TRANSCULTURAL DWELLING: AN EXPLORATION OF FINNISH AND JAPANESE INFLUENCES IN ALVAR AALTO'S DESIGN OF VILLA MAIREA

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By

Ceylin Karakaya

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ABSTRACT

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This research examines the influence of Finnish and Japanese dwelling cultures in the design of Villa Mairea, a pivotal work of the architect Alvar Aalto. The problem statement revolves around the need to understand how Aalto integrated two distinct dwelling cultures into a single architectural expression, diverging from the dominant rationalism of his era. The research employs qualitative analysis of architectural elements in Villa Mairea, interviews, memoirs, and examination of Aalto's personal library, revealing an intricate interplay of Finnish and Japanese influences.

Results indicate that Aalto achieved a profound synthesis of Finnish and Japanese dwelling cultures, resulting in an architectural language rich in material sensuality, subsequently becoming synonymous with Nordic architecture. The design principles inherent in Villa Mairea demonstrate the philosophies of Regionalism and Critical Regionalism, balancing local cultural elements with universal modernist principles.

The conclusion drawn from the research provides substantial implications for architectural theory and practice, suggesting the potential for architects to create contextually grounded and transcultural-informed architecture. The study also opens avenues for further research in the field of sensory architecture, the role of transcultural influences in other architectural works, and comparative studies on different architects' approaches to cultural integration.

Keywords: Alvar Aalto, Finnish Architecture, Japanese Influence, Transcultural Dwelling, Villa Mairea.

ÖZET

KÜLTÜRLER ARASI KONUT: ALVAR AALTO'NUN VİLLA MAİREA TASARIMINDA FİNLANDİYA VE JAPON ETKİLERİNİN KEŞFİ

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Bu araştırma, ünlü mimar Alvar Aalto'nun başyapıtlarından biri olan Villa Mairea'nın tasarım sürecinde Fin ve Japon konut kültürlerinin ne ölçüde etkili olduğunu derinlemesine inceliyor. Çalışmanın odak noktası, Aalto'nun, iki ayrıkonut kültürünü nasıl tek bir mimari dilde bir araya getirdiği konusunda anlayış kazanmasıetrafında şekilleniyor. Bu araştırma, Villa Mairea'daki mimari öğe lerin kapsamlıanalizi, çeşitli röpörtajlar, anılar ve Aalto'nun kişisel kütüphanesinin incelenmesi yoluyla Fin ve Japon kültürlerinin karmaşık etkileşimini gözler önüne seriyor.

Elde edilen sonuçlar, Aalto'nun Fin ve Japon konut kültürlerinin etkileyici bir birleşimini başarılışekilde gerçekleştirdiği, bu süreçte de malzemenin duygusal yönünü öne çıkaran zengin bir mimari dil oluşturduğu ve bu dilin sonraki dönemlerde İskandinav mimarisiyle özdeşleştiğini ortaya koyuyor. Villa Mairea'da bulunan tasarım ilkeleri, yerel kültürel öğelerin evrensel modernist ilkelerle nasıl dengelendiğini göstererek, Bölgeselcilik ve Eleştirel Bölgeselcilik felsefelerini ön plana çıkarıyor.

Bu araştırmanın sonucunda elde edilen bilgiler, mimarlık teorisi ve uygulamasına önemli katkılar sağlıyor ve mimarların bağlamıdikkate alarak ve kültürlerarasıanlayışıile mimarlık yaratma potansiyelini vurguluyor. Bu çalışma aynızamanda kültürlerarasıetkilerin diğer mimari eserlerdeki rollerinin anlaşılmasına ve farklımimarların kültürel bütünleşme konusundaki yaklaşımlarının karşılaştırılmasına zemin hazırlıyor.

Anahtar sözcükler: Alvar Aalto, Fin Mimarisi, Japon Etkisi, KültürlerarasıKonut, Villa Mairea.

To my family,

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The discipline of architecture extends beyond the formation of physical spaces, representing an amalgamation of cultural identity, regionalism, and the fusion of diverse human experiences. This dissertation focuses on the theme of 'dwelling' as a lens through which to explore the transcultural synthesis of Finnish and Japanese dwelling philosophies in the design of Alvar Aalto's Villa Mairea. Villa Mairea, a cornerstone of modern architecture, is characterized by the fusion of different cultural influences (Deriu, 2007; Schildt, 1998). Aalto's architectural decisions and their broader implications within the spheres of cultural identity and architectural expression are examined to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on regionalism and the integration of cultures in architectural design (Frampton, 1993).

Alvar Aalto, a Finnish architect and pioneer of modern architecture, is celebrated for his human-centered approach and his sensitivity to the nuances of nature and regional contexts (Pallasmaa, 2012; Schildt, 1998). His most notable work, Villa Mairea, exemplifies the integration of Finnish and Japanese dwelling philosophies, curating a unique architectural experience that transcends cultural distinctions (Schildt, 1998). Utilizing the theoretical framework of critical regionalism (Frampton, 1993), Heidegger's theories of dwelling (Heidegger, 2006), and notions of placemaking (Relph, 1976), this dissertation endeavors to unravel the

intricacies of Aalto's design decisions and reveal the profound cultural influences that have shaped Villa Mairea.

This dissertation will delve into a thorough review of pertinent literature and explore the intersections between these concepts with a specific focus on 'dwelling'. The aim is to develop a nuanced understanding of how Finnish and Japanese dwelling philosophies have left an indelible influence on Aalto's design of Villa Mairea (Schildt, 1998) Pallasmaa (2012), and how the architectural manifestation of this transcultural interpretation contributes to the wider discourse of regionalism and cultural identity in architecture (Frampton, 1993).

Each subchapter within this introductory chapter will consistently refer back to the central concept of 'dwelling'. The background and context will provide a more detailed examination of the concept of dwelling within Finnish and Japanese cultures. The research problem and questions will then identify the gaps in understanding how these dwelling concepts influenced Villa Mairea's design. In the methodology section, the research design, data collection and sources, and data analysis will all be constructed around this focal point. Similarly, the methods and approaches employed in the analysis of Villa Mairea will be chosen to best examine the concept of dwelling. Finally, the significance of this study, its scope and limitations, and the structure of the thesis will all reference how they relate to the concept of dwelling within the context of this research.

1.1 Background and Context

This chapter endeavors to set the historical and cultural context for the Finnish and Japanese dwelling concepts and their significance in Alvar Aalto's design of Villa Mairea. A thorough comprehension of this background is instrumental to interpreting Aalto's architectural choices through the lens of transculturation, critical regionalism, Heidegger's theories of dwelling, and place-making.

Finland's architectural tradition, characterized by its profound connection to

nature and the surrounding landscape, is deeply ingrained in the nation's cultural identity (Pallasmaa, 2012). The built environment of Finland shares a symbiotic relationship with its natural setting, an element that has consistently influenced Aalto's work (Schildt, 1998). On the other hand, Japanese dwelling philosophies, such as the concept of "shakkei (借景)" or borrowed scenery, underscore the integration of architecture with nature and the significance of spatial harmony and balance (Nitschke, 1993). These Japanese dwelling concepts have had a profound influence on Aalto's designs, most notably in Villa Mairea, where a transcultural interpretation of dwelling becomes evident (Schildt, 1998).

Alvar Aalto's personal and professional life was deeply impacted by the Japanese aesthetic. The chapter *"Aalto Through Japanese Eyes"* in *Alvar Aalto: His Life* (p.354-362) reveals this influence in detail. Aalto's designs, including Villa Mairea, showcase a keen understanding and appreciation of Japanese architecture and its philosophy, which left an indelible mark on his architectural style.

> "The idea that Japanese architecture helped Aalto break free from Rationalism, enabling him to formulate his own architectural idiom, nature-bound and characterized by a sensual feeling for material, does not seem too farfetched." (Schildt, 2007, p. 354)

Before the construction of Villa Mairea, Aalto had already made significant strides in the international architecture scene. His designs were lauded for their humanistic approach, innovative use of materials, and his ability to harmonize built structures with their natural surroundings. Villa Mairea, however, stands as a milestone in his career and the history of modern architecture, symbolizing a perfect blend of Finnish and Japanese dwelling concepts and a harmonious balance between regionalism and international influences.

The following chapters will explore in depth the historical progression and cultural context of Finnish and Japanese dwelling concepts. It will shed light on how these concepts have been assimilated and reinterpreted in Aalto's Villa Mairea,

paying special attention to the influences of transculturation (Ortiz, 1995), critical regionalism (Frampton, 1993), Heidegger's theories of dwelling (Heidegger, 2006), and place-making (Relph, 1976). By scrutinizing the background and context of these dwelling concepts, this research strives to contribute to a more profound understanding of Aalto's architectural expression and the broader discourse on regionalism and cultural identity in architecture.

1.2 Research Problem and Questions

The central problem this research aims to address stems from the intersection of Finnish and Japanese dwelling concepts in Alvar Aalto's design of Villa Mairea. While the influence of Finnish and Japanese dwelling philosophies on Aalto's architectural work is recognized, the depth and breadth of this transcultural synthesis and its manifestation in Villa Mairea remain underexplored. Similarly, Aino Niskanen mentions this research gap in the field of research on Alvar Aalto and his works, which had already a late start in terms of academic research (Laaksonen, Micheli, & Niskanen, 2018) [1]. The complexities of this cultural integration, viewed through the lens of dwelling, pose a compelling research problem. It is further complicated by the challenge of analyzing the sensory experience and perception of space within the Villa and the ways these aspects align with or diverge from Finnish and Japanese dwelling philosophies.

To examine this problem in detail, the following research questions are proposed:

- How does Villa Mairea embody the fusion of Finnish and Japanese dwelling concepts? Which architectural elements of Villa Mairea distinctly reflect these concepts, and how do they contribute to the overall experience and

[1] "There was a significant delay in Aalto research in Finland compared to that carried out elsewhere, The first Finnish books to be completely dedicated to his work were published only after his death in 1976." (Laaksonen, Micheli, & Niskanen, 2018). See; *Aalto Beyond Finland Vol.2*, 2018, chapter by Aino Niskanen *'Surrounded by Aalto: On Aalto Studies in Finland and Elsewhere'*, p. 95-103.

perception of the space?

- How does Alvar Aalto's design of Villa Mairea engage with the idea of transculturation? How do Finnish and Japanese cultures dialogically influence the design, and how is this synthesis reflected in the Villa's architectural form and space?
- How does the concept of 'dwelling', as theorized by Heidegger, relate to the design of Villa Mairea? How do the dwelling practices embodied in Villa Mairea reflect or reinterpret Heidegger's theories?
- How do regionalism and critical regionalism manifest in the design of Villa Mairea? How do these concepts inform the integration of Finnish and Japanese dwelling philosophies in Aalto's design?
- What does Villa Mairea reveal about Aalto's understanding and interpretation of Finnish and Japanese dwelling concepts? How has this understanding influenced his architectural legacy?

These questions aim to untangle the complex tapestry of transcultural influences in Villa Mairea. They seek to deepen the understanding of Alvar Aalto's approach to dwelling, his interpretation of Finnish and Japanese dwelling philosophies, and the influence of these concepts on his broader architectural legacy. By addressing these questions, this research hopes to contribute to the broader discourse on regionalism, critical regionalism, and the role of cultural synthesis in architecture.

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 Research Design

This thesis adopts a multifaceted research design to investigate the intricate interplay of Finnish and Japanese dwelling concepts in Alvar Aalto's design of Villa

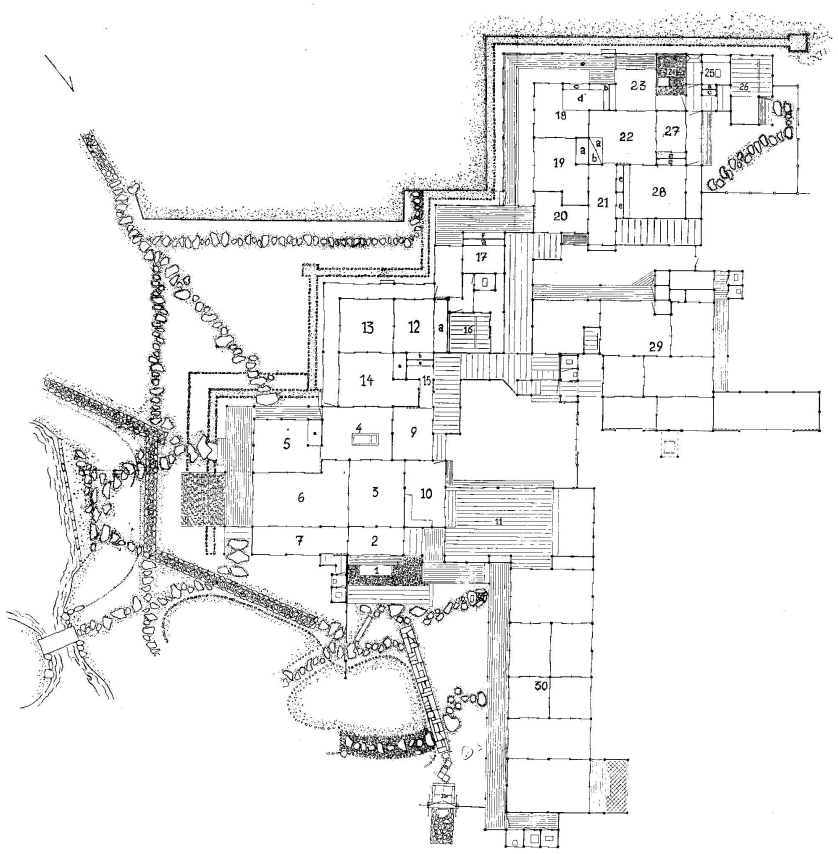
Mairea. The research design encompasses a qualitative research approach, an interpretive case study design, a comparative analysis, and a phenomenological approach, each contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

Primarily, a qualitative research approach underpins the overall study, providing an in-depth exploration of the architectural, cultural, and historical factors that influenced Aalto's design choices (Creswell, 2014). This method allows for a nuanced understanding of the context-specific and multi-dimensional aspects of dwelling, aligning with the subjective and interpretive nature of the architectural analysis.

Secondly, an interpretive case study design is utilized, focusing on Villa Mairea as a unique example of transcultural interpretation in architecture. Villa Mairea's design is examined in detail, from its architectural elements and spatial organization to its material choices, seeking to uncover and reinterpret how Aalto incorporated Finnish and Japanese dwelling concepts into a harmonious design. Notably, the study analyzes the Japanese dwelling concepts employed in Katsura Imperial Villa (Figure 1.1) and how they might be reinterpreted in Villa Mairea (Figure 1.2), drawing insights from Tetsuro Yoshida's *Das Japanische Wohnhaus* (Yoshida, 1935) as discussed by Schildt (1998). Furthermore, Frank Lloyd Wright's Falling Water (1936) (Figure 1.3) is used as a reference point for understanding the broader framework of transcultural interpretations in architecture (Gullichsen, Schildt, Pallasmaa, Suominen-Kokkonen, et al., 1998).

Thirdly, a comparative analysis further elucidates the architectural techniques employed by Aalto, particularly the transcultural implementation of Finnish and Japanese dwelling concepts. This comparative case study design explores the similarities and differences in the application of these dwelling concepts within Villa Mairea's context. Architectural and spatial analysis methods, drawing from primary and secondary sources such as architectural drawings, photographs, and texts, enable a detailed comparison of design elements, layout, and space usage.

Additionally, an in-depth cultural comparison methodology is employed to



20 Plan of the Imperial Katsura Palace

1 entrance 2 ante-room 3 spear-room 4 room with fire-place 5 and 6 first and second rooms of the Ko (Old)-Shoin 7 ante-room 8 bamboo terrace for the contemplation of the moon 9 waiting-room 10 servery 11 kitchen 12, 13 and 14 first, second and third rooms of the Chū (Intermediate)-Shoin 15 dressing-room 16 bath-room 17 room with musical instrument (Koto) 18 and 19 first and second rooms of the Shin (New)-Shoin 20 tea-kitchen 21 ante-room 22 bedroom 23 dressing-room 24 wash-room 25 privy 26 bathroom 27 dressing-room 28 store-room 29 former administrative rooms 30 new waiting-rooms 31 inner gate
a Tokonoma b Tana c Shoin d platform e wall-cupboard f built-in seat

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Figure 1.1: Plan of Katsura Imperial Palace in Kyoto. Yoshida (1935)



Figure 1.2: Exterior of Villa Mairea in Noormarkku, Finland. Photograph taken by the author during her visit to the site in May 2022.



Figure 1.3: Exterior of Falling Water by Frank Lloyd Wright in Bear Run, Pennsylvania. *Frank Lloyd Wright - tour the House Today - Pennsylvania. Fallingwater. (2023, June 21). https://fallingwater.org/* (2023)

understand the influence of cultural factors on Villa Mairea's design. This method involves investigating the historical background and cultural characteristics of Finnish and Japanese dwelling concepts, and their incorporation into Villa Mairea's design. For instance, the study examines the use of Finnish materials and construction techniques alongside Japanese spatial organization principles, such as the flexible use of space and the integration of indoor and outdoor environments.

Lastly, a phenomenological approach is adopted, delving into Villa Mairea's experiential qualities. This method emphasizes the subjective experience and personal interpretation of space, fostering a deeper understanding of the architectural space's meaning and significance. The phenomenological analysis covers multiple dimensions of Villa Mairea's design, investigating how spatial configuration, materiality, and atmosphere collectively shape the overall experience. Moreover, the study extends beyond the built environment to consider Villa Mairea's natural setting and the cultural context of Finnish and Japanese dwelling concepts.

In summary, this research design seeks to provide a thorough and nuanced exploration of the concept of dwelling in Aalto's Villa Mairea. It ties together several perspectives and methodologies to uncover the intricate relationship between Finnish and Japanese dwelling concepts, critical regionalism, Heidegger's theories of dwelling, and place-making. By focusing on dwelling as the main concept and integrating the various sub-chapters and topics, this research design aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of Alvar Aalto's architectural expression and the broader discourse on regionalism and cultural identity in architecture.

1.3.2 Data Collection and Sources

The data collection for this study primarily draws on a combination of both primary and secondary sources. Architectural drawings, photographs, and archival materials related to the design and construction of Villa Mairea are considered primary sources. They provide firsthand evidence of Alvar Aalto's architectural vision and his integration of Finnish and Japanese dwelling concepts (Schildt, 1998).

To supplement these primary sources, a series of site visits were conducted across various regions in Finland in May 2022. The locations encompass Helsinki, Munkkiniemi, Noormarkku, Säynätsalo, Muurame, and Jyväskylä. These visits served as an opportunity to directly experience Finnish architecture and culture, offering invaluable insights into Aalto's architectural process. The firsthand experience of these spaces permitted a phenomenological approach to understanding Villa Mairea, revealing how Aalto's design fosters a sense of interconnectivity, belonging, and individuality through the exploration of spatial configuration, materiality, ambiance, and the relationship to the natural environment.

Interviews and multiple conversations and correspondences with the Villa Mairea Foundation representative, Susanna Vestervik, as well as comprehensive tours of the Villa Mairea and the Säynätsalo Town Hall, designed by Aalto, were instrumental in the data collection process. These interactions facilitated a richer understanding of Aalto's architectural works and the Finnish and Japanese

dwelling concepts inherent within them. Archival photographs and illustrations sourced from the Villa Mairea archives served as invaluable resources in this regard [2].

Accessing archival work, distributed across various foundations and libraries, posed a considerable challenge due to the delicate and voluminous nature of these materials. However, it was undertaken successfully with the assistance of the Alvar Aalto Foundation, Villa Mairea Foundation, The Bobst Library of New York University, The National Library of Finland, Harald Herlin Learning Center in Aalto University, Säynätsalo Library in Jyväskylä, and Jyväskylä City Library. Research materials were also obtained from the library of the Finnish Embassy in Ankara, Turkey, courtesy of the Finnish Ambassador for Turkey, Ari Maki.

Secondary sources constituted scholarly articles, books, and academic works discussing Aalto's architecture, Finnish and Japanese dwelling concepts, critical regionalism, and related topics. Among these, Alvar Aalto's autobiography, *Aalto in his own words* (Schildt, 1998), Göran Schildt's *Alvar Aalto: His Life* (Schildt, 2007), Stewart Rogers's *Alvar Aalto architect* (Stewart & Rogers, 2017), Juhani Pallasmaa's *Alvar Aalto, Villa Mairea 1938-39* (Pallasmaa, 1998), Richard Westons's *Villa Mairea: Alvar Aalto* (R. Weston & Aalto, 1995), and Tetsuro Yoshida's *Das Japanische Wohnhaus* (Yoshida, 1935) were key texts discussed in the context of Aalto's architecture and implementations of Finnish and Japanese dwelling cultures.

Additionally, Frampton's *Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance* (Frampton, 1993), Martin Heidegger's *Building, Dwelling, Thinking* (Heidegger, 2006), and Relph's *Place and Placelessness* (Relph, 1976) were explored as secondary sources. These texts provided valuable insights into the concepts of critical regionalism, Heidegger's theories of dwelling, and place-making, thereby revealing the interconnection of these concepts with

[2]"The archive of the Alvar Aaito Foundation contains 874 catalogued drawings of the Villa Mairea by the Aalto Office; 74 drawings produced outside of Aalto's office by structural, mechanical, etc, engineers, 40 documents (bills, memos, material samples, etc.). 390 photographs, and extensive correspondence catalogued in accordance with the name of the sender and the receiver." See, Pallasmaa, *Villa Mairea 1938-39,* p. 33 (Pallasmaa, 1998)

Aalto's architectural interpretations in Villa Mairea.

In conclusion, the data collection process for this study was robust, employing a range of sources and methodologies. The gathered data facilitated a thorough exploration of the interplay between Finnish and Japanese dwelling concepts within Alvar Aalto's design of Villa Mairea, thus providing a comprehensive analysis. This approach ensured a meticulous examination of Aalto's architecture, while also addressing the complexities of a transcultural architectural analysis.

1.3.3 Data Analysis

The analytical process of the qualitative case study in this research involves the decoding, categorization, and interpretation of data. This step is essential in identifying patterns, themes, and relationships that could provide answers to the research questions. The focus is mainly on the re-interpretive nature of Alvar Aalto's design of Villa Mairea and its implementation, drawing from the intertwining themes of Finnish and Japanese dwelling concepts. The theoretical framework guiding this analysis serves as a lens through which findings are deciphered and meaningful conclusions are drawn. Techniques such as thematic analysis, content analysis, and comparative analysis are employed to process the collected data.The integrity and trustworthiness of this research are fortified through validation and triangulation techniques. Validation is achieved through member-checking. This process involves consulting with experts or individuals knowledgeable in the subject matter to affirm the accuracy of the interpretations. This might take the form of interviews and discussions that promote a deeper understanding of the dwelling concepts and the broader implications of Aalto's design philosophy.

Triangulation is another method applied to enhance the credibility of the research findings. This is achieved by utilizing multiple data sources, including primary and secondary materials, and examining the convergences and divergences in the data. This approach serves to strengthen the overall argument, underpinning the importance of a transcultural analysis of dwelling concepts in

architectural studies. The inclusion of archival first-hand data also contributes to building a solid foundation for this research.

In summary, the methodology employed in this thesis encompasses a qualitative research approach, interpretive case study design, comparative analysis, and a phenomenological approach. The process of data collection draws from both primary and secondary sources, while the data analysis is guided by a robust theoretical framework. By employing these methods, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the transcultural interpretation of Finnish and Japanese dwelling concepts in Alvar Aalto's design of Villa Mairea. This focus on dwelling concepts aims to illuminate the depth and complexity of Aalto's design philosophy, reflecting his unique synthesis of Finnish and Japanese architectural principles.

1.4 Methods and Approaches Employed in the Analysis of Villa Mairea

The exploration of Villa Mairea employs a rich tapestry of theoretical frameworks including the concept of dwelling, which is integral to our understanding of its space and design. This theoretical framework is interwoven with the theories of transculturation, cultural synthesis, critical regionalism, and Heidegger's theories of dwelling, all of which converge to offer a multifaceted understanding of Villa Mairea's architectural manifestation (Akcan, 2012).

Dwelling, in the Heideggerian sense, denotes the distinctive mode of human existence. It encapsulates the human state of being in the world where humans reside on the earth, under the sky, among other mortals, and in the presence of divinities. This existential spatiality forms the core of our analysis of Villa Mairea, shedding light on how the architectural design facilitates a sense of home, place, and belonging (Akcan, 2012).

The concept of dwelling is also intertwined with the theories of transculturation

and cultural synthesis. In the context of Villa Mairea, this involves an examination of how Finnish and Japanese dwelling concepts have been amalgamated. Through a comparative analysis, we aim to identify the specific elements of these dwelling concepts that Aalto has combined and adapted. This transcultural interpretation of dwelling is seen in the design features of Villa Mairea, revealing the ways in which Aalto has created a space that is both distinctly Finnish and Japanese, yet transcends the cultural boundaries of both.

Critical regionalism, a concept that advocates for the integration of local characteristics into architectural design, adds another layer to our understanding of dwelling in Villa Mairea. Aalto's design responds to the local climate and topography, utilizes local building materials and construction techniques, and organizes interior and exterior spaces in ways that foster a sense of place and community. This adherence to critical regionalism principles is evident in Villa Mairea's design, enhancing the dwelling experience by grounding it in its regional context.

The phenomenological analysis of Villa Mairea is guided by Heidegger's theories of dwelling. This involves a careful examination of the spatial configuration, materiality, and atmosphere of Villa Mairea, focusing on the experiential qualities of the spaces and how they foster a sense of connection, belonging, and identity. The design of Villa Mairea, as viewed through this lens, engages with the natural environment and cultural context, embodying a kind of dwelling that Heidegger might describe as more poetic than scientific (Bachelard, 2014; Heidegger, 2006).

The historical and cultural context of Villa Mairea's design is also pivotal in our analysis. Understanding the influences and intentions behind Aalto's architectural choices necessitates a review of relevant literature, including Aalto's own writings, as well as an examination of the broader architectural and cultural trends in Finland and Japan during the period when Villa Mairea was designed and constructed. This exploration provides insights into how these influences have shaped the concept of dwelling in Villa Mairea.

By employing these methods and approaches, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of Villa Mairea's design. The analysis illuminates how Aalto's

design embodies a transcultural interpretation of Finnish and Japanese dwelling concepts, addresses the principles of critical regionalism and place-making, and brings to life Heidegger's theories of dwelling. This layered exploration of Villa Mairea underscores the rich complexity of dwelling as a theoretical framework in architectural analysis.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study of Villa Mairea through the lens of dwelling and transculturation presents a unique opportunity to deepen our understanding of cultural synthesis in architecture, the experiential qualities of space, and the convergence of Finnish and Japanese dwelling cultures. This research holds significant implications for architectural theory and practice, transcultural studies, and phenomenological investigations of space.

This study is critical for several reasons. First, it offers a comprehensive exploration of the concept of dwelling as manifested in the architecture of Alvar Aalto, particularly in Villa Mairea. The dwelling, as a fundamental human condition, shapes our perception and experience of space and place. This research provides insights into how Aalto's design embodies and facilitates this existential spatiality, significantly contributing to the ongoing discourse on the theory of dwelling in architecture.

Second, this study investigates the transculturation between Finnish and Japanese cultures through the medium of architecture. The concept of transculturation, defined as the process of cultural synthesis through dialogue, is aptly demonstrated in Villa Mairea's design. By examining how Aalto integrates elements from both cultures, this research illuminates the process of architectural transculturation, offering valuable insights for architects and designers working within increasingly multicultural contexts.

Furthermore, this study fills a gap in the literature by examining Villa Mairea

through a phenomenological lens. While numerous studies have explored Aalto's work from historical, stylistic, and technical perspectives, less attention has been given to the experiential qualities of his spaces. This research focuses on the sensory perception of space in Villa Mairea, providing a more nuanced understanding of how Aalto's design engages with the human experience.

The study is also significant as it sheds light on the legacy of Alvar Aalto, one of the pioneers of modern architecture. By examining Villa Mairea, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of Aalto's architectural philosophy, his approach to design, and his influence on subsequent generations of architects.

The inspiration for this study is primarily drawn from the striking manifestation of the dwelling concept in Villa Mairea, along with the fascinating cultural synthesis between Finnish and Japanese dwelling cultures evident in its design. The rich tapestry of architectural elements, materials, and spatial configurations in Villa Mairea offers a fertile ground for exploring these concepts. Furthermore, this research is inspired by Aalto's humanistic approach to architecture, which prioritizes the needs, experiences, and cultural contexts of the inhabitants.

In conclusion, this study, centered on Villa Mairea and Alvar Aalto, offers valuable insights into the concept of dwelling, the process of transculturation, and the sensory perception of space. By bridging the gap in the literature, this research contributes to the broader understanding of how architectural design facilitates a sense of home, place, and belonging, and how it can serve as a medium for cultural dialogue.

1.6 Scope and Limitations

The scope of this thesis is directed towards the profound exploration of dwelling as a fundamental concept in the architectural design of Villa Mairea by Alvar Aalto. In this exploration, the theoretical framework provides a comprehensive methodology for analyzing Villa Mairea within the context of Finnish and

Japanese dwelling concepts.

However, it's important to acknowledge several limitations that might affect the writing of this thesis. One such limitation is the subjective interpretation of concepts such as transculturation, cultural synthesis, and place-making. Different researchers, based on their perspectives and biases, may draw varied conclusions, which could potentially limit the generalizability of the findings and make it difficult to establish a definitive understanding of Aalto's intentions and influences (Pallasmaa, 1994).

In addressing these limitations, the concept of "re-interpretation of Aalto's interpretations of Finnish and Japanese cultures into his practice and design of Villa Mairea" becomes essential. This emphasizes the subjective nature of analyzing Villa Mairea and its transcultural interpretation of dwelling concepts, as well as potential biases and assumptions that may affect the researcher's understanding of Aalto's work (Schildt, 1998). Laaksonen, Micheli, and Niskanen (2018) also mentions the nature of bias that may cause due to Schildt's sources, due to the fact that Schildt was neither an architect nor someone focused on the field. Schildt was a close friend of Aalto, who was commemorated through biographies after his death by Schildt (Laaksonen, Micheli, & Niskanen, 2018). Recognizing this limitation facilitates a nuanced and reflexive analysis, highlighting the complexities involved in interpreting architectural expressions and meanings across different cultural contexts (Heidegger, 2010).

The complexity of analyzing cultural influences in architectural design also presents a challenge, as various factors like historical context, personal experiences, and socio-political conditions contribute to the development of architectural ideas (Pallasmaa, 1994). Disentangling these influences and attributing specific design decisions to particular cultural sources can be challenging.

Another constraint is the limited availability of primary sources, including Aalto's own writings and historical documents pertaining to the design and construction of Villa Mairea (Schildt, 1998). The language barrier also poses a challenge, given that some sources are in Finnish or Japanese, potentially affecting

the depth and accuracy of the analysis (Laaksonen, Micheli, & Niskanen, 2018).

Despite these limitations, the theoretical framework provides a solid foundation for exploring the transcultural interpretation of Finnish and Japanese dwelling concepts in Villa Mairea. By acknowledging and addressing these limitations, the thesis can still contribute to the academic discourse on the synthesis of diverse cultural influences in architectural design and offer valuable insights into Aalto's work (Schildt, 2007).

1.7 Structure of the Thesis

The structure of this thesis is designed to provide an in-depth exploration of Alvar Aalto's transcultural design in Villa Mairea, focusing on the Finnish and Japanese interpretations of the concept of dwelling. The thesis is organized into six main chapters, each unfolding a layer of analysis and contributing to the overall understanding of Aalto's architectural legacy.

Chapter 2, titled *"Investigating Transcultural Interpretations in Architecture: A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Alvar Aalto's Transcultural Design in Villa Mairea,"* lays the theoretical groundwork for the investigation. It begins with the examination of cultural synthesis through transcultural dialogue, followed by an exploration of the experience and sensory perception of space. The subsequent sections delve into the concepts of regionalism and critical regionalism, setting the stage for a deeper understanding of Heidegger's theories of dwelling and place-making. The chapter concludes with the application of this theoretical framework to Alvar Aalto's work, presenting a cohesive understanding of how these theories underpin the design and architectural philosophy of Villa Mairea.

Chapter 3, *"The Multicultural Tapestry: Finnish and Japanese Dwelling Concepts Interwoven in Alvar Aalto's Architectural Legacy,"* delves into the intricate interplay of Finnish and Japanese dwelling concepts in Aalto's work. It explores

the complexities of dwelling beyond mere shelter, focusing on the interplay of physical, cultural, and sensory dimensions. This chapter traces the threads of Finnish and Japanese dwelling concepts, highlighting their interweaving in Aalto's architectural design.

Chapter 4, *"Alvar Aalto,"* is dedicated to Aalto's architectural design philosophy and his regional approach rooted in Finnish Romanticism. It particularly focuses on Aalto's understanding and interpretation of dwelling, providing a comprehensive background for the detailed analysis of Villa Mairea.

Chapter 5, *"The Case of Finnish and Japanese Dwelling in Alvar Aalto's Villa Mairea,"* delves into a meticulous case study of Villa Mairea. This chapter provides historical background and discusses the design and development of Villa Mairea. It engages in a thorough analysis of the transcultural interpretation of dwelling in the villa and discusses the role of critical regionalism in its design. The sensory experiences of Villa Mairea and its poetics of space are explored, along with the application of Heidegger's theories of dwelling. The chapter concludes with an investigation of place-making in Villa Mairea.

Finally, Chapter 6, *"Conclusion,"* provides a summary of key findings, discussing their implications for architectural theory and practice. This chapter also recommends avenues for further research, acknowledging the limitless scope of exploring transcultural architectural designs.

The thesis is structured in such a way that each chapter builds on the previous one, building a comprehensive understanding of Alvar Aalto's transcultural design in Villa Mairea. The central focus remains on the concept of dwelling and its Finnish and Japanese interpretations, within the broader context of architectural concepts and design philosophy. This structure enables a systematic investigation, analysis, and understanding of the subject while addressing the complexities and nuances associated with transcultural interpretations in architecture.

Chapter 2

INTERPRETATIONS BASED ON ON-SITE EXPERIENCES AND FIRST-HAND EVIDENCES OF VILLA MAIREA

2.1 Hermeneutics and Personal Perspective: Navigating the Complex Layers of Aalto Studies

This chapter delves into an analysis grounded in first-hand exploration. Leveraging my on-site observations of Villa Mairea in Noormarkku, Finland from May 2022, interviews with Villa Mairea and Alvar Aalto Foundation staff, and supported by archival materials and photographs, this chapter serves as a deeply

personal but rigorously substantiated commentary on the transcultural influences—particularly Japanese and Finnish—that manifest in Alvar Aalto's architectural marvel, Villa Mairea. The chapter aims to provide personal interpretations on Villa Mairea. Unlike other works on Villa Mairea, I aim to interpret the architectural details and on-site experiences from a personal point of view to be used and implemented in the light of other scholarly work.

As previously mentioned in Chapter 1.2 Research Problems and Questions of this thesis, available written sources are considered to be late in searching and providing the foundation for Aalto-related research. Even so, some research has been limited in terms of its reliability due to the fact that there has been a late start in this field which has gained momentum after Aalto's death in 1976. Additionally, most sources on Aalto have been in Finnish which provided a harder path for me to acquire them in English. Another problem for this research was to get to the heart of the sources since not many written materials are available in Turkey. After many trials of getting my hands on the sources from New York to Finland, I felt these were not enough for this research to come to life. Therefore, I decided to travel to Finland to see Villa Mairea from my own point of view and gather information as well as to experience the complete scene.

In the nuanced field of hermeneutics, the act of interpretation isn't merely a one-way lens but rather a complex interplay of multiple viewpoints, including those of the original creator. This study delves into Aalto's own interpretive processes, exploring how he integrated and viewed Japanese and Finnish cultures in his work, particularly in the landmark project of Villa Mairea. In the literature available within this thesis, there is no direct evidence from Alvar Aalto himself explaining the impact of Japanese influence on his work. Given that scholarly investigation into Aalto's work commenced significantly after his death, our access to "complete truth" about his interpretations remains forever limited. Nevertheless, this layered approach—interpreting an interpretation, if you will—offers a fresh, multifaceted vantage point. It allows us to contribute new perspectives to the field that could broaden our understanding of cross-cultural influences in architecture, even if these perspectives can only strive to approach, but never fully encapsulate Aalto's own views.

In this hermeneutic inquiry, it's crucial to acknowledge that the interpretation of Aalto's work is filtered through my own architectural understandings and sensibilities, cultivated over years of study and experience. This isn't merely a rehashing of existing scholarship but rather an individual lens that I bring to the academic conversation around Aalto and his influences, particularly in the context of Villa Mairea. This thesis offers an outside perspective independent of Finnish and Japanese cultures examining the interconnection of difference factors and variables. The interpretations offered here are inevitably shaped by my personal background and my unique grasp of the information at hand. Thus, while this study aims to deepen the collective understanding of Aalto's cross-cultural influences, it is also an exploration of how personal viewpoints can both enrich and complicate the academic discourse in architectural studies.

2.2 Author's Personal Investigations and Observations in Finland

In May 2022, I took a vital research trip to Finland to deepen my understanding of Alvar Aalto and his oeuvre. This journey was instrumental in expanding my personal interpretations and grounding them in firsthand experience. Not only did I get the chance to witness Villa Mairea in its true context, but I also explored Aalto's work across different regions and time periods. Moreover, the trip allowed me to access rare archival materials, shedding new light on his life and work. This journey enabled me to adjust my academic notions, offering a richer, more nuanced lens through which to view Aalto's contributions to architecture and culture.

Embarking on a research trip to Finland was a pivotal moment in my study of Alvar Aalto, and I believe that conducting my research solely through books, photos, and readily available materials would not have done justice to the subject matter. This trip allowed me to engage all my senses in the exploration of Aalto's work—from the tactile quality of the materials he used to the spatial nuances of

his designs. More importantly, the journey provided me opportunities for personal engagement with locals who have lived with Aalto's architecture, adding layers of social and cultural understanding that could not be gleaned from secondary sources. The trip not only fortified my research with sensorial experience but also initiated long-term contacts with people in Finland, further enriching my unique interpretive lens on Aalto's work.

2.3 Architectural Description and Observations of Villa Mairea

After immersing myself in the broader landscape of Alvar Aalto's work across Finland, my visit to Villa Mairea was nothing short of revelatory. The experience illuminated how the Finnish people, many of whom I had the chance to engage with, view Aalto's contributions as an almost ordinary aspect of their daily lives—even while acknowledging its role in shaping national identity. To them, the architectural details that felt so ground-breaking in my research were parts of their everyday environment. For me, walking through Aalto's work especially Villa Mairea was like meeting a celebrity; I was thrilled to finally experience firsthand the intricate details I had only read about in books or seen in photos.

When approaching the site of Villa Mairea, Ahlström's estate first welcomes with its glory in Art Nouveau style. The villa is located on a hilltop isolated in a dense body of coniferous trees in Noormarkku, Pori, where the Ahlström paper company is also located nearby (Figure 2.1). Further into the dense forest, Villa Mairea provides a glimpse through Maire Gullichsen's art studio, magnificently blending into the tree trunks, laying low in height, unlike the Ahlström's estate. Due to the immense height of the trees, it is challenging to comprehend the magnitude of the villa, which provides a humble first glance for the guests.

As we first approach the building, although it seems humble under the dense birch trees, we realize the immensity of the villa. The awning welcomes the

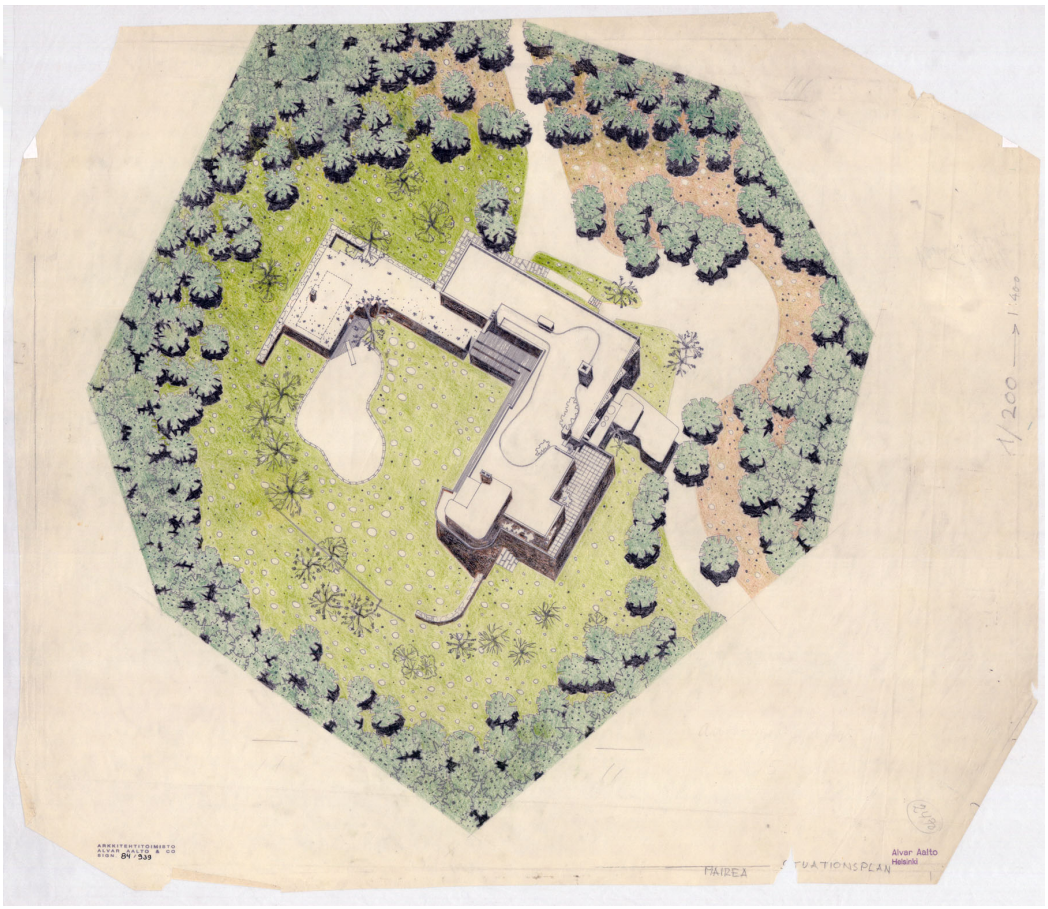


Figure 2.1: Site plan of Villa Mairea. Drawing courtesy of Alvar Aalto Foundation Archives. (AAA, sign 84-939)



Figure 2.2: Entrance canopy of the Villa Mairea. The photograph was taken by the author in Helsinki in May 2022

guests through intricate structural details that I interpreted to be influenced by Japanese woodworking techniques. Although the woodworking techniques can be from Japan, the dense repetitive placement of the wooden poles in the awning represents the birch forest that we passed a couple of minutes ago. Based on my first visual impression of the villa can be interpreted as a blend of two cultures. The pavement on the entrance resembles not only the stonework in Japanese gardens as mentioned in Yoshida (1935) but also the character of Finnish vernacular architecture (Figure 2.2).

According to Aalto couple's explanation in *Arkkitehti, No.9* in 1939, after the completion of the project, the property's focal point is a courtyard featuring a swimming pool, enclosed by family rooms, balconies, and a sauna, among other elements (Pallasmaa (1998), p. 31). Based on our conversations with Sussanna Vestervik at the Villa Mairea Foundation, who have kindly provided a detailed

tour of the villa, I have gathered personal information on the villa especially focusing on the Gullichsen family. The centerpiece of the residence is an expansive living room, approximately 250 square meters, designed for everyday family use and equipped with movable, felt-coated walls. Initially intended to house a separate art gallery, the design evolved to integrate the Gullichsens' personal art collection directly into the living space, akin to a library, reflecting their deep personal connection to painting. This innovative design was intended to illustrate the interplay between art and home life, even suggesting that such a concept could be adapted to smaller living spaces. Pallasmaa (1998) mentions, in the design of Villa Mairea, Aalto sought to achieve a balance between eschewing artificial architectural rhythm and maintaining 'pure form,' through harmonious structuring and material selection (p. 31). According to Pallasmaa (1998), Aalto's design philosophy, heavily influenced by modern painting, aimed to evoke personal experiences, offering a richer and more humanistic approach to architectural design than traditional ornamentation (p. 31).

Based on my personal experience at the villa, aside from Aalto's humanistic approach to design, he also integrated new innovations into his design of Villa Mairea. Pallasmaa (1998) states that Aalto explains the details and intricacies of air conditioning through pine panelings on the ceiling as well as the heating system in his own explanation of Villa Mairea in Arkkitehti (Figure 2.3) [1].

> "Ventilation of large living room was arranged by using the pine paneling fixed ler the concrete ceiling as a filter (it contains 52,000 vents) that distributes clean air evenly throughout the room. Most of the building has a system of air conditioning, which also provides some of the heating. There are a number of sliding windows with insulation that be strengthened with special materials during the winter season. Some of the external walls are also movable, making it possible to 'open the house completely toward the garden.'" (Pallasmaa (1998), p. 31)

[1] Aalto worked very closely with the Gullichsen couple along with the contributions and collaborations of the architects' Jarl Jaatinen at the office and Paul Bernoulli on site. See; Pallasmaa, *Villa Mairea 1938-39*, 1998, p. 31.



Figure 2.3: Air conditioning through the pine panelings on the ceiling of the living room. Photo courtesy of Alvar Aalto Foundation.

Concerning the composition of spaces, the villa presents a harmonious fusion of interior and exterior environments. TThe large outdoor space, outlined by a fence, is mirrored in the open living space on the main floor, which even features large windows and doors that can open, joining these spaces into one. S. Weston (2020) explains this spatial arrangement, which Aalto termed as 'flowing space,' seeks to evoke the limitless expanse of nature, further solidifying the organic connection between the built form and its surrounding landscape. This 'flowing space,' is further enhanced by sliding glass walls that directly connect the interior and exterior spaces, although was used only a couple of times by the Gullichsen family, as noted by Susanna Vestervik. Pallasmaa (1998) explains the continuous flow of space, inspired by the limitless space of nature, is one of the most striking aspects of Villa Mairea's design.

The Villa Mairea also showcases Aalto's innovative usage of materials and forms. It juxtaposes directional and linear elements, blending geometric shapes with free-flowing organic forms. The facade, for instance, features a classic Modernist white box offset by a curving wooden extension. The angular rectangular layout of the building provides the foundation for layers of open space, natural motifs, and humanist shapes and curves (Figure 2.4).

Inside of the Villa, this dialogue continues, with thin wooden poles referencing the surrounding forest, extending the metaphor of nature into the built environment and blurring the boundaries between the two. This approach parallels the philosophies of American architect Frank Lloyd Wright, who similarly sought to align his structures with their natural surroundings.

The selection of materials for Villa Mairea was dictated by Aalto's affinity for the organic and the regional. Poole (2017) provides material details as birchwood, Finland's national tree, was prominently used in the interior design, adding to the villa's sense of place. Colquhoun (2002) interprets the birch poles emulating the surrounding forest, and their presence inside the villa served to blur the boundary between the interior and exterior spaces, an important aspect of Aalto's organic design philosophy (Figure 2.5).



Figure 2.4: Maire Gullichsen's studio's organic form contrasting against the Modernist white box. The photograph was taken by the author in Helsinki in May 2022.



Figure 2.5: Approaching Villa Mairea surrounded by birch forests. The photograph was taken by the author in Helsinki in May 2022.

The structural design of Villa Mairea can be considered a masterclass in Aalto's blend of organic and geometric forms. For instance, according to S. Weston (2020) the main entrance is protected by an awning that protrudes from a classic Modernist white box, juxtaposed against a curving wooden extension. Intricate architectural design decisions, as seen in Aalto's integration of materials and techniques not only from a Finnish aesthetic perspective but also a cultivation of his transcultural interpretations, reflect Aalto's intention to integrate elements that stand in contrast to the brutal mechanicalness of the modern world. TUnwin (2020) mentions this bold interplay of forms creates a dynamic tension that is a characteristic feature of Aalto's architecture.

In conclusion, the design and development of Villa Mairea can be considered to encapsulate Aalto's organic architecture philosophy, his regionalist approach to material selection, his innovative structural design, and his masterful composition of spaces.

Chapter 3

ALVAR AALTO

3.1 Aalto's Architectural Design Philosophy

Alvar Aalto, one of the most influential architects of the 20th century, left an indelible mark on the discipline with his human-centric design approach. Quantrill (1990) goes on to explain Aalto's architectural philosophy, often encapsulated as organic architecture, was delineated by a steadfast commitment to an amalgamation of form and function that fosters a sense of belonging and connectivity . This philosophy found its roots in the principles that Martin Heidegger (2006) detailed in his theory of dwelling, most notably the tenet that architectural spaces should transcend mere physical constructs to become places that enhance and support human experiences.

Quantrill (1990) further explains Aalto's architectural philosophy as hallmarked by a deep reverence for the natural environment, cultural milieu, and the well-being of its inhabitants. According to Schildt (2007), Aalto's close relationships with his father, a topographer, and his grandfather, a forestry engineer, informed his upbringing and gave him the ability to establish an intricate relationship between his architectural designs and nature. This gave him a special sensitivity to the Finnish landscape Schildt (2007). His frequent use of organic

forms and natural materials like wood can be linked to this natural aesthetic permeated his designs. A prime example of this is the Villa Mairea, designed to integrate seamlessly with its forest setting while reflecting the cultural and aesthetic values of its owners, as also stated multiple times by Schildt (1998).

Aalto's emphasis on the human scale and experience is a defining characteristic of his philosophy. Schildt (1998) interprets Aalto's design of the Villa Mairea, for instance, as a manifestation of careful consideration of scale in relation to its inhabitants, utilizing materiality and spatial configuration to cultivate a sense of comfort and belonging.

In pursuit of form and function synthesis, Aalto transcended the boundaries of pure architectural design, venturing into product and furniture design, thereby further providing an idea for us to comment on his dedication to the user experience. Kirkham (1998) mentions on Aalto's human-centered, organic designs of furniture pieces, such as the Paimio Chair (1931–32) and the Stool 60 (1933), underscoring Aalto's commitment to ergonomics, comfort, and aesthetic harmony. Aalto's achievements in furniture design also amplified his international recognition through the Artek furniture company and its motto "För ökad mondial aktivitet," translating to "For increased international activity" as also mentioned by Artek (n.d.) (Figure 3.1)[1]. As Pelkonen Laaksonen, Micheli, and Pelkonen (2018) asserts, "Buildings don't move and circulate, but furniture and photographs do. Photographs further helped Aalto's architecture overcome its sedentary problem and distance from the cultural capitals of the world" (p. 56).

According to Laaksonen, Micheli, and Pelkonen (2018), Aalto's growing influence and connections in the international architectural realm were markedly bolstered when he became the Finnish representative of the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) in 1929 (p. 48). As further mentioned by Laaksonen, Micheli, and Pelkonen (2018), this transition introduced Aalto to

[1]The ultimate sign that Aalto was fully aware that the Modern Movement was based on the circulation of people, images, ideas, and objects came with the founding of the furniture company Artek in 1935, in collaboration with art historian Nils-Gustav Hahl and artist and patron Maire Gullichsen." See; Pelkonen, "Aalto's Entangled Geographies" in *Alvar Aalto Beyond Finland, vol 2 Projects, Buildings, and Networks*, p. 55

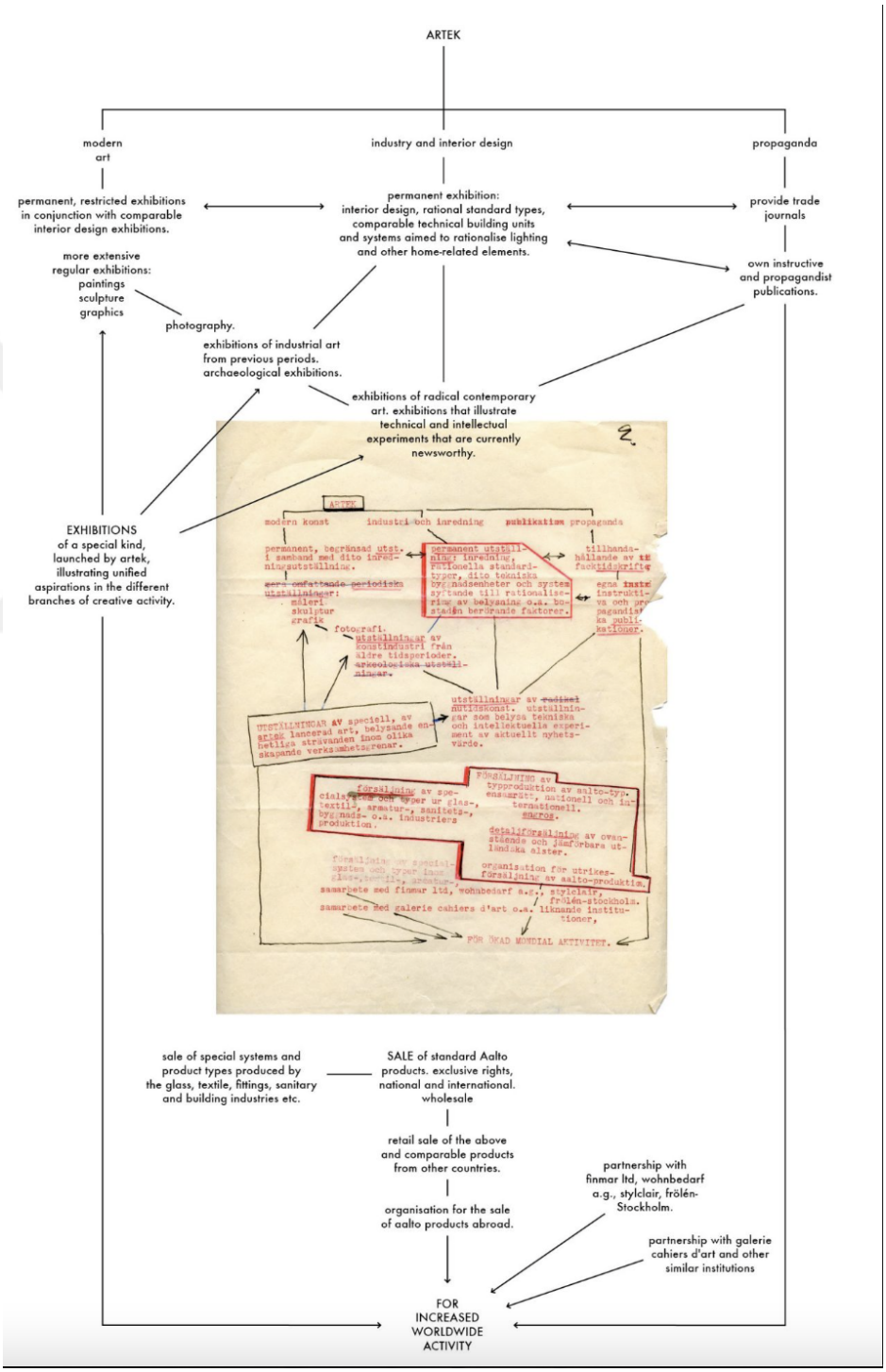


Figure 3.1: Artek Manifest, 1935. Artek (n.d.)

luminaries such as Sigfried Giedion, the organization's secretary-general, Walter Gropius, a consequential architect and head of the Bauhaus, and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, a Bauhaus teacher with a distinct proficiency in photography and film (p. 48). Laaksonen, Micheli, and Pelkonen (2018) suggest Aalto's participation in the Frankfurt meeting on Minimum Dwelling served as a significant milestone in his career, illuminating his understanding of architecture as a discipline extending beyond buildings to encompass education, discussion, and publication (p. 48). This expansive view of architectural culture resonates with Aalto's interpretation of architecture as it can correlate to dwelling. Aalto's choice of associations can be interpreted as an underlining to his understanding that his architectural influence would be amplified through both personal interactions and professional collaborations across these expansive domains.

Laaksonen, Micheli, and Pelkonen (2018) discusses in Aalto Beyond Finland, how Alvar Aalto's exposure to the international Modern Movement increased after he became the Finnish representative of CIAM in 1929. Laaksonen, Micheli, and Pelkonen (2018) adds that this led to him meeting influential architects such as Sigfried Giedion, Walter Gropius, and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, who helped shape his architectural philosophy (p. 48).

> "Aalto's access to the people and ideas that formed the international Modern Movement expanded significantly after he became the Finnish representative of CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne/International Congress of Modern Architecture) in 1929, when attended the Frankfurt meeting on Minimum Dwelling. It is there that he met Sigfried Giedion, who was a secretary-general of the organization. [...] in addition to Giedion, Walter Gropius, influential architect, author, and head of the Bauhaus, and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, an artist as well as a teacher at the Bauhaus, whose expertise was photography and film. His choice of friends underscores that he knew from the start that architecture culture not only encompasses buildings but also education, discussion, and publication." (Laaksonen, Micheli, & Pelkonen, 2018), p. 48).

Relph's Relph (1976) principles of place-making can suggest a resonance in Aalto's design approach. Aalto viewed local culture, history, and context as critical constituents of his design process, aspiring to create spaces that nurture a sense of community, identity, and belonging. According to Gullichsen et al. (1998), Aalto's design of Villa Mairea demonstrated sensitivity to landscape and cultural context, integrating Finnish and Japanese dwelling concepts to create a meaningful and engaging space.

3.2 Alvar Aalto's Finnish Romanticism and Regional Approach

Alvar Aalto's architecture, set forth an influential approach by the dual undercurrents of Finnish National Romanticism and the Modern Movement, crafted a distinctive, humanistic, and regionally inspired design language that resonated globally as mentioned by Quantrill (1990). S. Weston (2020) goes on to state that the synthesis of regionalism and universalism is masterfully exemplified in Villa Mairea, wherein Finnish motifs and materials are interwoven with the aesthetics of modernism to create a meaningful dialogue between the local and the global. S. Weston (2020) adds that this dialogue is poignantly illustrated in the use of birch wood, symbolic of Finland's national tree, to evoke a sense of place, and the adoption of a basic L-shaped plan, a design common among Scandinavian architects due to the region's dramatically fluctuating sun paths. Giedion (2009) adds to the idea of Finland's influence on Alvar Aalto's decision, by saying "Finland is wherever Aalto goes" (p. 620) [2]. While the touches of Finland's nature can be seen in Aalto's design decisions, Giedion (2009) also argues that Aalto has an ever-changing design language, and not only persists with the touches from Finland's nature.

[2]Giedion expanded his book in its 8th edition in 1949 to include an extensive chapter about Alvar Aalto. The chapter *'Alvar Aalto: Elemental and Contemporary'* became the most inclusive chapter in Giedion's book *Space, Time and Architecture*, 8th edition, 1949. See; Pallasmaa, *Villa Mairea 1938-39*, 1998 and Pelkonnen's chapter *'Aalto's Entagled Geographies'* in *Aalto Beyond Finland, vol.2,* 2018.

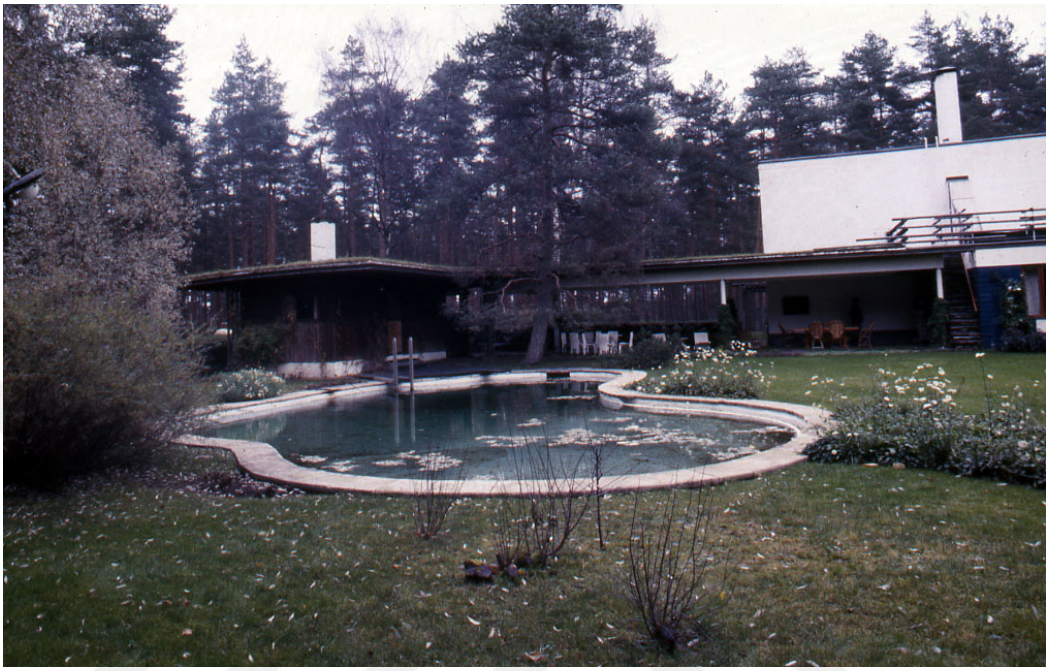


Figure 3.2: Pool of Villa Mairea. Photograph courtesy of Alvar Aalto Archives

> "Aalto is restless. He does not always remain in the pine and birch forests of Finland" (Giedion (2009), p. 621)

Aalto's design philosophy, though interpreted as rooted in the conceptual framework of organic architecture, eschewed rigid adherence to its principles. Instead, Hynynen (2014) mentions that Aalto's designs were marked by an organic reinterpretation of the environment, epitomized in the kidney bean-shaped swimming pool of Villa Mairea, an homage to the meandering bends of a Finnish lake (Figure 3.2). S. Weston (2020) also adds to the idea as the villa's organic forms serve to soften the harsh geometrical constructs of conventional modernism, testifying to Aalto's commitment to humanizing modernist materials and forms (Figure 3.3). S. Weston (2020) continues to this approach as it is said to be integral to Aalto's vision of architecture as a mediator in the transition from a craft and agrarian society to an urbanized industrial nation, ensuring that the fundamental bond between humanity and nature remained intact.

Aalto's architectural designs diverged from the restrictive geometrical forms characteristic of Internationalist architecture, incorporating regional nuances



Figure 3.3: Exterior of Maire Gullichsen's Studio in Villa Mairea. The photograph was taken by the author in Noormarkku in May 2022.

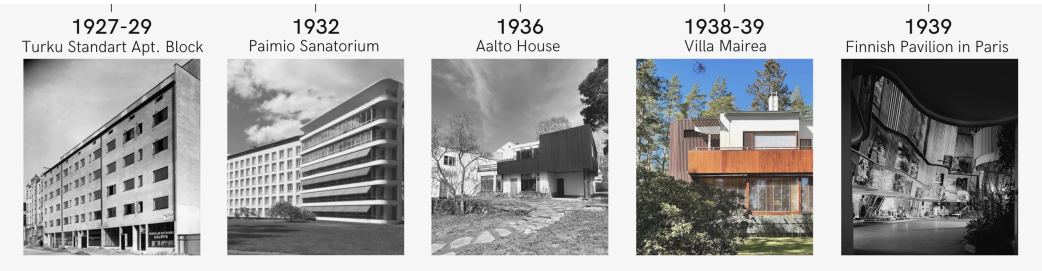


Figure 3.4: Aalto's prominent buildings in a chronological order to represent his change in architectural style. Photographs courtesy of Alvar Aalto Foundation website.

without resorting to the overt use of specific motifs over time as seen in his works investigated chronologically (Figure 3.4). According to Quantrill (1995) Aalto's designs represent a critical interpretation of Finnish Romanticism and regional influences, yet they resonate on an international scale, underscoring Aalto's nuanced design sensibility.

Laaksonen, Micheli, and Pelkonen (2018) elucidates that Aalto's architectural philosophy was shaped by his belief that architectural motifs could serve as cultural bridges, fostering an understanding and appreciation of Finnish culture both domestically and internationally. Laaksonen, Micheli, and Pelkonen (2018) adds that his architectural designs, therefore, embodied a transnational and Pan-European ethos, where boundaries were transcended and minds could meet. Laaksonen, Micheli, and Pelkonen (2018) further discusses how Alvar Aalto was influenced by a variety of cultures, including his native Finland, through his travels, education, and friendships (p.47).

> "In one way or another, we are all defined by the culture and society of our native countries, and Aalto was no exception. Yet the standard geographic narrative becomes questionable as soon as we begin to take into account that he was a polyglot, went to a classical lyceum, traveled extensively, had a vast network of international friends, subscribed to many foreign magazines, and willingly appropriated architectural ideas and imagery from other countries into his own work." (Laaksonen, Micheli, and Pelkonen (2018), p. 47)

Aalto's embrace of Finnish Romanticism and regional character extended beyond architecture to furniture design, as illustrated by his collaboration with Artek (Figure 3.5). Schildt (1998) mentions that this venture propelled Aalto onto the global stage, with his creations balancing local influences with universal appeal.

The concept of dwelling can be intrinsic to Aalto's architecture, exemplified in his thoughtful selection of materials, spatial design, and the harmonious integration of built and natural environments. Pallasmaa and Sato (2007) supports this idea as providing a salient instance as Villa Mairea, where Aalto utilized locally sourced timber, paying tribute to Finland's wood construction heritage, and implemented an open, fluid floorplan, reminiscent of Japanese dwelling concepts (Figure 3.6, Figure 3.7). These elements can underscore Aalto's regional approach and his interpretation of Finnish Romanticism. Giedion (2009) mentions his interaction with Aalto in *Space, Time and Architecture* to signify Aalto's interactions of East and West.

> "[...] Aalto suddenly exclaimed, "I see now, [Brancusi] You stand at the crossroads of Asia and Europe" Finland is also at the crossroads of East and West, but for the moment we would only stress the fact that many remnants of primeval and medieval times still remain alive there and intermingle with modern civilization. This double nature is instilled in Aalto too, and gives creative tension to his work." (Giedion (2009), p. 621)

Moreover, from Relph (1976) point of view, Aalto's incorporation of natural elements within Villa Mairea's design, such as the integration of a pine tree within the courtyard, exemplifies his philosophy of dwelling—designing spaces that coexist and interact symbiotically with their natural surroundings (Figure 3.8).

Collectively, Aalto's work can showcase a universal aesthetic that is imbued



Figure 3.5: Artek's first store in 1936. Artek (n.d.)



Figure 3.6: Use of naturally sourced materials on the exterior of Villa Mairea. The photograph is taken by the author in Noormarkku in May 2022.

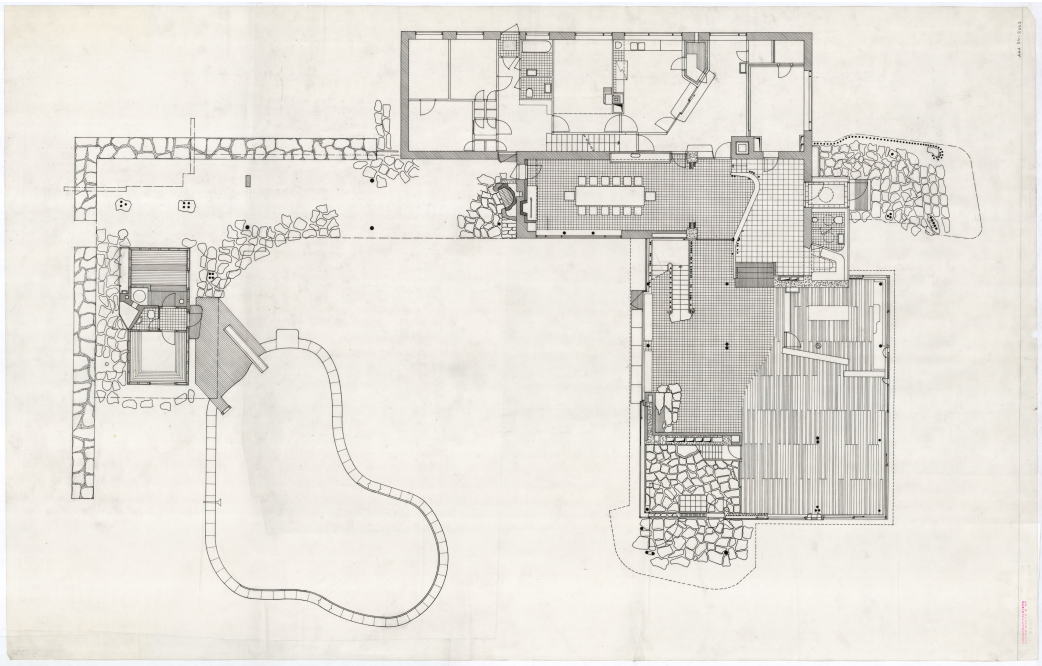


Figure 3.7: Fluid ground floor plan of Villa Mairea. Drawing courtesy of Alvar Aalto Archives. (AAA 84-2062)



Figure 3.8: Incorporation of pine trees within the courtyard of Villa Mairea. The photograph is taken by the author in Noormarkku in May 2022.

with regional specifics, a combination that significantly contributes to his international acclaim. Frampton (1993) comments on Aalto's architectural reinterpretation of the concept of dwelling by his integration of local sensibilities, material traditions, and universal design principles, thereby creating spaces that are deeply contextual yet globally appealing.

In conclusion, Alvar Aalto's integration of Finnish Romanticism with a regional approach can be considered as a manifestation of his quest to redefine modernism and humanize architecture. His work can be interpreted as a challenge to the universalism inherent in modernism, seeking to create structures that are not only of their time but deeply rooted in their specific geographic and cultural contexts. His enduring architectural legacy can attest to the transformative power of architecture when it is responsive to both its local environment and the global stage.

3.3 Alvar Aalto and Japan

> "The presentation of the building written by Aalto for *Arkkitehti* in 1939 shows his approach to the social aspects of the assignment:
>
> It is probably generally believed that there is a distinct opposition between small-scale, mass-produced housing on the one hand and a residence designed solely for the needs of an individual on the other. Thus, the special individual house has fallen somewhat outside the trend, which has made the production of small dwellings the main social issue. All the same, a case from architectural practice in which an individual lifestyle and conception of culture form the foundation for the assignment can have far-reaching, even social, significance in the long run. It points the way to new individualism; what with the continuing development of production machinery and improved forms of organization, this will make a more flexible consideration for the individual possible, even in places where the only semi-developed machinery of our primitive mass production leaves its mark on housing

> today. The individual case can be used as an experimental laboratory where things can be done which would be impossible with present-day mass production, and these experiments can spread further and become available to one and all as production methods advance." (Schildt (2007), pp. 413).

Alvar Aalto's design approach to the concept of dwelling goes beyond the dichotomy between mass-produced housing and individually tailored residences, as revealed in his presentation for *Arkkitehti* in 1939, mentioned by Schildt (2007) in *Alvar Aalto: His Life*. While societal focus had primarily been on small-scale mass housing, Aalto recognized the significance of individual houses that reflect unique lifestyles and cultural conceptions. He believed that such projects have the potential to shape new forms of individualism and challenge the limitations imposed by primitive mass production methods. Schildt (2007) mentions that these individual cases serve as experimental laboratories, allowing for design explorations that would be unattainable within the constraints of present-day mass production. Schildt (2007) further adds that through his emphasis on individualized design, Aalto anticipated the future advancements in production machinery and organizational systems that would enable more flexible and accessible housing solutions for individuals.

Designed as a private residence, Villa Mairea embodies Aalto's belief in the social significance of individual houses. The design of Villa Mairea was tailored to the needs and lifestyle of the owners, allowing for a highly personalized and unique living environment explained by Schildt (2007). The experimentation and exploration of design possibilities are evident throughout the villa, showcasing Aalto's ability to transcend the limitations of mass production. For instance, the integration of natural materials, such as wood and stone, provides a tactile and authentic experience that may not be possible to replicate through standardized mass production methods according to Schildt (2007) (Figure 3.9). Furthermore, the spatial organization of Villa Mairea reflects a deep understanding of the inhabitants' lifestyle and their desire for privacy and connection with nature (Figure

3.10). Gullichsen et al. (1998) explains the interplay between interior and exterior spaces, facilitated by the extensive use of glazing, blurring the boundaries between the built environment and the surrounding natural landscape, offering a unique living experience that harmoniously integrates individual needs with the natural environment (Figure 3.11).

Alvar Aalto's design approach to dwelling, as exemplified by Villa Mairea and his wider body of work, can be interpreted as a challenge to the prevailing trends and limitations of mass production by prioritizing individual lifestyles, cultural conceptions, and the potential for experimental design. His visionary outlook and recognition of the social significance of individual houses can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between architecture, society, and the individual. Schildt (2007) supports these idea by saying that through Aalto's innovative and humanistic design approach, Aalto set the stage for the advancement of individualized and flexible housing solutions in an era of evolving production methods.

Aalto's deep-rooted fascination and admiration for Japanese culture, as outlined in Schildt (2007)'s narrative, significantly influenced his architectural idiom, grounding it in an organic, material-sensitive approach similar to that found in Japanese architecture. Aalto's personal interactions with Japan's first ambassador to Finland, Hakotaro Ichikawa, and his wife Kayoko Ichikawa, opened avenues for mutual cultural exchanges that left indelible impressions on Aalto's perspective towards dwelling spaces (Schildt (2007), p. 355). Aalto's attention to architectural nuances, evidenced in his designs for hospitals, libraries, dwellings, and restaurants, echoed his fondness for Japanese tearooms and demonstrated an unmistakable Japanese aesthetic in his work. For example, his preference for natural materials such as pure wood and bamboo not only reflects Japanese architectural traditions but also denotes his commitment to creating harmonious, nature-inspired living environments (Schildt (2007), p. 354). The couple mentions their close acquaintance with Aalto, signifying his inspirations of Japan in Schildt's Schildt (2007) *Alvar Aalto His Life* [3] .

[3]Japan's first ambassador to Finland, Hakotaro Ichikawa, and his wife, Kayoko Ichikawa, stayed in Finland for almost 4 years, from March 1933 to July 1937. After they left Finland, they



Figure 3.9: Incorporation of natural materials Villa Mairea. The photograph is taken by the author in Noormarkku in May 2022.



Figure 3.10: The interplay between interior and exterior with the use of glazing in Villa Mairea. Photograph courtesy of Alvar Aalto Archives.

> "Of all the people I met in Finland, I particularly remember Alvar Aalto as a highly gifted man. He told me that he had read Marco Polo's memoirs in his youth and had conceived a liking for Japan. Later he had collected many books on our architecture, especially on tearooms. In his hospitals, libraries, dwellings and restaurants he used pure wood, even bamboo, with an unerring feeling for style." (Schildt (2007), p. 354).

The subtle and captivating charm of Aalto's furniture designs, utilizing thin laths of wood, can be seen as a testament to his adeptness at incorporating Japanese artistic influence into his work. Schildt (2007) comments on this influence as discernible in the way Aalto innovatively used wood in creating furniture pieces reminiscent of Japanese rattan chairs, but with a unique springiness that

published the book Finland Zakki (Essays on Finland), in which they included memoirs about not only Finland but also their acquaintances with the Aalto couple. Ambassador Hakotaro's wife Kayoko, includes very detailed information and impressions that span a period of years: the furniture shop - Artek (1936), and the Aalto couple's visit to Paris (1935). See; Schildt, *Alvar Aalto His Life*, p.354 - 355

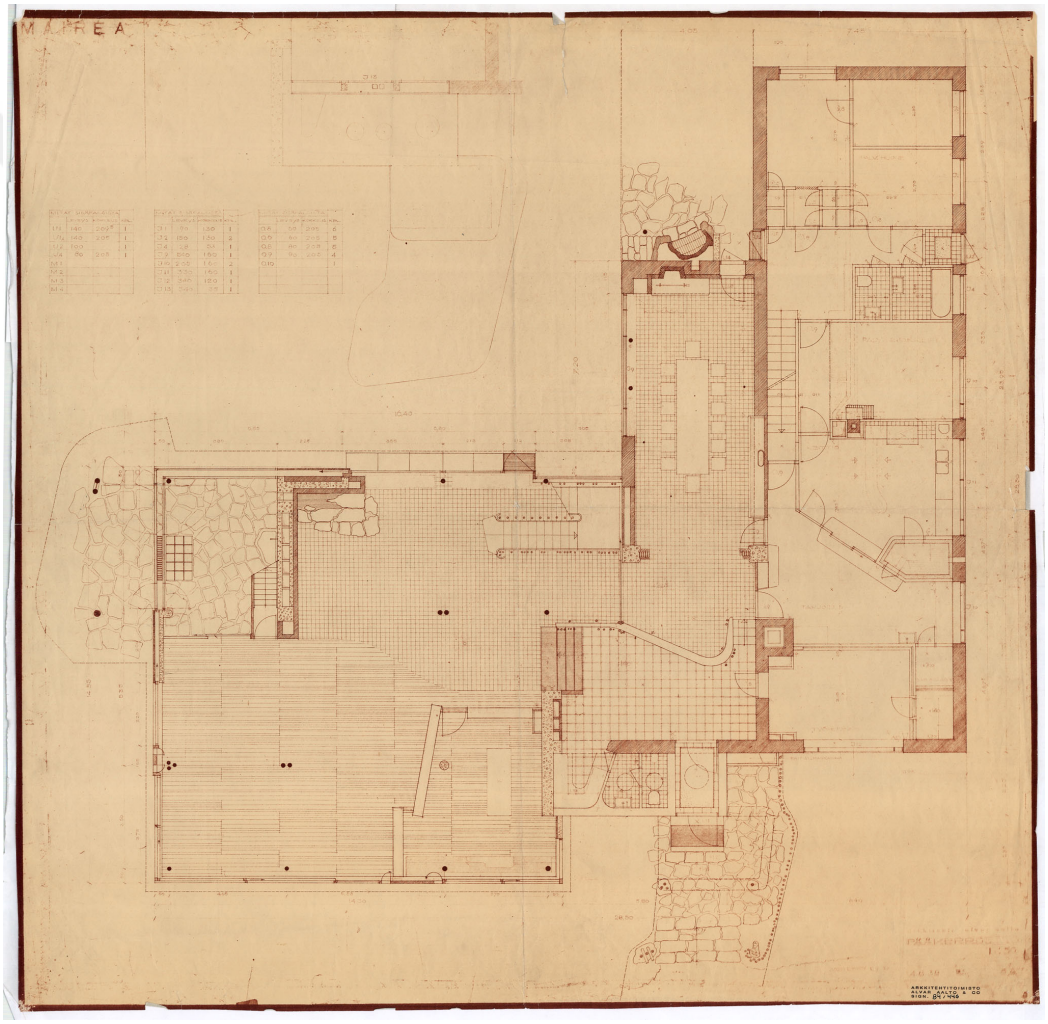


Figure 3.11: Aalto's sketch of the ground floor plan of Villa Mairea. Drawing courtesy of Alvar Aalto Archives. (AAA 84-446)

defied the rigidity of the original material. Aalto's works, according to Kayoko Ichikawa's account, were characterized by simplicity, functionality, and elegance, echoing the core principles of Japanese design (Schildt, 2007), p. 193).

Notably, According to Schildt (2007), Aalto's admiration for Japanese culture was not only limited to architecture; he was also attracted to the Japanese's deep-rooted love for nature, which he found exemplary and subsequently incorporated into his architecture. He acknowledged that the "limited range of raw materials and forms" in Japanese culture inspired him to craft diverse and new combinations in his works (Schildt (2007), p. 193). Aalto's architectural language can be interpreted to display an understanding of materials akin to Japanese architecture, instilling a sense of harmony and balance in his designs. Schildt (2007) provides evidence of his Japanese influences as being apparent in the Viipuri Library, where Gustaf Strengell (1935) observed Japanese characteristics in the building's interiors, particularly in the choice and treatment of pale wood. Overall, as Schildt (2007) also contributes that Aalto's Japanese influences and interpretations fostered a nature-bound, sensory architectural idiom, which he utilized to reimagine the concept of dwelling in his designs.

3.4 Alvar Aalto and Dwelling

Alvar Aalto's design approach to the concept of dwelling can be characterized by a deep understanding of the human experience, the integration of nature, and a sensitive response to cultural context. Pallasmaa and Sato (2007) states that Aalto's design philosophy emphasized the creation of spaces that foster a profound connection between individuals and their environment, transcending mere functionality and addressing the existential aspects of dwelling.

Both Pallasmaa and Sato (2007) and Schildt (1998) briefly mention that in Villa Mairea, Aalto's innovative approach to the dwelling is evident in his thoughtful integration of Finnish and Japanese architectural traditions. Similarly, Gullichsen et al. (1998) adds that the villa's spatial organization and planning reflect

a balance between openness and intimacy, creating a sense of privacy while maintaining a connection to the surrounding landscape. The interaction between interior and exterior spaces is achieved through the extensive incorporation of glazing and the strategic utilization of natural light. Gullichsen et al. (1998) comments on this design approach effectively diminishing the delineation between the constructed environment and the natural world, enabling occupants to experience a profound sense of cohesion and integration with their surrounding natural elements.

Aalto's attention to materiality and construction techniques further contribute to the concept of dwelling in his designs. Both Pallasmaa and Sato (2007) and Schildt (1998) from their own perspectives comments that Aalto skillfully employs natural materials, such as wood and stone, to create tactile and sensory experiences that evoke a sense of warmth, comfort, and authenticity. For example, based on my personal observations in Villa Mairea, the use of wooden surfaces, both in the interior and exterior, provides a tactile connection to nature almost as a continuation of the natural landscape and creates a welcoming atmosphere (Figure 3.12).

Furthermore, Aalto's designs incorporate elements of human scale and proportion, emphasizing the relationship between the individual and the built environment. Through careful consideration of spatial sequences, circulation patterns, and the arrangement of furniture, Pallasmaa and Sato (2007) articulate that Aalto creates spaces that invite human presence and interaction, encouraging a sense of community and fostering a deep sense of belonging through Gullichsen et al. (1998)'s commentaries.

Aalto's approach to dwelling extends beyond Villa Mairea to his other projects, such as the Paimio Sanatorium and the Finlandia Hall. In the Paimio Sanatorium, Schildt (2007) mentions that Aalto's design takes into account the therapeutic aspects of dwelling, incorporating elements of nature, light, and color to create an environment conducive to healing and well-being (Figure 3.13). In the Finlandia Hall, Schildt (2007) adds that Aalto's design reflects a sense of national identity and cultural pride, with careful attention to the integration of Finnish art and



Figure 3.12: The use of wood in the interior of Villa Mairea. Photograph courtesy of Alvar Aalto Archives.

craftsmanship, creating a space that resonates with the collective memory and spirit of the nation (Figure 3.14).

Aalto's approach is further enriched by his engagement with Japanese architectural traditions, as explored in Chiu, Niskanen, and Song (2017)'s study on the role of *Das Japanische Wohnhaus* in Aalto's design for his own house and studio in Riihitie. In the study it is mentioned that the influence of Japanese architecture on Aalto's work is evident in his careful attention to spatial organization, materiality, and the incorporation of nature (Chiu et al., 2017). Chiu et al. (2017) comments on Aalto's study of traditional Japanese dwellings, particularly the concept of "ma" or the experiential interval between spaces, inform his design principles and contribute to the creation of harmonious and contemplative living environments. For instance, Chiu et al. (2017) mentions in the article, that in his own house and studio, Aalto skillfully utilized sliding screens, natural materials, and seamless integration of indoor and outdoor spaces to create a sense of fluidity and connection with the surrounding environment (Figure



Figure 3.13: Paimio Sanatorium. The photograph was taken by Maija Holma, Alvar Aalto Foundation. *Paimio Sanatorium* (2022)



Figure 3.14: Finlandia Hall. The photograph was taken by Fethulla, Alvar Aalto Foundation. *Finlandia Hall* (2020)

3.15). Additionally, Aalto's adoption of Japanese concepts such as the "engawa" or transitional space between the interior and exterior, exemplifies his attention to the experiential qualities of dwelling as studied in *Das Japanische Wohnhaus* (Chiu et al., 2017). By incorporating elements from Japanese architecture into his own designs, Aalto's demonstration of a transcultural interpretation of dwelling that combines Finnish and Japanese sensibilities can be seen as a result in unique and deeply humanistic living spaces.

In summary, Alvar Aalto's design approach to the concept of dwelling can be characterized by a deep understanding of the human experience, a sensitive response to a cultural context, and a harmonious integration of nature. His designs, exemplified by Villa Mairea and other projects, can be interpreted to create spaces that evoke a profound sense of connection, belonging, and well-being through their thoughtful spatial organization, materiality, human scale, and attention to the human-nature relationship. Aalto's approach to dwelling can enrich our understanding of the complexities and nuances of human habitation and continues to inspire contemporary architectural practice.



Figure 3.15: Aalto's own house and studio in Munkkiniemi. The photograph is taken by the author in Munkkiniemi, Helsinki in May 2022.

Chapter 4

THE MULTICULTURAL TAPESTRY: FINNISH AND JAPANESE DWELLING CONCEPTS INTERWOVEN IN ALVAR AALTO'S ARCHITECTURAL LEGACY

In the sphere of architectural discourse, the notion of dwelling assumes an influential role, encapsulating the intricate interplay between individuals and their inhabited spaces. Based on the comments of Pallasmaa (1994) and Heidegger (2006), this concept transcends the physical boundaries of shelter, embodying existential, cultural, and emotional dimensions that construct our sense of connectivity, belonging, and identity within a structured environment. The divergent yet complementary dwelling concepts of Finland and Japan can provide valuable perspectives on how distinct cultures interpret and shape their architectural spaces, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of global

architectural practices.

Finnish dwelling is assumed to be characterized by a profound communion with nature and an emphasis on practical, human-centered design. According to Rapoport (2005), the essence of Finnish architecture lies in its harmonious integration with the surrounding landscape, drawing inspiration from serene forests, tranquil lakes, and expansive open spaces. The prevalent use of natural materials, particularly wood, is a testament to Finland's abundant forest resources and underpins the creation of a warm and inviting atmosphere. Alvar Aalto, a prominent figure in Finnish architecture, exemplified these dwelling concepts in his works, fostering a relationship with the natural environment and a design approach that prioritizes human well-being as mentioned by Schildt (1998).

Concurrently, the Japanese concept of dwelling can be mentioned as deeply embedded in the nation's rich cultural heritage, underscored by a profound reverence for nature. As Nitschke (1993) mentions, Japanese architecture harmonizes with the natural world, incorporating elements such as gardens, water features, and sliding screens that dissolve the demarcation between the indoor and outdoor environments. Similarly Yoshida (1935) notes that these principles are exemplified in traditional Japanese tea houses, spaces characterized by simplicity, tranquility, and appreciation for the ephemeral beauty of nature . The pioneering architect Tadao Ando has effectively translated these traditional dwelling concepts into contemporary architectural expressions, creating tranquil spaces that foster contemplation and respect the natural context (Bognar & Kuma, 2005).

Alvar Aalto, might assimilated both Finnish and Japanese dwelling concepts, yielding a transcultural interpretation within his designs. Aalto's architectural philosophy underscored a holistic approach, considering the emotional, social, and functional aspects of a space. His works, most notably the iconic Villa Mairea, may reflect a cultural synthesis of Finnish and Japanese influences, integrating natural materials, organic forms, and attention to human scale and well-being as mentioned previously by Pallasmaa (1994) and Schildt (1998).

Exploring the nuanced concepts of dwelling within the Finnish and Japanese

contexts and examining the transcultural interpretations manifested in Aalto's works offers profound insights into the intimate connections between culture, architecture, and human experience. This investigation illuminates the ways in which dwelling concepts shape architectural expressions, encapsulating societal aspirations, values, and cultural identities. Such an exploration can contribute significantly to the broader discourse on the cultural diversity and synthesis inherent in architectural design, thereby enriching our understanding of the multifaceted nature of global architectural practices.

4.1 Finnish Dwelling Traditions: An Interplay of Culture, Environment, and Pragmatism

The conception of traditional Finnish dwellings unfurls a complex tapestry of intertwined cultural values, environmental adaptations, and pragmatic necessities. According to Rapoport (2005), it accentuates the symbiotic relationship between a dwelling and its occupants, embedded within the larger socio-cultural milieu of Finnish society.

At the heart of Finnish dwellings, the philosophy of functionalism seems to be firmly entrenched. The design ethos primarily accords with the needs and requirements of the inhabitants rather than subscribing to any imposed stylistic dictum. The virtues of simplicity and utility are seen as paramount, ensuring each space serves a distinct purpose and avoids superfluous elements. Quantrill (1995) explains this pragmatic approach as distinctly visible in the layout of traditional Finnish houses, where communal spaces are strategically central, and private spaces are adequately secluded to ensure privacy.

Historically, as mentioned by Pallasmaa and Sato (2007), Finnish architecture has maintained a close-knit relationship with its natural surroundings, adapting to the country's austere climate, sparse population, and the expanse of its forests. This deep-seated respect for the natural environment is profusely mirrored in

traditional Finnish dwellings. The prevalent use of locally sourced materials, particularly wood, underscores the relationship between the built environment and the surrounding natural landscape as also stated by Rapoport (2005). This practice not only signifies sustainable building methods but also substantially enriches the aesthetic and sensory experiences of Finnish dwellings. Quantrill (1995) approaches the tactile texture, distinctive aroma, and visual appeal of wood to explain the contribution to a unique sensory resonance, emphasizing a harmonious connection between humans and nature.

The influence of climate is another critical determinant in the design of traditional Finnish dwellings. Architectural design strategies are significantly influenced by the necessity to alleviate the harshness of Finnish winters. This climatic consideration has resulted in distinctive features such as strategic spatial organization, enhanced insulation, and the pervasive presence of fireplaces in traditional Finnish dwellings, conferring both functional and aesthetic advantages according to Quantrill (1995).

The Finnish concept of dwelling transcends the physical realm to include sociocultural and psychological aspects. Based on my personal observations and experiences, the notion of communal living and social interaction are integral to Finnish dwellings. The sauna, an iconic symbol of Finnish culture, serves as a compelling illustration. As Lockwood (1977) explains, the sauna acts not merely as a physical space but also as a social and spiritual realm, underscoring the intricate relationships between dwelling, culture, and identity within Finnish society.

In essence, the traditional Finnish dwelling concept emerges as a profound reflection of Finnish culture and lifestyle, where functionality, reverence for nature, and social interaction are foundational principles. A comprehensive understanding of this concept offers a nuanced perspective into the worldview of Finnish society, elucidating the intricate interconnections between architecture, culture, and nature.

4.2 Traditional Japanese Dwelling: A Synthesis Of Culture, Philosophy, And Environment

The traditional Japanese dwelling concept, familiarized through Pallasmaa (1994) lens, epitomizes a vibrant fusion of cultural, philosophical, and environmental influences, engendering a unique architectural expression that encapsulates the ethos of Japanese society as Nute (2019) explains. Paramount to this concept is the principle of harmony with nature, manifest in the seamless integration of indoor and outdoor spaces, the application of natural materials, and the overarching objective of cultivating tranquility and serenity.

A distinctive feature of traditional Japanese dwellings is the emphasis placed on the relationship between the constructed environment and the natural milieu. The concept of "engawa," indicative of this relationship, pertains to the intermediary space bridging the interior and exterior, effectively dissolving boundaries, and facilitating an organic integration with nature (Bognar & Kuma, 2005). For instance as mentions in *Das Japanische Wohnhaus* by Yoshida (1935), the "tokonoma," a recessed alcove within the living space, typically showcases a scroll or floral arrangement reflecting the season's transience, thereby transporting the essence of nature indoors (Figure 4.1).

Nute (2019) explains the spatial organization in traditional Japanese dwellings as underscored by the concept of "ma," referring to the dynamic interplay between filled and void spaces, fostering rhythm, equilibrium, and fluidity. Based on Pallasmaa (1994), this notion can be discerned in the sliding screens or "fusuma" (Figure 4.2) and "shoji," (Figure 4.3) which enable flexible configurations and space transformations to accommodate fluctuating needs (Figure 4.4). Additionally, the design of "tatami" mats plays a significant role in delineating spatial hierarchy and orchestrating movement within the dwelling as mentioned by Yoshida (1935).

Furthermore, the application of natural materials is integral to traditional Japanese dwellings. Wood, particularly "sugi" (cedar) and "hinoki" (cypress), is



32 Tokonoma in Kyaku-den, Kōjō-in Temple (see Fig. 16)



33 Veranda in Kyaku-den, Kōjō-in Temple (see Fig. 16)

42

Figure 4.1: Tokonoma shown in *Das Japanische Wohnhaus* by Tetsura Yoshida, p. 42. Yoshida (1935)

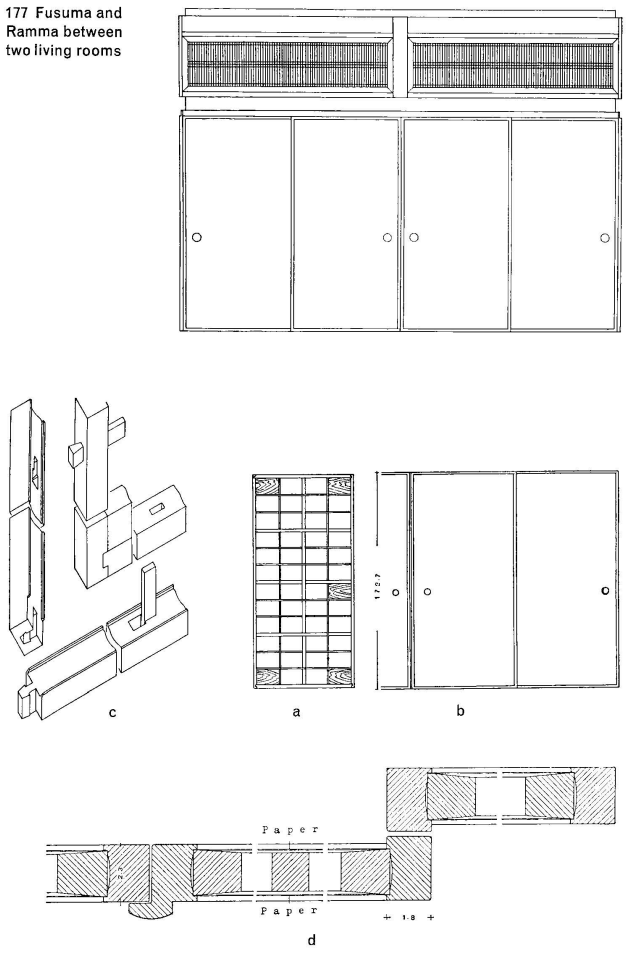
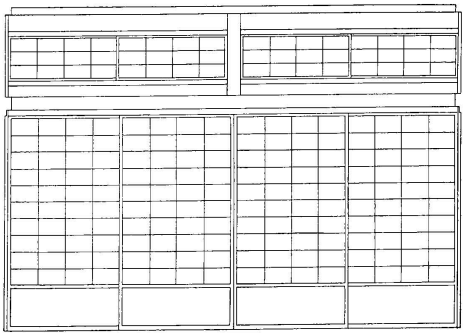


Figure 4.2: "Fusuma" shown in *Das Japanische Wohnhaus* by Tetsura Yoshida, p. 151. Yoshida (1935)



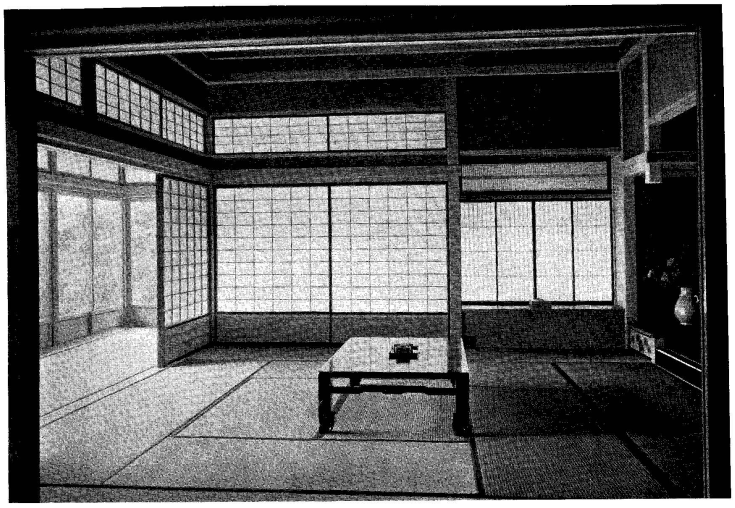
169 Room with Shōji, glass windows and paper windows which can slide vertically



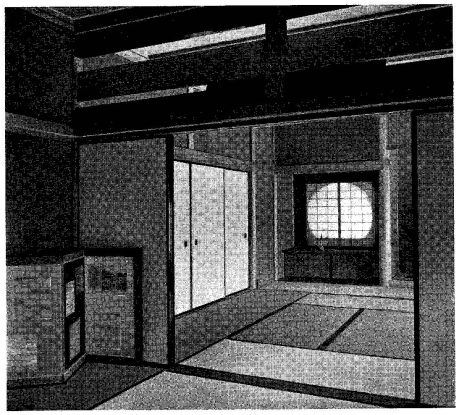
170 Shōji and Ramma between living room and veranda as seen from the living room

147

Figure 4.3: "Shoji" shown in *Das Japanische Wohnhaus* by Tetsura Yoshida, p. 147. Yoshida (1935)



109 Reception room of a house in Tōkyō. Order prevails in the room



110 Living room with an ante-room on the upper floor (see Fig. 112)

108

Figure 4.4: "Fusuma" and "shoji" shown in *Das Japanische Wohnhaus* by Tetsura Yoshida, p. 108. Yoshida (1935)

prized for its longevity, natural aesthetics, and warm visual qualities (Bognar & Kuma, 2005). According to Pallasmaa (2001) the craftsmanship involved in joinery techniques, such as "kanawa tsugi" and "shachi tsugi," exemplifies meticulous attention to detail and deep reverence for the intrinsic qualities of the materials.

In summary, the traditional Japanese dwelling concept seems to embody a holistic approach that combines nature, spatial organization, and the use of natural materials. By integrating indoor and outdoor spaces, cultivating a tranquil and serene atmosphere, and prioritizing craftsmanship and natural materials, traditional Japanese dwellings offer a tangible reflection of Japan's profound cultural values and philosophies.

4.3 The Interplay of Finnish and Japanese Dwelling Concepts: A Synergy of Architectural Traditions

The intricate relationship between Finland and Japan is can be interlaced within their respective architectural histories, as the distinctive architectural characteristics and philosophical foundations inherent in each culture have reciprocally influenced one another over time. An eminent example of this cultural dialogue is embodied in Alvar Aalto's integration of Japanese design principles into his architectural practice, as elucidated in Chiu et al. (2017)'s study, *"Humanizing Modern Architecture: The Role of Das Japanische Wohnhaus in Alvar Aalto's Design for His Own House and Studio in Riihitie"* in the chapter *"Japan in Finland."*

To fully comprehend this architectural symbiosis, it is imperative to consider Finland's historical predilection for organic architecture, which manifests itself in designs that harmonize with both nature and human experience as stated bt Rapoport (2005). The Finnish architectural philosophy is anchored in a deep respect for nature, typified by the extensive utilization of wood and a predilection

for designing structures that marry functionality with aesthetic appeal. According to Nitschke (1993), this cultural tenet closely aligns with Japanese design principles, which underscore simplicity, the use of natural materials, and the seamless integration of built structures within their surrounding landscapes. Chiu et al. (2017) states that this shared veneration of nature and simplicity constitutes the basis of the Finnish-Japanese architectural discourse.

The fluidity and multipurpose nature of spaces within dwellings bear testament to the Japanese design ethos that values adaptability in living spaces based on Itoh and Futagawa (1972). Pallasmaa and Sato (2007) interprets Aalto's successful melding of these Japanese design elements with his architectural style underscores the shared cultural appreciation for nature, simplicity, and functionality between the two nations. For instance, the fluidity and multipurpose nature of the space, a defining characteristic of Japanese design, augment the Aalto House in Riihitie's overarching sense of harmony and balance. Chiu et al. (2017) puts into words as these design choices demonstrate Aalto's capacity to deftly fuse elements of Japanese design with his distinctive architectural style, thereby embodying the shared appreciation of Finnish and Japanese dwelling cultures.

In summary, an exploration of Finland and Japan's architectural histories unravels a rich tapestry of shared cultural values and mutual inspiration. The shared thread of reverence for nature, coupled with the simplicity of design in both nations, has not only facilitated an engaging dialogue between the two cultures but has also engendered a transcultural architectural language that continues to reverberate in contemporary architectural discourse today. To gain an all-encompassing understanding of the mutual inspirations and integrated approaches in architectural design and dwelling concepts between Finland and Japan, this study delves further into the traditional Finnish and Japanese dwelling approaches.

4.4 Tracing the Threads of Finnish and Japanese Dwelling

Based on Rapoport (1969) and Quantrill (1995) interpretations, the dwelling cultures of Finland and Japan, despite their disparate geographical origins, converge on several pivotal principles deeply entrenched in simplicity, the natural realm, and functionality, thereby presenting a compelling nexus for architectural exploration.

According to Quantrill (1995), the Finnish dwelling culture is a testament to a profound bond with the environment, as exemplified by the prevalent use of sustainable local materials such as wood and logs in traditional architecture. Quantrill (1995) further delves into this choice of material that extends beyond mere sustainability, playing a crucial role in thermal insulation and thus fostering comfortable indoor conditions amidst harsh Finnish winters. Moreover, as Quantrill (1995) states the aesthetics of Finnish dwellings are intimately intertwined with these material selections, with wood and logs imparting a sense of warmth and an idiosyncratic aesthetic that harmonizes with the natural environment.

In parallel, the traditional Japanese dwelling culture accords high priority to achieving harmony with nature, a principle epitomized by the 'engawa,' a veranda-like element that subtly blurs the demarcation between interior and exterior as explained by Yoshida (1935) (Figure 4.5). In Itoh and Futagawa (1972) words, this principle is echoed in the use of natural, locally sourced materials like wood, bamboo, and paper in traditional Japanese dwellings, reinforcing broader cultural values of frugality and reverence for nature. Furthermore, the spatial organization within traditional Japanese homes, characterized by flexibility and the efficient utilization of space, often facilitated by sliding screens or 'shoji,' exhibits a high degree of functionality based on Isozaki (n.d.).

Despite their unique cultural characteristics, both Finnish and Japanese



40 Part of the Imperial Katsura Palace with raised wooden veranda

48

Figure 4.5: Engawa shown in *Das Japanische Wohnhaus* by Tetsura Yoshida, p. 48. Yoshida (1935)

dwelling cultures foster a transcultural dialogue through shared principles of harmony with nature, sustainability, and spatial functionality. For instance Pallasmaa and Sato (2007) explains, that the design of Villa Mairea by Finnish architect Alvar Aalto encapsulates a transcultural interpretation, deftly integrating Finnish and Japanese dwelling concepts into a harmonious synthesis that mirrors a mutual respect for nature, along with an emphasis on functionality and comfort.

Consequently, this exploration of Finnish and Japanese dwelling cultures illuminates a deeper understanding of how cultural principles can inform architectural design, furnishing valuable insights into the potential for transcultural interpretation within architecture.

Chapter 5

THE CASE OF FINNISH AND JAPANESE DWELLING IN ALVAR AALTO'S VILLA MAIREA

5.1 Historical Background of Villa Mairea

'It will be a good house, you will see.'

- Harry Gullichsen to his wife Maire in 1939 [1].

In 1937, the Gullichsen and Aalto couples, known for their social commitment, embarked on an unconventional venture that contrasted with their social vision. In Schildt (2007)'s words, they constructed Villa Mairea, "Finland's most exclusive millionaire's villa" in Noormarkku (p.412). This endeavor can be explained

[1]Kirsi Gullichsen shares this intimate moment of the couple at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1939, only after seeing their new homes in photographs. Before Villa Mairea's success in modern architecture, the Gullichsen couple was convinced that they had achieved their ideals of providing a house ahead of its time with the hard work and collaboration of the Aalto couple. See; Kirsi Gullichsen's chapter *'An Ideal Setting'* in *Inside the Villa Mairea Art, Design, and Interior Architecture,* 2009, p. 11.

as a paradoxical manifestation of their social utopia. Schildt (2007) explains, Harry and Maire Gullichsen viewed themselves as pioneers in advocating for a better world, an ideal they sought to physically represent through architectural design (p. 413). According to Schildt (2007), Maire's familial lineage also played a role, as her grandfather, Anti Ahlström, had established a legacy of creating magnificent homes reflecting the ethos of their respective generations, especially the Noormarkku site (p. 413). Schildt (2007) continues to add that for the Gullichsens, Villa Mairea was not just a lavish home but an illustration of the ideal lifestyle they envisioned for everyone in the approaching era of elevated living standards and a classless society.

> "For them [Maire and Harry Gullichsen] it was a question of demonstrating the new generation's idea of the good life that the rising standard of living would soon bring to everyone. In the classless society they dreamed of, industrial managers and high civil servants would naturally be at their disposal the reception rooms their professional functions called for, as well as the facilities for a well-balanced family life." (Schildt (2007), pp. 412-413).

In 1927-28, Aalto was commissioned to design a functionalist standard apartment block in Turku (Schildt, 2007) (Figure 5.1). In the following years, he was engaged in several other workers' dwellings and projects focusing on the *Rationalization of the Minimum Apartment exhibition* (Pallasmaa (1998), p. 70) (Figure 5.2). Pallasmaa (1998) mentions before Aalto started to take part in the design of Villa Mairea, he was taking part in social housing projects to provide functional and ideal living spaces for everyone. One of the main aims of these projects was that they had to be accessible to society. Therefore, Pallasmaa (1998) states, accepting the project of Villa Mairea created a dilemma and a contradictory challenge for Aalto (p. 70). Pallasmaa (1998) also states the dilemma and contradictory stage in Aalto's career in Alvar Aalto's words in *Villa Mairea 1938-39* [2].

[2] Aalto wrote 7 years prior to the commission of Villa Mairea in *Alvar Aalto, Luonnoksia (Sketches)* (Göran Schildt, ed.), translated by Juhani Pallasmaa. See; Pallasmaa, ed., *Villa Mairea 1938-39*, p.70.



Figure 5.1: Standart apartment block in Turku in 1927-28. The photograph was taken by Aino Aalto, courtesy of Alvar Aalto Foundation. *Standart Apartment Block in Turku* (2018)

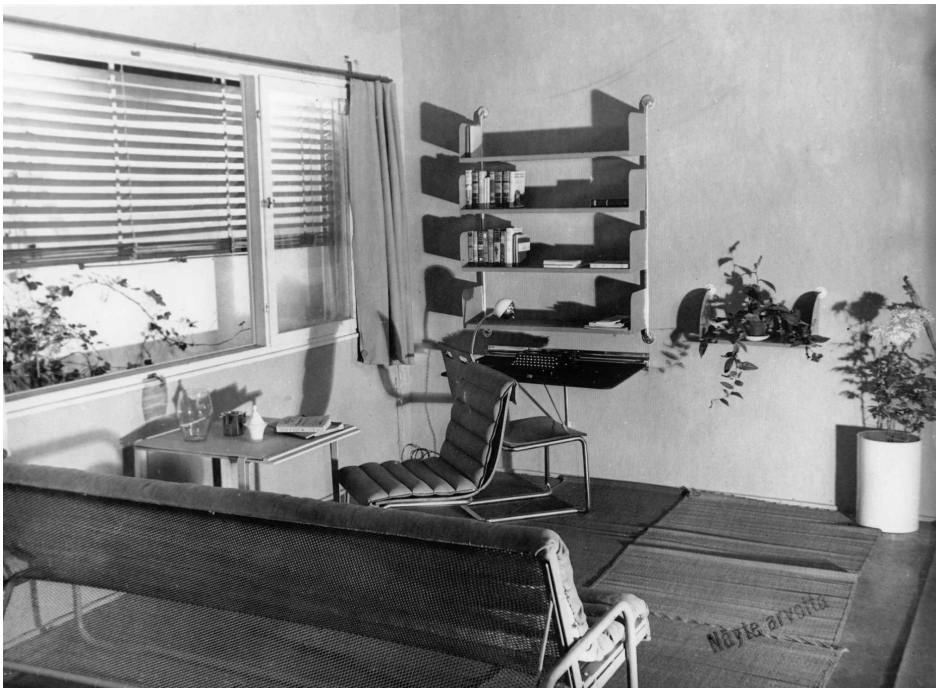


Figure 5.2: Rationalization of the Minimum Apartment exhibition at Helsinki Art Hall in 1930. Foundation (2019)

> "A luxury house, a large residence, does not contain any problems, whereas every aspect of the minimum dwelling projects a concentrated challenge (...). Only through this we can find the scientific conditions for the standard dwelling of the classless society (...)." (Pallasmaa (1998), p.70).

Despite the controversies, Villa Mairea was commissioned by Aalto as an experimental and innovative project as a solution to the design intricacies of social dwellings. According to Pallasmaa (1998) this served as the rationalization of the extravagant and privileged commission of Villa Mairea within the Finnish society. From this perspective, it can be argued that architectural projects, regardless of their nature, such as residential dwellings, medical facilities, educational institutions, or industrial complexes, have the potential to yield insights that extend beyond the confines of their respective programs and have broader implications for the field of architecture (Poole (2017) p. 4). Poole Poole (2017) mentions the Aaltos explanation in the chapter Villa Mairea:

> "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."(Poole (2017) p. 4).

The Gullichsen couple allowed Aalto to work freehand without any economic restraints to support the adequate environment for this experimental laboratory according to Pallasmaa (1998). Paul David Pearson (1977) adds in Mairea Gullichsen's recollection in *Alvar Aalto and the International Style*: "We told him that he should regard it as an experimental house; if it didn't work out, we wouldn't blame him for it." (p.168). Pallasmaa (1998) notes that at the beginning of the design process, nothing was clear about the phases even the exact site location and specifics. Pallasmaa (1998) adds that later in the various stages of the process alterations and adaptations were made according to the innovative

collaboration of the clients and Aalto's architectural vision and implementation of the villa.

The Gullichsens pushed Aalto to experiment and be innovative, but he was reluctant to take full advantage of the free hand given by the couple according to Schildt (2007). Pallasmaa (1998) goes on to provide details in reality, the couple expressed their dissatisfaction with the initial depiction of the residence, stating that it lacked sufficient ambition. The individual advised Aalto that he has the potential to improve his performance (Pallasmaa, 1998). In an interview, *'The Villa as an Experiment for Aalto'*, with the Gullichsen couple's son Kristian Gullichsen, Hiroshi Saito (2005) reveals that Maire Gullichsen was dissatisfied by the initial proposal saying: "No, Alvar, you can do better," to further encourage him to discover and experiment (p. 184).

> "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 Revisiting the Modern Project 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..." (Poole (2017), p. 5)

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 (Figure 5.3) [3]. It was not unrealistic, therefore, to believe that innovations

[3]The vase is derived from Alvar Aalto's original sketches for a collection of glassware known as "Eskimoerindens skinnbuxa" (translated as "The Eskimo woman's leather trousers"). These sketches were initially created by Aalto as part of his submission for a design competition organized by the Karhula-Iittala Glassworks in 1936. The initial collection of glassware was specifically crafted for display within the Finnish pavilion at the Paris World Exhibition in 1937. See; the official webpage of Alvar Aalto Foundation, *https://www.alvaraalto.fi/en/work/aalto-vase/*

made in a large villa for private clients, could translate to conventional housing and, later, industrially manufactured dwellings and public buildings.

The Villa Mairea can be considered a remarkable fusion of Aalto's principles of regionalism and universalism. The architecture softens the stark geometric forms that were typical of its time, introducing gentle curves and humanist shapes that stand in contrast to the linear forms of traditional modernism. S. Weston (2020) explains the result as, it is a composition characterized by contrasts: organic and geometric, humanist and technological, regional and universal.

A significant feature of the Villa Mairea can be its deep connection with the natural surroundings, which epitomizes Aalto's organic approach. On personal observations, this connection is symbolized through a series of thin wooden poles that extend from the overhang, emulating the forest that envelopes the Villa (Figure 5.4, Figure 5.5). The poles continue into the interior of the Villa, creating an illusion of looking through thin tree trunks (Figure 5.6). Schildt (2007) explains this blending of nature and human space as a recurring theme in Aalto's work, drawing parallels with the approach of American architect Frank Lloyd Wright.

Attention to detail is another hallmark of the Villa Mairea. It features a kidney bean-shaped swimming pool, believed to be one of the first of its kind and a range of other curvilinear elements that underscore Aalto's appreciation for the natural world and his aim to contrast the harsh mechanicalness of the modern world with the beauty of life, according to S. Weston (2020).

The Villa Mairea can be interpreted from a strong sense of regionalism, as can be evidenced by its use of local materials and motifs. The birch wood used in the interior furniture and decor is Finland's national tree, contributing to the Villa's "sense of place". The villa also boasts a traditional sauna, a common feature in Finnish homes, and its basic L-shaped plan is typical among Scandinavian architects (Figure 5.7). According to S. Weston (2020), these regional elements highlight Aalto's intention to create a distinct Finnish identity following the Finnish Civil War in 1918, and during Finland's transition from an agrarian society to an urbanized industrial nation.



Figure 5.3: Aalto Vase. The photograph was taken by the author in Helsinki in May 2022.



Figure 5.4: Poles under the entrance canopy of Villa Mairea as a reference to the continuation of the birch forests surrounding the villa. The photograph was taken by the author in Helsinki in May 2022.

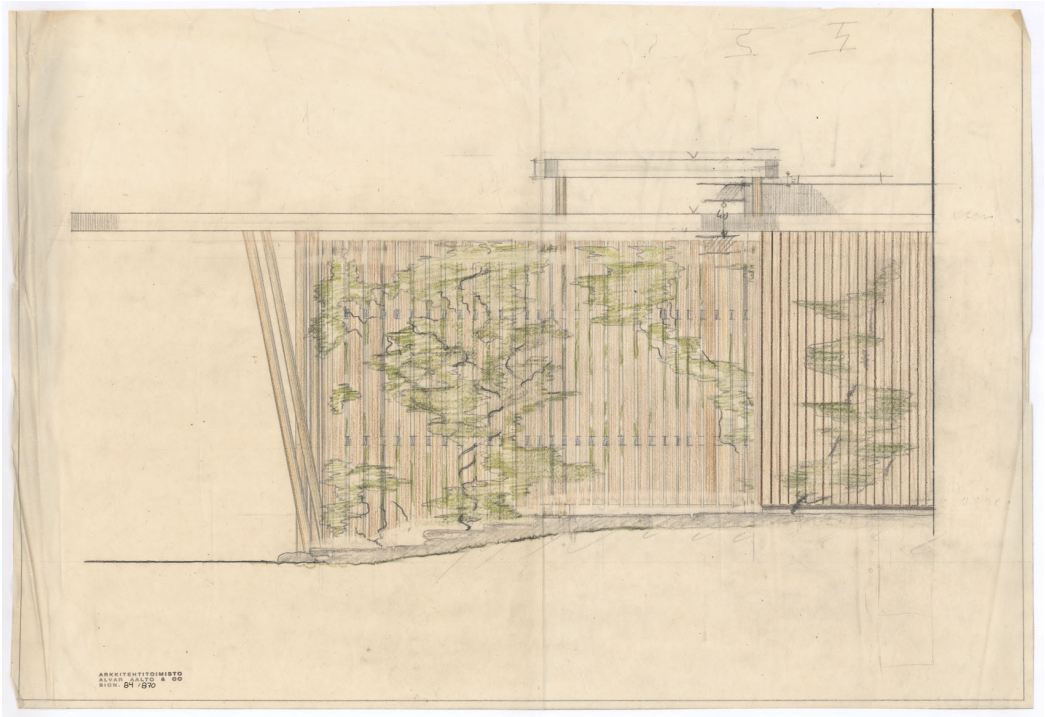


Figure 5.5: Drawing of the entrance canopy. Drawing courtesy of Alvar Aalto Foundation Archives. (AAA, sign 84-870)



Figure 5.6: Continuation of the wooden poles inside the villa, creating an illusion of looking through thin tree trunks. Photograph taken in the 1960s. Image courtesy of Sussanna Vestervik at the Mairea Foundation



Figure 5.7: Sauna in Villa Mairea overlooking the organically formed pool. The photograph was taken by the author in Helsinki in May 2022.

Alvar Aalto was a highly creative figure in architecture and industrial design, with an exceptional understanding of technology that he integrated into a humanistic building style. Like his contemporaries, Saarinen and Frank Lloyd Wright, Aalto pursued an organic synthesis of his structures with their surroundings, which might explain the global influence of his work, as stated by Quantrill (1990). Hynynen (2014) interprets Aalto's design approach as often analyzed through the lens of 'organic architecture', a concept that Aalto himself used, although he never clearly defined it. S. Weston (2020) views Aalto's Villa Mairea as a prime example of his unique style, combining regional and universal elements, organic and geometric forms, and humanist and technological elements. Similarly, the design of Villa Mairea showcases Aalto's endeavor to humanize the materials used in architecture, creating an almost collage-like effect as referenced by Pallasmaa (1998) [4] . Aalto's goal of masking the industrial with the natural and seeking humanist structures is where he diverts from other Modernist architects, notes S. Weston (2020). S. Weston (2020) further comments that the villa is a mixture of a traditional Finnish house and modernism, reflecting Finland's transformation from an agrarian and craft society to an urbanized industrial nation. As Malcolm Quantrill (1990) describes it, Aalto "introduced an experimental dimension that takes architecture beyond the codified and regulated forms of modernism".

Despite its modernist attributes, the Villa Mairea challenges the standard forms of modernism by introducing an experimental dimension, making it a contradictory example of Modernist architecture according to S. Weston (2020).

5.2 Design and Development of Villa Mairea

> "An architect cannot design buildings in the same spirit as Picasso painted pictures. Architecture is not an affair between an individual artist and an individual spectator. It is the client-financier rather

[4] Aalto was heavily influenced by the collage technique of the cubists specifically Georges Braque at the time of designing Villa Mairea. Aalto was not known to produce any collages however he is well-known with his wood-bending experiments and reliefs which come close to an assemblage. See; Pallasmaa, *Villa Mairea 1938-39*, 1997, p. 90.

than the architect-employee who has the last word in the artistic as well as the functional formulation of the work. The artistic aims of the client (frequently a social institution) are to honor values that are useful to him and to emphasize his solidarity with a certain social context. The architect, with his professional skill, must understand the client's needs better than he understands them himself, and then make the client's innermost wishes come true." (Schildt (2007), p.30)

As the Aaltos conclude their work on Villa Mairea, Aino and Alvar Aalto include their project description of Villa Mairea in *Arkkitehti, No 9* in 1939 focusing on the prevailing view suggests a stark contrast between mass-produced housing and residences designed for individual needs, with the former primarily occupying social discourse Pallasmaa (1998). However, an architectural project centered on individual lifestyle and cultural understanding can hold significant social implications over time, heralding a new wave of individualism. As production and organizational methods evolve, catering to individual needs will become more feasible, even within the constraints of existing mass production. Thus, personalized architectural projects can serve as experimental laboratories, paving the way for innovative designs that can eventually be integrated into mass housing production methods Pallasmaa (1998). In Aalto's own words, he explained and put emphasis on the design themes and adopted possible challenges to his design of Villa Mairea (Schildt (2007), p. 225).

"In his own words, he treated the villa as a kind of 'experimental laboratory' for testing and further developing various ideas. An important theme was how to adapt art collecting to a modern lifestyle, in accordance with the opposition to estheticism and "high culture" already found in earlier texts by Aalto (ef. II; Our Old and New Churches and III; The Stockholm Exhibition 1930). A second theme was the application of a new conception of space taken over from modern painting (primarily that of Cézanne); a third was the intuitive synthesis of these motifs with many others to form an organic whole. Aalto explained the strong emphasis on the first of these themes (art collecting) in a

> remarkable lecture delivered at Yale University on May 9, 1939. The freely movable inner walls of the living room, which he described as being intended to serve as "hoards" (If. VI; Finland Wonderland), actually turned out to be difficult to move, as they were encumbered on one side (that facing the small library) by bookshelves." (Schildt (2007), p.225)

From its inception, Villa Mairea was conceived as a humanistic response to the stark geometry of modernism. Aalto's design philosophy, centered around organic architecture, prioritized the harmonious integration of the building with its natural surroundings. This philosophy drove the design approach of Villa Mairea, where regionalism and universalism converge, presenting an eloquent argument against the cold formalism of the modernist aesthetic. In this endeavor, Aalto sought to change history through tender curves and humanist shapes juxtaposed against the harsh, linear forms of traditional modernism (Quantrill (1990); Colquhoun (2002)).

Villa Mairea, considered to be the experimental laboratory for Alvar Aalto, as Göran Schildt Schildt (2007) initially suggests in *Alvar Aalto His Life,* Alvar Aalto took major inspiration from Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater, a vacation house for Mr. and Mrs. Edgar J. Kauffman at Bear Run, Pennsylvania, in 1935-38 (p. 414). This inspiration might have also been due to the fact that Fallingwater gained incredible world fame through publicity and an exhibition at the New York Museum of Modern Art, Schildt Schildt (2007) adds (p. 414).

> "The intrepid experimentalist naturally had no idea of what results his 'experimental laboratory' would produce when he embarked on the assignment. Characteristically, the preliminary sketches for the Villa Mairea show a wealth of mutually incompatible ideas. The initial impetus seems to have come from Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater, which had just achieved world fame in January 1938 through simultaneous publicity in Architectural Forum, Life, and Time Magazine, and an exhibition at the New York Museum of Modern Art." (Schildt

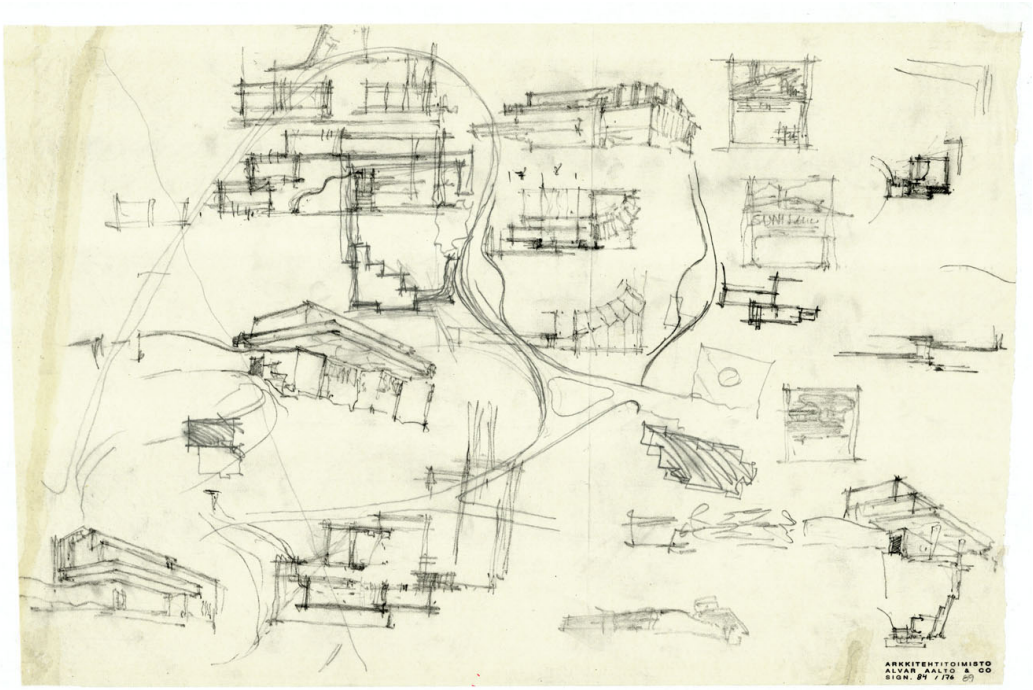


Figure 5.8: Plan and volumetric study of Villa Mairea by Alvar Aalto reminiscent of Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater. Drawing courtesy of Alvar Aalto Foundation Archives. (AAA, sign 84-176)

(2007), pp. 414).

Aalto being immensely eager to implement Frank Lloyd Wright's inspirational point to his new commission, tried to persuade the couple to move the site elsewhere, where a stream flows through (Schildt (2007), p. 414) [5] (Figure 5.8). Schildt Schildt (2007) further explains Aalto's attempts to persuade the couple.

> "According to Maire Gullichsen, Aalto tried to persuade her and Harry to build their home in the middle of a stream on Ahlström's land a few miles out of Noormarkku. They went to see the site together. There is no denying that it would have made an admirable location for a house intended to surpass Wright's masterpiece, but

[5] The Aaltos later visited the Fallingwater in their third trip to the United States in summer 1940, after the completion of Villa Mairea, through the invitation of Edgar Kaufmann Jr. See; Pallasmaa, *Villa Mairea 1938-39*, p. 78.

> Harry insisted that the house should be within walking distance from his office, and Aalto had to settle for the present site. The 'eagle's nest' he designed for this site did, however, retain Fallingwater's projecting balconies, but the stream was replaced by another 'natural element', a basement imitating the free form of a cliff face." (Schildt (2007), pp. 414) [6].

Although Aalto had to move away from his very initial idea of moving the site, he kept few inspirational details from the Fallingwater in his very early design proposals, which Schildt Schildt (2007) mentions as the Proto-Mairea (p. 414). *Proto-Mairea* embodied a blend of personal and functional aesthetics. In his early sketches, Aalto kept Wright's balconies in a more understated and nuanced way, incorporating and balancing out with the exterior Schildt (2007). In the early spring of 1937, clients agreed on adopting the 'Proto-Mairea' to start with groundwork and construction in Noormarkku (Figure 5.9). Although the groundwork and construction were in progress, the architectural design of Villa Mairea has evolved into working drawings dated April 14, 1938 (Pallasmaa (1998), p. 41).

The L-shaped building, initially inspired by Wright's designs, featured a semi-open courtyard and facilitated a smooth transition from the indoors to the outdoors. This progression was further accentuated by the sauna and swimming pool, an uncommon yet provocative addition in Finland during that period. The residence's layout comprised a dining room, expansive service facilities, individual rooms for the owners, and a suite of bedrooms for servants. Of particular note was the artist's studio for Maire Gullichsen, a nod to her background in painting Schildt (2007). However, the planning of the formal rooms, which included an entrance hall, living room, library, music room, and art gallery among others, posed a significant challenge to Aalto Schildt (2007). In the alteration of the proposed plans Aalto even criticized the couple's needs for the rooms, therefore he

[6] Juhani Pallasmaa suggests that it is very possible for the Gullichsen couple to be familiar with the Fallingwater and used as an inspirational starting point to their ideals and a model for their aspirations for the Villa Mairea within the Finnish context. Pallasmaa provide this suggestion through his interview with Kristian Gullichsen in August 14, 1993. See; Pallasmaa, *Villa Mairea 1938-39*, p. 79.

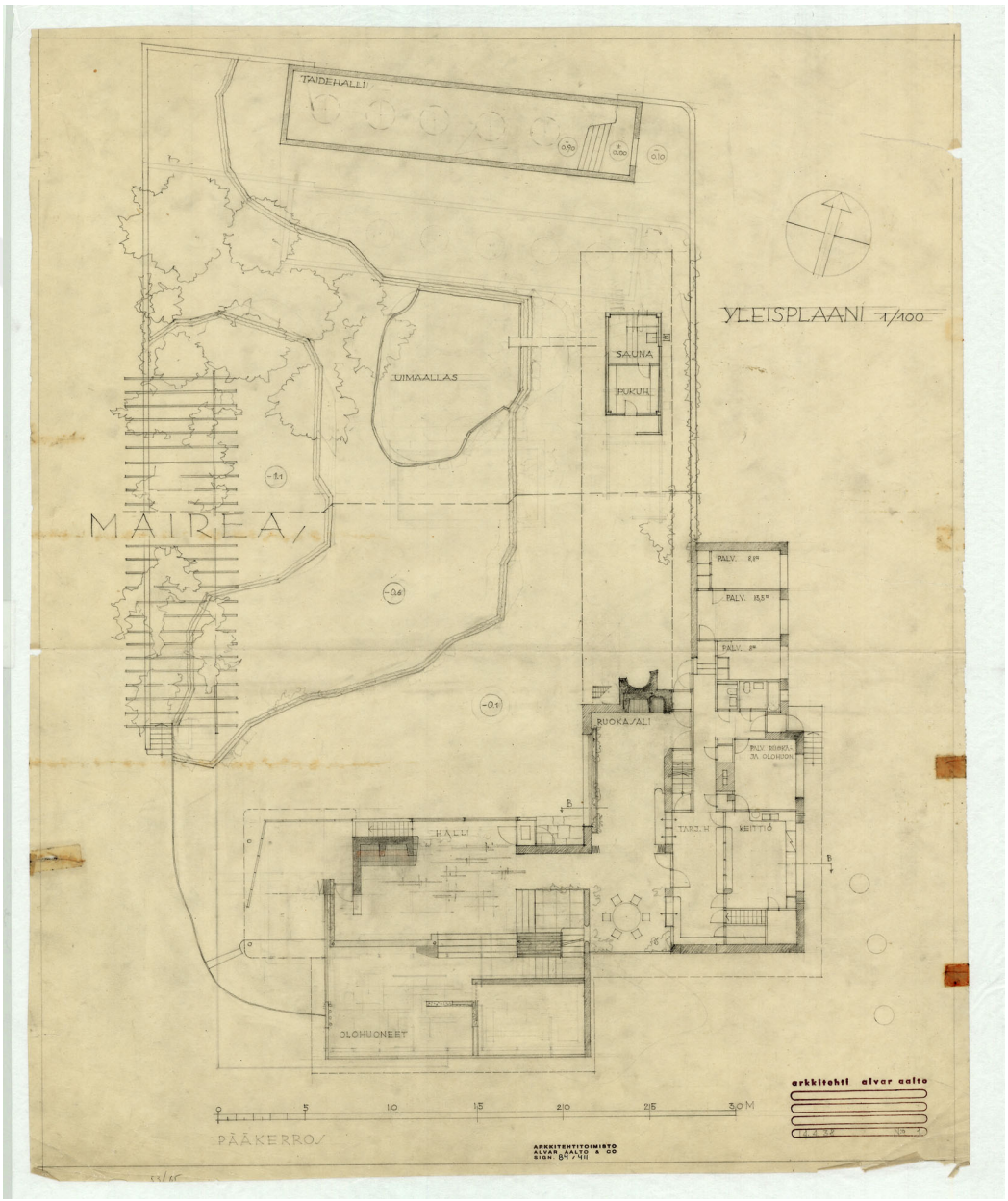


Figure 5.9: "Proto Mairea" design phase. Courtyard level floor plan of Villa Mairea by Alvar Aalto in spring 1937. Drawing courtesy of Alvar Aalto Foundation Archives.(AAA, sign 84-411)

decided to eliminate the social rooms in his preliminary design proposals (Schildt (2007), p. 417). In Schildt's Schildt (2007) Alvar Aalto His Life, Aalto writes in his presentation of the villa in *Arkkitehti, no. 9*, after the completion of the villa in 1939, explaining why eliminating social rooms was important in his design decisions (p. 419).

> "The salient feature of the plan solution is a single large living room of c. 250m2. Since there is no question of merely collecting art in the schematic sense, but of a deeper, more personal relationship with painting, the idea of having a separate art gallery was abandoned and the large, continuous room with partitions which can be grouped freely was designed to form an architectural whole, in which painting and everyday life can evolve in a more direct manner... The goal was to avoid an artificial architectural rhythm without giving up 'form' in itself... In this building I have tried to apply a special concept of form which has connections with modern painting ... Modern painting may be on the way to developing into a set of forms which have the capacity to evoke personal experiences in connection with architecture." (Schildt (2007), p. 419).

Similar to Aalto's idea of designing one single space with the free flow - *"Tsit Tsit Pum"* was a concept familiarized from his commission of the Finnish Pavilion at the World's Fair in Paris in 1937 which later Aalto applied in an altered format in Villa Mairea (Schildt (2007), p. 419) [7]. Villa Mairea boasts a "single living room" that communicates openness, both internally and externally via a glass wall overlooking the inner garden - even though it was used this way

[7] *"Tsit Tsit Pum"* and *"Le Bois est en marche"* are the two entries Aalto attended to the competition for the design of Finnish Pavillion at the World's Fair in Paris. The main idea of *"Tsit Tsit Pum"* is to implement a uniform-shaped flat roof above an irregular shape on the treeless part of the site and integrate openings in the existing trees. The sketches for the Viipuri Library from 1934, also show that this motif was used earlier by Aalto. He successfully provided a free-flow design that would also integrate and signify the forestry culture in Finland. He critically implemented a regional approach of Finland to enhance and innovate his architectural approach. See; Göran Schildt, chapter '*The Paris Pavillion*' in *Alvar Aalto His Life*, pp. 388 - 394.

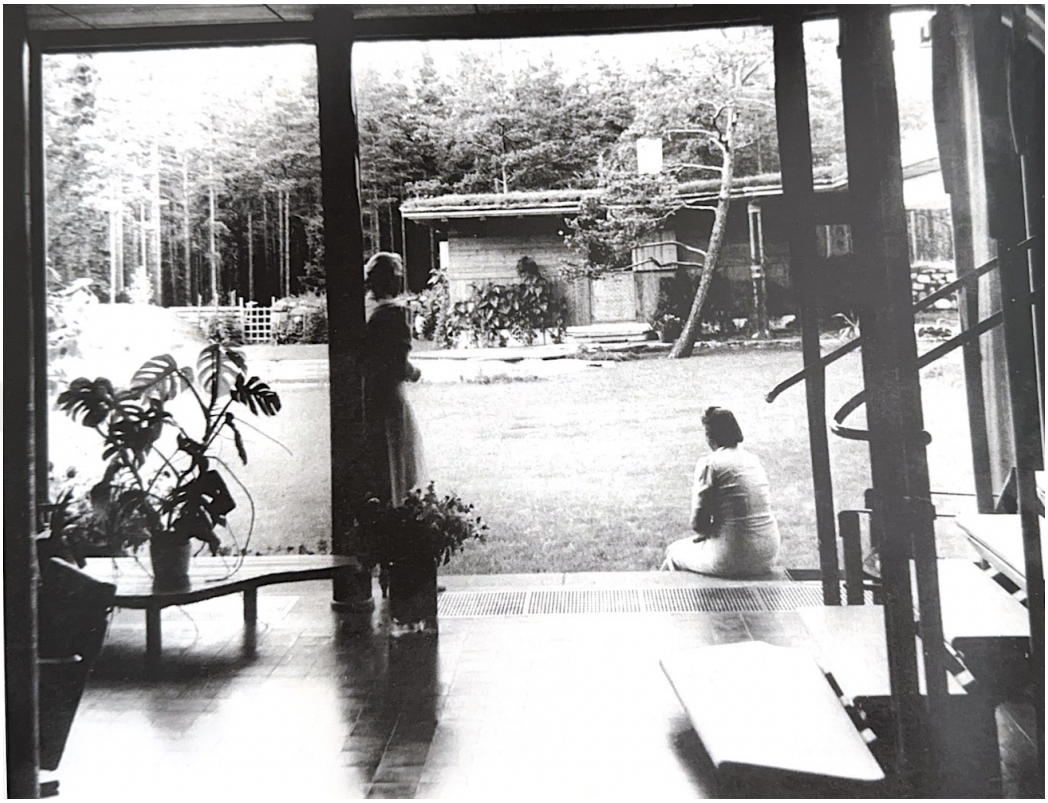


Figure 5.10: Movable glass wall to integrate interior and exterior living modes in Villa Mairea mentioned in Juhani Pallasmaa's *Villa Mairea 1938-39*, p. 88. Pallasmaa (1998)

only a few times as mentioned by Susanna Vestervik during the interview and my visit to Villa Mairea in May 2022 (Figure 5.10). This 'forest space' concept, free from stereometric constraints, became a dominant theme in Aalto's architecture following the Mairea Schildt (2007). Aalto also implied that the expansive 'all-purpose room' in the Mairea catered to the practical demands of daily life, marrying aesthetics with functionality Schildt (2007).

The versatile living room of Villa Mairea represents Alvar Aalto's innovative reintroduction of the multifunctional rural *tupa*, a traditional Finnish dwelling (Schildt (2007), p. 420). Aalto explains the Finnish vernacular dwelling element, *tupa*, in the article *'Our dwelling as a problem'* published in *Domus* in 1930 (Schildt (2007), p.420).

> "The Finnish farmer's tupa [a combined dining room, living room, and kitchen] ... is a combination of various functions and was never comparable with the concept of 'a room' until its decadence. No family can live in one room, not even in two if it has children. But any family can live in an area of the same size if that area is distributed with an eve to the life and interests of the members of the family."(Schildt (2007), p.420).

In doing so, he abolished the ceremonial architecture indicative of a class-based society, replacing it with a layout conducive to a 'natural' lifestyle, free from social conventions - a vision resonating with the utopian social ideals of the time (Schildt (2007), p. 420). To highlight this connection with traditional Finnish homesteads, Aalto incorporated an open fireplace in the Mairea's living room, echoing the grand, whitewashed hearths found in old farmhouses.

In its final form, Villa Mairea was decided in April 1938, main living area, dining, and reception functions are placed at the ground level, which provides a continuous flow into the courtyard Pallasmaa (1998). Aalto adapted the *'Tsit Tsit Pum'* concept to design the undisrupted continuous flow within the living area, which is also located across the courtyard that is placed next to the free-form pool.

From its initial sketches to the final touches of Villa Mairea, the Gullichsen couple and the architect had an intensive collaboration to achieve their vision not only for the villa but also for Finnish society. The relationship between the Gullichsens and Aalto fostered through the founding of Artek in 1935, was notably closer than the conventional architect-client bond. Aalto fondly addressed the Gullichsens as 'Dear childhood friends' *(Kära barndomsvänner)* in his letters, reflecting a deep-seated camaraderie, shared political ideals of a utopian, classless society, and a mutual appreciation for the arts (Pallasmaa (1998), p.72) [8]. Villa Mairea, thus, emerged from an intimate collaboration between the architect and his clients, embodying Aalto's *'opus con amore.'* (Gullichsen and Kinnunen

[8]Johan Gullichsen mentions the close relationship in an interview with Juhani Pallasmaa at the Villa Mairea in August 14, 1993. See; Pallasmaa, *Villa Mairea 1938-39*, p. 72.

(2009), p.17) [9]. As Maire Gullichsen highlighted in an interview, "Every detail was discussed" exemplifying their remarkable patience, even when Aalto decided to modify the fundamental concept after the initial groundwork was already in place (Pallasmaa (1998), p.72) [10] .

In conclusion, the design and development of Villa Mairea embody Aalto's pursuit of an organic architecture that upholds the dignity of the human spirit and respects the sanctity of nature. Aalto's architectural vision, as manifested in the villa, transcends the codified and regulated forms of modernism, introducing an experimental dimension that explores the delicate balance between regionalism and universalism S. Weston (2020).

5.3 The Multicultural Lens: Transcultural Interpretation and Influences of Aaltos's Design in Villa Mairea

In the artistic journey of many creatives, a continuum emerges where unique themes progressively develop from one work to the next, and occasionally, ideas take years or even decades to mature. Such a pathway is quite evident in Alvar Aalto's career. His ideas frequently begin as secondary contexts, develop into significant architectural and formal themes, and then eventually devolve into routine solutions, frequently carried out by assistants in his studio (Pallasmaa (1998), p. 75). In this continuous transformation of artistic thought, the Villa Mairea holds a pivotal position, signifying Aalto's ultimate departure from the predominant ideology and style of the Modern Movement [11] .

[9]The expression is how Aalto explained Villa Mairea's design process, mentioned in *Alvar Aalto, Band 1, 1922 - 1962*. Les editions d'Architecture Artemiz, Zurich 1963,p. 108. See; Suominen - Kokkonen's chapter, *'Opus Con Amore The Villa Mairea and the Culture of the Home'*, in *Inside the Villa Mairea Art, Design, and Interior Architecture*, Helsinki, 2009, p. 17.

[10]Maire Gullichsen reveals the intricacies of the design process in a radio interview, Finnish Broadcasting Company, July 1984. See; Pallasmaa, *Villa Mairea 1938-39*, p. 72.

[11]The design of Villa Mairea holds a significant pivotal point in Aalto's career which proceeds from his earlier works with the amalgamation of the experimental approach of Villa Mairea.

Building on the discussion of Aalto's design philosophy, a crucial aspect of the Villa Mairea's design is its embodiment of transcultural values, reflecting a confluence of Finnish and Japanese dwelling cultures. The manifestation of these cultures is not a mere juxtaposition, but a seamless integration that enriches the villa's architectural language. This seamless integration provides a possibility to comment and interpret further on Aalto's intricate re-interpretations and adaptations of the two dwelling cultures of Finland and Japan.

Although Aalto refused to reveal his inspirations and sources directly, sources close to him like Göran Schildt Schildt (2007) were able to pinpoint and mention several inspirations and influences in Aalto's life. Similarly, based on Aalto's life's work and developments in his personal life and career it is possible to re-interpret his interpretations and influences. Pallasmaa Pallasmaa (1998) includes Göran Schildt's interview with Aalto Esipuhsena in an attempt to reveal the sources of Alvar Aalto's inspirations.

> "It is known that Aalto did not reveal his sources. When directly asked about his sources of inspiration, he answered: It is a very difficult question. 'I can only say generally that I am greatly indebted to my colleagues and predecessors. But there are many. It would be a long list all the way from archaic times to our age. It would not only include architects but the entire field of art and science. In addition to personalities, the list would contain achievements of architects, painters, sculptors, engineers and of scientists of various disciplines, supporting different philosophies.'" (Pallasmaa (1998), p. 78) [12] .

Examining the interior design details of the Villa Mairea further elucidates this transcultural dwelling approach. The use of sliding doors, for instance, is

Some of the most related earlier works to Villa Mairea are his own house in Munkkiniemi, Helsinki of 1934-35, and the Finnish Pavillion in the World Fair in Paris in 1937. See; Pallasmaa, *Villa Mairea 1938-39*, p. 75.

[12] "Goran Schildt's interview with Aalto Esipuhsena keskusteld (Conversation as a Preface), quoted in the preface to Leonardo Mosso, Alvar Aalto. Teokset 1918-1967 (Alvar Aato, Works 1913-1967). Olava, Helsinki, 1967, p. 6." retrieved from Pallasmaa, *Villa Mairea 1938-39*, p. 78. See; footnote 34.

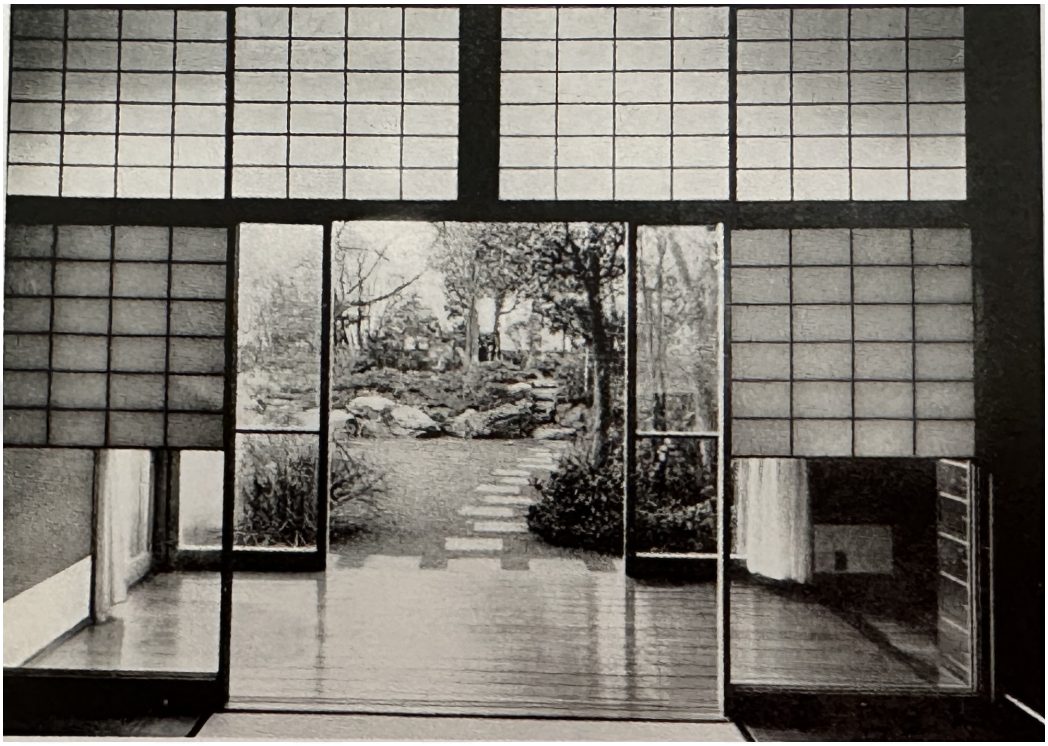


Figure 5.11: Shoji, sliding screens in Japanese house mentioned in Richard Westons's *Villa Mairea Alvar Aalto*. R. Weston and Aalto (1995).

reminiscent of Japanese Shoji screens, allowing flexible spatial arrangements while also providing a connection with the outdoors (Figure 5.11). The incorporation of a traditional Finnish sauna, on the other hand, is a nod to Finnish dwelling culture (Figure 5.12). Such design details are not merely stylistic choices; they embody the synthesis of Finnish and Japanese cultures within a shared dwelling paradigm (Nute (2004). Schildt Schildt (2007) carefully mentions the integration of multiple influential factors and concepts which might have been a part of Aalto's design of Villa Mairea (p. 420).

> "The Mairea was a melting pot in which Aalto combined apparently conflicting elements to produce an amazingly well-ordered and richly orchestrated whole. In it [Villa Mairea] the vernacular tradition, the organic overall conception of Art Nouveau, Neoclassical humanism, rational Functionalism, Japanese feeling for texture and Aalto's personal susceptibility to the complex interaction of natural forces came



Figure 5.12: Sauna in Villa Mairea. The photograph was taken by the author in Helsinki in May 2022.

together." (Schildt (2007), p. 420).

Alvar Aalto's fascination with Japanese culture significantly influenced his architectural style, notably in his design of Villa Mairea. Though it remains unconfirmed whether Aalto owned books on Japanese architecture during the early design stages, his personal library housed a series of illustrated books on Japanese culture, a gift from Ambassador Ichikawa (Schildt (2007), p. 360) (Figure 5.13). Schildt Schildt (2007) provides a part of the memoir of Mrs. Kayoko about their gift-giving rituals.

> "One day Mrs. Aalto sent a particularly thoughtful gift to our residence, a glass vase of her own design [...], with carmine flowers arranged to represent the unity of earth, heaven, and man. I had sent Mrs. Aalto books on the art of Japanese flower arrangements, and she had clearly arranged the flowers according to the rules in these books. As the only Japanese woman in this remote country, I was touched and appreciated the gesture very much. It is one of my unforgettable memories." (Schildt (2007), p. 360).

Texts in Aalto's library spanned subjects from Shinto religion, theatre, and tea ceremonies, to Japanese architecture and landscape gardening (Schildt (2007), p. 360). Aalto's admiration for Japanese culture, with its "virtuosity in creating variation and new combinations" from limited resources, was apparent in a speech delivered in 1935 (Schildt (2007), p. 360). It is also known that someone else gifted Aalto an expert book on Japanese architecture by Bruno Taut (Schildt (2007), p. 360). Aalto's fondness for the interplay of architecture and nature, and his inherent respect for materials, was reflected in his correspondence with Japanese and European contemporaries, comparing the traditional Finnish and Japanese architectures.

Finland's leading architectural critic Gustaf Strengell was among the first to suggest that Japanese architecture had helped Aalto break free from Rationalism,



Figure 5.13: Part of Alvar Aalto's library in his own house and office in Munkkiniemi, Helsinki. The photograph was taken by the author in Helsinki in May 2022.

developing his own nature-inspired architectural language, rich in material sensuality Schildt (2007). Strengell's 1935 review of the Vipuri Library highlighted Japanese characteristics, notably the selection of pale woods and the preservation of their natural states Schildt (2007). These elements, now synonymous with Nordic architecture, caused a sensation at the time. The influence of Japanese style was especially apparent in Villa Mairea's winter garden, featuring bamboo, and a stylized lake-like swimming pool along with a sauna nodding to the Finnish culture Schildt (2007) [13]. Despite these nuanced architectural influences, the Japanese kimono gifted to Aalto from Ambassador Ichikawa and used by him at his office in the mornings, though charming, holds little evidence of his professional admiration for Japanese architecture (Schildt (2007), p. 360). Aalto being incredibly mindful of his appearance, this gesture not only nods his politeness to the ambassador but also shows Aalto's willingness to accept the Japanese culture and aesthetics (Pallasmaa (1998), p. 98).

The Japanese dwelling culture was one of Alvar Aalto's main inspirations and influences, which was evident in Aalto's interest by the early 1930s, in Villa Mairea as mentioned previously by Göran Schildt Schildt (2007) and Juhani Pallasmaa Pallasmaa (1998). One source that may have played a role in shaping Aalto's understanding of Japanese architecture is Tetsuro Yoshida's book *Das Japanische Wohnhaus* Yoshida (1935), which provides a comprehensive examination of traditional Japanese domestic architecture and its unique features Pallasmaa (1998) [14]. Aalto's incorporation of Japanese architectural ideas can be seen in the Villa Mairea's design, where elements such as the fluidity of spaces, the use of natural materials, and the harmonious integration of the building with its surrounding landscape reflect the principles discussed in Yoshida's work Schildt (2007). By drawing on the insights provided by *Das Japanische Wohnhaus* Yoshida (1935), Aalto was able to reinterpret and adapt Japanese dwelling concepts to create a unique and culturally rich design that bridges the gap between Finnish and

[13]Pallasmaa notes in *Villa Mairea 1938-39*, p. 100 that the gardening and mound next to the pool are referenced from the artificial mound showed in Tetsuro Yoshida' *Das Japanische Wohnhaus*, 1935, p.170, which Aalto consulted the book several times in his design of the villa.

[14]See; Pallamaa, *Villa Mairea 1938-39*, p.47 footnote, which reveals the direct connection between Aalto's implementation of the book *Das Japanische Wohnhaus* by Tetsuro Yoshida (1935).

Japanese architectural traditions.

In *Das Japanische Wohnhaus Yoshida* Yoshida (1935) carefully analyzes the Japanese aestheticism in the gardens and the tea-ceremony [15]. He provides details and alterations to the intricate placement of step stones in the gardens to specify entrances and pathways which seems to be influential for Aalto in his interpretation of this idea in the pavement of the entrance canopy of Villa Mairea (Yoshida (1935), p. 168-192)(Figure 5.14, Figure 5.15, Figure 5.16). Similarly, Juhani Pallasmaa Pallasmaa (1998) suggests in *Villa Mairea 1938-39* that the garden room in Villa Mairea is another direct inspiration by the images from *Das Japanische Wohnhaus* that Aalto interpreted into his design of the villa (p.47) (Figure 5.17, Figure 5.18, Figure 5.19, Figure 5.20).

> "The studies for the wall between the living room and the garden room were directly inspired by images published in Tetsuro Yoshida's influential book Das Japanische Wohnhaus, Verlag Ernst Wasmuth, Tübingen, 1935." (Pallasmaa (1998), p. 47)

The garden room placed across the music room is designed as a flower conservatory for the flowers picked from the garden, which acts as the continuum of the villa. This room immediately provides direct references to Japanese aestheticism and evokes images of traditional Japanese architecture (Figure 5.21). Pallasmaa Pallasmaa (1998) mentions Aalto's collage technique in carefully implementing and juxtaposing his influences (p. 98) (Figure 5.22).

> "An interesting aspect of Aalto's collage principle is the multitude of motifs related to Japanese aesthetic tradition, such as the juxtaposition of regular and spontaneous rhythms, the overtly Japanese character of the door to the flower room, the shelf in the flower room

[15] The book covers a range of topics, such as the use of natural materials, the integration of indoor and outdoor spaces, and the importance of simplicity and minimalism in interior design specifically in Japanese dwelling culture with a case study on Katsura Imperial Villa. See, Yoshida, *Das Japanische Wohnhaus*, 1935.



Figure 5.14: Entrance Canopy of Villa Mairea in Noormarkku, Finland. The photograph was taken by the author in Finland in May 2022.

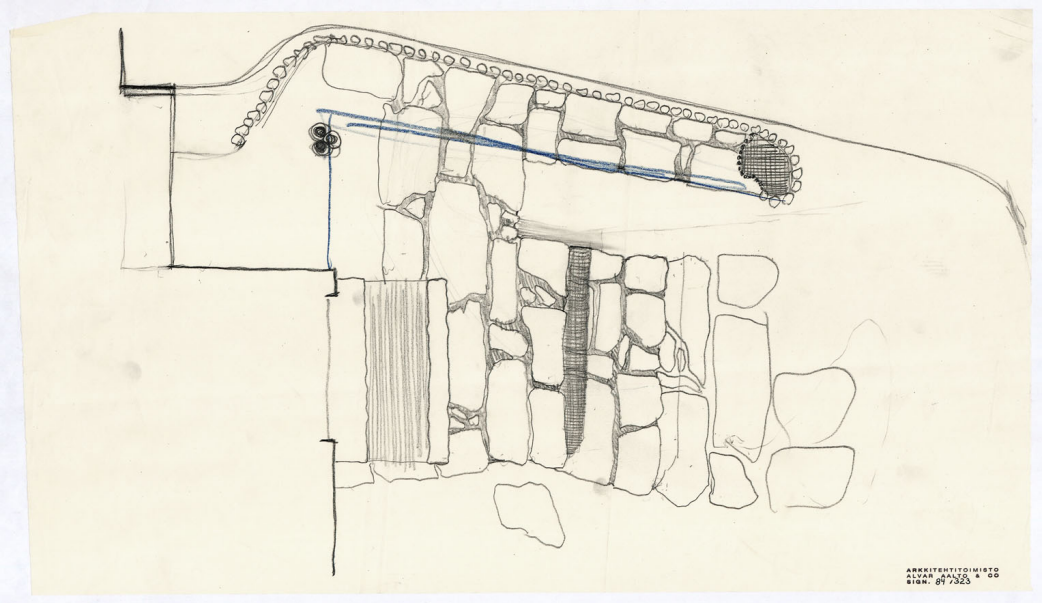


Figure 5.15: Sketch of the Entrance Canopy of Villa Mairea by Alvar Aalto in Noormarkku, Finland. Drawing courtesy of Alvar Aalto Foundation Archives. (AAA, sign 84/323)

> suspended from the ceiling by thin rattan rods like shelves in the tans or tokowaki nook of the traditional Japanese house, the numerous wooden and rattan bindings, as well as the general elegance and refinement of details. Even the flat rod of the main volume has been developed into a kind of a Japanese dry garden with its path of slate slabs." (Pallasmaa (1998), p. 98).

Additionally, the influence of Japanese aesthetics in Villa Mairea is evident in its minimalistic approach, with a focus on spatial harmony and integration with nature. This can be viewed as a form of "Japanization", a process of adopting and interpreting Japanese cultural and aesthetic values. Concurrently, the villa also embraces Finnish Romanticism, seen in the use of local materials and vernacular design elements. The interplay of these cultural influences results in a unique architectural expression that could be described as a locus of transcultural interpretation Pallasmaa (1998).

The sensory experience of space in Villa Mairea encompasses various aspects,

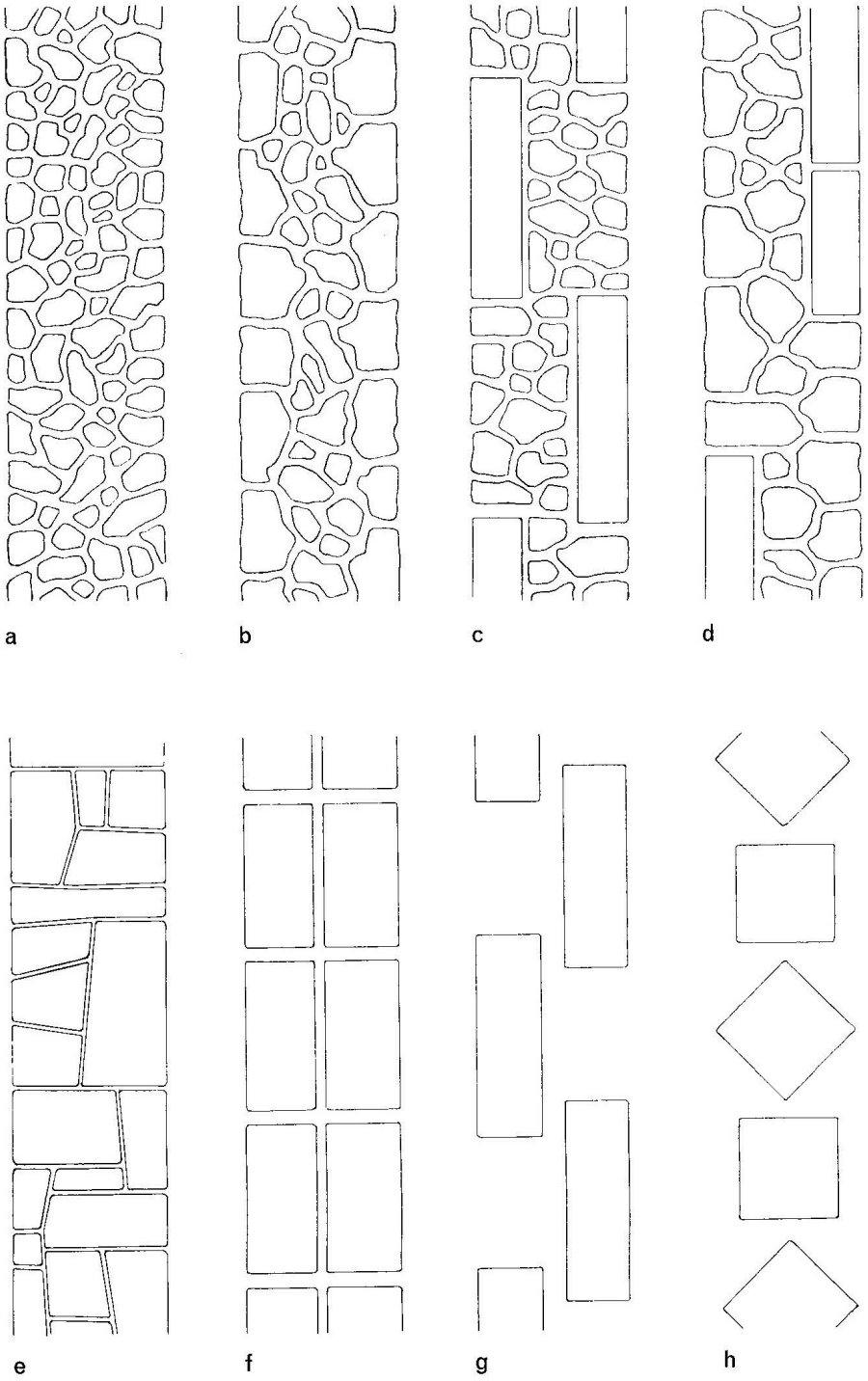


Figure 5.16: Sketch of Japanese laying stone paths found in Tetsuro Yoshida's *Das Japanische Wohnhaus*, p. 173. Yoshida (1935)



Figure 5.17: Japanese influences in the garden room of Villa Mairea. The photograph was taken in the 1960s. Image courtesy of Sussanna Vestervik at the Mairea Foundation



Figure 5.18: Japanese influences in the garden room of Villa Mairea. The photograph was taken in the 1940s. Image courtesy of Sussanna Vestervik at the Mairea Foundation



Figure 5.19: Permeability and lightness in the veranda of the Imperial Katsura Palace mentioned in Tetsuro Yoshida's *Das Japanische Wohnhaus*, p. 53. Yoshida (1935)



Figure 5.20: Pond view seen from the "Shokintei" of the Imperial Katsura Palace mentioned in Tetsuro Yoshida's *Das Japanische Wohnhaus*, p. 59. Yoshida (1935).



Figure 5.21: Japanese influences in the garden room of Villa Mairea. The photograph was taken in the 1960s. Image courtesy of Sussanna Vestervik at the Mairea Foundation



Figure 5.22: Aalto Collage: Aalto's juxtaposing of materials and use of negative and positive spaces in his designs, taken by the author in Finland in May 2022.

including tactile sensations, visual stimuli, acoustic qualities, and even olfactory and gustatory perceptions. For instance, the choice of materials, such as the warmth of wooden surfaces or the smoothness of the stone, can evoke different tactile experiences, creating a sensorial connection with both Finnish and Japanese architectural traditions (Pallasmaa (1998); Schildt (1998)). Additionally, the interplay of light and shadow, the arrangement of spatial volumes, and the integration of natural elements can contribute to the visual experience, immersing individuals in a multisensory environment that reflects the cultural synthesis embodied in the design (Pallasmaa (1998); Schildt (1998)). Aalto not only integrates his strategies and influences of Finnish and Japanese cultures into the built form but also amalgamates technical details into the multisensory environment of Villa Mairea.

> " The Mairea assignment [...] enabled Aalto to experiment with open, 'formless' space and folkloristic themes, both of which he was later able to apply in his more socially oriented architecture. The Mairea also involved numerous other experiments, from unconventional combinations of material to effects with purely aesthetic motivation. Another important step was the adoption of air conditioning a fairly recent innovation in Finland at the time. The living room ceiling, made of pine boards, contains 52,000 tiny vents made with a manual drill - a rather laborious way of distributing heated or cooled air evenly throughout the room." (Schildt (2007), p. 420).

Central to this transcultural interpretation is the concept of lightness and integration with nature. The villa's open floor plan, large windows, and incorporation of natural materials all contribute to a sense of lightness and openness. This is an attribute shared by both Finnish and Japanese dwelling cultures, where the integration of built form with nature is a central principle. The Villa Mairea, with its organic forms and regional material palette, embodies this principle, resulting in a built environment that is both culturally rich and contextually sensitive Pallasmaa (1994). Aalto carefully integrates the regional characteristics of the pine

forest surrounding the villa into the interior through the intricate articulation of the columns without using immediate motifs.

> "The metamorphosis of the interior into a metaphoric forest through the deliberate fusion of structural columns and non-structural ornamental poles into a continuity of vertical rhythms, as well as the feeling of a protected and sheltered space created by the clearing out into the pine forest, are associated with the 'philosopher's stone' of reversed indoor and outdoor spaces that Aalto elaborated in his 1926 essays." (Pallasmaa (1998), p. 98)

He rather confuses the reading of the structural system by varying in articulation, placing in singles, pairs or triples (Pallasmaa (1998), p. 123). Aalto not only provides an illusion with the placement of the columns but also contributes to the illusion by wrapping the columns in rattan or wooden slats in different colors (Figure 5.23, Figure 5.24).

The vertical elements and the metaphoric forest continues in the staircase of the Villa Mairea. Pallasmaa Pallasmaa (1998) defies the staircase to be the one single element that has received the most attention as well as gone through the most dramatic transformations (p. 46). When compared to the initial sketches to the final application of the staircase, the transformation develops from a modernist idea towards an idiosyncratic image (Figure 5.25). The staircase descends into the main living room of the villa, similar to Frank Lloyd Wright's design of the outdoor staircase in the Fallingwater at Bear Run in the sense that they both share a visual and symbolic approach (Pallasmaa (1998), p.78) (Figure 5.26). One main distinction between the two applications, Aalto's staircase seems to be suspended with the use of poles on the balustrades, whereas Wright's staircase is actually suspended (Pallasmaa (1998), p.78). Pallasmaa Pallasmaa (1998) further explores the two architects, their architectural designs in Villa Mairea and the Fallingwater, and their inspirations of Japanese dwelling culture in Villa Mairea 1938-39 (p. 80).



Figure 5.23: Different types of columns inside Villa Mairea's music room. The photograph was taken in the 1960s. Image courtesy of Sussanna Vestervik at the Mairea Foundation



Figure 5.24: Variety of columns wrapped in rattan, wooden slats and painted in different colors mentioned in Juhani Pallasmaa's *Villa Mairea 1938-39*, p. 123. Pallasmaa (1998)

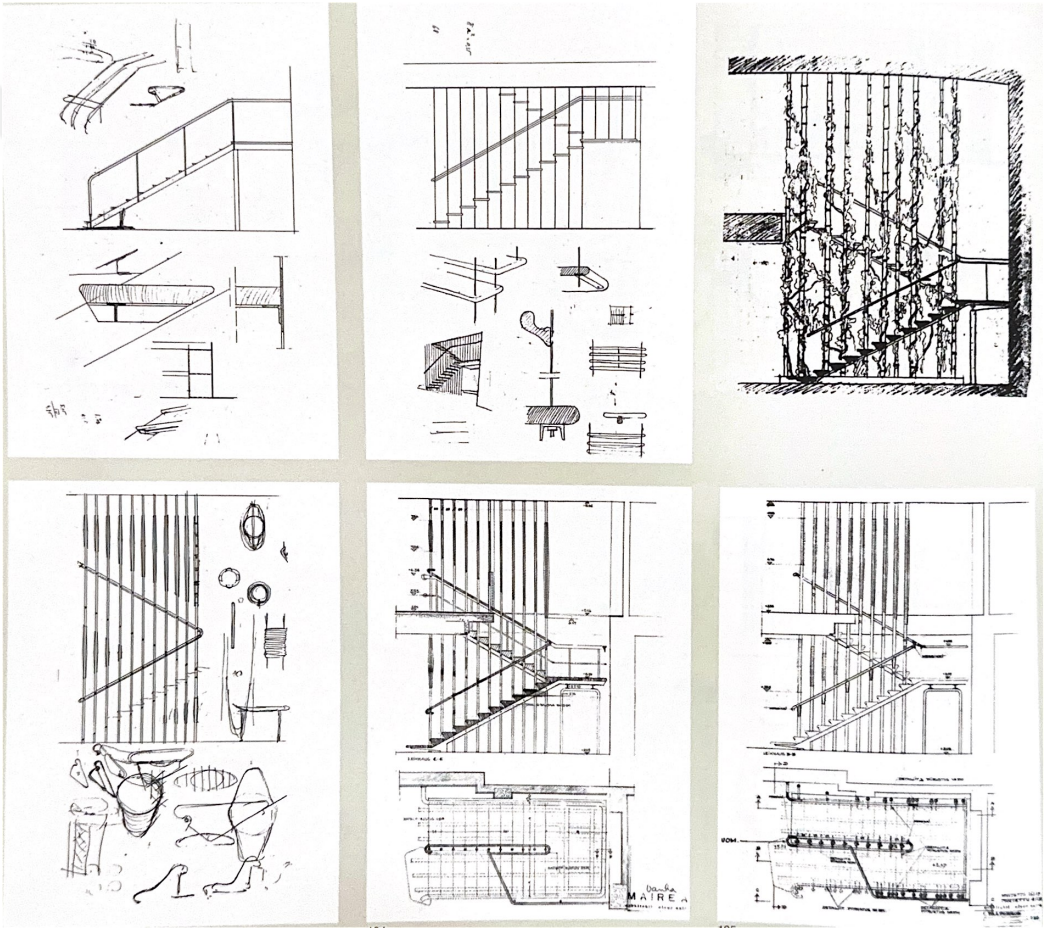


Figure 5.25: Architectural development of the staircase in Villa Mairea through Alvar Aalto's sketches compiled in Juhani Pallasmaa's *Villa Mairea 1938-39*, p. 46. Pallasmaa (1998)

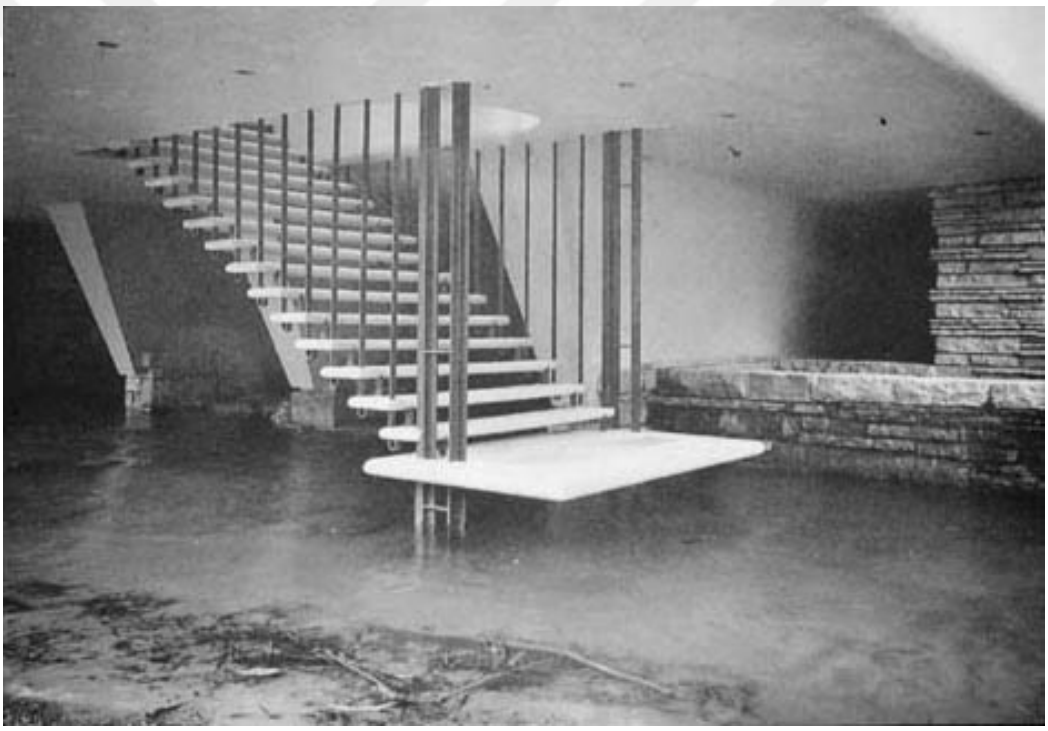


Figure 5.26: Exterior staircase at the Fallingwater design by Frank Lloyd Wright mentioned in Donald Hoffmann's *Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater. The House and Its History*, p. 33. Hoffmann (1993)

> "The two houses arouse strong tactile and motoric experiences, and both exhibit a wide spectrum of atmospheres ranging from archaic heaviness and rusticity to extreme elegance and lightness. Both houses also reflect distinct Japanese associations; the Japanese influence on Wright is well-known, whereas Aalto's is less known and was probably of shorter duration. As Wright planned to conceal the lights in the ceiling recesses of the Fallingwater living room behind panels made of Japanese rice paper, so Aalto originally intended to make the panes in the 'Japanese' sliding door next to the main staircase from paper." (Pallasmaa (1998), p. 80).

Although both houses' sensory and architectural experiences share similarities, this coincidence does not prove the direct influence of Wright on Aalto. It can be considered that the two visionary architects and the two ahead of their time houses were nurtured by similar inspirations and parallel intentions Pallasmaa (1998). The two architects shared similar aspirations for a natural integration and architectural engagement through sensory experiences, details, and images Pallasmaa (1998).

The sensory experience of space in Villa Mairea extends beyond the visual and tactile to include auditory and olfactory sensations. The soundscape within the villa, whether it be the hushed tranquility of certain spaces or the gentle flow of water, can contribute to a sense of calm and tranquility, transcending cultural boundaries and reflecting a universal appreciation for the acoustic qualities of space (Pallasmaa (2012); Schildt (2007)). Similarly, the presence of natural scents, such as the aroma of wood or the fragrance of a garden, can evoke emotional responses, fostering a deeper connection to the environment and the cultural elements it represents (Pallasmaa (2012); Schildt (2007)).

On another note, Heidegger believes that authentic dwelling occurs when architecture provides a balance between the fourfolds of earth, sky, divinities, and mortals Heidegger (2006). Aalto's design of Villa Mairea can be seen as an attempt to achieve this balance, as it reflects an integration of natural elements

(earth and sky), cultural and spiritual aspects (divinities), and the needs of the inhabitants (mortals) Heidegger (2006). The transcultural interpretation of Finnish and Japanese dwelling concepts in Villa Mairea can be understood as Aalto's effort to create a harmonious and meaningful dwelling experience by drawing from diverse cultural traditions and sensitively adapting them to the specific context of the project. Heidegger's theories of dwelling can be correlated with Alvar Aalto's design of Villa Mairea by examining how Aalto's architectural choices reflect a commitment to creating a sense of belonging, rootedness, and connection to the environment, as well as an integration of the diverse cultural influences from Finnish and Japanese dwelling concepts.

Finally, it is worth noting that Aalto's design for Villa Mairea aligns with the principles of Regionalism and Critical Regionalism. Regionalism emphasizes the use of local forms, materials, and building methods, while Critical Regionalism seeks to balance local cultural elements with universal modernist principles. The Villa Mairea, through its incorporation of Finnish and Japanese dwelling cultures and its response to the universalistic trends of Modernism, exemplifies these principles. It is a testament to the possibility of creating architecture that is both contextually grounded and transcultural informed Frampton (1993).

> "We find several other 'quotations' from the idiom of vernacular architecture, from the sod roof of the sauna and the pergola to the stone fence and rustic wooden gate at the back of the inner courtyard, from the primitive open fireplace under the pergola to the slate slabs of the main entrance and garden paths. It seems that the task of bringing Finland alive to the international public in Paris had set Aalto's latent nationalism free, though he was not afraid to combine it with international impulses." (Schildt (2007), p. 420).

A key aspect of both Finnish and Japanese dwelling concepts is the strong connection to the natural environment. Aalto incorporates this connection in Villa Mairea by using natural materials, such as wood and stone, and carefully situating the building within its landscape, allowing the surrounding nature to become

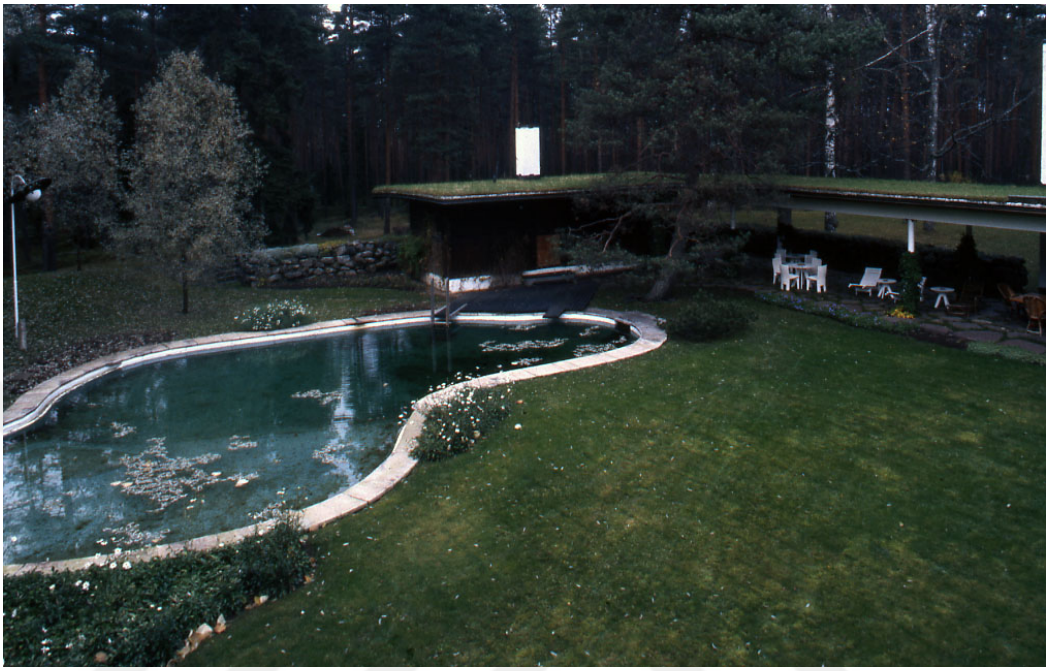


Figure 5.27: Villa Mairea blending with its surroundings. Photo courtesy of Alvar Aalto Foundation.

an integral part of the design. This connection to the environment contributes to the sense of place, as the villa feels harmoniously embedded in its surroundings (Figure 5.27). Specifically, the joints in the entrance canopy, sauna and trellis work around the villa evoke intricate juxtaposition of traditional Finnish farm details and Japanese aestheticism and architecture (Pallasmaa (1998), p.65) (Figure 5.28). The joints are "lashed together with strips of spruce roots" as the careful implementation and integration of Aalto's transcultural influences (Pallasmaa (1998), p.65) (Figure 5.29).

In sum, the Villa Mairea stands as a notable example of transcultural dwelling, where Finnish and Japanese cultural influences coalesce to form a unique architectural expression. This synthesis of cultures is not just a stylistic amalgamation but a thoughtful integration that enhances the humanistic and regionalist principles inherent in Aalto's design philosophy.



Figure 5.28: Finnish farm details and Japanese aestheticism in the sauna of Villa Mairea. The photograph was taken by the author in Finland in May 2022.



Figure 5.29: Joinery details: joints are lashed together with strips of spruce roots. The photograph was taken by the author in Finland in May 2022.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

6.1 Summary of Key Findings

The exploration of Alvar Aalto's design philosophy, as manifested in Villa Mairea, unveiled a profound synthesis of transcultural elements, wherein Finnish and Japanese dwelling cultures were thoughtfully integrated. This unique architectural expression expanded beyond mere stylistic amalgamation, embodying a thoughtful blend of humanistic and regionalist principles inherent in Aalto's design philosophy.

Aalto's influences from Japanese culture and architecture, which were discernible from his personal library and correspondences, significantly informed the design of Villa Mairea. The villa's design components, such as the use of sliding doors reminiscent of Japanese Shoji screens and a traditional Finnish sauna, embodied the dwelling cultures of both Finland and Japan. This amalgamation of two distinct dwelling cultures was neither accidental nor superficial but signified a deep-seated respect for both cultures, as well as an intelligent interpretation of their architectural traditions.

Another crucial finding was the role of Aalto's designs in breaking away from

the Rationalism that dominated the architectural scene. Inspired by elements from Japanese architecture and culture, Aalto crafted an architectural language rich in material sensuality, a style that became synonymous with Nordic architecture. The observation of this break and the subsequent development of a unique architectural language provides compelling evidence of Aalto's transformative influence on the architectural trajectory of his era.

6.2 Implications for Architectural Theory and Practice

The Villa Mairea, as an embodiment of Aalto's transcultural dwelling philosophy, offers valuable insights into the development of architectural theory and practice. Its design exemplifies the principles of Regionalism and Critical Regionalism, balancing local cultural elements with universal modernist principles. This provides a compelling model for contemporary architects who seek to create contextually grounded and culturally informed architecture.

Furthermore, Aalto's deliberate integration of Finnish and Japanese dwelling cultures offers a potent example of the possibilities that lie in transcultural interpretation. This could inspire a shift towards a more global perspective in architecture, in which architectural ideas are not confined within the boundaries of a single culture but are shared, adapted, and reinterpreted across cultural lines.

The thoughtful incorporation of sensory experiences—beyond visual and tactile—into the Villa Mairea's design also poses significant implications for architectural practice. By considering auditory and olfactory experiences in the design process, architects can create spaces that foster a deeper connection to the environment and cultural elements it represents.

6.3 Recommendations for Further Research

As our understanding of Aalto's transcultural dwelling philosophy has expanded through the study of Villa Mairea, it opens several avenues for further research. A comprehensive analysis of Aalto's other works would provide a more holistic understanding of his architectural trajectory, potentially unveiling other significant influences and developmental stages.

Additionally, a comparative study examining other architects' approaches to integrating different cultural influences would broaden the understanding of transcultural dwelling as a concept. How do other architects reinterpret and adapt cultural elements in their designs, and how do these approaches compare to Aalto's?

Finally, further research could be conducted into the sensory aspect of architecture, exploring how the deliberate design of acoustic and olfactory experiences could impact occupants' perceptions and emotional responses to a space. By building upon the observations made in Villa Mairea's design, architects could further develop techniques and approaches for creating multisensory spaces that foster deeper connections to the environment.

In conclusion, the exploration of Aalto's transcultural dwelling philosophy through Villa Mairea has revealed a wealth of insights into his unique architectural approach, with significant implications for both architectural theory and practice. As architects continue to navigate an increasingly globalized world, the lessons gleaned from Aalto's approach offer valuable guidance on creating meaningful, contextually grounded architecture that transcends cultural boundaries.

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