

## The Finlandia Prize for Architecture: winner selection criteria

The built environment is our common space, our extended living room, which has a significant influence on our well-being and the functioning of society. We spend almost all of our time in the built environment, which also constitutes the majority of our wealth. We must demand that our built environment is of high-quality design.

The shortlisted candidates for the first Finlandia Prize for Architecture were Gösta's Pavilion in Mänttä, Kaisa House in Helsinki, the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw, and the Seinäjoki main library. The candidates selected by the jury have a lot in common. They are all cultural buildings (two libraries and two museums). They represent architecture that conveys a sense of dignity and serenity, and that has a restrained formal idiom. They bear witness to the ability of today's architects to create beautiful and functional spaces.

I evaluated the candidates based on the following selection criteria.

The first criterion is that the appearance of the building must be consistent or have an interesting relationship with its use. The appearance of the building should convey something about its idea.

The second criterion is that the design meets both aesthetic and functional requirements. Practicality and beauty should go hand in hand.

Thirdly, the building should fit in with its surroundings. This involves harmony, but also interplay between elements.

Each of the candidates selected by the jury easily meets the criteria listed above. With Kaisa House, the entrance hall and open spaces that, either vertically or horizontally, allow daylight onto nearly all the floors, are perfectly suited for a university library, in which students are supposed to let their ideas flow freely. Gösta's Pavilion is in itself a stylish building, but it also nicely frames and enhances the 1930s manor house. The new Seinäjoki library has its own identity, but it also carries many references to the adjacent libraries and other buildings designed by **Alvar Aalto**, successfully complementing the architectural complex they form.

However, the winner of the first Finlandia Prize for Architecture is the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw. The justification for the selection is as follows.

On the outside, the Museum of the History of Polish Jews is like a big box, which is not in itself very exciting as a shape. Its glass exterior makes the building appear light, and the carefully considered details provide a contrast to the uniformity of the design. The building's modest and restrained appearance, when experienced on-site, feels like absolutely the right approach to take, considering its use. It is an approach that respects the history and tragic fate of the Polish Jews.

The form and facade of the building fit in with the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes in front of it. The opposite back wall of the building, in turn, features a very large and curvilinear window that opens onto a lush park. The front facade is dark and closed, while the opposite wall is open and expressive.

The large entrance hall, which divides and structures the building, forms its heart. Its high, curvilinear or undulating, and slightly unpolished walls baffle visitors and raise questions about the message of the space. Many metaphors have been suggested in the interpretations of the entrance hall, which is an indication of its successful design.

In addition to housing the museum, the building is full of life, with multiple functions, including spaces for temporary exhibitions, a busy learning centre and a sizable concert hall. The facilities are spacious and elegant, movement between the different parts of the building is smooth, and visitors are easily drawn into the mood. The details are carefully considered and finely implemented throughout.

The exhibition on the history of the Polish Jews is staged under the entrance hall, that is, below ground, and it is accessible via the staircase (or the lifts). It may seem strange that the main attraction is located under the heart of the building (in a way that resembles the tombs of the kings in ancient Egypt or Greece).

The fruitful main idea of the building is the tension between the restrained exterior and the dramatic form of the entrance hall. The mood of the building is solemn and dignified, but at the same time warm and optimistic. Familiarisation with the surrounding building stock leads to the idea that we are dealing with more than just a museum: this building is a powerful and significant work of art that will change the look of Warsaw as a whole.

**Sixten Korkman**