

NEW WAVE OF
MĀORI ARTISTS

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AMONG THEM

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RONGOĀ MĀORI

The art of healing

Forget pharmaceuticals and psychologists—many are now turning to traditional Māori massage for the answers.

THIS APPROACH IS becoming more popular beyond Māori circles according to two traditional medicine practitioners, Ruatau Perez (Ngāi Tuhoe, Ngāpuhi) and Tracey Te Paa (Ngāti Whatua, Waikato, Tuwharetoa, Te Rarawa).

Uniting to form a strong healing partnership, the couple run popular mirimiri and romiromi clinics in various parts of Auckland, Northland and Australia.

Mirimiri is a therapeutic massage with a difference—it is the support for romiromi, or the massage therapy to assist the korero or counselling that accompanies the bodywork.

Ruatau says his grandparents inspired him to respect rongoā but a health crisis suffered by his daughter motivated him to find out more. This led to a pivotal meeting in his search for answers with world renowned rohunga, Hohepa Delamare (affectionately known as Papa Jo), who proved to be an invaluable mentor.

"My grandmother taught me about tapu but Papa Jo taught me why it was tapu, taking it to a much deeper level."

He continued to teach Ruatau sacred esoteric knowledge for a decade before he passed away, changing the former Wellingtonian's life profoundly. "Papa taught me lessons that traditionally only a select few were privy to. He also taught me about greater life lessons such as integrity and honesty. It was a gift," he says.

It prompted Ruatau to start his rongoā business Te Maurea and continue Papa Jo's model of teaching and healing. As part of his evolution as a kaiako, he began where wananga and traditional Māori medicine clinics.

It was one of these wananga that brought the couple together after Tracey lost her beloved mother to cancer. There Tracey experienced

an epiphany.

"In wananga the ancient philosophies resonated. I found out that every ailment had a whakapapa. When I reflected on my mother's illness, I didn't want any other whānau or my children to navigate the same journey that I had."

Both are quick to say they don't "heal" people, as such. "We give people tools to make changes, apply the tools and heal themselves."

"We've been brought up to focus on the physical ailment when actually we need to look at the dynamics of the environment, past historic trauma, belief systems and what's going on internally from an energy perspective,"

Tracey believes.

They also produce a range of natural rongoā products—creams, balms and tonics made from handpicked native plants such as kawakawa and manuka.

Ta moko artist, Turumakina Duley (Ngāi Tuhoe, Ngāiterangi, Ngāti Awa) believes the cream heals tattoos in a matter of days rather than weeks. "It's made from traditional rongoā principles under ritual. It adds mana to the work I do."

"The traditional Māori healing approach to illness is simple and makes sense. Clients come to us out of synch. We give them more than one option to consider."

Insomnia, depression, eczema, lower back pain, fertility issues. The two practitioners are approached for advice and treatment by people from all walks of life.

In June as their way to give back to the community, the couple plan to hit the road and "take the clinics to the marae to teach others all over our amazing country."

SARAH SPARKS



Kaiako – teacher
Kawakawa – native plant with natural anti-bacterial and anti-inflammatory properties.
Ta Moko – traditional Māori tattoo
Takutaku – to recite prayer
Tapu – sacred; holy
Tohunga – spiritual leader; healer
Whakapapa – genealogy
Where Wananga – place of learning