The Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural Centre on the narrow Truk Peninsula, approximately 8 kilometers (5.0 mi) northeast of the historic centre of Nouméa, the capital of New Caledonia, celebrates the vernacular Kanak culture, the indigenous culture of New Caledonia. It opened in June 1989 and was designed by Italian architect Renzo Piano and named after Jean-Marie Tjibaou, the leader of the independence movement who was assassinated in 1989 and who had a vision of establishing a cultural centre which celebrated the linguistic and artistic heritage of the Kanak people.

The Kanak building traditions and the resources of modern international architecture were blended by Piano. The Kanak building traditions are the resources of modern international architecture were blended by Piano. The formal curved tower layout, 250 metre (820 ft) long on the top of the ridge, contains ten large central ces or pavilions (all of different dimensions) patterned on the traditional Kanak Grand Hut Design. The building is surrounded by landscaping which is also inspired by traditional Kanak design elements.

**LOCATION:**
The Jean-Marie Tjibaou Cultural Center is located on the narrow Truk Peninsula, approximately 8 kilometers (5.0 mi) northeast of the historic centre of Nouméa, the capital of New Caledonia.

**MISSION:**
To enhance the archaeological heritage and linguistic Kanak, encourage contemporary forms of expression of the Kanak culture, particularly in the craft areas, and visual arts, to promote cultural exchanges, particularly in the Pacific south and to define and conduct research programs.

**PROGRAM:**
Exhibition rooms, a library, an auditorium, an amphitheater, administrative departments, research areas, a conference room and studios for traditional crafts.

**BUILDING MATERIALS:**
- Exterior: concrete, aluminium, glazing, glass panels, fique bark and stainless steel. The exterior parts of the huts are given an ornamental appearance. The timber used extensively was imported from Africa (native to tropical Africa, from Sierra Leone to Tanzania). It was decided to use timber because it was durable, and mostly resistant to attacks by insects, fungi and mold. The frames of all cases were prefabricated in France and assembled on-site.
- Interior: conical domes consisted of laminated wood and natural wood. The frames of all cases were pre-fabricated in France and assembled on-site.

**CONCEPT:**
The building plan, spread over an area of 6,550 square metres (92,000 sq ft) of the museum, was conceived to incorporate the link between the landscape and the built structures in the Kanak traditions. The people had been removed from their natural landscape and habitat of mountains and valleys and any plan proposed for the art centre had to reflect this aspect. Thus, the planning aimed at a unique building which would be, as the architect Piano stated, “to create a symbol” – a cultural centre devoted to Kanak civilization, the place that would represent them to foreigners that would pass on their memory to their cultural centre devoted to Kanak civilization, the place that would represent them to foreigners that would pass on their memory to their grand children”.

Another aspect of the Kanak’s building tradition was that it did not fit in with the concept of a permanent building. They lived in temporary type of buildings made with locally available material which needed to be replaced from time to time in the sub-tropical climate. This involved a wood frame building built on earthen platforms and with roof covered by thatch. The form of the building also varied from island to island, generally round in plan and central in the vertical elevation. They made the houses in groups with the headman’s house at the end of an open public area formed by other buildings clustered along on both sides. Trees lined these alleys with a shady central gathering. This theme was adopted in the Cultural Centre planned by Piano and his associates.

**BRIEF DESCRIPTION:**
*ARCHITECT:* Renzo Piano  
*COMPLETED:* 1998  
*LOCATION:* Nouméa, New Caledonia  
*ORGANISER:* The Agency for Development of the Kanak Culture  
*Mission:* To create a symbol – a cultural centre devoted to Kanak civilization, the place that would represent them to foreigners.

**OBJECTIVE:**
“Tradition is fluid, it is always being reconstructed. Tradition is about change.” It is not static; it is developmental” (Sarup 1996). The few traditional structures in existence are hardly in their original state. The objective of this development was to solicit ideas for a center that would celebrate the Kanak culture native to New Caledonia, and in the process, smooth over ethnic tensions that had been chronically deteriorating between the Kanak people and the island’s other inhabitants. Thus, the planning aimed at a unique building which would be, as the architect Piano stated, “to create a symbol” – a cultural centre devoted to Kanak civilization, the place that would represent them to foreigners that would pass on their memory to their grand children”.

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