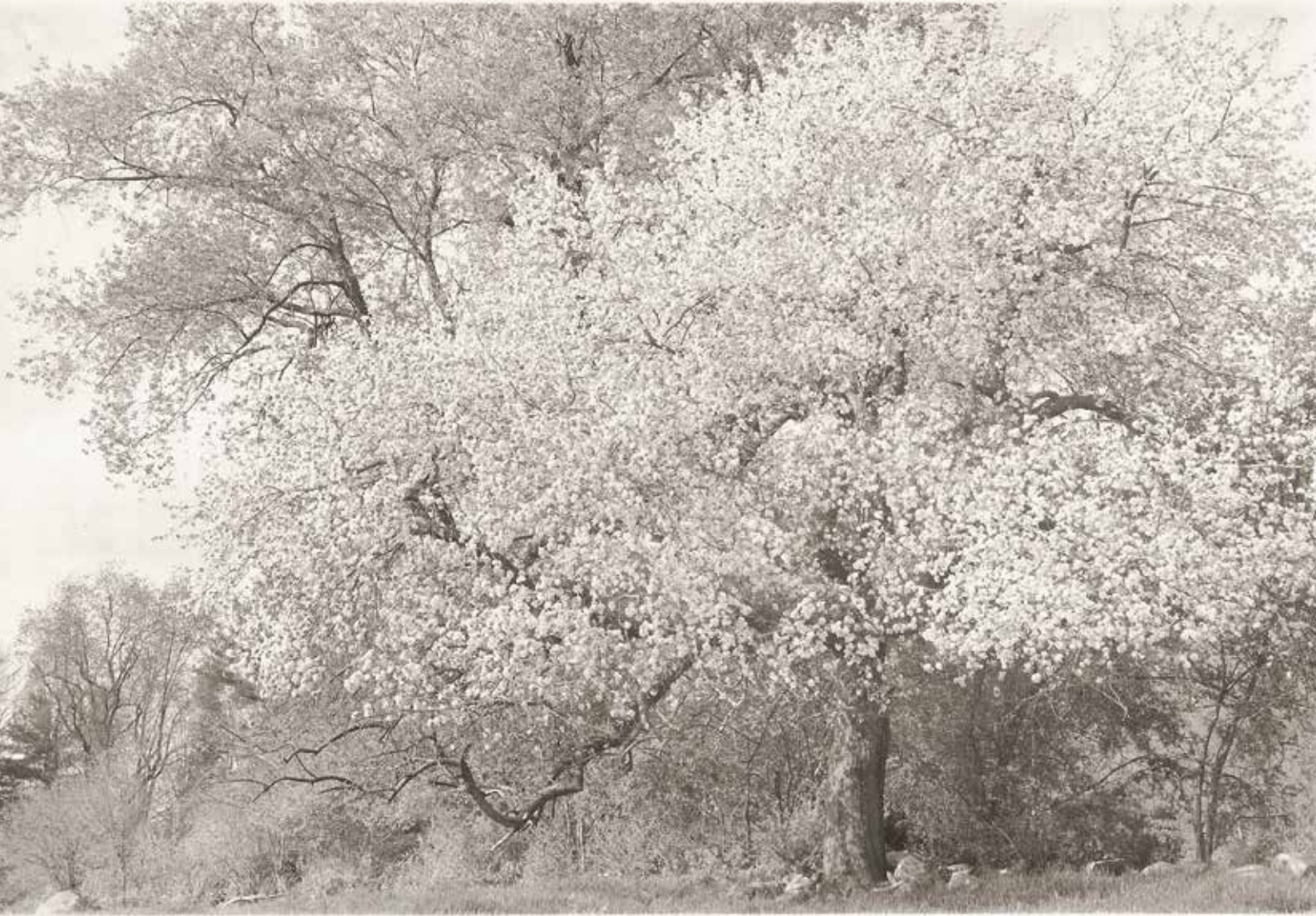


BERKSHIRE BOTANICAL GARDEN

SUMMER/FALL 2021

# CUTTINGS





# *Portraits of American Trees*

The Photographic Journey of Tom Zetterstrom

By Gillian Culff

Tom Zetterstrom has spent a lifetime communing with trees. As a child growing up on sixty acres of woodland in Canaan, Connecticut, he was surrounded by them. “We had two beautiful sugar maples in the yard that were very climbable trees,” he says; he and his sister Ingrid could often be found exploring their branches. Their father, an arborist, had planted many of the trees that still stand on the land. As a teenager, Tom went to work for his father, climbing, and pruning out diseased limbs. It was during this time that he “got well into the habit of looking at trees in the same way my father was always evaluating them.”

That inclination for observation would come to serve him well in his career as a photographer. Zetterstrom’s *Portraits of American Trees* will be featured in BBG’s Leonhardt Galleries from September 17 through October 31. These black and white silver gelatin prints often feature a single tree isolated from its background in portrait style.

Each print reflects hours or often days of effort: scouting the site, finding the tree that calls to him, waiting for just the right light, and afterward, hours in the darkroom using manual techniques to enhance or diminish certain details of the print. Describing some of the numerous variables, Zetterstrom explains, “There’s the choice of the film, the negative developer and choice of the paper. In all of those I tend toward softer, warmer tones.” Indeed, softness is a hallmark of his tree photos—so much so that some resemble graphite drawings.

In the photo titled “Horse Cove Ridge,” tall, dark trunks in the Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest of North Carolina stand out against the diminishing light of dusk. The long exposure evokes a breeze the viewer can almost feel. In many of the shots, fog, snow or mist set off the tree in an ethereal, dreamlike landscape. “Fog and snow are friends to the photographer,” says Zetterstrom. “They tend to isolate the subject and reduce background noise and



*Horse Cove Ridge, Joyce Kilmer Forest, NC 1994*

competing elements. A snow event is a reason to get out and shoot.”

Zetterstrom shoots with a medium format camera, which produces 6 x 9 cm negatives. With this type of camera, he uses four different viewfinders paired with four fixed lenses of different focal lengths. “I’m doing the framing in the field, and not in the darkroom. It’s a kind of practice of self-awareness when shooting. You want to get it right.” Nowadays, most photographers have moved over to

digital, which is something Zetterstrom uses for lectures. But his art is done with print film and darkroom processing. “Shooting film tends to discipline you,” he says, referring to the limitation of eight shots per roll of film. “You have to be more selective.”

“I’m looking for older trees that are well defined; I’m noticing, is something rising above the forest canopy? I’m drawn to a commanding presence of the tree in the environment, one that presents itself vividly. You have to search



Left: Photographer and Elm Watch founder Tom Zetterstrom with “the elm that started it all,” the Baldwin Hill Elm. His photographs of the tree in four seasons were acquired by the Library of Congress. The elm was adopted by the Haupt Tree Company, and the farm was preserved by the Berkshire Natural Resources Council. *Photo by Lisa Vollmer Photography, 2011.*

Below: *American Elm, Fall 1996*

for them, and when you spot them, they kind of step out.”

One such tree is called “Apple Blossom.” In it, a wild apple tree fills the foreground with spectacular white blossoms that burst against the feathery leaves of the trees behind. The overall effect is a softness in the blossoms and foliage—a hallmark of Zetterstrom’s technique. He spotted the tree on a hike in the Berkshires. “I’m standing on Monument Mountain,” he recalls, “and I see an apple tree in the distance, across the valley.” Wowed by its blossoms, he kept his eye on the tree as he made his way toward it. “I came down the mountain and wound my way until I found the tree.” He displays the photo, seemingly still awestruck by the beauty of the tree and his success in capturing it, saying, “You don’t see wild apple trees anymore.”

Zetterstrom’s interest in photography traces back to a Brownie camera he used to earn his photography merit badge in Boy Scouts, mostly photographing nature. Later, in high school, he won an award in the camera club’s exhibition for a photo titled “White Pine in Snow.” When he went off to Colorado College, he didn’t at first study art—he thought he’d major in botany—until, as he puts it, he was “seduced into the art department.” After studying sculpture and graduating as an art major, he went on to pursue graduate



studies at Pratt Institute. Subsequently, he was offered an opportunity to teach photography in the “inner-city” of Washington, DC as his Alternative Service. For two years he became a street photographer. Fifty years later, the Smithsonian Institution acquired that body of work for its Washington, DC museum in Anacostia, where it was installed from 2018-2020.

After his DC interlude, Zetterstrom returned home to Connecticut, moving into a cabin his father had built with logs from a pine forest he’d thinned. He lived there for the better part of ten years, during which time he had his first exhibition of

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—TOM ZETTERSTROM

*Portraits of Trees*, in Washington DC in 1979. Since then he has had 40 solo shows, over 40 group shows and his photographs have since been acquired by 43 museums nationally.

During those years, Zetterstrom was stirred by the growing force of environmentalism that was “sweeping the nation.” He began working as an environmental activist opposing the creation of the divided Super 7 highway through western New England. His slide lectures from Connecticut to Vermont helped defeat the proposal and indirectly spawned the creation of his other fine art landscape series, called the *Moving Point of View*. “There was a convergence,” he says, referring to environmental activism and his increasing interest in photographing trees and landscapes.

Zetterstrom photographed Egremont’s Baldwin Hill Elm through the 1990’s. His photographs of the elm in four seasons were acquired by the Library of Congress and the Boston Public Library. As he describes the course of events, “Thus the images of the tree were preserved. It then became obvious that the elm itself should be preserved.” In partnership with Tim Abbott of The Nature Conservancy, Zetterstrom founded Elm Watch with its “Adopt an Elm” program to protect elms from Dutch elm disease. Elm Watch, as a community forestry program, engaged 22 towns in the protection of their heritage elms, the state tree of Massachusetts. The National Arbor Day Foundation presented their Public Awareness of Trees Award to him in 2011 for his tree photography and his work as a tree preservationist, and in 2013 he received the Connecticut Urban Forest Council’s Award for Meritorious Service for his “efforts to educate and promote positive change regarding trees and plants.”

In conjunction with his gallery show, Zetterstrom will give three gallery talks and four environmental lectures under the heading, *Whose Woods These Are*. Tom adds, “*Portraits of American Trees* celebrates the beauty of trees, while embracing their wildness. Along with the talks, the show can deepen our reverence and may even teach us to become better stewards.”



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## Please join us for these gallery talks led by Tom Zetterstrom.

### ***Portraits of American Trees***

Notes on art, horticulture and forest habitat

Sunday, September 19, 1 – 2 p.m.

Sunday, October 10, 11 – 12 p.m.

Sunday, October 24, 11 – 12 p.m.

Since the 1970’s Tom Zetterstrom has photographed trees throughout the Northeast and from coast to coast. Learn more about seeing trees in black and white, and the art of tree photography.

### ***Whose Woods These Are***

Environmental lectures

Tom Zetterstrom’s photographic record from the pre-invasive era and his long perspective on northeast woodlands reveals a changing landscape impacted by species decline, alien plant invasion and forest collapse. In these talks he will describe projects in Connecticut and Massachusetts that have affected positive change to protect trees in natural and community forests.

*See education listings starting on page 18 for detailed information.*

Defeating Japanese Knotweed on the Wild and Scenic Housatonic  
**September 25, 10 – 11:00 a.m., Center House Classroom**

History and Preservation of the American Elm in New England  
**October 2, 3:30 – 5:00 p.m., Center House Classroom.**

Protecting Specimen Trees and Standing Forests from Asiatic Bittersweet  
**October 9, 11:00 a.m. lecture in the Center House classroom**

followed by an invasive identification and management workshop at noon.

Pruning Young Elms: Crown Structure Training to Promote Longevity  
**October 30, 10:00 a.m. – noon, lecture and pruning workshop, Education Center Classroom**

*See more information on page 23.*

## WHOSE WOODS THESE ARE

### ENVIRONMENTAL LECTURES PRESENTED BY TOM ZETTERSTROM

Exhibiting artist Tom Zetterstrom's photographic record from the pre-invasive era and his long perspective on northeast woodlands reveals a changing landscape impacted by species decline, alien plant invasion and forest collapse. In these talks, he will describe projects in Connecticut and Massachusetts that have effected positive change to protect trees in natural and community forests.

Defeating Japanese Knotweed on the Wild and Scenic Housatonic River

IN-PERSON AT BBG

**Saturday, September 25, 10 am – 11 am**

**Free Event**

This lecture illustrates cooperative efforts by the Housatonic Valley Association, Housatonic River Commission, and the Knotweed Network, to eradicate highly invasive knotweed thickets, and restore the rich diversity of native riparian ecosystems along the wild and scenic Housatonic in Northwest Connecticut.

History and Preservation of the American Elm in New England

IN-PERSON AT BBG

**Saturday, October 2, 3:30 – 5 pm**

**Members: \$10/Non-members: \$15**

In this talk, Tom Zetterstrom presents emblematic elms that defined New England villages and cities including the historic Pittsfield Elm, The Sheffield Elm, Canaan's Famous Elm, the Elm City of New Haven, and the contemporary Lanesborough Elm, Great Barrington Elm, Baldwin Hill Elm, etc. Since the advent of Dutch elm disease, efforts have evolved to preserve such surviving and notable trees. Tom's photos illustrate Elm Watch's efforts to preserve the Lanesborough Elm, Great Barrington Elm and Baldwin Hill Elm.

Protecting Specimen Trees and Standing Forests from Asiatic Bittersweet

IN-PERSON AT BBG

**Saturday, October 9, 11 am – 1 pm**

**Members: \$10/Non-members: \$15**

Bittersweet, the tree-killing vine, can undo a century of forest succession in a generation by encapsulating and collapsing trees, resulting in dramatic reduction of carbon sequestration and ecosystem services. Learn how land trusts, parks and campuses are efficiently and effectively defeating invasive vines and shrubs, and restoring inherent beauty and balance to natural areas. The lecture will be followed by a hands-on field demonstration of cut-and-treat as well as additional control methods.

Pruning Young Elms: Crown Structure Training to Promote Longevity

IN-PERSON AT BBG

**Saturday, October 30, 2021 10 am – 12 pm**

**Members: \$20/Non-members: \$35**

Tom Zetterstrom was a major contributor of photographs and text for the widely respected *Pruning Young Elms* manual published by the University of Minnesota in 2009. He has lectured on elm pruning throughout the Northeast. This lecture and pruning workshop is designed for arborists, tree wardens, arboretum directors and staff and nursery and landscape professionals, and will provide Continuing Education Units. A hands-on pruning workshop by arborist **Kieran Yapple** of Race Mountain Tree Services, will follow the talk. Kieran will prune the Berkshire Botanical Garden's Princeton American elm, which was planted in 2003.

Tom Zetterstrom, *Coast Oak*, 1991