

# Tōia

## Multi-Purpose Community Facility

DESIGN THINKING // MAORI DESIGN CASE STUDY

Ōtāhuhu, Auckland

# OVERVIEW

Tōia is a multi-purpose community facility located in central Ōtāhuhu. The facility features a library, swimming pools, recreation and training facilities, playgrounds, picnic areas, a café, a Citizen’s Advice Bureau and more.

Gifted the name Tōia in reference to nearby historic portage routes and featuring eight major artworks, Tōia expresses its Mana Whenua and Pasifika community and values most strongly through this artwork.

The project had low levels of Mana Whenua involvement which occurred late in the design process. That aside, engagement with the broader community across the project life resulted in a well-grounded design programme.

Tōia has been a long time coming for a suburb that has historically suffered from a lack of local government attention and investment. Based on community response and patronage, Tōia is a successful multi-purpose facility that delivers on broader community needs and aspirations.



*The Tōia community facility as seen from Mason Ave.*

# PROJECT SUMMARY

Ōtāhuhu is a predominantly Polynesian working class suburb which occupies the narrowest part of the Auckland isthmus. Reaching out through a long and important Māori history and beyond into Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa the past has framed the development of Tōia, informing form, art, facilities and management of the facility.

Tōia finds its origins in community surveys carried out in 1997, which clearly identified that Ōtāhuhu needed a multi-purpose facility. Master planning was initially undertaken in 2000, with another Master Plan prepared in 2007. Based upon this later master plan stage one of development was completed in 2008. Another lengthy delay followed until, following Auckland Council amalgamation, the project was championed by the Māngere – Ōtāhuhu Local Board. Tōia opened in 2015.

Tōia is a key community facility for Ōtāhuhu, located close enough to the shopping centre and churches to enable it to be woven into the fabric of Ōtāhuhu township. Reflecting traditional Polynesian architecture the 6300m<sup>2</sup> facility sits beneath three linked 'fale inspired' roofs and connects to its landscape setting through extensive glazing framed by elegant timber columns.



# KEY PROJECT INFORMATION

PROJECT TYPE  
**LIBRARY, AQUATIC AND  
RECREATION CENTRE**

SITE AREA  
**24,000 M<sup>2</sup>**

FLOOR AREA  
**6,300 M<sup>2</sup>**

ROHE / LOCATION  
**30 MANSON AVENUE  
ŌTĀHUHU,  
TĀMAKI MAKĀURAU** (Auckland)

YEAR COMPLETED  
**2015**

PROJECT DURATION  
**19 YEARS**  
(From conception to completion of final construction stage)

PRICE BAND  
**\$35.3 MILLION**  
plus \$100,000 arts budget

ARCHITECT  
**CREATIVE SPACES**

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE  
**BESPOKE LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS**

MAIN PLAYGROUND DESIGN  
**ISTHMUS**

BRANDING & TYPOLOGY  
**ALT GROUP**

MANA WHENUA INVOLVED IN PROJECT  
**TE ĀKITAI WAIOHUA, NGĀTI WHĀTUA O ŌRĀKEI,  
NGAATI TE ATA, NGĀTI PAOA, NGĀTI MARU AND  
TE AHIWARU**

CLIENT/DEVELOPER  
**MĀNGERE-ŌTĀHUHU LOCAL BOARD, AUCKLAND  
COUNCIL**

MAIN CONTRACTOR  
**NZ STRONG**

LANDSCAPING  
**MACE** - SOFTSCAPING  
**PETER ROBINSON** - HARDSCAPING

ARTISTS  
**DANIEL CLIFFORD** (NGĀI TAHU), WITH THE  
ŌTĀHUHU COMMUNITY  
- SPIRIT LEVEL (BLOWN GLASS INSTALLATION)

**DARIN JENKINS** (NGĀTI MARU)  
- HOE WAKA (PADDLES)  
- TĀUIHU AND TAURAPA (WAKA PROW &  
STERN)

**JANINE WILLIAMS** (NGĀTI PAOA, NGĀTI WHĀTUA O  
KAIPARA)  
- LIBRARY WINDOW MANIFESTATION  
(FLOWER GLASS ETCHINGS)

**NGĀTI MARU**  
- PARE AND WHAKAWAI (MAIN DOOR GLASS  
ETCHING)

**CHARLES WILLIAMS** (NGĀTI KAHUNGUNU, -NGĀI  
TŪHOE, NGĀPUHI)  
- KAITIAKI MURAL (HAWK)  
- HE TĀNGATA MURAL (TŌREA/OYSTER  
CATCHERS)  
- RANGATIRA MURAL (TUI)

**JANINE WILLIAMS** (NGĀTI PAOA, NGĀTI WHĀTUA  
O KAIPARA)  
- MAUNGA MURAL (MOUNTAINS)

# MANA WHENUA ENGAGEMENT

Whilst initial 2000 Masterplan and Stage One design work for the project was carried out with input from Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei, it is difficult to see any influence of this input in the Stage One built form. Despite the project design process being strongly guided by engagement with the broader community, attempts at engagement with Mana Whenua proved unsuccessful until 2010.

With the advent of the Māngere–Ōtāhuhu Local Board as project champions and funders in 2010, a more concerted attempt at engagement with Mana Whenua was undertaken. Following a call to Mana Whenua, six iwi/hapū identified as interested parties; Te Ākitai Waiohūa, Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei, Ngaati Te Ata, Ngāti Paoa, Ngāti Maru and Te Ahiwaru.

This late call for Mana Whenua involvement occurred during a phase of intensive design development and accelerated programming for the project. Unfortunately the Project Team significantly underestimated the negative effects for relationships with Mana Whenua stemming from this late engagement. As a consequence, whilst relationships with Mana Whenua were being fostered and repaired by the Project Team, opportunities to engage and influence major design outcomes were missed as building design was completed and actual build had commenced.

The effect of this late engagement was that meaningful Mana Whenua input was limited to the gifting of the name 'Tōia' and providing guidance and assistance with commissioning of art for the facility. These elements make an important and tangible contribution in locating and grounding Tōia in its physical and cultural place, however the challenging and flawed engagement process resulted in Mana Whenua input being neither as full nor as contributory as could have been.



*Blessing of artwork by Mana Whenua Rangatira at the official opening.*

# MANA WHENUA LANDSCAPE & INGOA MĀORI KEY FEATURES

Modern Ōtāhuhu is situated on the narrowest part of the Tāmaki isthmus, at the feet of two local maunga, *Ōtāhuhu* (Mt Richmond) to the north and *Te Tapuwae o Mataaoho* (Sturges Park) to the south.

The general narrowness of the isthmus in this vicinity presented a range of options for moving between Te Waitematā (Waitematā harbour) to the east and Manuka (Manukau Harbour) to the west. As a result, there are three known waka portages within this area, being *Karetu*, *Ōtāhuhu* and *Waokauri*. The shortest and arguably most important of the three portages was the *Ōtāhuhu/Te Tapotu o Tainui/Tauoma* portage, which measured approximately 700-metres.

A number of historical accounts identify the *Ōtāhuhu* portage as the route by which Tainui waka moved between harbours and coasts on its voyage of exploration around Aotearoa.

An 1835 description of the *Ōtāhuhu* portage stated "... the appearance of a cart track which has been formed by a number of canoes which have been drawn over from time to time" (Carlton. 1877, 171).

It has been suggested that these portages and *Ōtāhuhu* in particular were to form Aotearoa's first truly national transport infrastructure element.



The Ōtāhuhu area including Toia and Ōtāhuhu waka portage.

# MANA WHENUA LANDSCAPE & INGOA MĀORI KEY FEATURES

Local waka portage traditions inspired the naming of this facility. The kupu Māori for drag is *tō* and dragging is *tōia* – this being the name gifted to this facility by Te Ākitai Waiohūa with the support of Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei and Ngaati Te Ata. The notion of dragging is referenced in the architecture and landscape by the ceiling slots in the café area, the bands of etched glass in the library and the paving in the carpark all of which symbolize the rollers that waka were traditionally moved on. Similarly, the *hoe waka* (paddles), *taiihu* (prow) and the *taurapa waka* (stern) carvings speak to the numerous waka that were manhandled across the isthmus, literally within sight of this facility.

Less specific to people and histories, Tōia also connects to its landscape context through more general features. The playground includes green ‘mini volcanic cones’, the library is clad in local basalt, pool fencing reflects defensive palisading, and the poles used to hold up the centre’s roof reference both *pā* and *fale*. Planting selection is a mix of native and Pacific-inspired vegetation. Artwork within the facility also speaks to place, of the two local maunga and of estuarine birds such as *kuaka* and *tōrea* which ‘commuted’ back and forth across the isthmus throughout the day with respective tides to feed on the rich estuarine areas of both *Te Waitematā* and *Manuka*.

Tōia by name, through art and by use of vernacular materials brings forth aspects of Ōtāhuhu that ground it firmly in the Mana Whenua landscape.



*Waka ama crews pushing their craft along Portage Rd during the annual Ōtāhuhu portage crossing event (photo credit Manukau Courier).*

# MAHI TOI CREATIVE FEATURES

Development of Tōia involved the commissioning of eight major artworks and was also designed to embrace the David Lange Memorial, which was already on site. Artworks within the facility include waka inspired carvings, wall paintings/murals, etched glass, and community created blown glass installations – all of which were developed in association with Mana Whenua.

The artworks created for Tōia are diverse, and the ‘big’ conceptual themes of waka portaging, native flora and fauna, ancestral landscape and kaupapa Māori were developed with the help of Mana Whenua. Mana Whenua were involved in the development of project art briefs, and with commissioning of the artists who undertook the respective artworks.



*Rangatira - Charles & Janine Williams (Ngāti Kahungunu / Ngāi Tūhoe / Ngāpuhi & Ngāti Paoa / Ngāti Whātua o Kaipara).*

# MAHI TOI CREATIVE FEATURES

## ***Spirit Level***

*Spirit Level* is an artwork by Brisbane based artist Daniel Clifford (Ngāi Tahu) comprising 1660 glass globes varying from 90 to 135 mm in diameter blown by the community over a two week period in 2015. *Spirit Level* is the Tōia's largest and most complex artwork.

In Daniel's words "...every time [the community] go to the space they are ... seeing a reflection of themselves...the other beautiful thing is that in 30 years a little child will be able to go there and say my grandmother made this, her breath helped make this work".

The glass globes hang like a bright cloud, above the ramp running through the library. Each bubble is similar in form however is completely unique and in this the artwork captures some of the essence of Ōtāhuhu and its diverse community demographics.

Owing to timing issues Mana Whenua were not able to contribute to the development of this work, which was already underway by the time they were engaged with the project. Whilst *Spirit Level* was not devised through whakaaro or kōrero Māori, the artwork strongly resonates for Māori with its sharing of *ha* (breath) and strong focus on the Ōtāhuhu community.



*Spirit Level - Daniel Clifford (Ngāi Tahu).*



*Tauihu - Darin Jenkins (Ngāti Maru).*

# MAHI TOI CREATIVE FEATURES

## **Waka**

A waka sculpture in three parts recalls the importance of the portage and its role in shaping the community. The physical work comprises a carved timber *tauihu* (canoe prow) in the area adjacent to the café and carved timber *taurapa* (canoe stern) on the lawn on the other side of the basketball court. These two carvings frame an empty space in between that is metaphorically occupied by the body of the canoe. The third part, representing the human element, is 16 *hoe waka* (canoe paddles), one each for the iwi which maintain ancestral connection to Ōtāhuhu.

## **Murals**

***Kaitiaki*** – located in the front entrance to the gym and café foyer, a *kāhu* (hawk) stares at viewers as the centre’s kaitiaki (guardian). Poutama (traditional patterning) highlights the importance of ongoing growth and development behind the manu.

***Rangatira*** - located in the foyer at the bottom of the ramp, a *tui* symbolises the voice of leadership, highlights the importance of providing good direction and insight, and honours the voices of the tūpuna and rangatira past.

***He Tangata*** – located at the entrance the pool complex, a flock of *tōrea* (pied oyster catchers) represents the voyaging and the arrival of peoples and manu as part of the community.

***Maunga*** – located outside the library entrance on Mason Avenue and part of the play equipment, two three dimensional ‘land’ forms symbolise Ōtāhuhu and *Te Tapuwae o Mataaho* maunga.



*Hoe - Darin Jenkins (Ngāti Maru).*



*Kaitiaki - Charles & Janine Williams (Ngāti Kahungunu/Ngāi Tūhoe/Ngāpuhi & Ngāti Paoa/Ngāti Whātua o Kaipara).*

# MAHI TOI CREATIVE FEATURES

## **Library Wall Dividers**

Meeting rooms within the library are glazed and are etched with abstracted large flowers of importance and relevance to the area and community – pohutukawa, kowhai and hibiscus are included among others.

## **Pare**

The glass above the main entrance off Mason Avenue is etched with designs derived from moko wahine to create a *pare* for the entry.

*Pare* are traditionally used to emphasise the important process of arrival and transition from one dimension, a state of being or a space to another. The side-pieces represent *Ira-Tangata* and *Ira Atua*, life forces present in all people.



*Pare* - Ngāti Maru.



*Manifestation* - Janine Williams (Ngāti Paoa, Ngāti Whātua O Kaipara).

# A LIVING PRESENCE



The design and development of Tōia has given both a Pasifika and Māori face to the facility's form and character. Tōia draws attention to local portage traditions, bringing to light (and life) the relationship and associations that Mana Whenua maintain with this area. Alongside these benefits, another aspect perhaps less tangible is the degree to which Tōia allows the *Whakawai* community to celebrate and live their cultures at the facility and in this it has been very successful.

As a community recreation facility, Tōia meets community (including Māori) needs. The pools (including a bombing pool) are there because the community wanted them. The café, meeting rooms, homework spaces and computer suites are there because the community needed them. All are requirements of a brief which was attuned to community needs and sought to reflect Ōtāhuhu's contemporary South Auckland context.

Acknowledging the dynamics of local families and social groups the facility is roomier, less 'precious' and aims to fit the community, not have the community fit it. There are no anti-grind strips on concrete elements within the exterior landscape – all elements are designed to be skated on. Furniture is more generously proportioned to fit a Pasifika physique. The playground space is intergenerational, leading seamlessly from the toddlers at one end to the basketball court at the other, with lots of seating and shade - recognition that this is a space for the whole whānau and not solely for tamariki (children) and rangatahi (youths).

These design features actively encourage kotahitanga (togetherness), manaakitanga (hospitality), whanaungatanga (family and relationships), and oranga (wellness) – key aspects of Māori and Pasifika culture, made possible on site.

Tōia is managed to support a living community presence, including Mana Whenua. Reo Māori, Samoan and Tongan language swim classes are offered at the pool and family memberships are promoted for the fitness centre. Tōia has an outreach programme going to 12 pre-schools and a reading collection that has a clear focus on Māori and Pacific material.

Tōia is trying to move forward in a way that is meaningful, relevant and engaging for the *Whakawai* community, on their terms.

# SUSTAINABILITY

Tōia maintains a 50 kw array of 192 photovoltaic panels on the roof which is sufficient to meet the energy needs of the library (as of 2016).



*Tōia from above including the buildings photovoltaic panels.*

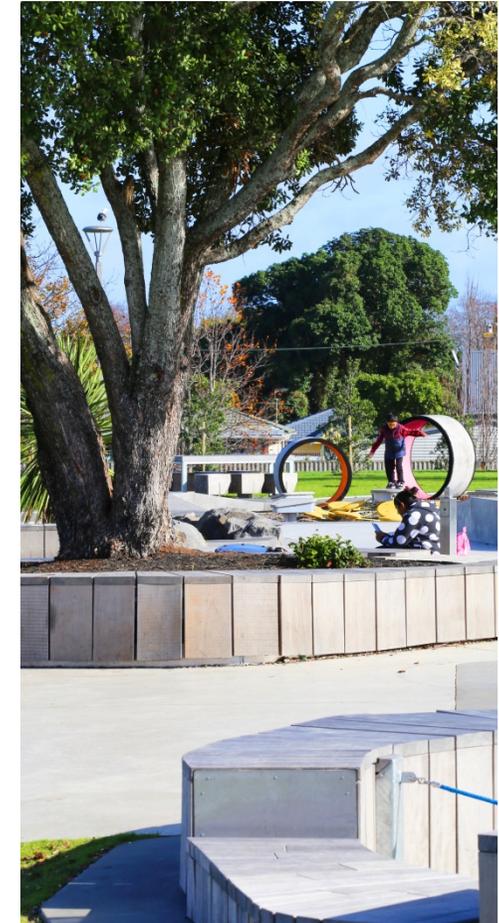
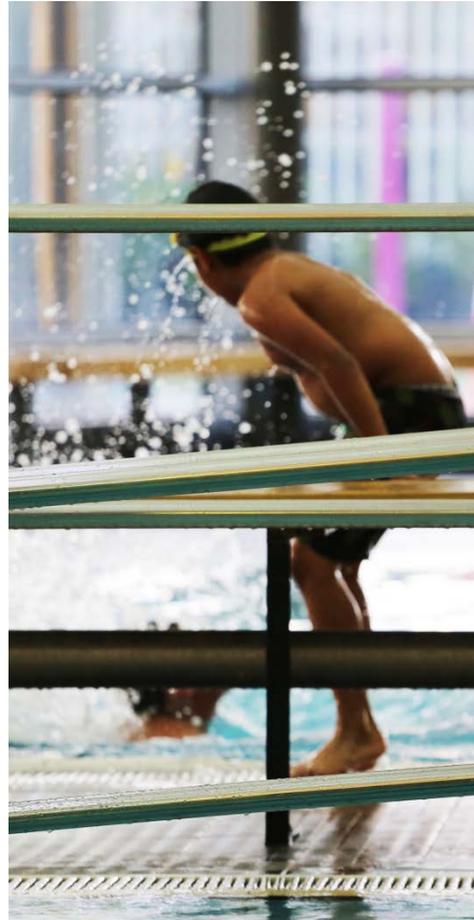
# LESSONS LEARNT

**Design Programme** – While the artwork and narrative content of Tōia are contributory to a Māori identity, Māori design thinking has not been instrumental in determining the form of the facility. Despite this, Tōia is clearly very successful with significant use and little redundancy of space. This is product of a brief which determined key opportunities and activities for the design to make possible, the brief itself is a product of comprehensive engagement with the broader community.

**Mana Whenua Engagement Processes** –Regrettably Tōia’s Mana Whenua engagement occurred too late in the process for it to meaningfully influence structural form. The artwork that has been incorporated imparts a Māori design and cultural flavour, however it could be critiqued as cultural veneer to an overwhelmingly mainstream structure.

Tōia begs the question of what the design would be like if Mana Whenua engagement had been integrated from the outset.

Engagement with Mana Whenua could be considered equal part art and science, founded on goodwill, respect and understanding.



## MORE INFORMATION

Auckland Council (2015), *Public Artwork by Daniel Clifford for Auckland's Ōtāhuhu Library*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z5c8elo5vqw>, Auckland

Auckland Council, (2015), *Ōtāhuhu Recreation Precinct Project*, <http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/SiteCollectionDocuments/aboutcouncil/localboards/mangereotahuhulocalboard/otahuhurecreationprecinctinfopack.pdf>

Barton C., (2015), 'A fale for David Lange: Ōtāhuhu's new community hub follows a familiar architectural path', in *Metro Weekly*, November 5, 2015; <http://www.metro.co.nz/city-life/urban-design/a-fale-for-david-lange/>

Hooker B., (1997), Portages of early Auckland - to and from the Waitematā Harbour: The hub of an ancient communications network, in *The Auckland-Waikato Historical Journal*, No. 70 (September 1997), pp. 39-40; [http://folksong.org.nz/he\\_tangi\\_te\\_kiwi/portages\\_of\\_early\\_auckland.html](http://folksong.org.nz/he_tangi_te_kiwi/portages_of_early_auckland.html)

Kathleen Kinney, (2015), Toia – Ōtāhuhu Recreation Precinct, in *Architecture*



The Toia playground area references the surrounding volcanic landscape.



The Auckland Design Manual is a fantastic free resource that's been created to help you through your design concept and development phase. It's a practical guide that sits alongside the Unitary Plan. If the Unitary Plan is your rule book, think of the Design Manual as your how to guide - helping you to visualise what you can build in Auckland.

The Design Manual will help you to avoid expensive mistakes by giving you the information you need up front, so that you are well-informed and know how to ask the right questions.

The Design Manual can support you at the following key stages in your development process:

- Inspiration for what you could build on your site
- Understanding the rules
- Writing your brief
- Developing a design
- Hiring your design and build team

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