

TOWARDS AN ECOLOGICAL FUNCTIONALISM

The architecture of Juhani Pallasmaa is remarkable in the way that it encompasses all scales of object from the smallest brass door-pull to the largest city block. Little known outside his native Finland he is an educationist, an executor of important cultural and commercial commissions, a deviser of prefabrication systems in timber and plastic, a designer of exhibitions – including the much admired Finnish exhibition at last year's Seville Expo – and a force in the world of sculpture, furniture design and art.

Helsinki in late June is a quiet place. A certain number of planes come and go at the airport, and every day giant floating shopping malls called ferries enter and leave the harbour from Stockholm and Tallinn. But the broad boulevards and cobbled streets of the Finnish capital seem oversized and empty, as though waiting for even larger ships and planes that have yet to arrive. As the sun shines down through long northern days on trams, taxis and neatly parked cars, there is no sense of being in a metropolis. The more fortunate of the city's 800,000 population are already drifting away to their country cottages and island retreats among the country's 200,000 lakes.

The offices of Juhani Pallasmaa are a microcosm of this evacuation. Not only is he clearing his desk for his own five-week stay in a remote cottage in the archipelago but, like virtually all Finnish architects, he has been hit hard by the recession and the size of his office is greatly reduced from five years ago. Then he was engrossed in a revolutionary £300 million project to place new buildings in the courtyard, and refurbish and repopulate seven of the existing buildings in a huge 10,000 square metre downtown city block, the whole to be serviced and accessed from below through deep parking tunnels and a new subway. Today he is concentrating on a single house and studio, a striking project of geometrical arcs and chords that boasts a huge curved rear shelter-wall and polished natural rock landscaping.

Pallasmaa is an energetic boyish figure in his mid-fifties who works long days and exploits the somnolent traffic of the city, dashing from appointment to appointment in his Saab 9000, his car telephone constantly in use. As well as running his practice he is Dean of the school of architecture

at Helsinki Technical University and has just come back from an enjoyable leave of absence teaching at Yale. With school out, America behind him and his summer break ahead, he seems almost relaxed. It is a good time for an interview.

Pallasmaa works from well-proportioned booklined rooms in a 1920s Lars Sonck apartment building turned offices. Though capable of repose, when he moves he moves at speed, drawing the visitor's attention to a variety of books, models, photographs, paintings, framed drawings, sculptures, objects and doorhandles. Puzzled by this last preoccupation I ask for an explanation. Doorhandles seem almost to play as important a part in his life as the telephone. He explains cheerfully that one night, unable to sleep, he designed 16 of them between 1.00 and 3.00am, complete with 48 dimensioned drawings so that pilot models could be made up in brass.

"The doorhandle is your very first physical encounter with a building", he explains, "I think it should be individual, friendly and inviting, not impersonal or standardised, or not thought about."

What about doors that don't have handles, like lift doors?

"A lift is a machine. If you go inside a machine it is not the same as going inside a building. But obviously it is impractical to always insist on doorhandles. Nonetheless automatic glass sliding doors do not invite you into an interior, as most people say. I think they are rather alienating. I sometimes avoid them by using opaque, solid doors set in transparent vestibules. At the Rovaniemi art museum you pass through the door but you are still outside the building. It is an important aspect of traditional architecture, light

seeping through a heavy door. I think of African masks and light entering through the cracks in a farmer's barn."

His father away at war, the young Pallasmaa was brought up on his grandfather's small farm in central Finland, an era he increasingly looks back to with affection. There was no specialism then, he recalls. If a farm building was necessary, the farmer became its architect and builder. If iron or steel utensils were needed, they were forged in the blacksmith's shop. Nor was there much technology – his grandfather was the only farmer in the district with a diesel engine to power his threshing machine. Because of his rural upbringing Pallasmaa had no formal or family introduction to the profession of architecture: the invigilator at the admission examination to the school of architecture at Otaniemi was the first architect he had ever seen in his life.

In his early years as a student and architect, Pallasmaa reacted strongly against this early primitivism. He became a convinced Modernist and, following an exchange year with an American family in Minneapolis, took up the cause of industrial design. Looking back now on the projects and thinking of the 1960s, the decade in which he graduated, he marvels at the political naivety of his peers, but commends the absolute soundness of their social programme.

"Architects are always naive about politics, but in those days we not only had a strong social conscience, we believed in a universal, anonymous, international and democratic architecture for everybody. Almost none of us were members of any political party, but our political idealism was absolutely correct. We were right to think that architecture held the answer to many social and political problems. Unfortunately today we have lost the sense of hierarchy that makes organised thinking about any sort of social programme possible. We no longer know what is important and what is not important, what is urgent and what is not urgent. We do not even focus on one problem at a time. Instead we insist on confronting ourselves with a mass of undefined problems, and then try to deal with all of them in the present tense."

A quarter of a century ago, the youthful Pallasmaa's idealism expressed itself in student politics as well as practice. After academic disturbances in 1968, and what he calls "a period of momentary desperation" on the part of the Finnish ministry of education, he was elected Dean of the 1,300-student Institute of Industrial Arts in Helsinki – the first and only Dean in Scandinavia ever to be

appointed on the basis on a one man one vote. Before and during his tenure of office, he also designed a number of small modern houses for clients in the Helsinki area. Elegant houses heavily influenced by the work of Mies van der Rohe, Craig Ellwood, Charles Eames and Jean Prouvé. This work culminated in a joint project with another Finnish architect, Christian Gullichsen, for the design of a prefabrications system for the Finnish timber industry. Called Moduli 225, this project was intended to divert some of Finland's large timber export trade from raw material into finished manufactures in order to improve its profitability. Although the scheme never attained the volume success intended, about fifty Moduli houses were sold and assembled between 1970 and 1978, the final one erected outside the Pompidou Centre for an exhibition of timber architecture.

The last building from Pallasmaa's "Miesian" period was a small summer house for a painter that combined his industrialised West Coast aesthetic with rustic materials and far more primitive detailing. But in the 1970s, under the impact of the energy crisis, Finnish architecture was undergoing a sea change. Inflation and high oil prices led to a resurgence of industrial concrete panel construction that limited the area of architectural expression. As he remembers it, creativity was confined to "variations in window size permitted by the difference between the regulations governing heat loss and daylighting".

Exasperated by what he called "the problems of a country that manufactured problems", he left Finland for two years, spent teaching and building in Ethiopia. It was a sobering experience for him, and one that he does not readily talk about. What is clear is that it fundamentally changed his outlook, and his view of what architects might do in the world.

"From then on I separated my work as an architect from what I could do on the political or social front," he recalls today. "I accepted that architecture can never be more than a low-energy, slow acting process. It can never have the immediate impact of rock music or film. Changing the environment is a slow, incremental process. It has to be, because it is founded on the real experience of construction, not on some kind of virtual reality. I think that today's avant-garde – which is much louder and more drastic than we were in the 1960s – has a real problem in coming to terms with this. Today radicalism in architecture is immediately rewarded, but it is just as immediately swallowed up. No one can be radical for long enough to be significant today. My good friend

Daniel Libeskind became an establishment figure before his first building had even been erected! It may seem paradoxical, but I think that now it takes more energy to keep a tradition alive than to overthrow it."

Pallasmaa's own career developed steadily after his return from Africa. His Finnish Cultural centre in Paris, his Rovaniemi museum, his 250 metre long Eastern centre shopping mall – at one time part of the largest retail project in Scandinavia – and his arc and chord Kuopio courthouse, have all been widely published and met with critical success. Had it not been a casualty of the recession, his mammoth City Centre Block project too would undoubtedly have brought him even more challenging commissions. Today, like most radical and avant-garde figures who survive, he has become part of the architectural establishment that he once reacted against. What does he think now of the beliefs he held in the 1960s?

"I am still interested in developing industrialised building systems. I would resume work on them tomorrow if there were a real client for such work.

"But there is an enormous difference between paper architecture and real architecture that is forced through against the resistance of a real client. Every art form needs resistance of that kind to work against. Without it there can be no real achievement.

"What is needed now is a new ethical consciousness, and that will not come without a major crisis to create a new condition zero, a state of disaster from which we must design ourselves an escape. I know almost nothing about such matters but I believe that a new kind of ecological functionalism will emerge from such a crisis. A functionalism that will produce an architecture that is much more radical in relation to Modernism than Modernism was in relation to Classicism."

For Le Corbusier ocean liners, motor cars and aeroplanes provided the indications of what such a radical architecture might look like. What does he see as their equivalents today?

Pallasmaa sits in his chair at the glass boardroom table in his office and thinks for a moment.

"The solar photo-voltaic cell is a very good metaphor", he muses. "I have seen an illustration of a small refrigerator powered by solar cells on the back of a camel in the desert. Perhaps that is an image of how an ecological functionalist architecture could combine the most sophisticated with the most primitive in a way that has the same kind of positive, optimistic symbolism that the Modern Movement used to have." □

HEIR TO A GRAND TRADITION

Juhani Pallasmaa comes from the third generation of Finnish modern architects. His work not only demonstrates an almost bodily experiencing of architecture, but a totality of design at all scales, from the humblest door handle to a three-dimensional city plan. Peter Mackeith offers this appreciation of the architect and his work.

In the spring of 1993, while serving as the Eero Saarinen Visiting Professor at the Yale School of Architecture, Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa found himself awash with invitations to lecture and visit school reviews across the United States. The 57 year-old Pallasmaa expressed some surprise at the hectic state of affairs – he had expected to live quietly in New Haven with his family for the four month term of appointment, dutifully teaching a design studio, exploring Yale's libraries, and watching his son play on the local junior hockey team.

Yet his surprise at such demands was somewhat disingenuous, for the invitations, as much as they were compliments, were also the products of a growing awareness and appreciation – well beyond the boundaries of the Nordic countries – of the work and thought of this skilled, energetic architect and educator. To many in the architectural communities of the Nordic countries, and to that number of European and American sympathizers to the Finnish architectural cause, Juhani Pallasmaa is a representative figure – yet one whose work and voice, paradoxically, has yet to be adequately exhibited and heard.

In his home country, however, Juhani Pallasmaa is already regarded by colleagues and critics alike as a phenomenon, yet the sheer amount of productivity and positions of responsibility in which he has succeeded in the Finnish architectural culture over the last quarter century may not offer an

adequate explanation. His has been an architectural life of fascinating versatility and surprisingly complementary roles, in which the strength of his protean intellect has paralleled an intense commitment to the making of an intimate architecture.

It is neither ironic nor fortuitous, for example, that Pallasmaa represented Finland at the 1991 Venice Biennale with a one-man show in Alvar Aalto's pavilion; or that he was appointed to the position of Professor in the Faculty of Architecture at the Helsinki University of Technology, and is currently serving as Dean of that Faculty; or was awarded the State Medal for Architecture from the Ministry of Culture for his exhibition contributions to the Finnish Pavilion at Expo '92 in Seville; or finally, in the spring of 1993, that he received the Helsinki Medal for cultural contributions and an honorary doctorate from the University of Industrial Arts in Helsinki.

It is only that such responsibilities and honours are a far cry from the expectations of the vocal architect-educator in the days of the Paris Spring, whose ideology then included opposition to the bureaucratic and technological excesses of the state and to the architectural authority of the pre-eminent Finnish architect, Alvar Aalto. Pallasmaa's first action as the youthful rector of the University of Industrial Arts in 1970 was to close the school in support of striking Finnish workers.

These circumstances of Pallasmaa's relative

The renovated interior of Pekka Halonen's atelier, originally built in 1902



Ruuno Träskelén



Al Weber

This tiny apartment (above) was renovated as the guest flat for the architect's office. It was seen as a minute architectural experiment. This view shows the sleeping platform suspended over the kitchen/dining area

obscurity outside of Finland are partially due to the perceived distance of a "provincial" Finland from the accepted cultural and media centres – with the equal perception of Finnish architecture as a set of buildings peripheral, even if interesting, to the more centrally located architectural events of the great Western economies. Moreover, the inability of many observers to overcome an image of Finnish architecture essentially centred on Alvar Aalto simultaneously has engendered the belief, founded on many of Aalto's statements, that Finnish architecture is both intuitive and pragmatic in its orientation, and therefore lacking a substantial intellectual foundation or theoretical direction.

Pallasmaa's career provides a remarkable set of bridges over these gaps in the perception of Finnish architecture. From the Paris Spring of 1968 to the overheated Finnish economy of the 1990s, his "thoughts and ideas have found expression in many different fields, from the traditional work of the architect to the design of exhibitions, publications and objects, to teaching, lecturing and writing." It is a body of work which in many ways cuts a cross-section through the crucial developments in Finnish architecture over the last 40 years, spanning the post-war establishment of a Finnish rationalism in architecture by architects and teachers Aulis Blomstedt and Aarno Ruusuvuori – a counterforce to the ascendant authority of Alvar Aalto; a tumultuous period of decline and distrust of the architec-

tural profession during the 1960s and early 1970s; a concomitant rejection of "the Master" by many younger architects trained under Blomstedt and the liberated architectural atmosphere subsequent to Aalto's death in 1976; and the resurgent strength of a contemporary Finnish architecture of the 1980s. In the course of many of these events, Pallasmaa has had an articulate voice and an energetic hand.

Over the last 25 years, Pallasmaa has given himself to a wide range of designs: exhibitions, publications, objects, furniture, graphics, lighting, and household items as well as a series of intimate, sensitively detailed domestic interiors and civic buildings. Simultaneously, he has held positions of institutional responsibility with the Finnish architectural culture – as rector of the University of the Industrial Arts in Helsinki in the early 1970s; as exhibition designer throughout the mid-1970s for the Museum of Finnish Architecture; and then, from 1978 until 1983, as Director of the Museum of Finnish Architecture. Immediately thereafter, while establishing an independent design office, he was appointed to a five year term as State Artist Professor, one of a handful of architects to receive the position.

An architect whose limited built work – until the last 10 years – was developed in collaboration with his contemporaries Kirimo Mikkola, Kristian Gullichsen and others, Pallasmaa undertook in the last decade an increasing number of commissions.

The planning, renovation and design of an existing perimeter block and courtyard in central Helsinki over the last four years had, until recently, consequently expanded his office from three to a sizeable staff of 30. The current conditions of economic recession in Finland have brought such ambitious visions to a halt; the prospering, close-knit atmosphere of the office has unfortunately diminished.

With the number and scale of projects reduced to a minimum, Pallasmaa has returned his attention more fully to architectural education. Currently, as the Dean of the Faculty of Architecture at the Helsinki University of Technology, he is in the middle of a five year term as Professor of the Foundation Programme in the Faculty of Architecture. That is to say, he oversees the curriculum development, delivers the main lectures and guides the studio instruction during the first two years of architecture instruction at the University.

In Helsinki, his work now threads throughout the city on a variety of scales, from a graceful set of bridges and pedestrian walks to a subtle Market Hall restoration; from the understated City telephone booths to intimate, reinvigorated commercial courtyards; and from restrained shop designs to finely detailed apartment interiors. At a larger scale, the Helsinki City Planning Office has a handsome set of auditorium, conference and meeting rooms showing the Pallasmaa hand. Both the KOP Helsinki centre block and the Eastern

Leprosy settlement, Ambo, Ethiopia. (Right) Model view of a housing unit including roofed area for cows and goats. (Below right) Site model

centre galleria boulevard, the two largest commercial ventures of the overly optimistic 1980s Finnish economy, have been Pallasmaa projects – both attempts to challenge the accepted norms of retail and commercial architecture.

Further afield, in Rovaniemi, on the Arctic Circle, he has shaped a light-filled art museum from the brick shell of an unused bus depot. In Kuopio, in eastern Finland, a courthouse administration building was recently dedicated. Overseas, his Finnish Cultural Institute graces the Rue des Ecoles, near the Sorbonne in Paris, a smoothly finished “jewel-box” of interlocking volumes and spaces. In counterpoint to these civic buildings, scattered among the Finnish archipelago in the Gulf of Finland are a series of small summer houses, each site-specific experiments in material and detail.

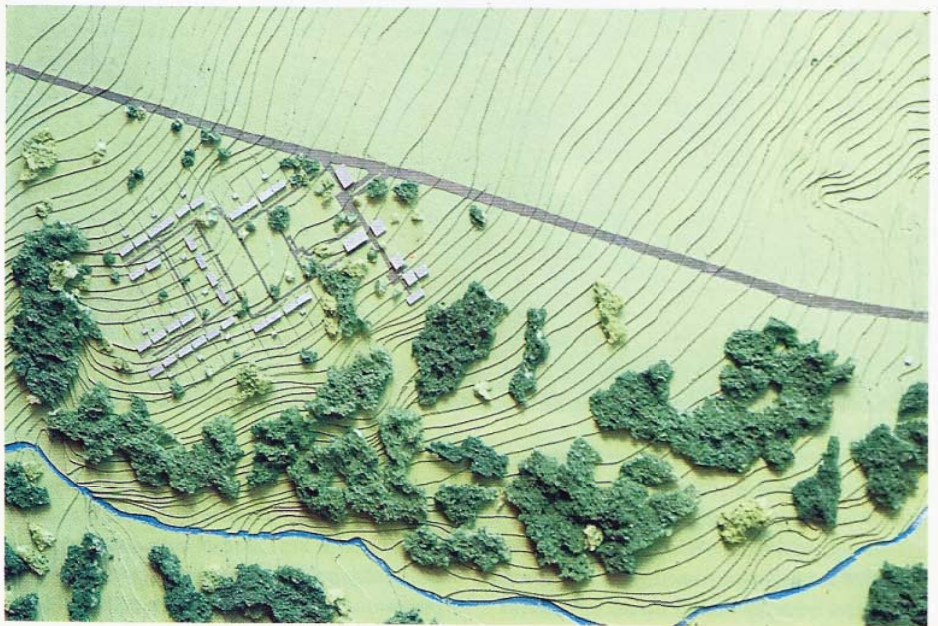
Throughout this work, Pallasmaa’s belief in the bodily experience of architecture upholds “the tactile over the visual” and acknowledges as well a metaphysical dimension to the task of building. His emphasis on the totality of design at all scales – through a graceful, sophisticated combination of geometry, materials, craftsmanship and detail – resonates throughout both his thought and work. The laminate of these values is bonded by Pallasmaa’s cultural consciousness of his homeland and his varied background in architecture.

A Descriptive Geometry

“In the visual arts in general and in architecture in particular the basic forms dominate: the circle, the square, the triangle and the basic orientation and numbers. The circle for instance, is a symbol of the self, expressing all the dimensions of the psyche, including the man-nature relationship.”

An existential geometry describing the substance of Pallasmaa’s life might well be configured by a circle: a perimeter of circumstances, consistently expanding, but always with reference to the central point of his Finnish homeland, the point of origin, the intimate inhabitation of house and landscape, functions as psychological foundation and metaphorical description for Pallasmaa’s work and thought. Simultaneously, the deep consciousness of his upbringing and culture has allowed the architect to move in widening arcs towards a deepening knowledge of the world outside of Finland, and towards a more profound understanding of art and architecture.

Pallasmaa’s upbringing in the Finnish countryside is a distinct set of palpable memories for him, memories which inform his designs in an abstracted, unconscious way: “Regardless of having lived in eight houses, I have had only one experiential



home in my childhood; my experiential home seems to have travelled with me and constantly transformed to new physical shapes as we moved...I recall vividly the sense of home, the feeling of returning home from a skiing trip in the darkness of a cold winter evening. The experience of home is never stronger than when seeing the windows of the house lit in the dark winter landscape and sensing the invitation of warmth warming your frozen limbs...I can no longer conjure up a clear picture of the plank table in my grandad's living room, but I can still imagine myself sitting beside it and reliving this focal point of a rural cottage, the binding force of our family circle and its occasional visitors.”

The architect identifies strongly with the forces of stability in that culture: the aesthetics of necessity based on scarce natural resources – what has been termed “a noble poverty” emphasizing the use of wood in design; a spatial psychology of the forest and the spatial consequences of a language in which pauses of silence have a necessary function in the structure of articulated thought; even the advantages of a necessary geographical and psychological

distance from “the centre”. Pallasmaa comprehends that these forces bind his culture together, despite the changing state of the homeland: the transformation of the nation from a pre-war rural, inwardly focused agriculturally based economy to a post-war urban, increasingly industrialized society contending for a consequent economic and cultural identity in an interconnected European community. Most recently, these intertwined perceptions underlay his organization and installation of an exhibition devoted to these fundamental themes, entitled, “The Language of Wood”.

However, in the 1960s, fresh from an education gained under the tutelage of rationalists Blomstedt and Ruusuvoori, Pallasmaa “defended rational thinking, emphasizing the importance of knowledge and technology. These ideas left an indelible mark on his designs from that period, most of which were carried out in collaboration with Kirimo Mikkola.” In 1967, for example, he would write: “Design is moving away from individual supervision and intuition to collective methodological control, from the design of separate sites to general sys-

tems and structures, and from immutable and ultimate design to disposable, changing and varying design. The design of forms is gradually being replaced by the control and arrangement of powers emanating from forms (technological, economic, social, psychic...). The continuing process replaces the permanent, circumstance the fixed visual shape, and the measurable that observed by the senses. This has meant a fundamental change in the tasks and arts of the designer." Architecture, in his opinion, was not "a mystical attribute of space, but organization, the arrangement of facts. Actually, the word beautiful should be replaced by right. For then art is the skill of doing right."

Such reductionist positions were the extension of the thought and work of Pallasmaa and Mikkola's mentor, Aulis Blomstedt. While Blomstedt's career and importance in Finnish architecture has only recently begun to be assessed and appreciated, the formative influence of his example on Pallasmaa cannot be underestimated. There was an intense ethical toughness to Blomstedt's character and work. This aspect, together with Blomstedt's insistence on the primacy of number, geometry, proportion, and harmony in the making of architecture remains the underpinning to Pallasmaa's designs even today. As Pallasmaa is careful to point out, however, Blomstedt's commitment to the purity of numbers was not an historical rationalization of production. It was both a system and a philosophy, a "2500-year-old tradition of harmonic proportions, a tradition whose purpose was to link man to the world he had built, to creation and the universe." Such relationships between geometry and construction, between philosophy, history and architecture, had a profound effect on Pallasmaa.

In his work today, these sensibilities are still apparent at the early stages of design. Ordering ideas of geometry – circles, squares, triangles – are studied and combined with a systematic dimensioning, often in grid or modular form. Arcs, whether in plan or section, are always ordered back to a larger circular geometry and symmetries are balanced against asymmetries. An emphasis on dimensioning in whole numbers prevails. Much trouble is taken in this "measuring" of the building throughout the design development to order the different layers of the design scale: site to building, space to structure, room to detail. Often, the grids of squares or discs reappear at a variety of smaller scales, most evidently in doors, window frames and panelling.

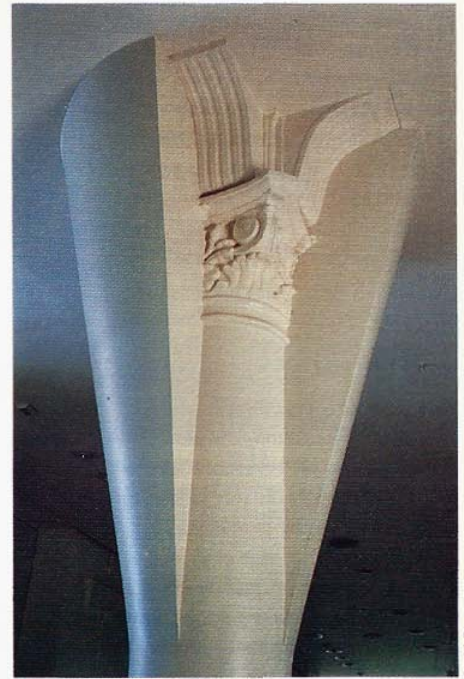
The late 1960s, during which Pallasmaa completed his diploma work, marked the height of the widespread student resistance to the perceived

expressive aesthetics of Aalto. On a larger front, a left-wing ideology demanding an architecture with social content dominated architectural discussions. Scott Poole, writing in *The New Finnish Architecture*, has outlined the aesthetic characteristics and consequences of this period. For Pallasmaa, the Relander House, the Enarvi House, the first small summer houses in the archipelago, and especially the Moduli 225 experimental house series date from this period as his first substantial commissions. Despite the rational discipline of their planning and design, the buildings are also studies in the subtle expressive combinations of structure and material, joint and detail, module and rhythm, texture and surface.

In the early 1970s, following his tenure as rector of the UIAH, Pallasmaa departed Finland for Africa, in particular for Ethiopia, where he assumed the responsibilities of a professor in architecture at the University of Addis Ababa for nearly three years. The period, one that Pallasmaa describes in terms of a self-imposed political exile, was a transformative one for the maturing architect. His idealistic belief in the redemptive powers of rationalistic design, technology and building standardization in his home country had already been disillusioned by the brutalizing takeover of the building process by the Finnish construction monopolies. The control of pre-fabricated production resulted in a tragic exclusion of quality from the urgent needs for housing. In Africa, Pallasmaa instructed in a wide range of subjects in the architecture department and as he accepted planning and design commissions for a variety of urban and civic projects. He rediscovered directly the meaning of the social content of architecture, as well as the advantages of small-scale modular systems in solving architectural commissions under drastically different conditions of culture and technology.

But more importantly, the experience catalyzed Pallasmaa's understanding of the cultural, environmental and psychological elements in his evolving architectural philosophy. The African experience, as it has done for many from the purportedly more advanced industrialized nations, struck deep chords within his consciousness and awakened an awareness of the possible role of archetypes, dreams and memories in art and architecture. Pallasmaa's intellectual and emotional debt to the diverse cultural experiences of Africa is undeniable in his writings and lectures, if indirectly indicated in his built work; he has directly shown his respect and affection in part by his sensitive 1990 installation of an exhibition in Finland devoted to the Dogon people, entitled "Behind the Mask".

In the Marimekko shop renovation, Helsinki, a group of four columns added to the interior of the space were later neutralized by part concealing the Corinthian capitals in an "industrial" column



Patrick Degenner

This interest in the psychological and biological bases of spatial perception and the visual arts dominated Pallasmaa's thought as he returned to Finland in the mid-1970s. As Exhibition Director for the Museum of Finnish Architecture, he had ample opportunity to materially clarify the effects of his African experience through the design of numerous temporary exhibitions. Subsequently, during a five year term as Director of the Museum, Pallasmaa would have an internationalizing effect on the Museum's activities: he organized displays of work by Tadao Ando, Alvaro y Siza, Daniel Libeskind, and American architectural drawings in an attempt to broaden the cultural outlook of the Museum.

He was also able to use the Museum's yearbook, *Abacus*, as a forum for the examination of national and international architectural issues. His own contributions reflected his growing awareness of anthropological, linguistic, and psychological issues, as shown in this 1980 excerpt: "The deep-structure meanings unconsciously aroused in the architectural experience are memories and associations connected with the synaesthetic mental images of early childhood, spatiokinetic experience and collective archetypes."

Leaving the Museum in 1983, Pallasmaa was able to put these ideas to the test with a growing number of projects, beginning with his own apartment and continuing through thoroughly detailed designs for Marimekko and the Rovaniemi Art Museum. These projects of the 1980s were in

many ways extensions of the principles worked out in exhibition design. The tactile was stressed over the sheerly visual: beginning with door handles, softened edges, consideration of materials, surfaces and light. Often a distilled image or sensation informed the detailing of a project, as was the case with the Marimekko commission. While the relationship between the exhibition of images in a museum and the display of goods in a store was visible, in carefully thinking through the process of presenting the Marimekko interior, one key element highlighted the moment of purchase – an inset stone disc at the charge counter, whereby transaction of coins, bills and credit acquired an aural significance. During this period, Pallasmaa also established his preference for working with a limited number of assistants, master carpenters and craftsmen in the execution of his designs.

By 1986, on the verge of an intense period of design commissions, Pallasmaa would confirm his shift in thinking by quoting Aalto's well-known statement concerning the depth of rationalization in modern architecture and the new directions of the movement: "...the fault is that the rationalization has not gone deep enough. Instead of resisting the rationalist approach, the latest phase of modern architecture is trying to channel rational methods away from the technical sphere and into that of humanism and psychology." Pallasmaa's observation that "it seems that Finnish architects in general are now engaged in materializing Aalto's programme of expanding a rational attitude to the psychological sphere of design" was both thinly veiled self-observation and a declaration of emergent intentions.

Pallasmaa had for many years argued forcefully against the "architecture of a consumer society", describing his feelings in no uncertain terms: "I have on many occasions been bewildered by the products of hyper-realistic architecture – shopping centres, hotel foyers, restaurant decors – and come to the same conclusion; their obscenity is that there is nothing to see." Paradoxically, several of his commissions in the late 1980s fell into this category of commercialized space.

Undoubtedly the architect found it difficult to resist such commercial commissions, in part because of the overheated Finnish economy of the 1980s, which produced a surfeit of design work for the profession as a whole. Equally, while modest often to the point of self-deprecation, Pallasmaa is not without ambition. Having endured periods of work in positions and fields indirectly related to the making of buildings and of sustaining his architectural ideas through the execution of a series of small, intimate furniture,

exhibition, renovation and interior designs, the ambition to build on a larger and more free-standing scale lay close to the surface.

Yet in all these cases, the ambition has been one tempered by Pallasmaa's reflections on the philosophical characteristics and aesthetic pitfalls of "the architecture of a consumer society"; his is a subversive ambition, attempting to prove the possibility of a transcendent architecture within the seemingly corrosive atmosphere surrounding the commercial commission. In each case, the conventional attitudes of the business and marketing interests regarding an appropriate commercial architecture have been challenged and in their stead, alternative, inventive strategies have been applied.

Over the last 15 years, he has also consistently argued in his published writings and in public forums for a reinvigoration of the philosophy and practice of architecture. His perspective is "radical" in the sense that he calls for a renewed understanding of architecture's ontology; the point of view being that architecture cannot disassociate itself from its metaphysical and existential basis: "Our culture identifies the world of ideals and the everyday, and thus nullifies the function of art as the mediator between the two ... art must stir a consciousness of the metaphysical dimension superseding the everyday ... The job of architecture is not to beautify or "humanize" the world of everyday fact, but to open a view into the second dimension of our consciousness, the reality of dreams, images and memories."

Pallasmaa's best work is in fact, just such a series of elements and images. The architect is interpolating towards what might be called a metaphorical house, one of specific architectural elements and details: "The house is composed by the architect as a system of spatial hierarchies and dynamics, structure, light, colour, etc, whereas home is structured around a few foci consisting of distinct functions and objects. The following types of elements may function as foci of behaviour and symbolization: a front (frontyard, facade, the urban set-up), entry, window, hearth, stove, table, cupboard, bath, bookcase, furniture, family treasures, memorabilia..."

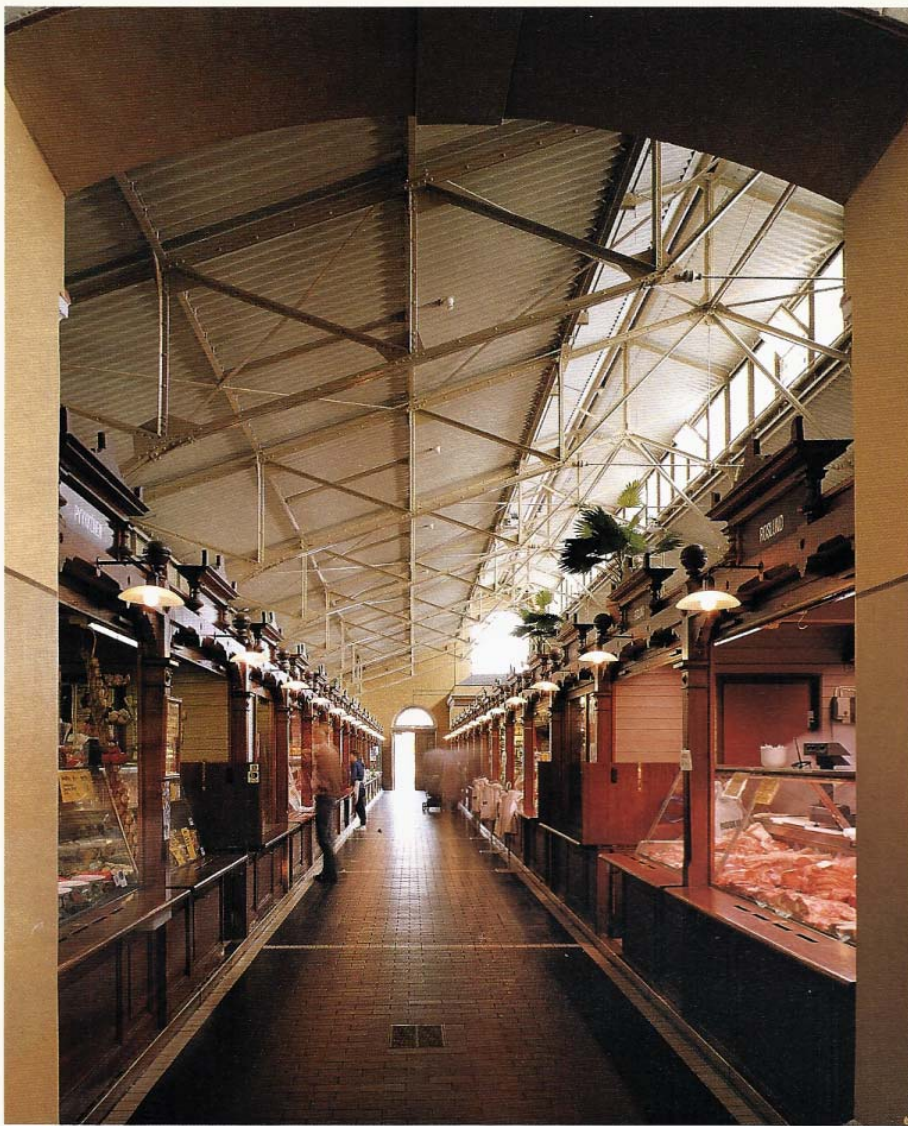
The architectural strategy is not without its pitfalls. Pallasmaa cannot claim that the execution of his designs consistently matches the ambitions of his intentions. Much of his design and detailing depends on the assembly of industrial materials with craftsmanlike skill – a quality not always possible for reasons of available labour or adequate finances. His concentration on details at times obscures the ordering of a building at the urban or basic plan scale. The intimacy of his spaces is a

delicate balance, at its best an enticing combination of scale and detail, but prey to a dimensional constriction on occasion and a certain oppressive density of detail on others.

Yet the high ambition of the work remains true. For Pallasmaa, architecture is subsumed by a more complete process of design, one in which the tactile experience of space, light and material is balanced against the intellectual ordering of form through geometry and structure. Space and structure are rendered minimally, leaving a field for the elaboration of material. A certain palpable quality, a subtle eroticism, hovers over many elements. A visitor to a Pallasmaa design is seduced into such experiences by the gift of the designed objects themselves – sensuously curved door handles and drawer pulls are offered to the hand and fingers, for example. There is evident pleasure in the crafting of materials both luxurious and simple: a coil of stainless steel, alderwood models of house projects, carved blocks of rusted steel, brass handles, layered plywood.

The intent is to slow down our experience of the spaces he designs; it is an effect achieved by the thoughtful placement of architectural elements, by the careful use of coloured surfaces, by the introduction of shafts and washes of natural light from subtly placed roof lights, clerestories and framed wall openings, by the considered juxtaposition of materials, by the subtle imposition of ordering geometries in both plan and section, and by the intense concentration on the precise crafting of each specific component and detail. The result is a "collage", as Pallasmaa describes it, but one in which what is left to chance is the individual sensory experience alone, the subjective relationships and linkages created by the participation of those entering into the space, the tactile memories.

Pallasmaa's often-stated conceptual desire is for "an architecture of silence" – given the high idealism of the rhetoric, the phrase has engendered as much cynicism as it has provided inspiration – but the silence desired is not absolute or overwhelming; it is rather the simple quietude, a calm reflection, born of one's intimate discovery of an underlying spatial order animated by the appeal of the sensual use of materials and the comprehension of the craftsmanship of each element. It is, then, the slowed passage of time that allows the tactile experience to resonate within one's consciousness long after departing from the design: the memory of a granite disc or colonnade, a sweeping curve of tile or wall, a stair of an attenuated steel structure, a continuous succession of perforated door, wall and ceiling panels.



Marimekko shop interior (above) converted from the previous basement storage space. (Left) The old Market Hall, Helsinki, view of one of the renovated shopping aisles

At the Helsinki University of Technology, Pallasmaa now seeks to reinvigorate the theoretical dimension of the architecture curriculum, simultaneously attaching these poetic considerations to the material aspects of building. Pallasmaa has argued for a radical poetic of architecture, in which theory informs praxis, in which the satisfaction of function includes the awareness of the psychological dimensions of design, in which orders of material, structure, light and space accumulate towards a metaphysical experience.

He remains as passionate now, if not outright angry, about the failings and fashions of contemporary architecture as he was a generation ago. He is joined in this opposition to fashion, a critical resistance to the ephemeral, by his colleagues Kristian Gullichsen, Sverre Fehn, Aldo van Eyck and Colin St John Wilson, as well as by a growing number of younger Finnish architect-instructors, inspired by Pallasmaa's reinvigoration of the curriculum in the Faculty of Architecture and by the increasing international attention in the programme his presence attracts.

That the one-time defender of rationalism is now the enthusiastic advocate of intuition has not gone unnoticed by critics within the tight circles of the Finnish architectural community, whose desire is seemingly for a paralysis of thought and a simul-

taneity of theory and practice. Yet the local sniping seems solely short-sighted and ill-tempered; with the exception of Reima Pietilä, since the death of Alvar Aalto few Finnish architects have been so energetically forthcoming with ideas and opinions, nor so willing to act on behalf of Finnish architecture in so many capacities both at home and abroad – other than Pallasmaa.

Moreover, with the sole guiding example of Aulis Blomstedt before him, Pallasmaa has attempted to articulate and stand by a developing philosophy of architecture, one grounded in the Finnish experience, but not exclusively attached to it. A voracious reader, with equally passionate interests in both the humanities and the sciences, Pallasmaa's critical vision roams across the creative arts, from literature (Chekhov to Eliot) to film (Hitchcock to Tarkovsky). Importantly, Pallasmaa's perspective does not rely upon an regionalist analysis, but has sought broader and deeper understandings from the visual arts, philosophy and the natural sciences, with reference to the traditions of modern architecture so firmly established in the Nordic countries. As Marja-Riitta Nomi has observed, "the re-evaluation of one's own ideas is often a slow and onerous process. In this respect, the changes in Juhani Pallasmaa's opinions have occurred logically, with an intuitive anticipation of the problems of the

time and characterized by a firm belief in the expressive powers of modern architecture."

Despite the limiting conditions of the Finnish recession, there are no signs that Pallasmaa is slackening in his efforts to continue towards these multivalent ends. As with his previous responsibilities, he is now vigorously revising the curriculum and projected a new energy into the Faculty of Architecture. An ethnographic museum for the Saame people of Lapland, a building commissioned by the National Board of Public Building, is in the development stages of design. Sited in Inari, Finland, far above the Arctic Circle, the project addresses complex issues of cultural representation, natural light, geography and climate. And at the Cranbrook Schools in Michigan, long allied with Finnish architecture and design, Pallasmaa has designed a Point of Arrival entry area in collaboration with Cranbrook Studio Director Dan Hoffman. There as well, a layered design of columns, paving, landscape, planar geometries, lighting and text is being interwoven into the Cranbrook fabric. Both commissions are "marriages of place and occasion" in which Pallasmaa asserts his commitment to the reinstatement of "Quality, the dimension of spiritual depth, ... as the only criterion of art." Again as before, this pursuit of quality can only have revolutionary consequences. □