

Weaving many strands

Putting 'our faces in our places' is the aim of a new design framework that will allow Māori design culture to be woven into strong cultural landscapes.

By Desna Whaanga-Schollum

Māori are committed to working towards reinstating and developing a physical and metaphysical understanding of cultural landscape within contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand. In January 2007 a set of guiding principles – the Te Aranga Principles – was developed by Māori professionals and supporters spanning many areas of design, arts, health, education, local and central government. The principles assert that “the development and articulation of the Māori cultural landscape will contribute to the health and well-being of all who reside in and visit Aotearoa – through realising our unique Aotearoa and Pacific identity.”

The Te Aranga Principles articulate a mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) view of the cultural landscape as a holistic environment that informs and sculpts our identities:

“As Māori we have a unique sense of our 'landscape'. It includes past, present and future.

It includes both physical and spiritual dimensions.

It is how we express ourselves in our environment.

It connects whānau and whenua, flora and fauna, through whakapapa.

It does not disconnect urban from rural.

It transcends the boundaries of 'land' into other 'scapes': rivers, lakes, ocean and sky.

It is enshrined in our whakapapa, pepeha [tribal saying], tauparapara [incantation to begin a speech], whaikōrero [a formal speech], karakia [ritual chants], waiata [song, chant], tikanga [correct procedure, custom, lore, method], ngā kōrero a kui ma, a koroua ma [the words of our elders] and our mahi toi [art and architecture].

It is not just where we live – it is who we are!”

A few months after the promulgation of the Te Aranga Principles a hui (gathering) convened at Apumoana Marae in Rotorua titled 'Designing Māori Futures'. The hui's purpose was the establishment of a Society of Māori Design Professionals as a vehicle to carry forward the Te Aranga Principles. The outcome of the hui, which was supported by the tertiary education provider Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, was the formation of Ngā Aho, Māori Design Professionals Incorporated Society.

'Ngā Aho', a name originally provided by kaumātua (respected elder) Haare Williams, translates as 'the many strands'. It suggests the weaving together of the many strands of Māori design culture: strategy,



01. Te Uru Taumatua, a new centre of governance and a meeting place for the Tūhoe people in Te Urewera National Park, in the central North Island. The Tūhoe iwi was adamant the new development fully aligns with the tribe's inherent connection to the land – mana tangata. The building, designed by Jasmx, is made of Te Urewera materials – native timber from Te Urewera, pine from Kaingaroa, clay from the region – and made by Tūhoe hands. Photo courtesy of Arrow International.

planning, architecture, landscape architecture, visual communications, product design and education. In essence, Ngā Aho creates a multi-disciplinary professional platform to progress complex cultural issues which span economic, social and ecological concerns. This approach seeks to support wider Māori identity aspirations in an Aotearoa where we can clearly see 'our faces in our places'.

Ngā Aho sits alongside other mainstream design professional associations such as the New Zealand Institute of Architects, Designers Institute of New Zealand, New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects and the New Zealand Planning Institute to support the needs of Māori design professionals and their Māori client bases. Central to this position is actively maintaining reciprocal relationships with Māori communities and therefore providing responsive and skilled support.

Ngā Aho is based on Māori principles while offering technical and analytical professional experience to stakeholders who are whānau (family), hapū (sub

tribe), iwi (tribe) and mātāwaka (pan tribal) organisations. Māori design within Ngā Aho is framed as applied research with the stakeholders' participation and evaluation being core to further development of appropriate professional tools.

Ngā Aho also promotes the development of policy and structural industry approaches leading to the regenerative presence of Māori culture in the designed landscapes of Aotearoa. Seen through capacity building of Māori design practitioners, in collaboration with their communities, this central principle of community connection within the Te Aranga Principles is termed 'mana'. So, Ngā Aho provides "a platform for working relationships where mana whenua values, world views, tikanga, cultural narratives and visual identity can be appropriately expressed in the design environment." This tikanga-based approach to Māori design for Ngā Aho was seeded in conversations with Arnold Wilson, a kaumātua of Māori art and design in Aotearoa.

The ability for design discourse to be open-ended,

and therefore continually evolving as suited to context, is a frequent request from Māori communities. This is particularly relevant when forming contemporary agreements such as a memorandum of understanding, strategic partnerships, and resource co-management agreements, and is reflected in the contemporary application of Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi).

It is important to understand that agreements are regarded as guidance frameworks rather than prescriptions. All iwi are different, as are all projects. Knowledge is built from collecting and communicating learning from successive projects, rather than from a set 'traditional' approach. Cultural approaches, if seen in this light, can be given the room to be dynamic and globally connected.

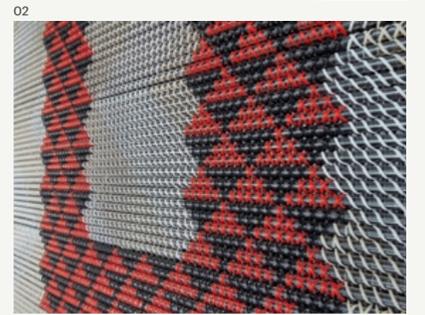
This approach to tikanga Māori is recognised in the Treaty. The principle of 'development', the New Zealand Law Commission stated in 2001, "recognises that culture is not static. The integrity of tikanga Māori is not threatened; rather, it is enhanced by its ability to adapt and evolve as society changes."

Committing time to defining collectively agreed upon principles at the outset of each project is an essential step towards ensuring bicultural outcomes with integrity. The agreement to a dynamic discussion and place-making approach between those who are more mobile in their occupation patterns and indigenous communities supports the progression of a built environment without the eradication of distinctive place traits. The collaboration of the two understandings of place brings exciting new opportunities for design growth, both in process and outcome.

In 2012 Ngā Aho partnered with the Designers Institute of New Zealand and introduced a new Ngā Aho Award to the annual Best Design Awards. Designers submitting work for the Ngā Aho Award have commented on their growth of understanding in projects which have pursued solid cultural connection with iwi/Māori via relationship development and 'co-design' process. This is described in the award parameters as "designers and clients working effectively Kanohi ki te Kanohi – Pakahiwi ki te Pakahiwi, face to face and shoulder to shoulder, exhibiting trust, respect and rapport."

This is a significant shift in mind-set for the New Zealand design industry, both in championing an Aotearoa New Zealand design vernacular, and encouraging designers to challenge the commonly held assumption that the 'designer knows best' within a project. The co-design proposition opens up communication and value channels that support genuine dialogue and respect for each party's needs within a project, creating new opportunities for unexpected outcomes or solutions to design problems.

At the forefront of design development in Māori cultural landscapes is a steadily growing body of work focusing on the articulation of Māori values and methodologies that illustrate respectful, reciprocal relationships. The Te Aranga Principles have been formally adopted by Auckland Council in the *Auckland Design Manual* and are now becoming visible in collaborative Māori design processes around the country. Ngā Aho is moving cultural and social objectives for Māori forward and enabling design professional associations to help envision a future Aotearoa New Zealand.



02 & 03. Contemporary tukutuku panel work, designed by Alt Group and Ngāti Pāoa, Ngāti Whātua, Ngāti Tai Ki Tāmaki, at Te Oro, a new arts and music facility in Glen Innes, Auckland. Tukutuku panels – a type of woven latticework – are traditionally used to decorate Māori whare nui (meeting houses). Photos courtesy of Alt Group.

04. Wooden block letters and carving tools developed for Tourism New Zealand's Pure Pākati branding campaign. The typeface was designed by Phil Kelly, Rangī Kipa, Karl Wixon and Kris Sowersby. 05. Spread from the catalogue for Lisa Reihana's exhibition, *In Pursuit of Venus*, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2015. Lisa Reihana will be New Zealand's artist at the 57th Venice Art Biennale in 2017.

