



Acknowledgement of *Country*

Interface Acknowledges the sovereign and unceded territories of our diverse First Nations communities and their elders, and we pay our deep respect to the custodians and leaders for their continued stewardship and care of their homelands.

We value the welcome teachers, custodial guides, wisdom holders and their students have provided. We embrace the shared experiences, it's a new way of education.

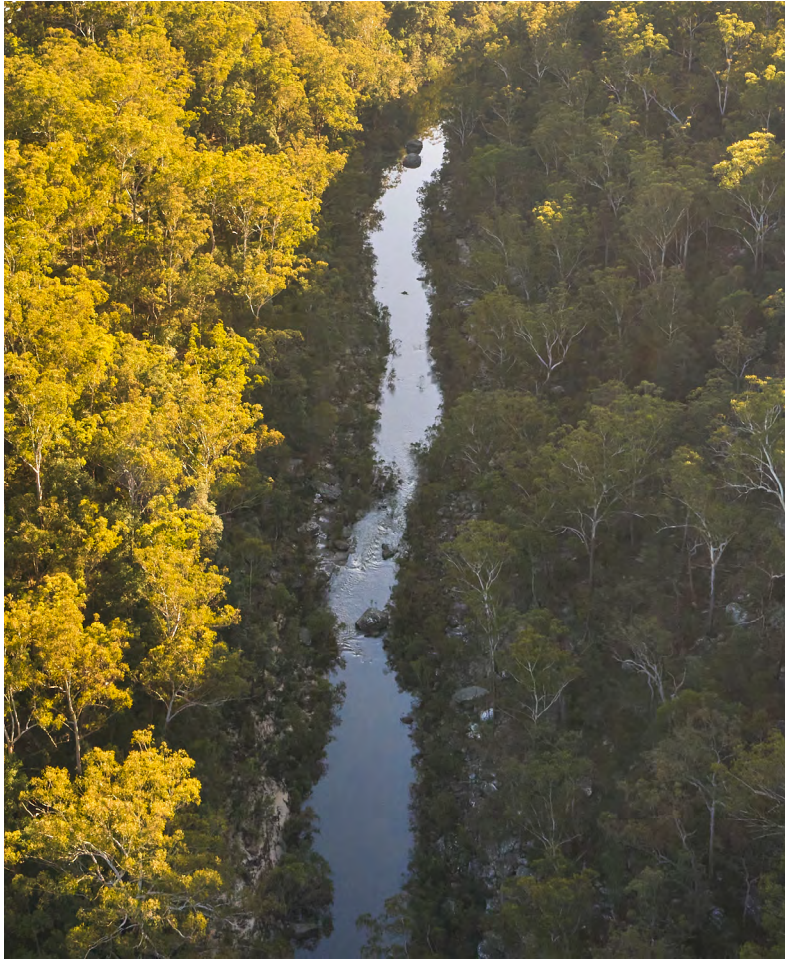
We are guided by the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and express our heartfelt thanks to the communities and their imparting of connection to Country as we work side by side in a new era of interconnectedness.

© Rhoda Roberts, AO



Credit: Menindee Central School

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Aerial shot of The Woolwash, Airds

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Introduction

Some journeys have a clear starting point and a destination in mind. This journey is not one of those.

The journey that has brought Interface to The Home Project and subsequently our **Upon Common Ground collection** was one we only realised we were on once we were halfway here. It is a journey that started over 60,000 years ago.

This is the story of who we met, what we learned and how we used that knowledge to enrich our understanding of First Nations people, whilst exploring what inspired learning spaces can be, and how we could help realise those spaces for the benefit of all Australians.

This is **The Home Project**.



Credit: Menindee Central School



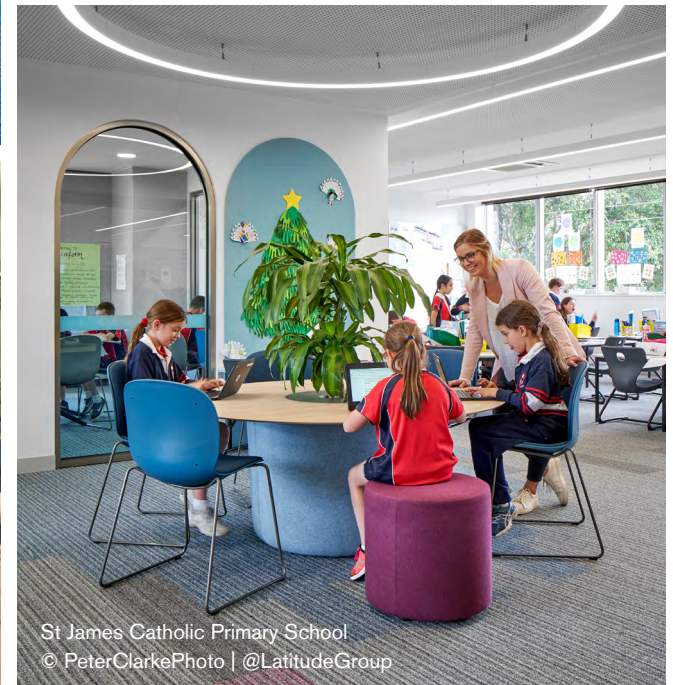
1972

Growing in Country

Interface has proudly been a part of Australia and our local community in Southwestern Sydney for over 50 years. In that time, we have helped designers and educators create environments that reflect the very latest understanding of what learning spaces should be. The change in that time has been nothing short of dramatic.



Monochromatic primary-coloured patterns that graced school interiors in the 1970's.



St James Catholic Primary School
© PeterClarkePhoto | @LatitudeGroup

A meeting that changed *everything*

Interface has always sought connection to those who are defining the future of learning. In 2017, we convened a unique group of architects, designers, educators and entrepreneurs from Singapore and Australia to discuss how we could create confidence-building environments for learning. This event, the **Future of Learning Spaces Workshop**, would become a signpost for our journey.

The participants were selected to represent a diversity of perspectives and experience, across different roles that contribute to shaping the future of learning. What we covered was both wide ranging, and extremely focused: The output was six key themes, some wide eyes, and a strong commitment to continue the conversation.





A dialogue of *design*

Over the next two years Interface engaged with the Australian based workshop participants to delve deeper in the findings from our workshop. These 'Design Forums' focused on distilling the performance-based, functional attributes required by flooring within educational environments and how flooring products can positively contribute to these environments. Run by our Australian Design Studio and business development managers, they included leading and specialist architects, designers, and consultants. The rich knowledge that these experts brought to the conversation was crucial in helping guide our journey.

Two rivers *converge*

Like many Australian businesses, Interface was committed to undertaking a Reconciliation Action Plan, a key recommendation and program that was born of the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.



Aerial view of
Georges River at The
Woolwash, Airds.

“

Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) have enabled organisations to sustainably and strategically take meaningful action to advance reconciliation. Based around the core pillars of relationships, respect and opportunities, RAPs provide tangible and substantive benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, increasing economic equity and supporting First Nations self-determination.

Reconciliation Australia



Interface's first RAP started at the 'Reflect' level and launched in 2019 with a focus on Education and Aspiration – two major pillars within the RAP's deliverables. Interface held factory tours and sustainability talks for local First Nations students from Briar Road Public School and found the experience to be enriching for both the kids and business.

At the same time as the Reflect RAP was published, Interface was organically discussing the findings of the Design Forums with a Sydney school and their First Nations students. Two tributaries were about to merge into a powerful river of thought.

Students engaged in on Country immersion activities at The Woolwash, Airds.



The 'Aha!' *moment*

It took one of our team to see that the two programs, our RAP and our Design Forums, were intersecting. A convergence of ideas was realised in the strong link between our work in the future of learning spaces and the traditional Aboriginal ways of teaching, which were being practised in some schools.

What we were discovering in our Design Forums mirrored the traditional ways of teaching and storytelling of Indigenous Australians. We could see that contemporary and traditional could be richer and deeper together and that 60,000-year-old methods were just as relevant in our modern world. We knew this was no coincidence; fate had not brought these ideas together, our desire for positive change had.



Yarning circle at Cabbage Tree Island Public School before going on Country. Yarning circle is a gathering of people and a collaborative way to communicate. It provides a respectful place to speak and be heard.

2020

An idea finds a *home*

Our lightbulb moment led to **The Home Project**. A project of collaboration, experience, immersion, and connection. It is a project where we are continually learning and encouraged to do more, stepping outside of the known and into a space of appreciation, curiosity and empathy.

The project was led by our Interface Design Studio Manager, partnering with Danielle Mate, Murrawari & Euahlayi, Contemporary Aboriginal Artist, and four schools within NSW. The vision was to hold creative and artistic workshops with their First Nations students to learn about the education experience of First Nations people.





What is Connection to *Country*?



Country is the term often used by Aboriginal peoples to describe the lands, waterways and seas to which they are connected. The term contains complex ideas about law, place, custom, language, spiritual belief, cultural practice, material sustenance, family and identity.

On Country with students and staff from Menindee Central School.



Click to Listen



Connection to Country is not an easy concept to unpack. It's a feeling that makes your body swell with pride: pride of Country and pride of people. As Aboriginal people we know that we do not own the land, for the land owns us. We are custodians of Country. We have a cultural responsibility to care for our Country and all that calls our Country home. We know and feel the presence of our ancestors on Country. Country is our strength, Country is home, Country is where we come from. Our bloodlines run deeply through Country.

This was and always will be, Aboriginal Country.

Tammy Anderson - Principal
Briar Road Public School
Biripi Woman

Journey to Country

To learn, you need to experience, so in late 2020 the team travelled to spend time on Country and explore what the connection to Country means to First Nations students, their educators and elders.

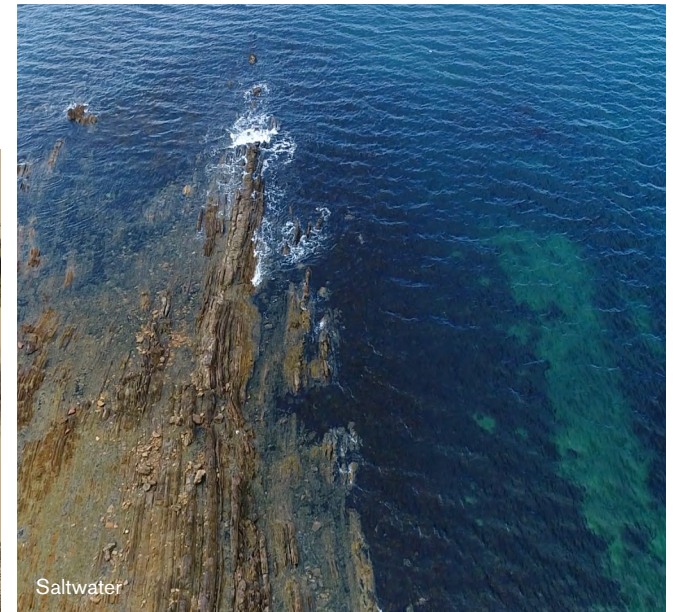
The immersive workshops we conducted using the medium of art helped the students bring to life the sounds, sights, smells, touch and feelings of their land. We explored four regions: Freshwater, Saltwater, Rainforest and Desert, with the fifth region of Spinifex explored virtually due to covid restrictions.



Desert



Rainforest



Saltwater



Freshwater

These regions are representative of all the major regions in Australia and hold a special significance for the people who live in them. In each region we partnered with schools and their leaders. They were:

- Briar Rd Public School**
- Eden Marine High School**
- Menindee Central School**
- Cabbage Tree Island Public School**



The output from the workshops gave us a far deeper understanding of what the land means to Aboriginal people, how their Ancestors created these places and all the people who have lived there. The student's artworks gave us the visual and textural cues that we could use to bring that connection to Country into the classrooms through a new product collection.

Now the hard work for the design team could begin.



The trees lean on each other it seems like they know the meaning of family.



Students from Cabbage Tree Island Public School on Country.



“

I'm just really proud of what the kids have been able to create today as a result of really being immersed in that environment knowing that Bundjalung is diverse. So, it was a great experience for our kids being able to explore the diversity of being in Bundjalung, being on Country and caring for Country and what that means for our future.

Dyonne Anderson - Principal
Cabbage Tree Island Public School

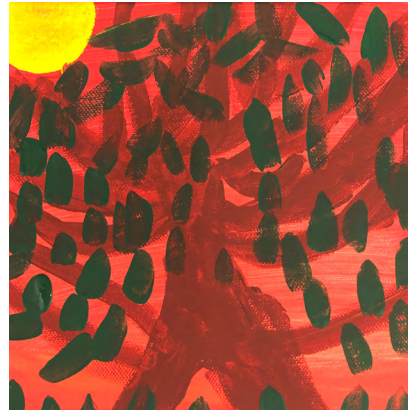


Credit: Cabbage Tree Island Public School



The stones
look like they're slowly
emerging from the water
dragging their way up the
banks of sand.

Credit: Menindee Central School



Students' art workshop led by Contemporary Aboriginal Artist, Danielle Mate.

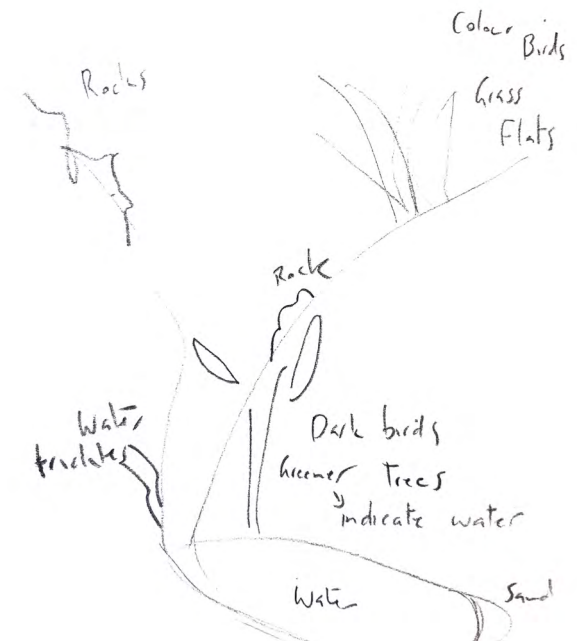
Product inspiration: Design Manager interview

In spending time on Country with Aboriginal educators, children, and community knowledge holders, we were privileged to observe and learn the depth of their connection to Country. We learnt that Country and all it encompasses was created by the ancestors, and they continue to live in the land, water and sky. The connection to Country is spiritual. Country is loved and cared for, and Country loves and cares for her people in turn.

While being on Country with the children, their connectedness to the land was immediately apparent. For most, there seemed to be a sense of ease, purpose, comfort and belonging while being on Country. The place they were standing on seemed to make them feel connected to something bigger than them.

Several commented that they could “feel their culture” and many said they felt “calm and peaceful”. They had stories and knowledge that had been passed down to them about their land that seemed to really cement their connection to Country and their ancestors.

The **Upon Common Ground** product collection is centred around exploring that deep connection and love for Country. In doing this, we have drawn on Interface’s experience designing with biophilic design principles. Biophilic design recognises that humans have an innate connection to natural patterns, forms, materials, and light. It can also evoke positive feelings of connectedness to the outdoors and a sense of wellbeing. We aimed to create a flooring collection with visual and textural cues that tap into a sense of connectedness to Country, and that children can use within their daily learning spaces.



The other synergy we have explored while developing this collection is Interface's core principles of sustainability. Aboriginal culture is centred around understanding and nurturing Country. They 'tread lightly' in all aspects of their daily life to ensure care for the land that cares for them.

In creating this collection, we have explored yarns, backings and manufacturing methods that draw from our rich pool of knowledge in manufacturing sustainably, so in turn this product collection treads lightly on Country.

The water reflects like
the ~~insect~~ innocent eyes
of a dingo pup.



Aboriginal Elder, Uncle Ossie demonstrating the art of making music with the gum leaf.



Bringing it to *life*

When we set ourselves the task of creating a product collection, we were absolutely committed to it being a genuine representation of what we experienced on Country and felt that it also needed to reflect everything we had learned in our Design Forums about inspired learning spaces. There could be no compromise.

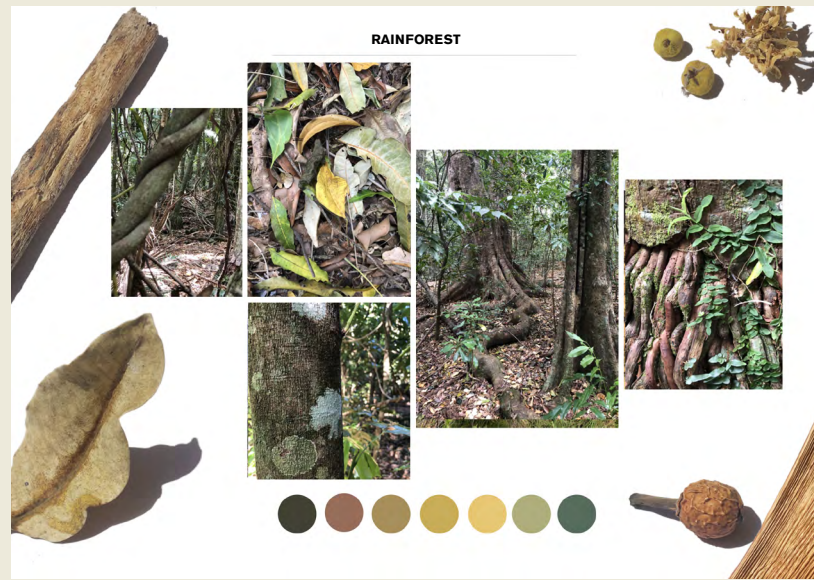
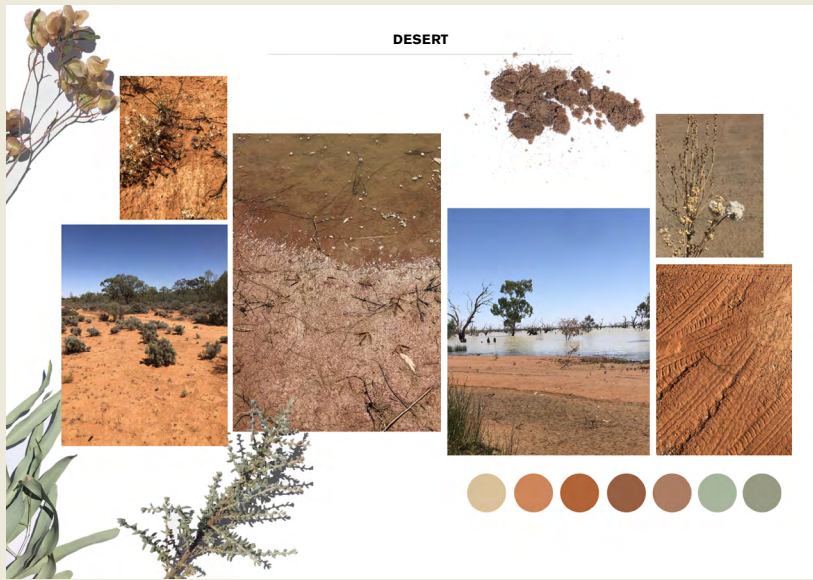
Throughout 2021 we undertook a 6 month development process. The colours, patterns and textures were turned into product, initially in a digital form and then trialled with real fabrics at our Minto manufacturing plant, in NSW.

Then we applied two strict criteria to test each product:

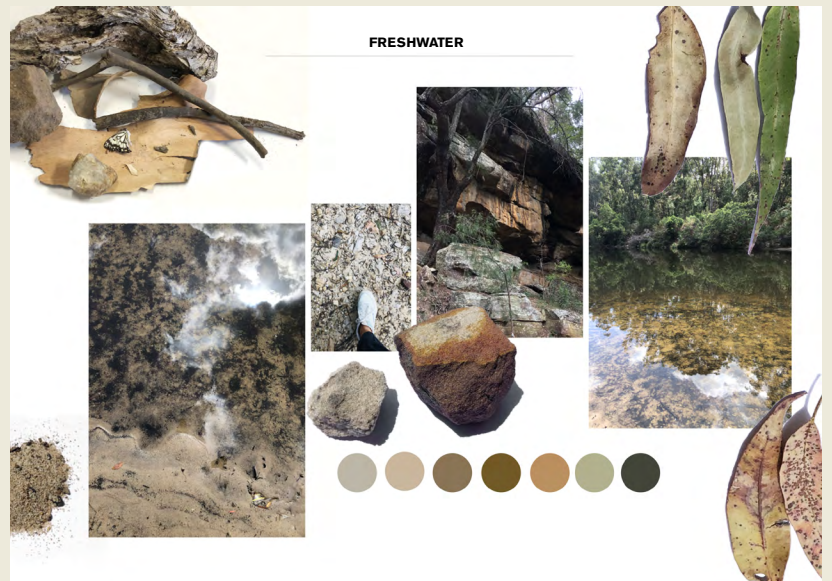
1. Did they successfully represent the connection to Country for the region they were depicting?
2. Did they meet the functional performance criteria as outlined through the education Design Forums?

For the product development to be successful, both criteria needed to be clearly met. They did, and we were one step further on our journey.





Mood boards created by our Design team bringing together the unique patterns, textures and colourways found in each region.



Weaving *Country* into carpet

The next stage of our journey was far easier. Production. With world-class production facilities at our disposal, our team went through the very familiar process of turning the ideas into commercial grade flooring. Once completed, they were tested to ensure they met ours, and the industry's very high standards. Now in late 2022, we stand ready to launch our **Upon Common Ground** collection to industry, and architectural and design communities.

Is this the end of our journey? Not even close. Although we started with no destination (or even the knowledge we were travelling) we now very clearly understand what our journey is, and the launch of this product collection is just our first step. We now have a clearer idea of what our mission is and how we can help both reconciliation and education in a small, but very honest way.

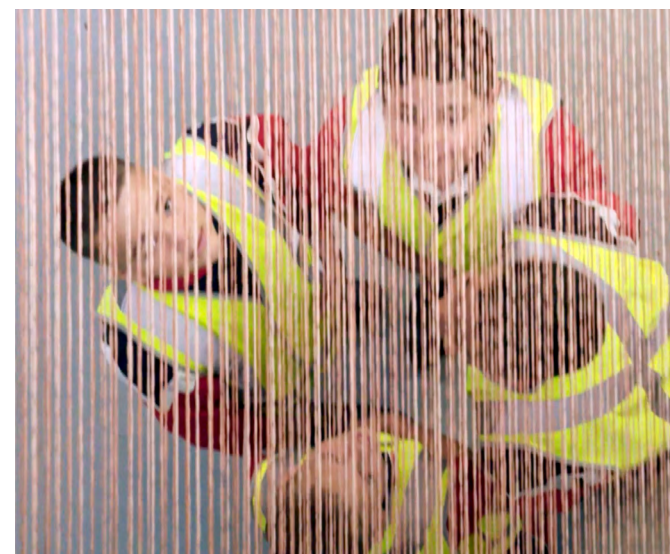


Students' mill tour at Interface Minto plant.





Students from Briar Rd Public School visit the Minto factory.



Why Upon Common Ground?

By early 2021 we were using Home as the name for the product collection, but we realised that to better reflect what we had learned, we required a more profound name, one that talked more broadly to our objectives in terms of our RAP commitments and desire to create inspired learning environments.

Here is our inspiration:

Firstly, our Reconciliation Action Plan is part of our commitment as a company and a nation to find common ground between new Australians and First Nation peoples.

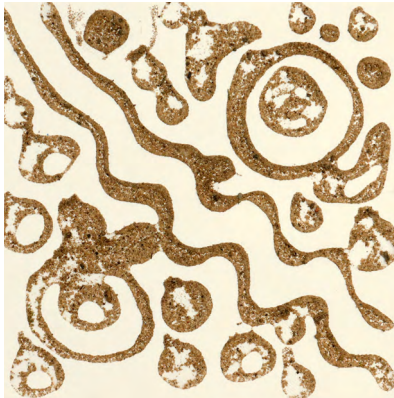
We also acknowledge that here in Australia, wherever we are, we are walking on common ground, that Country is at the heart of our First Nation people's beliefs and that we all need to understand the importance of the land to Aboriginal people.

Professionally, as designers of flooring for education environments, we are seeking to find common ground between all stakeholders in the thinking around contemporary educational practices and how the spaces that we design for education can have a positive impact on educational outcomes.

But most importantly we are passionate about finding common ground for all Australians through reconciliation.

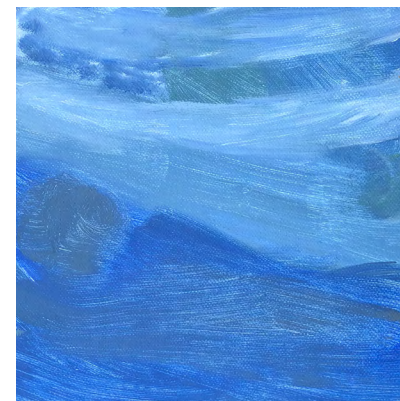


Credit: Briar Rd Public School



Upon Common Ground collection - **Freshwater**

Upon Common Ground collection - **Saltwater**



Credit: Eden Marine High School

Credit: Menindee Central School

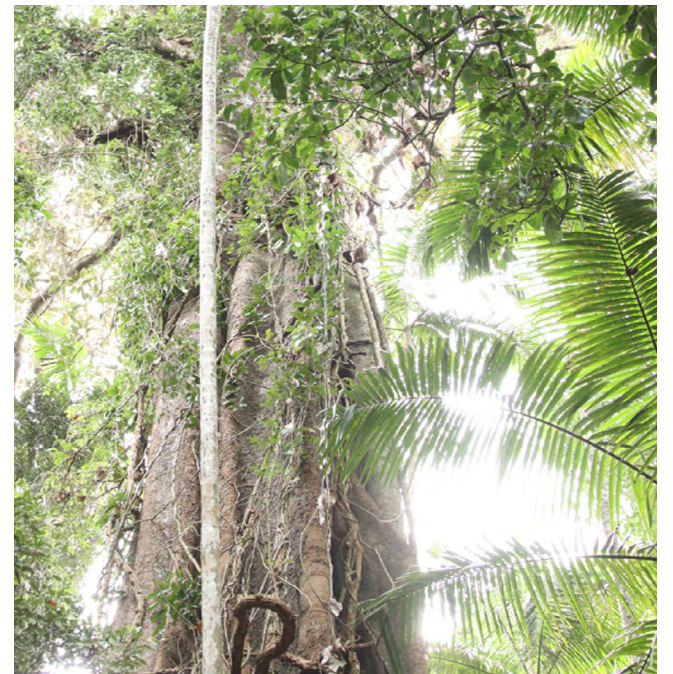
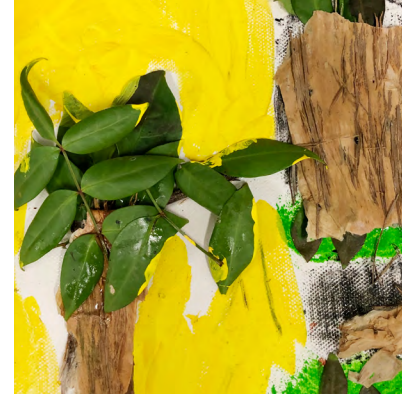


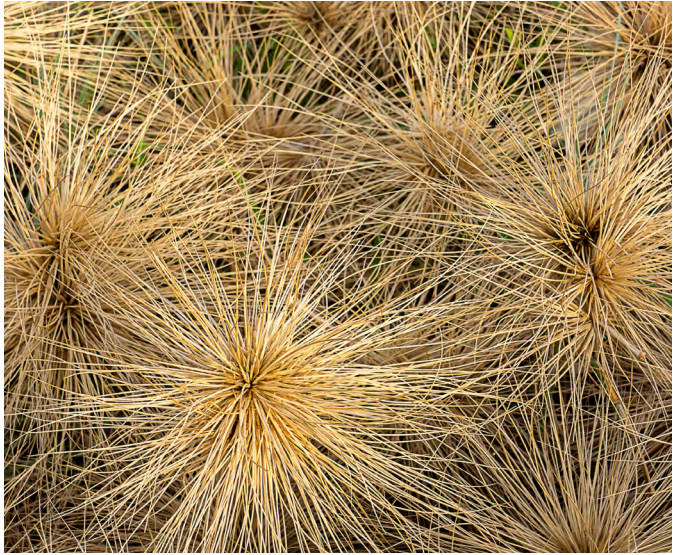
Upon Common Ground collection - **Desert**



Upon Common Ground collection - **Rainforest**

Credit: Cabbage Tree Island Public School





Upon Common Ground collection - **Spinifex**



The path *ahead*

The Home Project will continue to evolve as we seek to deepen our relationships with the communities we worked with and expand our understanding of the First Nations culture. Reciprocity is very purposely intertwined into the project, so as it evolves, we will continue to look for opportunities to partner and support the Aboriginal community through workshops, sponsorship and engagement. We will lean on our external Cultural Advisory Group to support and guide our RAP commitments to ensure our journey has a clear path.

We also anticipate that the lengthy and extensive design consultation with our collaborators, through the Design Forums, will yield impactful and respectful product development and we will continue working in this space.

The connections made through this journey will allow Interface to develop meaningful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and establish sustainable opportunities for all Australians.

We have committed to supporting the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principals Association (NATSIPA) and will continue to work with the schools, providing funding for them and their communities, and working together on future projects where we can benefit and enrich each others' understandings, philosophies and policies.

This journey started over 60,000 years ago. Only in the last 0.5% of that time have First Nations people had to co-exist with other cultures in a way that profoundly altered their culture. This project is no more than our acknowledgement of that incredible journey and that we, like all Australians, can play a part in steering Australia in the direction of meaningful reconciliation, based around the core pillars of relationships, respect and opportunities that will enrich us all.



Acknowledgements

We thank our design partners, collaborating schools, their dedicated Principals and staff for working with us and providing valuable insights.

Schools

Briar Rd Public School
Cabbage Tree Island Public School
Eden Marine High School
Menindee Central School

Design Forums

Alleanza Architecture
Anne Knock Consulting
Architectus
BKA Architecture
Brand Architecture
Clarke Hopkins Clarke
COX Architecture
Dani Martin, Architect
JDH Architects
LEAF Architecture
Munns Sly Moore Architects
Santelli Architects
Site Architecture Studio
Smith Tracey Architects
SQU Group
Swanbury Penglase
Taylor Robinson Chaney Broderick
Danielle Mate, Murrawari & Euahlayi, Contemporary Aboriginal Artist

On Country images taken by:

Bini Paea, Junior Meredith & Dan Gosse



Artwork Credits

Top Right: Cabbage Tree Island Public School
Top Left: Menindee Central School
Bottom Left: Briar Rd Public School





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