

This Is Not a Book Review

Māori Architecture: From *fale* to whareniui and beyond by Deidre Brown

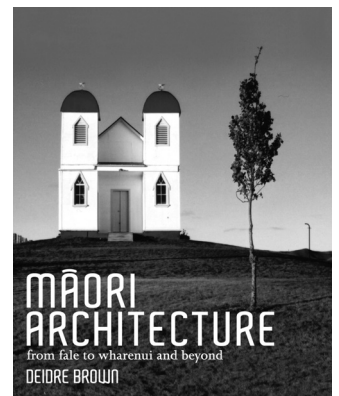
Review by Derek Kawiti

I was approached by Tina Engels-Schwarzpaul to review Dr Deidre Brown's book *Māori Architecture: from Fale to Whareniui and beyond*. It was hoped that, as a reviewer, I would offer a perspective on the book, which lies outside of general publishers' and distributors' review formats. After reading the book, I met with colleagues to discuss the merits and implications of a more in-depth engagement with what I consider an important work (which is referred to as the first of its kind). As a person of Māori descent, and being involved in the field of architecture, I consider it crucial that this book be assessed and evaluated in a more culturally specific and appropriate way, which the general review format does not envisage.

In short, it was agreed to postpone a detailed discussion of the book's content to the next issue of *Interstices*, by which time we expect to be able to include a range of perspectives and interpretations. It is possible that these will highlight the dilemmas and issues facing Māori researchers and authors when reading and writing about this type of subject matter.

Significantly, the book has opened up an opportunity for us to discuss these issues within the context of an academic architectural discourse initiated by Māori practitioners and designers. The latter are at present lacking greatly in numbers. However, the advent of Nga Aho (The Network of Maori Design Professionals) has recently provided a critical forum, in which Deidre's book can act as a catalyst for creating an ongoing research peer support system. Such peer support would help to consolidate Māori research, especially in areas involving sometimes sensitive material. We yet are to develop protocols and processes for dealing with sources of historic-cultural information that are often non-written accounts which operate in parallel with documented/written sources.

Often, though, it is the role of the author to substantiate process or rigour and, for Māori, an important component in any publication is the issue of appropriate processes when undertaking research work of a cultural nature (e.g., citations, endorsements, etc.). The emerging Māori research support network will hopefully develop definitions and interpretations of processes and parameters that will offer consistency and support for researchers and authors regarding the assessment, adoption and framing of Māori cultural material. Māori research ethics, for instance, are still not well known within architectural academic discourse. Nevertheless, they do exist and are able to borrow from consistent and established frameworks and procedures, such as those developed by post-graduate students in conjunction with Graham and Linda Smith (Department of Māori Education) some 20 years ago, at The University of Auckland. Māori research ethics, and wider Māori cultural ethics strongly inform each other, highlighting issues not so far removed from the 1990s discussions of cultural



A Raupo book, Penguin Group, North Shore, Auckland.

appropriation and authenticity. These ethics can also inform any assessment of process, methods and content as they apply to Māori writing and ensure that important protocols and standards are upheld. Obviously, such culturally appropriate ways of working will usually be of a consultative nature, which may be seen as an obstacle by some. However, even if such consultations may be lengthy, they can provide a positive testing of any material and ideas, and ultimately enhance research process and outcome. This approach can, in turn, contribute to an overall strengthening of the collegiate of Māori architectural academics or, even, a singular academic study or career.

Finally, the processes and protocols guiding research and writing on Māori culture also have implications for readers. While reviews of *Māori Architecture* mostly suggest a wider 'coffee table' audience for the book, it will also come to influence the views and approaches of students and practitioners – just as Peter Shaw's *A history of New Zealand architecture* became a key text informing architectural academic discourse. It will stimulate discussion and raise new questions. The Nga Aho academic forum provides a timely and fertile ground for such discussions.