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Jyväskylä University Seminaarinmäki Campus

Alvar Aalto

Arto Sipinen



Photo: Jyväskylä University Library (Arto Sipinen). Simo Rista / MFA

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| Place | Jyväskylä | Completion | 1951–1971, 1970–1974 |
| Decade | 1950s | Period | Post-war modernism |
| Year of selection | 1993 | | |

The demographics in post-World War Two Finland manifested in a shortage of teachers. In 1950 it was decided to expand the operations of the Jyväskylä College of Education. An invited competition was held in 1951 for the design of the new buildings, which was won by Alvar Aalto.

The campus area is connected via an access road to the grid plan of the Jyväskylä city centre. The road culminates at the university's main building and a square in front of it, and with the library to the side of it. At the rear of the main building is a ceremonial courtyard where academic ceremonies can be held. Aalto's plan is based on the Anglo-American campus principle, with facilities for teaching, research, dining, exercise and accommodation placed around an open central field. The campus area is set in a ridge landscape, with its pine forest creating a strong vertical theme, in contrast to the horizontality of the building masses, which is further emphasised by the upper strip windows on the side facing the inner campus area.

The dominant building material is red brick, which in places has been combined with light-coloured granite, rendered or concrete surfaces. The light materials have been used to highlight hierarchically significant places, such as the upper floor of the administrative wing of the main building, the meeting space called Lyhty, as well as the entrance to the offices of the director of the teacher training school. With its white-rendered façades, the Department of Sports Science building, completed in 1971, differs from the rest of the red-brick complex.

The exteriors and interiors of the buildings have been well preserved. There have been some changes in the exterior appearance due to repairs to the technical infrastructure, and some of the interior materials have been changed. The original furniture has been well preserved, particularly in the main building and the library. In addition to the furniture and lamps designed by Aino and Alvar Aalto, there are also works by other well-known designers of the era: Ilmari Tapiovaara and Olof Ottelin (some of the furniture), Kirsti Ilvessalo (colour schemes and textiles), Paavo Tynell and Lisa Johnsson-Pape (some of the lamps).

Aalto's campus carries references to the architecture of the antiquities, Middle Ages and Renaissance combined with the Anglo-American campus tradition. Red-brick walls, large glazed surfaces, as well as rhythmically subdivided strip windows form a unique totality, which is connected to the strong history of Finnish-language teacher training and education.

Alongside Alvar Aalto's buildings on Seminaarinmäki are also buildings designed by architect Arto Sipinen built in 1970-74: the university main library, the arts buildings, and the administration building. It was originally intended that Aalto's own office would design the area in its entirety, but Aalto withdrew from the commission. The commission was transferred to Arto Sipinen, who in 1969 had won the Nordic architectural competition for the university's new buildings at Mattilanniemi.

The buildings designed by Sipinen reflect strongly both the Finnish state's approach to building during the late 1960s and 1970s and the spirit of the architecture of the era. The social and civic significance of building was emphasised. Strengthening the university network was seen as a way to generate and strengthen provincial centres. The comprehensive and economic benefits of education for society were the starting points in this thinking. The set design goals were, on the one hand, versatility and adaptability and, on the other hand, appropriateness, functionality and cost efficiency. Industrial mass production and technical innovation were seen to produce a high-quality environment. The goals were evident also in the construction technology and materials. A reinforced concrete post-and-beam frame and lightweight partition walls guaranteed adaptability. Hand-laid brick facings, blue-coloured sheetmetal work and stripped windows create the typical look of the

era. The buildings are visually anonymous and do not convey the intended use of the interior. Vuokko and Toivo Laakso worked on the project as interior designers, the latter also designing some of the furniture. Textiles by textile designers Marjatta Metsovaara and Vuokko Nurmesniemi were used in the interior.

The interiors of the buildings have been well preserved, including furniture, textiles and colour schemes. The biggest changes have been made in the administrative building, which was renovated and the brickwork of the facades re-laid in 2013-2014. Sipinen's buildings typify university building construction during the 1970s and are part of the important phase of growth in pedagogical history at the University of Jyväskylä.

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