

Doesn't it sound like paradise? A country where young architects quite often launch their careers by designing a major library, a school, or even a concert hall, because of a competition system that actually works. Not just that, it also offers excellent possibilities for creating innovative (interior) public space. The Finnish architecture policy enables ample opportunity for architects to learn the profession by trial and error, and also by finding inspiration in the 'old masters', like Aalto and Saarinen. Does this sound all too decent? Then it might be a relief to hear that the housing industry could do with an occasional touch of brilliance, and that a small group of independent thinkers is appending some question marks to all this national bliss. To find out more, we follow A10 correspondent Tarja Nurmi into the heart of Finnish architecture.

Finland: mostly harmless

TEXT: ANNI VARTOLA

Let's cut short the trivia: yes, Finland is a prosperous country equipped with 160,000 lakes, 5.4 million inhabitants, two million saunas and about 3500 architects, educated either at Aalto University, Tampere University of Technology, or the University of Oulu. Like planet Earth, as described in Douglas Adams' *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, Finland – despite its youth and modernity, and in terms of both society and culture – has comprehensively been touted as mostly harmless.

Although the grand narrative of Finnish architecture depends on one's viewpoint, certain defining characteristics are apparent. The built environment is young, sturdy and modern: 60 per cent of housing is built after 1970 and less than five per cent of all buildings were constructed before Finland declared independence in 1917. Youth marks out Finland in respect to architects as well. Talent surfaces early, thanks to an esteemed system of open architectural competitions, where anonymity is guaranteed and projects, as a rule, are realized. All the current top offices, such as ALA, Avanto, JKMM and K2S, are run by partners in their early 40's. All of these offices began their careers with competition success. ALA's amazing debut was Kilden, a theatre and concert hall in Kristiansand, Norway; Avanto was built on the Helsinki Zoo lookout tower, Kupla; JKMM started off by bagging the first prize in the open competition for Turku Main

Library in 1998; and K2S is a fusion of three experienced (competition-wise) young tigers already famous for Café Hiili, a wooden pavilion raised in Helsinki for the summer of 2000.

Accordingly, the pinnacle of contemporary Finnish architecture is not completely harmless, but actually rather sharp. The persistent work accomplished at the architecture schools has finally paid off. The turning point's prelude was Helvetinkolu, the Finnish pavilion at the Seville Expo in 1992. It was pivotal in terms of exemplifying how young architecture students from far-off Finland could be capable of capturing something that was so timely. It also visualized the method of how late-20th-century modernism could be reformed into something that Juhani Pallasmaa sketched in 1990 as 'hybrid architecture'. The new architectural metaphysics was strong, both visually and mentally, and functional as a building and a work of art.

Then came Kiasma, the Helsinki Museum of Contemporary Art, which opened in 1998. Although Steven Holl's architectural language represented similar 'lucid aesthetics and accompanying awe', as Helvetinkolu was described by Roger Connah in his peerless *Finland: Modern Architectures in History*, Kiasma inverted the lesson about international dispositions. Holl played the role of the inconsiderate American invading Finland with his bright ideas about silence and drama for such an architecturally delicate

and historically charged urban site. Finnish architecture has not been the same ever since. The once sacred urban principles of our towns have now been forgotten, and international stars have embraced Finland many times over.

Consequently, contemporary Finnish architecture is on track with the legends: Eliel Saarinen (1873–1950) blended art and architecture into beautiful national romanticism; Alvar Aalto (1898–1976) never ceased to find the right balance for his lines; and Reima Pietilä (1923–1993) dismissed the possibility of resolution altogether. The grand masters of Finnish modernism set their seal on the most sustainable ethos ever: be international but do not lose your identity, be open to novelties but be moderate and sensible not to be repudiated. The present-day architectural scene indicates a willingness to conquer the Big World, an ability to deal with constant instability, and the flexibility to act according to one's own ideals. One axis extends across Hollmén-Reuter-Sandman, Rudanko & Kankkunen and the Uusikaupunki group; Finnish architecture is ethically responsible; it thinks big but acts small. Another axis passes from PES-Architects across Esa Ruskeepää to Lahdelma & Mahlamäki Architects: Finnish architecture is boldly global yet oddly original. Indeed, Finnish architecture is mostly harmless, but luckily enough, no longer completely insignificant. ◀

Museum of Finnish Architecture

TEXT: TIINA VALPOLA AND JUULIA KAUSTE

The Museum of Finnish Architecture's dual mission is to preserve the cultural heritage of Finnish architecture and to serve as a platform for the presentation of contemporary architecture. Established in 1956, it is one of the oldest museums focused solely on architecture in the world. It is also one of the national museums in Finland, and is responsible for covering the field of architecture though collecting, researching, publishing, presenting and disseminating information. The goal is to raise the level of awareness of the role of architecture as a fundamental building block of society. The museum serves as a bridge between the past and future, as well as a link between professionals and their wider audience.

The museum has an extensive collection of drawings, sketches, photographs and scale models, plus a comprehensive library of publications on architecture. The library is an open lending library. The museum organizes temporary exhibitions in its own premises and supports an

active programme of touring exhibitions, both in Finland and internationally. In addition, it organizes a broad spectrum of lectures, debates, events, workshops and site visits, and also runs a strong programme of publications.

Currently, the museum is presenting the Biannual Review of Finnish Architecture, on view until 29 September 2014, after which it will tour internationally. The exhibition is accompanied by a 'review of reviews' showcasing a selection of buildings from past reviews of Finnish Architecture, organized regularly since 1953. At the 14th International Biennale of Architecture in Venice, on view until 23 November 2014, the museum presents *Re-Creation*, an installation by Anssi Lassila of OOPEAA Office for Peripheral Architecture. Demonstrating the continuity of themes central to modernity in Finland, it takes a stand on the resilience of architecture. ◀

Info www.mfa.fi

Interior views of *Re-Creation* at the Finnish pavilion, 14th Biennale of Architecture in Venice



Architecture Information Centre Finland

TEXT: TIINA VALPOLA AND JUULIA KAUSTE

Architecture Information Centre Finland (Archinfo) acts as a hub for advancing general knowledge about Finnish architecture and boosts collaboration in the field. Its goal is to raise national awareness of architecture and discuss the effects of architectural and urban design on the quality of life and well-being. The centre furthers international recognition of Finnish architecture and serves an international audience interested in the Finnish approach towards the art of building.

Archinfo was established in 2012 through the joint initiative of five key organizations in Finland: the Museum of Finnish Architecture, the Alvar Aalto Foundation, the Finnish Association of Architects, the Association of Finnish Architects' Offices and the Building Information Foundation. The centre is one of eight information centres for the cultural field in Finland, and is financed by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

The centre publishes an online journal that explores the news, events and phenomena surrounding Finnish architecture. Its aim is to provide knowledge on various

perspectives involving the art of architecture. It therefore also coordinates and organizes educational activities on architecture-related issues for non-architects of all ages, and is a collaborative partner on projects promoting Finnish architecture internationally.

Archinfo also facilitates the advancement of architectural policy. In 1998, Finland was among the first countries in Europe to launch a national architectural policy programme. The national programme has spawned a series of local architectural policy programmes, and altogether five regions and ten cities and towns have currently adopted an architectural policy of their own. While these regional and municipal programmes are not mandated by law, they are officially recognized policies ratified by the local government. The process of preparing such a policy has provided an important conduit for discussion and debate on issues related to architecture and planning between officials, politicians and citizens. ◀

Info www.finnisharchitecture.fi

Re-Creation by Anssi Lassila (OOPEAA Office for Peripheral Architecture)



Finland

Everybody needs a home, but who hits the jackpot?

TEXT: TARJA NURMI

The well-functioning Finnish housing politics were completely left to market whims in the 1990s. That decade also saw the abandonment of any rent control. Following the deep economic recession and during the early, energetic (now bygone) Nokia years, *market economy* has been the big thing.

Still, Helsinki is growing fast. This growth is visible: old harbour areas, currently construction sites, are hopefully being transformed into lively neighbourhoods. The main metropolitan area of Finland still consists of three competing 'cities' – Espoo, Vantaa and Helsinki – each fighting to attract affluent taxpayers. Plans to develop a real and cohesive metropolitan area are difficult to make. Even so, an underground line will be extended towards Espoo in the west and a train connection to the Helsinki Vantaa Airport has at last been created.

A genuine housing market does not really function in the country at the moment. The volume of what is put on the market is restricted and demand is high, especially for urban homes for single people.

Back to the city!

Younger families have again realized that life in the city can be fun. The dream about an American-style house surrounded by a close-cut lawn still exists,

but is no longer a big priority for the educated middle class. Ideas connected with urban farming, small-scale permaculture and local food are becoming more visible. A sterile, minimalistic condo is a bygone object of desire. Once more, many functionalism-inspired areas built before the time of the drab, grey suburbs have gained in popularity.

But prices can reach 7000 to 10,000 euros per square metre, and rents are skyrocketing. The very conservative idea of having to own an apartment or a house – made possible with long-term bank loans – has been effectively marketed as the only option for the Finns.

The big construction companies call the shots. All kinds of new regulations take care of the rest; even simple buildings seem to get increasingly complicated and expensive. Cooperative housing groups have found it difficult to get financing from banks. However, a few new interesting projects have been realized.

Wanted: metropolitan update

Compared with the rest of Europe, Finland is not at the front line of housing. There is not very much high-quality, socially conscious architecture for people with average incomes. Yet positive

examples do exist. There are very competent and experienced architects in the field of housing design. Through competitions, younger practices also have a chance. The Helsinki Housing Production Department (ATT) has developed systems of special competitions in order to find the best possible solutions for various projects.

What Helsinki – and Finland – needs is a variety of affordable and updated housing to meet the demands of flexibility and contemporary urban life. Some projects, also by young architects, are positive signs of change.

For the profession of architects, it is demanding to create high-quality housing that is environmentally, aesthetically and socially solid, and made of concrete, brick, wood or whatever materials, for a fair price. Finland also must develop a fresh, flexible supply of rental housing, after the Central European model. It would stimulate the economy and make life easier for those who are counting the square metres they have bought, not daring to make a new move in life.

Ultimately, what Finland needs most is a strong political grip on the matter. The Helsinki region must rapidly restructure itself into a metropolitan area of today. ◀

1

NRT ARCHITECTS
Merenkulkijanranta, by the perpetually young in spirit NRT, represents genuine Nordic Cool. It is a high-end housing project in a terrific location. The ensemble consists of four finger-like horizontal building masses, partly on stilts above the sea, and more vertical volumes in the back. Whiteness, copper, glazed balconies and fantastic views.

www.n-r-t.fi



ANTTILÄ LITTONEN

2

LAHDELMA & MAHLAMÄKI ARCHITECTS WITH HMV ARCHITECTS
This studio and city house in Kalasatama comprises small and flexible rented apartments with generous common terraces, top floor sauna and club room, and shares the same yard with a sleek and hip, privately owned studio apartment building. Aimed at residents who prefer biking before driving. Different houses, same features, different kinds of people – in short, contemporary urban.

www.ark-l-m.fi, www.arkhmv.fi



THIETTALA AND MARKO HÜTTUNEN

3

HÜTTUNEN LIPASTI PAKKANEN ARCHITECTS
The winner of the Saukonpaasi Housing invited architectural competition represents social housing. It was one of the first buildings in the new Jätkäsaari area in Helsinki. The block consists of a housing wall that closes the inner garden from street life. The envelope of the block is built of white pre-fabricated concrete elements, and there is a continuous play of openings in the fibre concrete wall. Lace-like, semi-transparent balcony walls create situations for exposure or privacy (see also p. 54).

www.h-l-p.fi

4

ROOMY
This is a cool shoehorn project in Eira, one of the best parts of Helsinki. Family apartments are carefully squeezed into a visible and very demanding spot. Master bedrooms partly underground, with saunas and jacuzzis, generous windows, high ceilings in living spaces, private terraces, balconies, yards. Well thought out privacy contra exhibitionist openness. Three old friends with families saw it, bought it and moved in.

www.roomy.fi



JAANI PIRJUNILA

5

PLAYA ARCHITECTS
Kotisaari, designed by the young office of Playa, comprises three urban, villa-like houses where the special balconies and their wood-paneled side storage spaces do the trick. Sleek and light brick architecture, clear plans in apartments from two to five or six rooms. Saunas and terraces on the top floor, while bicycle sheds and a beautiful layout of entrance fronts towards the street. Swiss-style elegance for regulated prices. There is a lottery for who gets to buy here.

www.playa.fi



TUOMAS UUSHEIMO

To collaborate, just contact

TEXT: INDIRA VAN 'T KLOOSTER

Now this is interesting. Difficult to pin down, these architects. They have websites, but not necessarily in English. Or in English, but with a minimum of information. Yet, here they are: Futudesign, JADA, Rudanko+Kankkunen and Studio Puisto, who together collaborate under the name Uusi Kaupunki (meaning 'New Town'), along with Hukkatila and Pro-Toto. All were established between 2010 and 2012. Most of these architects come from internationally successful offices like OMA, Herzog & de Meuron, or the Helsinki-based ALA Architects (the 'Finnish BIG'), JKMM and Lahdelma-Mahlamäki. Born and raised in what seems to be a Finnish paradise to foreign architects, where competition-minded clients actually commission very young architects to build complex projects like schools, libraries, churches, museums and concert halls. And yet, they work differently...

Futudesign has completed various interior design for bars and restaurants, usually in collaboration with artists. Their latest project involves the design of bicycle details for Pelago, a famous Finnish company. But according to Auvo Lindroos, 'Our biggest project so far is probably the Art Hotel in Jätkäsaari, Helsinki.'

JADA focuses on architecture and design, from large-scale planning to art installations, and from research to hands-on tasks. As Jussi Vuori explains it, 'Our work actually ranges from large- to small-scale. At the moment we're into a permanent gallery building in collaboration with an artist. Attic conversions, which we are also doing, are a great way to make more housing at good locations. Due to the slowness of city planning processes and the power of larger developers, there is a shortage of all kinds of housing at reasonable prices. Many architects have turned to developing their own projects in response.'

Studio Puisto is busy working on a cultural power station designed by Alvar Aalto in 1931, turning it into an environmental, community and media art centre. 'We have a special knowledge in wood architecture, refurbishment projects combining old and new and site-specific as well as local architecture,' claims Heikki Riitahuhta.

Rudanko+Kankkunen specializes in spaces for learning. 'We want to become public building and education architecture experts,' says Hilla Rudanko. Their school in Cambodia, which started as an Aalto University design studio project, was finished two years ago. 'As we drew the first sketches, the project became so real and the construction so necessary that we ended up collecting funding for it and organizing the construction a year later.'

Impatience, hands-on. These words will return many times during our conversation with the architects who work as the Uusi Kaupunki collective. 'I think we are the first Finnish architects' collective organized as a company,' says Hilla. 'Major Finnish architecture projects start with ready-to-build design from the very beginning, as there is a competition-winning design to be constructed. But there's a downside to this competitive system. There's hardly room for the voice of users or neighbours to be heard. There is no mutual investment.'



↑ Uusi Kaupunki members (standing, left to right) Heikki Riitahuhta, Erica Österlund, Inari Virkkala, Hilla Rudanko, Jaakko Lehtonen, Anssi Kankkunen and Martti Kalliala; (front) Jussi Vuori, Aleksi Niemeläinen and Auvo Lindroos

Heikki elaborates, 'Architecture could and should be more adventurous than that. Because of all kinds of objections and procedures against a design, it might actually be faster and more profitable to conduct the public first. But the market situation is squeezed, so there are quick proposals for big buildings.'

Their answer is low-key: hold workshops, speak with the public. Talk first, then draw. Says Auvo, 'Our most important joint project is a series of planning workshops for municipalities that are actually being televised at the moment by Yle, the Finnish Broadcasting Company.' Why is that? 'I think it's new, fresh, close to the people; it is about architecture, but not just about aesthetics,' opines Hilla.

And they're honest, too. 'Don't get us wrong.

We all want to win a major competition, but as long as we haven't, we like to experiment with different kind of situations to create more freedom for design as a process,' says Jussi. Besides, competitions require a lot of work, and chances to win are usually slim, with 100 entries or more per competition. In fact, it's really ineffective to ask so many man hours from all these individual designers. 'We can put the hours in other projects and make our work more effective. Plus, the way we work now gives us the possibility to build up a network of clients. The people at the workshops are also our future clients,' remarks Heikki.

So, how do they work? Do they have a fixed method? They have planned six workshops. Pori



↑ Rail yard linear redevelopment, Oulu (Pro-Toto)



↑ Locomotive stables as amusement park, Oulu (Hukkatila)



↑ 'Oulu C', typologically diverse urban plan, Oulu (JADA)



↑ Recreation in former rail yard, Oulu (Studio Puisto)



↑ Railway station and urban plan, Oulu (Futudesign)



↑ 'Oulu C' concept (JADA)

was the first, and the most recent was in Oulu. Hilla continues, 'The workshops are exercises in free thinking. Gradually, we've developed a way to do things, and yes, maybe you can call that a method. We have done four workshops so far. These are two-day workshops in which we set up six tables, one for every practice, and then we start addressing the public. For example, in a shopping mall. At the end of the day, we have six results, as we all have different approaches to the questions. So the clients gets six results to choose from.'

And what if the client only chooses one? Doesn't that bother the others? 'No, apparently that solution was the best answer to the problem then,' says Heikki. 'But usually there is a way to integrate all six answers into one overall scheme, as some deal with short-term and others with long-term issues, the one is a design, the other a strategy, etc. As relative outsiders in the community at hand, we offer lots of ideas that can be realized within a short time span.'

Their approach is quite pragmatic. 'It's also a way to test ideas and to talk to entrepreneurs. It's a more informal way of working,' explains Jussi. 'And it's about the use of public space. Not to overdesign it, but to stimulate use. It's the market square versus the ceremonial square. We have lots of public spaces, but most of them are empty because of the harsh climate. We want to revive them,' adds Auvo.



↑ Rail yard housing development, Oulu (Rudanko+Kankkunen)

Thus Uusi Kaupunki also reflects typical Finnish values, like the art of learning by doing and the design of public space. Outdoor space needs diversifying, so that it allows different kinds of use in both summer and winter. Maybe that's why Finnish television likes them. 'We raise awareness for the social side of architecture. Do we really need more architecture?' What kind of public space works best in Finland?' asks Hilla. Auvo, quite serious, continues, 'Unofficially, you might say that we write alternative briefs for future commissions by formulating new questions.'

'Another way to describe our manner of working: when we have been around, clients don't need a competition. They can simply commission the project, as the brief is carefully thought out,' says Hilla with a smile.

Will Uusi Kaupunki be expanded as a network, or will it be confined to a fixed number of six? According to Jussi, 'We haven't worked that one out ourselves yet. The group as it is works well. We

can be approached easily. On the other hand, maybe we should. Especially now that we are also working on architecture clinics.'

'These are fifteen-minute consults in which people who mistrust architects as a species in general can see that we can actually save money for them, that we are not merely doing colours and aesthetics,' explains Hilla. Jussi smiles, 'Just have a look at our website. It says: to collaborate, just contact.'

What they mean to say is this: society is changing. Private money is becoming more powerful. The profession is diversifying. The system of competitions might soon be outdated. Commissions could come from different corners. 'Like our small hotel project in Tampere,' points out Heikki. 'The client is just someone we met during one of our workshops.' Maybe it's a sign of the times, but they feel these changes coming to them and they are simply too impatient to wait for them. They like to work together. They prefer to create opportunities halfway. ◀

Public space within buildings

TEXT: TARJA NURMI

The flight from Helsinki to Ivalo, in the north of Lapland, takes about two hours. The regions around the Arctic Circle have dark winters, when periods of daylight are close to none. On the other hand, summers are full of light – there is magic all over the place. Each November, however, architecture must once more come to the rescue in every part of the country.

Indoor space is important in all parts of Finland, especially during the really cold season. Yet it also requires a great deal of energy to heat voluminous buildings. Mixed-use and hybrid buildings are currently in high demand. Relatively hectic urban life demands flexible movement within and between indoor and outdoor spaces, and an excellent public infrastructure. Sustainability means user-friendly bus and tram stops right in the vicinity of important buildings, or spaces and buildings that are cleverly interconnected via transport terminals.

In some of the newer buildings by young architects, generous and inventive spaces add real architectural beauty, comfort and practicality. In the heart of Helsinki, the Kaisa Library by AOA Architects (see A10 #48) is cleverly woven into the transportation network, having access to an underground station, buses and trams. Gangways and corridors link it with the Helsinki University Porthania building, the Alexandria Learning Centre and other spaces in the mixed-use central campus block, plus commercial services. It is even possible to reach the bottom floor supermarket without having to put on an overcoat.

The building has horizontal, vertical and diagonal porosity, grandness and light. There are silent nooks and corners for reading, and even a roof terrace. The building, though, is a victim of its success: by lunchtime, it is difficult to find a single vacant place to sit. Of course, the most popular seats are the ones located in the grandest space, where there is an abundance of light and air, with a view towards the busy cityscape.

Another impressive indoor space with mixed uses is in the Saunalahti School in Espoo, by Verstas Architects. One gets the feeling of entering a city hall, where contemporary concrete surfaces and a nice amount of colour and artistic ornamentation meet each other in a very impressive way. Huge windows tie the space into a carefully designed schoolyard. There is a broad, nicely constructed wooden roof slab following the entire curvature of the facade. The building is in a small community in Espoo, the feel is of real quality, furniture included. The school library is also open for community use, and part of the central hall can be used as a library



↑ Saunalahti School, Espoo (Verstas Architects)

reading room. An open fireplace gives the building an archaic feel of dignity and hospitality.

The Seinäjoki Apila Library by JKMM Architects, hundreds of kilometres to the north-west, has an inviting, all-glass front facade (see A10 #51). The café-media room has become a popular spot where club meetings are held, newspapers browsed and gossip exchanged. A public auditorium next to the café provides for events from fields far outside of literature and the world of books. Still, when you go further down, the building has the atmosphere of an excellent city library. The whole building will later be connected to the Seinäjoki Aalto Centre's original library, designed by Alvar Aalto, via an underground passage. Even here, fine concrete surfaces, excellent graphic design and splashes of colour and inventive interior design meet each other.

The JKMM team – a genuine role model for many younger offices – are now working on an interesting concept for the Amos Anderson New Museum, right across the street from the Kiasma Art Museum in Helsinki. The new art museum will mostly be built underground, and some of its functions will be placed inside the functionalist-era Lasipalatsi (Glass Palace), a competition winner by then architecture students Niilo Kokko, Viljo Revell and Heimo Riihimäki. Not only will it be an art museum, but also other functions like outdoor cinemas will be created. It will be different from the Kiasma, which is a solitary institutional building standing on its own piece of land. The new Amos will have extra spaces with underground corridors connecting the museum to both inner-city commercial hubs and metro and train stations.



↑ Amos Anderson New Museum, Helsinki (JKMM Architects)



↑ Seinäjoki Apila Library, Seinäjoki (JKMM Architects)



↑ Kuokkala Church, Jyväskylä (Lassila Hirvilampi Architects)



↑ Sajos Sámi Cultural Centre, Inari (HALO Architects)

The first renderings of the galleries and outdoor spaces are very promising, and the city of Helsinki has given the privately funded, 46-million-euro project the green light. The architects have already shown their competence with some of the best new buildings and interiors in the country. No wonder that the commission was direct, which is relatively rare – usually for such projects, a competition is held. The combining of contemporary thinking about art museums with new, huge underground spaces and the incorporation of the beautiful and fresh spaces of the Glass Palace, from the breakthrough of functionalism, will be quite challenging.

The Kuokkala Church in Jyväskylä, meanwhile, by Lassila Hirvilampi Architects, is best known for its beautiful sacral space and outer shell, which recalls medieval churches (see A10 #33). Less known is the fact that the building houses many functions under the same roof. It is used for concerts and choir rehearsals, and the ground floor offers rooms for private consultation with social workers. The Sunday mass is not only a religious event; after the service, the whole main floor is opened up and the space becomes one. Lunch is prepared in the kitchen and

served in the congregation hall. The carefully crafted spaces are also intended to facilitate interaction between people of different age groups, social status and background. Here, the good architectural and design quality touches everyone, and the architects devised its programme together with the vicar. Everything a community really needs can be found in this building.

Located in a small village far to the north is Sajos, the Sámi Cultural Centre by HALO Architects (see A10 #46). The building offers ample space for international film festivals and local cultural events. It is often very quiet, but can suddenly be full of people from all around the world, dressed in colourful costumes. The fluidity of the two- and three-storey in-between spaces can of course be appreciated as such. But when there is an international event or music festival, the whole building becomes truly alive. It is really during those days that its free-flowing spatiality can be enjoyed to the fullest.

Architecture in Finland has taken a fresh turn, just like it did in the 1920s and '30s. Hopefully its architects, who even here are sinking further down in the food chain, can keep their spirits up... and ours. ◀



1

ALA ARCHITECTS

ALA was established after its partners won the competition for the Kilden Performing Arts Centre. Since, they have become one of the most inventive architecture studios in Scandinavia. Their next challenge is the Helsinki Central Library, due to begin construction by 2017, along with new underground stations for the Helsinki-Espoo metro extension. ALA are media darlings; its partners are easy-going and communicative, and their new, widely published office is among the coolest in town. ALA is one of the first offices in Finland that actually cares to inform about their doings. Coming up is the Kuopio Theatre extension, opening in September.

KILDEN, KRISTIANSAND (NO)

Kilden won ALA international recognition, including the recent A+ Jury Award. The building has proven to be such a success that it is already being expanded with new rehearsal studios on top. Kilden is recognizable by its main facade, where the roof's curves are inspired by a ballet tutu. The abstract form of the wooden 'wall', built from solid oak, separates reality from fantasy. The building is open all day and the lobby café-restaurant is frequented by passers-by. At night the facade is magically lit from underneath and reflected in the watery mirror in front of it.

www.ala.fi

2

HALO ARCHITECTS

Members of Oulu-based HALO were still students when they won the competition for the Sajos building in Lapland. For a young and inexperienced office, it was a huge challenge that proved to be a success. HALO is working further to make Lapland's tourism buildings better than the ever, developing odd copies of those found in Alpine ski villages. They have made ideas for an eco hotel near Novgorod, Russia, and others in Finland, including a design for a Wilderness Hotel in Lapland. HALO has also designed cabinets and vitrines for their Sajos building, and taken part in many competitions.

SAJOS, INARI

Sajos, near Lake Inari, is the first cultural building in Lapland for the Sámi community. It houses the Sámi Parliament, a multi-purpose theatre, shop and library, plus restaurant and conference spaces, offices for the staff and special studios for young Sámi people and locals who want to make music and experiment. The village inhabitants use the building on a daily basis, but many international events also take place there each year. The structure is cool and contemporary, yet seems perfect for the site, despite its rather large volume in comparison to the modest village buildings.

www.halo-arkkitehdit.fi

3

VERSTAS ARCHITECTS

Verstas means 'workshop'. The office's four founders/partners started working together, workshop style, before establishing an office with the same name. They recently built two excellent school buildings in Espoo, won a competition for the new campus at Aalto University (see A10 #55), and will soon finish an office and apartment building in the Helsinki Töölönlahti area. They also won the shared third prize in the Helsinki Central Library competition. Verstas have shown competence in housing design as well: their cute little 'City Cottage' of 14 m² is widely published.

SAUNALAHTI SCHOOL

The Saunalahti school is related to its predecessor, Kirkkojärvi School, both in Espoo. It shows the talent of this team when creating places for learning. The design process included lively discussions with the headmaster and staff. The result is a spacious yet compact building in contemporary brick, concrete, wood and glass, and belongs to the typology of more freely-formed plans. The school even has a small public library under its roof, as well as club spaces for local youth and a day care centre. The schoolyard's landscaping is of excellent quality.

www.verstasarkkitehdit.fi

4

ANTTINEN OIVA ARCHITECTS

The breakthrough for AOA Architects was Helsinki's Kaisa Library. Since, they have proven to be one of the leading younger generation offices. In the pipeline are the ambitious Wood City in the Helsinki Jätkäsäri area (see A10 #50) and several other housing projects. Selina Anttinen and Vesa Oiva, a married couple, also both teach architecture. Their team consists of experienced project architects and younger talents. Kaisa Library won them the national architecture prize, which more often than not goes to architects with long and successful careers.

AGRONOMINKATU HOUSING

This group of rental houses in the Helsinki Viikki district has buildings with different characteristics and typologies: a gallery access building, a point block and a terraced house. The overall feeling is that of clarity, lightness and elegance. The gallery access building turns its back towards a busy motorway, with its balconies looking south. The grouping of the buildings creates a protected, semi-public front garden. The apartments have glazed balconies, French balconies and/or small yards. There are two common sauna units, a free laundry for inhabitants, several storage spaces and clubroom. On street level, facing a small square, there are also units for small businesses or shops.

www.aoa.fi

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HUTTUNEN LIPASTI PAKKANEN ARCHITECTS

Huttunen Lipasti Pakkanen was first best known for their private villa, which was widely published internationally. Now they have reached the phase when they have been accepted as one of the offices who design large housing projects for demanding commissioners. One of their projects in the Arabianranta district was chosen into the MFA biennial exhibition on Finnish architecture. Their buildings often have beautiful material clarity and inventiveness. They are also partner architects for the soon-to-be-opened Serlachius Art Museum Gösta, by the Spanish MX_SI Architectural Studio.

TONTUNMÄKI HOUSES

The Tontunmäki houses are a group of three townhouse-type homes in red brick, set in a densely built area with small residential housing and offering beautiful vistas to the surrounding landscape. The beautifully sculpted buildings have their main entrance and living/dining/kitchen areas on the middle floor, the bedrooms and terrace on the top floor and the sauna on the ground floor. Interiors are very elegant, sleek and basic, with large windows opening towards a park on the south side.

www.h-l-p.fi

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PLAYA ARCHITECTS

Playa is a small, Helsinki-based office. Their breakthrough was a student housing project for Helsinki University's Viikki Campus. Playa believes in the future, thorough design, play, sustainability, passion, architectural pluralism and quality. The roots of the practice are in taking part and winning competitions; real building has added to their competence. They have also received direct commissions and are a promising firm in the Helsinki housing design market. Besides shared third prize in the international competition for the Helsinki Central Library, they won competitions for Aurinkokivi school and the development of a parish centre in Kotka. They belong to the group of younger architects also showing their skills in the design of diverse projects.

MÄRTENSBRÖ SCHOOL, ESPOO

Completed in 2012, the building houses facilities for 550 students and a staff of 70. It varies in height from a single-storey day care wing to three storeys on the northern side. The two wings define a southwards opening courtyard, which is shielded from traffic and the cold north wind by the higher part of the building. Facades are mostly of handmade off-white brick except on the courtyard side, which features large timber columns for shading. The cafeteria, stage and library are located centrally between the wings containing the classrooms. The grand lobby connects the different levels and functions, offering long vistas over

the surroundings. Materials and colours are neutral, providing a long-lasting backdrop. The school is a pilot project for energy-efficient education buildings in Espoo. It utilizes district heating, geothermal and solar energy both passively and actively. The building is also a test bed for a forced-air system. An array of RFID sensors are embedded in the structure to provide real-time information on the building.

www.playa.fi

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LINJA ARCHITECTS

Linja established its offices in Oulu and Helsinki. They have won several competitions, the breakthrough being Tervaväylä, a school for handicapped children. Among their works is the Leppäsuu day care centre in Kuopio, and more educational buildings are in the pipeline. With three partners and a team of around 20, Linja is fostering international recognition. Linja's approach is artistic, humorous and pragmatic. Especially Tervaväylä, located in the north of the country, tested the art of meeting special requirements for very special children and young people, to give something more to this group. The school has dormitories for visitors, a sauna/swimming hall and bright colours.

KANNISTO SCHOOL, VANTAA

Kannisto is a good example of the architects' thinking: generous spaces, cool and inventive details, well-designed outdoor spaces and possibility for expansion, all on a limited budget. Linja uses colours taken from nature, but not overly much. The greenness of the facade references the trees that once stood there. It houses both day care and classrooms for older kids, plus a special unit where the youth can spend evenings and small health-care station. The schoolyard, gym and indoor sports facilities can be used by the neighbourhood. The building was included in the WDC2012 programme as an example of fresh Finnish architecture for children and teenagers.

www.linja-arkkitehdit.fi