



1926–1935

Aalto's Period of white functionalism in Turku and foreign contacts



1938–1947

Sparing commissions in Finland, Sweden and the USA

Value properties →  
STRATEGIES →

## ALVAR AALTO'S LIFE WORK 1926–1974



## IMBUED WITH TIMELESSNESS



1953–1962

Public planning commissions in an established office



1965–1974

Period of gradual deceleration with active collaborators

Value properties →  
STRATEGIES →



Function  
INNER  
REPETITION

### 1. Finland's Proper farm estate

In 1926, Turku published a planning competition for a new farm estate for Southwest Finland. Aino and Alvar Aalto won the competition, which led to the move of their office from Jyväskylä to Turku, where they worked for six years. The years meant for Aalto contacts with Nordic lands, which also gave him an opportunity for foreign visibility. This image shows the main entrance type of the Farm Estate, taken as an example of the application of the basic strategy "Inner Repetition" between "entries and entrance".



Style  
SIMULTANEITY

### 2. Turun Sanomat newspaper building

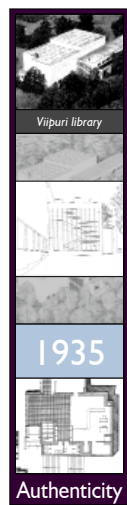
The office building for the newspaper Turun Sanomat was completed in Turku in 1929, and was characterized by band windows on the façade, signifying Aalto's turn away from 20th century classicism to functionalism. When the building was presented in the journal Arkitekten, Aalto made use of the formulation, "façade within a façade". Here attention is called to how "Simultaneity" has been applied as a strategy in the ribbed slats above the entrance, furnishing the stairway with daylight and the tenants with nameplates.



Structure  
DIALOGUE

### 3. Paimio Sanatorium

As a result of a general competition, Aalto received the commission to plan Paimio sanatorium which was completed in 1932. In the competition program, the section with beds formed the main façade, and the main image when the completed sanatorium was publicized in the journal Arkitekten. The reality proved otherwise. The parade view sought out a place round the corner where the strategy "Dialogue" awaited. The main façade was moved to the hospital's approach, in between the section with beds and the remaining space.



Authenticity  
OPPOSITIONS

### 4. Viipuri city library

The library in the formerly Finnish city of Viipuri, now located in Vyborg, Russia, opened in 1935, eight years after Aalto had turned in his winning competition entry. That the project managed to go through four planning stages before construction started appeared to be a stroke of luck. For the final version the strategy "Oppositions" was applied. The library's dominant volume containing the lending department was able, thanks to its circular roof apertures, to take its final form as a closed volume connected to an open pavilion section.



Roots  
INNER  
REPETITION

### 5. Extended row house in Sunila

After Aalto's office moved to Helsinki, a friendship developed with Maire and Harry Gullichsen which on Aalto's part resulted in extensive planning commissions. One commission concerned the planning of an industrial district in Sunila. In addition to a factory plant, the project concerned a residential neighborhood. In a rowhouse form which often is drawn in different contexts, the timeless strategy of "Inner Repetition" was established, as "dwelling place within a dwelling place", where a mini-apartment house created extended rowhouse lines.



Atmosphere  
SIMULTANEITY

### 6. Villa Mairea

Villa Mairea, planned by Aalto's office for the Gullichsen family, was completed in Noormarkku a few weeks before the Winter War broke out. In 1941, a full year later, the villa experienced a short period of peace before the Continuation War began. The villa is of interest here as a result of the changes which Aalto managed to drive through while the construction was underway. He established "Simultaneity" as a timeless strategy where he connected Maire's art gallery to Harry's study – as a part of the whole of the living room's volume.



Tradition  
DIALOGUE

### 7. Avesta city center

Aalto's active contacts with Sweden and the USA during the war years led to foreign planning commissions which often remained on paper only. In 1944 he received a commission to plan a city center for Avesta in Sweden. The project was never realized but is of interest because it serves as an example of how Aalto applied "Dialogue" as a strategy. An open plaza distinguishes itself from the center's main volumes, the city hall and city theatre. The tension among these parts, or their dialogue, creates the central motif.



Landscape  
OPPOSITIONS

### 8. Baker House in Boston's MIT

After the war, Aalto came for several stays at MIT in Boston, up until 1948 when his Baker House project at MIT was completed. Here we are reminded of the design alterations of the Viipuri library and Villa Mairea. The project was developed in stages and was completed, using "Oppositions" as its strategy. The building's interior obtains its final character from the interplay between two contrasting exteriors, forming waves on the exterior which faces toward the shore and appearing broken on the side facing toward land.



Landscape  
OPPOSITIONS

### 9. Jyväskylä university

When experiences independent of time and place concur, they often proceed from the application of timeless strategies. The planning of the main building for the present university began in 1953 and the building was ready the following year. The work out of the passages in the building was exceptionally successful because of the application of the timeless strategy, "Oppositions". Against a uniformly dark exterior, a light line pattern stands forth as a motif, brought about by means of staircases and columns.



Tradition  
DIALOGUE

### 10. House of Culture in Helsinki

After the war, Finland's Communist Party originated the creation of a House of Culture in Helsinki. Aalto's office received the commission and was responsible for the planning, which was underway in 1956. The building was dedicated two years later. An entry court with an extended peaked roof constitutes here an example of "Dialogue" as a strategy: an effective outer space stands here between the festival hall's closed volume of brick and a copper-clad row of offices featuring white functionalist style.



Atmosphere  
SIMULTANEITY

### 11. Vuoksenniska Church

Regarding office employment, Aalto received assistance from friends. Greta and William Lehtinen were among them. Town councillor Lehtinen arranged a site for Vuoksenniska Church in exchange for Aalto's office being given the planning commission for it. In 1956 the church had been consecrated the year before. The church space's guiding strategy was "Simultaneity". The outer church space could be partitioned by sliding concrete walls to serve the congregation's other activities.



Roots  
INNER  
REPETITION

### 12. Otaniemi main building

After the war years, there was indecision about whether to move the Technical High School to Otaniemi. An architectural competition for the Main Building was won by Aalto, and five years elapsed until the planning was seriously underway. In 1962 the building was in its final stages. "Inner Repetition" was the dominant strategy for the main building, as "an auditorium in auditoria". The upward-reaching dominant theme came with its outer auditorium firmly anchored toward the building site and the surroundings.



Authenticity  
OPPOSITIONS

### 13. Seinäjoki Community Center

Several events led to a number of buildings which together constituted the Seinäjoki Community Center being given to Aalto's office to plan. A church, a City Hall, and a city library made up the district's earliest building projects. The timeless strategy of "Oppositions" was used when the church was supplemented with an outdoor church in 1965. It was successful when a sufficiently large area could be framed within the simultaneously built parish center.



Structure  
DIALOGUE

### 14. Riola Congregational Church

Italian admiration for Aalto led to his receiving a commission to build a church building for Riola, near Bologna, in the 1960's. The church was ready in 1968, lacking a detached belltower. This untenable situation was resolved in the 1990's, when a belltower was built. The use of "Dialogue" as the timeless strategy, resulting in an entrance plaza in front of the church which made use of the interplay between the belltower's vertical lines and the church's enveloping roof structure.



Style  
SIMULTANEITY

### 15. Finlandia House

Finlandia House in Helsinki was dedicated in 1971, and became together with its addition that which was realized of Aalto's plan for the center. In the planning's final phase, Aalto was criticized for an excessively tight dimensioning of the lobby space. He solved the problem by moving out an internal staircase to the exterior of the foyer, at the same time achieving a welcome interruption as a motif in the horizontal main façade. The use of "Simultaneity" as a timeless strategy provided a successful resolution.



Function  
INNER  
REPETITION

### 16. Lappia, Rovaniemi City Theatre

Rovaniemi City Theatre and Congress Center became one of the last projects which were carried out by Aalto's office. In 1974 planning was completed a year before the theatre's dedication and two years before Aalto's death. He himself never witnessed the completed building in its locale and site. In working out the stage tower design, the timeless strategy, "Inner Repetition" when Aalto conceptualized the building's dominant feature as a part of the surrounding natural landscape, as "Arctic hills in an arctic landscape".





# A MUNICIPAL COMMONS IN FOCAL POINT

As a middle field for a life work with provision for the future



## FOR EXHIBITION VISITORS

In spring and summer of 2021, I was requested by the Aalto Museum to, together with Tampere University and the city of Jyväskylä, produce a summer exhibit at Säynätsalo Village Centre. The exhibit was intended to give a picture of how my early years of employment in Alvar Aalto's office influenced my pedagogy in architecture history for architecture students at Tampere University.

I chose then to present the underpinnings of a basic course in the history of European architectural culture. It was intended for students in their first autumn term. The threshold of knowledge as far as possible was held low, and the course was intended to awaken an interest in architectural history including among those who lacked the necessary previous historical knowledge.

The course organization differed from the customary approach in two ways: history's temporal space was formed as a visual whole, to be thereafter filled with architectural history. The course advanced at the same time by means of a timeless or time-transcending foundation, which I also regarded Aalto as having relied upon in his architectural execution.

The exhibition material in Säynätsalo consists mainly of different temporal spaces, which were prepared as a collective work exercise. As a result of the selection of an exhibition site, the exhibition material was completed by students at Tampere University in Spring 2021, with a Säynätsalo composition. A model of Säynätsalo was built for the exhibition, in which Aalto's life work was reflected against the history of European architectural culture and a timeless foundation. With the composition and model, the application of the basic course's pedagogic method again manifested itself.

With the Säynätsalo composition and model led the arrangers of the exhibition to conclude that a new exhibition was called for in which the Säynätsalo Village Centre would take the sole main role, 1) as a treasure, 2) as a midpoint for Aalto's work, and 3) as a treasury with timeless features of value and timeless strategies. Another Aalto exhibit would be able to transport interest and the most central points into the future.

The Department of Architecture at the swedish speaking engineering association in Finland, Tekniska Föreningen i Finland, has realized the idea with support from the foundations Tekniska Föreningens i Finlands stiftelse, Föreningen Konstsamfundet and Svenska Tekniska Vetenskapsakademien i Finland, and professionally by Suomen Rakennustietosäätiö and Alvar Aalto foundations.

The following details set forth the content of the new exhibition, in three parts: 1) The Introduction, 2) The Transformation, and 3) The Conclusion.

The idea for the exhibition arose as a result of unexpected coincidences: the design of Säynätsalo Village Centre drawn by Alvar Aalto succeeds in opening three new tracks. As a particular structure, the Village Centre is understood as an individual treasure. As a village centre, the project is widely known. A few years ago, the New York Times gave tribute to the Centre in a list of the ten most significant structures built since World War II. The coming into being of Säynätsalo Village Centre around 1950 marked the midpoint of Aalto's life work.

During the earlier period, Aalto collaborated with his first wife, architect Aino Aalto (1894–1949). During the second period, he collaborated with his second wife, architect Elissa Aalto (1922–1994). The midpoint viewed as bisecting his work, makes it easier to form an overview of what characterizes Alvar Aalto's 50 year long life work.

Thus arises the Village Centre's third role, its calling attention to a timeless basis to his work. To that must be added a tetrahedron, a tetrahedron derived from his ability to use an instrument of thought. The tetrahedron is a three dimensional Yin and Yang figure and its choice as a conceptual tool can be attributed to Aalto's own belief that his architecture has its origins in the Far East. Regarding the use of the Yin and Yang figure in connection with architecture, his own home in Helsinki in Munkkiniemi represents an excellent example. (See the adjacent plan drawing.)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

From Figures 1, 2 and 3, above, it is clear how a timeless foundation for building culture is derived, taking off from the Village Centre's Inner Courtyard. Figure 1 reflects the Basic intentions existing behind the functions of the Inner Courtyard.

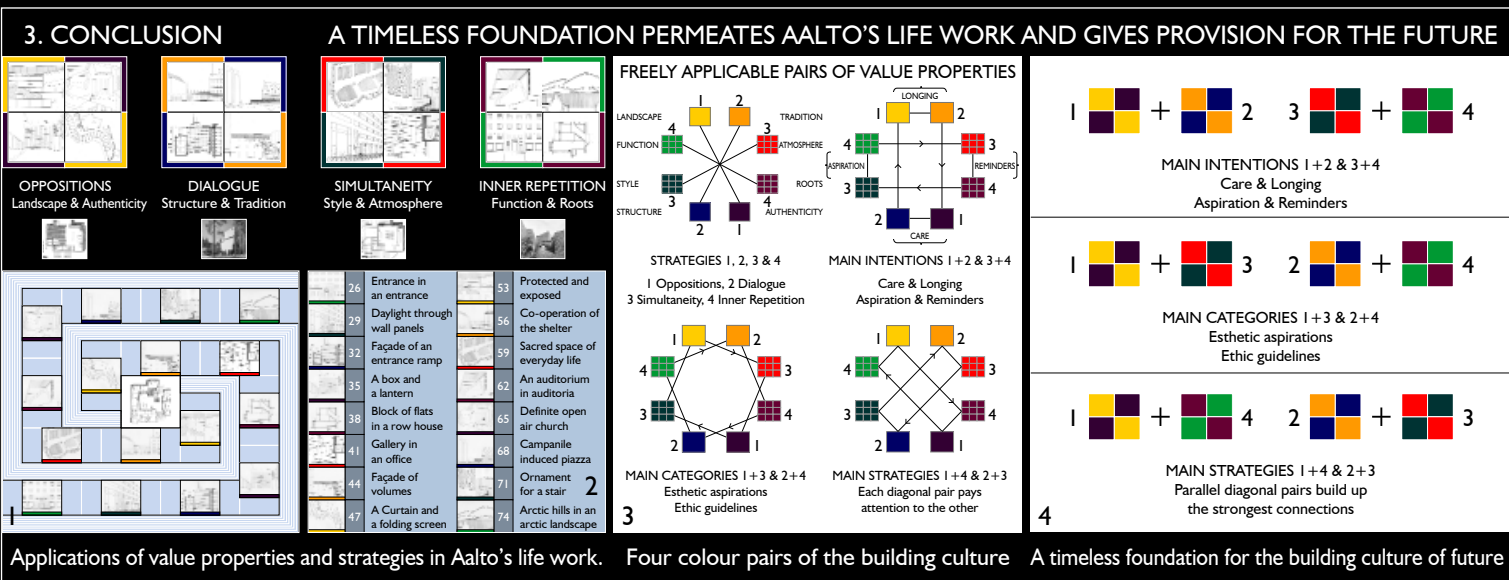
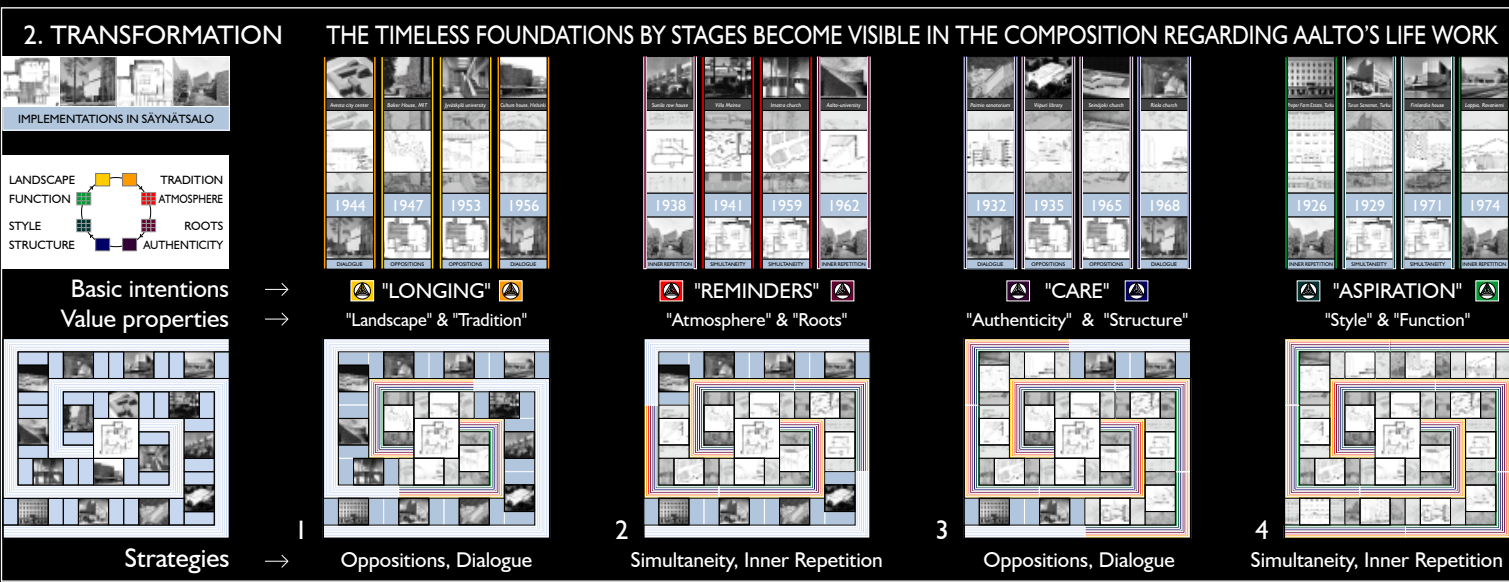
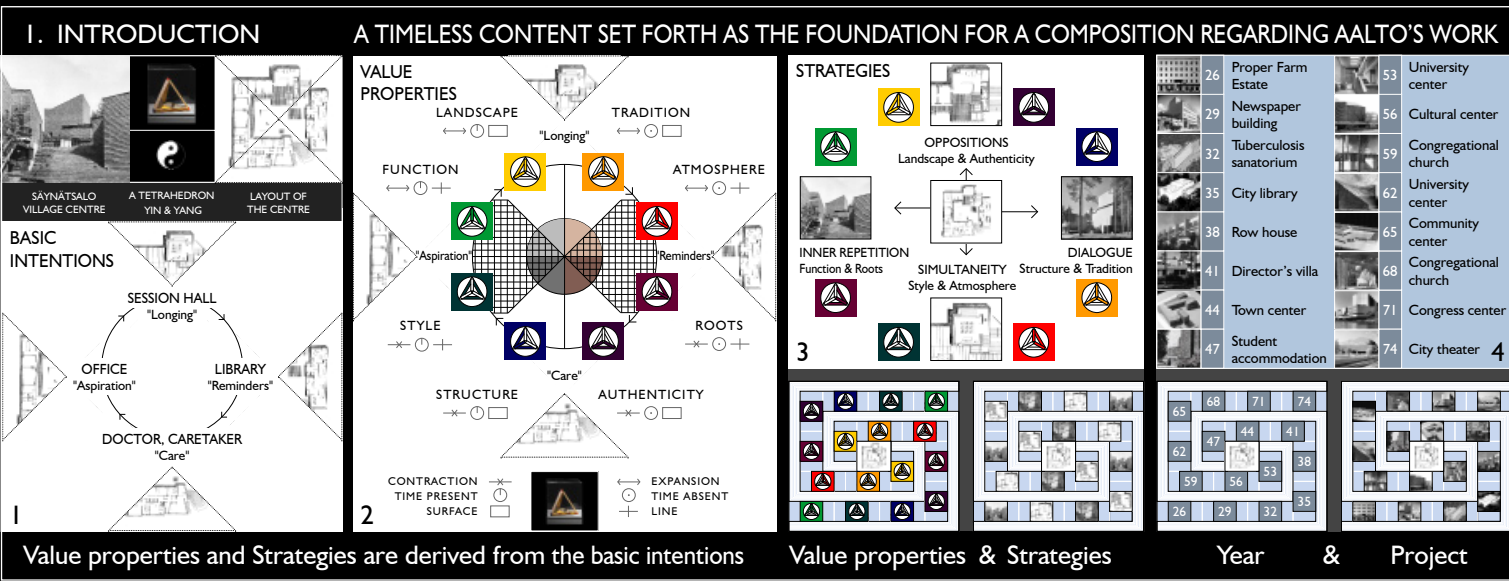


Figure 2 separates the intentions' core parts from one another after a tetrahedron's three opposing sides have been reserved for POWER, TIME, and GEOMETRY. Eight different combinations arise from the opposing pairs. Supplied with symbolic colors, the eight combinations evoke building culture's timeless underlying features of value.

Figure 3 makes visible the tetrahedron's own four timeless strategies, which are illustrated with the application to the Village Centre's entrance: the floor of wood and stone (Oppositions), outer stair (Dialogue), the hall's lateral aisle (Simultaneity), and the hall's volume (Inner Repetition).

Finally, a portrait can be developed in which Aalto's rests upon basic values and strategies' timeless foundation.

## 2. TRANSFORMATION

Transformation with Säynätsalo Village Centre in the middle field of the diagrams, is the exhibition's primary focus. A picture of Aalto's life work and his central objectives over a three year time span gives the starting point. In the middle of the sixteen triptychs displayed in the exhibition, lies Aalto's central objective of a timeless foundation.

While Transformation happens in four stages, it opens with Aalto's applications of four strategies in the triptych's center and gives the necessary content for the miniature model's columns. Simultaneously, every object's color draws attention to its possession of value as part of the spiral chain. Finally, the Transformation results in the completed Säynätsalo Village Centre composition, with drawings that the Tampere students prepared in the spring term of 2021.

## 3. CONCLUSION

When attention is turned to the exhibition's timeless foundation, it becomes clear that every one of the four timeless strategies in combination with a pair of colors in the color circle exhibits a joint diagonal. In three different pairs, where two color pairs work together, they make visible basic intentions, basic categories, and basic strategies.

On the brochure's other side is presented a miniature model of Aalto's life work with the Village Centre in the middle, surrounded by its timeless underlying foundations. When the Centre's timebound content comes to be removed, the model with its present day significance will remain in the center field, as a machine of eternity.

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