Aulani Architecture, Landscape Blend Magic of Disney, Splendor of Hawaii

KO OLINA, Hawaii – Aulani, a Disney Resort & Spa celebrates the history and culture of the Hawaiian Islands with a design that seamlessly melds the traditional with the contemporary. It also showcases one of the largest collections of contemporary Hawaiian art in the islands.

“Disney is about storytelling,” said Bo Bolanos, principal concept designer for Walt Disney Imagineering. “With Aulani, we combine the beauty of storytelling and family – elements important to Hawaiian culture and to Disney – with a touch of magic.”

The goal was to create a project that honors and respects Hawaiian culture … and inspires guests to go see the rest of the islands, said Bolanos. “The culture is a living culture,” he explains. “With Aulani, we are telling you the story of Hawaii – from the mountains to the ocean – through the eyes of Disney, weaving together culture, art, legends, stories and places with a basis in history, but with current interpretations and an eye to the future.”

During the design of Aulani, Walt Disney Imagineering studied the culture and history, and worked with local Hawaiian cultural advisers, including Auntie Nettie Tiffany, whose family has cared for the nearby area called Lanik?honua, and who is now the *kahu*, or guardian, for Ko Olina on the island of Oahu, where Aulani is located.

Together, the architecture and landscaping immerse guests in the story, as Walt Disney Imagineering Landscape Architect Jeff Morosky explains. “Aulani is a marriage of resort architecture, site topography, geology, landscape, water, wind, solar patterns…we analyzed all of that, understanding that the Hawaiian theory of living with the *aina,* or land, is a critical part of island life,” Morosky said.

The *ahupuaa* is the traditional division of land, extending from the top of the mountain to the sea, encompassing all the resource zones that families needed to thrive. Through both landscape and architecture, Aulani incorporates this important cultural idea in its design, with the lobby area as the mountaintop, the Waikolohe Valley below, extending out to the Pacific Ocean. (*Wai* is the word for freshwater, and *kolohe* means “mischievous.”)

Aulani exemplifies state-of-the art resort design, but with an impressive amount of fantasy.

“The resulting design is deliberately architectural, an inspiration for the future, but a way to pay tribute to a rich culture that is still very much alive today,” said Bolanos, the concept designer.

In fact, Aulani is the first resort tower in the islands to honor Hawaiian architecture and symbols throughout, paying homage to the culture. “The adze bracket, a traditional chiseling tool, for instance, is used symbolically throughout the resort as a metaphor of transforming a natural material into a manmade product – just like it was used in the early days to transform wood into a canoe or a piece of furniture…from the beams in the porte-cochere to canopies and trellises,” Bolanos said.

The Story Begins as Guests Arrive

Beautifully designed with a balance between the manmade structures and natural surroundings, Aulani relates to the environment and design traditions of the islands. At the resort’s entry is a loi *kalo* (taro terrace) embodying the important cultural and spiritual ties of the people to the land, each other and ‘ohana. Kalo is believed to have the greatest life force of all foods and is an important staple from early times to the present. “This loi *kalo* near the front door says something unique about Aulani,” said Morosky, the landscape architect. “It’s a manifestation of such an important part of Hawaiian life – not only to guests, but to the local community.”

From traditional to contemporary, art is an integral part of the story and the Aulani architecture. With more than 50 pieces decorating the resort, including oils, acrylics and watercolors, batik on silk, sculptures, wood carving, and bas relief, Aulani showcases one of the largest collections of contemporary Hawaiian art in the islands.

“Aulani is a living gallery just like Hawaii is a living culture,” Bolanos said.

The resort’s most dramatic interior space is the *Makaala*, the grand, open-air lobby where layers of meaning begin to be revealed. *(Makaala* means “eyes wide open” and “alert.”)

“The more you look, the more you see,” said Bolanos. A rock outcropping forms the lobby’s foundation, anchoring the sleek porte-cochere that transitions to a flooring of coral and lava stone. A dramatic view westward to the ocean is directly across from the entry; on each side is flowing water, one a rushing stream, the other tranquil.

“This reflects the idea in Hawaiian culture that there is a symbolic balance and harmony of masculine and feminine elements, the two streams joining in a waterfall that cascades into the gardens toward the beach,” Bolanos continued. Also in the lobby, a mural along one wall reflects the masculine theme while one along the other wall features a feminine theme.

“There are so many patterns, stories and layers,” said Bolanos, “all part of the philosophy of *maka’ala.*”

Stories Throughout the Resort

Aulani’s Waikolohe Valley was inspired by Oahu’s M?noa Valley, with the tall walls of the surrounding resort creating the “edges” of the valley. Morosky explains: “We created a place with broad canopy and flowering trees, a forest setting with water woven through the garden. The valley is rich and lush with trees and shrubs, transitioning out to the beach with palm trees, more sunlight and long views out to the water.” The setting is ideal for Aulani recreation, including a 321,000-gallon swimming area, a children’s interactive water-play area, a snorkel lagoon, a kids’ club, spa, lounges and restaurants.

Construction techniques also create a history lesson, taking inspiration from the building traditions indigenous to Oahu. “In Waikolohe Valley, we took references from Hawaii’s railings, bridge structures and aquaducts…some of the walls along the Waikolohe Stream represent stone construction along the canals in Honolulu,” Morosky explained. “The Menehune Bridge children’s water play area is made to look like timbers of `?hi`a wood, a legendary tree that is native to Hawaii.”

The art of Hawaiian lashing, a centuries-old construction technique that uses a braided or twisted cord instead of nails, is showcased throughout the resort. One of the most visible structures that uses lashing is at the ’AMA’AMA entry and main dining area. “Nobody has done this sort of construction at this scale for more than 100 years,” said Bolanos. “We found an older craftsman who does traditional lashing to work with us.”

Bolanos compares the architectural detail to the Arts & Crafts design philosophy in the U.S. made famous by such luminaries as Greene & Greene in the late 1800s. “How the wood pieces come together, the trellises, canopies, big beams, it’s all very articulate and refined.”

And while rockwork and much of the structures are manmade materials, Hawaii’s beautiful natural elements are used as finishing touches. “For instance, we didn’t want to disturb nature by collecting stones,” Morosky said. “Rocks and stones are considered to have spirits and are living, so we tried to be respectful of natural resources.” When the site was excavated, Disney saved the coral boulders and placed them along the beachfront walkway as places to sit and gather.

The Imagineers had fun with the oceanfront restaurants and lounges, crafting a whimsical story of a fishing family that fell in love with the land in the 1890s and built the first structure (Off the Hook lounge) where they lived. As the family grew, they built a second *hale*, or thatched-roof dwelling, from the 1910 era, then two more buildings (‘AMA’AMA and One Paddle Two Paddle). “The story goes that when Disney developed the property, these four ‘historic’ buildings, built up until the 1930s, were here,” said Bolanos. “Again, it’s our tribute to Hawaiian culture with an eye to the future.”

Bolanos and Morosky agree that the resort rings true in both its details and overall design – and that as the

landscape grows and the buildings mature, Aulani will become even more beautiful.

“What we’ve accomplished based on history only will get better with age,” Morosky said.

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About Aulani, a Disney Resort & Spa

Aulani opened in August of 2011 and sits on 21 acres of beautiful oceanfront in Ko Olina, adjacent to a nine-acre, crystal-blue lagoon and white-sand beach. Ko Olina is 17 miles from Honolulu International Airport and approximately 30 minutes from Waikiki.

Uniquely designed for families and inspired by the wonders and traditions of Hawaii, Aulani is a family paradise with a touch of magic. Aulani offers kids, adults and families Hawaiian vacation experiences with a special magic that only Disney can create. Delightful rooms and spacious Disney Vacation Club villas, a perfect location on a beautiful beachfront lagoon, and renowned Disney service and enchanting entertainment let dreamers of every age savor their time together on Hawaii as never before.

For Aulani reservations, guests may visit www.disneyaulani.com or call (866) 44-DISNE