Watercolour sketch of an Aboriginal village near Mt Shannon in north-west New South Wales. The function of the small domes (adjacent to the larger ones) is not known, but there are two plausible suggestions as to their use. One is that they were used to store grass seeds and other staple seeds and grains. The other is that they were dog kennels. [Source: Sturt, Capt. C. 1849 Narrative of an Expedition into Central Australia, London: T. and W. Boone, 1849, Vol. 1 facing p.254. Artist: J. H. Le Keux.]

Title page, detail, A house in an Alice Springs town camp designed by Mark Savage and Jane Dillon in the mid 1980s. [Photographer: James Ricketson, 1987, AERC Collection, University of Queensland.]
RAIA SISALATION PRIZE

This issue is the second in the recently established RAIA journal series, TAKE, which celebrates a new direction for the longstanding RAIA Sisalation Prize. Managed by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects and sponsored by Insulation Solutions, this prize has been awarded annually since 1956. Over the years it has taken different formats—a travel scholarship, as a commission to an author to write a book—and since 2001 as two separate prizes to an editor and associate contributors of the RAIA architectural journal series, TAKE.

While retaining its objective to develop and apply architectural knowledge in Australia, a review of the RAIA Sisalation Prize in 2001 resulted in its restructure into two stages to make it more attractive to a wider range of potential applicants and to deliver an annual event. The first stage selects an editor, who as primary prize winner, proposes a theme and draws together in stage 2 a team of associate contributors to produce a journal volume featuring an edited collection of papers. The theme of each issue bridges academic and practice issues in architecture. The RAIA Sisalation Prize is awarded annually and seeks to further the development of architecture through both the annual publication of the guest edited journal TAKE and an annual symposium event addressing key issues of the journal publication.

The RAIA Sisalation Prize is guided by a Steering Committee including practitioners, academics and a representative of the sponsor, Insulation Solutions. The Steering Committee is responsible for the overall management of the prize including selection of the major prizewinner, selection of the journal theme, guidance to the Editor, copy editing, management of editorial and publication issues and promotion of the prize. The Steering Committee reports to the RAIA National Education Committee. The RAIA Education Unit provides management support for the Prize, including the journal publication, and the RAIA Chapter Manager in the state/territory in which the event is held manages the annual symposium. The symposium launching this second issue was held in Brisbane, Queensland in August 2003.

STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS
Richard Blythe (Chair to March 2003)
University of Tasmania, Member of RAIA National Education Committee

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Stephen Earle, Member Services Manager

All enquiries about the RAIA Sisalation Prize should be directed to the RAIA Education Unit, The Royal Australian Institute of Architects, PO Box 3373, Red Hill, ACT 2603.
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A photograph of Meriam men building a house in 1958 on the island of Mer (or Murray Island), the most easterly of the Torres Strait Islands. It was built of bamboo and bush timber, with woven coconut leaf walls. The grass-thatched roof was about 2.4 metres high at the ridge of the gable. Elevated, split bamboo floors were also utilised, being raised about a metre from ground. Under the influence of Pacific Islander missionaries around the turn of the 19th Century, this gable roof design superseded traditional dome forms. [Photographer: J. Beckett, University of Sydney.]
Part of a discrete urban settlement on the outskirts of a rural town in the Murdi Paaki region of western New South Wales. The ‘humpy’ survives from a Town Camp established on a Town Common Reserve in the 1950s. As part of an ATSIC programme, most humpies have been replaced by modern houses on elevated platforms to reduce flooding risks presented by the nearby river. However, the residents had retained a few humpies, partly for storage and visitor use, but also as symbols of a past lifestyle era. (Photographer: P. Memmott, AEREC, University of Queensland.)
Paul Memmott
Associate Professor Paul Memmott is an architect and anthropologist with 30 years experience in the field of Indigenous people-environment relations. He is currently Director of the Aboriginal Environments Research Centre (AERC) located in the School of Geography, Planning and Architecture at the University of Queensland, which maintains a national focus on Indigenous housing and settlement research. Memmott is also Principal of the consulting firm Paul Memmott and Associates (PMA), which is based in Brisbane and operates in close association with the AERC. The firm specialises in consulting on Aboriginal projects and since 1972 has had a long track record of involvement in Aboriginal housing practice and research.

Memmott has undertaken numerous projects throughout Australia, ranging from anthropological and cultural heritage investigations for Indigenous groups, to architectural projects, settlement planning and housing policy development for government clients. Memmott’s general research interest is the cross-cultural study of the ethno-environmental relations of Indigenous peoples. He is the author of five books, 50 published papers and some 200 technical reports for clients ranging from Indigenous organisations, to state and federal governments. (see www.aboriginalenvironments.com)

Caroll Go-Sam
Caroll Go-Sam is a descendant of the yabalambara and gambilbara Dyirbal people from the Wild, Herbert and upper Tully River basins, and maintains connections and interests in townships and locations where Dyirbal people are located. Go-Sam’s Bachelor of Architecture degree was completed in 1997 at the University of Queensland, and was complimented with studies in anthropology. Go-Sam’s study focused on the issues of Aboriginal environmental design and culminated in the completion of her final year thesis entitled The Mutitjulu experiment: a study of decentralised houses by Paul Pholeros, which was awarded the Department’s thesis prize.

Go-Sam has worked for Aboriginal community organisations such as Kambu Progress Association, Tjuntjuntjara Council and Musgrave Park Cultural Centre. She has been employed by various Brisbane architectural firms and worked on the Bilinda Housing Project, Gregory Crossings, North Queensland. Her professional services range from project management, architectural design, negotiation with authorities on town planning issues and design assessment. She also participates in traditional owner organisations such as Budjubulla, Gumillbara and Gooliawan Bana, which focus on service delivery for Dyirbal descendants.

Julian and Barbara Wigley
Julian and Barbara Wigley are practising architects who have specialised in community planning, housing management and building design for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients for the past 31 years. Their architectural practice specialises in Aboriginal town planning, housing, land negotiation and facilitating community participation in development projects. They assisted in the establishment of Tjuntjuntjara Council in Alice Springs during their stay in Alice Springs between 1975 and 1979 while working for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Panel. The Wigleys continued an independent national architectural practice assisting community clients in northern Australia after the closure of the panel in 1979. They have co-authored a number of books on housing and housing management.

Jane Dillon and Mark Savage
During the 1980s, Jane Dillon and Mark Savage spent eight years in Alice Springs working for Tjuntjuntjara Council, an Aboriginal community council and resource agency that provides architectural and planning services to Aboriginal communities and organisations within a 600 kilometre radius of Alice Springs. The range of work conducted by Dillon and Savage was considerable and included housing, schools, clinics, stores, sporting facilities, art and craft centres, community and childcare centres, offices and media facilities. The nature of their work in Central Australia provided an understanding of the broader issues surrounding the provision of housing, infrastructure and other community facilities for Aboriginal groups.

Dillon and Savage currently run a small architectural practice in Sydney, which has focused on providing architectural services that require a high degree of community involvement. They have continued to work on a variety of planning and design projects with a wide range of Aboriginal communities and organisations in many parts of Australia.

Su Groome
Su Groome is a Cairns based architect and a founding partner of Studio Mango, with over ten years experience working in Topical North Queensland. She has worked with Indigenous communities for more than seven years.

Groome’s work with Indigenous communities includes: settlement planning with developing communities; design of housing, outstation facilities and community buildings; and housing maintenance projects based on the Housing for Health methodology devised by Healthabitat (see Pholeros below). Her work in Cairns includes a demonstration sustainable house, designed around passive design principles, and incorporating substantial renewable power and water conservation components. The Master Builders and Housing Industry Association gave this house an award.

Groome’s published work includes numerous contributions to the Centre for Appropriate Technology’s Our House magazine, discussion papers on participatory planning and kitchen design for the Centre for Appropriate Technology, planning reports for the Port Stewart and Mona Mona communities, a report on the Housing for Health project in Pormpuraaw and the Your House book for Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing. Groome is also a contributor to the National Indigenous Housing Guide.

Paul Pholeros
Paul Pholeros is an architect and has a small architectural practice working on urban, rural and remote area architectural projects throughout Australia. He is also a co-director of Healthabitat Pty Ltd, in partnership with a specialist medical doctor and an environmental health professional. For over 17 years, Healthabitat has been involved in improving the health of Indigenous people by improving their living environments by means of community projects around Australia.

Cathy Keys
Cathy Keys graduated from the Department of Architecture, University of Queensland in 1993 after completing a final year thesis concerned with Indigenous birth practices and their implications for architectural design. She then commenced a doctoral thesis on Warlpiri women’s living environments. Keys currently works in the Queensland Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing.

Shaneen Fantin
Shaneen Fantin has eight years experience working with Aboriginal people on community and housing projects in the Northern Territory, Queensland and Canada. Between 1997 and 2002 she was consultation and design architect (with ‘Toppo Architects and Richard Layton and Associates) on seven National Aboriginal Health Strategy housing and infrastructure projects in the Northern Territory and Queensland. Fantin’s particular expertise is in cross-cultural consultation and design. Most recently she has worked on the consultation and design process of the Beegolman-Youth Space on Palm Island for the Queensland Community Renewal Team.

Fantin has recently submitted her PhD thesis entitled ‘Housing Aboriginal culture in northeast Arnhem Land’, which focuses on the ‘Yolngu people in Arnhem Land and the translation of their cultural beliefs and practices into
architectural design outcomes. She has won numerous grants and awards for her research into Aboriginal housing design and culture, and has co-authored papers and reports on Yuin traditional architecture, Indigenous homelessness and post-occupancy evaluations of Aboriginal Housing in the Northern Territory. Farin is currently a lecturer in Design Studio, Remote Area Construction, Architecture and Technology, and History and Theory in the Louis Laybourne Smith School of Architecture and Design at the University of South Australia.

Philip Kirke
Philip Kirke is the Principal Architect of the Western Australian office of GHD. He graduated with an Honours degree in Architecture from the University of Western Australia in 1988. From 1990 to 1991 he worked in Manchester in the United Kingdom and was involved in community architecture projects for its inner city West Indian community. Kirke gained corporate membership of the Royal Institute of British Architects before returning to Australia. From 1992 to the present time he has been the architect for the major staged development of the unique multi-cultural Christmas Island District High School. From 1996 to the present time he has been continuously involved in remote Aboriginal community projects, chiefly in the Western Desert, but also in the Kimberley, the Great Victoria Desert with the Spinifex people and Western Australia’s wheatbelt Nyungar communities.

Kirke has developed an interest in the idea that our own society has become too large and anonymous. A true culture, that is a culture born of the spirit of man and functioning as a living instrument of that spirit, is nowhere to be found, except in pockets as micro-cultures. He is currently designing a series of unique houses for local artists in Perth. These houses have been influenced by his cross-cultural work and with a fresh sense of what is unique and important in our own micro-cultures.

Simon Scally
Simon Scally graduated from the University of Melbourne in 1987. In 1992, he moved to Darwin and established Build-Up Design Architects. The firm’s focus is the delivery of high quality, culturally-appropriate housing, schools, clinics, community buildings and infrastructure for Aboriginal clients. Build Up Design has received a number of awards from the Royal Australian Institute of Architects’ NT Chapter, including the 1994 Institutional Award for the Bawinanga Womens’ Centres, the 2000 Institutional Award for the Belyuen School and the 2001 Public Building Award for The Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education study centre at Maningrida.

Paul Haar
Architect, Paul Haar, is a sole practitioner with offices in Melbourne and country Victoria. Much of his work as a young graduate was focused on researching climate-appropriate design, and the revitalisation of a community based housing culture amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in remote parts of northern Australia. Experience in these fields has led him to develop, in his practice design processes and building, solutions that are guided less by architectural ego and more by the essence of client and community in the context of a sustainable future. Underlying this thrust is a 28-year grounding in construction management and trade work, gathered from a broad range of small and medium-scale projects.

Haar was born to a migrant family of farmers, engineers and wood craftsmen. Thus his well-known appreciation of timber in architecture, his attention to detail in construction practice, and his love for community and the land are easily explained.

Geoff Barker
Geoff Barker has worked with Indigenous communities over a period of approximately 20 years. This period included eight years with Northern Building Consultants (NBC), an Indigenous owned and directed organisation operating in the Northern Territory and the Kimberley region of Western Australia. Five of those years were spent as the organisation’s General Manager, Practical Management and Development (PM&D), which he founded, has been the focus of his activity for the last 10 years. The firm has been involved in housing and community facility design, asset management, and community planning and development projects, as well as major infrastructure development work and providing assistance to self-build schemes.

Barker’s prime interest is in working with community groups to enable them to integrate their ideas and needs into an overall project methodology, and then to develop these into a community-based project delivery process. The intention is to achieve specific project objectives concurrently with a range of community benefits, which can lead to improved conditions and wellbeing. PM+D’s staff are involved in a range of voluntary activities including technical advice to Yirra Yaalka Noongar Theatre in Perth, and membership on the Graham (Pol) Farmer Foundation Board that funds Indigenous education projects in Western Australia.

Col James
Col James, AM, is a local resident architect/planner who has worked with the Aboriginal Housing Company since its inception in 1972. James is a graduate of the Universities of NSW, Sydney and Harvard, and director of the I.B. Fell Housing Research Centre, located in the Faculty of Architecture, at the University of Sydney. He is committed to the active involvement of university staff and students to support the local Aboriginals.

Angela Pitts
Angela Pitts has over ten years experience in urban and regional development working in Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. She is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Sydney and holds Masters degrees in Urban Planning and African Area Studies from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Since arriving in Australia, Pitts has worked as a volunteer for the Aboriginal Housing Company as a social/urban planner on the Pamuluyk Redevelopment Project.

Dillon Kombumerri
Dillon Kombumerri, a Yaguriarr man from the Gold Coast, Queensland, is a registered architect with 13 years experience. He set up Memma in 1995 within the NSW Government Architect’s Office as a discrete business unit run by Indigenous design professionals. Kombumerri previously sat on the Aboriginal Housing Company Board and is currently a director of AISEAN (Australian Indigenous Scientists, Engineers and Architects Network Ltd). Incorporated in 2001, AISEAN is a national network of Indigenous professionals working in the fields of science, engineering, architecture and the built environment.

Chambers has been engaged in a number of cultural heritage, native title claim and site recording projects. She has co-authored a major published report on violence in Australian Indigenous communities, and a series of papers on how Indigenous homelessness can be categorised and responded to. Since early 2001, she has been involved in a Mentoring and Evaluation Program initiated by the Commonwealth Office of the Status of Women to assist its National Indigenous Family Violence Grants Program recipients.

Chambers graduated from the University of Queensland in 1995, receiving a Bachelor of Architecture with honours. Her tertiary studies also included an anthropology component. She has worked professionally on architectural projects within Australia and overseas, including heritage conservation schemes, urban renewal, convention and conference centre projects, single and multi-residences and educational facilities. She was a part-time design tutor at the Queensland University of Technology’s School of Architecture for three years. During 2003, Catharine has been employed as a Research Officer with the Cultural Heritage Branch of Queensland’s Environment Protection Agency, assisting with maintenance of the state’s Heritage Register.
The collection of specialist knowledge and skills related to the design of housing for Aboriginal Australians has emerged as an architectural sub-discipline. One of its chief components centres on how an understanding of the cultural differences inherent in Aboriginal domiciliary behaviour can inform the design process. This can be described as the cultural design paradigm. Two other architectural paradigms have impacted on Aboriginal housing design in recent years; these are the environmental health paradigm and the housing-as-process philosophy, both of which contribute to its distinctiveness as a field of study and practice. Reconciling all these approaches within the design process has become a key challenge for contemporary practitioners.

The cultural design paradigm involves the use of models of culturally distinct behaviour to inform definitions of Aboriginal housing needs. Its premise is that to competently design appropriate residential accommodation for Aboriginal people who have traditionally oriented lifestyles, architects must understand the nature of those lifestyles, particularly in the domiciliary context. This knowledge also increases understanding of the needs of groups who have undergone cultural changes, including those in rural, urban and metropolitan settings, by helping to identify those aspects of their customary domiciliary behaviour that have been retained. The approach was adopted by a variety of practitioners in the 1970s and is analysed here in Take 2. For example, the first essay by Julian and Barbara Wigley, who have 30 years of experience in the field, starts with a thumbnail sketch of Aboriginal history, and goes on to outline a series of design conundrums in Aboriginal housing. It addresses some contradictory cultural needs, a number of which are considered by later contributors.

Julian Wigley’s work in Alice Springs during the mid-1970s included assisting with the establishment of Tjapangka Council, an umbrella Aboriginal organisation that now services some 18 or 19 Alice Springs’ town camps. Tjapangka is considered something of a benchmark in Aboriginal housing design and practice. In the mid-1980s, its architectural department was managed by the Take 2 contributors Jane Dillon and Mark Savage. At this time Paul Memmott was contracted by the council to carry out an evaluation of its housing stock. He attempted to apply the ‘cultural design paradigm’ to his analysis of the approximately 120 designs in the Tjapangka report folio. It was this early work, and the experience he gained by exposure to other Central Australian projects throughout the 1990s, which forms the basis of his essay in Take 2.

Meanwhile the cultural design paradigm has been taught, researched and applied from within the Aboriginal Environments Research Centre (AERC) at the University of Queensland, of which Memmott is Director. Two of the AERC’s doctoral graduates, who are architectural practitioners in their own right, have also contributed to Take 2 and their work demonstrates elements of this approach at its strongest. Shaneen Fantin’s paper on Arnhem Land Yolngu people deals with the relationship between housing design and avoidance behaviour and sorcery, whilst Catherine Keys’ discussion of women’s domiciliary camps built and occupied by Warlpiri people of the Northern Territory’s central west extrapolates design strategies related to their culturally distinct household needs. Their work is complemented by that of Philip Kirke whose essay considers further issues related to designing for spatial behaviour, as exemplified in his work with the Martu tribespeople of the Western Desert of Western Australia.

Whereas Dillon and Savage’s paper draws readers into the specifics of tropical, arid-area climatic design, material choice and detailing, Sue Groome’s contribution provides an overview of these technical design aspects, which is illustrated by using a number of examples from Australia’s tropical north. These contexts are characterised by the monsoonal influence and reflect her professional experience with the Centre for Appropriate Technology before she established her own practice in Cairns.

The attention given to technology and detailing by Dillon and Savage, and Groome leads readers into the
second paradigm: environmental health design. This approach emerged from within Nganjampa Health Council in Alice Springs, which services the Anangu Pitjantjatjara homelands in the north-west of South Australia. Between 1986 and 1987, Nganjampa, in conjunction with the South Australian Government, sponsored a review of environmental and public health in these homelands. The resulting document has become known as the ‘UPK report’. In it architect Paul Pholeros combined his architectural skills with those of Paul T arrogant, a doctor, and Stephen Rainow, an anthropologist, to develop an understanding of the critical relationships between poor Aboriginal health and housing technology performance. A seminal project of a similarly multi-disciplinary type, involving an architect and a doctor, had been carried out prior to the Nganjampa et al study. However, the former was the first that systematically isolated and causally linked complex health problems with sets of design features and ranked them in a set of priorities based on the likelihood of improving health standards. Pholeros, T arrogant and Rainow have produced further books about their work, most recently under the logo of Healthabitat, as well as a series of important papers. Their work culminated in a commission from the Commonwealth, State and Territory Housing Ministers’ Working Group on Indigenous Housing to prepare The National Indigenous Housing Guide, and their methodology has been practically applied through a large-scale ATIBIC project entitled, Fixing Houses for Better Health Project.

Despite some contradictions existing between the design practice guidelines or methods advocated by the proponents of the cultural design paradigm and the environmental health paradigm, these two approaches can and should be complementary. They lead into a third architectural paradigm: the housing-as-process philosophy, which aims to firmly situate housing design and provision within the broader framework of an Aboriginal community’s planning goals and cultural practices, as well as its socio-economic structure and development. One fundamental aspect of this approach involves design attention being given to the community’s housing management capacities to ensure that all technology is locally sustainable. This subject is introduced in Simon Scally’s essay on outstation architecture in the Top End. A second grass-roots perspective was essentially one drawn from environmental psychology, and like Heppell’s first book, while oriented camps but, as architects did not write it, it failed to translate its findings into design strategies. Three Council in Alice Springs, which services the Anangu Pitjantjatjara homelands in the north-west of South Australia, has not been a book produced that deals with this subject from a broadly architectural perspective, that fundamentally different to those adopted in mainstream practice. Indeed, all of the normal principles, methods and precepts apply. But in addition there is a gradually accruing body of knowledge and techniques focused on a range of problems encountered in this field of work, which in combination, if not in their inherent nature, are rather unique. The reader interested in Aboriginal housing history would benefit from prior research by Read, P. (ed.), Settlement: A History of Australia Indigenous Housing, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2000; Memmott, P., Aboriginal Housing: State of the Art (or Non-State of the Art) , Architecture Australia, June 1989; pp.34–42; Memmott, P. (ed.), Aboriginal and Islander Architecture in Queensland , Special Edition, Queensland Architect: Chapter News and Views, Brisbane: Royal Australian Institute of Architects, September 1993; and Wijeyer, B. & Wijeyer, J., Black Iron: A History of Aboriginal Housing in Northern Australia, Darwin: Northern Territory National Trust, 1993.


Canberra: Commonwealth, State and Territory Housing Ministers’ Working Group on Indigenous Housing (Australian Department of Family & Community Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission), 1999.

11 For example, see Shaneen Fantin’s essay in Take 2.

12 One of Geoff Barker’s major contributions to Aboriginal housing has been to facilitate the second sustained integration of an Indigenous organisation and an architectural service, after Tangentyere. This organisation is known as Northern Building Consultants (NBC). NBC evolved in the 1980s under different structures, with the duration of Barker’s involvement being from 1984 to 1991. NBC now has two successful independent companies, one operating in the Northern Territory and one in Western Australia.


19 See Memmott, Keys, Smith, Pholeros et al, and Haar in Read, (ed.), Settlement, 2000. All except Smith are contributors to this journal.