

## Lani Yamasaki

**AGE:** 43 **EDUCATION:** Scripps College, B.A., studio arts and the humanities, 1982; American University, 1981; American Studies Semester Smithsonian Fellow, 1981; Museum Studies Programs, Smithsonian Museum Leadership Award for Diversity, 1995; Ford Fellow, 1998; First Nations Development Institute, Indigenous Economics Certificate, 1996-2000 **WORK EXPERIENCE:** Self-employed, 1988-present; founder and executive director, 'Ano'ano Aloha Inc., 1996-present **HOBBIES:** Travel, art, music, reading **FAMILY:** Kamau Line

## Hawaiiiana Gets A Helping Hand

CULTURAL CONSULTANTS SUPPORT LOCAL COMPANIES WANTING TO "GO HAWAIIAN" **BY JACY L. YOUN**

Early this year, rival banking chiefs Walter Dods of BancWest Corp. and Clinton Arnoldus of CPF Corp. exchanged words over which bank was "more local." At the same time, City Bank ran advertisements touting its predominantly local management team. American Savings Bank also emphasized its Island roots by unveiling an overtly Hawaiian-themed main branch and a new corporate logo: the taro leaf.

Hawaiian cultural practitioner Lani Yamasaki says it isn't just the banks that are suddenly embracing Hawaiian culture and values. "There is a movement by Hawaii's companies to integrate Hawaiian culture and protocol into their businesses," says Yamasaki, owner of Lani Yamasaki Communications and Design. "Some people are motivated by the bottom line, because there is value in integrating Hawaiiiana into the workplace. But I think it stems from a basic desire to learn about our culture and being accountable for our history, language and protocol."

Yamasaki, a Kamehameha Schools graduate of Hawaiian, Chinese, Japanese and English ancestry, has been practicing art and cultural consulting since the early '80s. Over the years she's helped incorporate Hawaiian values and culture into many local companies, including Castle & Cooke Inc., Halekulani, The Estate of James Campbell, Kamehameha Schools and Philpotts Inc. Nationally, she has worked with The Ford Foundation, First Nations Development Institute and more. Most recently, Yamasaki assisted American Savings Bank with its redesign and creation of a new corporate identity.

### The terms "Hawaiianess" and "sense of place" are often thrown around. What do they mean?

When I hear Hawaiianess, I usually try to replace it with Hawaiian culture or Hawaiiiana. In terms of sense of place, to me a sense of spirit would more accurately describe creating an environment that is truly reflective of Hawaiian culture. That's because Hawaiian culture is based on a spiritual foundation. It goes beyond just a sense of place. It actually embraces the spirit and ancestors, understanding the natural history: Who lived here before, and what's their history?



### What can a cultural consultant do for a company?

Their role is to be a facilitator or a venue to share Hawaiian epistemology. There are different types of cultural consultants, and my focus is in design. Under that guise, design falls into the hospitality industry, health and healing, environmental planning and restoration. And my work has taken me into the fields of community-based economic development planning. I don't think the title Hawaiian Cultural Consultant is actually appropriate. It's just something that you do. You have kumu hula who are incredible consultants ... You have all kinds of consultants within Hawaiian culture.

### How can companies incorporate Hawaiian values into their businesses?

Provide training programs to their employees. Integrate Hawaiian designs into the workspace. Provide classes in Hawaiian history and invite guest speakers from the community. Give employees incentives to learn more about Hawaiian culture, which includes encouraging families to understand their own personal family histories. Encourage them to explore their own cultural backgrounds, as well.

### What brought on this resurgence of Hawaiian culture and values in local businesses?

I think the first huge surges of Hawaiian renaissance were in the '70s. The search for personal identity, authenticity and pride for family heritage was on for all ethnic groups. Diversity was celebrated and being Hapa was in.

**CAPTURING CULTURE:** Lani Yamasaki helped American Savings Bank redesign its main branch, giving it a Hawaiian flair.



The University of Hawaii established the Ethnic Studies department – the forerunner to the present-day Hawaiian Studies department. The recording industry had a huge impact on the renaissance with the music of The Sons of Hawaii, Peter Moon [and others].

In the '80s, as these ho'okipa (hospitality) programs began to come into the visitor industry, we saw visitors coming back, because they wanted to experience that authenticity. Then, in the wake of 9/11 and Y2K, we really began to examine how sustainable we are as a state. And when you look at our main industry, tourism, the bottom line was – what do visitors want? We know they want Hawaiian culture, but how can we really bring it into the business community with integrity?

**Do you get the sense that local businesses are trying to preserve the culture, or to get the competitive edge?**

I think it has to do with being sustainable as a state. Let me take that back. It is a bottom-line thing. Absolutely, some companies do it because they want to be good stewards. But I think most mainstream businesses want to see a return in their bottom line. I don't want it to come across like that's all people are concerned about. But I think it's a combination of both. In the Western mindset, people are ultimately concerned about the bottom line. From the Hawaiian point of view, success is not necessarily money. Success is being happy, feeling like your family's being taken care of and knowing that you have enough to take care of basic needs. So once the process of education begins, business leaders under-

stand it goes beyond learning Hawaiian values and selling them as a commodity.

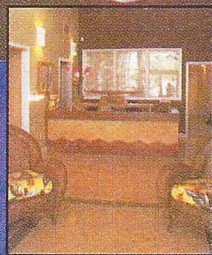
They begin to understand that, if we're not authentic in integrating and truly living these values, then, according to Hawaiian tradition, we're not really successful. And I do think people are very sincere when they want to bring Hawaiian culture into the business world. I really feel that people do have a natural longing to understand who they are. A lot of people or businesses have a desire to integrate Hawaiian culture into their businesses. But I think the main thing is to understand your own culture and where you come from. Because I think when you can understand where you come from, what your own culture is, and have a respect for that, then it makes it easier to understand how you respectfully integrate Hawaiian culture and values into your own personal lives, businesses and eventually the community. I think this movement we see toward embracing Hawaiian culture is all part of a world movement to be authentic and to live according to spiritual and cultural values.

**What is the value in being perceived as a local company?**

I think that people are immediately drawn to things that are Hawaiian. They walk into an environment and they feel first before they begin to bring in the details of what they see. They feel that people in that work environment are more conducive to listening to them. They feel at home, more at ease to talk about business and their personal dreams. People want to feel that their cultures are being listened to and embraced. ■

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