



Shedding light on Auckland

Since settling in Sydney in the late 70s, Japanese-born photographer MikiNobu Komatsu has been a repeat visitor to Aotearoa, a consequence, he says, of this country's rich light. His new photo book, *Classic Aotearoa*, collects five decades of architectural images.

BY THEO MACDONALD

After growing up in Tokyo and New York, how did you end up in Sydney in 1977? I knew I was going to leave Japan after finishing a social studies degree at university in Tokyo. I was going to do postgraduate studies in Oregon because I had been to the USA before, but I became very attracted to Australia and New Zealand after visiting both countries a few times with Japanese tour groups, and was convinced by the simple, laidback feeling. I thought I'd start from Sydney and move to somewhere better later. This never happened, though I almost moved to Auckland once.

Are you a full-time photographer, or do you have another career? I had another career, line producing for Japanese film productions in Australia and NZ, mostly TV commercials for Japan shot on 35mm motion picture cameras in the old days. There was one feature film I was involved in, *Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence*, which I worked on as an interpreter for the Arts Department in Auckland. Now, I'm a full-time photographer, busy putting together books and exhibitions.

What has kept bringing you back to Aotearoa for over forty years? Initially, the nature and landscape, which came together in my first book *Light Moods South*, which the *Listener* chose as one of the best 100 books of 2011. After working on a book of photographs of Japan, *Japan Journey Nostalgia*, I am back to NZ again this time with the architectural images I've been attracted to from the beginning.

Are you interested in or influenced by any particular photographers from New Zealand? Robin Morrison. I was chasing an original copy of his book *South Island from the Road* for decades until, last year, I suddenly came across his big exhibition (*Robin Morrison: Road Trip*) at the Auckland War Memorial Museum. I was so happy to go, and had a good look at his great images in large prints, as well as, of course, getting the new book.

How does the artistic and photographic culture of Australia and New Zealand compare to that of Tokyo? I don't know much about Japan nowadays, and I'm not much interested in trends. Generally I find many trying to be artistic and creative, rather than clicking my real emotional experience.

You must have taken hundreds of photographs of Auckland on your many trips here. What about the photos in *Classic Aotearoa* stands out to you? Looking at them afterwards, my selections for this book are usually to do with the feeling light created for me there in that moment. Each photograph has my emotional involvement. ■

Classic Aotearoa: New Zealand Architecture Through a Photographer's Eye (*Jap-Art Productions, \$65*) is available now from selected bookstores.



Facing page: The Albion Hotel, one of New Zealand's oldest standing Pub Hotels, 1982. This page: The Civic Theatre, 1989; old Farmers Department Store in Hobson Street, 1982; The Helensville Regent Theatre, 2023.