

For much of New Zealand's history, the government had an architecture office. The person who headed the office was variously titled; he – yes, always he – was the Colonial Architect in the 19th century, the Government Architect in the first half of the 20th century, and the Chief Architect in the twilight of the role in the 1980s. The bureaucratic home of the office went under different names also; the Public Works Department became the Ministry of Works, which became the Ministry of Works and Development, and then finally the sad shadow that was Works Consultancy Services.

The government architect's office offered advice to ministers and ministries, but for most of its history that office just got on with the core job of designing buildings. It existed for the same reason the Public Works Department existed: in a settler society in which a state was being grown from scratch there was a great deal of infrastructure to build, and if the government didn't build it, it wouldn't get built. The government didn't merely commission works; it also had to develop the capacity to get work done. That included employing the people who designed and constructed the nation's parliament and courts, schools and prisons, police and railway stations, bridges and dams and what we now call social housing.

New Zealand's ideological volte-face in the mid-1980s meant the end of many departments and offices that had been responsible for the country's physical infrastructure. Among the casualties of privatisation were the government architect's office and its parent department. The government has been without high-level in-house architectural advice for 40 years.

Does this matter? Recent events suggest it does. The post-earthquake reconstruction of Christchurch has been a hugely expensive exercise, significantly funded or underwritten by the state. Early on, central government took control of reconstruction planning. Its processes were opaque and there was no locus in the government bureaucracy for high-level design or architectural advice. Recognising this, the Institute of Architects appointed its then-President, Ian Athfield, as 'Architectural Ambassador' to Christchurch. The gesture was well-intentioned but ill-advised: Christchurch is a city with a strong architectural tradition, not some barbarian realm in need of enlightenment by an emissary from the world of Architecture. What

was needed, as has become evident, was influential design advocacy within the system, not exhortations from the sidelines.

Latterly, an ambitious and interventionist



# Does the Government need an Architect?

John Walsh

government has been trying to effect big changes in the provision of infrastructure and housing. There has been a sudden evolution in the rhetoric around design – it is no longer the pursuit that dare not mention its name – but not much clarity as to who has design responsibility or even influence. Many departments and agencies have been churning out policies and jockeying for position: the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment (MBIE), the bureaucratic behemoth the Government inherited but probably wishes it hadn't; the newly configured Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (HUD); the Housing and Urban Development Agency (HUDA); Housing NZ (HNZ); Hobsonville Land Corp (HLC); and the Kiwibuild Unit. And now there's Kāinga Ora – Homes and Communities, which has hoovered up HNZ, HLC and parts of Kiwibuild.

The person charged, for now, with making sense of this acronymymania is Sir Brian Roche, accountant and member of the great and the good, who is interim chair of Kāinga Ora. What's the point of Kāinga Ora? At a recent 'Kiwibuild Summit' at an Auckland trade show, Roche said the agency will provide "high-quality infrastructure and world-class urban design". That being so, some high-level design thinking is indispensable.

Where's that thinking going to come from – an office in the bowels of MBIE or Kāinga Ora? New Zealand doesn't have to reinvent the wheel here; models for providing strategic, pan-government design advice and coherent design policy exist close at hand. In Australia, all the states except Tasmania have Government Architect offices. These are not drawing or 'doing' offices, as in the days of New Zealand's Ministry of Works. They are relatively small, multi-disciplinary offices – a dozen staff in Victoria, two dozen in New South Wales – that, in the words of Anthony Roberts, Minister of Planning and Housing in New South Wales' Liberal Government, assist government agencies and private developers to produce "well-designed places that are appealing, liveable and successful for the communities that live there". The goal, says Roberts, is "to leave a legacy that we can look back and be proud of – a legacy of great places and spaces".

New Zealand's government might not be so overtly ambitious about its desired legacy for its infrastructure and housing investment, but at least it wants to leave some sort of legacy. The bill establishing Kāinga Ora anticipates a Government Policy Statement that "promotes a housing and urban development system that contributes to the current or future well-being of New Zealanders". How will the Kāinga Ora bureaucracy satisfy even that cautious remit? It's not too late to look across the Tasman for answers. In Australia, Government Architect offices have secure places in the bureaucracies of states that are producing, to cite Anthony Roberts, "high-quality infrastructure and world-class urban design". Our government should check these offices out. ●

Cover **Lower Greys Avenue Flats (1947)**, Auckland city. Architect: Gordon Wilson (Housing Division, Ministry of Works). Photograph: Patrick Reynolds.



#### INTERVIEW

### **BEN HEWETT** Acting NSW Government Architect

With John Walsh

JW [How long have you been with the New South Wales Government Architect's Office, Ben?](#)

BH I took up the role of Deputy Government Architect in New South Wales at the beginning of 2015 – I had been the inaugural government architect in South Australia. That was around the time of the office's bicentennial, when it shifted from being primarily a design services office within the Department of Finance and Services, which used to be Public Works, and consolidated its strategic advisory function in its move to the Department of Planning, where it now sits.

JW [The NSW Government Architect's Office reaches back almost to the time of the Rum Corps. It built much of Sydney and the State. What's the size of the office these days?](#)

BH When we shifted [to the Department of Planning] in 2016 it was three, then built back up to eight or nine, and over the last year, we're up to 24 Full-Time Employees.

JW [What does the office do?](#)

BH The core purpose of the Government Architect's Office is strategic design advice. Our role is to

provide thought leadership and design assurance to government, so that we can assist in delivering quality, managing risk, and fostering innovation to create public value in the built environment.

JW How do you do that?

BH Through strategy, methodologies and evaluation. The strategic work is everything from the formation of the State's first design policy – 'Better Placed' – through to strategic frameworks and pre-masterplanning processes for complex, government-owned or -led projects – working with multiple government agencies to help unlock a shared understanding and a shared position before a project goes into the masterplanning phases. This informs more formalised planning policy.

The methodologies are around guidance on best or leading practice for the way design is undertaken within government, at the point of consent or approval but also in the early stages when broader strategic planning is being considered. There is a real opportunity to include communities, stakeholders and landowners, and allow for the early testing and visualisation of ideas and possibilities so that people



can understand earlier in the life of projects how things might turn out.

Assurance is everything from advising agencies early in the life of projects as to how they might go about forming a brief, scoping projects and appointing consultants –

the procurement side of things – through to more formal design review and advising consent authorities on the merits of planning applications.

JW Is design review a role of the office?

BH We've established the State Design Review Panel pilot. It looks at a host of projects that are deemed 'state significant'. There's a requirement that these projects come into the Government Architect's Office for design advice. On the panel, there's a pool of 40 experts across New South Wales, and nationally. They're paid for the half day or day when they view a number of projects. Projects that are less complex can be handled internally or through desk-top review by a smaller number of panel members.

JW Do both public and private projects come within the ambit of 'state significance'?

BH In terms of the planning system, yes, but in terms of requests from government, obviously they're primarily government projects.

JW What about choosing designers? Does the Government Architect's Office have any role there?

BH We have what's called the Government Architect's Pre-qualification Scheme for Strategy and Design Excellence – a real mouthful! This is tied to the gateway assurance process that Infrastructure New South Wales delivers and evaluates against,

and also to the design excellence category.

People go through a process to join the pre-qualification scheme so they can be deployed on government projects directly for lower value fees. For larger values, agencies can select from the scheme to assemble a tender group that they might select from, or we can work with an agency and provide a longer list from which agencies can choose. That's quite effective because we have an emerging architect category in the scheme, so we're able to support the deepening of talent in New South Wales.

JW Can your office weigh in if you think a project may be going awry?

BH We're extremely busy just doing the work I've talked about. The capacity to do much else is limited by our resourcing but we do have a very positive relationship across government with agencies.

JW Do agencies and government departments have to listen to you?

BH No, they don't. Ours is an advisory role. We like to call it a critical friend relationship. We make sure we're at the table for important projects. Agencies and departments can see the difference that this has made; so when we are critical, as we might need to be – about the nature of a project, the performance of the team, the way things are being briefed or scoped, the way a client is seeking to drive a project – we're generally listened to and our professional opinion is valued.

JW How securely is the Government Architect's Office embedded in the bureaucracy?

BH We have a strong influence, not direct power. The one thing we have a delegated authority on is design excellence processes within the planning system.

That's based on competitive design processes and design review panels, where the requirement is that we are involved or that agencies have to follow a certain process that we sign off. We advise, but because the consent authorities trust our opinion and expertise, our advice is generally valued and followed.

JW Does the office have a public advocacy role?

BH It does. We speak on things judiciously [but] we prefer to build relationships early on and work with agencies and politicians.



JW The language you use in your position must be important. There's always a risk that the design professions, when they talk to government agencies and developers, come across as preachy or waffly. What sort of language do these interests respond to?

BH That's a good question and something I've spent a lot of time considering and trying to work on. It is important to understand the different audiences you're speaking to, and to find a way of speaking so that the value of what we offer can be recognised and understood. You have to be adept at changing language according to who you're talking to.

We have shifted from a focus just on design quality to one of supporting public space and place outcomes, which is something that state agencies are starting

to want to talk about, but in a way that's quite rigorous and based on tangible things – streets, public services and public buildings, infrastructure. How does all of this create social value or public benefit? And we can then say, "If you appreciate and want these things – and who doesn't? – then here's the role that design quality plays in achieving them. Here's why we have to look through a design lens at the parts of the process – the project initiation and formation stages, the way a brief is written, the way design services are procured, the way you consider possibilities early in the life of projects to develop scenarios and options before determining a course of action."

Across government we talk in their language of the life cycle of a project, or the stage in a life cycle of a project, ensuring it's not design for design's sake. It's design because it allows you to create better places and support public space, and, in doing so, create public benefit and social value. We're taking this to the next level and talking to Treasury about how you measure social value, so you can embed that earlier in the life of projects.

One of the tangible examples of our language approach is 'Better Placed', our design policy. We decided this document must work with multiple audiences. For every design objective in there, there is an explanation of what good design is. There's a plain English version, there's the planning or government terminology, and there's a text which explains the objective in such a way that it has a legitimacy in the design world. The publication has been extremely successful in conveying the value and importance of design.

JW [Is it still useful to be called the Office of the Government Architect?](#)

BH That's a constant conversation, because in many ways what we're really trying to focus on is urbanity. Inevitably, there is some disciplinary competition. What we're saying, in a very large department of planning, is not that design needs to take over but that design needs to be at the table.



We try to talk about design in its broader sense, so it's a more inclusive term. We talk about urban design in the way it was first defined – as the link between landscape architecture, architecture and planning. We keep trying to lift the conversation out of a single disciplinary one. I would argue [though] that architects' experience and understanding of procurement is a really important skillset, and that we have a strength there which other disciplines don't. The way briefs are formed and conceived to allow the best processes to occur is another component of what we bring.

JW [If there wasn't a Government Architect's Office in New South Wales, do you think you could make the case for one?](#)

BH I think it would be a very easy argument because of the scale of investment we're seeing – not just in infrastructure but also in housing, services, parks and open space, and the legacy that comes with that. We want to make sure that legacy is one of quality. Government and developers are very good at focusing on

time and cost, but we all know, from any basic project management understanding, that what's important is the balance of time, cost and quality. Unless you have a voice advocating for quality, this is going to be the thing that suffers. I say this in the context of what's often occurring in New South

Wales now, and the public being a little uneasy about the rate of development. If our office didn't exist, it would be a very easy argument to make that there's a role for design assurance or design quality, and a Government Architect can provide that.

JW [How does the office intersect with local government – with Sydney and regional cities?](#)

BH We are involved in a fair few design review panels at a local government level. I believe we understand what local governments can do in terms of place making, and we appreciate local knowledge in terms of projects, and try to make space for them in the way state government goes about doing their job.

JW [Looking at the different Government Architect offices around the Australian states – is there a commonality of approach?](#)

BH I think there's a fundamental belief in the stuff I'm talking about, but the nature of the role varies. It can be an appointment from industry in a part-time capacity, or a public servant with a small office, or a public

servant running a larger office within an agency, which is more like us.

JW [The downsizing, to put it mildly, of the New South Wales Government Architect's Office a few years ago was pretty severe, from well over a hundred staff to a handful. Why did the office even survive?](#)

BH Because we made the case for the strategic design advisory role. The office wouldn't have survived unless we reframed the nature of the role. There's a compelling argument around that design advisory role. Otherwise, where do you get that—inside government? You just wouldn't get it. You wouldn't get those who know what design is, how to support it and know whether something's any good or not.

JW [If you weren't a discrete office but rather individuals located at some level in various government departments, what would happen?](#)

BH It would be impossible to do what I've talked about. You have to be senior in government, you have to be valued and you have to have a consolidated group in the right location.

JW [How do you think things are going to pan out for the office, in the medium term?](#)

BH I believe they're only going to improve, because of the trajectory we've been on, and in the context of everything I've been saying around the State's investment and the value we have added. ♦

Previous page (left) Bankstown Library and Knowledge Centre, FJMT (2014). Previous page (right) Central Park Master Plan, Foster and Partners (et al.), under construction. Above Prince Alfred Park Pool, Neeson Murcutt (2012). Photographs courtesy of Government Architect's Office, NSW.

# The Government Architect's Office, 1869–1940

Peter Richardson

“ Whatever the final assessment of its works, the office had rightfully secured its place in the civil service and the wider architectural profession. ”

It's around 10 o'clock in the morning. A fox terrier scampers through the architectural drafting office, followed by its owner, New Zealand's first Government Architect, John Campbell (1857–1942). Without glancing at his staff, Campbell walks through the office, deliberately ignoring any inactivity or tobacco smoke. Repeating this routine every working day, Campbell is compelled to discipline only one draughtsman for smoking in this smoke-free workplace: Arthur Ford, who, being deaf, does not hear the advance patter of the fox terrier that forewarns other staff of Campbell's arrival.

With the dog curled up under Campbell's desk, order has been asserted in the office. Campbell will leave at 1pm, return at 3pm and finish at 5pm, preceded by his fox terrier. He will receive his instructions from the Minister of Public Works, and manage a dozen staff to deliver the Minister's work programme. Everyone in the office is focused on a very particular set of building types: post offices, customs houses, prisons, police stations, courthouses, departmental offices and the Parliament Buildings.

This account of Campbell's office, circa 1917, is drawn mainly from the recollections of one of his staff, Walter Vine. Campbell's working hours and routine suggest a high degree of trust and mutual respect. (Sporting a slightly smoke-stained moustache, Campbell could hardly be too heavy-handed in enforcing the Government's no-smoking policy.) A closer look at the office reveals it comprises a remarkably homogenous team; a high proportion of senior staff are, like Campbell, born and trained in Scotland.

How had such an office become established in New Zealand? Throughout the British Empire, the ultimate inspiration for government architect's offices was HM Office of Works; in New Zealand, the more immediate model was the Colonial Architect's offices in the Australian colonies. Even so, New Zealand did not immediately recognise the need for such an office, and had no overall plan for its development.

En route from Sydney in 1840, New Zealand's first Governor, William Hobson, had selected an architect from the New South Wales Colonial Architect's office, William Mason (1810–97), to be New Zealand's Superintendent of Public Works. Mason believed Hobson had promised he would be promoted to Colonial Architect once he proved his abilities in New Zealand. He raised the matter some months after taking up his new role, but Hobson asserted he had not intended to create the office of Colonial Architect. With little prospect of architectural work, Mason resigned in 1841.

It was not until the late 1860s that a Colonial Architect's office was established. The impetus was Treasurer Julius Vogel's commitment to the growth of central government and his ambitious programme of immigration and public works, intended to stimulate the then stagnant economy. To design the government buildings Vogel's policies required, his son-in-law William Clayton (1823–77) was appointed Colonial Architect in 1869.

Born in Tasmania, Clayton had trained as an architect in England, probably under Edward Lidge (1779–1860). His major governmental work in New Zealand was the Classical Italianate timber Government Buildings in Wellington (1875–76). Working with a standard set of architectural forms, virtually a 'kit of parts', he erected other Classical Italianate buildings, and some Gothic works, throughout the colony, creating a recognisably official image for the Government. The Napier Courthouse (1874–75) and Chief Post Office in Christchurch (1877–79) are examples of this work.

In 1877 Clayton died while he was serving as Colonial Architect, and his office went into decline. He was not replaced and his former staff (Pierre Burrows and later Charles Beatson) served in lesser roles, becoming responsible for works in the North Island only.

John Campbell's career was on a very different trajectory. In 1883, shortly after



arriving in New Zealand, he took up a position in the Dunedin office of the Public Works Department as an architectural draughtsman. In 1888, he was transferred to Wellington, where, in 1889, he became draughtsman for a newly created Public Buildings Department. That department merged with the Public Works Department in 1890, and Campbell's title became 'Architect' in 1899. He remained in charge of the design of government buildings in New Zealand until his retirement in 1922, holding the title of Government Architect from 1909.

For much of his career, Campbell worked for the Liberal Government (1891–1912), designing the buildings needed to support an administration committed to wide-ranging social and economic reforms. His early works were predominantly in the Queen Anne style, which was associated with progressive causes such as housing for the poor, free public education and votes for women. Increasingly, and especially in the 20th century,

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his works were Edwardian Baroque, a style architects promoted as distinctly British and reflective of New Zealand's strong imperial bonds.

There are distinctive and sometimes obvious British models for major works: the administration block of the Dunedin Gaol (1895–97) recalls the northern block of London's New Scotland Yard (1887–90), and the Auckland and Wellington Post Offices (both 1909–12) are modelled on London's General Post Office (1907–10). The Hokitika Government Buildings (completed 1913) recall the London headquarters of the Post Office Savings Bank (1899–1903).

The high point of Campbell's career was the Edwardian Baroque Parliament House, Wellington (1912–22), the most ambitious architectural project attempted in New Zealand at that time. It was never completed, and Campbell retired in 1922 following construction of the one wing that was built.

In 1923 the Public Works Department appointed John T Mair (1876–1959) as Government Architect. His office flourished under the first Labour Government (1935–49), elected on a platform of social and economic security. Before becoming Government Architect, Mair was architect to the Education Department, and he had earlier been the Defence Department's Inspector of Military Hospitals. He had trained under William Sharp (Invercargill Borough architect, surveyor and engineer), studied at the Beaux Arts-influenced Pennsylvania School of Architecture, and run his own architectural practice.

Mair did not share the reforming zeal of his principal Minister under the Labour administration, Hon. Robert Semple. Semple demonstrated his flair for publicity and delight in modern technology when he mounted a Caterpillar tractor to drive over an old wheelbarrow and shovel. By contrast, Mair was not willing to drive over architectural tradition to adopt 'radical' European Modernism. His buildings instead create a gentler image; the architectural expression, perhaps, of the avuncular smile captured in the photograph of Labour Prime Minister Michael Joseph Savage which graced many New Zealanders' homes.

Mair's works as Government Architect are in the populist and historically inspired styles of the 1920s and 30s: Stripped Classicism, and Zigzag and Streamline Moderne, now known as Art Deco. His office is perhaps best known for the Stout Street Departmental Building, Wellington (1938–40), a Streamline Moderne design with a Stripped Classical entrance porch. Mair also developed more up-to-date designs for secondary works, such as the Classical-style Blenheim Court House (1937–38) and the Art Deco Palmerston North Police Station (1938). Reflecting 1930s nationalist thinking, his later designs incorporate Māori decorative elements. The Stout Street Departmental Building, for example, incorporates koru as decoration on the façades of the entrance porch.

Mair found himself operating in a very different public service from Campbell's. A decade before his appointment, the Government passed the Public

Service Act 1912, establishing a unified structure in place of the quasi-independent public sector fiefdoms in which Campbell's office flourished. This Act was important in codifying public service career paths but was not drafted with architects in mind. Reporting to the Public Works Department's Under-Secretary, Mair could at times become frustrated by his office's lack of autonomy, and the dominance of the department's engineers.

To judge by the popular press and political rhetoric, the Government Architect's office was regarded much like the wider public service: generally competent but lacking the flair and innovation to be found in the private sector. More balanced assessments might have acknowledged its importance to nation-building and the high quality of its major projects, as well as the challenges given the available budgets. Nowhere was this better illustrated than in Wellington's Parliamentary precinct, where successive attempts to create an impressive architecturally coherent ensemble failed, leaving behind fragments of unrealised proposals. In 1940, this precinct comprised one wing of the Edwardian Baroque Parliament House, a Gothic Parliamentary Library, the timber Italianate Government Offices, and a timber Italianate Government House that was destined for demolition. The lack of architectural coherence does not reflect the quality of the individual components; it is a consequence of the hard realities of changing political priorities, tight budgets and faltering political will.

Whatever the final assessment of its works, the office had rightfully secured its place in the civil service and the wider architectural profession. The days of gentleman's office hours, when the patter of a fox terrier would warn staff of the impending arrival of the Government Architect, had long since passed. By 1940, the office was well integrated into a modern public service and was set to play an increasingly important role in serving the New Zealand public. ●

Left **Ponsonby Post Office (1912)**. Designed by John Campbell (Government Architect). Photograph: Patrick Reynolds.

*John Campbell (1857–1942) loved Edwardian Baroque architecture, and as Government Architect, he was ideally placed to implement his preference as a national style. Post offices were a specialty; they were, in the nation-building phase of New Zealand's history, essential public amenities and their importance was expressed in their architecture.*



# The Government Architect's Office, 1940–1992

Duncan Joiner

The position of Government Architect was established within the Public Works Department in 1909. After World War II the Public Works Department became the Ministry of Works (MoW), which in 1974 became the Ministry of Works and Development (MWD). [For convenience, the acronym MoW is used in this article.] For four decades the New Zealand Government Architect was head of the Ministry's Architectural Division.

Having the Architectural Division embedded in the Ministry was highly beneficial. The work of architects in the Division was informed by collegial working relationships with professional, technical and policy staff in the engineering, town planning, property services and legal disciplines. Their location in the bureaucracy also meant that architects contributed to government policy on the built environment, and to the design of infrastructure projects led by other disciplines.

The head of the MoW was the Commissioner of Works, traditionally a civil engineer. In later years, the Government Architect position had the status of an Assistant Commissioner of Works. As a Divisional Head, the Government Architect had direct access to the Minister of Works. Architects worked in the MoW's 12 nationwide offices, from Whangārei to Invercargill. In the post-war years, the Architectural Division faced unprecedented growth in demand for public facilities, schools, universities and infrastructure; in the 1960s a shortage of architects prompted the Government Architect to recruit architects from the United Kingdom.

The Architectural Division became a sort of architectural supernova. It burned brighter and brighter in the New Zealand architectural skies until it suddenly vanished in 1988 due to the deregulation and privatisation of the public service introduced by Roger Douglas, Minister of Finance in the Labour government. Not just the Architectural Division, but the whole of the MoW, and indeed many government ministries and departments – especially those with

Left **Jean Batten Place Departmental Building, Auckland City (1942).** Designed by John Thomas Mair (Government Architect). Photograph: Patrick Reynolds.

*The building, named for pioneer aviator Jean Batten, was a commission of the progressive Labour government elected in 1936. Government Architect John Thomas Mair (1876–1959) took the hint and forswore Classical references, opting for a restrained Moderne style. The building now exists as the lower-level façade of an office tower.*

operational responsibilities – were split up and privatised. The operational arms of government were separated from the policy and regulatory arms, and recast as commercial entities. The policy and regulatory arms were weakened and combined with those agencies advising government ministers.

For the MoW, privatisation meant the abolition of the position of Commissioner of Works. A chief executive was appointed to the new commercial entity Works Consultancy Services Ltd, a State-Owned Enterprise (SOE) charged with returning a profit from its architectural and engineering services. In the early 1990s, Works Consultancy Services became independent from government, ceased to be an SOE and began trading as Opus International. As a result of the ‘Rogernomic’ reformation of the public service, the two MoW architectural streams – practice-informed government policy and regulation, and policy-informed architectural design for public facilities – were disconnected and have remained so ever since.

The trouble with privatisation is that commercial industries and private consulting practices cannot be expected to maintain records of their experiences and research for the public good, and are not always well enough connected, or sufficiently incentivised, to share their experiences and knowledge. With the dismantling of the MoW and the Architectural Division, a century of practice-based, professional experience-sharing and knowledge was lost.

Another consequence of the privatisation is that the professions have reduced access to ministers, central government policymaking and government agencies. It is unlikely that Engineering New Zealand or the New Zealand Institute of Architects (NZIA) would be able to move politicians’ thinking as the Commissioner of Works and the Government Architect did with major infrastructure and buildings projects in the early 1980s.

What was the Architectural Division, and what did it do? The Division advised government on all aspects of architecture, building and the built environment, including policies for the design of and expenditure on government-funded and -operated facilities. It had a central role in the New Zealand building information system, providing practice-based experience and information for government agencies, and the trades and professions.

Central to the Architectural Division was a fully functioning architectural practice working across all regions of New Zealand and connected to all the policy and operational arms of government and the public service. The Division had a Head Office in Wellington, seven District Offices, three Resident Architect locations, and an architectural group in the Power Design Office in Wellington. By the mid-1980s the Division employed around 65 architects and probably the same number of technicians. Projects included office buildings, secondary schools, university and tertiary education

buildings, science and agriculture research buildings, post offices, telecommunications and transport facilities, courthouses, prisons, power stations and, of course, Parliament Buildings and the Wellington Government Centre. MoW architects were seconded to the Departments of Education and Health, and architects were employed by regional Education Boards and New Zealand Railways on similar State Services conditions as those within the MoW Architectural Division.

Architectural teams in the MoW District Offices typically included architects, architectural graduates, draughtsmen (technicians), structural, mechanical and electrical engineers, quantity surveyors, building overseers and clerks of works. The Head Office in Wellington worked with ‘client’ government departments, Treasury and the State Services Commission on programming and briefing for accommodation and design quality.

In Head Office, Section (or consulting) Architects worked directly with a number of client departments. An important function of the Section Architects was to advise their client departments on the engagement of private architectural practices and other building-related specialists. For much of the post-war period, private architectural practices were engaged for 70 per cent of central government projects.

In the early post-war period, major design work was undertaken in the Head Office under the direct supervision of the Government Architect and the Assistant Government Architect (Design). Drawings and specifications were passed on to the relevant District Architects’ offices to call tenders for construction and supervise construction contracts. Smaller projects and alteration work were handled in the District Offices. In the early 1970s this arrangement changed. The Head Office design office was disbanded, apart from the Architectural Research and Development Unit (ARDU) and the Industrial Design Unit (IDU), and design and documentation were devolved to the District Offices.

The design capability of the Architectural Division was strengthened by the ARDU and IDU, both located in Head Office. The ARDU co-ordinated information from the experience of architects, engineers, clerks of works and construction overseers in the District Offices, as well as from some private practitioners and construction firms. It provided technical information to the architectural profession, liaised with industry, and commissioned research on building and materials technology, and building use and performance.

The IDU provided furniture, interior design and graphic design services for high-profile architectural projects such as Parliament Buildings, the High Court and District Courthouses, and State Services Commission accommodation. Through this work, the unit fostered the development of product design in New Zealand industries, and developed robust processes for commissioning artworks for government facilities.



The ethos of the Architectural Division of the MoW was to involve as many of the architectural staff as possible in the whole practice of architecture. Designing was done in the District Offices, co-ordinated by the District Design Architects and was regularly reviewed through design seminars in which designers from the District Offices assessed each other's projects. Similarly, as many architectural staff as possible were involved in client consultation and construction contract supervision. Briefing, design, documentation and contract supervision were regarded as a necessary continuum in the role of the professional architect and, where possible, the same architect and architectural team would work on all of these phases for each of their projects.

Architects in the Architectural Division had opportunities to work on interesting projects, varying in size, scope and complexity, for different government agencies. The MoW offered comprehensive training for architectural graduates and technicians, and the range of work meant that graduates could have early experience of supervising smaller projects at the design and construction stages, while also participating in teams working on major projects.

Training and education were integral to the Architectural Division. The Division operated cadetship schemes and maintained strong relationships with the University Schools of Architecture and polytechnics. It managed a bursary scheme that supported undergraduate student cadets attending the Schools of Architecture, and also supported scholarships for postgraduate study in New Zealand and overseas.

The Architectural Division was not a closed shop. Architects, like all public servants at the time, had clear employment conditions including the publication of their individual gradings and salaries in the Classification List which was available for public consultation at every post office counter. Many architects in private practice had been cadets in the Architectural Division, and there was much friendship across the private-public divide. The culture in the Architectural Division was collegial; staff were encouraged and supported to hold office in the NZIA and its branches.

From time to time it was asked whether the Architectural Division was taking work from private practices, and whether the Division was a cost-efficient design practice. These questions were probably posed as much within the Architectural Division as by private practitioners. In the early 1980s, the questions were escalated to a political level. The Parliamentary Public Expenditure Committee asked the Government Architect to compare the cost-effectiveness of the Division's architectural practice with that of private architectural practices.

With the co-operation of some private practices and the availability of good time/cost records for projects in the Architectural Division, comparisons were made which showed that the

Architectural Division was efficient and cost effective. In addition, the Division was sharing knowledge with the professions and industry. The existence of the Architectural Division also meant that government had a stake in the practice of architecture and understood what architects could do for it. The conclusion seemed to be: the Division was good value for money. ●

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## NEW ZEALAND GOVERNMENT ARCHITECTS

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**John Campbell**  
1909—1922\*

**John Thomas Mair**  
1923—1941

**Robert Adams Patterson**  
1941—1952

**Francis Gordon Wilson**  
1952—1959

**Fergus George**  
**Frederick Sheppard**  
1959—1971

**John Robert Patrick**  
**Blake-Kelly**  
1971—1973

**Frank Anderson**  
1973—1976

**Graydon Miskimmin**  
1976—1986

**Peter Fage**  
1986—1988\*\*

**Duncan Joiner**  
1988—1992\*\*

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\* *The predecessor of the Government Architect, or more properly the Head of the Architectural Division of the Public Works Department, was the Colonial Architect. William Henry Clayton was the first and only official Colonial Architect (1869—77), but his work was continued by his chief draughtsman, Pierre Finch Martineau Burrows (1877—84), and Charles Edward Beatson (1884—87). John Campbell served as Architect in the Public Works Department from 1898 to 1909.*

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\*\* *The title remained in use until 1988 when the Ministry of Works and Development was disestablished. Duncan Joiner was Chief Architect in the short-lived Works Consultancy Services.*

INTERVIEW

**THE GIFT OF  
A NEW CLOAK**  
Dr Haare Williams  
& Elisapeta Heta

with John Walsh



**Te Kāhui  
Whaihanga  
New Zealand  
Institute of  
Architects**

In the New Zealand Institute of Architects (NZIA)’s 115th year, and following the 2017 signing of a kawenata (covenant) between the NZIA and Ngā Aho, the Māori designers’ organisation, the Institute has been gifted a Māori name by the eminent teacher, broadcaster and writer Dr Haare Williams, MNZM. The words Te Kāhui Whaihanga will now be incorporated in the Institute’s title.

Dr Williams (Te Aitanga-a-Māhaki, Rongowhakaata, Ngāi Tūhoe) and NZIA Councillor Elisapeta Heta (Ngātiwai, Waikato Tainui) discussed the genesis and meaning of the new te reo title with John Walsh, the NZIA’s Communications Director, over a cup of tea in Dr Williams’ Papakura home.



JW [Haare and Elisapeta, could you talk about the context for the title Te Kāhui Whaihanga New Zealand Institute of Architects.](#)

EH The background is the earlier discussion about the relationship between Ngā Aho [the Māori designers’ organisation] and the NZIA. It was Matua Haare who suggested we shift from an MOU – a Memorandum of Understanding – to a kawenata or a covenant,

because that suggests something that’s bigger than just a relationship with a legal or formal character, shall we say. Haare, when we talked about the kawenata, we related a lot of that back to your experience of developing a partnership document with Unitec. When you did that, you brought the focus to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The discussion of a kawenata with the NZIA essentially came down to how the NZIA might acknowledge its relationship to the Treaty, as well as to Māori.

HW The kawenata, which is in English and Māori, is a living, dynamic document, and it will contribute to respect and promote the equal standing which we confer on Māori and Pākehā.

JW [As you say, the kawenata is a document in two languages, and now the Institute of Architecture has a title in two languages. What was your approach when considering a Māori name for the NZIA?](#)

EH There ended up being a big kōrero about the Māori name for the Institute. We started out talking about a name that could be translated into te reo and back into English, more or less, but the discussion became deeper than that.

HW We decided to bring it down to conceiving and expressing an idea, not just for a building but for building a nation and building people as well. Shaping people – it’s that kind of vision. The name Te Kāhui Whaihanga is not only about architecture, but it’s also about building a nation; building a future and building a people. It’s to do with identity.

JW [Haare, could break down the elements of the phrase?](#)

HW Te Kāhui is a group of people covered by a cloak that embraces the deeper meanings of knowledge – the taonga of knowledge. The cabinet

in Parliament is known as a kāhui; the group that advises the Māori King is known as Kāhui. It’s a group that advises, guides and produces outcomes that are going to benefit its constituents.

Whaihanga is to build. Whai is to pursue, hanga is to shape, so Whaihanga is to build – a house, a nation, a people. Building a house has primary importance in the Māori world. When you walk into a meeting house, you walk into an ancestor; you walk into the womb to be reborn. The meeting house (wharenui) embodies everything that is spiritually, culturally, emotionally and intellectually of great importance in Te Ao Māori.

JW [So ‘Te Kāhui Whaihanga’ has a resonance that extends well beyond a simple translation of the English name of the NZIA?](#)

HW It is not a translation of ‘New Zealand Institute of Architects’. It’s really an interpretation. It’s a name that advances an idea to another level. This idea of Kāhui Whaihanga is about the ecology of a building, the whakapapa of a building, the way that a wharenui needs to be built by the people from the ground up. I’ve got a poem: “One, two, three, lift, and everyone lifts the tāhuhu up to the top.” One lift to lift the ridge pole up to the top. That’s what a wharenui is about. It takes people to put it into place and put its backbone into place. It’s hugely important.

I believe the Treaty has become a watershed for New Zealand. Whatever frustrations Māori have had in the past, the Treaty has always been the talisman for that journey ahead.

You have te reo starting to come back and have meaning in Aotearoa New Zealand. You have the NZIA seeking an appropriate Māori name. That name, Te Kāhui Whaihanga, came from rangitahi, from young people – great leadership was shown by them.

Above The updated NZIA logo marquee.  
Right Dr Haare Williams.  
Far Right Elisapeta Heta.

JW Those three words – Te Kāhui Whaihanga – convey a much wider meaning than the title of an organisation.

HW Māori don't separate art, architecture, design, music and poetry. They are a seamless part of our culture. There's no separation of those elements. Astronomy, astrology, hygiene, art, warfare, agriculture and horticulture, religion, you name it – it's seamless. I call it our literature rather than our culture because our literature is spoken.

I think another overarching thing, apart from the Treaty, is the principle of kaitiakitanga. This is one of the principles in the kawenata between the NZIA and Ngā Aho. Kaitiakitanga is about giving and receiving, and when you receive, you return. The essence of koha is reciprocity. In the Māori world, when you give something, it's never closed. You expect the return. It might not come in your generation, it might come in your child's generation. A koha is never closed.

JW That principle seems to be very relevant to architecture because a building should be something that keeps on giving. Of course, it's one thing to have a name, and it's another to use it. What's next for the name Te Kāhui Whaihanga?

HW Well, what do you think, John?

JW I think people will get used to it – some more quickly than others – as it spreads itself through the things the Institute does. It will naturally migrate across the programmes and publications the NZIA produces. I guess, over a period of time – just as Auckland's art gallery is now known as Auckland Art Gallery Toi o

Tāmaki – people will increasingly refer to Te Kāhui Whaihanga New Zealand Institute of Architects. It won't be seen as a hierarchy of titles, just as one thing.

HW Yes, you'll grow into it, I feel. There's an increasing awareness now of Māori terms and Māori concepts. I think the reaction to the Christchurch attacks has expressed the evolution of our identity as New Zealanders. The words aroha and manaakitanga and tatau tatau e have been pushed right to the front. People are just using them naturally now. A decade ago, you wouldn't think that was going to be possible. When I was a journalist, you had to put brackets around words like kaumātua. I wasn't allowed to use the word tangi, you had to use the brackets. You don't have to anymore.



EH You're right—the understanding about words like kaitiakitanga, manaakitanga and aroha is becoming universal. Māori expressions are grounding themselves now. They're less used by a small fraction of society and they're more understood holistically. I think that what happened after Christchurch was a perfect example of the Treaty in action because Māori, as befits those who are meant to manaaki (support) the people of Aotearoa, were there at every single vigil up and down the country. There was a constant presence of mana whenua, standing alongside Muslim communities at

the fore-front in every single vigil. For me, that was the perfect example of manaakitanga in action.

Maybe one thing that I could think of in terms of the practicalities of the Institute is that at the moment, we have the values of the kawenata sitting there but might not reference them enough in our work yet. The adoption of the Institute's Māori title will help there. I believe terms that are in the kawenata here, concepts like rangatiratanga or Mahi Kotahitanga, will become more normal for us to talk about and use and understand, both from a Pākehā perspective and a Māori perspective.

If you were to take what the kawenata proposes seriously, in your role as an architect, you would think about your role as kaitiaki, as a guardian of the places we're making, and there would probably be an automatic shift, regardless of budget and client. A shift to little things could turn into big things quite easily. Simple things, like understanding the relationship to site, historic relationships, important tohu (ritual) around an area and the people you might need to have a conversation with, will actually shift, and in turn will shift the architecture. It doesn't mean that a building needs to have kōwhaiwhai (decoration) on it, but it might mean it settles into the land a little better. I don't think it means that every architect needs to go around talking about how they've considered intrinsic Māori propositions. It's just that they've maybe made a slightly different shift in their own thinking which might allow an openness to different conversations.

I find that in the practice of architecture, we are still having to do a lot of proving to our clients about the value of involving Māori in projects, of trying to prove the intrinsic value that will be given to a building as a result of engaging with Māori. It just comes back to

establishing a relationship with a place that Māori have a long history with. This will support what you can already do as an architect. I understand how tough the building industry is, but I think it's a mindset change that has to happen.

HW It's happening slowly. Ten years ago, I would never have dreamt of engaging in this kind of dialogue.

EH The New Zealand Institute of Architects as a name states a fact, where Te Kāhui Whaihanga as a name states an aspiration. I feel it's so important to be clear about what you're doing, but to be aspirational or inspirational at the same time. I love the balance of those two names. The NZIA now has an ability to be clear about who it is, as well as potentially to be visionary.

JW That's a very good point. As you say, Elisapeta, the bald name of an institute is just a fact. It doesn't declare anything about what we hope to do or what we think is important.

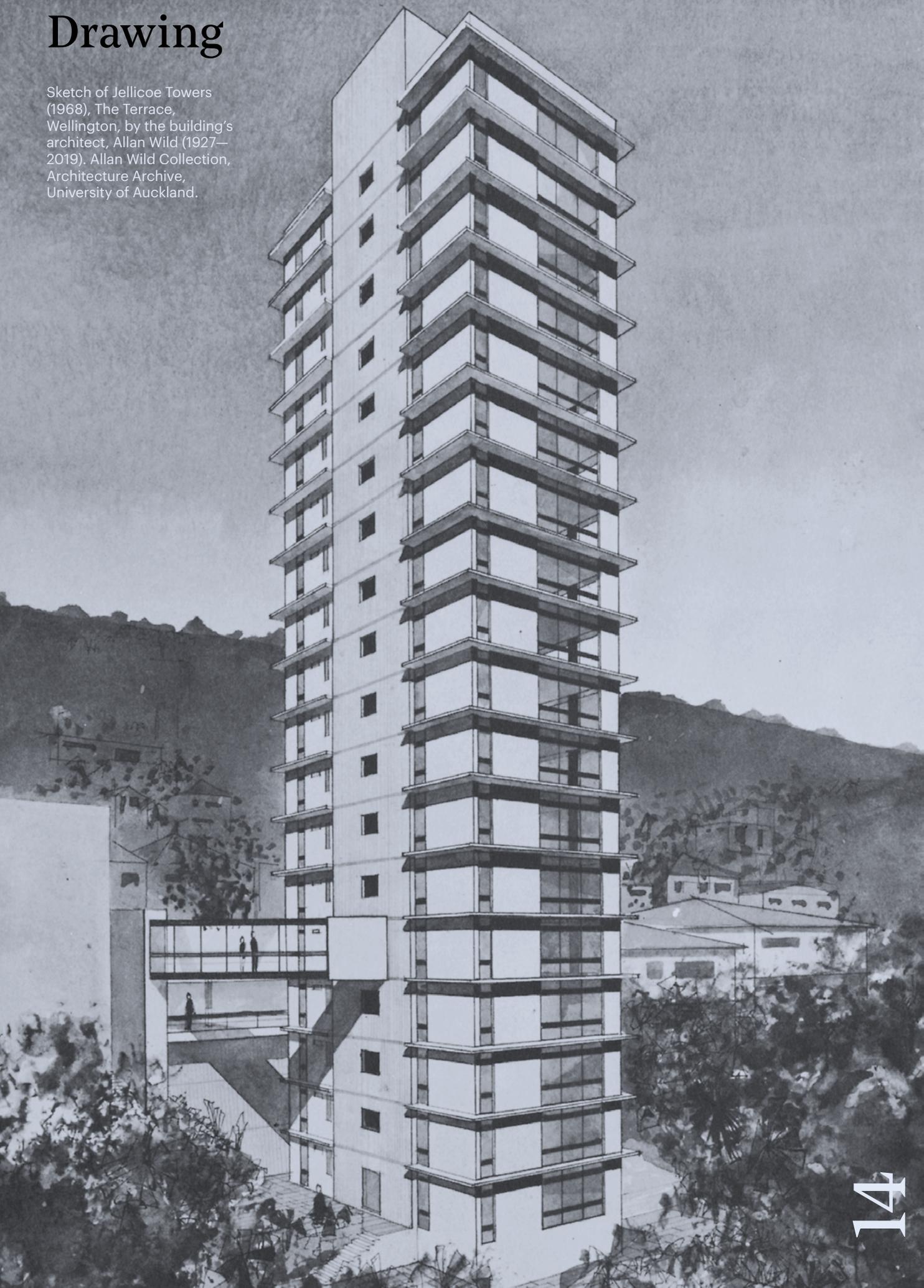
HW I think the values in the kawenata will become integrated with the Institute's name now. Values like authority and responsibility, knowledge and tikanga (custom) – the protection of not just Māori knowledge but Western knowledge as well. Co-operation, working together, and representation—all of these values are expressed in the kawenata, and in the name Te Kāhui Whaihanga New Zealand Institute of Architects.

JW Thank you very much for that explanation Haare and Elisapeta, and for the gift of the NZIA's new te reo Māori name.

HW Ka pai, and have another cup of bicultural tea, John. ♦

# Drawing

Sketch of Jellicoe Towers (1968), The Terrace, Wellington, by the building's architect, Allan Wild (1927–2019). Allan Wild Collection, Architecture Archive, University of Auckland.



## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Imogen Greenfield

As the NZIA's designer it was my job to give graphic representation to the Institute's new Māori name, and to incorporate the new name in the mark or logo of the organisation. There were contextual issues to understand in the first place: where does the name Te Kāhui Whaihangā come from, and what does the term mean? Following on from that, there were graphic challenges to address: how to visually distinguish between the te reo Māori name and the English name without creating a hierarchy. And how to make a visual connection between the wordmark and its meaning.

Taking inspiration from, but not seeking to replicate, whakairo – Māori traditional carving – and using the form of NZIA's standard typeface, I developed a wordmark that can fit with the English name but stand independent of it, too. In the mark, the double line used on Te Kāhui Whaihangā creates a unique texture and lightens the weight of the words without sacrificing their importance. It also talks to the meaning of a house, or a nation, to create something.

I also looked at a pattern which could be incorporated into the Institute's graphic collateral. I thought a weave pattern or motif would be appropriate as what the adoption of a te reo Māori title signifies is the weaving together of the Institute and Māori practitioners. I considered an iteration of the tukutuku pattern, but a discussion with Elisapeta Heta led in the direction of the kupenga, or net, used to gather food. This is another weave motif, and it has a nice allusion to the collection of knowledge and the bringing together of people. ♦



## FOREIGN AFFAIRS

SHARON LAM  
New Zealand graduate  
in Hong Kong

with John Walsh

JW [Where did you study architecture, Sharon, and why did you choose architecture?](#)

AH I studied architecture in Wellington at Victoria University, with an exchange semester at National University of Singapore. I chose architecture after a 'gap year' doing health science at Otago. Some people somehow know what they want to do after high school; I definitely wasn't one of them. While I was in Dunedin, incredibly bored and not very good at my papers, I was also listening to a lot of Talking Heads, as an impressionable 18-year-old does. They sing a lot about places and buildings (one of their albums is called *More Songs About Buildings and Food*). It felt very deep at the time and next thing you know, I was switching courses.

JW [What part of your study did you most enjoy?](#)

AH Thesis year. It was the only time I felt like research and design were truly integrated, and I found that really generative. My thesis was on bees and I got to read many eco-feminist texts and do all these fine-lined, spooky three-metre-long drawings. I couldn't believe this was what you did to get a Master's degree, but I also thought it was beautiful that surely

only in architecture school could I be doing this work. Being part of the NZIA Student Design Awards at the end of that year was great fun too, and a very wholesome way to end my time as a student.

JW [You're now in Hong Kong. What was the path there?](#)

AH It was a very lame, unromantic path! I just couldn't get a full-time job in New Zealand, in architecture or otherwise. Hong Kong was financially and citizenship-ally the easiest place to move to (I was born there), so off I went.

JW [Who do you work for, and what sort of work do you do?](#)

AH A small architecture firm in Tsuen Wan. We mainly do schools, residential, community and spiritual work (Buddhist temples and centres). A lot of interior fit-out stuff – brand new stand-alone buildings are rare in Hong Kong due to lack of space. It's a local firm so everything's in Cantonese. It's been a bit wild to practise architecture in a language I've only ever used with my parents to talk about food and where the TV remote is.

JW [Which part of the city do you live in? What's the neighbourhood like?](#)

AH Tseung Kwan O, which is in the New Territories, i.e. semi-wop wops for HK. The neighbourhood is kind of bland, to be honest. It's a relatively new residential area so there's not a lot of character and instead just a million malls with chain shops, all connected by walkways. You could spend weeks just indoors and underground.

JW [What do you enjoy about life in Hong Kong?](#)

AH The food, places being open at night, heaps of different areas both in nature and the city to explore, Milo cornettos, the anonymity, knowing that

I can go for a walk and no one will yell "ni hao" at me.

JW [Anything you miss about New Zealand?](#)

AH Tip Top boysenberry ice cream, various people, and animals.

JW [Your other career: writing. A few years ago, I had the pleasure of publishing an essay that you had submitted into the Warren Trust Writing Awards. The essay was wry and funny, and it seemed to me you were already finding your voice. What have you written recently – and how do you find time to write?](#)

AH Hey thanks! That essay was the first time I'd had something published in print outside of university magazines, so it was pretty cool. Recently I published my debut novel, *Lonely Asian Woman*, with the inimitable Wellington-based publisher Lawrence & Gibson. The novel briefly mentions architecture at least twice. I haven't written much since then – post-book fatigue, I guess. Once I have the energy, I'll look for the time—maybe on the long subway commutes to work, one iPhone note at a time.

JW [What's next for you, in architecture and writing?](#)

AH I was unemployed for so long that having a full-time job, let alone in the field that I studied, is still a huge kick for me, and I hope to continue not taking that for granted. As for writing, I'd love to be able to find the urge and energy to write again soon. I have a very long nonsensical list of essay and short-story ideas. ♦

**EDITORIAL****JOHN WALSH**

Welcome to the second issue of *Tāpoto – The Brief*, a publication of the New Zealand Institute of Architects. This issue looks at the relationship of government and architecture, and specifically at the question of whether the Government should have an architect, or some discrete office capable of giving high-level design advice.

As the Government launches its latest bureaucratic attempt – *Kāinga Ora* – to wrangle house-building and infrastructure development, it would seem that sophisticated design thinking would be at a premium. All that spending deserves the best-possible return and most enduring legacy, surely? And yet the design literacy of the relevant sections of the bureaucracy seems as rudimentary as ever.

It's hard to know where to start in the search for reasons why. But it's easier, and saner, to suggest where to look for a solution. The Australian states have done much thinking about the government-architecture relationship and have developed various bureaucratic models to facilitate the production of good buildings and high-quality urban spaces. We should draw on this experience.

Also in this issue, we look at a significant development in the history of the NZIA: the incorporation of a *te reo* name in the Institute's title. The Institute is very grateful to Dr Haare Williams, supported by Ngā Aho and, in particular, Elisapeta Heta, for generously considering the subject of a *te reo* formulation, and for bestowing on the NZIA a most appropriate and inspirational name: Te Kāhui Whaihanga. ♦

**FROM THE PRESIDENT****TIM MELVILLE**

In February 2017, representatives of the New Zealand Institute of Architects and Ngā Aho, the society of Māori design professionals, signed Te Kawenata o Rata, a covenant that formalises an ongoing relationship of co-operation between the two organisations.

The kawenata is a values-based agreement, intentionally kept simple, based around five articles: whakaritenga, or respect; rangatiratanga, or authority and responsibility; mātauranga whaihanga, or knowledge and traditional values and customs; mahi kotahitanga, or co-operation; and kanohi kitea, or representation (in this case, of Ngā Aho on the NZIA Council). These articles set out the relationship between the NZIA and Ngā Aho in the spirit of partnership under the mana of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

The relationship between our two organisations has continued to grow since the signing of the kawenata, and earlier this year, at *in:situ 2019*, Dr Haare Williams gifted the *te reo* name Te Kāhui Whaihanga to the Institute.

This was a special moment in the history of the Institute. The name Te Kāhui Whaihanga, which is introduced and explained in this issue of *Tāpoto*, has significance not only for the identity of the Institute and its members but also in describing the essence of our role as architects in helping shape our nation and our people.

The timing of Dr William's gift is auspicious and our new *te reo* title is eloquent in its expression and resonant in its meaning. It feels right that the Institute will now give concrete expression of its commitment to this place and its values, history and aspirations, in its new full name: Te Kāhui Whaihanga New Zealand Institute of Architects. ♦

**CONTRIBUTORS**

Imogen Greenfield is Design and Creative Manager for the New Zealand Institute of Architects. Elisapeta Heta is an Architectural Graduate – Senior Associate in the Auckland office of Jasmx and a founding member of the firm's Waka Māia unit that applies Te Aranga Māori Design Principles; she also sits on the Council of the NZIAs. Ben Hewett is Acting Government Architect in the office of the Government Architect of New South Wales. Duncan Joiner recently retired from the position of Chief Architect in the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment. Sharon Lam is a graduate of the School of Architecture at Victoria University of Wellington; she works for an architecture practice in Hong Kong and has just published her first novel, *Lonely Asian Woman*. Tim Melville is President of the NZIA and a principal in the Auckland office of Warren and Mahoney. Patrick Reynolds is a leading New Zealand architectural photographer; his latest book, produced with writer John Walsh, is *Auckland Architecture: A Walking Guide*. Peter Richardson is a Wellington-based public servant and is researching the history of the Government Architect's Office in New Zealand; he works in the former Public Trust Building (1907–08), designed by John Campbell's office. John Walsh is the Communications Director of the NZIA. Allan Wild was a founding member of the Architectural Group and Head of the School of Architecture and Planning at the University of Auckland (1969–93); he died in February this year at the age of 91. Dr Haare Williams, MNZM, is a broadcaster, academic, writer and artist; he was a cultural advisor for the Mayor of Auckland and is Amorangi at Auckland War Memorial Museum.

Correspondence is welcome; all submissions will be considered. Email: [jwalsh@nzia.co.nz](mailto:jwalsh@nzia.co.nz)

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