

Biography

Alvar Aalto

1898–1976

- 1898 Born on 3 February in Kuortane, Finland, as Hugo Alvar Henrik Aalto.
- 1916 Graduates from the classical academic secondary school in Jyväskylä, followed by studies in architecture at the Helsinki University of Technology.
- 1918 Finnish civil war between »red« and »white« troops. Aalto fights on the side of the national (white) militia, who win the war with the support of Germany.
- 1921 Completes his degree in architecture, graduating with distinction from Helsinki University of Technology.
- 1923 Opens the Alvar Aalto Office for Architecture and Monumental Art in Jyväskylä, Finland.
- 1924 Marries the architect Aino Marsio, who joins his office and becomes a lifelong collaborator.
- 1925 Birth of the couple's daughter Johanna Flora Maria Annunziata on 1 August.
- 1927 Wins the commission to build a complex for the Southwestern Finland Agricultural Cooperative, prompting the family's move from the more provincial Jyväskylä to the port and university city of Turku.
- 1928 Becomes acquainted with furniture manufacturer Otto Korhonen, who produces Aalto's furniture from then on.
Birth of the couple's son Johan Henrik Hamilkar Alvar on 8 January.
- 1929 Attends the second Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne (CIAM) in Frankfurt, held under the theme »The Minimum Dwelling«. Aalto is elected to the CIRPAC committee, the inner circle of CIAM responsible for planning its conference programmes.
- 1932 Opening of the Paimio Sanatorium (1928–1932).
Presentation of Aalto's Turun Sanomat building (1928–1930) in a show at the New York Museum of Modern Art entitled »Modern Architecture – International Exhibition«. Aalto signs a licensing agreement with Wohnbedarf AG for the production and sale of his furniture in Switzerland.
- 1933 Moves his office to Helsinki. Exhibition of furniture by Aino and Alvar Aalto at the Fortnum & Mason department store in London, organized with the help of P. Morton Shand.
- 1935 Maire Gullichsen, Nils-Gustav Hahl and Alvar and Aino Aalto found the Artek furniture company and the Artek Gallery for »mondial activities«. Opening of the library in Viipuri.
- 1937 The Finnish Pavilion for the World Exposition in Paris is the Aaltos' first project outside of Finland.

- 1938 First trip to the US on the occasion of the exhibition *Alvar Aalto: Architecture and Furniture* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and to make preparations for the Finnish Pavilion at the World's Fair.
- 1939 Completion of Villa Mairea for Maire and Harry Gullichsen.
Serves as a lieutenant, then as a propaganda expert, in the Winter War between Finland and the Soviet Union (November 1939 to March 1940).
- 1940 Travels with his family to the USA and holds several lectures on the reconstruction of Finland in Washington, D.C. Aalto is appointed as a research professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology(MIT) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, but returns to Finland because of the war.
- 1942 The Reconstruction Office begins its work under Aalto's direction together with the Finnish Standards Association, also founded by him.
- 1944 Commission to develop a new master plan for the city of Rovaniemi after it is entirely destroyed by fire; Aalto's concept, which becomes known as the »reindeer antler plan«, is only partially implemented.
- 1945 Extended stay at MIT.
- 1946 Aalto is commissioned to design the Baker House Senior Dormitory (completed in 1949).
- 1949 Aino Aalto dies on 13 January after a long illness.
Sigfried Giedion devotes an extensive chapter to Alvar Aalto in the second edition of his book *Space, Time and Architecture*.
- 1952 Spends the summer in Sicily, where he marries the architect Elissa Mäkinen (1922–1994).
Aalto builds a summer house for the couple's own use on the Finnish island of Muuratsalo.
Completion of Säynätsalo Town Hall (1947–1952); Fernand Léger is commissioned by Aalto to contribute a painting to the council hall.
- 1957 Completion of the National Pensions Institute in Helsinki according to Aalto's plans.
Recipient of the Royal Gold Medal from the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in London.
- 1958 Completion of the Church of the Three Crosses in Vuoksenniska, Imatra (1955–1958).
- 1959 Opening party for the *Maison Louis Carré* in Bazoches-sur-Guyonne, France, with over 300 guests.
- 1961 Presents the first version of his master plan for the central district of Helsinki around Töölönlahti Bay and continues to work on it during the following years. The plan is never realised.
- 1967 Last trip to the USA. Aalto is the second architect to be awarded the Thomas Jefferson Medal.

1975

Completion of Finlandia Hall and the adjacent Congress Wing in Helsinki (1962–1975).

1976

Alvar Aalto dies on 11 May in Helsinki. His widow Elissa Aalto runs the office until her death in 1994. She oversees the completion of Aalto's design for the Essen Opera House between 1981 and 1988 and entrusts the collection of drawings in Aalto's estate to the Alvar Aalto Foundation.