



1. Pirjo and Matti Sanaksenaho, Architects

There is an interesting phenomenon in the history of modern Finnish architecture: the collaboration and achievements of architect couples. Beginning in the 1920s, Aino and Alvar Aalto provided an outstanding example of interaction in architectural work between two exceptionally gifted and creative spouses. They have been followed by several other architect couples who have entered Finland's architectural hall of fame. It is clear that the ideal of equality in Finnish society is one of the factors that has liberated women from domestic work in the family and prepared the way for working in professions that have been traditionally male-dominated. On the other hand, architecture and the work of an architect is often much more than just a profession. Architecture is a way of life which you can only devote yourself to entirely when your life-companion is ready to share in it. Pirjo and Matti Sanaksenaho are among the most gifted young architect couples working in Finland today. Both were born in 1966 and graduated in architecture from the Helsinki University of Technology in 1993. They have worked together since 1997 in their own architect's office, which was set up in 1991 by Matti Sanaksenaho while he was still studying. Both have also worked as teachers in schools of architecture in Finland and abroad. When asked how they work together, the couple's answer is simple: their work is based on constant dialogue. They discuss solutions together throughout the entire design process. The office also employs two young female architects in addition to Pirjo and Matti. The prevailing atmosphere in the office in the centre of Helsinki is informal and creative. Before graduating as an architect, Matti Sanaksenaho had already established something of a reputation with four other architecture students in a group founded called MONARK. In 1990 the group won Finland's pavilion design competition for the 1992 world exhibition in Seville. The sculptural shape of the pavilion, suggestive of a natural rock formation, attracted attention at that time as an example of a new type of environmental architecture. Since the 1990s, public as well as private building projects have been designed in Sanaksenaho's own office. Although the list of commissioned works has yet to grow very long, several of them have already attracted considerable attention in international architecture media and exhibitions. As a result, the office has begun to receive commissions and invitations for competitions both at home and from abroad, one noteworthy example being Villa CIPEA in Nanjing, China for an international housing exhibition in 2005.

2. St. Henry's Ecumenical Art Chapel

St. Henry's Ecumenical Art Chapel is itself a work of art. When approached from the outside, the shape of the chapel looks like a copper sculpture resting on a hill, whose high window openings nevertheless invite you to search for a way in. The entrance is hidden to the pedestrian on the street. To enter the chapel one must walk uphill, past its south facade to a plateau, which opens out onto a beautiful natural environment. A heavy copper door dominates the western facade of the chapel. The door leads to the foyer, which receives light from two skylights located high up in the steep rake of the roof as well as from a low horizontal ribbon window on the northern wall opening onto the surrounding woods. The sights of the sky from the roof windows and of the woods from the ribbon window quite literally offer a perspective of "heaven and earth". Pirjo and Matti Sanaksenaho, the venture has been supported by an association of friends from the Helsinki University of Technology in 1993. They have worked together since 1997 in their own architect's office, which was set up in 1991 by Matti Sanaksenaho while he was still studying. Both have also worked as teachers in schools of architecture in Finland and abroad. When asked how they work together, the couple's answer is simple: their work is based on constant dialogue. They discuss solutions together throughout the entire design process. The office also employs two young female architects in addition to Pirjo and Matti. The prevailing atmosphere in the office in the centre of Helsinki is informal and creative. Before graduating as an architect, Matti Sanaksenaho had already established something of a reputation with four other architecture students in a group founded called MONARK. In 1990 the group won Finland's pavilion design competition for the 1992 world exhibition in Seville. The sculptural shape of the pavilion, suggestive of a natural rock formation, attracted attention at that time as an example of a new type of environmental architecture. Since the 1990s, public as well as private building projects have been designed in Sanaksenaho's own office. Although the list of commissioned works has yet to grow very long, several of them have already attracted considerable attention in international architecture media and exhibitions. As a result, the office has begun to receive commissions and invitations for competitions both at home and from abroad, one noteworthy example being Villa CIPEA in Nanjing, China for an international housing exhibition in 2005.

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