

GADIGAL COUNTRY  
104-116 REGENT ST, REDFERN - CONNECTING TO COUNTRY  
MAY 2021

wsp

## ABORIGINAL DESIGN PRINCIPLES





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Research by Sian Hromek (Yuin), WSP. Sian specialises in variety of fields relating to Aboriginal Country and landscape design, including Cultural Land Management Practices such as cultural burning, and how these practices might inform built outcomes and inform engagement strategies.

Reviewed by Ashleigh Hyland (Anaiwan), WSP. Ashleigh specialises in Sustainability and holds a variety of knowledge in relation to Cultural Land Management Practices.

Please note:  
In order to highlight the use of Aboriginal Design Principles, this document may contain examples from other Aboriginal Countries.

Warning:  
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are warned that this document may contain reference to or images of deceased persons.

Front cover: View of Sydney, looking towards old Barrack Square, ca. 1818 by Joseph Lycett Source: Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW  
Back cover: Sydney 1830 [view of the Domain and Mrs. Macquarie's Point]  
By A.W.F. Fuller. Source: State Library of NSW

*This document acknowledges the elders, past and present, of the **Darug and Eora People** as the traditional custodians of the land and its knowledge*

*“Warami wellamabamiyui, yura.”  
**It is good to see you all, people.***

*“One day our history will be known  
And through our own books be shown  
Our children will be proud  
In the knowledge their heritage is sound.”*

*Ruth Simmin in 'A History of Aboriginal Illawarra Volume 1  
Before Colonisation' by Dharawal Publications*

# Indigenous Specialist Services

## Indigenous design statement

**Indigenous peoples and the built environment** have had a problematic relationship as settlements, roads, and railways often cut through and disrupt the connection between people and Country.

Our projects change the environment in significant, and often positive ways, yet Aboriginal people often ask the following question::

**“How are you going to leave my Country better than what it was before?”**

**How can we reconnect the relationship between Country and people?** Projects offer an opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate the Aboriginal Country, Culture and people of the land on where the project is located.

Through the project's design elements and our place-based landscape interventions (architecture, infrastructure, art and the like), **we can acknowledge Country** and reveal the site's latent Aboriginal history.

**This document describes the principles we use as a starting point** to engage with the Darug people and Country. While more consultation and permission must be sort from the local elders, the ideas set out in this document should be seen as an introduction to the engagement process.



Some of the Darug language groups within the eastern Sydney region. Image by Michael Hromek.

# Aboriginal Design Principles

## Aboriginal design principles

**Aboriginal led/** Aboriginal people (designers, elder and community members) should be leading or co-leading the Indigenous design elements.

**Community involvement/** The local Aboriginal communities to be engaged in this process; can we use their patterns? Can they design patterns for the project?

**Appropriate use of Aboriginal design/** All Aboriginal design elements must be approved by consulted Indigenous elders and community members. If approval is not given, the knowledge will not be used on the project.

## Design approach

**Image - Signage/surface treatment/ walls/art/** Signage tells the Country and its people's story. Surface treatments use local Aboriginal design knowledge, commissioned from artists, or urban designers who engage with community for approval.

**Space - Indigenous space/ landscaping/** Aboriginal Space. A space or landscape where Aboriginal culture can be celebrated, including cultural land-management practices, firestick farming, daisy yam propagation, and the like

**Language -** Using language in the built environment to use it and keep it alive.

## Country focused design

**Overall, Aboriginal Australia** has a simple but quite different hierarchy when it comes to their connection to nature. It is best contrasted against human-focused design, depicted below.

How might this shift or enhance current practices?

**Country, over  
Community, over  
Individual**

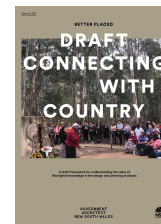


Country focused design

## This document aims to

1. Provide further cultural context and competency for anyone with interest in the 104-116 Regent St Redfern Project
2. Propose principles that align with important guidelines, such as the Connecting to Country Guidelines by the NSW Government Architects Office, The International Indigenous Design Charters Principles, and the 3 tenors of the Reconciliation Australia of Respect, Relationships and Participation.
3. Consider high level concepts for how project might engage and co-design with Aboriginal people.

This document has been produced with information sourced from publicly available desktop research on Country, people and culture and will develop / change based upon on-going consultation with Aboriginal people with connections to Redfern





# Darug Country

## A Country of beauty

Early settlers 'found environments which reminded them of the manicured parks of England, with trees well spaced and a grassy understorey'. The country west of Parramatta and Liverpool was described in 1827 as:

*'a fine-timbered country, perfectly clear of bush, through which you might, generally speaking, drive a gig in all directions, without any impediment in the shape of rocks, scrubs and close forest'.*

Arthur Bowes Smyth from The First Fleet described the landscape around Sydney as

*'... fresh terraced, lawns and grottos with distinct plantations of the tallest and most stately trees I ever saw in any nobleman's grounds in England, cannot excel in beauty those whose nature now presented to our view.'<sup>1</sup>*



Aboriginal people hunting kangaroos by Joseph Lycett, 1817. National Library of Australia

## A Country curated by Fire

Aboriginal people in this Country utilised sophisticated environmental management conducted over long periods of time — in particular, traditional cultural fire management.

The First Fleet officer John Hunter noted that Aboriginal people around Sydney 'set the country on fire for several miles extent'. He recognised that the purpose was 'to clear that part of the country through which they have frequent occasion to travel, of the brush or underwood', as well as enabling women to get at edible roots with digging sticks and hunting kangaroo.

The mosaic of landscapes was 'maintained by Aboriginal burning, a carefully calibrated system which kept some areas open while others grew dense and dark'.<sup>2</sup>



People using fire to hunt kangaroos by Joseph Lycett, 1817  
National Library of Australia,

# Eora Country

## Eora Country

There are about 29 Aboriginal groups in the Sydney metropolitan area, which is now referred to collectively as the Eora Nation. There has been extensive debate about which group or nation these 29 clans belong to.

It is generally acknowledged that the Eora are the coastal people of the Sydney area, with the Darug people occupying the inland area from Parramatta to the Blue Mountains. The Dharawal people's lands are mostly confined to the area south of Botany Bay, extending as far south as the Nowra area, across to the Georges River in Sydney's west.<sup>3</sup>

Each group is distinguished from other groups by different designs and decorations on tools and weapons, unique body decorations – for example painted designs worn during ceremonies, also the cicatrices (scarification) formed during initiation rites. Some groups also had distinctive hairstyles.<sup>4</sup>

At the time of colonisation coastal groups used stone as implements less often than those on the Cumberland Plain, and bone or shell was used in its place for items such as spear barbs, adzes and scrapers.

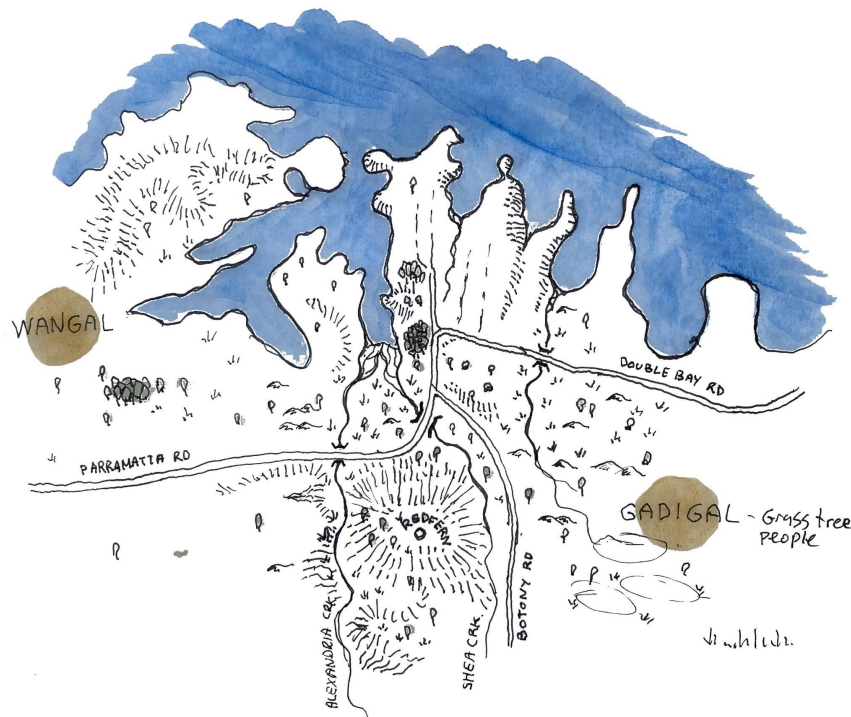
**Alternative names:** Dharruk, Dharrook, Dhar'rook, Darrook, Dharug

## Coastal Darug Country and People

Eora is the name given to coastal people around Sydney. The word Eora simply means 'here' or 'from this place'. Local people used the word to describe to the British where they came from and so the word was then used to define the Aboriginal people themselves. The name Eora is proudly used today by the descendants of those very same people. Central Sydney is therefore often referred to as 'Eora Country'.

Traditionally people moved seasonally between camps accessing different resources. The main coastal diet was fish, with men using multi pronged spears, and women using hooks and lines. Both fished from Nawi which are canoes made of bark. Women also gathered shellfish and plant foods such as fern roots and native figs.<sup>5</sup>

The original inhabitants of coastal Sydney suffered from the trauma of occupation and the severing of their spiritual bonds to Country. Within two years of settlement, kinship ties in the area were ruptured, more than half the Eora died from smallpox.<sup>6</sup>



# Gadigal Country

## Gadigal Country

Gadi land extends from Burrawara (South Head) through to Warrane (Sydney Cove), Gomora (Cockle Bay-Darling Harbour) and possibly to Blackwattle Creek, taking in the wetland sand and dunes now known as Redfern, Erskineville, Surry Hills and Paddington, down to the Cook's River.<sup>9</sup>

## Gadigal People

The Gadigal (Cadigal) are a harbour-dwelling saltwater people. The suffix 'gal' denotes 'people of', and Cadi (gadi) may be the name of the grass trees (*Xanthorrhoea* species), the flower stalks being used as spear shafts. Another theory is that Cadi is the name of the freshwater creek at Camp Cove, others suggest that it may be Kutti the traditional name of what is now called Watson's Bay.<sup>8,9</sup>

## Redfern Gathering Ground

At the time of settlement Redfern was a clear area surrounded by scrub containing food sources such as geebung and five corners. Recorded by Obed West as a 'great rendezvous' area, it was one of the 'great feasting grounds as well as the scene of many hard-fought battle' there were campsites around the edge of the cleared area.<sup>9</sup>

## Gadigal Pathways

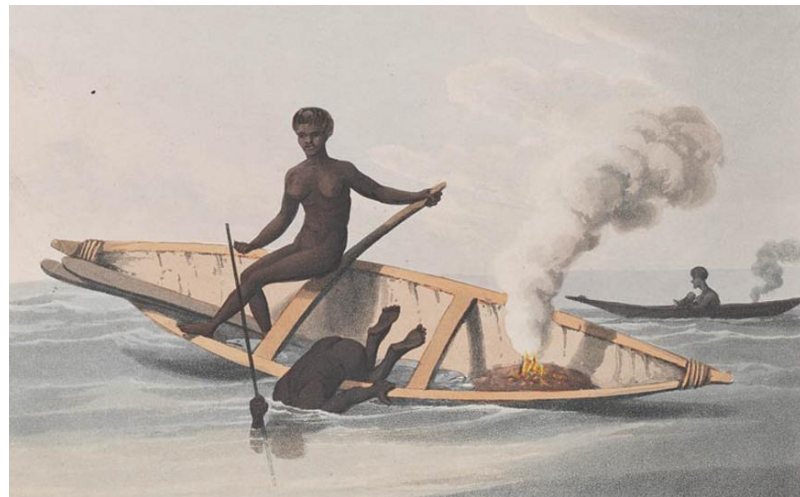
Well established pathways were maintained over generations through the intentional use of fire. One meter wide paths were burnt regularly to keep them clear and open for easy passage.<sup>9</sup>

Obed West, who often hunted with Aboriginal people at Botany Bay during the 1830s, wrote in the Sydney Morning Herald (1882): *"The blacks called Long Bay 'Boora', and it was long before white men came to this country; and for long afterwards, the principal camping place for the aboriginal [people] between Sydney [and Botany Bay]. Several well-beaten paths led down to the bay."*<sup>9</sup>

One notable path runs from Blackwattle Creek at the Brickfields Village (now Chippendale) southwards to the north shore of Botany Bay, was the forerunner of Botany Road.<sup>9</sup>

## Redfern Ceremony Grounds

The area called 'Cleveland Paddocks' near Central Station was a ceremony ground, even though ceremonies were discouraged in the 1890s: *'...Corroborees kept the few residents of Redfern awake till far into the night.'* The camps were pushed south towards Waterloo and Alexandria as settlements displaced Gadigal people.<sup>9</sup>



# Cultural Heritage of the region

## Middens

These are mounds of shell built up over hundreds or thousands of years as a result of countless meals. They primarily contain mature species of edible shellfish species. They might also contain bird and animal teeth and bones, campfire charcoal and stone tools.<sup>10</sup>

## Rock Shelters – “giba gunyahs”

These are places where people took shelter. This is a warm place to eat, sleep, repair or fashion tools and, we can imagine, talk of stories and exploits. Artefacts such as stone tools may be found in the rock shelters.<sup>10</sup>



Middens are remnants of feasts and gatherings, they are time capsules that show what types of food were collected and eaten

## Rock Art

Stencils are produced by mixing ochre in the mouth with other material into a wet paste and spraying it over the object to be stencilled. Often we find stencilled hands and tools represented in rock shelters. Other forms of artwork include ochre painting as well as charcoal drawings and etchings.<sup>10</sup>

## Grinding Grooves

These are grooves resulting from the production or sharpening and maintenance of an edge ground tool such as a stone axe. These sites are usually located near a water source, like a water hole.<sup>10</sup>



Grinding grooves beside a rock pool on sandstone rock-platform, Gosford

## Engravings

Engravings are made by drilling or pecking a series of holes in the rock which are then connected to form a line. An accepted understanding of these engravings is that they are the product of sacred ceremonies and are periodically re-engraved as part of ongoing ritual and to pass on knowledge and stories.

**Shields** are coated with white pipeclay and often painted with a red vertical line crossed by one or two horizontal lines.<sup>11</sup>



Engravings into sandstone show important cultural features and often have stories associated with them.

## Scar and Carved Trees

These trees are evidence of bark and wood being removed for shields, shelters, coolamons and canoes. They are rare in the Sydney region due to intense colonisation.

Three types of scar trees are:

- carved trees with patterns to identify burial sites of important people
- bark removal for use for coolamons (water / grain containers) shields and canoes.
- wood removal for use to make boomerangs and digging sticks
- Evidence of climbing footholds when hunting possum and 'sugar bag' (honey)

The tree is not killed by these methods and scarring is evident.<sup>12</sup>



Segments of carved trees which were associated with burials on the Greendale Estate, Vermont near Narellan

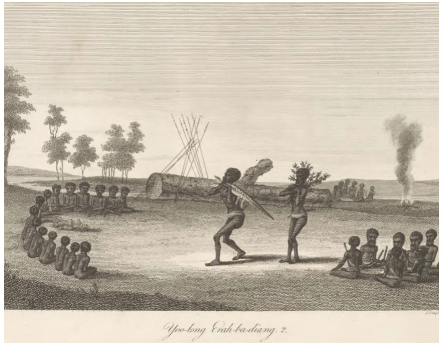


# Cultural Sites of the region

## Aboriginal Sites in the region

In the Sydney region, some 600 rock art sites are recorded with over 4,000 separate figures mainly of plants, animals, fish and people, which recall the dreamtime and events from the past.<sup>13</sup>

**Meeting sites:** Places where different group of Aboriginal people meet to trade and partake in corroborees together. In the Sydney region such corroborees are known to have taken place near Hyde Park, near the Domain and near Redfern.<sup>13</sup>



Corroboree at Hyde Park, *Yoo-long Erah-ba-diang*, Engraving by James Neagle after Thomas Watling, 1798.

**Sacred sites:** are areas set aside for religious ceremonies, initiations etc. Very little evidence of the use of such sites remain, the major tell-tale signs being the arrangement of stones in patterns or formations.

Most sacred sites were located on hilltops which offered panoramic views of the groups land. Such locations are preferred as the women are not permitted at such sites and the chance of them coming across the sites by accident is lessened if they are located away from hunting grounds. A prerequisite for such sites is a large slab of flat rock upon which engravings recording tribal history and culture can be made.<sup>13</sup>



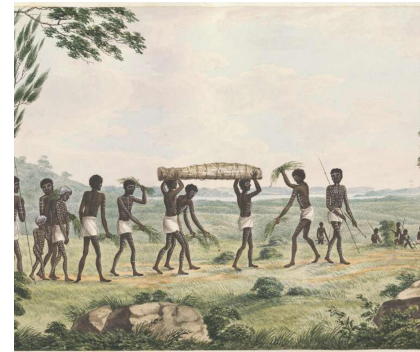
Rock engravings at Ben Buckler, North Bondi.

**Economic Sites:** Generally campsites which show evidence of occupation. Often close to or within rock overhangs and caves used to give shelter. Evidence of occupation include middens (piles of discarded shells at feasting sites), fish traps, scarred trees, cooking mounds, wells, watering holes (often depressions carved into flat rock surfaces used to catch the water), remnants of discarded tools, quarries and axe sharpening grooves.<sup>13</sup>



A rock shelter in Queens Park

**Burial sites:** Senior members of the tribe or clan are buried or cremated at sacred sites from which their spirits are freed to travel skyward. Other family members are buried within the tribal area, often near campsites, in caves and beside middens. Often such sites are marked by earth mounds, stone arrangements and carved trees.<sup>13</sup>



An Aboriginal funeral by Joseph Lycett, National Library of Australia

## Significant Sites around Redfern

1 Blackwattle Creek a tidal watercourse extended from Glebe to the harbour. The creek was a source of freshwater for Aboriginal people, and a place for fishing and other activities. A campsite and artifacts were uncovered along its banks.<sup>1</sup>

2 Lake Northam in Victoria Park is a remnant of Blackwattle Creek. Victoria Park is the site of the Tent Embassy protest against the Sydney Olympics in 2000, and is the venue for Yabun, an annual festival held on 26 January, showcasing Aboriginal culture.<sup>2</sup>

3 University of Sydney- artefacts uncovered at two locations within the grounds of the University of Sydney, in what would originally have been the swampy headwaters of Blackwattle Creek.<sup>2</sup>

4 Prince Alfred Park- a campsite until mid 1850's until the coming of the railway. Sydney's Aboriginal population had been pushed to the fringes of the city, away from their traditional camping grounds around Sydney Cove at The Domain and Woolloomooloo.<sup>3</sup>

5 Reconciliation Park- in 1997 the park was upgraded and named Reconciliation Park in recognition of the special place and culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia.<sup>4</sup>

6 The Block- an important residential area for Aboriginal people who came to the city to work at the Eveleigh railway yards.

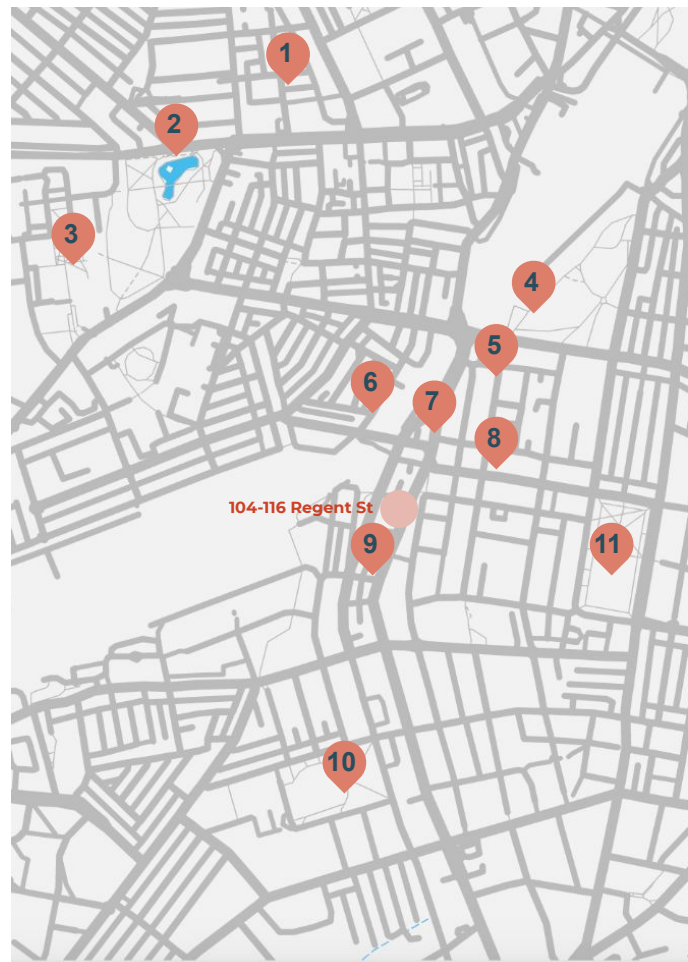
7 Empress Hotel - frequented by Aboriginal people from the 1940s till the 1970s, a place where Aboriginal people were able to drink and socialise freely, it was also a site for heavy handed police action. Aboriginal activists who began to record police harassment at the Empress created the foundations of the Aboriginal Legal Service in 1970.<sup>5</sup>

8 The Aboriginal Medical Service- established in 1971 to provide free medical support to Aboriginal people living in Sydney. It was the first Aboriginal community-run medical service in Australia, and had a holistic approach to health care from the outset.<sup>6</sup>

9 The Aboriginal Legal Service- established in 1970 to provide free legal assistance to Aboriginal people living in Sydney. The service was intended to counteract disadvantage and discrimination faced by Aboriginal people, especially those unable to afford legal advice.<sup>7</sup>

10 Alexandria Oval- Redfern All Blacks rugby league team formed in 1944. Training and matches at Alexandria and Redfern Ovals showcased talent and many players pursued professional careers, often with the South Sydney Rabbitohs. The team's success had important political, social and symbolic ramifications, and as an expression of community pride was a significant component in the shift towards self-determination within Sydney's Aboriginal community.<sup>8</sup>

11 Redfern Park is the site of a speech given by the former Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating in 1992. Subsequently referred to as the 'Redfern Speech', it focused on reconciliation, and was the first acknowledgement by a Commonwealth Government of the dispossession of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.<sup>9</sup>



# Topography and Geology

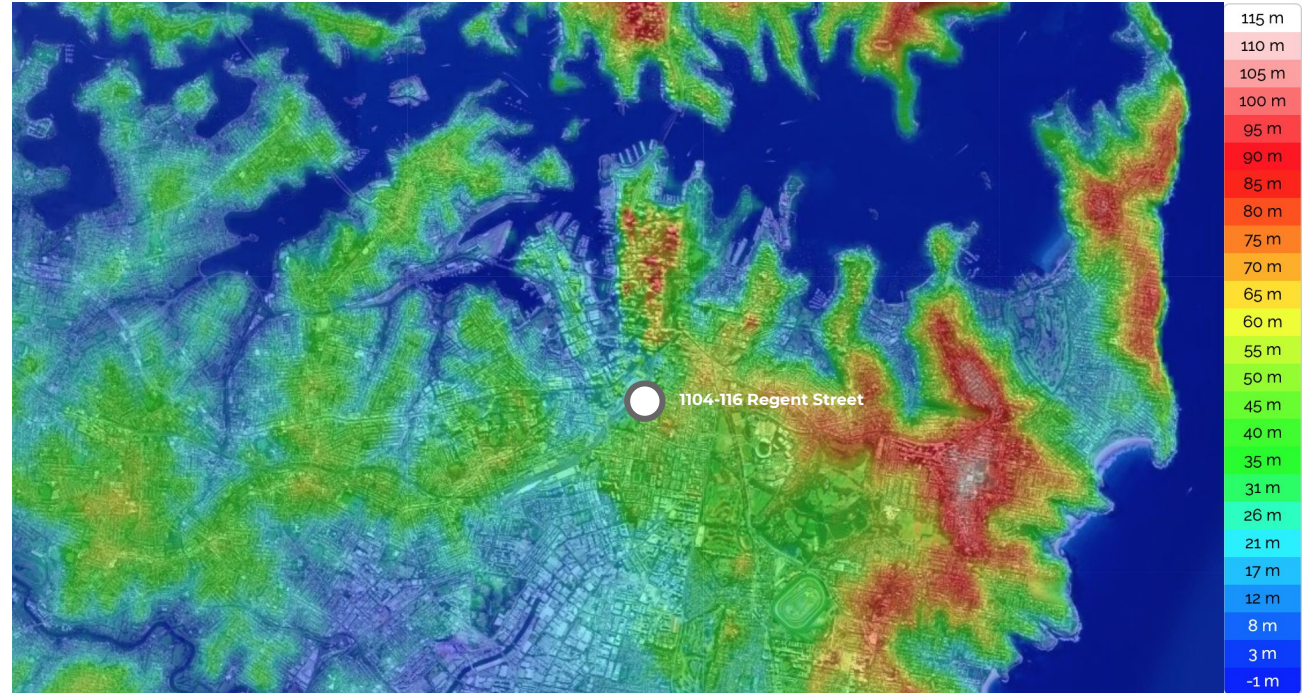
## Topography

Redfern is located south of Port Jackson on an elevated sandstone ridge. Port Jackson is situated within the Sydney Basin Bioregion which lies on the east coast of the continent and covers a large part of the catchments of the Hawkesbury-Nepean, Hunter and Shoalhaven river systems. Here sedimentary rocks have been uplifted with gentle folding and minor faulting during the formation of the Great Dividing Range.<sup>9</sup>

Erosion by coastal streams has created a landscape of deep cliffed gorges and remnant plateaus across which an east-west rainfall gradient and differences in soil control the vegetation of eucalypt forests, woodlands and heaths. The Sydney Basin Bioregion includes coastal landscapes of cliffs, beaches and estuaries.<sup>9</sup>

## Geology

The Sydney-Bowen Basin was formed when the earth's crust expanded, subsided and filled with sediment between the late Carboniferous and Triassic. Early stages of development were due to a continental rift that filled with marine volcanic sediments, later the deposition shifted to river and swamp environments in a cold climate in the early Permian.<sup>9</sup>



Source: [www.en-au.topographic-map.com/maps/janv/Sydney/](http://www.en-au.topographic-map.com/maps/janv/Sydney/)



# Contemporary History of Redfern

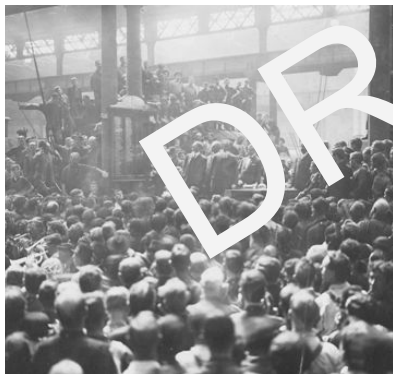
## The formation of the Block

There were many forces bringing Aboriginal people to Redfern including the various services, such as the housing, legal and medical service.



Members of the Aboriginal Housing Corporation in at The Block, Redfern in 1960's

## Eveleigh Railway Industry- jobs for Aboriginal people



## Urban Aboriginal Community of The Block



## Pemulwuy Project, the future of The Block and Aboriginal Redfern





# Gadigal Key Issues

## Ground disturbance

For Gadigal people the ground plane is important and should not be disturbed too much or else you change the ecosystem.

**Any construction should have as minimal disturbance to the ground as possible.**



## Important viewpoints

Elevated spaces provide a good place to look at Country.

**How might the design cater for any important views points of Darug Eora Country?**



## Celebrate Country

The project has the potential to celebrate Gadigal Country and culture.

**Can the project provide a space to celebrate this important Country?**



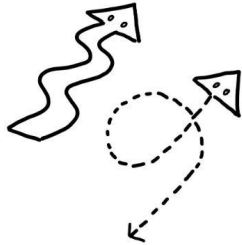
## Tell our stories.

Sydney area is a center of trade, yet to get there you and to cross many rivers, the Parramatta being the most significant, and in the process cleanse your body and mind, ready for clear headed trade.

**How might we tell the stories of this Country and it's first peoples?**



## Potential Themes



1. Rainbow Serpent Narrative



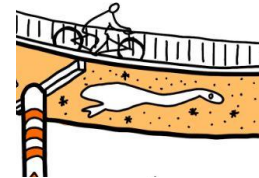
Shane Smithers



2. Bridging between Earth and Sky



Nadeena Dixon



3. Important Totems

4. Weaving practices

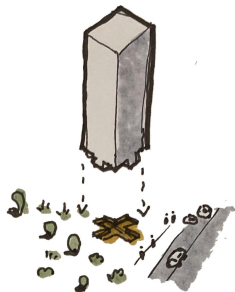
# Key Issues

## Connecting the site to Country

Redfern has always been an important place of gathering for Aboriginal people, overlooking two waterways and old tracks that went west and south.

How might we honour Country and ensure it's dignity is still intact after the project?

**Any new building should Honour Gadigal Country and the culture associated with this land through tangible and intangible outcomes**

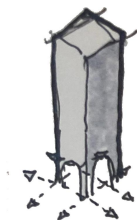


Connect the building to Country

## Open up the site

Ensuring the building is open, accessible, and to provide access for people.

**How might we bring people closer to the site, make them stay longer, and learn a bit about Gadigal / Aboriginal redfern culture?**

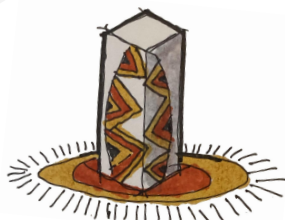


Connect people to the site

## Celebrate Country

This precinct will be a threshold to the city for many students who come from a long way away and are here to stay on Gadigal land and learn.

**Can the project provide a space to celebrate this important gateway to Country and have elements of education and teaching about Aboriginal values?**



Connect the building to Gadigal Design

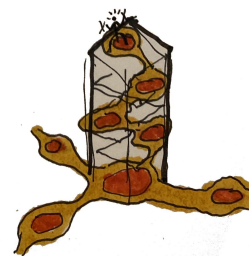


Invite Country into the building

## Tell our stories.

Sydney was a place of ceremony, lore, and settlement. There are many latent stories associated with this place waiting to be told through place based interventions.

**How might we tell the stories of this Country and it's first peoples in the design of this building? What are the appropriate stories / themes to tell?**



Connect the building to Culture

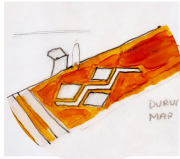
# Potential use of Gadigal / Darug / Eora design

Aims of the project:

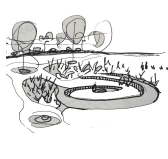
- Tell the story of Redfern, of the Gadigal People.
- Incorporate native and endemic plant species through the space.
- Create opportunities for the installation of Aboriginal Art through the space.



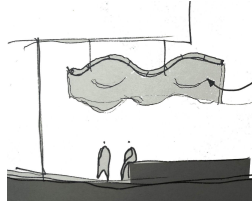
**Entry statement,**  
significant site marker  
sculpture referencing  
Darug Eora Design.



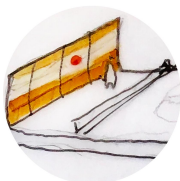
**The ground plane.**  
**Pathways** with Darug  
Eora patterns in  
coloured asphalt.



**Resting / yarning  
place** Darug Eora  
design treatment in  
pavement, seating,  
landscape art.



**An iconic sculpture /  
element** to mark  
important gateway or  
zone.



**Columns** painted up  
in colours and  
patterns of Darug Eora  
Country.



**Wall treatment,**  
murals, surface  
etching, internal  
design etc

**Sculptural elements,**  
landscape  
communicating  
stories and design.

## Language and naming

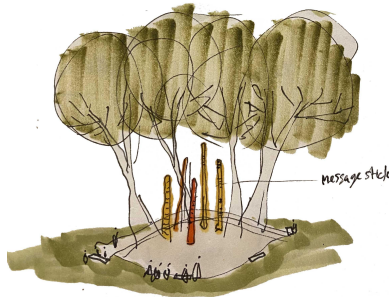
Can the building be  
named after important  
people from Redfern?  
(Mum Shirl (Coleen  
Shirley Perry Smith),  
Tony Mundeen etc?)





# The Pedestrian Experience

**A space to celebrate culture**, such as a viewing, yarning or sitting place with references to local design and stories allowing leaders to tell the story.

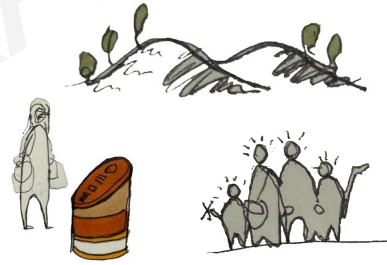


**Integrated Art** High quality photo / print of local artist, or electronic or light display artwork. Example below is of Reid Highway WA upgrade with Noongar design translated by artist Drew Straker through a community led co-design process.

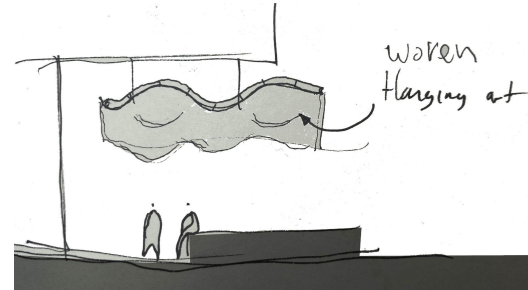
**Client:** Decmil / Main Roads WA



**Storytelling and wayfinding devices** help connect people and orientate them to Gadigal Eora Country and the stories and history that came before. Signage, surface etching, sampling of language etc.



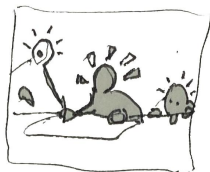
**Undercroft spaces, abutments and substructures can be activated with bright and meaningful Darug design** either through direct application, moulding / relief or light installation. This serves the benefit of beautifying otherwise dull features and providing engaging, fun, safe and accessible areas.



# How to apply these themes

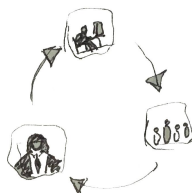
## 1. Engagement

The first step will be to engage with the relevant Aboriginal group (artist / elder, Lands Council etc), early and often, through a series of 'yarns' or conversations about the potential opportunities to incorporate the theming contained within the document (or other themes) into project outcomes.



## 2. Co Design

To kick off the co-design process design teams are given time to integrate the themes and ideas into the scope of the project



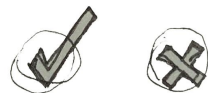
## 3. Co Design workshops

Engagement workshops with the relevant Aboriginal group will everyone gets in the room to co-design cultural solutions to project outcomes, yet Aboriginal voices should be given preference to ensure they are heard.



## 4. Endorsement:

All content that uses local Aboriginal theming will be endorsed by the Aboriginal group.



## 5. Other opportunities:

Should be highlighted and put forward to ensure the local Aboriginal community has opportunities, economic outcomes and better connections to their Country, through the project





# Further Indigenous participation

## **1. Consultation with Aboriginal Community. Elders, community, respected community members etc**

The use of Aboriginal patterns and motifs must be done with approval - and hopefully involvement - from the elders and community. A document like this can begin these conversations between community.

We need to ask:

- Can we use your Countries patterns?
- Do you want to make patterns for the project?
- How would you like to be involved?

## **2. Engage Aboriginal artists and designers**

Aboriginal artists should be engaged from the local community who acknowledge Country / culture in their designs

## **3. A Smoking Ceremony recommended on the site**

Smoking Ceremonies are conducted by Aboriginal people with specialised cultural knowledge. The ceremony aims to cleanse the space in which the ceremony takes place (this site being of major significance). Given the significant nature of the ceremony, smoking ceremonies are usually only performed at major events.

## **4 Perform a Welcome to Country when site opens .**

Generally, providers offer participants local Aboriginal history and cultural information and will go on to welcome the delegates to the Country.

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