
Salutogenic Design
Culturally Centred Aged Care
Design & Health 15th World Congress
Design &Health
International Academy for Design and Health
KAUNITZ YEUNG ARCHITECTURE


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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Kaunitz Yeung Architecture have had the privilege of working on First Nations across the continent and Moana, designing in partnership with communities to support their continual custodianship and self determination.

Recognising the Traditional people's ongoing connection to the land, sky, seas, cultures and communities. Honouring their Elder's, and intergenerational leadership.

The architecture we support occupies Country and becomes apart of it. We feel the weight of this responsibility and are committed to a culturally competent process and outcome that aims to heal Country and support community's protocols and practices.

We are forever grateful for all that has been shared and taught to us. We work everyday to honour that privilege.

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Village Latrines
The Solomon Islands
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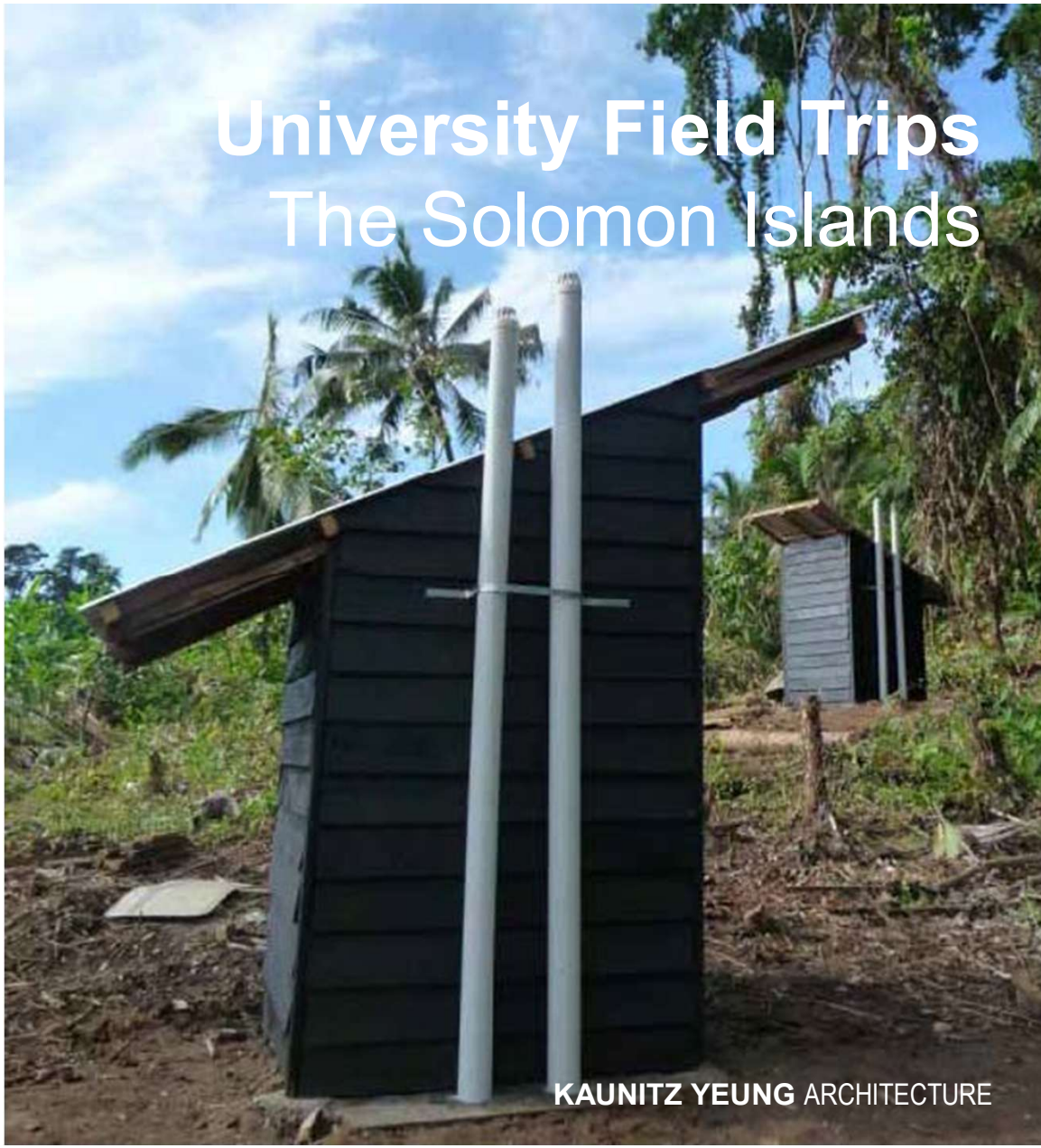

University Field Trips
The Solomon Islands

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Ngari School
The Solomon Islands
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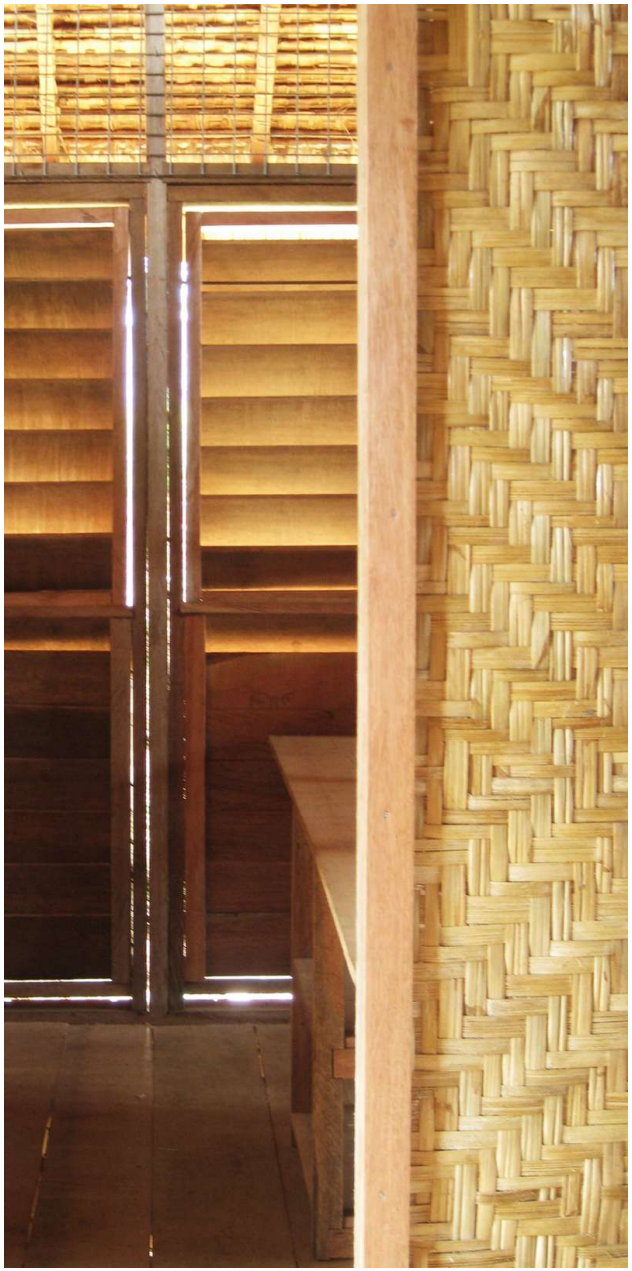


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Takara School
Republic of Vanuatu
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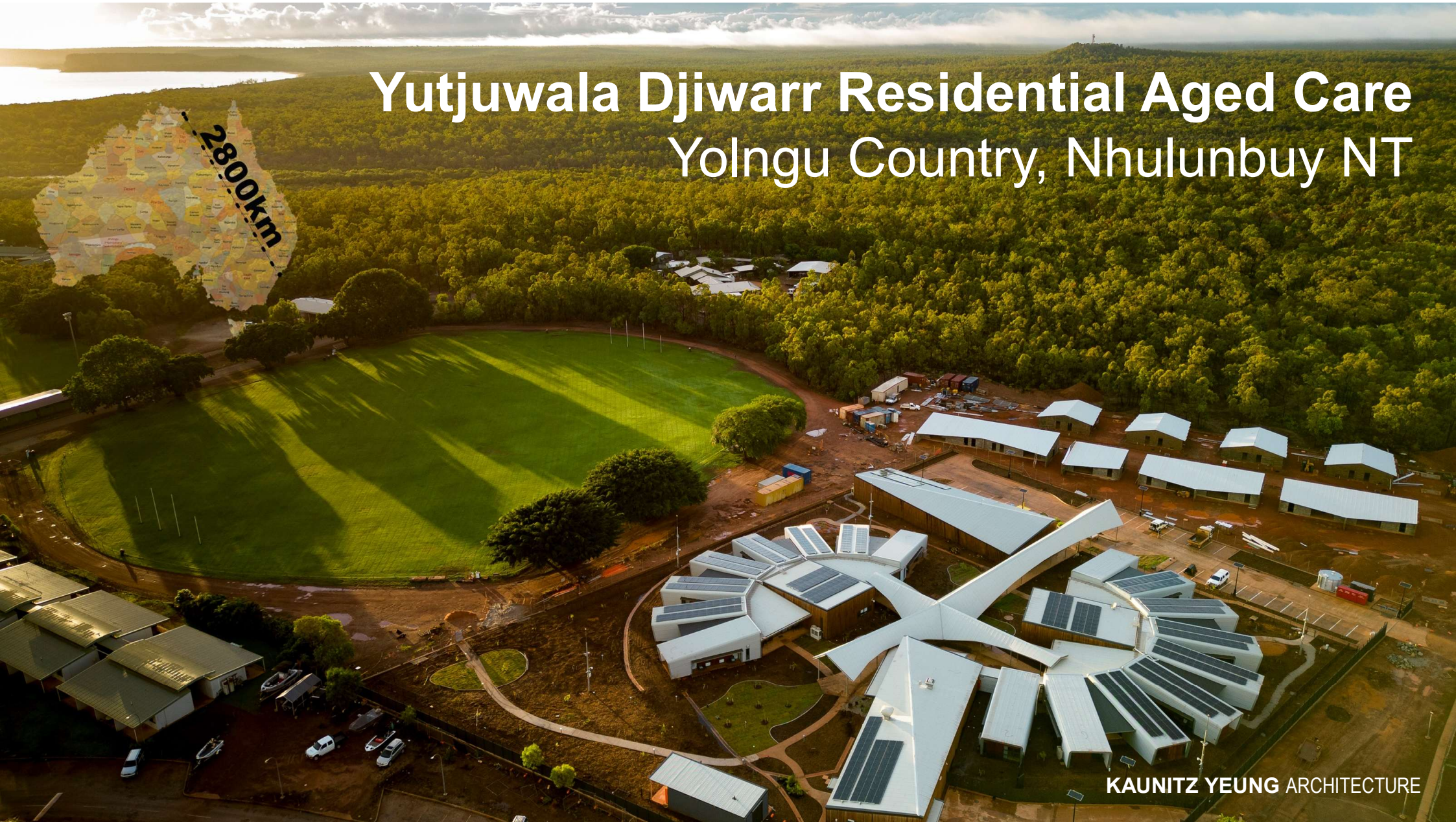
Yutjuwala Djiwarr Residential Aged Care

Yolngu Country, Nhulunbuy NT





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East Arnhem Land

97,000km2, 16,000 people, 12,000 Yolngu, 16 clans, 8 communities + countless homelands










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CO-CONSTRUCTION - ENDEMIC LANDSCAPE
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ABC NEWS
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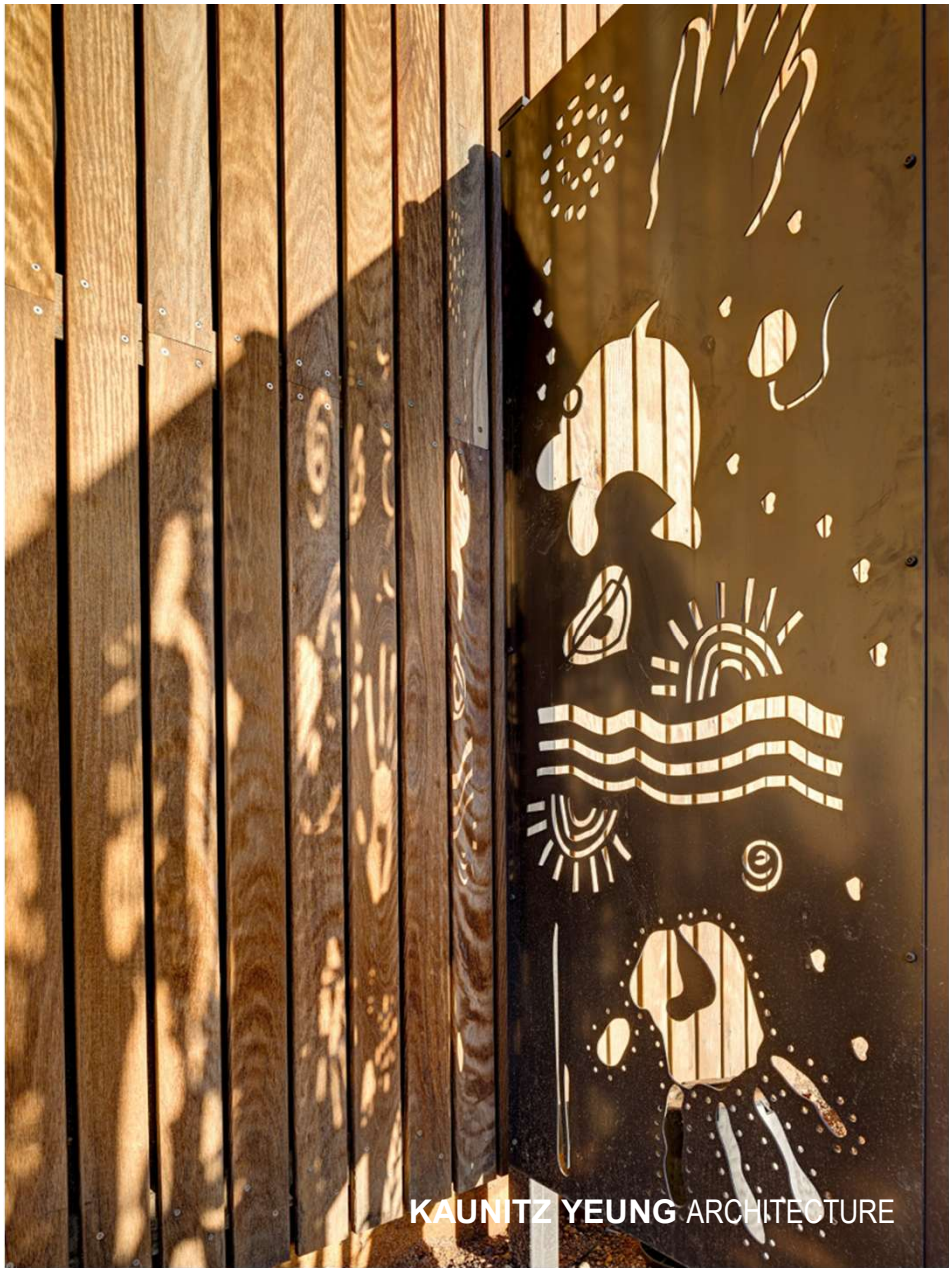
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Designing Culturally Safe Aged Care Homes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

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Australian Government
Department of Health, Disability and Ageing

Designing Culturally Safe Aged Care Homes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

A complementary resource to the National Aged Care Design Principles and Guidelines



health.gov.au

April 2026

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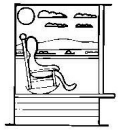
Principles and Guidelines at a glance

Principle 1 – Country and Island Home



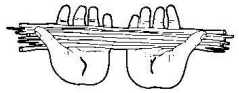
1.1 Inside/Outside



1.2 Country and Island Home-Centric Landscape

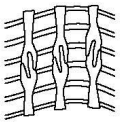


1.3 Local Seasons

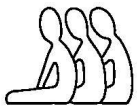


1.4 Local Materials

Principle 2 – Culture



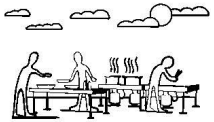
2.1 Cultural Protocols



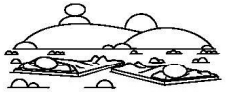
2.2 Cultural Integration



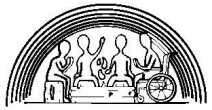
2.3 Sorry Business



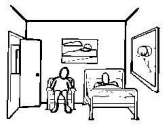
2.4 External Kitchens



2.5 External and Cultural Sleeping



2.6 Fire Pits

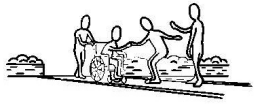


2.7 Bedroom Configuration



2.8 Sensory Rooms

Principle 3 – Community



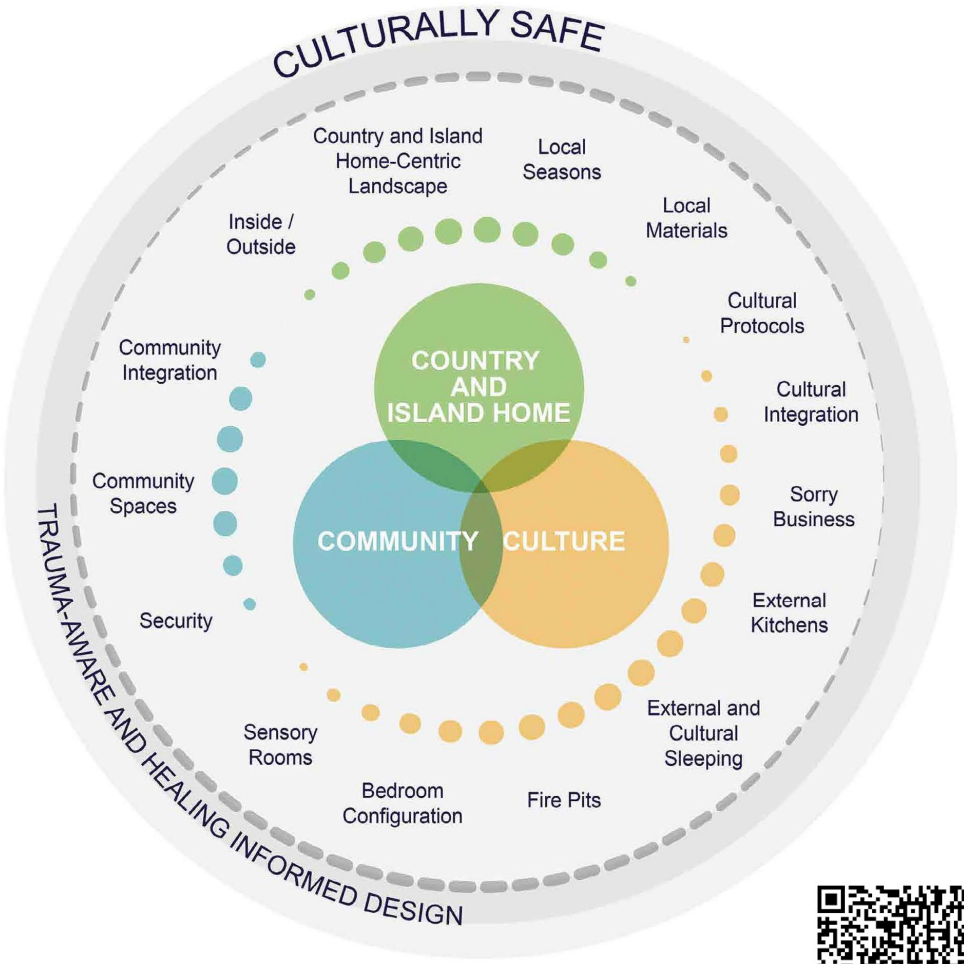
3.1 Community Integration



3.2 Community Spaces



3.3 Security



Design Principle 1

Country and Island Home

1



Design Principle 1

Objective

To design aged care home environments that enable residents, staff and visitors to maintain their connection to Country and Island Home.

What is Country and Island Home?

Country [or Island Home] encompasses everything. It includes both living and non-living elements. It holds everything within the landscape, including Earth, Water and Sky Country, as well as people, animals, plants and the stories that connect them.

Country [or Island Home]... has specific and significant meaning for Aboriginal [and Torres Strait Islander] peoples. Country [or Island Home] relates to the nation, cultural group and region that Aboriginal [and Torres Strait Islander] people belong to, yearn for, find healing from and will return to. Country [or Island Home] is the literal place of origin for Aboriginal [and Torres Strait Islander] peoples.

Aboriginal [and Torres Strait Islander] peoples' deep and personal relationships with Country [or Island Home] are expressed in multiple ways. The lore of Country is expressed through songlines, stories, art and ceremony. Language, including the names of Aboriginal [and Torres Strait Islander] groups and placenames, are another means of expressing relationships with Country [or Island Home].

There is no universal way of defining Country [or Island Home]. Descriptions of Country [or Island Home], particularly traditional associations, will differ from individual to individual, depending on the associations passed down through the family and community.

Source: Government Architect New South Wales, Connecting with Country Framework[1]



Design Principle 2

Culture

2



Design Principle 2

Objective

To design aged care home environments that enable residents, staff and visitors to maintain their connection to culture.

What is culture?

By culture, we mean the collective beliefs, values, rules and customs that inform a group's way of life. At its most basic level, culture is shared knowledge and practice. Members of a group use this knowledge as a guide for how to understand and behave in the world around them.

Every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander group has a unique culture. But there are some important cultural features that they all share, including:

- *Networked systems of kinship and family support*
- *Deep connection to Country (lands and waters)*
- *Value of ceremony, traditions and ritual*
- *Respect for law and the authority of Elders*
- *Respect for women's and men's areas of knowledge*
- *Mutual responsibility and sharing of resources.*

Culture is not static. It is a living system of beliefs, values, practices and understandings. This system evolves in response to changing circumstances. As the needs, lifestyles and characteristics of a group change, so do their worldviews and behaviours.

Source: Australian Indigenous Governance Institute Centre, Your Culture Toolkit[4]



Design Principle 3

Community

3



Design Principle 3

Objective

To design aged care home environments that offer two-way connections between residents and community, cultivating a place of living culture.

What is community?

For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, knowing and being part of particular Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities is an important part of identity.

As well as being important to identity, communities can be sources of support and resilience, and this support can enhance and promote an individual's SEWB [social and emotional wellbeing]...

Communities that are empowered and cohesive are best able to support the SEWB [social and emotional wellbeing] of individuals and families. Self-determination, community control, cultural revitalisation and community healing have been identified as crucial strategies for empowering and strengthening communities.

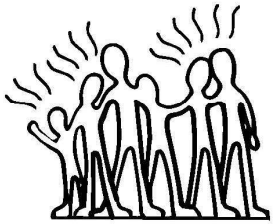
Source: Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet, *Family, kinship and community*[4]



Guideline 2.3

Sorry Business

Design spaces that support culturally safe palliative care and Sorry Business practices.



Opportunity

These moments are pivotal and sensitive in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents, their families and their communities. Historically, cultural expression was frequently restricted, and barriers still exist today. Sometimes spaces or amenities in an aged care home are insufficient to fully support the required cultural practices.

Culturally supportive environments should ensure cultural continuity. Missteps can cause friction in communities, while respectful approaches empower residents to practice their culture and enable self-determination.

The period of Sorry Business and palliative care are defined by rich cultural practices that strengthen cultural connection at life's most pivotal time. Providing space for these practices requires serious consideration and collaboration with local knowledge holders, Elders and others. Done well, it upholds dignity and fosters harmony.

Considerations

1. **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led:** ensure Sorry Business protocols and practices are led and determined by local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, supporting their cultural authority and decision making.
2. **Connection with Country and Island Home:** create humane and culturally grounded spaces that support the resident staying connected to Country and Island Home. Consider external spaces including fire pits and natural elements that reflect local tradition and ecological rhythms. Consider the ability to view and connect with Sky Country.
3. **Family/community presence:** provide spaces and amenities that allow immediate family and community members (possibly interchanging) to stay close, including overnight stays.
4. **Community connections:** design access, gathering spaces and amenities for extended family and community to be close to and visit the resident.
5. **Respectful viewing:** include facilities that allow for respectful viewing of residents after passing, aligned with cultural customs and family wishes.
6. **Morgues:** carefully assess the need for spaces to hold the deceased for an appropriate period to support local culture. Carefully assess viability and compliance.
7. **Spaces for cultural transitions:** evaluate how palliative care areas, mourning spaces and other aged care home spaces interact. How to effectively incorporate practices such as cultural cleansing and protocols for room turnover after a resident passes should be carefully considered in partnership with the community.
8. **Safety protocols:** assess the feasibility of temporarily isolating fire detection systems in designated areas to safely accommodate smoking ceremonies, ensuring compliance with the National Construction Code, Australian Standards and any other relevant codes/standards.
9. **Impact on residents:** plan the placement of spaces to ensure minimal disruption to other residents and aged care home operations. Consider appropriate connections where cultural protocols support this.
10. **Culturally respectful departures:** provide options for ceremonial or private departures, reflecting diverse cultural protocols and supporting dignity in transition.

Scenarios

Niece We had to take Aunty away from community for palliative care because we need extra support to look after her. We know this care is necessary and we value the dignity and comfort that proper end-of-life support can provide, but we are also worried about cultural barriers. It is important to us that close family members can take turns staying with her and that other family and community members are able to visit or stay nearby.

The space didn't easily support this, but staff have helped make it feel like home. They allowed us to bring in her belongings, including her plants, and found a room for us to be present and provide comfort. Through their respectful, community-led approach, Aunty's dignity is upheld.

Uncle My cultural practices require that key members of my family come together to participate in Sorry Business. However, the morgue at the local hospital has strict timeframes and there are no facilities at the aged care home for my family to carry out these practices. Over the years family members have been forced to break cultural protocols and experience cultural stress when they are unable to visit the morgue in time. But my aged care home has been talking to us lately and is better understanding the practices involved with Sorry Business in our community. They are working with the morgue to adapt their processes to allow time for Sorry Business. They are asking us what facilities would be needed to best support Sorry Business here at the home too.



Kaltukatjara Aged Care

Pitjantjatjara Country
Northern Territory

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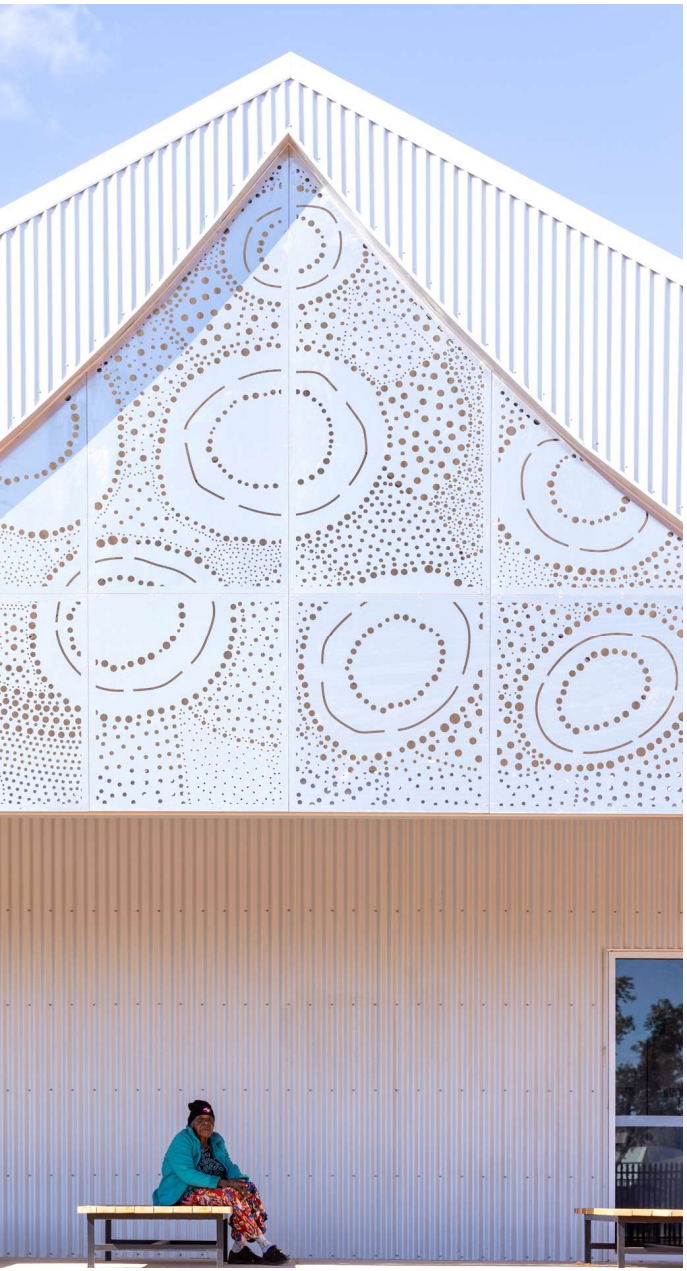




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Dhupuma Barker School

Yolngu Country
Gunyangara NT

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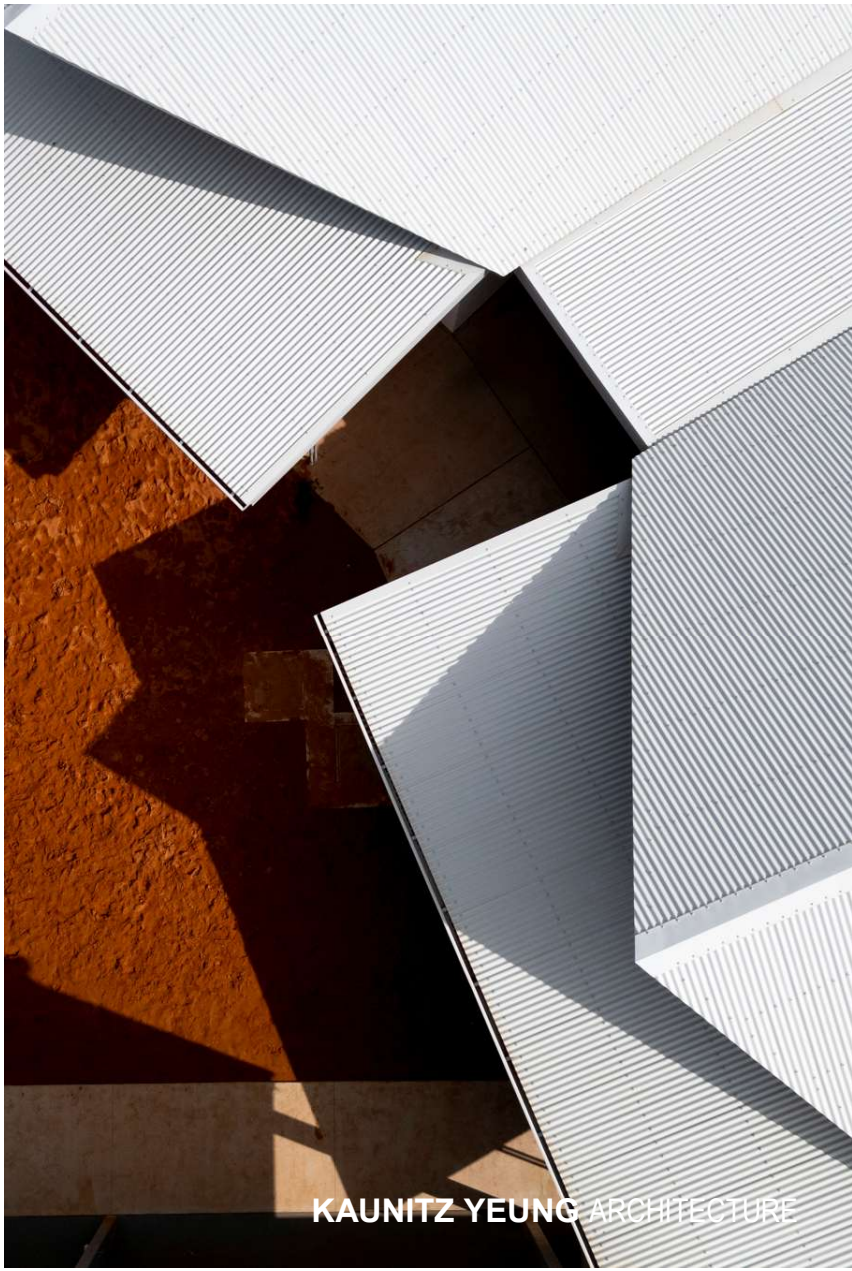
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Resources

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