

Q. What does “sense of place” mean to you?

When you're lost, where better to turn for advice or directions than a local? In Hawaii, it's no different. In each issue, we'll ask island experts a question that addresses some aspect of Hawaii, its tourism industry and its culture. The goal is to help you, the reader, better understand and appreciate the Aloha State and the

people who live there, the stewards of the islands' natural and cultural legacies.

For our initial column, we asked six cultural leaders — Peter Apo, Elizabeth Lindsey, Oswald Stender, Charles Maxwell, Ramsay Taum and Charles Kaupu — what the term “sense of place” means to them.

Peter Apo

“First, I define ‘place’ as ‘located space.’ It can be as large as a country or as small as a coffee shop. Sense of place is about the feeling that emanates from a place as a combination of the physical environment and the social construct of people activity (or absence of) that produces the feeling of a place.

“People either seek out or avoid a place because of its sense of place. People seek out Hawaii because of the expectation of what its sense of place will be when they get there. Conversely, people will avoid the neighborhood ghetto (unless they live there) because of its onerous sense of place.”

Peter Apo has been a Hawaiian activist, a trustee for the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, a state legislator and a professional musician. He is currently the director of culture and education for the Native Hawaiian Hospitality Association (www.nahba.com).



VAL LOH

Elizabeth Lindsey

“A sense of place is one of the most important aspects in Native Hawaiian life. Not only does it speak to our genealogy, but often to our destiny. The birthplace of our *kupuna*, our elders, commonly marked the resting place of their elders. Generations of families would become so intimate with their environment that they could call the winds and the rains by name. Whether a family lived near the ocean as fishermen or upland as farmers, they were inextricably tied to their surroundings.

“It may seem unusual in this modern age to experience such a love affair with a place. Yet, for many of us, Hawaii is our *puuhonua*, our sanctuary, from an often-troubled world. We are nurtured here. Each time a fragrant breeze enfolds us or



a gentle wave cleanses us, we are renewed and made whole again. In return, we walk gently upon this land, for we understand that we are no more than temporary stewards. And when our bones are laid to rest beside those of our elders, another generation will call the winds and the rains by name.”

Dr. Elizabeth Kapuwailani Lindsey is a cultural anthropologist and award-winning filmmaker (Then There Were None). A former Miss Hawaii, Dr. Lindsey lectures throughout the United States and abroad on the subject of Hawaiian philosophy and culture. She also serves as an advisor to the trustees of Kamehameha Schools and is a member of numerous boards in Hawaii.

Oswald Stender



“A sense of place is a state of mind. Each of us describes a sense of place as a space or place in which we are comfortable. This place is a physical and psychological environment that is pleasant, safe, socially comfortable and enjoyable. A sense of place is nirvana — a place of peace and harmony.”

Oswald “Oz” Stender is a trustee of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs.

Ramsay Taum

VAL LOH



“Every place or travel destination has a story, a persona, customs and traditions. Every place likewise has a sense of place that helps the traveler judge his or her experience. With this in mind, sense of place might be considered the characteristics, qualities and features that help to distinguish one place from another.

“As sensual beings, we often relate to a place or formulate memories of an experience based on the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, temperature and climate. These physical cues trigger emotional attachments, memories and responses that we then choose to share or not share with others. However, there are other less tangible or tactile things that contribute to a destination’s sense of place that have less to do with architecture, interior design and physical landscape: the atmosphere, or *ha*, the spiritual essence and ambience of the place that reflects the way people relate to one another and their surroundings.

“The spirit of *aloha*, for instance, is one of those characteristics that can’t be bought or sold, and it cannot be designed into the physical architecture of a building or complex. That’s not to say that a designer, architect or developer cannot create opportunities for the spirit of *aloha* to be shared or experienced by those who frequent their creations, nor does it suggest that they don’t approach or execute their trades with *aloha*. The built and natural environments are only part of the equation that contributes to the overall experience and sense of place. Sense of place helps to define the relationships we have as hosts and guests, as well as how we treat one another and our surroundings.”

Ramsay Taum is the community outreach coordinator with the University of Hawaii School of Travel Industry Management educational and community outreach program.

Charles Maxwell

“Because I am the product of my ancestors who lived on these lands for thousands of years, everything associated with Hawaii is my sense of place, and I readily can associate to it.”

Charles Maxwell (aka Uncle Charlie) is a Hawaiian priest, a cultural practitioner, a cultural consultant for the Maui Ocean Center and other places, and a kupuna (elder) for the County of Maui and Haleakala National Park. Uncle Charlie hosts a weekly radio program, “Talk Story with Uncle Charlie,” Fridays on Maui’s KNUI 900 AM. Visit his website for more information (www.moolelo.com).



Charles Kaupu

SCOTT MEAD



“Sense of place is the knowledge of who you are, where you come from and those treasures that have been passed from generation to generation to be used in such a way to enhance all that you do to honor the past, function in the present and set a solid foundation for the future.”

Charles Kaupu is a cultural specialist who helps the Maui Visitors Bureau, Kaanapali Beach Resort Association and Intrawest Inc. He also teaches hula in Maui, Japan and on the mainland.