

**MAOTA  
SAMOA**

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SAMOA  
HOUSE

Evelina Lolesi

Thank you to Samoa House Library for funding this research project,  
and to JASMAX for permission to publish images of the Maota Samoa  
in this zine.

November 2024

Evelina Lolesi is an architectural graduate with a Master's in Architecture and Heritage Conservation from the University of Auckland. Her research interests include Aotearoa's Architectural history, Pacific architecture, Heritage buildings and sites, Pacific and indigenous spatial knowledge and her Pākeha/Pacific identity.



Maota Samoa, also known as Samoa House, sits at 283 Karangahape road in the Auckland CBD. Designed by JASMaD (now JASMAX) in the 1970s and completed in 1978, it is a little-known, yet a unique and important piece of Aotearoa's built heritage.

In the latter half of 2024 I undertook a research project funded by Samoa House Library, with the goal of compiling published information on the history of Maota Samoa. This zine is a collection of newspaper excerpts which create a historical timeline of the building's construction. Also contained are previously unpublished drawings of the building by JASMaD, and items from the personal archive of M.S Fonoti, who was the President of the Samoa Progressive Movement from 1970-1972, and involved in launching the original funding appeal for the building.

The idea of a community-focused, Samoan inspired building in the central city first emerged in 1970, when the 'Samoan Progressive Movement', also known as 'Chiefs, Orators and People of Samoa Inc' launched the Samoa House Appeal Fund. Their intention was to create a space for Auckland's growing Samoan population, particularly youth, to learn and engage with their culture. After reported delays in finding funding, the building site was purchased by the Government of Samoa, and subsequently JASMaD were appointed to design the new building.

The design of the building is a marrying of Pacific design elements and local modernism. The street-facing entrance on Karangahape Road opens up to a green-tiled thoroughfare, double-height retail spaces and the entryway to the fale maota. The offices of the Samoan, Niue and Nauru consulates sat on the upper floors.

The fale Maota itself, while inspired by the structure of a Samoan fale afolau, is not traditional. To adapt the traditional form to the shape, climate and codes of Auckland city, the materials and structure were rearranged in an enclosed space - commercial timber and exposed steel brackets a stark contrast to the rounded beams and intricate woven fala seen in JASMAX's more recent Fale Pasifika at the University of Auckland.

When construction began in 1978 and the foundation stone was laid in ceremony, the building was labeled a "symbol of commitment" between the two countries in a speech by Samoan Head-of-state, Malietoa Tanumafili II. It is impossible to ignore this sentiment, when throughout the decade Aotearoa's Pacific community were traumatized by the Dawn Raids. It is interesting to note that by the time Prime Minister Robert Muldoon was pictured at the opening of Maota Samoa in 1978, raids were still taking place.

After the building completed construction, published records on operations within the Maota Samoa are next-to-none. Many of the original knowledge-holders; those who may have been involved in the building's design, construction and use have passed on. Much of the history between then and now is contained in anecdotes and family stories. With recent efforts to raise awareness of the building's cultural and historical significance to Aotearoa's Pacific communities, it is important to re-examine whether our forebearer's vision of Maota Samoa has been upheld.

Throughout my research I have been unable to find evidence of any further meaningful engagements between this building and the New Zealand government. Furthermore, with the dwindled population of Pacific People in central Tamaki Makaurau, the Samoan Consulate re-located to Mangere in 2016, and the upper floors were occupied by private businesses. 'Friends of Maota Samoa' was established in 2023, a group dedicated to restoring community access to the maota, and advocates for dynamic gathering spaces for Tāmaki Makaurau's Pacific population.

Maota Samoa has a persisting connection to the Pacific arts community. In the late 1980s, artist and founding president of Tautai Gallery, Fatu Feu'u, met with Pacific artists in the fale maota, and it seems like subsequent exhibitions took place in the space. In 2018, Samoa House Library opened on the building's second floor, containing acquisitioned books from the University of Auckland's disestablished Fine Arts library.

The Maota Samoa is also situated at the very beginning of JASMAX's legacy of bi-cultural design. Currently their manifesto acknowledges the bi-cultural foundations of Aotearoa, and their cultural advisory team, Waka Māia, are one of a few Māori and Pacific architecture groups sparking change within the industry. It is staggering that despite its overwhelming value to Aotearoa's architectural and cultural heritage, it is not currently a heritage-listed building.

Hopefully this document presents a compelling argument for Maota Samoa's significance to our history, and has the potential to become a starting point for further engagement and research. It is clear that much of the building's history is unpublished, even unwritten. If you have stories relating to the Maota Samoa, either your own or ones passed down, I would encourage you to share them.



#### A timeline of Maota Samoa

1970 - The Samoa House Appeal Fund is launched by the 'Samoaan Progressive movement' also known as the 'Chiefs, Orators and People of Samoa' with the intention of uplifting and educating younger generations of Samoans in Auckland.

October 1971 - The original intended build date.

January-February 1972 - The government of Western Samoa bought the building site between Karangahape Road and Beresford Street.

17th November 1972 - Project delay reported in the Auckland Press. Community fundraising continued.

13th September 1977 - JASMaD sent a letter, along with architectural drawings to council for building consent.

7th December 1977 - It's reported in the Herald that site work was being completed, and construction was set to begin early the following year.

2nd April 1978 - Foundation stone was laid by Samoan Head-of-state, Malietoa Tanumafili II, who also presented a speech on the occasion.

20th April 1978 - The Auckland Star reports that the building is to start construction.

27th December 1978 - Building is opened to the public - in attendance is current Prime Minister Robert Muldoon and Tupua Tamaese Lealofi IV, pictured in the Press newspaper.

30th May 1980 - JASMaD wins the NZIA National Design award and the 1979 Architects Assn. design award for the Maota Samoa

A timeline of Maota Samoa (continued)

8th November 1986 - The Polynesian Bookshop opens in the building, moving from it's original location in Ponsonby.

1988 - The director of Tautai Art Gallery, Fatu Feu'u meets with group of artists who share a commitment to producing work reflecting a Pacific perspective.

1991 - Penguin books holds an opening in the Fale Maota for ALbert Wendt's book, 'Ola'.

2009 - Samoa House Lane was named

1978-2016 - The Samoan consulate operates within the offices of Samoa House. The Nauru and Niue consulates are also housed in this building for unknown periods of time.

2016 - The Samoan consulate moves to the Fale o Samoa in Mangere.

2018 - Samoa House Library was established by former members of the 'Save our Fine Arts Libraries' campaign - a response to the disestablishment of specialist creative arts libraries at the University of Auckland.

2023 - Friends of Maota Samoa was established to raise awareness for and protect the cultural heritage of Samoa House

September 16 2023 - the building's 45th anniversary was celebrated with a fiafia day.

Copy of speech by M S Fonoti  
Fund Raising SAMOA HOUSE  
22/9/1970.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

Tomorrow we will launch our building fund appeal. I will start off with a question which is:-

Why are we bothering to take on a large project of this manner?

If we were waiting for the right person or persons to come along, nothing will ever happen. Our reasons for raising funds for the erection of a modern building are as follows:-

1. To lift up our people in
  - (a) Education.
  - (b) Physical.
  - (c) Spiritual.

By so doing the present and future generations will be far better New Zealand citizens. The advantages of modern building of this nature is where our people could come to qualified counselors for legal problems, language classes, employment, difficulties, and emotional matters which we would with trained help, remedy much better than outsiders. It would be better to prevent than to find a cure.

The more reliant we are as people the less concern we are to society. We are really trying to help ourselves by raising money from our own people, but we will accept any help offered with sincerity from government, local or well wishes.

Do you think as a New Zealand citizen and a Samoan to see our people in desperate plight, that it doesn't concern us? We will never give up this goal we have set until it is accomplished. No doubt you have read in the press about Ponsonby and Otara as a trouble spots which is causing a lot of worry to the authorities.

Well this is your big opportunity you can offer your service in talent or finance.

Please let us show to our polynesian cousins that we can lift ourselves up and become a first class citizen to be proud of.

We owe a great deal to our Maori cousins being leaders of our Polynesian race in this land.

We hope the day will come we will be side by side helping for the common good of all peoples living in this country harmoniously.

Please help us so we can help one another.

My speech before launching fund raising for  
the SAMOA HOUSE now stand at Karangahape Rd



"THE SAMOAN PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT OF (N.Z. INC)"

576 New North Road  
Morningside  
Ph--864480  
Auckland. New Zealand  
16-9-1970

Dear Sir,

No doubt you are aware from recent press reports of the intension of our Movement to erect in Auckland a Samoan Community Centre. The aimlessness of many of our young people is of deep concern to us, and we feel that the time is ripe to do something practical for our youth who for want of proper leadership and organisation have allowed their energies to be diverted into undesirable channels.

The prime object therefore in bringing a Samoan Community Centre into existence, is to provide the Polynesian Youths of our city with facilities where they may engage in Cultural and Recreational Activities (Indoor swimming pool, gymnasium library, class rooms etc). Our intension is that in addition to the above we will also provide conference rooms and offices and that the centre will be freely available to other ethnic groups.

It is obvious that a scheme such as ours will require a great deal of finance and because of this, we are launching an appeal to all sections of the Community for support. A number of business houses have already demonstrated their willingness to aid our appeal, and our Movement feels that a request to your goodselves will not go amiss.

All donations will be acknowledged in the "AUCKLAND STAR" weekly. Cheques should be made out to "SAMOA HOUSE APPEAL FUND" and send to the Newton Branch of the Bank of New Zealand or any other nearest Branch of the Bank of New Zealand.

Yours faithfully,

BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
SAMOA HOUSE APPEAL FUND

per

M. S. Fonoti

President

A letter from M.S Fonoti, which may have been sent to potential donors for the Samoa House Appeal Fund. It outlines some of the original intentions for the building.

# **\$1m project delayed**

(N.Z. Press Association)

AUCKLAND, Nov. 16.

Work on the construction of a \$1m Samoa House in Karangahape Road, Auckland, has been delayed because of financial difficulties. Originally intended to start in October, 1971, construction has still not begun.

Mr J. K. Fuimaono, legal adviser for the group organising the building scheme, said that finance sources which the group had approached had not been able to assist in the financing of the venture as yet.

The idea to build a community centre to cater specifically for the large Samoan and Polynesian population in Auckland was first mooted in September, 1970.

Early in 1971, the group organising the building scheme, the "chiefs, orators, and people of Samoa," announced that the construction of an eight-storey building would start the next October at a cost of \$2m.

But in September, 1971, the date was put back to January this year.

In February, when there was still no sign of work beginning, the Government of Western Samoa bought the building site, between Karangahape Road and Beresford Street, for \$153,000.

But because of the delay in obtaining finance, work has still not begun.

An appeal set up to raise funds for the building—the cost of which was cut back to \$1m—brought in more than \$20,000 but this has since been absorbed in interest paid to banks, Mr Fuimaono said.

It is not known at this stage if the Samoan Government will subsidise the cost

of constructing the building.

Mr Fuimaono said that the group would continue to look about for capital loans in an effort to get the building under way.

# Building to Begin On Samoa House in City

Work on the million-dollar Samoa House building project in Karangahape Rd for the Government of Western Samoa is to go ahead immediately.

The Auckland City Council withheld planning approval last month until the architects, JASMaD, made minor modifications to the fifth-storey penthouse.

These modifications have now been made, according to a spokesman for the group, Mr Ivan Mercep,

and site work for the building is expected to be completed before Christmas, ready for construction to begin early in the New Year.

Samoa House will be on land owned by the Government of Western Samoa and is expected to cost almost \$1.1 million.

It will provide an arcade of shops leading to a covered terrace and coffee shop with extensive views

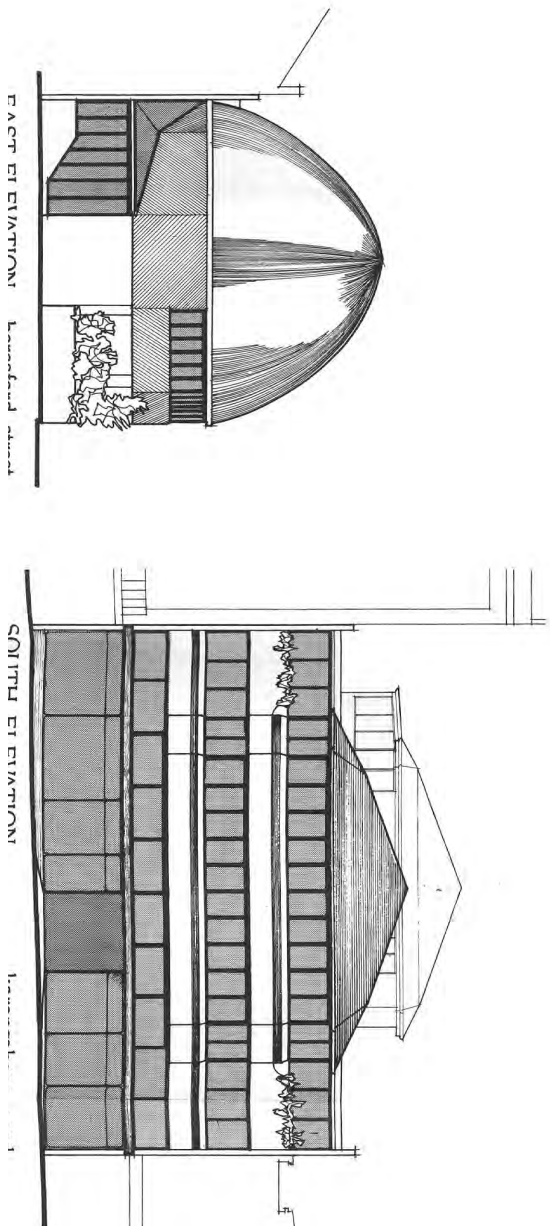
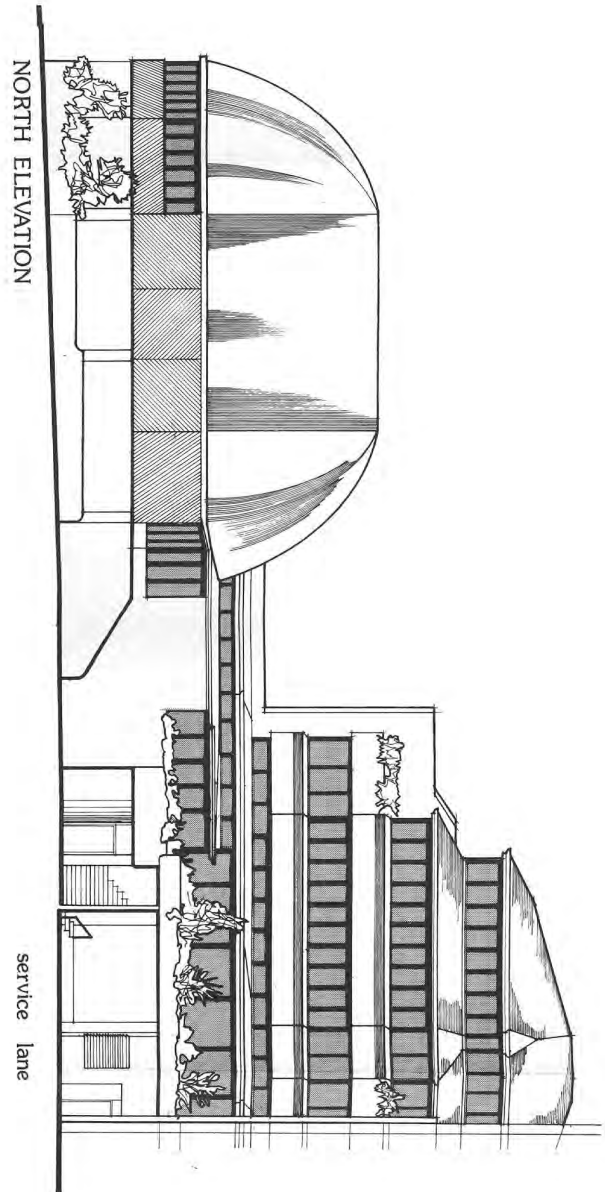
of the Waitemata Harbour, together with office space for rent and occupation by Samoan government agencies.

Some of the shops will be showpieces for Pacific handicrafts and foods and the building will also house tourist services.

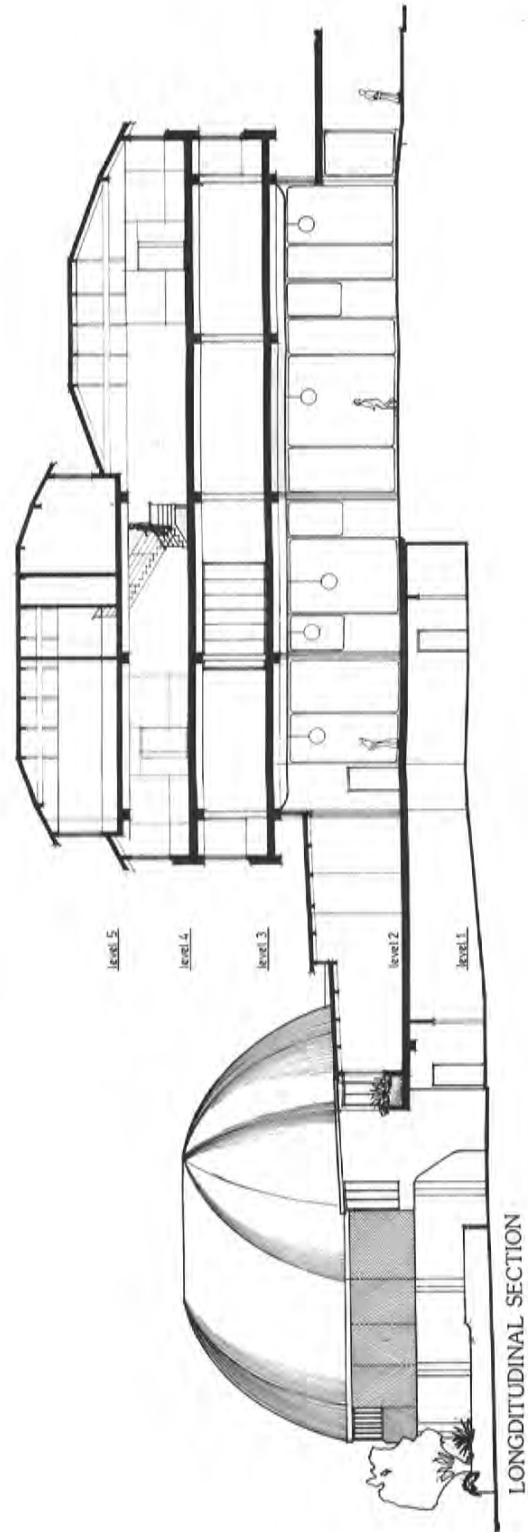
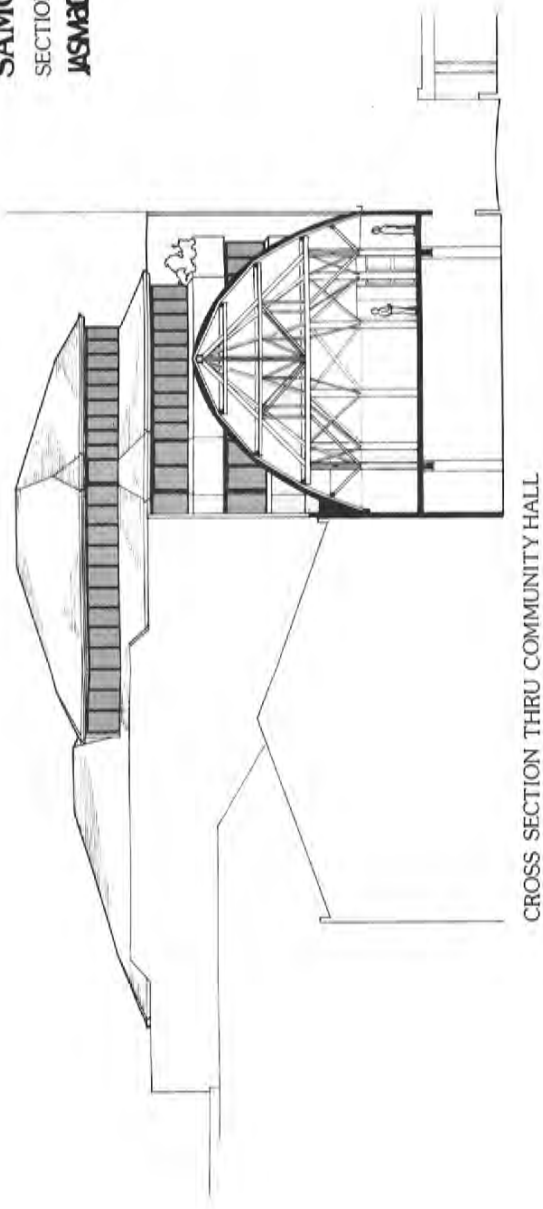
A traditional Samoan community hall — a fale — will comprise the second stage of the project.

The building is expected to be completed by November next year.

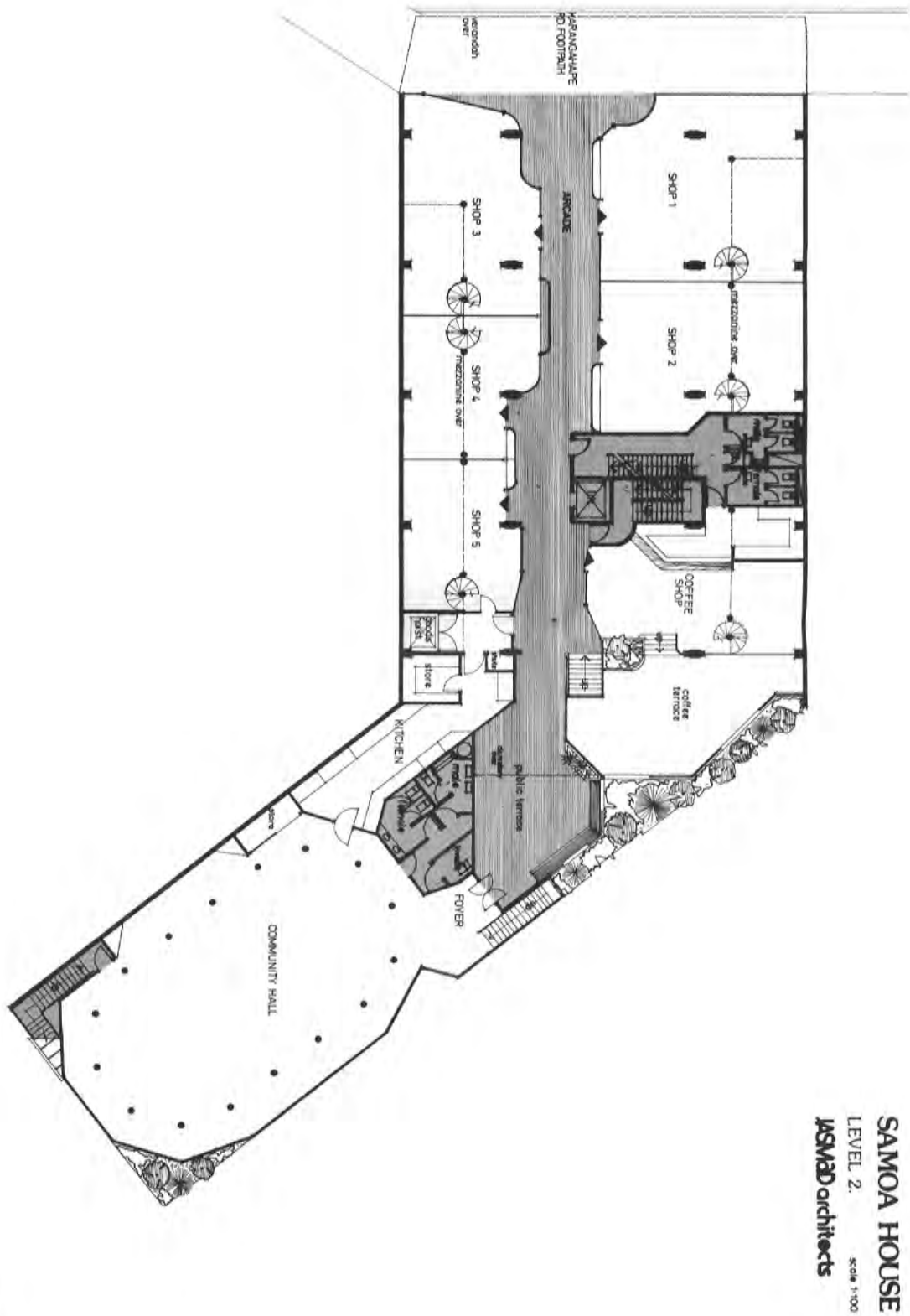
**SAMOA HOUSE**  
ELEVATIONS  
**JASMaD architects**



Elevation drawings of Maota Samoa by JASMaD

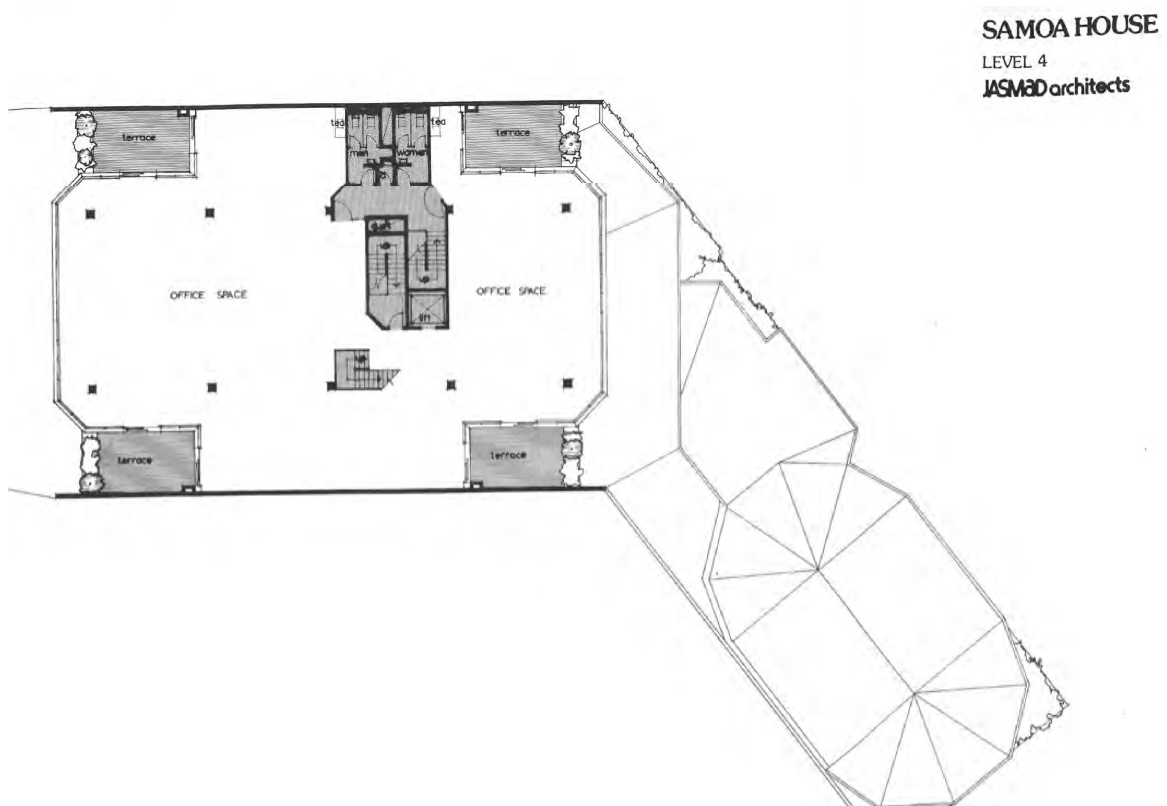
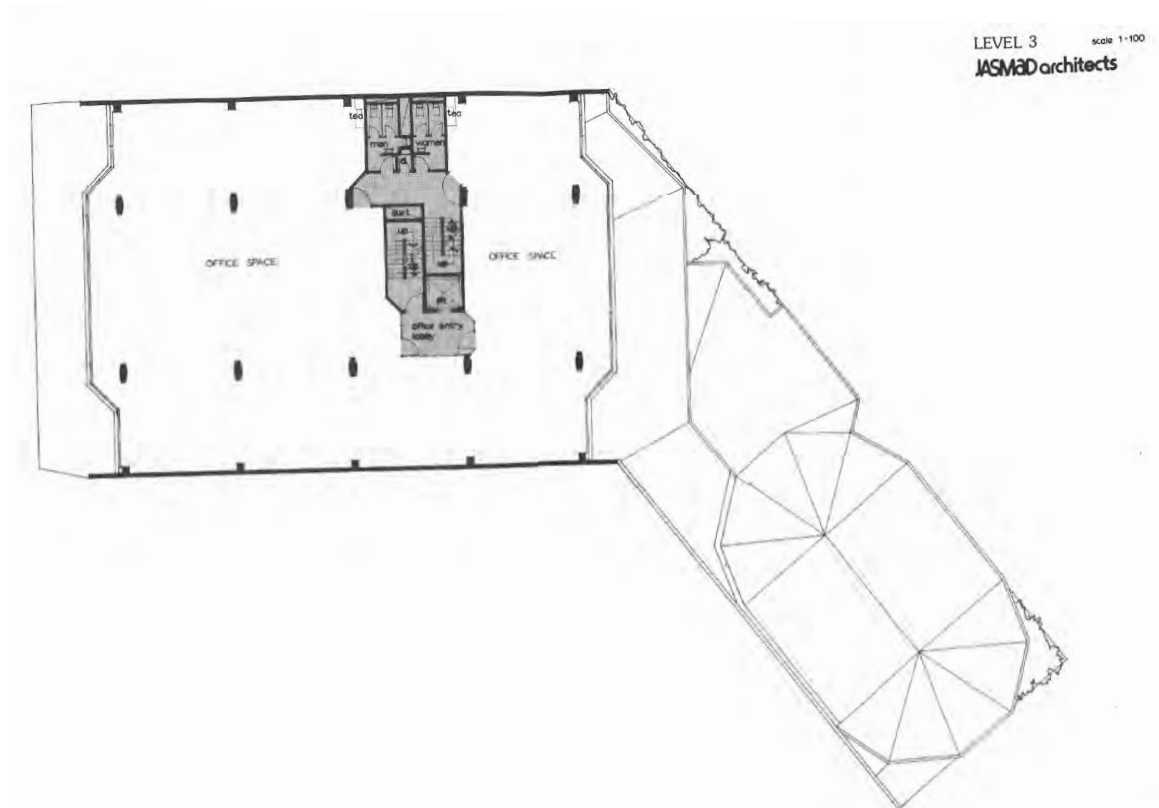


Section drawings of Maota Samoa by JASMaD.

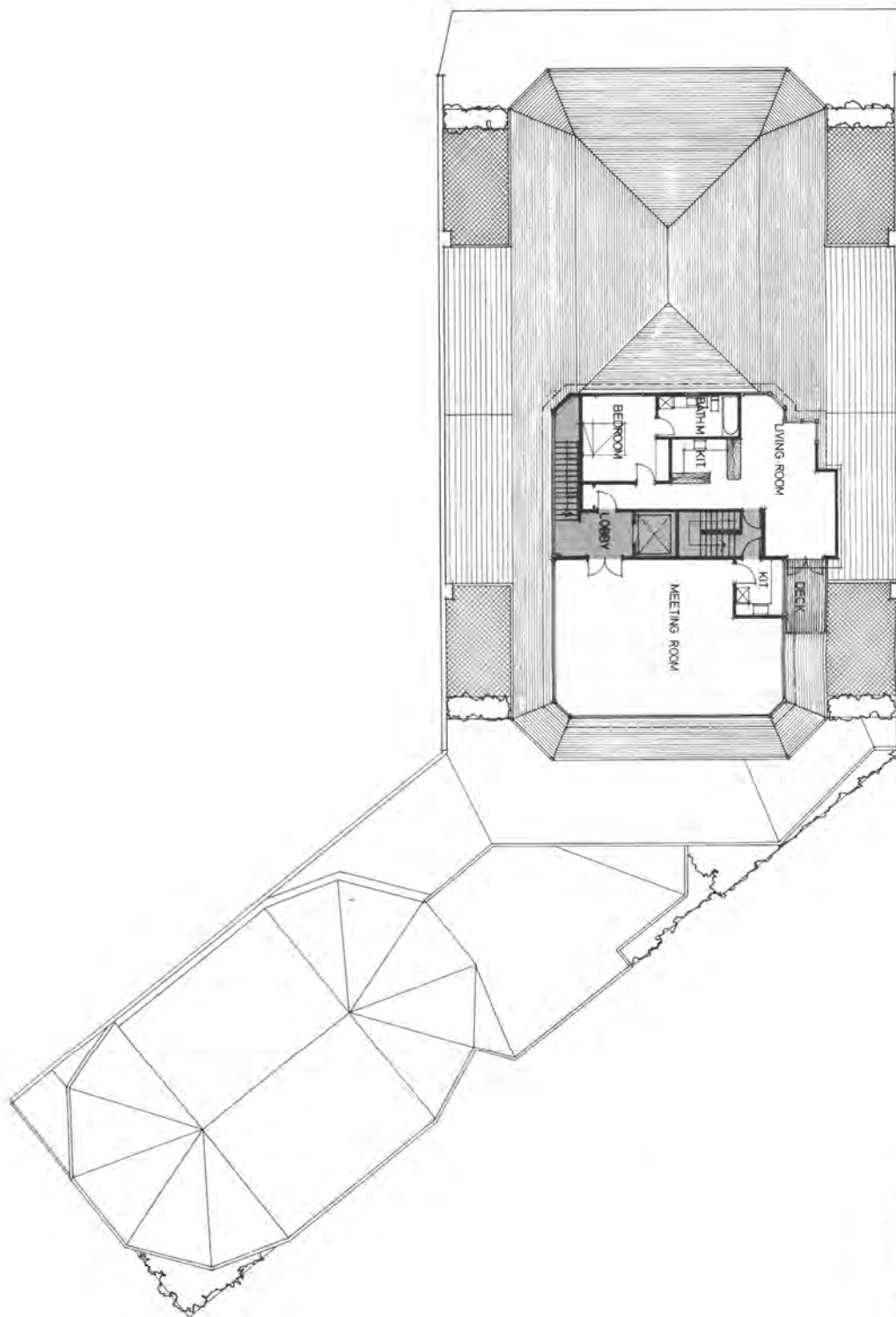


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A plan drawing of Maota Samoa by JASMaD, showing the ground floor at Karangahape road, and the throughfare between shops to the Fale Maota.



Plan drawings by JASMaD of the office spaces on levels 3 and 4 of Maota Samoa



**SAMOA HOUSE**  
LEVEL 5 & ROOF PLAN  
**JASMaD architects**

A plan drawing by JASMaD of the fifth-floor apartment.





The foundation stone, located on Karangahape Road street-level



Photograph of what looks like a model of Maota Samoa, attached to a newspaper article announcing the beginning of construction.

# Symbol of Commitment

**“The Right Hon. Minister, His Excellency High Commissioner, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:**

**It is appropriate that we gather here today to put it in real terms, the simple close relationship between New Zealand and the Government of Western Samoa. It is also appropriate that this ceremony coincides with the first official duty that I have to perform on this State Visit to New Zealand.**

**The relationship between the Government of Western Samoa and New Zealand is deeper than the relationship that Western Samoa has with any other country. Part of this, historical stemming is from the shared polynesian experience that stretches over many countries. Part of it, is extended from political economic considerations.**

**Western Samoa has been an independent country for sixteen years, but it is significant that, New Zealand and the City of Auckland will be the site of this Centre. The depth of the relationship between our two countries is**

**symbolized by this building; it will be a symbol of the commitment that our two countries and our two peoples have to each other. It will be a symbol to the Samoan people who have elected to settle in the country, and contribute to the New Zealand society and economy.**

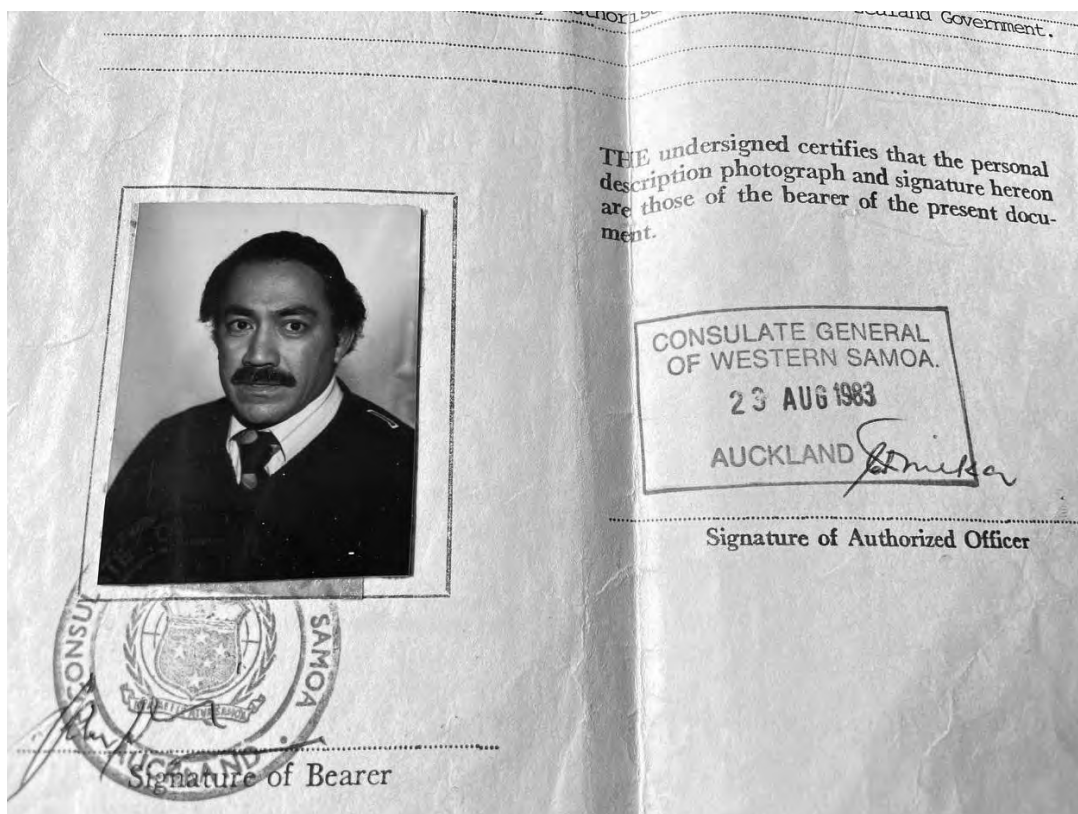
**It is an acknowledgement by the Samoan people to the New Zealand way of life. Auckland is a cosmopolitan city, and its culture has been enriched by the contributions each group is making to the society as a whole.**

**This is a joint venture between New Zealand and Western Samoa. Samoa House will not have been possible without the generous corporation of the New Zealand government. I thank the Government and the people of New Zealand for this contribution.**

**It is now my great honour and pleasure to lay this Foundation Stone which marks the commencement of the construction of the Samoa House in Auckland New Zealand.**



Samoa's Deputy head-of-state, Tupua Tamasese Lealofi IV, pictured at the opening of Maota Samoa with Robert Muldoon and his wife, Thea Muldoon.



A document from the Samoan Consulate, found the author's family archives.

# CHIEFS, ORATORS & PEOPLE OF SAMOA INC.

Work will begin in October on a \$2 million centre for Samoans in Karangahape Rd. called Samoa House. Centre was idea of recently-formed group called the Chiefs, Orators and People of Samoa Inc. Government of Samoa has bought a section in Karangahape Road, and work on the site should begin soon.

P.207

ASB. December 1970-

P. 95

ASB. January 1972-

## SAMOA HOUSE

The design for this Karangahape Rd. building has brought the Jasmad Group the 1980 N.Z.I.A. national design award and the 1979 Architects Assn. design award.

P. 37

ASB

Aug. 1983-Jan. 198

## SAMOAN ART

Biog. information on Fata Feu'u, Samoan-born Aucklanders whose first exhibition is held in Samoa House.

port.

P 7

sect 2

NZH

26 November, 1987.

# POLYNESIAN BOOKSHOP

Has moved to Samoa House in  
Karangahape Rd., and the original  
shop will be known as Ponsonby's  
Bookshop.

P. 74

LISTENER  
8 Nov. 1986

# ART - GALLERIES - AUCKLAND

Tautai, a new gallery committed  
to promoting Pacific art has  
opened in Samoa House, Karangahape  
Road.

f-B4 Ak Star 21 Dec. 1987

# POLYNESIAN BOOKSHOP

In a guide to Auckland's specialist  
bookshops

owner: Robert Holding

stock: Pacific material, Iohangareo  
resource bks

address: Samoa House, 283 Karangahape Rd

p. 107

Metro  
Feb 1991

NZP  
995.72K  
MSB



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