

ABORIGINAL ARCHITECTURE LIVING ARCHITECTURE

Detailed Synopsis

For over three hundred years native communities in North America have had no indigenous architecture. The communities have made do with low cost government housing and community projects designed by strangers in far away places.

The traditional dwellings unique to each region are so ingenious, so rich in meaning and context, that one has to wonder: what would have happened if the native communities had been able to continue building for themselves? Would we have Hogans as big as stadiums? Teepees as tall as skyscrapers?

We are just beginning to discover the answers to those questions. Across North America political, financial and cultural changes are creating a renaissance of aboriginal architecture. This two part documentary visits seven communities and explores how each one is solving the problems of re-discovering, interpreting, and re-defining their own ancient architectures.

- Pueblo: In Acoma descendants of the Pueblo who built the sophisticated complex at Chaco Canyon are building a new cultural center that reflects the evolution of building materials and design since those ancient times. Brian Vallo the General Manager of the new cultural center takes us to the home of his ancestors and explains how Chaco Canyon relates to Sky City and the cultural center.
- Mohawk: With the help of a local architect, Brian Porter, Mohawk communities are building new multipurpose complexes that defy typical urban zoning conventions but are true to the democratic spirit of their predecessor longhouses. Brian explains how changes in government procedures have drastically affected building styles in native communities in Canada.
- Inuit: Whether the structures are snow, whale bone and stone, or steel and plywood, the fierce climate continues to define architectural design in the Arctic. Anne Hansen understands the need for traditional expertise while also anticipating new Inuit designed permanent constructions.
- Crow: Crow architect Daniel Glenn interprets the idea of the teepee lodge when he designs affordable, efficient buildings that are never meant to

travel like a teepee. Robert Howe, a Crow elder describes the ongoing role of the transportable teepee lodge in modern Crow life.

- Navajo: At the Design and Engineering Department on the vast Navajo Nation, designer Harrison Martin maintains the belief system intrinsic to the original Hogan as he works with the team to build schools, chapter houses and senior centers on tight budgets and schedules. Richard Begay Jr. a young Navajo architect dreams of the day when his designs will grace Window Rock, the Navajo seat of government.
- Coast Salish: Archeological discoveries of the oldest pit houses built in Canada are helping the Coast Salish people reclaim their land, history and culture. Patrick Stewart is a (Niska) architect who helps the Coast Salish and other nations develop buildings that reflect their own cultural values.
- Haida: Now that the Haida have regained some control over the old growth cedars, prominent Haida leaders and artists have begun to build their own cedar big houses based on traditional designs with a few individual twists. Chief Jim Hart shares his own experiences with Haida designer Gina Mae Schubert.