



Finland: Aalto & Others

20th-century architecture and design

25 June–3 July 2026 (MM 101)

9 days • £4,420

Lecturer: Professor Harry Charrington

Journey through Finland surveying the works of Alvar Aalto, 'the poet of International Modernism'.

See major buildings by other 20th-century Finnish architects and look at wider areas of design and art.

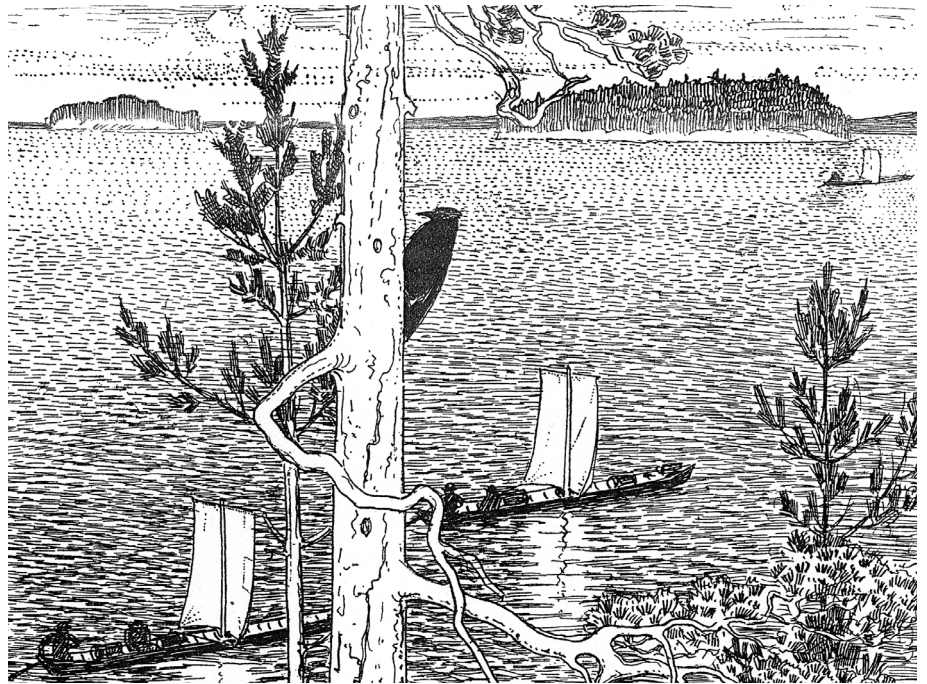
Led by Professor Harry Charrington who worked in Aalto's office and is author of the award-winning *Alvar Aalto: the Mark of the Hand*.

It is extraordinary what impact such a small country as Finland – which only gained independence in 1917 – had on the look of the 20th century.

Finland has always occupied an ambiguous space when viewed from central Europe; combining civilisation and wilderness on the periphery of Europe itself, and straddling East and West. The land was populated from the East by Fennic tribes and Swedes crossing the Baltic. Gradually absorbed into Sweden in the Middle Ages, the country was marked by a sparse population and shifting borders, leaving behind a legacy of timber architecture, churches and castles, and a few coastal towns. In 1809, following the 18th-century wars between Russia and Sweden, Finland was defined as an entity for the first time, becoming an autonomous Grand Duchy in the Russian Empire and acquiring a new monumental neo-classical capital in Helsinki.

An aspiration towards national self-determination in the later 19th century found expression in the extraordinarily productive National Romantic movement which combined Finland's vernacular with impulses from central and western Europe. Sibelius' music is, of course, the best-known manifestation of this, but is matched in the brilliant, haunting paintings of Akseli Gallén-Kallela and Helénè Schjerfbeck, and the architecture of Lars Sonck and Eliel Saarinen, among others.

After Independence and the subsequent constructions and reconstructions of the Finnish Republic, one name stands out: Alvar Aalto. Revered by architects around the world seeking (to quote him) 'to give life a gentler structure' through grounding modernism in nature, it is reasonable to consider his



Finnish tar boats, 1900.

practice as the most successful of the 20th century, dealing with the complexities and contradictions of modernity in every kind of project, from emergency housing to factories to concert halls, with subtlety and grace.

Less well-known are the architects he worked alongside – most iniquitously his two partners Aino Marsio-Aalto and Elissa Aalto who not only ran the atelier with him, but also ran Artek which fulfilled the arts and crafts dream of well-designed furniture and applied arts for all, as well as the great Turku architect, Erik Brygmann. The work of the Finnish Golden Age would be marked by its modest humanity with a concern for materials, colour and texture that provide for a beauty forbidden to more hard-line modernists. These are buildings with an innate social purpose and strong sense of place, that, as the envy-inducing series of recently completed libraries we visit attest, is frequently still the case.

Itinerary

Day 1: Helsinki. Fly at c. 10.15am (Finnair) from London Heathrow to Helsinki. Begin with a walk through the Neo-Classical heart of the city: the colourful Market Square by the harbour, Senate Square, Esplanade and Aalto's

Academic bookshop (1969). First of four nights in Helsinki.

Day 2: Helsinki. Morning walk including the Art Nouveau Katajanokka district, Saarinen's Railway Station (1919) and Aalto's Rautatalo office building (1951–5). The Ateneum, Finland's foremost art museum houses a collection of brilliant National Romantic pictures. Private tour of the National Pensions Institute (Aalto, 1952–6), considered by many members of the Aalto atelier to be its finest construction. End with Aalto's Finlandia Hall (1961–75), re-open again after a period of renovation. Dinner in the Savoy Restaurant designed by Aalto.

Day 3: Otaniemi, Tuusula, Helsinki. Spend the morning at the Technical University campus at Otaniemi, much of it designed by Aalto. Special access to many buildings, among them the Undergraduate Centre (1964), library (1969) and the chapel by fellow architect couple Kaija and Heikki Sirén in 1957. Continue to Tuusula Lake with its turn of the century villa for Sibelius. Back in Helsinki visit 'Oodi', the Helsinki Central Library (ALA Architects, 2018), a striking wood-clad structure that reconceives the public library for the 21st century.

Finland: Aalto & Others
continued

Day 4: Helsinki, Seurasaari. Visits by special arrangement to The Aalto House and Studio, the family home and office, completed in 1936 and 1955 respectively. On Seurasaari island the open-air museum shows the whole history of Finnish vernacular building. Some free time in the afternoon; we suggest Kiasma, Finland's main contemporary art collection in a building by Steven Holl (2000).

Day 5: Muurame, Säynätsalo, Muuratsalo, Jyväskylä. Drive north into the increasingly scenic Finnish Lakeland. See Aalto's early neo-classical Muurame church (1928), and town hall at Säynätsalo (1952), perhaps his greatest synthesis of a vision of European civic life and the immediacy of the Finnish forest landscape. At nearby Muuratsalo, his experimental summer house (1954) is beautifully set in woodland on the shores of Lake Päijanne. Overnight Jyväskylä.

Day 6: Jyväskylä, Petäjävesi, Seinäjoki. Aalto went to school in Jyväskylä and set up his first independent practice here with Aino-Marsio Aalto. Representative of his early classical buildings is the Worker's Club (1923–5), his first important commission. The Teachers' Training College (1952–7, now university), is one of the finest manifestations of his 'red' period, with warm-hued bricks. Visit the newly extended Alvar Aalto Museum, re-opened in 2023 as a centre for design and architecture with displays of Aalto's life and works. See the UNESCO-listed Petäjävesi wooden church (1765). Overnight Seinäjoki.

Day 7: Seinäjoki, Noormarkku, Turku. Seinäjoki has a striking complex by Alvar Aalto (1960–8): the Cross of the Plains church that dominates the townscape, parish hall, town hall-cum-theatre, clad in dark blue tiles, and library. In the afternoon a special arrangement to see the Villa Mairea (1939) in Noormarkku, the most beautiful of Aalto's private houses. First of two nights in Turku.

Day 8: Turku, Paimio. Visit to the cemetery and Resurrection Chapel (1940) by Erik Bryggman. Walk through Turku, Finland's oldest city, including the market square and medieval cathedral. In Paimio is Aalto's Sanatorium (1929–33), a classic of modern architecture for which he designed widely-imitated timber furniture.

Day 9: Hvitträsk, Helsinki. Drive to Hvitträsk home and studio (1903) by Gesellius, Lindgren and Saarinen, with pretty gardens overlooking

a lake. Continue to Helsinki airport and fly to Heathrow, arriving at c. 5.00pm.

A number of visits are by special arrangement and the order may differ to that published here.

Lecturer

Professor Harry Charrington. Architect and Professor of Architecture at the University of Westminster. He read Architecture at Cambridge, where he was the founding editor of *Scroope: Cambridge Architectural Journal*, and subsequently combined academia and practice in both England and Finland. He has a particular interest in the history of modernism and obtained his PhD from the LSE on Alvar Aalto. His books include the award-winning *Alvar Aalto: the Mark of the Hand* and contributions to *Artek and the Aaltos: Creating a Modern World* (Yale University Press).

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £4,420 or £4,130 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £4,910 or £4,620 without flights.

Included: flights (economy class) with Finnair (aircraft: Airbus 350-900); travel by private coach; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts; 1 light lunch, 6 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions and donations; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. Hotel Haven, Helsinki (hotelhaven.fi): smart, boutique hotel close to the harbour. **Boutique Hotel Yöpuu, Jyväskylä** (hotelliyopuu.fi): small, friendly, traditional. **Sokos Hotel Vaakuna, Seinäjoki** (sokoshotels.fi): simple, bland, but well-located. **Radisson Blu Marina Palace Hotel, Turku** (radissonblu.fi/hotelli-turku): comfortable hotel overlooking the river. All hotels have a local 4-star rating.

How strenuous? The itinerary is necessarily busy with four hotels, many miles covered and a lot of walking, much of it on uneven ground. Fitness and stamina are essential. Average distance by coach per day: 76 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.