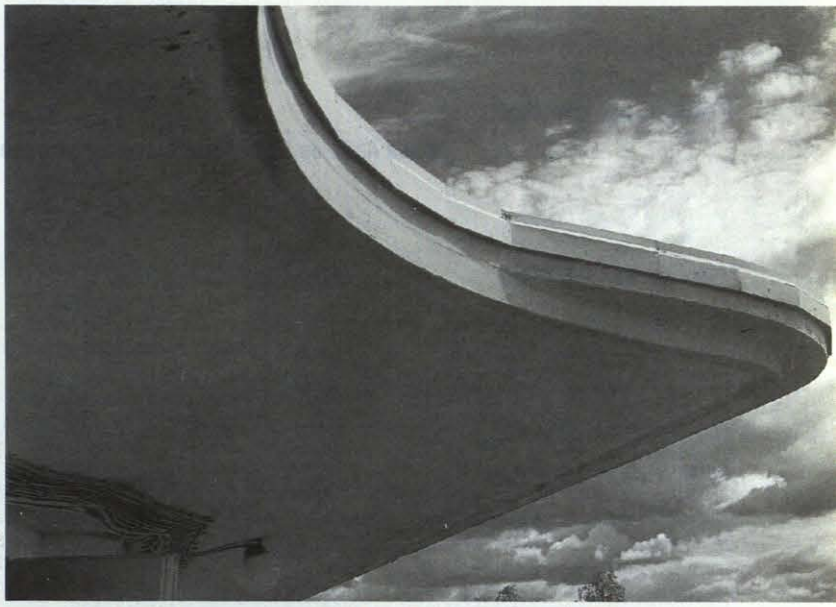
ENGLISH

English translation by **David Cemlyn-Jones**



The northern light. Alvar Aalto, one hundred years

Miguel Angel Baldellou

Alvar Aalto was always an outsider as far as the canonical lines of the Modern Movement were concerned. Yet his character is essential to understand the most vital sense of the Movement. He surprised everyone with his precocity - the Paimio Project was built when he was only 30. This is why perhaps, apart from his singular independent and unmistakable mind, he represented a silent and secure option among the struggles for the control of the tribe.

Aalto and Finland. The Northern Lights

Visiting Finland where he was born 100 years ago, we can understand how the northern lights reflect his example; still, suspended, directionless and without defined shadows. A vertical light perhaps, possibly horizontal and capable of remaining indefinitely suspended in time, dissolving its relation with the space, that which we accept, and, being indifferent to all direction, is motionless and silent.

The church of Muurame, a Renaissance and Albertian copy, where a virtual Virgin awaits a Fra Angelico portrait, demonstrates his tense cultural relationship with the West. His work in the frontiers of the north and east, Rovaniemi and Viipuri, give a premonition of his search for the origin of things and his need for shelter, surpassing even the certainty of a continuous night under the sophisticated application of a permanent day.

In Finland he is remembered with the respect and affection that is extended by Finns to people they consider to be one of their own. Not as an strange genius of eccentric tastes who from abroad expostulates, dictates rules or becomes remote because of his successes. His works belong, and this still seems to hold, to the place where they were created to such an extent that they themselves are the place. They dilute the distance between the being and the appearance. They seem to be what they are and are what they seem to be. They don't overwhelm the place, they are the place.

It is surprising to us that he, whose image today is displayed in bronze busts on so many of his works, should use as a motto the Latin saying Nemo propheta in Patria. Clearly an irony from someone who knew very well who he was and where he stood. He was the light of the North.

To others he seemed primitive and up-to-date. Today, as his 100th anniversary is celebrated, it feels, moreover, as though he were still alive. Once I referred to what I consider as the main condition of the masters: their moral authority. Time and fashions, ephemeral homages, masterly lessons pass, but never rigourous attitudes. Perhaps no one can personalise Valary's Eupalines as he does. That reliable reference which accompanies us in our sleepless hours, independent of literature, is like him, or even he himself. In any case, a demanding guide and probably an understanding one, too. Precisely in his case, his influence has filtered faintly into our very conscience as though it had always belonged to us. Aalto is top of the list, not only for alphabetical reasons, when many others fail us. We will always have Aalto.

Aalto and the Spanish

When Spanish architects returned to the common European fold after the period of autarchy, Aalto appeared as a possible and approachable style to follow, midway between the almost unattainable technological discipline of Mies and his diverging disciples, and the search for native expression. Aalto's arrival in 1951 consolidated what some architects had begun a little earlier. These included Fisac's Council building (the Duke of Medinaceli library - 1949), Moragas's Femina and so many more efforts from the first years of the 1950s, those of Fernandez del Amo, and of the organic Sota that just preceded Fernandez Alba's systematic search, or the explorations of the ill-fated Inza.

A good number of these architects discovered on their first journeys abroad that the architecture of Asplund, Aalto or Jacobsen, to cite the best known names, could be more easily accepted in the Spanish context as the latter did not belong to the hard core of between-the-wars ultramodernists. At the same time, their links to a more rural culture allowed for a relationship with the poetics derived from the INC or Devastated Regions programmes. The common constructive reasoning that embraced the simple recovery of the idealised landscape uncontaminated by ideology, as well as traditional techniques, the only ones possible in those times, inevitably led to a convergence of postures.

The example in Italy, with an immediate past similar to that of Spain, served to make results produced by influences from the north acceptable here. The Church (remember the Lercaro-Aalto connexion), validated the relationship. Thus the passion that both Aalto and Asplund showed for Italian tradition during their travels was repaid.

The work of the Nordics also justified the historic constructions of Zevi and his school, followed in Spain by Fullaondo and his sponsors. Oiza's organic-expressive or Higueras and Miró's geometric-explosive variations, Longorio's explosions and some of Moneo's approaches would be difficult to explain without Aalto and his most notable derivations. Utzon's more moderate positions,

beyond the sail forms, those of Siren, Pietila and other excellent architects, permitted Spanish architects to connect with an apparently inexhaustible system. What later passed for more or less critical regionalism, sunk its roots into this seam. It affects the relationship with the landscape, the scale, in a way of making highlighting a delicate form that at times would prefer to go unnoticed.

Perhaps the last great echo of the Finnish master reverberates from Oporto where Siza established the mystical union between nature and the construction of emotive places. Thus influences have been dispersed in different directions that can, at times, appear to have been recovered. However, they have a common body encased by empathy that goes beyond apparent forms and can materialise in an attentive attitude to the world.

Aalto's enduring qualities

If a fourth or fifth generation of architects from the North retain lingering influences of the master in their apparent coldness, his lesson can be seen in more recent contributions. How else can variations in transgressing the orthodoxies of the Modern Movement be understood? Or the unprejudiced attitude that some architects adopt when confronting their own formalising volition, abandoned to controlled chance?

The modernity that can be observed in some composed architects is much deeper than that of the terrorists of form who, incapable of any subtlety, try to enslave us with their disturbing incompetence. Although this attitude is obviously not new, it is so when it is conscientiously presented as a gentle cultural declaration. Today, more than yesterday, it can be traced in Bilbao's old Fine Arts Museum which seems to me to become more modern every day when compared inevitably with its recently-built, pretentious neighbourhood. Elegance is not usually the heritage of the new rich. It is, among others things, the ability to place oneself at the right distance to feel the release of that emotive tension still transmitted so intensely by Aalto.

The centenary of his birth should be celebrated, not just as the commemoration of another historic event, like those anniversaries listed in the daily press, but as a vindication of reason without 'isms', of moderate emotions, of the common sense that has been buried by senselessness presented as a goal.

At the threshold of the next millenium the enduring value of Aalto's message is unquestionable. The attitude promoted by him, among others, is handed down to us as the most consistent way of seeing, because it assumes that answers are only open proposals. The great latent transformation in his answers is contained in the initial question, in the way it is posed, always returning, from its origin, to tirelessly restart with the emotion of one who celebrates an initiating rite without celebrants - in a solitude that he knew was shared. ■

Following the line

Elissa Aalto on Alvar Aalto's working practise

From first ideas to details

The fundamental decisions and ideas were always Aalto's. Generally he brought into the office a tiny scrap of paper on which the whole project was completely thought out. Tn later years, in particular, he did not need to draw as much as when he was younger: when you llok at the earlier drawings, it looks as if he is using drawings to find solutions and forms. When he was older, I think he did more mental work. And when he then began to draw, the design eas very far-advanced - all we had to do was work out the dimensions.

In other words, Aalto made the sketches himself. If it was a very big project, the office checked that the site measurements tallied. Of course, he followed the work all the time and made changes. But he didn't particularly like the working drawing stage, he never checked whether the dimensions had been calculated correctly. In that respect we had free hands! Details, however, werw terribly important - he sketched them and followed them very closely.

Ther was one thing that Aalto didn't understand, which started to affect the way we worked perhaps a couple of decades ago: by the time contracts were put out to tender, there had to be an enormous number of drawings in which matters were finalised. He sometimes jeered at us on this account: why arw you bothering with that? His whole approach was that the architect could change his mind during construction, make changes - today, of course, that isn't really possible any more.

Aalto was generally fairly flexible toward changes the client wished to make in the brief. He took them into account, he didn't immediately put his foot down; when he was suddenly able to invent someting new, sometimes he was even inspired. Although he did say to us in the office, in regard to such changes: "You have to know what is A and what is B. In B-matters we can be flexible, A's are matters of principle".

Simplified presentation

The number of drawing depended to a great extent on the situation and the time. Our archive covers a long period, and when one looks at the drawings of the 1920s, one is amazed how few of them were needed for a building. In the 1960s and 1970s a quite extraordinary number was needed for the same purpose, althougt it must be said that the projects, too, were bigger. Detailing, too, became richer.

Technically, the office's drawings are not particularly decorative. Perspective drawings, for instance: althought Aalto himself was such a skilful draughtsman and could have made fine perspective drawings, for some reason he avoided them - there aren't very many. Generally, the office's drawings are fairly simple. Perhaps this drawing style originates in some way from the ascetiscism of the 1930's: when the style of a period is simple, the drawings are very simple, too. They showed the main features and facts very accurately, avoiding unnecesary additions. Competition drawings were often coloured: since they were always drawn in pencil and the jury had sometimes to view them from a distance, colour made then cleares.

The office worked a lot with models, particulary in its earlier period, when it had a moldel-workshop. The space where the archive drawings are now stored in metal boxes was originally a garage. It was only used as such, however, for one winter; then it became the model-workshop. It was particularly important to Aalto. Models were often made by less-than-proffesional model Makers, such a students, who were nevertheless often very skilful. Only in the case of some of the bigger models - such as the large wooden model for Essen - was it necessary to use professionals. But even those models were made here. The workshop also made smaller models in which details were studied-roof-forms, wall gratings and so on.

Models were generally made of cardboard, althought we have also made some rather fine wooden models. These were not made during the project, however, but generally afterwards or near completion of the building, at the request of the client.

Aalto always used a pencil

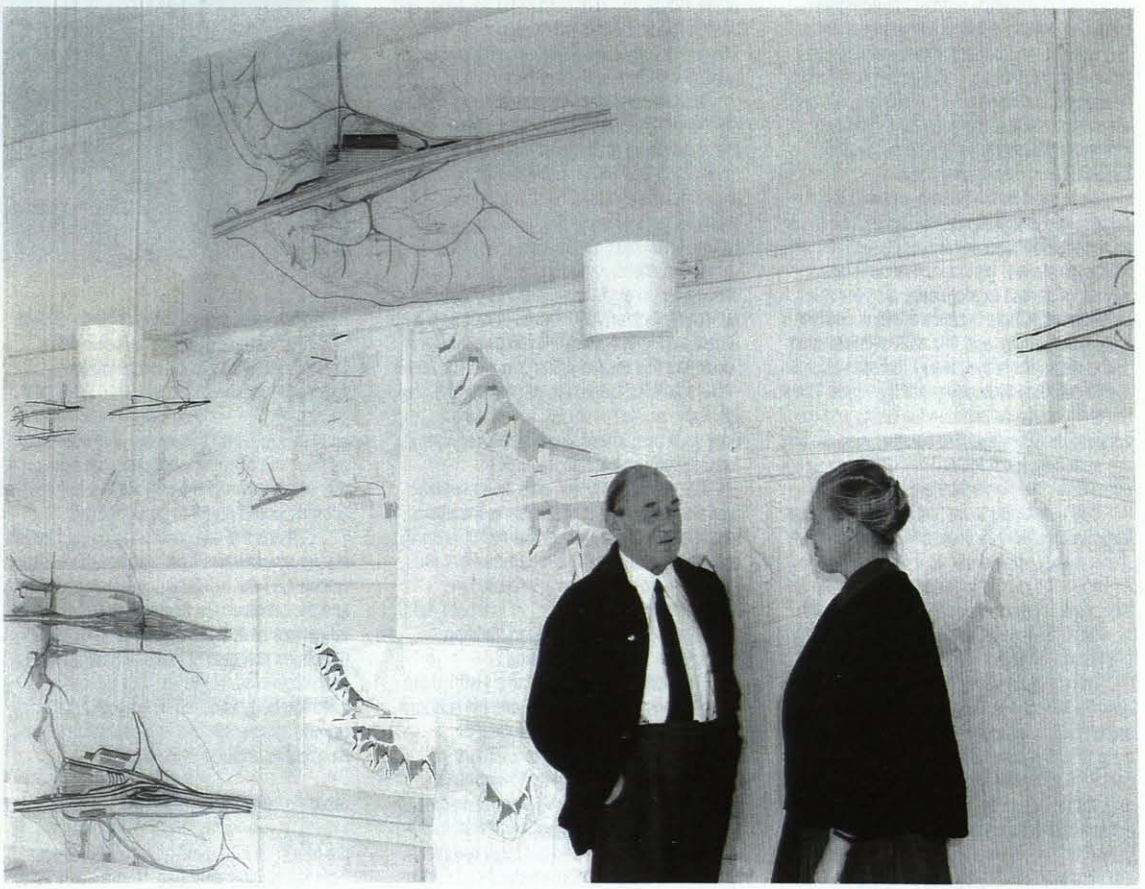
I don't remember ever seeing Aalto with a pen in his hand. Generally he used a 6B pencil, except when using a ruler. When he travelled, he always had sketch-books and a 6B pencil with him. Once we were travelling in Mexico - where, in fact, he didn't do any drawing at all - and I had put all the pencils in a neat little package so that they would not get lost in his suitcase. We arrived at customs in New York, the package was found: "What is this?" I was horrified - at that moment I'd completely forgotten what was inside it. The package was opened up, and there were the 6B pencils, in good order.

We also had a travelling drawing board, very small, but it meant that Aalto could draw in peace even in a hotel room. For example, the unbuilt museum in Shiraz began life as a vision on the edge of a hotel bed.

The travel sketches as such are more architectural history than the architecture of today. But they must have left some unconscious influences in the mind: for example the amphitheatres, to which all Aalto's public spaces aspire, to a greater or lesser extent, even if he did break the classical mould.

These are just a few scattered memories of the past of our archive. When I begin to remember individual projects, all the many phases that go into the creation of a single building, I could tell a long story about them.■

The Aalto office, Tiijimaki 20, Helsinki, 13.4.1993.
Based on an interview by Marja-Riitta Norri



From doorstep to living room*

Alvar Aalto

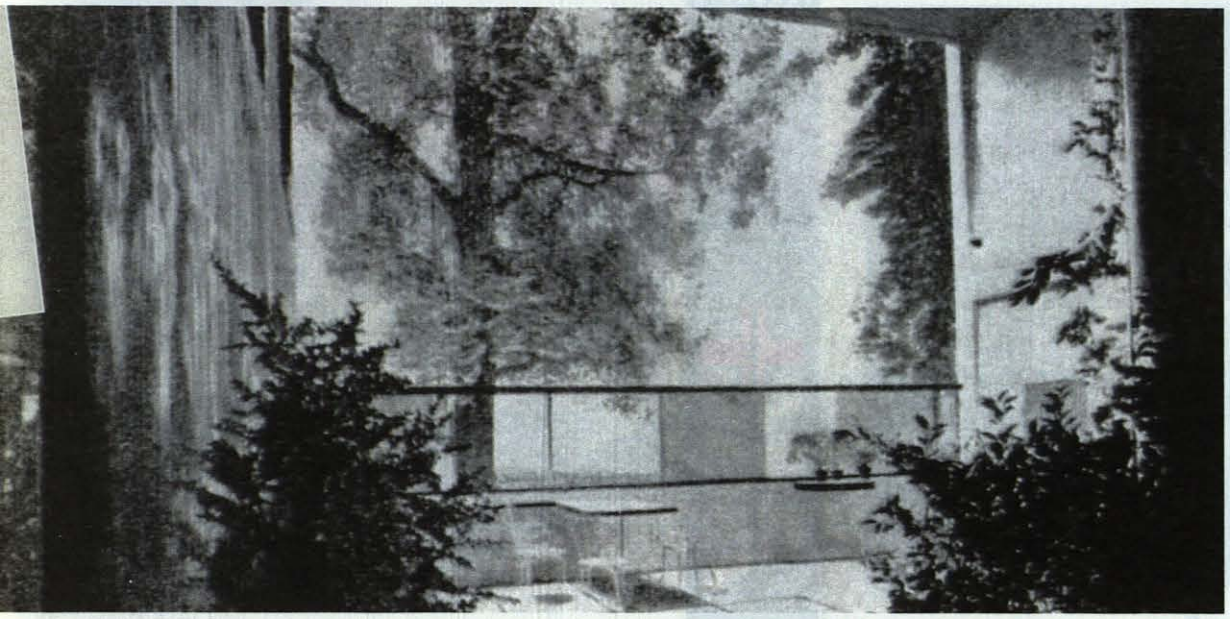
The title of the article alludes to that part of our home which most closely unies the more intimate rooms with the open air. In his kind letter to the writer, the editor of the present journal noted the neglect which our interior design has usually given to this part of our buildings, especially vestibules and halls, and offered his magazine as a forum for "reform".

In private houses, country manors, villas, etc., which stand freely in their surroundings and where good taste and artistic ambitions have to some extent prevailed (and we need only concern ourselves with such homes here), no space or architectural forms have been spared in designing staircases, vestibules and halls, but here is almost invariably something helpless and aesthetically impure about the way in which the interiors of the building open outward. The Nordic climate, which requires of a sharp differentiation between the warm interior and the surroundings, has become a stumbling block for architects, and has given rise to defects in proportions on both sides of the demarcation line. The task of fitting the buildings into the landscape correctly -which is also one of our weaknesses- has nevertheless been managed better. Those of us who for our sins have to live in rented housing must be content with no mere parodies of entrances and anterooms in our homes.

For very special reasons, I have choosen Fra Angelico's Annunciation as my first illustration. We find in its miniature form a great deal of truth and refinement to illustrate our problem. The picture provides an ideal example of "entering a room". The trinity of human being and garden shown in the picture makes it an unattainable ideal image of the home. The same smile which plays on the face of the Holy Virgin is seen in the delicate details of the building and in the brilliant flowers in the garden. Two things stand out plainly: the unity of the room, the external wall and the garden, and the formation of these elements so as to give the human figure prominence and express her state of mind. Whoever truly understands the secrets of Fra Angelico's picture can safety stop reading his article.

It was cautiously hinted above that our cold climate might do violence to he unity which should link the interior and exterior of our homes, whit the result that the entrance section cannot be given the elegant ceremonial form it has in the civilized zones of the South. The fault, however, is hardly the climate if it is more likely due to immature form. There is nothing wrong with our homes being closed to the outside world -so are those in the South, though for different reasons- but the screening element of our houses is almost invariably placed badly. The right spot for our doorstep in where we step out of the street or road into the garden. The garden wall is the real external wall of the home. Within it, there should be open access not just between house and garden, but also between the disposition of rooms and the garden. The garden (or courtvard) belongs to our home just as much as any of the rooms. Let the step from the kitchen garden to the rooms provide a much smaller contrast than the one from the road or street to the garden. We might say: the Finnish home should have two faces. One is the aesthetically direct contact with the world oustide; the other, its winter face, turns inward as is seen in the interior design, which emphasizes the warmth of our inner rooms. This also goes for the large blocks of rented flats in the towns, though in another way. To neglect the potential offered here by courtyards is repulsive Americanism.

I see the garden and the interior decoration as a closely-knit organism. One can thus no longer speak of type plans for halls: their form and function vary. Taking the problem of form

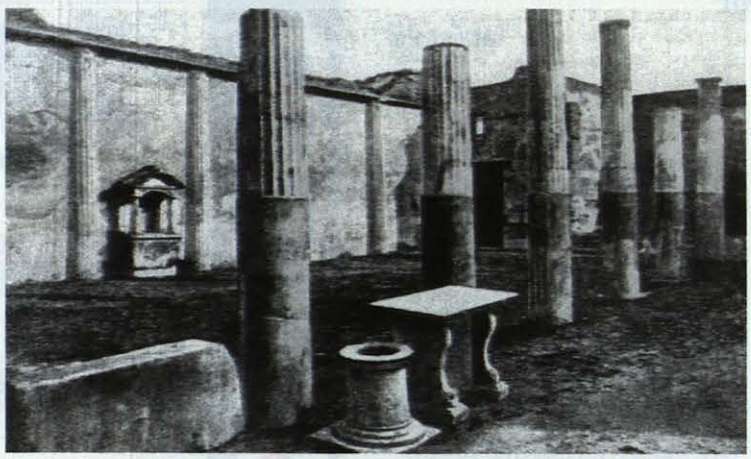


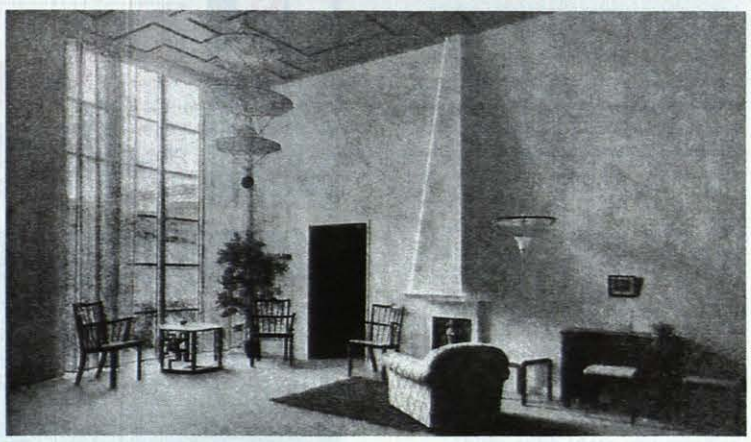
thus organically, the placing of furniture is also affected.

I should like to mention the long-despised corridor. As part of the entrance to a house, it offers undreamed-of aesthetic potential, as it is a natural coordinator of the inner rooms, and permits the use of a bold, monumental linear scale, even in small buildings.

One of the possible ways to arrange and furnish the entrance section is offered in the English hall. If the thoroughly British art of interior design has brought much that is good in its wake, misinterpretations of it have also given rise to parodies in thousands of homes. The British psyche is foreign to us and does not readily take root in our soil. One of these large, spacious rooms with an open fireplace, a rustic floor and a form which differs from that of the other rooms has a psychological function apparent to the sensitive eye. It symbolizes the open air under the home roof. It is very remotely related to the atrium of the patricians of Pompeii, which really had the sky as its ceiling. The relationship of the English hall to the atrium is rather like that of old Flatford Forest to a mathematically defined, terraced vineyard.

This idea of the hall as an open-air space can form a piece of he philosoper's stone, if correctly used. I hand it to my reader in a locker casket, and ask his pardon if I should fail to provide him with the key. For the same reason as I previously wished to turn your garden into an interior, I now wish to make your hall into an "open-air space". This is one way to minimiza the contrast between them and to hint at how one should furnish the room that provides a point of transition between "outdoors and indoors". In brief, here we have the philosophical foundation for the forecourt of our home. There are many ways to attain it: by accentuating specific details or with paintings, but it is best achieved by correct placemente of the hall in relation to the rooms, the yard and the garden. All this, however, should be done with caution. The world is full of decorators and mediocre architects. If you, dear reader, have a friend with an aristocratic taste but poor health, the brainwaves of these bunglers may lead to his untimely death.





All of the illustrations for this article point up the principle laid down above in various ways. The Pompeiian house is deliberaty presented as a ruin: the pure chord struck by the columns and the few pieces of furniture is a classic example of how massive outdoor motifs can be combiend with a more intimate interior. There should be no more furniture than this in the hall of a Finnish home, either. Another picture shows how even in the economically used space in a block of flats, a similar hall furnishing can be achieved by perfectly homelike means. The arch motifs part of the main partition wall of the house -in other words, one of its principal constructive elements- which, with its heavy forms, represents the city outside. Next to the arch motif, we see a few pieces of furniture, not so much intended for sitting on but rather to symbolize the occupants or as a reflection of the furniture of the inner rooms. The street perspective, the structural idea of the house, and the intimacy of the home shake hands here.

The point of contact between the structure of a house and some intimate feature of the home is another basic idea of the hall furnishing. The atrium of a Roman house at the same time forms the termination of the entrance area and the central space of the whole house. Its ceiling is the sky and the roofed rooms inside open up towards it. Simply by virtue of its ground plan, the atrium beautifully fulfils all the ideas developed here. A Finnish house making use of similar effects is showm here in a pair of drawings. Again, the hall is placed in the center of the house, and acquires its character from the doors leading to it from each room and the special treatment accorded to them. All of the objects that fulfill a practical purpose -the coat rack, even the stairway- have been placed in niches of their own, and the room remains a pure cube with a top opening to the upper floor. The visitor who enters this room immediately gets a clear idea of the entire internal construction and room arrangement of the home. This hall is completely unfurnished, but the furnishing of each room in turn can be glimpsed through the open doors, producting the required feeling of warmth. The hall has the only decorative floor in the house, made of limestone. Thus the architectural character of the room is a little severe, making it a suitable setting in which the mistress of the house can receive her guests. In other words, it is a ceremonial room, but its stiffness is toned down by the glimpse the visitor has of the upper story of the house, with drying articles of clothing on it, hanging there as a somewhat careless piece of evidence of the chores of everiday life; the commonplace as a crucial architectural element, a piece of the Neapolitan street in a Finnish home interior!

I have concentrated here on the basic ideas of our home decoration rather than on ways to implement them. There are many ways, and they vary according to circumstances, which is why I thougt I would do best to indicate merely the kind of atmosphere that should be evoked. But if you want my blessing for your home, it should have one furhter characteristic: you must give yourself away in some little detail. Your home should purposely show up some weakness of yours. This may seem to be a field in which the architect's authority ceases, but no architectural creation is complete without some such trait: it will not be alive. This trait can be comparated to the need for a particularly subtle kind of humor to expose one's own weaknesses. Perhaps the reader should not immediately start cultivating the clothes-line between the marble columns of his hall. It is enough to be aware that "the open visor" is and will remain the true mark of the modern gentleman, and his home reflects his attitude.■

***(Aitta -Número cero- 1926)**

Alvar Aalto: a lesson in humanity

Ismael García Ríos

"The correct orientation of architecture is in good initial order: fundamentals directed towards social issues that have been so notable in our profession during the past two decades. But with this we have only the foundation; we must work with greater determination and resolution. Apart from what has been mentioned previously, we need to view society in a more organic way than until now, we must place mankind and his essential needs at the forefront, and technical means and organisational efforts at his service."

Alvar Aalto

Many aspects of architect Alvar Aalto's personality are tremendously attractive, as much for today's architects as for the world of magazines, publications, exhibitions, conferences and so on in whose milieu he moved. And obviously some of the issues that Aalto's architecture have raised, such as proximity to the human being, relations with nature and the environment, his particular formal world, or the transparent assimilation of modernity, are very interesting. This year of celebration provides an unique occasion to revise and study in depth an architectural development as coherent as that of the Finnish architect. One thing that cannot be questioned is the unanimous belief that Aalto's architecture is very complex; a complexity resulting from his attempt to resolve with it the countless problems faced by the human being. It is now 100 years since Aalto's birth and his architecture maintains the same applicability and agelessness as when it was first devised. I suspect that the issues architects have to resolve two years before the arrival of 20th century ends remain the same.

Few architects have believed with the same intensity as Aalto that architects and architecture are committed to a social responsibility, and that this commitment is intimately linked to making architecture. I do not think it is possible to understand Alvar Aalto's architecture without knowing the debt, which as a human being was considerable, he felt towards the society for whom he built. Behind any issue raised by Aalto's architecture is a concern for the "ordinary little man" in the street, as he used to call him.

If on studying Aalto's architecture it rapidly becomes evident that many of his characteristic touches are closely tied to Finnish architectural tradition, the country's geography, its climate, light, natural resources or culture, an awareness that the architect's social responsibility and architecture must respond to social needs were issues that had already appeared in Nordic classicism at the beginning of the 1920s. Additionally Finnish society had always been very egalitarian, and an attempt was made to strengthen equality in the years of great democratic enthusiasm that followed the country's independence in 1917. So at the time of the start of functionalism much attention was already being devoted to social problems, an effort to resolve social housing and a clear awareness that architecture was deeply connected to society. In 1930 Aino and Alvar Aalto organised an exhibition titled Rationalisation in Minimal Housing that focussed on the economic and social aspects of housing. The influence wielded by Germany and its social welfare revolution in those years via Sweden led to a greater importance being attached to social questions than to aesthetic issues. Architecture must be for a democratic people and must respond to their uses, and socially aware architects with clear responsibilities must provide solutions for living space.

In 1955 Aalto wrote: "The aim of our profession is to make the ordinary little man a bit happier by offering him a means that adjusts to his needs and does not convert him into a slave under the coercive pressure of standardisation". Throughout his life Aalto fought to prevent man's individual identity being lost to mechanisation, proposing a flexible standardisation that would allow for the beneficial advantages of industrial production without losing the possibility of diversifying and personalising the results. Industrial products should have such flexibility in their use and combination to be able to resolve the personal needs posed by each individual. Aalto felt that architecture had a great responsibility in seeing that this came about; architects had to act in this direction. So he suggested that in each work planned by an architect there should exist a certain degree of compromise and experimentation that could later be of benefit to the ordinary little man. He dedicated huge effort to this work all through his life. "The possibility came to my mind that such a small country as Finland, for instance, could be used as a sort of laboratory where some small scale plan could be elaborated that bigger nations with their colossal laboratories perhaps could not do. This option arises precisely in the case of the environment and habitat: the design of cities, rural areas, housing groups and cells, resorting to human means as far as scale is concerned. Later we would add technical products embellished by art, the test ground being precisely its adaptability to the use of the 'ordinary little man'". When he was planning Villa Mairea Aalto wrote: "It is perfectly possible to use a single architectural idea as a sort of test laboratory in that, although nothing feasible for mass production could be accomplished in it, it would permit us to experiment with cases that could be expanded and extended to everyone in a later development of the productive machine." This building could well be regarded as the most paradigmatic example of how every individual in a society is committed and has a responsibility with that society. Property-owning clients believe it is a duty of businessmen in Finland to think of the progress of the country, and of course this is not measured only in economic terms; welfare must be achieved by all persons without exception. If on the one hand a building that is absolutely unpretentious and unspectacular has been planned, on the other it is a work full of experimentation: from the concept of the relation of the individual and art collector with the works - with moving walls for display in the lounge, with the idea of a work of total art, or with the importance of the paint workshop in the composition of the building - or the relationship of the Villa with nature to the final detail of an intertwined doorknocker. The sense of the building is lame without this social aspect.

The architectural experimentation in benefit of society proposed by Aalto is not limited to buildings and includes other areas. For years he worked hard to create experimental laboratories of architecture that led to his so-called "flexible standardisation", a task to which he returned time and again: in the Massachusetts Technological Institute when he suggested the construction of an "American Town in Finland", when he studied the reconstruction of Europe devastated by World War Two, or in his later activities as president of Finland's Federation of Architects. In articles written in 1930 and 1939 he showed similar vision when he suggested that Universal Expositions be converted into enormous laboratories where architecture would have an educational value - by transforming these expositions into "Universal Colleges" for all the world's nations - and become the driving force for human development. Once again Aalto's concern that any architectural manifestation should be of benefit to society was beyond all doubt.

Regarding the reconstruction of post-war Europe and without ever losing sight of the importance of architecture and experimentation in this project, Aalto wrote: "Today, compared to other forms of destruction, the indirect threat to human life through the destruction of even man's most elementary shelters is proportionally much greater than it was after the previous war. That is why organisations of scientists and humanitarian methods to combat this indirect disaster are vital and urgently needed. A work of reconstruction conducted scientifically and systematically must be undertaken in connection with a centre that functions as a laboratory in which the most desirable methods of resolving present building problems can be studied". Aalto regarded man's emplacement in a territory as a global problem. It is impossible to understand the relationship that he proposes for man and construction with the environment without considering it as a part of the town planning that he had conceived. Any human need problem that has been mentioned in the previous quote is encountered within this urbanism. From the planning of the Rovaniemi Centre, the Oulu express Centre, or the approach to the City of Nynäshamn to Sunila, any homogeneity that limits the particular conditions of each case should be avoided. On the idea that urbanism is at the service of the human being, Aalto wrote: "Town planning has to create a real freedom to grow, and not diagramatic schemes; it should be a flexible system by which the growth of communities is regularised with the ultimate concern only being the physiological, social and psychological problems that affect human groups".

Aalto believed that social responsibility did not rest with architects and architecture alone; even Finland has an obligation with the rest of the world. From the most insignificant action to the complete architecture of a country, they must take the well-being of a society into account. Aalto felt confident that Finnish architects knew how to serve society. He used to say that they had not been submissive lackeys but had known

how to activate the most transcendental and fundamental aspects of his country's culture. Regarding the task faced by architects, Aalto viewed: "We have work to do to help the world and its problems in the present cultural crisis. Something that architects - you and I - should consider as the main problem today. It isn't easy to explain, but I will try do so briefly. We have all been taught by our mothers and fathers, by our grandfathers, in a school where the greatest teachers were Rousseau and Voltaire, or they could have been Marx and Engels, and so forth. We all believe in a future of freedom for the human being, freedom in a political sense, freedom in regards to pressure from the economic world, freedom in regards to production that increasingly converts man into a slave - anyway, a more visible freedom. We have all been educated with a certain optimism. There is something behind the mountains that we can reach if we act intellectually. Today we see many of the dreams of those early times of functionalism. There is a special kind of social thought that is operating in the world. This is especially true in the small countries of the north - Finland, Sweden and Denmark among others". Aalto believed that social changes in the 1920s and 30s had been enormous and that, therefore, the commitments faced by architects had increased in complexity. For Aalto, architects formed part of these changes and were an essential regulating part that should keep vigil so that that the human aspect of the individual not be forgotten. By the early date of 1940 he wrote: "To make architecture more humane is to make better architecture, and that means a much broader functionalism than the merely technical. This goal can only be reached with architectural methods - with the creation and combination of different technical elements in such a way that they provide the human being with the most harmonious life". The responsibility of architects included the requirement to provide forms to social transformation that could practically not be changed. In comparison with the work of a poet or painter that could be modified, architecture remained fixed and was conditioning. Aalto thought that a formal solution rebounded for many years, and would be difficult to transform. Therefore, he believed that society required architects to be the persons who would coordinate the different areas of influence in the creation of human emplacements and provide them with harmony.

In 1939 Aalto attempted to establish a progressive magazine, The Human Side, that counted among its contributors such emblematic architects and artists as Gropius, Frank Lloyd Wright and Moholy-Nagy. In such a troubled and delicate time for Finland, Aalto wrote about the aims and contents of the magazine: "to inform the great public, in a serious manner and in reasonable language, about new socio-biologically explicable phenomena that can be observed in social, economic and political life, and that which have started to appear all over the world and that in their entirety are a sign that in the mentioned areas a decisive structural change is occurring.

Later he went on the expound: "In the culture for which we have fought in the countries of northern Europe, nothing is more characteristic than the desire to create a balanced state between individual and collective phenomena, as well as harmonising the personal activity of individuals and collective creation. This vision of the world is in flagrant contradiction with a social system where this balance is not sought". The architect should be a social being. Aalto belonged to the society in which he lived and was committed to freedom and his country. He made it clear what the position of architects should be with his example. Aalto believed that in almost all architects' projects something could be found to advance architecture and social improvements, even when the programme showed little promise and at first offered no possibility of doing so. Giving examples of workers' houses, hospitals, sporting centres, railway stations and so forth, Aalto thought that any order was valid to study the "particular sensitivities" of human life, and apply solutions to other situations of daily life. Of Villa Mairea Aalto wrote: "You should study the problem in such a way that your solution not only adapts to a particular case, a client and his art collection, or great house, but your solution should serve for the general use of art in a house, maybe even in a very limited space, a small house or apartment, even a room". There are numerous examples of buildings designed by Aalto where his important social care is emblematic; some have entered architectural history books just for this reason, and perhaps not because of the exposure to sun or acoustics are in this or that form. Buildings such as the Paimio Hospital, Villa Mairea, the Säynätsal townhall, the Kultuuritalo building, the Technological University of Helsinki in Otaniemi and the Finland Talo, without forgetting the Seinajoki and Rovaniemi centres, provide good proof of this.

From reading the papers that Aalto wrote during his life not a few very thought-provoking ideas are evident regarding the situation in which architecture actually found itself. His reflections on the architect's commitment and social responsibility are equally evident. It is difficult, if not impossible, to understand Aalto's architecture without approaching his person and the beliefs he had in that the architect's task should be much closer to man, and not only as an isolated individual but as a social being. The remaining fertile torrent of his ideas are probably contained within this context. THIS MEANS THAT YOU ARE NOT MERELY A POOR ARCHITECT WITH A TEMPORARY CLIENT, BUT THAT YOU ARE WORKING AS A RESPONSIBLE DESIGNER; RESPONSIBLE TO AN ENTIRE NATION AND FOR THE SOCIAL LIFE OF THE WHOLE WORLD. If you achieve this, your work will be what today we call true "ARCHITECTURE".■