

Maori architect astounds

by Debra Reweti

It's not one of those pie-in-the-sky type visions it's far more realistic than that.

This sensitive architect believes that one day a building will not merely speak for itself. But it will also speak for the personality of the people living in it and for the people that live around it.

Gone will be the days when architects design buildings that cater only for the NEEDS of the people living in it. Gone will be the days when it is sufficient that a house have one toilet, one bathroom, bedrooms, a lounge and a kitchen.

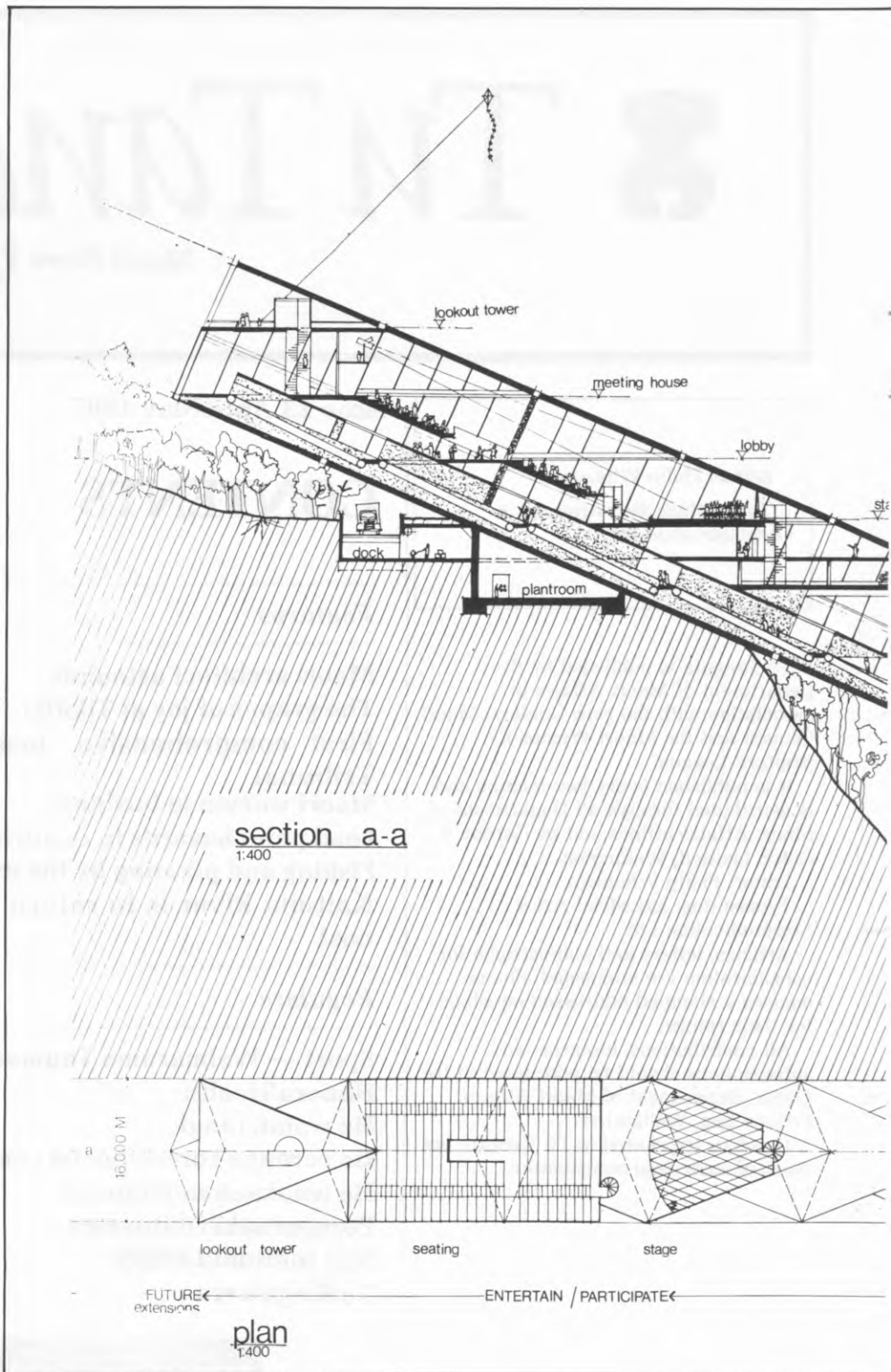
Instead, Rewi Thompson imagines a house that reflects, in its design, the character of the people living in it and the likes of the people who must see it every day.

"For example, if you look at the maori community. The people express themselves in their feelings of love, warmth and in the philosophical. Transforming that into a building can be daunting but there is no reason, in the future, why it can't be done," he explained.

It is a vision of "humanistic" architecture.

Rewi has already made a move toward expressing that special form of architecture. His most recent prize-winning design was a futuristic state house specifically based on te whanau. Looking something like an angular mushroom, the design allows for two open plan spaces on the bottom level to accommodate community gathering. Upstairs the spaces are more intimate, designed specially for the family. Private from the lower community area but still open so that the people are together in a "sharing, caring" area.

Rewi took the design to show the people who helped inspire it, in the South Auckland suburb of Otara, and their reaction was quick: "They thought it was pretty far out. They didn't really see how it would work but they appreciated the idea."



'An unreal mixture of steel and glass'

And that is the reaction Rewi Thompson expects... for the time being.

Rewi (30), is a late beginner in the so-called glamour world of architecture. Of Ngati Porou and Ngati Raukawa descent, he was born and brought up in Wellington.

His parents were and still are very active in Ngati Poneke.

"They never taught us the language but I don't blame them because they were trying very hard to give my sister and I a sound economic base from which we could grow."

Young Rewi was always interested in buildings but was never encouraged to even consider becoming an architect.

"I suppose that one of the problems with the present day system is that it doesn't allow for the individual to express their own ideals.

"I was always in the position where I was led to believe that I couldn't become a designer and that I wasn't material for university."

On the basis of having done woodwork and technical drawing at school and on the recommendation of a