

Design examples:



Ryan Gorrie is a member of Bingwi Neyaashi Anishinaabek (Sand Point First Nation on Lake Nipigon). From participating in ceremonies, to volunteer work with elders, to pursuit of proficiency in Anishinaabemowin, Ryan contributes to the perpetuation of indigenous culture. His past design work ranges from traditionally carved ceremonial items to health centres, and recently culminated in the award winning Gathering Circle at Thunder Bay Waterfront.

The Gathering Circle is an open-air pavilion located at Prince Arthur's Landing in Thunder Bay. Gorrie collaborated with architectural firm Brook McIlroy to create this hybrid of traditional arc geometry with contemporary design techniques. The exterior is composed of machined cedar strips. They are held up by poles made from young spruce trees, harvested in the spring by a local Aboriginal craftsman and then bent and lashed to create twenty arched supports.



Q. How might someone use anishinaabe arcs for other kinds of design? Furniture? Shoes? Packaging? If someone said “your design will be used for a building” what would you like the function of the building to be? Hospital? Home? Playground? Office? Barn? Sports stadium? How would the arcs relate to its function?

In a google doc answers: How does your design relate to your career path? Your family or community? And, your own interests and future goals?

Gorrie's advice to indigenous design students:

I think our students should look to our traditions as inspiration. Many architectures for indigenous communities often try to look indigenous by reducing culture to a fixed image. What is important is, like our languages, consider things as animate, alive. Look to our stories, how time, scale and the confines of the physical world are fluid in those stories. That stones are considered living things for example. A recent article by Brett MacIntyre (Haida) states that our cultures are so deep and complex S that we do them a disservice by boiling them down to an essence, whereas we should be leaving them open to allow the multiplicity that is our culture's present through ambiguity, ie. leaving them open for interpretation, greater and multiple meanings.

Indigenous architecture so open, not predetermined, and although we've had interrupted development in our architecture/culture, the cross pollination with modern materiality allows us to redefine/reclaim our architecture. Anishinaabe-izing any modern object, material etc by drawing inspiration from tradition, ie making it our own, we originally adorned our garments with folded and sewn and dyed porcupine quills. The bead was introduced and we adapted them to our designs. We should try to think this way about the things in our life, how can we transform them, whether they are construction materials or clothing etc. Also look at our actions towards each other, to our world, are we perpetuating colonial processes?

It's difficult when so many of us are struggling to reclaim culture and language. I think it's natural for us to want to see a tipi/wigwam/longhouse, because we've not experienced these structures, we are drawn to them as they embody that which is a foundational cultural element and are forms still used today. We still build our sweat lodges the same way, there is no need to do it differently. I've seen and heard of modern attempts to create sweat lodges, disconnected from traditional materials, from land, they lack the spirit of coming together to build the lodge, to harvest, to give thanks, to rebuild when it's time. There is no better way to connect with the earth than to be on it, in it, as much as possible.

Other examples:



Native Child and Family Services of Toronto -- excerpts their website below:

This consolidates social and culture-based services for aboriginal children and families within a 30,000 square foot office building in the heart of downtown Toronto. The challenge for this project was to create a place that would reconnect urban aboriginals with nature in the heart of the city and project a bold visual presence for the First Nations community – which was difficult to conceive for a community that is comprised of distinctive bands with their own identities and customs.

Finding mathematical patterns common to all is one way to bring different groups together.



Cree cultural institute -- excerpts from their website below:

Douglas Cardinal, of Métis, Blackfoot/Kainai, German and Algonquin heritage, designed this cultural center. He was one of the first North American architects to use computers to assist in the design process. Community activities are staged at ground floor level, with dance and music shows taking place alongside more intimate events. The lower storey contains the offices of associations involved in preserving the native cree language, local hunting methods and arts and handicrafts, as well as in promoting tourism. Throughout the project, wood is used extensively – referencing the importance of the forest to the local population – while symbolic elements that reference the traditional habitat have been transposed across the design.

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Further reading:

[Unknown Ground: The Case for Ambiguity in Indigenous Architecture \(Brett MacIntyre\)](#)

[Dancing on our turtle's back \(Leanne Simpson\)](#)