Where Karakia: Maori Church Building, Decoration and Ritual in Aotearoa New Zealand, 1834-1863 by Richard Sundt

Richard Sundt’s Where Karakia: Maori Church Building, Decoration and Ritual in Aotearoa New Zealand, 1834-1863 is part of a recent flourish of scholarship regarding Maori architecture. Last year, Deidre Brown’s book Maori Architecture gave a general study of the subject, but here Sundt focuses exclusively on Maori church building that took place during the Anglican mission. He proposes that in the early-to-mid 19th century Maori were encouraged by missionaries to build churches and they did so by reportedly transforming their whare (house) to whare karakia (house of prayer) to wharenui (meeting house).

The transformation at the heart of the book recalls a number of the subtexts to Brown’s work – the leading role of public building in Maori architecture, the complex relations between large public buildings and smaller dwellings, and the dominance of the private house as the key artifact of the local architectural canon. In addition, Sundt identifies one of the challenging spatial qualities of Maori architecture – monumentality. The transformation from whare to whare karakia is a story about making big buildings that could house up to one thousand worshippers. Sundt’s description of the “monumental whare-style” presents a challenge to local assumptions about architecture, as monumentality is a quality more readily associated with our landscapes than with the buildings we put in them. For a profession with a soft spot for the small house, this history of the large public buildings in our midst proves an unsettling read and perhaps goes someway towards explaining the under-appreciation of Maori architecture in the local discourse. Both Brown and Sundt demonstrate that the qualities and concerns of Maori architecture are different to those which have historically defined the profession.

One should not let the above discussion lead to misunderstandings about Where Karakia’s contents, for the book makes no mention of these domestic peregrinations. Sundt is Associate Professor of Art History at the University of Oregon and is therefore removed from our local neuroses. And as a specialist in the subjects of Medieval, Ancient and Pacific architecture he clearly wields a sharp pencil that focuses his studies and prevents such wanderings. Indeed, Sundt’s focus is reflected in Whare Karakia’s pointed concentration on the years 1834-1863, the later representing a point of decline in church membership, something Sundt puts down to “social and religious upheavals spawned by the last of the New Zealand Wars”.

The sharp focus on three decades benefits the author by allowing him to craft a story of transformation, carefully tracing the course Maori took towards monumentality, and observing how they resolved the structural and construction problems associated with enclosing a big room while navigating the missionary’s expectations for proper liturgical space. Sundt says his aim was to provide a detailed examination and evaluation of the technological process that aided the emergence of the monumental style church. Indeed, he maintains a largely technical focus, concentrating on the construction lessons Maori learnt at the missions, and observing the ways in which these were combined with indigenous knowledge to enclose large space. But whilst the sharp focus permits a close commentary on matters like the ways Maori overcame problems of deflection in ever increasing rafter spans, it also raises concern that the transformation Sundt identifies is itself a condition of his limited view.

Significant architectural change tends to be sporadic; marked by a period of upheaval followed by a lull. Take the New Architecture of the 1920s, which represented a moment of change the likes of which some historians predict we will never see again. Following the upheaval, things settled down for a long time as architectural change became very refined. For example, it has been said that you could show most people a picture of a Frank Lloyd Wright house and they will likely think it a contemporary building were it not for the vintage car parked out front - not bad for buildings approaching their centenary and a sign of architecture’s small evolutionary steps when compared to other arts and sciences. Given this slow passage, if one goes looking for architectural change over a short period, one is likely to be looking for very refined things. Similarly, if one likes the idea of architecture changing through refined transformation, than one should study architecture for only a brief period – such as Sundt’s three decades. Transformation, one could also argue, is the kind of change that appeals to a scholarly mind that likes to carefully (and with admirable reverence) pick through the evidence and pull to pieces the logic of building and structure. There is, therefore, a sense that this study of the Maori churches is coloured by a historical mind that considers technical transformation to be the proper way for architecture, in general, to develop. This perspective perhaps encouraged the book’s focus.

These observations should not diminish Sundt’s efforts, for he has a passion for our indigenous buildings and the book offers many insights into the challenges faced by Maori as they moved towards bigness. But some observations reveal the limits to the historical method, for example his repeated assertion that cost was one of the reasons why the missionaries acquiesced to whare-style churches – “Financially, the expense of constructing huge European-style churches was not a...
Whare Karakia

Continued from p.1...

realistic option. This made accepting the whare-style church an attractive alternative to the missionary establishment – with the benefit of obtaining larger spaces at lesser cost...” There is undoubtedly a degree of truth to this observation, but it is a sharply focused truth. Spend time with a QS and one quickly learns that statements like “it costs too much!” are often a front for more complex judgments of value and taste. Statements of cost are inconsequential without a broader context. This is, after all, what the whole process of evaluating tenders is about. Find a good price and one tries to understand why it is good; what is the motive behind the money? Isn’t it possible that Maori – keen for particular reasons on the whare style – came to the missionary table with a tender too good to refuse; a tender that cast a shadow over the European offers? This is speculation and Sundt has obviously read all the books, but his reasoning seems to sever some of the complexities of the whare karakia debate. His use of cost is a clinical evaluation that clears a way for a theory of transformation that turns around technology, but it is reasoning that feels a bit thin in places.

In other areas though, Sundt’s favoured technical view leads directly to the complexities of architectural and cultural transformation, such as with his discussion of the ‘middle pole problem’. As a general model, Sundt describes the whare as “a building with the roof carried by a ridgepole supported at each end by a wall post, and often one or more free-standing uprights placed between the end posts.” This line of free-standing uprights marching down the centre of the whare was at odds with the dominant European model of sacred space. Sundt dates this back to the times of Constantine where Roman decree required the ecclesiastical interior be designed to “leave the central longitudinal axis, the linear nexus along which ritual unfolds, free from architectural obstructions.” The monumental whare style was therefore, for some missionaries, at odds with this requirement. Its middle poles were an impediment both in visual terms – they blocked the view of the altar – and in physical terms – they impeded processions. In other areas, Sundt’s technical view leads directly to cost. It costs too much and there is no alternative to the missionary establishment – with the benefit of obtaining larger spaces at lesser cost...”

Behind Glass Boxes with Jerome Partington & Hugh Byrd, NZIA Environmental Policy

November 8: Home Star Residential Rating Tool officially launched in Wellington by Hon. Maurice Williamson MP. For technical involvement/briefing contact residential@nzgbc.org.nz or www.homestar.org.nz.

November 9: Wastewater Recycling & How Different Sustainable Systems Work. Craig Brown’s informative talk will cover how historic approaches are unsustainable, followed by the principles and challenges of growing array of systems for domestic wastewater, greywater recycling, and roof water capture and treatment. www.cbconsult.co.nz

NZIA Environmental Policy: The Environmental Group, while negotiable on delivery dates, helping with delivery of the policy and minor formatting adjustments, as per last Council meeting feedback, were not happy to endorse the latest revised policy which in their view was a lengthy and weakened version. Further refinements in progress.

DBH-B2 Timber Treatment Consultation: Priority needs to be given to advocating for more durable, preferably local, tree species with independent credible 3rd party sustainable endorsement (e.g. FSC) that, preferably, do not require timber treatment at all. Third International Holcim Sustainable Construction Awards: Entries now open until March 23rd, 2011 to showcase sustainable responses to technological, environmental, socioeconomic and cultural issues with contemporary building and construction. Projects are eligible for the competition if they have reached an advanced stage of design or construction (or in the case of materials, products and construction technologies) must not have started before July 1st, 2010. www.holcimfoundation.org
UNITEC STUDENT REPORT: Rachel Dawkins & Stu Penno
The year is almost complete for Unitec students. Bachelor students have completed their exam week and now have a final week of compiling portfolios and handing in last submissions. Masters students have also finished up the year with final presentations held from the 26th October to the 3rd November. The middle of October saw Unitec undertaking its five yearly internal BAS review. The visiting review panel provided an opportunity for students to discuss their program and discuss any concerns that were had. It proved to be a valuable time for those who attended. Final crits were completed on the week ending Thursday the 21st of October. A BBQ was held for all staff and students to celebrate with everyone having a great time winding down together. An end of year party is to be held on the 11th November for all final year BArch and MANch students to celebrate their studies. Preparations now turn to Unitec’s annual Grad Show, which will run from the 24th to the 27th of November. The Landscape, Visual Design and Architecture schools will open their doors with the opening party beginning on Wednesday the 24th at 5.30pm. For more information please visit http://www.unitec.ac.nz/gradshow/gradshow2010.html. The Architecture School’s prize giving will also coincide with the opening party.

HERITAGE PORTFOLIO: Adam Wilo
Proposed NZHPT Registration of Queen’s Wharf: In accordance with the letter received from the NZHPT seeking support for their proposal to register Queen’s Wharf and Shed 10. Discussion of the Committee will consider this proposal further.

Revised ICOMOS Charter: The revised ICOMOS Charter and a link to ICOMOS New Zealand can now be found on the NZIA website. Discussions with the NZILA has forged links along heritage lines through shared interest in the revised ICOMOS Charter. Developing out of this discussion are further links with the Urban Design Forum as a means of developing closer interdisciplinary ties.

MAORI BUSINESS STRATEGY NETWORK (C4C): Kiri Reihana
“Maori in Influential Positions” - vision for the future: Auckland Museum hosted a meeting on the 12th of October. Antoine Coffin spoke about the museums vision for developing “Maori partnerships” and the ideas the museum is currently embracing for future strategies. The present exhibition of ‘Kai te Pai’ explores Auckland through the lens of food; production, consumption and as a recreational pastime. Core concepts in the “Fuel, Feast, Fashion and the Future” exhibitions were developed around ideas from a European and Maori perspective on the history of Auckland and past events. The second speaker, Professor Paul Moon from AUT, spoke on “Maori employment in the private sector”. He spoke up 15% of the national population yet this is not reflected in private sector Maori employment statistics. The Maori population is expected to grow to 20% in the regions over the next couple of decades. Prof Moon described the implications and challenges ahead for the private sector in successfully embracing this growth. A multi dimensional approach is necessary, where no one group is excluded by the private sector to embrace future expansion and efforts to shift perceptions across the business sectors will be duly rewarded.

UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND REPORT: Uwe Rieger
From October 8th-10th, the School of Architecture and Planning has successfully hosted the international Interstices Under Construction Symposium on the theme of Unsettled Containers. The Skyrise City event was held on October 16th as part of the Auckland Architecture Week 2010. The event presenting 40 installations by 2 groups of architecture students from around the world involved. The city hosting the exhibition was Auckland. The School of Architecture and Planning will host The Fifth Australasian Housing Researchers Conference. Under the tile of ‘In Production’, the School will exhibit a cross section of student work on November 20th and 21st.

UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND STUDENT REPORT: Aishwarya Barad & Jordan Saunders
The University year is coming to a close, with the final critiques having taken place at the end of October. There will be an exhibition of selected work within the NICAI Creative Showcase from the 13th until the 21st of November at the Gus Fisher Gallery. There is an exhibition of Architecture students’ work, from 2010 opening on the 20th of November, which will be in the exhibition space. The final year students have started to turn in their completed theses. The four students to go forward for the travel prize have been selected. The Skyrise event for the second year’s one-to-one scale projects went well. Four students have received Summer Scholarship grants to undertake architectural research over the summer. Their topics range from domestic investigation, architectural representation and sustainable design.

EVENTS PORTFOLIO: Andrea Bell
October was an action packed month with Fast Forward, Future Proof and Architecture Week. All the events at Architecture Week were well attended and seemed to run smoothly and we had great feedback about the Kevin Low lecture. The Charette had seven teams competing, with the Jasmax team taking out the top prize. Skyrise City was spectacular although it was felt that it was a little hidden away and next year it would be great for it to have a more prominent place within the city so that more of the public can get involved. Thank you to everyone who helped out. We have started thinking about next year’s events and Architecture Week and the Events Committee will have a meeting before the end of the year to start to get things moving. Any ideas please let us know.

PRACTICE ISSUES GROUP: John Anderson & Richard Goldie
After a slow, almost wallowing start, the PIG has hosted two events last month, both of which are significant, one, the important and ongoing issue of limiting your liability in the context of partial services, and an issue much discussed and now likely to arise, peer review and self certification, read on… (clearly the volume of useful info below questions just how it is that ‘Issues Groups’ get the word of their mostly valuable work out there? Without recognition by National Office this is an obvious waste

CTTE FOR AUCKLAND / FUTURE AUCKLAND LEADERS: Marianne Riley
Manukau Institute of Technology hosted the FAL this month. Stuart Middleton gave an excellent and entertaining presentation outlining the failure of the current education system which focuses on achieving school leaving qualifications prior to tertiary and poly technical training. The loss of traditional vocational training, disengagement by students leading to truancy and dropping out means many South Auckland students are exiting the system with no school or work qualifications. MIT has developed a secondary school within MIT that has been focused on gaining school and work qualifications. Its success is evident with students who were failing at ages 13 -15 passing and achieving work based training. Auckland District Health Board also hosted the FAL group. Garry Smith, CEO spoke about his career journey and about working with honesty and integrity. Denis Jury spoke around the challenges of health care, and Michael Shepherd spoke about NZ’s poor record at preventing injuries to children. Education around using booster seats for 5-10 year olds, better home assistance were two key initiatives that were highlighted.

The group has been preparing project ideas for next year. So far the group has 53 ideas that will be narrowed down to ten to go forward to a dragon’s den in December.

AUCKLAND COUNCIL LIAISON: Christina van Bohemen
Streamlined consent process: The pilot for the Western Bays projects has been established. Auckland Council (Ian Smallburn and Hayes Perkins) held a meeting to brief a group of architects on the background to the streamlined consent process, outline council objectives and to present a draft template that streamlined consent applications must follow. A small number of architects registered their interest based on imminent resource consent applications in the Western Bays Area. The pilot will run until early next year and may be expanded if more projects are required to give a good feedback loop. It was agreed that this is a good opportunity for architects and council planners to work out an effective process from both points of view.

Urban Design Panel: There was a meeting at AC last week for member of both the Auckland City and Manukau City Urban Design panelist. This was arranged by David Mead (Hill Young Cooper) and Ludo Campbell Reid. It was an opportunity to reflect on the achievements and effectiveness of the panelist process to date. John McKay (Boffa Miskell) reported on a study undertaken to follow the council monitoring process of projects after they have

Continued on p.4...
Dash Dot

Pip Cheshire Reflects on a Growing Design Trend

I know I can’t be alone in observing the fashion for hit and miss wall cladding on the city’s larger buildings. You know, those syncopated arrangements of solid and glazed wall panels that are enlivening facades around town? I think the first I saw was the Jasmax/Bligh Voller Nield Sovereign House on Smales Farm where infrequently placed chinks of southern light penetrated the superbly intense interior; it seemed like a good idea, deemphasising the surrounding suburban landscape in favour of that inner hive. It then popped up a little later with the first drawings of the Peddle Thorpe/JPW buildings for Westpac at Britomart. Architect Richard Johnson graciously acknowledged the debt to Rafael Moneo’s City Hall at Murcia, and it seemed at the time a plausible response to the need to balance the contemporary office desire for glass walls with a masonry neighbourhood.

Then around the corner Warren and Mahoney/Woods Bagot got into the same thing on the side of the Deloitte building and I thought there was a plot, a takeover. Lest those in southern climes relax secure in the measured common sense of a less frantic pace, I urge a closer inspection of Warren and Mahoney’s new research building and gymnasium for Otago University – the pattern is there for all to see.

And as the paranoia of being on the outside of an in-group took hold, I wondered if we could somehow decode these unequal bars of light and dark - might we correlate hit and miss with a keyboard’s greater and lesser scales and hear the message concealed within? And, if so, what might it be that joins this assembly – Advance Australia Fair? Waltzing Matilda?

As the paranoia grows I see them everywhere, those dot dot dash dot dash Morse messages and wonder now with alarm, what are we to make of the new Telecom building in Victoria Street? Is Architectus signalling a move of head office across the Tasman to don the green and gold?

The Fine Print

Continued from p.3...

been through the panel. It is evident that Council needs to work on more effective monitoring at critical stages in a project and for the system to be able to track the direction a project takes from the urban design panel review until completion. Roger Blakeley was introduced to the group and he outlined the process underway for the spatial plan. AC has requested another session to explore what or how the urban design review process could assist the spatial plan. There is more discussion to follow on this.

John Hunt organised another meeting with Roger Blakeley (Chief Planning Officer), Ludo Campbell Reid (Environmental Strategy and Policy Manager) and Tim Watts (Built Environment Manager - ESP) that was attended by representatives of the design disciplines on the panel and the property council. I attended as the NZIA representative. The intention was to brief Roger Blakeley on the background to the Panel’s establishment, and to brief him on the input and support of the member groups. There is support for the continuation of the panel at officer level. Roger Blakeley will take a report prepared by LCR, to the new council seeking support for its continuation. It was agreed that all member bodies would write to LDC confirming their belief in the value of the panel and to express support for an independent urban design review panel.

iPhone Drawing Competition Winner


Thanks to all those who entered. We received an overwhelming number of entries and judging a single winner was a tough task for the Block team. ‘Chapel near Orakei’ (pictured above left) was selected as the overall winner for its textured linework, expressive colour and composition. Congratulations to Daniel Jun who will receive a return airfare to Sydney, two nights accommodation and a $100 iTunes store voucher. Despite failure to comply with competition rules on the grounds of not being an Auckland building, a consolation prize of Tracy Kidder’s, The Soul of a New Machine and a $50 iTunes store voucher go to Walter Lego for his flattering portrait of Block editor Nat Cheshire.
Blocks’s
Handy Christmas Gift Guide

Christmas can be a painful time for professionals used to making careful decisions about the things that appear in any given space. BLOCK comes to the rescue with Yuletide recommendations for every price point. Circle the item(s) you want and leave this page where your loved ones will find it.

1. Toilet
   From Oxfam Unwrapped
   $50

   For your paltry remaining clients grimly hanging on to their dreams of an architecturally-designed masterpiece worthy of a full-colour mortgagee sale ad in the local Property Press, isn’t another bottle of booze just adding to their mounting alcohol dependence? Oxfam has for several years run an alternative gift range called Oxfam Unwrapped. Amongst a veritable barnyard of gifts is this architectural gem - a good ol’ outhouse. Where there is no toilet, there is cholera, typhoid and other un-Christmas-like nasties. And nowhere to dispense of that tepid prawn skewer you know you didn’t need but just had to have. At fifty bucks, a steal.
   www.oxfamunwrapped.org.nz

2. Brushes
   From the Apple App Store
   $6.49

   When you think about it, David Hockney is the perfect face of iPhone art. Silvered haired, a little rounded, previously famous but invisible for a while - if he can do it then so can we, right? Hockney writes fondly of the speed of digital draughting, and the simple directness and democracy of making work for computer printing on a machine that anyone can have. The work has made it to the Tate and the Royal Academy, and with this fine app in your hands, so can yours!
   www.brushesapp.com

3. Architecture Sucks T-Shirt
   From Archinect
   $25.00 USD

   I had a friend at architecture school who was most ambivalent about the practice, but no less brilliant. A few years later I shipped her this T-shirt and it became a firm favourite. Send them to your embittered clients, as a make-up gift, or to your lonely better halves, for the same reason. While you’re there, check out the Autocad hatch tees - we always liked the wood one, it drove the CAD managers insane with its memory-hungry splines.
   www.archinect.com/tshirts

4. The new Citroen DS3
   From your local dealer
   $37,990

   Citroens have long been the car of choice for architects - odd looking, expensive, fetching in black, cranky and deeply unreliable, they suit us to a tee. The DS was the archetype, lovingly referred to as the goddess. The new Citroen DS3 betrays its memory and presents us with what Top gear describes as “…a seriously good little car. Stylish, spacious, fun to drive and well built.” Those French Bastards.
   www.citroen.co.nz

5. iPad
   16GB, Wifi Model
   From your local merchant
   $814

   For goodness sake, what are you, living in the Ice Ages? Your Brushes drawings will look so much better at this scale. Someone called Dodo is making covers for them that look like Moleskines. They’re black. You like black. Your summer intern already has one. They’re cheaper than a real computer. They’re so cheap you can afford to pay someone else to do the stuff you used to do on a real computer. What’s a computer? Get one already.
   http://store.apple.com

6. Piece of Shed 11
   POA from Jasmax

   We could only write a short blurb for this one - the wounds from that most retarded of competitions are still healing. If we all buy a piece, maybe we can stick it back together again afterwards?
   www.jasmax.com
Enough of those lazy afternoons ensconced on the sofa with a racy romance novel concealed inside the dust jacket of a racy detective novel. Holidays are for serious research, and BLOCK comes to your intellectual rescue with Yuletide recommendations for the wistful modernist, the oh-so-sensitive culturally-aware and green-star accredited regionalist, as well as those of you who just like a good perve through other people’s curtains. Support your burgeoning local press!

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