

Facilitating Cultural Transformation: Redefining Indigenous Identity through Architecture

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Abstract

This investigation of a Canadian contemporary indigenous building has findings that are relevant to cross-cultural architecture in Australia and New Zealand. As a result of being colonised by the British at around the same time, there are similarities in the socio-political policies dispossessing indigenous people of their cultural identity in these countries. The investigation begins by examining the role played by the built environment in reaffirming identity while raising the question of how the built environment may be supportive in the quest to solve problems created by a forced dislocation from community, land, language and belief systems. The paper examines the ways indigenous peoples in North America are formulating environments that suit their current concerns. Currently, fuelled by a cultural revival within Canada's aboriginal people, native-determined buildings are growing in number. Within the movement to rebuild and redefine First Nations culture there is recognition by cultural theorists that the built environment is an important vehicle to inform and reflect cultural concerns. How architecture plays a role in cultural rebuilding and communication is explored through this case study of The First Nations Longhouse at the University of British Columbia (UBC), in Vancouver, Canada. The Longhouse was a conscious effort to articulate contemporary First Nations cultural identity. In response to the limited number of First Nations students participating in post-secondary education, UBC decided to transform the First Nations experience of education from one of assimilation to one of self-expression and self-determination. The past assimilation experience was the education of Indians by non-Indians using non-Indian methods, whereas presently a bicultural educational framework is being developed. At UBC both aboriginal and immigrant ways of learning are blended and embedded in mainstream courses across certain faculties. Case study methods were deployed to investigate how

pedagogy, process and the built environment contribute to cultural rebuilding.

Introduction

How architecture plays a role in cultural rebuilding and communication is explored through this case study of The First Nations Longhouse at the University of British Columbia (UBC), in Vancouver, Canada. The site, landscape and building merge indigenous cultural knowledge, identity and educational pedagogies, and is the home of UBC's Indigenous education group – the First Nation House of Learning (FNHL). The FNHL was established in 1987 against a complex cultural and educational background characterised by both loss and a re-emerging vitality.

Traditionally, First Nations people have had strong social, economic and spiritual mores that tie their communities together in specific geographical places. Prior to the influx of Europeans, each Indian nation had its own form of education. Eber Hampton, a celebrated education theorist and until recently, the President of the First Nations University of Canada, asserts that

All traditional native methods occurred within cultural settings that were characterised by subsistence economies, in-context learning, personal and kinship relations between teachers and students, and ample opportunities for students to observe adult role models who exemplified knowledge, skills and values being taught.¹

Colonisation eroded these communities through the systems imposed on them. In the nineteenth century, the British adopted the social policy of assimilation for the aboriginal people of Canada – similar to those in Australia and New Zealand. They were to become civilized, Christian, and citizens. In order to shape the next generation, children received special attention and in the process many children were required to leave their families, communities, language, and culture behind.²

Education was the primary vehicle used by colonials to assimilate aboriginals and encourage an abandonment of traditions. In *Comparing the Policy of Aboriginal Assimilation: Australia, Canada and New Zealand*, social theorist Andrew Armitage

describes assimilation through five principal phases. During initial contact, power relationships were established. In the second period, policy was passive and aboriginal people were expected to die out or merge with the immigrant populations. A period of aggressive policy then introduced specific social policies to suppress aboriginal institutions. In education this translated into education of Indians by non-Indians using non-Indian methods.³ This approach has been characterised by high failure rates in literacy and educational attainment, poor school-community relations, negative attitudes towards Native cultures and non-use of Native languages.⁴ During the fourth period, aboriginal existence was disregarded in an attempt at integration. However the 1960s movement for social equality for minorities and indigenous people started a renaissance. In the present period, policy is being reversed to accommodate the demands of aboriginal people to determine the welfare of their children themselves. Today, as aboriginal societies reassert themselves, there are grounds for hope that a plural social and educational policy can be developed and maintained.⁵ Hampton asserts:

The recognition of Indian education as distinctive indicates a legitimate desire of Indian people to be self-defining, to have their way of life respected, and to teach their children in a manner that enhances consciousness of being an Indian and a fully participating citizen of Canada.... [N]o aspect of a culture is more vital to its integrity than its means of education.⁶

The development of Native curricula and educational methods is an enormous task due to more than a century of predominantly non-Native education methods. During this period there has been a decline of Native language speakers and cultural understanding further reduced as a by product of the limited number of First Nations students participating in post-secondary education in British Columbia. As a result the FNHL sought to redefine Indigenous Education in the 1980s. The University of British Columbia decided to transform the First Nations contemporary experience of education from one of assimilation to one of self-expression and self-determination. In contrast to other tertiary institutions, such as Australia's Curtin University of Technology where aboriginals primarily learn in the Aboriginal Studies Building, the FNHL developed a bicultural learning model that focuses on First Nations students' learning in the individual faculties popular with Native Canadians – such as law,

education, forestry and land management. By embedding First Nations pedagogy in faculties, native and non-native students have exposure concurrently to both aboriginal and western ways of learning.

However, the FNHL recognised that an important part of making native students feel comfortable in the higher education setting was to create a physical space where identity could be mustered and expressed. The objective was to establish a physical facility on the University of British Columbia's campus to enhance access and support services for indigenous students. Therefore, the Longhouse serves as a home and spiritual centre for the students outside of their main studies, where they celebrate their culture and learn from the aboriginal community.

This relatively new building type 'the indigenous learning centre' has appeared in the last 20 years on tertiary campuses across Canada, Australia and New Zealand. These centres serve pan-tribal students and scholars nationally, and they serve the pan-indigenous community world-wide. Kirkness, Memmott & Reser and Brown identify that a significant design challenge of national indigenous buildings is to find communicable architectural signs of pan-tribal significance that transcend local and regional meanings that might be interpreted as privileging one group. Others' design problems include the balance between academic and cultural spaces and the planning of spaces to conform to concepts of sacred, restricted, protected and prohibited.⁷

Table I provides an overview of the project.

Project	First Nations Longhouse University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. Designed 1989-1990. Built in phases. Groundbreaking May 1991, the main Longhouse building, Sacred Circle and library in March 1993, and childcare centre in 1995.
Longhouse Building Committee	First Nation's elders, students, staff and faculty, and chairperson and FNHL founding Director Verna Kirkness.
Managed by	Longhouse Management Council
Client	First Nations House of Learning, Campus Planning and Development, University of British Columbia
Cost	Construction \$4,000,000 CAD (excluding child care centre) \$180 per square foot/\$ 1600 per square metre for a slab on grade building. Soft costs \$900,000 CAD.

<p>Size</p>	<p>Building: 2,043 square metres. Site: As there are no property lines at UBC—and therefore the site is visually bound to the east by the West Mall (road); to the south there are three existing low-rise buildings; to the west by the Lower Mall and to the north by a low-rise parking garage.</p>
<p>Architect Landscape Architect Structural/ Mechanical Engineers Electrical Engineers Builder</p>	<p>Larry McFarland Architects, Vancouver Christopher Phillips and Associates, Vancouver Choukalos, Woodburn, McKenzie & Miranda, Vancouver D.W. Thomson Consultants, Vancouver Heatherbrae Construction, Vancouver</p>

Table I Baseline Information on Longhouse. Baseline data is taken from Kirkness & Archibald, 2001; Owen, 1994; unpublished project documents; MacIvor, interview 2.11.04; and McFarland, interview 4.1.05.

Research Approach

The goals of the First Nations Longhouse at UBC were to develop the site according to First Nations aims and aspirations for the future. This case study describes how this self-determined architecture was achieved. This study describes the people involved in the design and management, and how users regard the Longhouse. The case study method involves the collection and analysis of different kinds of information, including baseline data, roles of key project participants, financial aspects, project goals, design and decision making processes. In addition, this case study documents the socio-economic context, use, perceptions, unique constraints and project successes and limitations.

The drawings, photographs and mapping of the site, buildings and user patterns were analysed through a framework developed by Carol Krinsky, an architectural historian, and former President of the Society of Architectural Historians. She broke new ground in her study of over 100 contemporary Native American buildings that uncovered seven repeating design strategies used by North American Indians in their contemporary architecture. Her framework enabled me to identify strategies and systems that were embedded in the Longhouse, and will be of value in further studies. The strategies are: paraphrases, ornament, symbolic forms, embodiment of values, references to nature, modified continuity and individual elements. How they are revealed in the Longhouse is discussed in later sections and illuminated in figures throughout. Figure 1 (the Longhouse site plan) identifies spaces discussed in the

paper. Design strategies uncovered in the site and building are annotated – for example, paraphrases and symbolic forms: ‘The Longhouse is traditionally sited, aligned with the true cardinal points of the compass with ceremonial entry facing the rising sun’⁸.

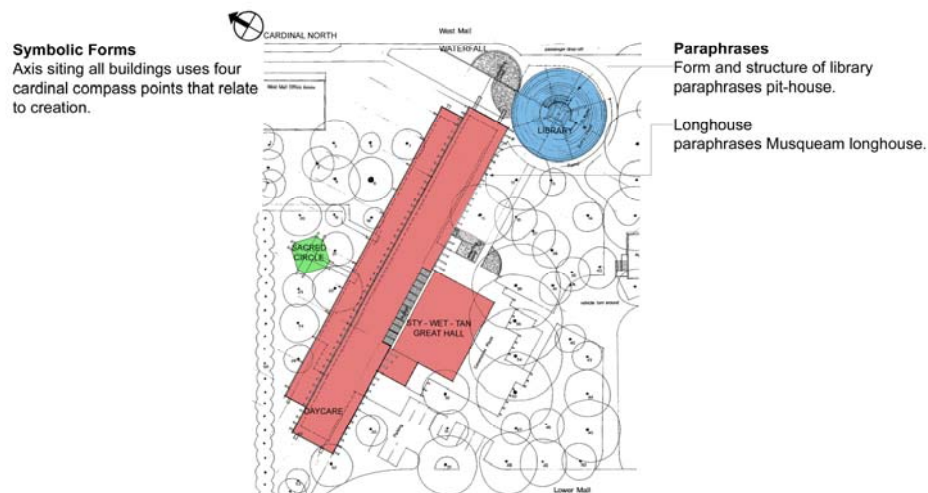


Figure 1 Site plan analysis reveals design strategies for site and buildings, Source: Base plan Larry McFarland Architects. Analysis/annotations Marina Lommerse, Sandy Franco.

Context: A Discursive Built Environment

I spent my formative years living in remote indigenous communities in Tanzania and Northern Canada. Being the daughter of public health practitioners working to improve the lives of indigenous peoples influenced my research on how physical environments can contribute to well-being. My move from Canadian design practice into Australian design education illuminated the link between indigenous peoples, learning spaces, pedagogy and self-worth.

Aboriginal peoples are working hard at changing externally imposed views by providing self-generated portraits. In the ongoing process of redefinition of First Nations identity, the built environment can play a crucial part in encouraging and affirming this emerging identity. While architecture cannot solve social problems, it can provide a supportive environment.⁹ Historian Michael Behiels states:

Through the creative use and dissemination of real and imagined traditions, natives have come to appreciate the tremendous power of

language, song, visual representations, symbols and metaphors – especially for the purposes of community renewal and development.¹⁰

Understanding this, the First Nations Longhouse Committee integrated these aspects into the development, and physical design of the building. Figure 2 illuminates design strategies realised – References to Nature, Paraphrases and Modified Continuity.

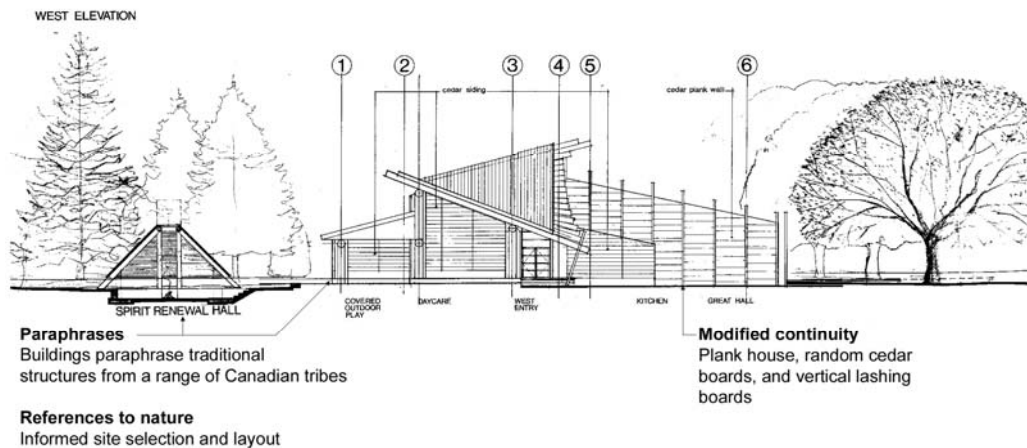


Figure 2 West Elevation illustrates the design strategies used: References to nature, Paraphrases and modified continuity.
Source: Base drawing Larry McFarland Architects.
Analysis /annotations Marina Lommerse/Sandy Franco.

Context: Stakeholders and Financing

Central to the paradigm of self-determination is that through aboriginal control and definition, it is aboriginals who decide what is important to continue in native values, traditions and rituals. Key cultural theorists Hooks, Hampton and Krinsky identified important aspects in people-environment design: people need to define their own space; the lack of involvement is dehumanising; and involvement provides a positive self-image and a sense of power.¹¹ Verna Kirkness, as the then director of the FNHL, understood the inclusive process was central to the success of the Longhouse. By involving elders and students from day one, making a deliberate decision to include three prominent elders and by including the Musqueam Nation they recognised the traditional territory of aboriginal people.¹² 'Meetings ... from the beginning of the project were open to students, staff and other interested persons, a practice that continued throughout the project'.¹³

Kirkness convened a series of meetings with stakeholders (elders, staff and students), which resulted in a defined purpose for the building and a wish list of what it should contain. She established and chaired a building committee of elders, students, staff and faculty to oversee the project once initial funding was secured. The committee steered the fundraising efforts, selected an architect and made decisions by consensus ranging from the site selection to functional/cultural design program development. Figure 3 illuminates some of the design strategies realised through this stakeholder process – Symbolic Forms and Paraphrases. ‘The Longhouse paraphrases the Coast Salish shed form by varying the pitch of the roof rafters along the 100 meter length’.¹⁴

Paraphrasing

Main Longhouse building paraphrases the Musqueam Longhouse through use of pole structure for supports and beams, curtain wall, and shed style roofline.

Symbolic Forms

The southside of the Longhouse is considered the public side, and contains the non-indigenous trees of the Arboretum

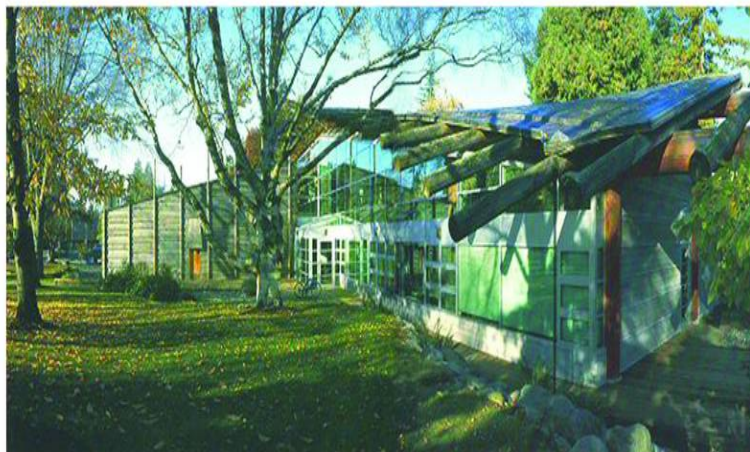


Figure 3 Introducing two of the design strategies used in respecting cultural values. Photographer: George Vaitkunas.

Process: Design Process – Self-determined Architecture

The Longhouse was developed to address both philosophical and pedagogical issues of importance to First Nations people. In *Towards a Redefinition of Indian Education*, Eber Hampton proposes twelve standards of Indian education. These relate to pan-Indian beliefs known as ‘the six directions’ (the four winds – north, east, south and west – plus earth and spirit). Themes within the standards and ‘the six directions’ (see Figure 4) can be linked to the processes used in the design development and the design strategies revealed in the Longhouse, alluding to the depth and complexity of meaning the Longhouse has for its users.¹⁵

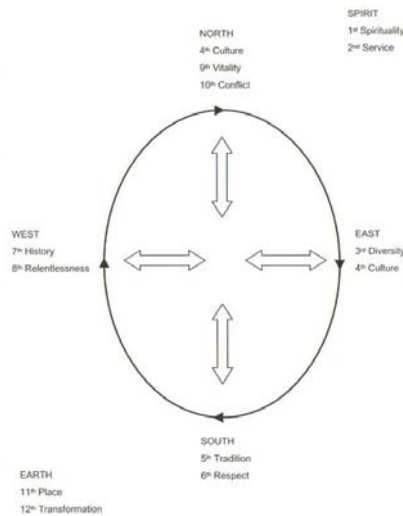


Figure 4 Hampton's Twelve Standards of Indian Education fused with Pan-Indians beliefs of the Six Directions. Source: E. Hampton, 'Towards a Redefinition of Indian Education', in M. Battiste and J. Barman (eds.), *First Nations Education in Canada: The Circle Unfolds* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1995), 19-40, 17.

Process: The Talking Wall Process

Appropriate design processes enhance indigenous values in new building for First Nations peoples. A method was needed to gather appropriate material to inform all aspects of the project, and provide a way to debate and inform consensual decision making about a national indigenous building. A range of cross-tribal, multi-generational people bringing oral traditions, alternate ways of working, different languages and essential stories needed to be involved. McFarland Architects had evolved over years of practice an inclusive and visible process to develop client briefs – the talking wall.

Through a series of open meetings and the sharing of food and ceremony, a framework for gathering information was established. Each meeting focused on a topic: identity, function, site and image (Figures 5, 6). Participants explored questions like: What is our image? How do we want to be seen on the campus? What programs do we want to provide? What is the right site for us? McFarland's approach was to listen rather than to tell: 'We were listening for clues that would help guide us in the planning of the building'.¹⁶ Ideas related to topics were put on a card on the wall for all to see. This 'talking wall' stimulated discussion. At subsequent meetings, ideas on the new topic would build onto the existing wall. The talking wall worked because it was visual and immediate. It drew out people of diverse backgrounds and ages. The importance is captured in the following quote by architect McFarland:

... every two weeks we would go out to UBC for a potluck lunch and people would talk. We would take notes and write things on the panels. It took those four months for them to have confidence that what we were doing was listening to what they wanted their building to be; and not what we wanted to tell them that their building was to be. By gaining the confidence of our users, when it came down to putting pencil to paper they appreciated that what we were doing was not creating a vision of the building that was our vision, but that it was their vision of the building through our eyes.¹⁷

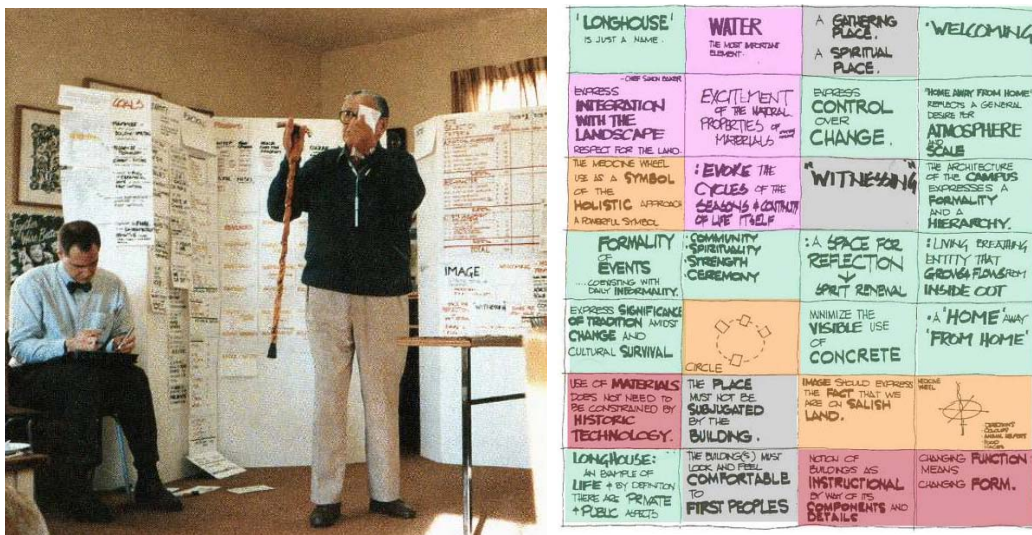


Figure 5 Elder speaking in front of the 'talking wall', The 'talking wall' provided an inclusive and visible listening device, Source: Larry McFarland Architects. **Figure 6** 'Talking wall' summary of the Design Objectives from the Workshop on Image. Design strategies revealed in built project emerged from 'talking wall'. Source: Larry McFarland Architects.

Process: Decision Making, Ceremony and Witnessing

Decision making processes and the associated documentation straddled traditional aboriginal and western approaches. The growing 'talking wall' (brought to each meeting) allowed for the revisiting of ideas and decisions. It was a reminder of why certain decisions had been made. The raw data was synthesised into the design brief and site selection criterion for consensus decision making by the Longhouse building committee. Ideas were aligned with external requirements of the project, such as construction budgets and site possibilities, and then used for communication and/or

approval to UBC's administration, sub-consultants, and provincial and campus authorities.

The open meetings paralleled and complimented the Musqueam consensual approach to decision making. They were participatory and collegial, beginning and ending with a prayer. This ceremony enhanced teamwork and mutual respect. Six important milestones for the Longhouse were marked by ceremonies, where the Creator and the traditional landowners were honoured. These ceremonies were witnessed. Out of the group of people, four were assigned to witness the event. They were given a token coin and their role, when everybody else had gone, was to pass on the information about this project. The witnesses changed, so over the six ceremonies there were 24 people who were official witnesses to these important aspects of the Longhouse.

Involvement of senior elders was a very important part of regeneration. They brought cross-tribal communication, links, stories, ritual and teaching to the process.¹⁸ Figure 7 portrays the cross-tribal elders consulted in the process. Kirkness reflects that presentations and discussion with the Musqueam Band Council resulted in good feedback, respect and a request that the building reflect their Longhouse vernacular. Meetings were convened with other First Nations stakeholders at key points for feedback.¹⁹ Through these consensual processes decisions about the use of local, regional or pan-tribal architectural signs were negotiated.



Figure 7 The cross-tribal Elders participated in key directions for a Pan-Indian building, left to right: Verna Kirkness with Elders Minnie Croft, Vince Stogan and Simon Baker
Photographer: UBC IT Services, Telestudio.

The importance of the site selection offers one example of the dialogue and consensus that underpinned the decision making process. Through the workshop, a number of issues were identified as important: functional adjacencies, proximity to the academic core, pedestrian and public transit access, character, visibility on campus, existing site ambience, neighbourhood, safety of the environment and prestige. Each criterion was ranked by the group for importance. There were five sites available and after a visit to each site, the site was rated against the ranked criteria (Figure 8). For example, the group recognised that the most prestigious site was next to the Museum of Anthropology. However, prestige was not the highest ranking criteria. This approach allowed subjective values to be read on an objective scale, and decisions were made through a consensus process. The net result was a site close to the academic core, and although it didn't score the highest in all the categories, it had the highest overall score. McFarland recounts a second process for this difficult decision:

... they didn't want to be next to the museum at all, it is the culture of the past, they didn't want people coming to the Longhouse and expecting a museum. So they chose the site which was a parking lot, which could be healed.²⁰

SITE SELECTION CRITERIA	WEIGHTING FACTOR	RATING	SITE #1		SITE #2		SITE #3		SITE #4		SITE #5	
			RATING	SCORE	RATING	SCORE	RATING	SCORE	RATING	SCORE	RATING	SCORE
A FUNCTIONAL ADJACENCIES												
A.1 ACADEMIC CORE	5	25	3	15	4	20	5	25	2	10	3	15
A.2 PARKING	3	15	2	6	3	9	5	15	2	6	3	9
A.3 PEDESTRIAN ACCESS	5	25	2	10	3	15	5	25	2	10	3	15
A.4 PUBLIC TRANSIT	4	20	3	12	3	12	4	16	2	8	2	8
A.5 VEHICULAR ACCESS	2	10	5	10	5	10	5	10	5	10	5	10
A.6 PUBLIC FACILITIES	2	10	2	4	3	6	5	10	2	4	1	2
SUBTOTAL		106		57		72		101		46		59
B CHARACTER												
B.1 VISIBILITY ON CAMPUS	3	15	3	9	4	12	5	15	2	6	1	3
B.2 EXISTING SITE AMBIANCE	5	25	5	25	5	25	3	15	5	25	0	0
B.3 NEIGHBORHOOD	4	20	2	8	4	16	3	12	2	8	1	4
B.4 SAFETY OF ENVIRONMENT TO USERS	5	25	3	15	4	20	5	25	2	10	4	20
B.5 PRESTIGE	5	25	5	25	4	20	4	20	2	10	1	5
SUBTOTAL		110		84		98		89		59		32
C SITE DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS												
C.1 SERVICING COSTS	4	20	3	12	0	0	3	12	5	20	2	8
C.2 CONTROL OF SITE	3	15	5	15	5	15	3	9	5	15	3	9
C.3 IMPACT ON EXISTING NATURAL ENVIRONMENT	5	25	2	10	2	10	5	25	1	5	5	25
C.4 BUILDABLE AREA	5	25	5	25	3	15	5	25	5	25	5	25
SUBTOTAL		85		42		40		71		65		67
TOTAL	300			203		210		261		172		158

Figure 8 First Nations processes informed the site selection. The talking wall teased out core concerns around site selection used to develop this chart – then a conscious decision was made following site visits, Source: Larry McFarland Architects.

Process: Building Management

The management and decision making regarding the facility in order to determine its ongoing use and profile are important. A considered activity program informed by FNHL pedagogy has clearly played a part in the project's success in educating indigenous and non-indigenous people in the culture. Upon move-in, the Longhouse Management Council was set up, and in the spirit of the original Longhouse building committee, consensus agreement for major issues goes through this council. Day-to-day building management, related policies and program scheduling is handled by the FNHL building manager.

Design Outcome: Expressional Cultural Concepts and Forms

The Longhouse combines a number of design strategies that reflect culture and values, creating a site filled with layers of meaning. A few of the strategies are visually powerful and obvious to any first time visitor with a basic grasp of west coast First Nations material culture. Most members of the Canadian public would be able to appreciate these. Other design elements stimulate more subtle senses such as sight, hearing, smell and touch. These take time and interest and require more knowledge about the culture for the visitor to absorb them. Many aspects, however, need to be pointed out and narrated to ensure understanding of their significance. The greater the understanding of the culture, the more significance these gestures have to the individual or to the community.

Earlier I introduced Carole Krinsky's seven design strategies described in her book *Contemporary Native American Architecture: Cultural Regeneration and Creativity*. The strategies are: paraphrases, ornament, symbolic forms, embodiment of values, references to nature, modified continuity and individual elements. Table II briefly defines the strategies and reveals aspects in the Longhouse that correspond to Krinsky's. Figures illuminating the strategies are cross-referenced. Krinsky underlines that the choices of architecture solutions for affirming Native culture vary with the individuals involved in the process and the tribes involved; 'there is no one Indian way'. Of the strategies identified, there is evidence of all in the Longhouse. This may indicate why the Longhouse is so successful across a broad spectrum of peoples.

Design Strategy	Definition	Examples of use in Longhouse
Paraphrases	To translate the traditional essence in new ways	Main Longhouse building paraphrases the Musqueam Longhouse—through use of pole structure for supports and beams, curtain wall, and shed style roofline. Figures, 1,2,3,9,10,15
Ornament	To adorn or embellish	Photographs are a powerful way to communicate culturally significant people and events. Displayed in the elders lounge is a photos wall of elders that were awarded UBC honorary doctorates. Figures, 13,14
Symbolic forms	Cultural symbols expressed in diagrams or zoomorphs	The axis for the siting of all the buildings uses the four cardinal compass points that relate to the creation. In Sty-Wet-Tan (the great hall) symbolic forms are used on the structural house posts, beams and doors. Figures, 1,3,10,11,12
Embodiment of values	Incorporate references to native concerns or values	Musqueam egalitarian principles informed spatial arrangements. For example all the staff offices are equal in size and importance and staff and students share a lounge and kitchen.
References to nature	Reflecting shape, colour, form of landscape and wildlife	The Longhouse building committee when selecting this site above the other four available appreciated the special features the site offered in terms of environment—the sun and wind and orientation and a sense of place (Pacific Northwest). Figures, 2,12,13,14
Modified continuity	Continue to build traditional structures for traditional purposes	Sweat lodge—built by the ‘sweat’ participants for spiritual renewal. Figures,2,10,11,15
Individual elements	First Nations element as a single feature, not integral to the overall scheme	The Haida Longhouse facade over the reception desk. Figure 13

Table II Seven design strategies revealed in Longhouse. Lommerse analysed Longhouse to identify where design strategies defined by Krinsky were present.

There is no evidence to suggest that the committee was aware of these different design strategies, nor made choices about using one over another – rather it appears it was a result of a symbiotic process that emerged from the talking wall. It has created a building that has many levels of meaning, one that is ambiguous enough at one level to allow individuals to provide their own interpretation, therefore appealing to a wide range of indigenous and non-indigenous people. At other levels, areas of the building have a high degree of specificity, appealing to those with a direct association and intimate knowledge of indigenous culture and history. The four most prevalent strategies revealed in this place were: a) Paraphrases; b) Symbolic Forms; c) Embodiment of Values; and d) References to Nature.

a) Paraphrases

To paraphrase is to translate the traditional essence in new ways. This can be by taking a traditional building form and altering one or more of its characteristics: size, height, materials, function, use, and inhabitation.²¹ In the Longhouse paraphrases are the most obvious to those with limited knowledge of the culture.

Traditionally longhouses were year round dwellings for indigenous Pacific Northwest peoples. Usually related individuals, 30, 40 or more occupied a longhouse. Typically each family unit added on a section, and the longhouse could grow to house a thousand people. The region grows some of the largest cedar trees in the world. The trees were used for post and beam structure, siding, roofing and the bark was used for lashing.

The building paraphrases the traditional form and materials as shown in Figures 1, 2, 3, 9, 10 and 15. The Longhouse paraphrases the Coast Salish shed form by varying the pitch of the roof rafters along the 100 metre length. Given the cultural significance of wood to the coastal native community it was the material of choice, combined with traditional craftsmanship and construction methods throughout.²²

Paraphrasing
Main Longhouse paraphrases
Musqueam Longhouse
through use of post, beam
and curtain wall construction.



Figure 9 Longhouse structure and curtain wall-paraphrases traditional construction. Photographer: Marina Lommerse.

b) Symbolic Forms

Symbolic forms refer to cultural symbols expressed in a diagram or zoomorph. Plans and elevations based on symbols reflect a perception that symbolic content is more potent and enduring than literal content. These are expressed either as a diagram like

the circle with spiritual connotations, or through zoomorphic-shapes of animals important in native narrative.²³

These symbolic forms are meaningful in a number of ways. For example, in the Longhouse the artists provide role models for indigenous students interested in a creative future. The stories within their work provide links to First Nations history, family ties and to the Creator. The zoomorphic forms on the massive posts and beams dominate the area due to the large scale and beauty. A link to the culture is immediately obvious to viewers. However, to fully understand the meaning you must have been raised with the stories and values or be taught it. Figures 1, 3, 10, 11 and 12 reveal symbolic forms.



Figure 10 Breakout area in front of Sty-Wet-Tan-reveal three design strategies. Photographer: Marina Lommerse

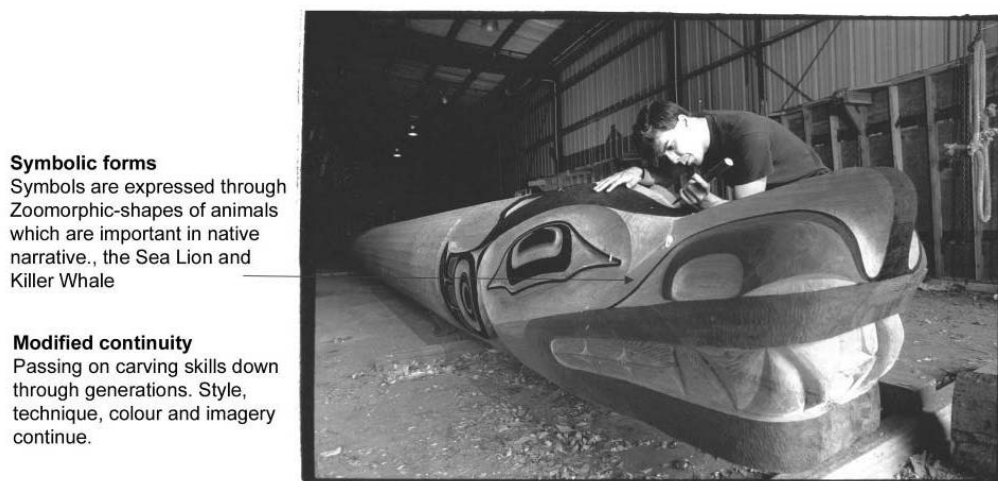


Figure 11 Symbolic Forms – Haida Carver Don Yeomans at work on one of the roof beams. Photographer: Alistair Eagle.

c) Embodiment of Values

Embodiment of values indicates references to native concerns and ideals. They do not evoke traditional buildings or symbolise anything from material culture.²⁴ For example, they may symbolise privacy by including a dividing element. Some buildings may not have any indication of what is traditionally understood as native. Respect for original landowners is embodied in the spirit of this site in many ways that would not be seen by an outsider. The ceremonies and the names reflect the Musqueam Nation ways, and these are honoured in many aspects of the building. In earlier sections under process, examples of embodiment of values are described (Figure 12).

d) References to Nature

Native peoples are usually described as having a great affinity to land, animals and seasons. Reference to Nature is revealed as a core design strategy in many parts of the site and building. In Figure 12 cedar planked decks and boardwalks are combined with river rock, gravel, wildflowers and snag-filled waterfall to create a tranquil, ecologically sound exterior environment. Where the site meets the campus road grid, the grade embanks 14 feet. Descending into the site via a curving exterior stairs from a road level roof plaza from the main campus level marks a crossing from one environment to another.²⁵

References to nature

Waterfall-sounds and smells-provides natural cooling for library.

The concrete waterfall was textured to represent sedimentary rock formation over which water flows into a river.

Symbolic forms

River of life. The boulders and pebbles extend underneath the boardwalk alongside the administrative offices leading to the Great Hall.



Figure 12 Reference to Nature is revealed as a core design strategy in all parts of the site and building. Photographer: George Vaitkunas.

Less evident in the Longhouse are individual elements, ornament and modified continuity, however some examples are illustrated in Figures 2, 10, 11, 13, 14 and 15.

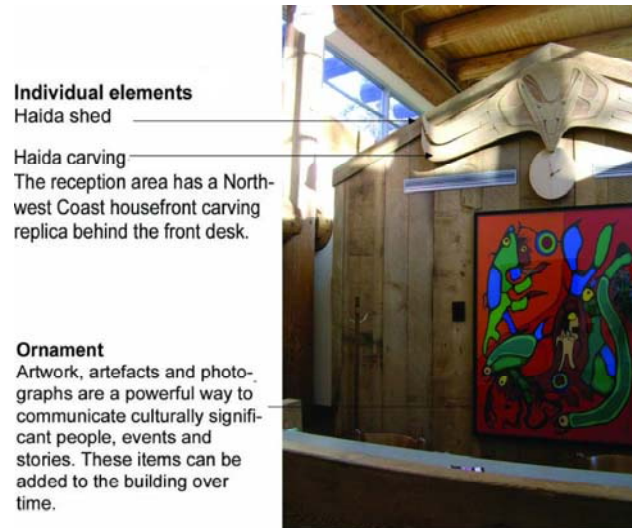


Figure 13 Reception area-design strategies.
Photographer: Marina Lommerse

Ornament

Artwork, artefacts, and photographs are a powerful way to communicate culturally significant people, events and stories. These items can be added to the building over time.

In the Elders Lounge a photo wall of elders illustrates the leaders with a mix of contemporary and traditional roles. Elders on photo wall were awarded UBC honorary doctorates.

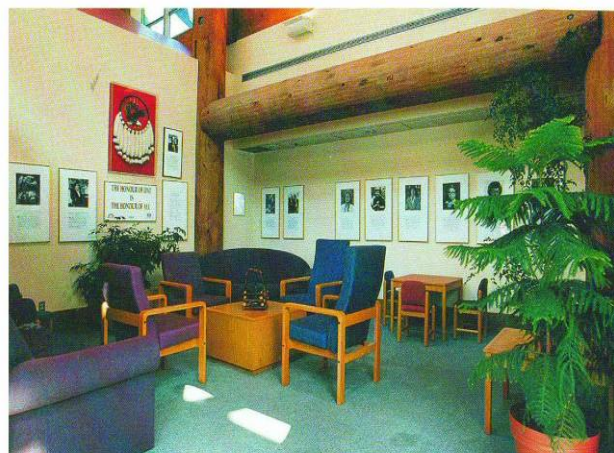


Figure 14 Elders lounge-design strategies.
Photographer: Bentley Wong.

Outcomes: Usage Patterns and Users' Perspectives

Users' perceptions triangulated from a number of sources provide indirect reflections which were gathered from FNHL quarterly publications, published reviews, interviews, observation and mapping. Today the Longhouse is a well-used and popular place on the UBC campus, and it serves the larger community. The use and format of the building remains much the same as when it opened sixteen years ago. It serves aboriginal and non-aboriginal users in spiritual and functional ways. Aboriginal

students new to UBC are welcomed at the Longhouse, and their graduations are held in Sty-Wet-Tan. Student facilities include a computer room, a staff/student lounge/kitchen, a living culture workshop, and the First Nations Student Union office. A variety of activities draw indigenous and non-indigenous students to the Longhouse for opportunities to learn. The library is widely used by UBC staff, students and the public interested in First Nations. The library is unique in North America as it is catalogued using a First Nations classification system.²⁶ The public spaces and elders lounge are available for enjoyment and spiritual renewal. A number of aboriginal organisations hold their meetings in the facility, and cultural and educational activities for aboriginal and the general public are held annually. Sty-Wet-Tan is rented when not in use by the FNHL for a range of events. Figure 15 reveals multiple layers of meaning in Sty-Wet-Tan.

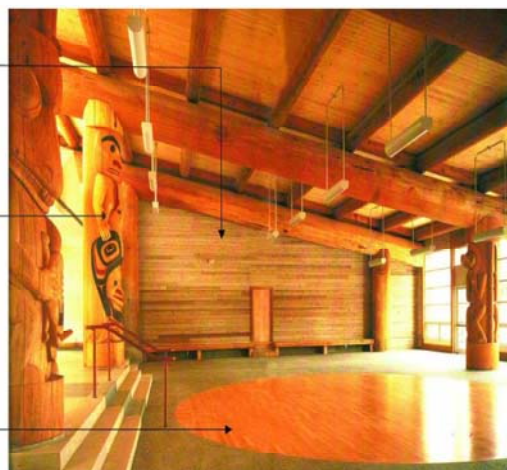
Modified continuity

The familiar and comforting smell of cedar in the Great Hall is often commented on. The roughly hewn cedar is hung to represent the Northwest Coast First Nations architecture.

Symbolic form

Symbolic forms are used extensively in the Great Hall. The structural posts and beams are carved by regional artists using zoomorphs important to specific clans. In the hall stands the Beaver and the Eagle Housepost which symbolise the clan crests of Lyle Wilson's (the carver) parents in Kitamaat village.

Sty-Wet-Tan floor-circular dance floor, a Pan Indian symbol relates to the creation.



Paraphrases

Sty-Wet-Tan (great hall) paraphrases the Musqueam Longhouse through the spatial quality and function - a large undivided hall traditionally a multi-functional space used for ceremony, meetings and day to day living.

Figure 15 Sty-Wet-Tan reveals layers of meaning.
Photographer, Steven Evans.

The building houses the Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEP) and the FNHL staff. These organisations run programs in off-campus communities as well as at UBC. They offer counselling services to indigenous students. Staff lead many of the spiritual and learning activities programmed in the building. The childcare centre facilitates cross-cultural communication through First Nations philosophy underlining the pedagogy. Of particular note is the external play area which emulates a natural west-coast environment. Children are exposed to First Nations ways with elders interacting. 'This reflects the traditional integrated social and cultural environment

[which] from birth through death is a valuable part of a family, band, nation and tradition'.²⁷

The building is renowned in Vancouver and is listed on the Vancouver Tourism website. It is widely known due to its hosting of numerous national and international conferences. Students are proud of the building and bring fellow students, friends and relatives, aboriginal and non-aboriginal, to visit regularly. Aside from normal wear, the buildings are in excellent condition. Kirkness said:

One of the things that I noted was the care of the building, I felt going there ten years later that it didn't look much different than on opening day. That is important; it tells me that there is pride. You know how really hard it is in public places.²⁸

McIvor explains, 'there is the matter of the Longhouse teachings, one of them being respect; there is an expectation on all the users to respect and care for their "house"'.²⁹

Concluding Remarks – Self-determined Architecture as Cultural and Educational Facilitator

Aside from the recognition of some practical problems and some criticism regarding oversights in form and construction method for the paraphrased pit-house of the library, the Longhouse can largely be considered a success. It has been touted a success by the aboriginal community. Literature on the Longhouse is unanimous in praise. It won a Governor General's Award in Architecture and a Merit Award from the Canadian Wood Council in 1994.

Factors commonly cited regarding why the Longhouse works include the following: First Nations people feel at home there; people like going there; it is perceived as an interface to the non-indigenous community; it aids the implementation of the goals and objectives that the FNHL are striving towards; it is seen as a visible and permanent reminder of UBC's commitment to higher education for First Nations people; it has meaning as a spiritual place; it provides a home where students can bring friends, both aboriginal and non-aboriginal; it gives First Nations people pride and strength; it encourages respect for the traditional stewards; the planning supports the functional

needs of First Nations students and staff; the beautiful, tactile, warm and welcoming aesthetic evokes different responses; 'The smell, people always talk about the smell'.³⁰

Strong themes emerge from the study that underlie why the building is a success: speaking for self – the cultural group drove the project from beginning to end, resulting in a building that suits their functional and spiritual needs; cultural symbols were selected that represent them in this place and time; the Longhouse is a tool for the community – enabling them to move forward; redefinition – created a self-generated identity that suits them in this transformative period; regeneration – was made possible through the involvement of elders, respect for the Creator and traditional ceremonies; synergy – between the time, the players and the processes created something where the whole is larger than the sum of the parts. I contend that the process of consultation about and discussion of the Longhouse forms part of the redefinition of identity, as First Nations people decided what their building would convey.

Conclusion

The Longhouse is a success as it has created a self-determined identity. It is a tangible and permanent statement of respect for native Canadians in this place and time. Its success emerged from a process that the cultural group drove from beginning to end. The architect played an important role in facilitating an inclusive process – and translating this self-determined identity into a built form. Krinsky's seven design strategies were all present, however the most overt were paraphrases, symbolic forms and references to nature. It is clear that not just any building would create the sense of community and regeneration that this building does. The process itself had impact on the rebuilding and redefinition of the First Nations communities involved. The process of creating the building became a vehicle for the rebuilding of the culture and the community with lessons to be learned and passed on in the tradition of the culture to those coming later. The story of this building has become part of the culture, which completes a positive story.

The Longhouse provides one model for how to develop and design a meaningful educational support building for a cultural group. This case study provides insights into my future research in Canada and Australia as: a) a model for teaching and learning integration into built form; and b) buildings that enable people.

Endnotes

Acknowledgements:

I acknowledge the valuable viewpoints provided by key people about the Longhouse: Verna Kirkness, Madeleine McIvor, Richard Vedan and Larry McFarland. Thanks to Julie Lommerse, Veronica Ng and Sandy Franco for research assistance.

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¹⁶ Author's interview with Larry McFarland 25.10.04.

¹⁷ Author's interview with Larry McFarland 25.10.04.

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¹⁹ Author's interview with Verna Kirkness 25.10.04.

²⁰ Author's interview with Larry McFarland 25.10.04.

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³⁰ Author's interview with Madeleine MacIvor 2.11.04.