

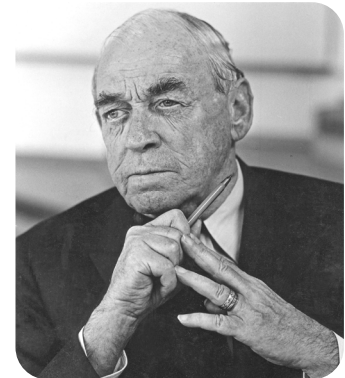
Alvar Aalto, biography and works

■ Biography

Hugo Alvar Henrik Aalto (1898-1976) was a Finnish architect and designer. His work includes architecture, furniture, textiles and glassware. The distinctive feature for his entire career is a concern for design as a total work of art.

Alvar Aalto was born in Kuortane, Finland, in 1898. He studied at the Jyväskylä Lyceum school, completing his basic education in 1916. In the same year, he enrolled at the Helsinki University of Technology to study architecture, graduating in 1921. In 1923, he returned to Jyväskylä, where he opened his first architectural office. The following year he married Aino Marsio, an architect and a fellow student, who was his professional collaborator until her death. Aalto's early career runs parallel with the rapid economic growth and industrialization of Finland during the first half of the 20th century and many of his clients were industrialists. His career, which spanned from the 1920s to the 1970s, is reflected in the styles of his work, ranging from the Nordic Classicism of his early career to

an International Style Modernism during the 1930s, and a more organic modernist style from the 1940s onwards. Aalto designed buildings in Finland, Germany, America, and Sweden.



Alvar Aalto

He used complex forms and varied materials, giving attention to both the character of the site and every detail of the building.

Aalto received many honours. He was the president of the Academy of Finland from 1963 to 1968 and a member of the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne from 1928 to 1956. His awards included the Royal Gold Medal for Architecture from the Royal Institute of British Architects (1957) and the Gold Medal from the American Institute of Architects (1963).

1 Complete the table with the missing dates and facts.

1898	
	He completed his basic education
	He graduated from the Helsinki University of Technology
1923	
	He married Aino Marsio
	His career
	He was a member of the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne
1957	
1963	
	He was president of the Academy of Finland

■ Career

2 Complete the text on Aalto's early career with the words in the box.

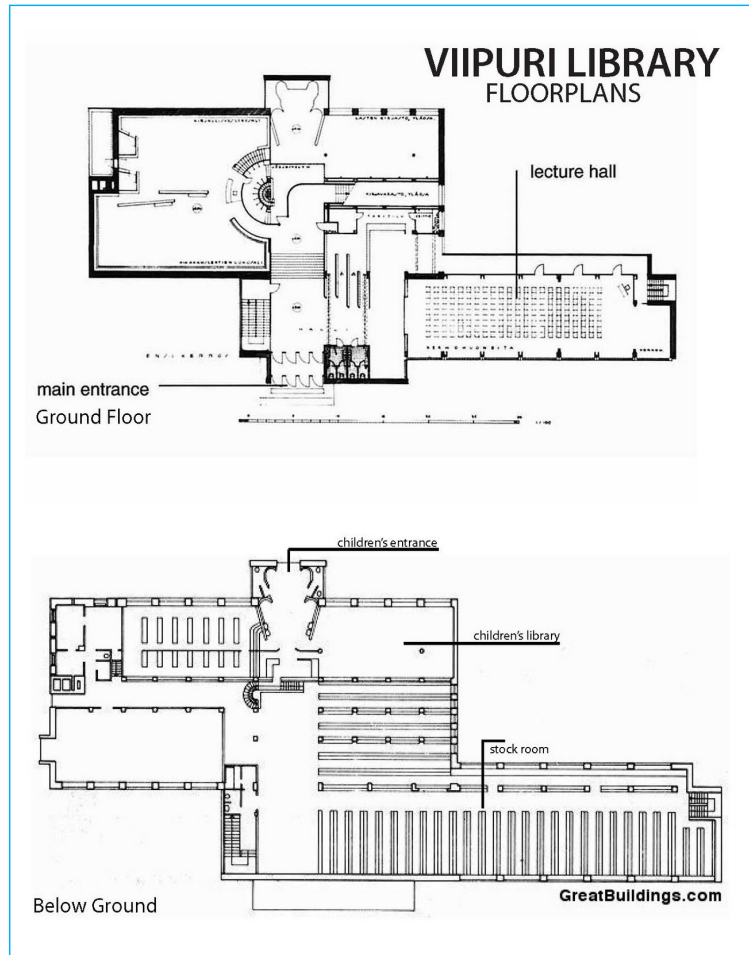
approach • commissions • described • important • natural • reputation • success • time • work • worldwide

Early career. The years 1927 and 1928 were significant in Aalto's career. He received **1.** for three **2.** buildings that brought him **3.** recognition. These were the Turun Sanomat Building (newspaper office) in Turku, the Tuberculosis Sanatorium at Paimio, and the Municipal Library at Viipuri (now Vyborg, Russia). His humanistic **4.** is in full evidence in Viipuri library: the interior displays **5.** materials and warm colours. For the library auditorium, Aalto created an undulating acoustic ceiling of wooden strips. It was Aalto's **6.** here that identified him with the so-called "organic approach" of modern design.

In 1928, Aalto became a member of the Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne and it was during this **7.** that he followed closely the **8.** of

Le Corbusier. In the 1930s, his **9.** grew in the USA when his design for the Finnish Pavilion at

the 1939 New York World's Fair was **10.** by Frank Lloyd Wright as a "work of genius".



Mid career. Aalto's experiments in furniture date from the early 1930s, when he furnished the Sanatorium at Paimio. His furniture is well-known for its use of laminated wood in ribbon-like forms that serve both structural and aesthetic ends. In 1935, the Artek Company was founded by Aalto and Maire Gullichsen, the wife of the industrialist and art collector Harry Gullichsen, to manufacture and market his furniture.



Paimio chair



Villa Mairea

The Gullichsens believed in the possibility of a social utopia based on technological progress and found in Alvar Aalto a designer who shared their ideals. Alvar Aalto designed their country home, Villa Mairea in Noormarkku, Finland, between 1937 and 1939. The design of the house is a synthesis of numerous stylistic influences, from traditional Finnish architecture to purist modernism, as well as influences from English and Japanese architecture.

3 Complete the phrases with the right ending.

- | | | |
|--|--------------------------|---|
| 1. The Artek Company was founded by | <input type="checkbox"/> | a. date from the early 1930s. |
| 2. The use of laminated wood | <input type="checkbox"/> | b. a designer who shared their ideals. |
| 3. Aalto's experiments in furniture | <input type="checkbox"/> | c. is a synthesis of numerous stylistic influences. |
| 4. Villa Mairea was built for | <input type="checkbox"/> | d. in ribbon-like forms. |
| 5. The design of the house | <input type="checkbox"/> | e. the Gullichsens near Noormarkku (1939). |
| 6. In Alvar Aalto, the Gullichsens found | <input type="checkbox"/> | f. Aalto and Maire Gullichsen. |

■ Mature works

The decade of the 1940s was upset by war and saddened by his wife's death. In 1952, he married Elissa Mäkinen, who became his new collaborator. Aalto's works after 1950, in addition to being greater in number, were more varied, such as a high-rise apartment building in Bremen, Germany (1958), a church near Bologna, Italy (1966), an art museum in Iran (1970).

His continuing work in Finland, however, remained the measure of his genius. Many of his projects involved site planning of building groups. Two such projects were the master plans of colleges at Otaniemi (1949-55) and at Jyväskylä (1952-57).

The single work that best characterizes Aalto's mature style is perhaps Säynätsalo Town Hall, built in red brick, wood, and copper, all traditional materials of Finland.

Following Aalto's death in 1976, his office continued to operate under the direction of his

widow, Elissa, completing works already to some extent designed.

These works include the Jyväskylä City Theatre and Essen Opera House. Since the death of Elissa Aalto, the office has continued to operate as the Alvar Aalto Academy, giving advice on the restoration of Aalto buildings and organising the vast archive material.



Säynätsalo Town Hall

4 Answer the questions about Aalto's mature works.

1. Why was the decade of 1940s a sad period for Alvar Aalto?
2. What happened in 1952?
3. What buildings did Aalto design after 1950?
4. What were his main projects in Finland?
5. What single building characterizes his mature style?
6. What works were completed after his death by his widow, Elissa?
7. What are the tasks of Alvar Aalto Academy today?



Baker House dormitory at the MIT, Cambridge, Boston

Alvar Aalto designed the **Baker House** in 1946 while he was a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where the dormitory is located. It received its name in 1950, after the MIT's Dean of Students Everett Moore Baker was killed in an airplane crash that year. The building runs along the north side of the Charles River and Aalto's plans maximize the view of the river for every student. The form established a wide variety of room shapes, creating 43 rooms and 22 different room shapes per floor that although similar, still required distinct designs for the placement of built-in furniture. Built with dark red bricks, the modular pieces come together to create sweeping curves that contrast the solid limestone of the rectilinear common room which is a static space in comparison to the movement of the dormitories. The Baker House went through four major renovations since it was completed in 1948, including a replacement of all the windows, making the building wheelchair accessible, a renovation of the mechanical systems, and a restoration of birch furnishings. However, despite these renovations, the attention to detail in the Baker House dormitory brought the essence and formality of Aalto's work into America.

