



New Zealand  
Institute of Architects  
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The  
New Zealand  
Pavilion

# LAST LONELIEST LOVELIEST

14<sup>th</sup> International  
Architecture Exhibition  
La Biennale di Venezia

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14. Mostra  
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Partecipazioni nazionali



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Edited by John Welsh



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Fig. 8 'Sticks of timber and sheltering roofs': 'Under Pohutukawa', Auckland, 2011, a house designed by Herbst Architects, a practice led by architects originally from South African. Photo: Patrick Reynolds



with its obsession with tension structures and joints, has some affinities with Oceanic architecture.

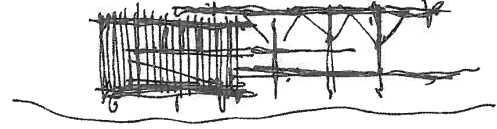
Modernism arrived in New Zealand after the Second World War. A generation of young men who survived service were variously disillusioned or energised by their experience. Some trained as architects, called themselves 'The Group' and constructed houses that went back to fundamentals. They nodded at indigenous architecture, giving one of their designs – a dwelling with a sheltered gable porch – the ironic name 'Pākehā House'. New Zealand architecture has followed this pragmatic tectonic approach ever since, using sticks of timber and sheltering roofs. Immigrant architects often see the potential of this tradition and reinterpret these themes (Fig. 8).

Architects in New Zealand are endlessly scouring the local environment for architectural sources, but always with their gaze directed over the horizon. The hope for the future is for the production of an architecture resulting from the grinding together of land and people in the context of ever-present ocean. We keep searching for an Aotearoa New Zealand architecture, as a work in progress. As one visitor to New Zealand is reported, perhaps apocryphally, to have said, "It might be alright if they ever get it finished."

- 1 Rudyard Kipling, "The Song of the Cities", first published in *English Illustrated Magazine*, May 1893
- 2 S. Hurst Seager, *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, 1900 (20 Sept) VII (19), 481–91, 482.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 490.
- 4 Cyril Knight, *1840 and After* (Auckland: Auckland University College, 1940), 180–81.
- 5 George French Angas, *Savage Life and Scenes in Australia and New Zealand*, Vol II (London: Smith Elder and Co, 1847), 88.
- 6 Nicholas Thomas (ed), *Rauru: Tene Waitere, Maori Carving, Colonial History* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2009).
- 7 Elsdon Best, *Maori Storehouses and Kindred Structures*, Dominion Museum Bulletin no. 5 (Wellington, New Zealand: Government Printer, first published in 1916, reprinted 1974), 28.
- 8 Joseph Rykwert, *On Adam's house in paradise: The idea of the primitive hut in architectural history* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1981).
- 9 Alfred C. Haddon, James Hornell, *Canoes of Oceania* (Honolulu, Hawaii: Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, 1936–38, 43.
- 10 Arata Isozaki, *The Island Nation Aesthetic* (London: Academy Editions, 1996), 20.
- 11 Mike Austin and Jeremy Treadwell, "Constructing the Maori Whare", in Julia Gatley (ed), *Cultural Crossroads: Proceedings of the 26th. International Conference of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand* (University of Auckland: 2009).
- 12 Sarah Treadwell, *Rangiataea Revisited* (Gordon H. Brown Lecture, Victoria University of Wellington, 2008).
- 13 Bernard Smith, *European vision and the South Pacific* (Sydney: Harper and Row, 1985).
- 14 Adolf Max Vogt, *Le Corbusier, the Noble Savage: Toward an Archeology of Modernism* (Cambridge Mass: MIT Press, 2000).

↓ **Fig. 41** 'Under Pohutukawa', Auckland, 2011, designed by Herbst Architects. Sheltered delicately among a grove of pohutukawa trees on a windswept beach, this beach house is another dwelling that can be read as a type of encampment. Photo: Patrick Reynolds

**Fig. 42** 'Under Pohutukawa'.  
Concept sketch: Herbst  
Architects



**There must be something satisfying about presenting an exhibition of stick architecture in the city of stones.**

Yes, I like the juxtaposition. The more we talked about how we'd do the exhibition, the lighter it got. When we first looked at photographs of our venue, Palazzo Pisani Santa Marina, we said, 'This is pretty good architecture – we had better respect it.' We thought we might draw on the spatial and material qualities of the palazzo, but the further we went the more we realised that what we wanted to talk about was not that stuff at all. It's fine to put an artwork, a 3-metre-high pink object, in one of these Venetian spaces. It looks terrific, but if you're trying to talk about Pacific architecture it doesn't necessarily help you much, particularly if you want to use a lot of pictures. So we moved towards darkening the space (Fig. 51). We said, 'Venice is full of these great rooms that are as high as they are wide and three times as long. We'll just try to evoke the Pacific in ours.'

**Is the lightweight Pacific tradition incompatible with urbanism?**

I don't think so, but it might be a different kind of urbanism. There are some intensely dense areas of the world built in lightweight construction. One thinks of the outskirts of Manila and other places in Southeast Asia where people build on poles in the sea, which is cheaper than anything else they can do because they don't own land. Fire used to be the problem with timber structures but fire-fighting tools such as sprinklers have got better. Timber construction and density are no longer incompatible. We can now design multi-storey timber buildings because we think we can stop the fire before it gets far into the wood.

**You would think that Auckland, a city of harbours and inlets and beaches, would be, in its way, as suited for water-borne habitation as Venice.**

I think it would be, and it's a shame we don't have more of it. We find it impossible to declaim. Letting the sea in costs money, and it only gives you water, as financiers see it. It doesn't give you a mortgageable asset. I believe the Tank Farm area on the Auckland waterfront should have some major declamations. Tongues of the sea should reach in to Victoria Park, which once was harbour. Frances Cooper's scheme (Figs 52–53), which won the postgraduate category in *The Architectural Review's* Global Architecture Graduate Awards in 2013, and which is in our exhibition, does a great deal of declamation. Frances eats away not just at the notion of the iconic building on the harbour end of the Tank Farm, but also at the notion of a single Tank Farm site, by carving pieces out of the reclamation and making an island of them.

**Two buildings prominent in your exhibition are the Christchurch Transitional or 'Cardboard' Cathedral [2013], designed by Shigeru Ban,**

Fig. 51 New Zealand Pavilion at the 14<sup>th</sup> International Architecture Exhibition, la Biennale di Venezia. Concept sketch: Julie Stout, 2013



Fig. 63 Looking through the lightweight fabric structure – suggestive of a tent or whare – to a small port tensioned tower illustrative of the timber technology under development in post-earthquake Christchurch. Photo: John Gollings



Fig. 08 Visitors in the New Zealand Pavilion.  
Photo: Alexander Mayes

