

# 24 VILLA MAIREA

Alvar Aalto

*Scott Poole*



Alvar and Aino Aalto, Villa Mairea, living room with Aino Aalto and Maire Gullichsen, Noormarkku, Finland, 1939.\*

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As late as 1927, at a time when modernism was making bold advances in the centers of European culture, Alvar and Aino Aalto were designing neoclassical buildings and handcrafted furniture in an array of historical styles in Jyväskylä.<sup>1</sup> A small city in the countryside of central Finland, Jyväskylä was far from Turku and Helsinki, the cultural centers of a country that was already on the periphery of European civilization. There was little out of the ordinary in the Aaltos' work.<sup>2</sup> It was competent, conventional in its style and appropriate for its place. Looking forward from this point in time, the prospect that a modern masterpiece would emerge from their office seemed unlikely, let alone inevitable.<sup>3</sup> Yet, looking back from 1939, the year the Villa Mairea was completed, the trajectory seems clearer. In fact, by early 1938, Alvar Aalto's exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York was announced in a press release: "The Exhibition of Furniture and Architecture by Alvar Aalto presents the first American survey of the work of the Finnish architect, who is recognized as one of the most important and original modern architects and furniture designers of the past decade."<sup>4</sup>

In retrospect, from 1938, one sees how this improbable outcome was forged by a number of factors: A resolute artistic will, an uncanny ability to win competitions, and a propensity to attract highly influential, like-minded clients.<sup>5</sup> In addition, Alvar Aalto had developed, in a small number of brief but surprisingly mature writings, a thoughtful approach to some of the most pressing architectural issues of his time, including questions concerning form and content, national character, international influence, the right relation of the avant-garde to the authority of the past, the significance of emotional content, the importance of social equity, and the potential impact of industrialized manufacturing on the everyday life of the common man.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, his emergence was serendipitous: The groundwork for modernism had already been prepared abroad; he and his partner Aino were professionally aligned with an industry that continued to provide work during the bleak years of the world economic depression; and their commissions varied in range and scale, providing the opportunity to test innovative ideas.<sup>7</sup>

## **A New Cosmopolitan Outlook**

As modernists, Alvar Aalto and Aino Aalto may have been late to arrive, but once they did, they advanced quickly. In mid-1927, the Aaltos, with their baby daughter, moved to the port city of Turku, taking advantage of the cultural, social, and economic opportunities offered by Finland's gateway to western Europe.<sup>8</sup> More broadly, the atmosphere was right for modernism to thrive in northern Europe. That same year, in Stuttgart, more than 500,000 visitors toured the Weissenhofseidlung housing exposition where they encountered a new domestic culture for modern city dwellers, characterized by, among other qualities, flat roofs, taut and unornamented volumes, flexible open plans, and terraces linking interior rooms to abundant light and fresh air. Just three years later, across the

Finnish archipelago at the Stockholm Exhibition, the dream of better living through modern architecture and industrial production would draw nearly four million visitors.<sup>9</sup>

During this three-year interval, the Aaltos jettisoned neoclassicism and began assimilating the culturally progressive architecture emerging from mainland Europe. In this short span of time, the Aalto firm won major architectural competitions, designed and realized the construction for one of Finland's first internationally recognized modern buildings, forged a pivotal relationship with the technical director of a well established furniture manufacturer, and encountered leading figures of the modern movement at International Congresses of Modern Architecture (CIAM) conferences in Frankfurt and Brussels, making lasting friendships that would have a major impact, particularly on Alvar Aalto's career.<sup>10</sup>

One of those colleagues, Uno Åhrén, introduced Aalto's work to Philip Johnson, leading to the inclusion of Aalto's first large-scale modern building in Hitchcock and Johnson's influential book, *The International Style: Architecture Since 1922* (1932), as well as MoMA's first exhibit of modern architecture installed that same year.<sup>11</sup> Like other work, included in the book and exhibit, the Turun Sanomat newspaper plant and office building (1928–29) were characterized by a clear expression of volume, structured by reinforced concrete columns, a dynamically balanced asymmetrical composition, and an absence of ornament, features clearly identifying it with other modern buildings of its type over the specificity of its place.<sup>12</sup> In this sense, Aalto's first international style building in the city of Turku would have been equally out of context in Prague, Paris, or Amsterdam.

Alvar Aalto's ascendancy as a leading figure of the modern movement was based on more than the force of an engaging personality. Without doubt, charisma allowed him to establish relationships quickly among key figures within modern architecture's vanguard. The major breakthrough, however, came in his own country, where he began to win important architectural competitions and receive commissions from industry, leading to the opportunity to build at a scale that allowed him to experiment, make discoveries, and innovate at a level that would begin to substantiate his unique direction within the modern movement.<sup>13</sup>

## Shaping the Values of a New Society

When the design of Villa Mairea was first discussed in autumn 1936, Alvar Aalto was 38 years old and Aino, 42. Their clients and close friends, Harry and Maire (née Ahlstrom) Gullichsen, son and daughter of prominent industrialists, were even younger at the time of the commission; Harry was 34, and Maire was 29.<sup>14</sup> The Gullichsens, like the architects of their home, were keen advocates for modern culture and shared their architects' ideological interest in shaping, through architecture and design, the values of Finland's rapidly developing, increasingly urban and industrialized society.<sup>15</sup>

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In 1935, Alvar and Aino Aalto, together with Maire Gullichsen and Nils-Gustav Hahl, had already formed the Artek Company with the intention of selling the line of modern bent wood furniture and fittings the Aaltos had been designing since the late 1920s. The purpose of the company was more than a commercial enterprise; it was, among other objectives, an extension of their mutual interest in promoting social and cultural progress.<sup>16</sup>

By means of affordable, well-made things, realized through serial industrial production, the company could, through the quality of the Aalto's furnishings and a limited number of other products, reinforce traditional Finnish values of simplicity and functionality, elevate the aesthetic judgment of Finland's emerging middle class, and advance their society's acceptance of a new modern outlook.<sup>17</sup> By changing the public perception of standardized products, Artek could contribute to the day-to-day physical and emotional well-being of modern families and play a meaningful part in the aesthetic and ethical development of a new egalitarian society.<sup>18</sup>

Two years before founding Artek, the Aaltos had moved from Turku to Helsinki where the reality of rapid urbanization was an integral part of everyday life. In Helsinki and throughout Europe, workers were crowding into cities and relocating to the districts surrounding factories. Housing was an urgent issue, and its place in urban and regional planning was compelling to both Aalto and the CIAM-centered vanguard of the modern movement. Advances in the quantity, quality, and costs of housing made possible by new materials, standardized mass production, a focus on public health, and the new practice of functional zoning dominated the discourse of the time, underscoring the modern movement's progressive ideals as well as heightened expectations of an architect's social responsibility.

### An Ethical Dilemma

In this context, Maire, a private country villa for a wealthy art patron and a captain of industry seems an unusual development for architects whose foundation as modernists was substantially influenced, less than a decade earlier, by the practical difficulties of the Minimum House.<sup>19</sup> The Aaltos addressed this ethical dilemma in their description of the project where they advanced the thought that the villa could be conceived as an opportunity for experiment and innovation.<sup>20</sup> In this sense, any architectural assignment: a house, hospital, library, factory – could provide an opportunity for discoveries that had general implications for architecture beyond the specifics of a particular program. The Aaltos explained: “The individual architectural assignment can be treated as a laboratory experiment of sorts, in which things can be done that would be impossible with present-day mass production and those experiments can spread further and eventually become available to one and all as production methods advance.”<sup>21</sup> Alvar Aalto elaborated on the idea of a luxury villa as an experimental laboratory in a lecture at Yale University on May 9, 1939: “[W]e may use the house as a laboratory to tackle some of the central

problems in architecture today ... [Y]ou use this house to work out those things especially, and the solutions you discover in this building can later be applied in connection with larger buildings and under different conditions....”<sup>22</sup>

The utopian idea that technological progress would give designers and manufacturers the capacity to bring good, high-quality, mass-produced objects to the general public had already been realized in the Aaltos’ domestic objects – furniture, glassware, fabrics, and lighting fixtures – in production since the early 1930s.<sup>23</sup> It was not unrealistic, therefore, to believe that innovations made in a large villa for private clients, could translate to conventional housing and, later, industrially manufactured dwellings and public buildings.<sup>24</sup>

## Expanding the Concept of Rationalism

But Alvar Aalto was struggling with modernism’s orthodox formalism and had largely withdrawn from the idea that an objective approach, driven by science, technology, and the logic of construction, would inevitably resolve the fundamentally human purpose at the core of architecture.<sup>25</sup> He did not dismiss the idea of highly analytical working methods; he simply believed that the architecture of the time, as it developed in the direction of “functional and constructive necessity,” and “the new aesthetic of mechanized life,” had excluded too many critical issues to remain relevant.<sup>26</sup>

Hence, experiments carried out in the villa were not in the areas of standardized construction or technical innovation but rather primarily in the realms of character, identity, and milieu. In particular, their focus was the distinctiveness of the epoch, the specificity of the place, and a fitting domestic atmosphere for a modern family. Apart from the Aaltos’ own industrially manufactured furnishings, the relationship between the art of building and technological production was typically downplayed. In fact, only one standardized element, a white, off-the-shelf, circular metal staircase, was employed in the villa.<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, Aalto worked to conceal industrially produced items, deferring to an overall ambience of intimacy, warmth, and welcome rather than specific demonstrations of technical logic. The steel columns in the main living spaces, for example, are finished with a soft black gloss and wrapped in twisted rattan, transforming a cold, hard material that embodies strength and durability, into one that exudes warmth, delicacy, and an irresistible invitation to touch. Similarly, steel beams that support the prominent stair that separates the main living area from the private family rooms above, are painted white, and almost completely hidden by the thickness, length, and breadth of the wooden stair treads. The structure is further concealed by numerous wooden poles that run floor to ceiling on either side, and by a low wall in the entry hall, partially obstructing a view of the underside of the stair landing, where the steel structure would be most evident.

## Masterful Coherence

Judging from photographs of the villa, there seems to be too much there; too many unusual details and contrasts, too much accommodation of circumstance, too many motifs, materials and textures – simply too much to control.<sup>28</sup> Added to this multitude are numerous disjunctions in time and place. In the courtyard, for example, there are free-standing elements; a traditional sod-roofed sauna, an archaic garden gate, and a thick stone wall forming the outer boundary at the edge of the forest – that appear much older than the new villa, as if the house itself were sited to form a counterpoint to a place already inhabited long ago. Particular aspects of Finnish farms and lakeside retreats are combined with features from Swiss Alpine villages and traditional Japanese gardens to evoke an informal, even rustic atmosphere. This curious amalgam hangs together through a common thread of association: The straightforward simplicity and down-to-earth utility of vernacular forms. Under the entry canopy, for example, vernacular details seeming to belong to both Finnish and Japanese traditional architecture, merge with surprising ease, as if they always belonged together.<sup>29</sup>

Here, and throughout the villa, Aalto employs the integrity, utility, and time-tested veracity of vernacular elements as a complement to the progressive architecture of the epoch. The constant interchange of polarities, between the timeless authority of the vernacular and the unproven character of the new, is one of the principal artistic devices employed to unify the villa. One encounters, throughout the villa, oppositions of handcraft and industrial manufacture, austerity and embellishment, hard edge and soft contour, nature and culture.<sup>30</sup> But the manner in which Aalto plays with time – with the backward and forward reach of key elements at pivotal moments – is the villa's dominant motif.

On the surface, the Villa Mairea gives the impression of being improvisational. But what may appear to be a series of idiosyncratic, one-of-a-kind experiments is, more typically, iterative versions of elements, motifs, and techniques that Aalto had previously tested in other works. What makes the Villa Mairea one of the marvels of modern architecture is the masterful coherence of those artistic forces: Their wholeness, internal consistency, and seeming inevitability.

## Orchestrating Time and Perception

The choreography of the architectural encounter with the villa is distinguished by tempo, by the gradual unfolding of a relaxed domestic atmosphere.<sup>31</sup> The approach to the villa is oblique, coursing through a winding gravel drive that begins at the edge of the forest. At first, the home is not visible. Gradually, glimpses of the villa framed between tall pines reveal key features: White rendered brick walls, wood cladding, an unusual entry canopy, and several unorthodox windows on an upper floor. The disclosure is purposely slow and

indistinct.<sup>32</sup> At a sharp curve in the entrance drive, after passing much of the south-eastern façade, the front corner of the villa and the prominent entry portico are fully revealed. The gradual build-up becomes a sudden unveiling. But the calming effect of the leisurely approach remains, prolonging the subtle awakening of the senses set in motion by the slow approach through the forest.<sup>33</sup> While the villa is now in the foreground, it continues to be inseparable from the presence of the forest and its profound quietude – a theme Aalto will continue to reinforce throughout the villa.

In the approach, there is then no long view; no place to distantly analyze the villa. Not only is the forest drawn close, but also the villa itself is presented, for the first time, from a relatively short distance, prompting a visceral response.<sup>34</sup> Contrasting dark wooden features are visually balanced yet set in sharp contrast to the primary structure, a crisp white volume characteristic of orthodox modernity. While the dark wood and light stucco are visibly balanced, the wood features dominate one's inward experience of the villa, drawing attention to the earthiness of texture and patina: engaging the sense of touch through the eye.<sup>35</sup> While these wood forms are new, their earthy ambience appears historically backward looking, even primitive, appealing to what Alvar Aalto, in an essay from 1922, described as the subconscious content associated with old architecture. "The emotions it arouses," he wrote, "are so elevated, even intoxicating, that we usually pay no attention at all to details – if there are any."<sup>36</sup>

Just ahead, under the entry portico, however, it is precisely the discrete details – twisted rattan joinery, tiny geometric steel feet that transition between wood and stone, and an unusual cast bronze door pull – that captivate attention, keeping one fully engaged in the present moment. Again, time is drawn-out, as it was in a literal sense, by the length of the route to the front door, then by memory through association with times past at the southernmost corner of the façade, and finally, under the portico, by the strangeness of small individual features and the curiosity they arouse.<sup>37</sup>

Likewise, inside the front door of the villa, the architects skillfully control the visitor's tempo. After a brief pause in a small, sky-lit antechamber, one arrives at an entry hall defined by the low angled wall that directs the visitor away from a formal dining area straight ahead and within view. The contrast between the unadorned emptiness of the antechamber and the rich abundance of forms, textures, and subdued colors immediately visible from the entry hall, is stunning.<sup>38</sup> The visual impact of the interior's spatial flux is augmented by the sounds of floor surfaces that alternate between hard and soft, tile and wood, defining key moments of transition. An upholstered settee, designed by Aino, follows the contour of the vestibule wall inviting the visitor to sit, relax, and be at home.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, beyond the vestibule near the hearth, a cozy sitting area defined by a rug and furnished with comfortable chairs further encourages the visitor to feel at home. Here, and throughout the villa's interior, an atmosphere of domestic intimacy, warmth, and solicitude is pervasive.<sup>40</sup>

## Architecture and Landscape

It is at this point, between the vestibule and the sitting area near the hearth, that Aalto situates the principal place of arrival. Passing screens of wooden poles that define the end of the vestibule wall and then encase the open stair to the second floor, the visitor reaches the view of the garden courtyard, the sauna, and the vast forest beyond. From this standpoint, in one of the best-known architectural photographs of the period, Eino Mäkinen captured Maire Gullichsen and Aino Aalto. They are at the edge of the villa's living room looking outward, transfixed, in a scene reminiscent of the archetypal aura of I.K. Inha's nineteenth-century photographs of Finland's forests, or the unsettling solitude that Edward Hopper depicted in his paintings of the time.<sup>41</sup> The focused view, framed by a floor-to-ceiling sliding glass window, is an archetypal image laden with the memories of generations of Finns who built with wood at the edge of the forest.<sup>42</sup> Signs of domesticity dominate the photograph's foreground. Freshly cut flowers, an indoor plant, and the informal arrangement of the Aaltos' furnishings lend a sense of calm and tranquility to the scene. The distinctive aroma of crisp Nordic summer air mingled with earth and pines is almost palpable. The wooden poles screening the living room stair, the thick wood mullions of the expansive window, and the steel columns supporting the second floor mirror the trees in the forest. A small rise near the garden gate, evocative of a mound in a Japanese garden, a hillock in the woods, or a miniaturized knoll, links rather than divides, forest and courtyard.<sup>43</sup>

By bringing the outside in and projecting the inside out, Aalto underscores the fact that the cultivated landscape within the courtyard, and the forest beyond, are all part of the Villa Mairea's composition, all part of one whole thing.<sup>44</sup> This idea is reinforced from the opposite perspective; looking back at the villa and its courtyard façades from the forest. From this vantage point, wood window mullions begin to soften the great expanse of white rendered brick that clads the second-floor bedrooms. Moreover, on the walls and roof of the first floor, wood veneers, numerous wood mullions, stripped sapling rails, and sod roofing continue the theme of contrast. Likewise, the hard edge of the southwest corner of the second-floor guest bedroom wing is visually dominated by its opposite, the curvilinear wooden tower of Maire Gullichsen's painting studio, on the other southwest corner. These features, combined with tall pines in the background and lush creepers in the foreground, nullify the severity of the modernist treatment of the courtyard façades, further unifying the architecture and landscape.

## Cosmopolitan Localism<sup>45</sup>

The expansive artistic scope of the villa, in particular its sense of place, could not have been realized without the complex integration of architecture, landscape architecture, interior design, and industrial design. It would be difficult, for



example, to imagine the villa on another site.<sup>46</sup> The nearby sites of Isotalo (1884) and Havulinna (1901), Maire Gullichsen's grandfather's and father's homes, are located within view of cultivated clearings – a universal sign of human civilization.<sup>47</sup> Aalto, by contrast, locates the granddaughter's house apart from the Ahlstrom estate's fields and at the periphery of the forest.

A compelling photo, taken by Heikki Havas, from the entry door, looks out at a stand of carefully pruned pine trees fronted by a modest area of cropped grass and plantings in the foreground. Acres of cultivated fields are nearby, but not within view. From here, the house merges with the landscape. Even the irregular stones that comprise the floor under the entry canopy are separated, allowing earth and grass to identify with the nearby garden and the floor of the forest. Here, again, anachronistic wooden canopy supports and numerous slender saplings screen the portico, visually intertwining it with the forest, dominating the single modern element, a concrete column, and effectively obscuring its tectonic logic.

Likewise, the villa's interior furnishings – the birch furniture in particular – augment the interior's unity and breadth, contributing to its sense of place. The materials, labor, and technology to fabricate Aalto's bent wood furniture were all locally sourced. Birch is Finland's national tree and the most abundant deciduous wood in the country and skilled craftsmen and unskilled workers were also abundant following the rural migration to Finland's cities. Moreover, the high quality machine craft employed to fabricate Aalto's bent wood furniture helped advance Finland's evolving national identity by promoting the idea that this new nation was progressive and forward thinking, yet ethnographically linked to the archaic realm of the forest.<sup>48</sup>

By linking the vernacular, the familiar language of ordinary people, with the strangeness of the new, Aalto created a work with broad appeal. Whereas the compositional, constructive and functional priorities of many examples of early modernist housing created distance from geographic and historical contexts in an effort to be universal, the Villa Mairea emphasized features particular to Finland – the regional economy, local materials, available labor, and established traditions – to create a place with which Finns could identify and in which they could recognize themselves.<sup>49</sup> In doing so, Aalto created a safe middle ground between tradition and modernity, between the security of a familiar past and the promise of an exhilarating future, a place where everyday people could engage the new forms of modernity from a frame of reference they were familiar with – from the mirror of history, their history.

What gives the Villa Mairea its distinctive place in the history of architecture is not only a skillful play with contrasting forms or a mastery of time and tempo, scale and density, politics and geography but also how prescient it was and how relevant it remains.<sup>50</sup> Questions of national identity and international influence, the right-balance between the newness of the present and the aura of the past, the integration of architecture and its natural site, and the role that new technologies play in

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making a better life for the common man, are recurring difficulties brought into sharp focus in the villa.<sup>51</sup>

Looking forward, Aalto's brilliant resolution to these issues prefigures one of the daunting challenges of the twenty-first century: Being rooted in a specific place, its local economy, and its indigenous traditions, while at the same time being globally intertwined with the larger world and its fluid movement of ideas, forms, and technical innovations.<sup>52</sup> It is here, in this fertile middle ground, that Aalto created a house with lasting global significance.

### Notes

\* Image credit: Eino Mäkinen. Reproduced by permission of Alvar Aalto Museum.

1. "Perhaps the most surprising discovery consisted of the files from the 1920s stored in the attic of the Aalto home on Riihitie. Aalto had systematically suppressed his entire Neo-Classical period after his 'conversion' to Rationalism in 1927." Göran Schildt, introduction to *The Architectural Drawings of Alvar Aalto, 1917–39* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994), xi.
2. Alvar Aalto opened his architectural office in Jvaskylä in 1923. Aino Marsio began working in Aalto's office in spring 1924, and they were married later the same year. Aino's role in the work of the Aalto office is difficult to determine precisely, in part due to the fact that it was not until 1929, when the Finnish Marriage Act was passed, that equality between spouses was realized. Nevertheless, a strong collaborative relationship was already established from the beginning of their work together, and both partners often signed drawings. See: Arne Heporauta, "On Aino Marsio-Aalto," in *Aino Aalto*, ed. Ulla Kinnunen (Helsinki: Alvar Aalto Foundation, Alvar Aalto Museum, 2004). In the realm of product design, and in certain competitions, the attribution of works by Aino or Alvar is relatively clear. It is difficult, however, to establish an accurate account of the role Aino Marsio-Aalto had in many of the office's architectural projects. This was complicated by the fact that Aino temporarily withdrew from the office in the 1930s when their children were young and by her leading role as Director of Artek, the furnishings firm the Aaltos established with Maire Gullichsen and Nils-Gustav Hahl in 1935. While Aino had a significant role in the office's product, landscape, interior, and exhibit design, her role in the conception, development, and execution of architectural projects, particularly after the mid-1930s, is less clearly established. Where attribution has been established Aino is mentioned specifically; otherwise the terms "the Aaltos," "the Aalto office," or "Aalto" are used throughout this chapter. Likewise, the role of the assistants in the office's work (there were ten at the time of the Villa Mairea), as is the case in most architectural offices, is even less clear.
3. To better understand the significance of the Villa Mairea it would be useful to reflect on the social turbulence that existed in Finland at the time that Alvar Aalto and Aino Marsio were studying at the Helsinki University of Technology. When they began their studies, Finland was a Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire. It became an independent nation in

December 1917, shortly after the Bolshevik takeover in Russia. Civil war erupted in Finland in January 1918. Alvar Aalto left his architectural studies to serve with the Whites, forces predominantly constituted by farmers from rural Finland, in their struggle against the Reds, whose main source of support was the urban working class. The Whites prevailed. As a result of the conflict, which lasted less than five months, nearly 30,000 Finns, about 1% of the country's total population, perished. See "The Finnish Civil War" at <http://countrystudies.us/finland/15.htm>. The division of society and the specter of class-based revolution were therefore very real for Aalto and Marsio's generation. The idea that social reform could be advanced through innovative industrialized processes – an idea that was prevalent among the modern movement's avant-garde – had a profound influence on the epoch. Indeed, without this frame of reference, it would be difficult to understand the social significance of the Aaltos' architecture and product design.

4. Museum of Modern Art, Exhibit #75 March 14 – April 18, 1938, *Alvar Aalto: Architecture and Furniture*. The exhibit included enlarged photographs, drawings, and models of four of Aalto's buildings including the Paimio Sanatorium, the Viipuri Library, his own house in Helsinki, and the Finnish Pavilion for the Paris 1937 Exposition, as well as 50 pieces of furniture and bent wood experiments, [https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press\\_archives/437/releases/MOMA\\_1938\\_0017\\_1938-03-14\\_38314-10.pdf](https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press_archives/437/releases/MOMA_1938_0017_1938-03-14_38314-10.pdf)?2010. Aalto was also Included in MoMA's first modern architecture exhibit (Exhibit #15 February 9 – March 23, 1932, *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition*, [http://www.moma.org/docs/press\\_archives/64/releases/MOMA\\_1932\\_0001\\_1932-01-16.pdf](http://www.moma.org/docs/press_archives/64/releases/MOMA_1932_0001_1932-01-16.pdf)?2010).
5. By the late 1930s, through his association with influential industrialists and leading politicians "Aalto changed from an outspoken opponent of the establishment into an expert deeply entangled with industrial capitalism and national strategies." Pekka Korvenmaa, "Aalto and Finnish Industry," *Alvar Aalto: Between Humanism and Materialism* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 75–6.
6. On content and form, see Alvar Aalto, "The Latest Trends in Architecture" [1928], in *Alvar Aalto In His Own Words*, ed. Göran Schildt, (Helsinki: Otava Publishing Company Ltd., 1997), 62. On national and international influence, see Alvar Aalto, "Motifs From Past Ages" [1922], in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto In His Own Words*, 35. On the new and old, see Alvar Aalto, "The Old and New Churches" [1921], in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto In His Own Words*, 35. On emotional content, see Alvar Aalto, "The Stockholm Exhibition" [1930], in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto In His Own Words*, 72. On social equity, see Alvar Aalto, "The Housing Problem" [1932], in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto In His Own Words*, 83. On the benefits of industrial manufacturing, see Göran Schildt, ed., *Alvar Aalto In His Own Words* (Helsinki: Otava Publishing Company Ltd., 1997), 72.
7. By the time they began the design of the Villa Mairea in 1938, Alvar and Aino Aalto had designed factories, housing for factory workers, summer houses, city houses, hospitals, restaurants, a theater, a library, a newspaper headquarters, and exhibits for world expositions. In addition, they designed an extensive line of furnishings.
8. "During Aino's lifetime, Alvar Aalto's office was connected with their home in all the cities in which they lived, and during their years in Jyväskylä, and even in Turku, she participated actively in the office's interior design projects and was always involved in

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- preparing competition entries.” Renja Suominen-Kokkonen, “The Silent Central Personage: The Architect Aino Marsio-Aalto,” in Kinnunen, *Aino Aalto*, 213.
9. See Carl Marklund and Peter Stadius, “Acceptance and Conformity: Merging Modernity with Nationalism in the Stockholm Exhibition in 1930,” *Culture Unbound. Journal of Current Cultural Research* 2, no. 35 (2010): 609–34. <http://www.cultureunbound.ep.liu.se/v2/a35/>
  10. As the Finnish delegate to the CIAM in Frankfurt in September 1929, Aalto encountered the vanguard of the modern movement and participated in discussions that would have a profound impact on his development as an architect, both immediately and in the long term. Aalto was elected to CIRPAC, the executive body of CIAM, and travelled to attend its meeting in Berlin in 1931, and later to its third meeting (The Functional City) in Athens in 1933. Aalto’s writing from this period was to a great extent influenced by CIAM ideology: The crisis of housing, standardization, industrialized production, modern materials, functional zoning, daylight, and even biological analogies. In fact, the first sentence of Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret’s report of 1929 CIAM conference in Frankfurt (Analysis of the Fundamental Elements of the Problem of the “Minimum House”) reads: “The dwelling place is a distinctly biological phenomenon.” Unfortunately, biological analogies and an ideological interest in the psychological and physical (psychophysiological) well-being of the modern dweller, while widespread among modern architects in the 1920s, became increasingly connected to Alvar Aalto whose architecture is hardly “organic,” other than in the formal sense, as parts fitting together as a harmonious whole. In fact, Aalto considered an expanded concept of the rational, including empathy for the day-to-day life of “the little man,” as a necessity for a “more humanely built environment.”
  11. “Aalto and Johnson did not meet until 1939.” Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen, *Alvar Aalto: Architecture, Modernity, and Geopolitics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 217.
  12. Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, *The International Style* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. 1966). Originally published as *The International Style: Architecture Since 1922*, in 1932. In his foreword to the 1966 edition, Hitchcock retrospectively notes that Aalto’s sculptural columns in the Turun Sanomat Building (1929–30) placed him among those architects who “effectively rivaled – or rejected” the International Style “during just those years when it was also spreading most widely through the western world.”
  13. Two competitions, in particular, accelerated Alvar Aalto’s development as modern architect: The Viipuri Library (1927–35) and the Paimio Sanatorium (1929–33). Both were initially designed shortly after his arrival in Turku in the late 1920s. Like the Turun Sanomat building, these were severe functionalist buildings, predominantly rendered with white stucco and characterized by taut rectilinear volumes, steel framed ribbon windows, and large expanses of polished plate glass – features that drew attention to both advanced building technologies and new conceptions of space and light beyond the façade. In each of these buildings, however, the severity of the architectural encounter was softened by furnishing, fittings, and fabrics, designed by the Aaltos linking the interior architecture with materials and forms characteristic of the region. The wooden features of two rooms in particular –

the undulating acoustic ceiling, curvilinear stacking chairs, and floor of the Viipuri Library's lecture room; and the three-part window and contoured wall-hung closet in the Paimio Sanatorium's patient room – were significant departures from the characteristic austerity of the early modern movement's interior architecture. The three-part window of the sanatorium, in fact, was similar in type to the windows with curtains with which patients were familiar in their homes, contributing to an atmosphere of warmth and domestic comfort. The long corridor, just outside the patient rooms, by contrast, has no recognizable domestic qualities whatsoever. It is lit by the kind of continuous metal-framed strip window that Le Corbusier made famous in his "five points for a new architecture" in the early 1920s. Aalto's ambivalence about the universality of an international style and its relevance to the everyday well-being of the individual, made present here, would continue throughout the 1930s and culminate with his manifesto on the subject: The architecture of the Villa Mairea.

14. Kristian Gullichsen, foreword to *Inside the Villa Mairea*, ed. Kirsi Gullichsen and Ulla Kinnunen (Helsinki: Alvar Aalto Museum, Mairea Foundation, 2009), 9.
15. Pelkonen, *Alvar Aalto*, 118. "Aalto gained a new outlook on Finland, its future and how it should be run after Gullichsen invited him to join a think tank of politicians, industrialists, and cultural leaders charged with shaping a vision for Finnish society based on American-style economic pragmatism and left-leaning social ideals ... Both husband and wife (Harry and Maire Gullichsen) believed that with privilege came social responsibility, such as providing housing for workers...." Pelkonen's book is an essential resource for situating Alvar Aalto's work with what she calls "a geopolitics of architecture." Pelkonen convincingly makes the case that Aalto's works are inseparable aspects of Finland's cultural, political, and historical milieu – and, further, that Aalto actively took part in shaping Finland's particular geopolitical reality: "The discourse surrounding Aalto's life has involved fellow architects, clients, industrialists, politicians and critics, and his architecture and objects, their makers, users and viewers – all became 'coproducers' of Finnish Society."
16. The Artek (Art and Technology) Company's larger aesthetic and social mission was to raise awareness of good design; to enrich public dialogue through exhibitions advancing the interconnectedness of art, architecture, planning, and product design; and to promote the advantages of well designed, industrially manufactured furnishings for everyday domestic life in a new egalitarian society. In this sense, although it was a business, it also seemed, paradoxically, to function like the "intermediary institutions" of a civil society, enriching public participation in an egalitarian institution. <http://www.artek.fi/company>.
17. In the early years of the twentieth century the German architect, Hermann Muthesius, forecast the pivotal role that basic aesthetic education could have in shaping society. As Stanford Anderson notes in his introduction to Muthesius' book, *Style-Architecture and Building-Art*: "Progress in the arts and in a reinvigorated culture necessitated that people again acquire an understanding of quality, a yet uninaugurated matter of fundamental public education." For his part Muthesius writes: "Previously the guilds upheld the level of work. With today's altered conditions the public must be on its guard against

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the factory owners. This requires a fundamental public education in the appreciation of quality, which today has not even begun. What we need,” he continues, “is not an emotion-laden furniture and a luxurious art but decent household artifacts for the ordinary man.” Hermann Muthesius, *Style-Architecture and Building-Art: Transformations of Architecture in the Nineteenth Century And Its Present Condition*, 1st ed. 1902; 2nd ed. 1903, trans. Stanford Anderson (Santa Monica: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1994), 17, 92, 95. The idea that architecture and design could contribute to the ethical and aesthetic enlightenment of a new middle class permeated the ideology of the early modern movement in northern Europe. A principal feature of the theoretical program advanced by the Left Front for the Arts in Russia and its journal *LEF* (1923–25) “was the view that art offered a vital means of exerting an influence on the psyche of the proletariat, and that this influence could stimulate it to build a new life.” Anatole Senkevitch, Jr. introduction to *Style and Epoch*, by Mosei Ginzburg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), 33.

18. The ethical basis of art was also a fundamental tenet of the Bauhaus under Gropius. In the abstract to her insightful essay, “The Ethics of Perception,” Eva Diaz writes: “Albers encouraged a reflexive relation between better art production and better social performance ... Better design thus alters habits of perception and can improve society.” Eva Diaz, “The Ethics of Perception: Josef Albers in the United States,” *The Art Bulletin* 90, no. 2 (June 2008): 260–85. Through the CIAM, Aalto met Gropius and Bauhaus masters Josef Albers and László Moholy-Nagy, who taught in the school’s Vorkurs or Foundation Curriculum. Moholy-Nagy visited Aalto in Finland in 1931, where he inevitably shared the Bauhaus vision of an improved society through artistic education.
19. Alvar Aalto was chiefly responsible for the Minimum Apartment Exhibit in Helsinki in 1930, and as late as 1932 wrote of a “planned economy in the production of utility housing ... under a management working scientifically, as if in a laboratory.” Alvar Aalto, “Hyvä asunto” [A Good Home] [1932], in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto In His Own Words*, 76.
20. Aalto was encouraged by the clients to experiment, but he was somewhat hesitant to take full advantage of the opportunity. In fact, the clients, upon seeing an early rendering of the house, remarked that it was not ambitious enough. “No, Alvar, you can do better,” they told him. Interview with Kristian Gullichsen, “The Villa As an Experiment for Aalto,” quoted in Hiroshi Saito, *Villa Mairea, Alvar Aalto, 1937–39* (Tokyo: TOTO, 2005), 184.
21. “Mairea,” the architect’s description of the Villa Mairea, was published in *Arkkitehti*, the Finnish Architectural Review, no. 9, 1939. This text, often attributed to Alvar Aalto alone, was attributed to authors Aino and Alvar Aalto. Schildt, *Alvar Aalto In His Own Words*, 229–30. Their statement is not a theoretical position but a statement of actual practice. Numerous elements and themes, empirically tested and developed prior to Mairea, became manifest in the house itself, emerging later, with continued refinements, in architectural commissions ranging, in scope and scale, from worker’s housing and exhibition pavilions to concert halls, museums, and cultural centers. These experiments range in scope and scale from broad ideas such as the volumetric and material expression of program, the integration of the natural site, and the flow of interior space, to specific elements including skylights, floor treatments, entrance canopies, and door handles.

22. Unpublished notes in Aalto Archives. Schildt, *Alvar Aalto In His Own Words*, 226–9.
23. That many of Aino and Alvar Aalto's furnishings designed in the early 1930s remain in use and in production today speaks to the first principles of sustainability – beauty, utility, and durability. Aino's "Bölgeblick" glassware series (1932), which was Gold Medal Winner at the Milan Triennale in 1936, is the longest selling line of glassware sold by the Iittala company. Alvar Aalto's furniture continues to be the financial core of the Artek Company. The laminated birch L-system stackable Stool 60 design (1933), whose prototype, according to legend, was repeatedly thrown across the production floor to test its ability to withstand heavy use, was famously forecast by Aalto to sell in the thousands. By Artek's 80th Anniversary in 2013, more than eight million copies of Stool 60 had been sold. A recent Artek venture, *2<sup>nd</sup> Cycle*, debuted in 2007, featuring reissued Aalto furnishings complete with patina and provenance. No market research was used to predict the success of either of the objects mentioned above or of any of the dozens of other furnishings the Aaltos created in the 1930s. This is a testament to the belief that simplicity and quality could easily be perceived when presented to the public. For this reason, exhibitions were crucial to the success of early modernism, and the Aaltos were regular participants in exhibits – ranging from pavilions in Paris, Milan, and New York to department stores and shops in Helsinki, London, and Zurich. While many who visited the exhibits could not afford modern housing, many of the furnishings exhibited were affordable to the middle class. By bringing these objects home and interacting with them on a daily basis, the burgeoning middle class could begin to create the foundation for a new aesthetic based on quality and a certain indifference to the fact that they were industrially manufactured.
24. Between 1936 and 1939 Aalto began designing serially produced wooden houses ("A" series) for the A. Ahlström Company and the construction firm EKA. Later, in the early 1940s, during the evacuation and resettlement of refugees following the Winter War with Russia, Aalto produced more developed versions of the houses ("AA" series). Göran Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: The Decisive Years* (New York: Rizzoli, 1986), 264–7.
25. In his essay, "Rationalism and Man," Aalto argued for an expanded concept of the rational, extending it beyond what he called "technical functionalism" to include the "rationally undefinable requirements, still invisible to us." "We have conceded," he writes, "that objects that properly can be given the label *rational* often suffer from a noticeable lack of human qualities." He used Marcel Breuer's Wassily chair, a tubular metal chair he and Aino owned and lived with in their apartment in Turku, to illustrate his point. While Aalto conceded that the chair was a "clever technical solution," he remarked that it failed as a "thoroughly rational creation" in the sense that its chrome-finished steel reflects too much light and too much sound, and conducts too much heat, making it cool to the touch. The chair suffers, in Aalto's estimation, from a lack of the rationally indefinable term, "coziness." Alvar Aalto, "Rationalism and Man" [1935], in *Sketches, Alvar Aalto*, ed. Göran Schildt (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978), 47–51.
26. See, for example, Van Doesburg, "If we interpret form not as an a priori-determined style scheme, in which the various spaces are fitted according to dwelling needs and the demands of life but rather as the final result of functional and constructive necessity,

then, in my opinion, modern architecture should base itself upon the latter.” Theo Van Doesburg, “The Virtues of Craftsmanship, Architectural Purity and Regional Traditions” 7, no. 7 (March 1930): 145–9, in Theo van Doesburg, *On European Architecture: Complete Essays from Het Bouwbedrijf 1924–31* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1990), 102. Another example would be Mosei Ginsburg: “Indeed, modern industrial plants condense within themselves, in an artistic sense, all the most characteristic and potential features of the new life. Everything capable of establishing the essential thrust of creative progress is to be found here.” Mosei Ginzburg, *Style and Epoch* [1924] (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), 80–1. Given his direct contact with large scale industrial manufacturing and its architecture (the Aalto office designed a number of factories for the Serlachius Corporation, the A. Ahlström Company, and the Tampella Company: Toppila-Vaara Pulp Mill, Oulu, 1930–33; Sunila Pulp Mill and Housing, Kotka, 1936–38; Anjala Paper Mill, Inkeroinen, 1937–38) it is not surprising that the machine romanticism that characterized Ginzburg and the Russian constructivists, Le Corbusier, and other early modernists, would find little support – even an opposite reaction – in Aalto’s early writings, public buildings, and domestic architecture.

27. Juhani Pallasmaa, “Image and Meaning,” in *Alvar Aalto Villa Mairea 1938–39*, ed. Juhani Pallasmaa (Helsinki: Alvar Aalto Foundation, Mairea Foundation, 1998), 62, 93.
28. “It is necessary to know Aalto’s work first hand, because it translates so poorly into pictures. So much of its excellence is its absolute rightness of conception, the three-dimensional relationships of its elements, its use of light and low-key color, the subtle sensuousness of details, remarkable for consistency and restraint, and ultimately, its humanity. All this is resistant to a photographer’s art.” Ada Louise Huxtable, “Where They Do It Right,” *On Architecture* (New York: Walker & Company, 2008), 181. First published in *The New York Times* (January 23, 1972).
29. In lesser hands, the result would have been what Daumier, Director Guido’s artistic conscience in Federico Fellini’s 8½ called a “series of gratuitous events.”
30. For an enlightening discussion of Aalto’s use of the motif of polarity in the Villa Mairea see: Juhani Pallasmaa “Villa Mairea – Fusion of Utopia and Tradition,” in *GA 67 Alvar Aalto, Villa Mairea, Noormarkku, Finland, 1937–39*, ed. Yukio Futagawa (Tokyo: A.D.A. EDITA, 1985).
31. The word “tempo” is used here in the double meaning that Aldo Rossi ascribes to it in the Italian language: “*tempo* which signifies both atmosphere and chronology, is a principle that presides over every construction: this is the double meaning of energy that I now see clearly in architecture, as well as other technics and arts.” Aldo Rossi, *A Scientific Autobiography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), 1.
32. Because the approach to the villa is, by intention, neither axial nor direct, the speed at which the house is experienced on foot should not be overlooked. In fact, the timing of the approach could be compared to music’s eight basic tempo markings for speeds slower than walking pace (andante), from a bit slower than walking pace (moderato) to very, very slow (larghissimo). The proprioceptive sense – the awareness of the position and movement of one’s body in space – although a transitory feature of the architecture, may be one of the key features of the villa.
33. In his 2010 essay, “On Atmospheres,” Juhani Pallasmaa writes: “The judgement of environmental character is a complex fusion of countless factors which are immediately and



synthetically grasped as an overall atmosphere, feeling, mood, or ambience.” He goes on to say, “Peripheral perception is the perceptive mode through which we grasp atmospheres. The importance of the senses of hearing, smell, touch (temperature, moisture, air movement) for the atmospheric perception arises from their essence as non-directional and non embracing experiences. In deep thought,” he concludes, “focused vision is blocked and thoughts travel with an absent-minded gaze.” Juhani Pallasmaa, “On Atmospheres,” in *Encounters 2*, ed. Peter MacKeith (Helsinki: Rakennustieto Publishing, 2012), 238, 250. For a more extensive discussion of the predominance of vision in the understanding and evaluation of architecture and the underemphasized role of the multitude of other human senses in the experience and production of architecture see Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2012).

34. The word “visceral,” which relates here to immediate, deep-seated, even primordial emotions, is used rather than the term “somatic,” which perpetuates the common separation of mind, body, and self in architectural discourse. As the artist Bill Viola perceptively notes, “There is still such a strong mistrust in intellectual circles about things which speak to the mind via the body. In my opinion, the emotions are precisely the missing key that has thrown things out of balance and the restoration to their rightful place as one of the higher orders of the mind of a human being cannot happen fast enough.” Interview, Bill Viola, Jörg Zutter, in *Bill Viola: Unseen Images* (Düsseldorf: Verlag und Offsetdruckerie, R. Meyer, 1992), 101. Likewise, more than a half-century earlier, Aalto wrote, “There is hardly anyone who would seriously deny that instinctive joy is the right response to an aesthetic experience. It is related to all intuitive activity, the joy of creation, the joy of work. Unfortunately, modern man, particularly Western man, is so deeply influenced by methodical analysis that his natural insight and immediate receptiveness have been greatly weakened.” Abbé Coignard’s Sermon, radio broadcast (1925), Schildt, *Alvar Aalto In His Own Words*, 57.
35. In reference to his ephemeral works, where forms built of light entice yet elude the grasp of the hands, the artist James Turrell asserts, “touch goes out of the eyes like feel.” Scott Poole, ed., *James Turrell, The Thingness of Light* (Blacksburg: Architecture Edition, 2000), 2.
36. Aalto, “Motifs From Past Ages,” 33.
37. “The purpose of art,” wrote the Russian critic Victor Shklovsky, “is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known ... to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception...” In this regard, a primary function of art is to overcome the dull, mechanical effect that automatic mental schema can have on a person’s everyday encounters with their environment. Victor Shklovsky, from “Art as Device” (1917), quoted in Roger Fowler, ed., *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms* (London: Routledge, 1993), 101.
38. The antechamber is an interesting feature and a key to understanding Aalto’s accretional approach to architecture of the villa. It is one of three functional elements, lit by four skylights, in a rectangular one-story volume attached to the main, two-story volume. A flat roof overlapping the entry canopy hides the fact that this small volume is “added on” to the main volume. In addition to the antechamber, this volume contains a water closet and a welcoming open volume with a built-in bench where

the family or its guests can sit and remove boots or shoes during inclement weather. The entry to the main hall of the villa is through the thick walls flanking the end of the antechamber. Once inside the entry hall, one must again pass through the thick walls of the two-story volume to re-enter the one-story volume with its sitting area and water closet. It is part of a sequence of welcoming gestures – open portico, enclosed antechamber, arrival hall, open wardrobe, and closed water closet – that brings the visitor full circle, to a room that shares a wall with the antechamber and the front door. This small volume is significant because it demonstrates Aalto’s priority to “good form,” in the sense of good architectural manners or a correct level of comfort, over an excessive concern with formal appearances. It is the first of many events in the villa that will illustrate what Aalto, in his 1935 essay “Rationalism and Man” called “...*the mysterious concept of ‘cozy’*” (Aalto’s italics). Schildt, *Sketches, Alvar Aalto*, 48.

39. Aino-Marsio Aalto was also responsible for the design of a number of other interior furnishings for the villa including the linen upholstered “Mairea Sofa,” the dining room table, a modern kitchen, and built-in cabinetry as well as leather chairs, lamps, and children’s furniture designed for previous commissions. Renja Suominen-Kokonen “The Interior Design,” in Pallasmaa, *Alvar Aalto Villa Mairea 1938–39*, 129.
40. Aalto seems to have been influenced either directly (Aalto was fluent in German) or indirectly (through teachers or colleagues) by Hermann Muthesius’ writing on domestic architecture. In Muthesius’ text, *Style-Architecture and Building-Art: Transformations of Architecture in the Nineteenth Century And Its Present Condition*, the terms “cozy,” “psychophysiological,” and “rental barracks industry” are used to make the case for a new domestic environment. Likewise, in Aalto’s own writing, these same terms appear in several essays as he developed his own advocacy for a new approach to the architecture of the home. I would like to thank Dr. George Dodds for referring me to Muthesius’ use of the concept of “cozy.”
41. In Hopper’s paintings, like *Cape Cod Evening* (1939) or *Gas* (1940), the interrelationship between an architectural element, a shallow clearing, a dark forest, and one or two human figures are recurring motifs. This backlit image with its faint halo is also reminiscent of late nineteenth-century landscape photography and, in particular, certain photographs by I. K. Inha (1865–1930) whose images of Eastern Finland’s Karelian countryside and its people were recorded in *Suomi kuvissa*. Havas’ photograph of the Villa Mairea has a strange foreboding quality as well. Shortly after this scene was photographed, Finland was at war with Russia and eventually lost Karelia, a territory deeply attached to Finnish identity, to the Soviet Union, as part of a World War II reparation agreement.
42. This is one of the rare instances where the visitor encounters a focused view and the predominance of vision. More typically, Aalto relies on the full range of senses – hearing, smell, touch – as well as the proprioceptive system (position, orientation, and movement of the body), vestibular system (sense of balance), and peripheral vision to grasp a mood created by the totality of the environment. See note 33 on Pallasmaa.
43. “The garden was initially developed by Alvar and Aino Aalto and Maire Gullichsen in collaboration with Paul Olsson (1890–1974), a landscape architect with whom the Aaltos had worked on other projects ... The earth excavated from the foundations of the

building was used to level the courtyard and create the gentle hillock which provides it with a sense of privacy.” Juhani Pallasmaa, “The Garden,” in Pallasmaa, *Alvar Aalto Villa Mairea 1938–39*, 163.

44. In his essay, “From Doorstep to Living Room” (1926), published in the Finnish journal, *Aitta*, in 1926, Aalto uses two images, Fra Angelico’s *The Annunciation* (1426) and a view from the roof terrace to the exterior from Le Corbusier’s *Pavillon de L’Esprit Nouveau* (Paris, 1925), to demonstrate his belief that the past and present are linked by repetition, by the unfulfilled potential of permanent features of architecture – in this case the intertwining of interior and exterior. His caption for the *Pavillon de L’Esprit Nouveau* reads: “Latter-day classicism,” “A brilliant example of the affinity of the home interior and the garden. It is a hall, beautifully open to the exterior and taking its dominating character from the trees, or is it a garden built into the house, a garden room?” Schildt, *Aalto In His Own Words*, 49–55.
45. “Cosmopolitan localism” is an idea expressed by industrial Designer Ezio Manzini for a sustainable society – environmental, economic, ideological, social, cultural – examining the delicate balance between the specific qualities of being rooted in a place and its community and the general character of global exchange. “Today, the context is totally different. Today the small can be influential at the large scale as a node in a global network. And the local can break its isolation by being open to the global flow of people, ideas and information. In other words, today we can say that the small is no longer small and a local is no longer local, at least in traditional terms.” Ezio Manzini, “The New Way Of The Future: Small, Local, Open And Connected,” *Social Space* (2011): 100–5. <https://centres.smu.edu.sg/lien/files/2013/10/Social-Space2011-The-New-Way-of-the-Future-Small-local-open-and-connected-Ezio-Manzini-pdf>
46. Alternate sites were briefly considered, including one that would have had the villa in the middle of a stream on the Ahlstrom’s land more than a mile from the present site. Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: The Decisive Years*, 154.
47. “Human civilization has so far reached its greatest development in what was originally forest and grasslands in temperate regions ... Man, in fact, tends to combine features of both grasslands and forests into a habitat for himself that might be called the *forest edge* .... When man settles in the forest he replaces it with grassland and croplands, but leaves patches of the original forest on farms and around residential areas ... Man depends on grasslands for food, but likes to live and play in the shelter of the forest.” Eugene P. Odum, *Ecology* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1943), 135. Quoted in *Fit: An Architect’s Manifesto*, Robert Geddes, (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 2013), 31.
48. While Aalto’s bent wood furniture was new, it emerged from a nation with an ancient forest culture whose down-to-earth customs and skills with wood continued to be respected in the twentieth century. Like his forebears, Aalto is practical and realistic. His industrially manufactured furniture and the Villa Mairea, itself, is neither nostalgic nor technologically utopian. Aalto’s approach to the unvarying condition of man, to those aspects of human nature that persist and endure, prefigures architects like Aldo Van Eyck who were seeking, amid tumultuous change, a starting point based on humankind’s permanent qualities: “I dislike the sentimental antiquarian attitude towards the past as much as I dislike the sentimental technocratic one toward the

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- future. Both are founded on a static, clockwork notion of time (what antiquarians and technocrats have in common). So let's start with the past for a change and discover the unchanging conditions of man." Aldo Van Eyck quoted in Kenneth Frampton, *Labor, Work and Architecture* (New York: Phaidon Press Limited, 2002), 291.
49. Aalto's Finnish Pavillion, New York World's Fair (1937–39), designed simultaneously with the Villa Mairea, featured a 52-foot-high open space, dynamically shaped by a canted and curved wooden multimedia wall, organized horizontally into four separate themes: Country, People, Work, each represented by very large photographs and, at the ground level, by their actual Products. Like the Villa Mairea, the exhibit brought international attention to Finland's specific national identity. [http://www.greatbuildings.com/buildings/Finnish\\_Pavilion\\_1939.html](http://www.greatbuildings.com/buildings/Finnish_Pavilion_1939.html)
  50. While this observation is that of the author, this linguistic structure of the sentence was influenced by the fine essayist, Joseph Epstein, "The Prince's Man," *Wall Street Journal* (July 27–28, 2013).
  51. When the Villa Mairea was completed in 1939, it received widespread recognition, but its significance was largely underestimated. In fact, the year after its completion, in Sigfried Giedion's first edition of *Space, Time and Architecture* (1940), Aalto was scarcely mentioned (three sentences and a single illustration of Aalto's cantilevered bent plywood armchair "31"), and there is no reference to the Villa Mairea. In the book's fifth and final edition, published in 1966, 50 pages and nearly 50 illustrations were devoted to Aalto's work and focused, to a large extent, on work completed prior to 1940, including several pages accompanied by photographs and a plan of the Villa Mairea.
  52. "Superficially the concepts national and international are regarded as opposites; in a deeper sense this is less plausible ... When everything is said and done, no matter what the starting point or end may be, it is the connection between the concepts that achieves the balance we need in today's world, where the concepts national and international can hardly be separated from each other." Alvar Aalto, "National-International" (1967), in Schildt, *Sketches*, 168.

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