

## TelstraClear Pacific Events Centre - Architect's Statement



The TelstraClear Pacific Events Centre represents the first stage of a proposed entertainment development of a 26 hectare site bounded by the Southern Motorway, Manukau City/Airport off-ramp and Great South Road. This strategically located high profile site, purchased by the Manukau City Council in 1983 has long been considered a desirable amenity site. In 2000 the Counties Manukau Pacific Trust was established to hold the land, fund, develop and operate the TelstraClear Pacific Events Centre.

The Trust developed a vision for "A multi-purpose events centre for all the people of Manukau - promoting art, culture, business and leisure to celebrate our excellence and diversity". In articulating the vision the theme of "coming together as one" - the passage, arrival and gathering of the peoples of Manukau - became central to an understanding of the project's more esoteric objectives and helped inform the architectural expression.

A masterplan for the development of the site was established and following a rigorous analysis of development options a first stage development identified, comprising a 700 seat theatre and a 3000 capacity arena under one roof.

The business plan was predicated on being able to use the two venues (theatre and arena) simultaneously and so the concept design had to resolve a number of potential conflicts, whilst seeking to maximise the benefits arising from the use of shared facilities. Planning follows a simple strategy of theatre and arena sharing back of house facilities (change rooms, technical back-up, stores and administration) all linked by public circulation spaces around the building's perimeter. Theatre and arena foyers are located at opposite ends of the building.

Flexibility of format were important drivers in planning both venues in order to be able to accommodate the widest possible range of events, and to appeal to the widest range of Manukau residents. The arena seating can be tilted/lifted out of the way to change it from a concert/sports venue accommodating up to 3000 spectators, to a flat floor venue for exhibitions or banquets. The theatre can be reconfigured from a traditional 700 seat proscenium format theatre to a number of different formats ranging from 'flat floor' to 'catwalk' to 'theatre-in-the round'.

In representing the cultural diversity of the Manukau community and in fulfilling the need for a well equipped performance venue in South Auckland it was recognised that the venues had to meet the needs of both European and Maori/Polynesian performance traditions. In order to be 'owned' by the community the design had to take into account how that community gathers and expresses itself, ceremonially and creatively. And the design had to become a 'home' for local artists who will use it. The theatre can therefore be formatted in a number of ways depending on where performers and spectators enter, can form a direct connection to outdoors and provides for a range of spectating opportunities, from standing to seated, from being within the auditorium to being on the periphery.

The decision to use timber for structure and finishes was a deliberate one arising from the vision and themes for the project. It is an obvious reference to traditional Maori and Polynesian building materials and creates the warm ambience experienced in the theatre and arena. Timber is most obvious, in the cladding of the roof "leaves" where plywood adapts easily to the complex curves, based on a toroidal geometry. The timber lattice visible under the roof, whilst assisting in the acoustic performance of the venues, is a metaphorical "net" relating to the theme of "coming together as one".

The architectural form was inspired by both Maori and Polynesian building and craft traditions and expresses these in a contemporary manner. A number of interpretations are possible. The traditional Tauhuhu (ridgepole) of Maori architecture is evident in the spine truss spanning from one end of the building to the other whilst the traditional light weight roof of the fale may be recognised, in part, in the timber clad roof 'leaves' spanning from the spine truss to perimeter trusses.

