

Pushing the Architectural Boundaries

Challenging the status quo

Lama Tone, photo: SAV SCHULMAN

Lama Tone and Charmaine Ilaiu are pushing the Architectural boundaries. They are the only Masters Research graduates of Pacific descent in the world. **PETER REES** reports

While travelling the world with the Manu Samoa rugby team in the late 1990s, Lama Tone used to admire the buildings he came across. It was always his childhood dream to be an architect. Artistic in his youth, Lama had done some drafting work for an uncle.

But his towering 6'6" (1.98m) frame was kept busy by his rugby and basketball commitments. In 2001 he sustained a career-ending neck injury. It was a sad way to end his career, but it allowed him to commence architectural studies at the University of Auckland the following year at age 31.

He is set to graduate this year with a Masters in Architecture (Research) which will allow him to put his ideas into practise in a profession short in Pacific expression.

"He will be the expert in this field when his thesis is complete, and his advice and work will make a huge difference to how Pacific people live and the way Pacific is represented in our buildings

and built environment," says Dr Deidre Brown, Senior Lecturer at the University of Auckland School of Architecture and Planning.

Lama's focus is on incorporating Pacific ideas and concepts into the design of New Zealand buildings, to reflect the country's climate, culture and unique place in the Pacific.

It is a challenge for Lama being one of the few Samoan postgraduates in the field and without mentors or design models. But his dedication to the task reflects his passion for the subject and his commitment to correct the architectural oversights that exist today.

"New Zealand is slowly climbing out of more westernised approaches to architecture, thanks to a new-found sense of itself and a readdressed interest in its Maori/Polynesian roots," he tells SPASIFIK. "New Zealand is an island in the Pacific and our architecture needs to reflect that in a contemporary and

sustainable way. I think Pacific architecture is about community...the connection and engagement of people coming together under communal spaces is an important factor. Maybe the mainstream could learn something from Pacific architecture in how Pacific people have sacred connections with their dwellings, surroundings, land, people and culture."

Born and raised in Mangere, south Auckland, Lama traces his Samoan heritage to the villages of Vaimoso, and Lufilufi.



Lama Tone playing for Manu Samoa against the All Blacks
photo: PHOTO SPORT