

Philosopher Esa Saarinen to select winner of the 2021 Finlandia Prize for Architecture

The nominees shortlisted for this year's Finlandia Prize for Architecture are the City of Helsinki's Urban Environment Division headquarters in Verkkosaari, the Fyyri library in Kirkkonummi and Ylivieska Church.

The recipient of the Finlandia Prize for Architecture is chosen each year by an influential public figure who is a recognised expert in an area other than architecture. This year, the winner will be chosen by philosopher Esa Saarinen. It is the eighth time the award will be presented by the Finnish Association of Architects (SAFA). The winner will be announced on 4 October 2021.

Philosopher, business coach and writer, Esa Saarinen is also Professor Emeritus at Aalto University and a well-known contributor to Finnish public debates on a wide range of topics. Saarinen has long enjoyed a close professional association with engineering as a scientific discipline and in 2001, he was appointed professor of systems sciences, applied philosophy and creative problem solving at what is now Helsinki's Aalto University. His course titled *Philosophy and systems thinking* was a popular feature of the curriculum for many years. Esa Saarinen recently retired from his post at Aalto University.

All 2021 nominees are public sector projects

The Finlandia Prize for Architecture shortlist is chosen by a pre-selection jury appointed each year by SAFA. The Covid-19 pandemic again continued to impact on the jury's work this year.

"Due to the ongoing situation with the Covid-19 pandemic, we made the decision to exclude all schools, nurseries, care homes and international projects from the selection process, due to the challenges involved in conducting visits at these sites. As a result, all of the buildings shortlisted this year are public sector projects, as these buildings have remained open and accessible to the public. What all these projects share is an unstinting commitment to the highest architectural standards, a strong conceptual approach and a well-considered and balanced use of materials. They are all well placed and complement their surroundings beautifully. Importantly, they are also hugely meaningful to the communities that surround them," explains Saija Hollmén, Chair of the pre-selection jury.

The 2021 pre-selection jury comprised Professor Saija Hollmén, Professor Tuomo Siitonen, Professor Panu Lehtovuori and architect Mona Schalin. The secretariat was provided by Paula Huotelin, Secretary General of the Finnish Association of Architects (SAFA).

Archaic yet modern – Helsinki's Urban Environment Division HQ

Built in the Verkkosaari district of Helsinki in 2020, the city council's new Urban Environment Division headquarters has been designed and built to accommodate the whole division, including staff workspaces and customer service facilities, under one roof. The office block was designed by Ilmari Lahdelma, Teemu Seppälä and Minja Hildén.

Featuring seven above-ground floors, the design is characterised by its lively articulation which enriches the surrounding area's visual identity. A cut has been made into the otherwise uniform urban block structure to create an open square that highlights the building's status as a public space. At street level, the building anchors into place through a series of arcades and pillared walkways.

Internally, the airy and spacious public areas stretch across two floors and are easy to navigate. The transition from public to restricted and then private spaces is smooth and well thought-through. The office spaces are designed with a collaborative, community feel in mind.

The architects also make bold and accomplished use of brick. The end result is a truly impressive building that's archaic yet modern. It is an excellent addition to Helsinki's new generation of stone buildings.

Rooted in the land and in local history – Kirkkonummi's main library Fyyri

The Fyyri library building in Kirkkonummi was completed in 2020. The library was designed by JKMM Arkkitehdit. The principal designer was Teemu Kurkela, the project architect Jukka Mäkinen and the interior

architect Tiina Rytkönen. The new building envelopes the original library by Ola Hansson, built in 1982, with the original library retained in its entirety and insightfully incorporated into Fyri.

The copper-clad facades and white concrete, wood and glass interiors are unapologetically bold and have a sense of vivacity and momentum about them. Inside, Fyri offers visitors a wealth of opportunities, from state-of-the-art audiovisual equipment, a music studio and rehearsal rooms to sewing, storytelling and simply chilling.

The architecture skilfully highlights the twin *raison d'être* of libraries everywhere: books and reading. The book collection is housed in an east-facing space built using tall and slender concrete structures. The periodicals room and cafe with their low ceilings and horizontal lines take their cue from Kirkkonummi's medieval church. The design engages in dialogue with the city's other architectures, creating a truly memorable and aesthetically satisfying urban space.

The main entrance to the library is located in a spot where the historic King's Road, Finland's medieval highway, bends. The building forges links with the past while radiating shared meanings for the future.

Built of light – Ylivieska Church

Ylivieska's Holy Trinity Church was consecrated in spring 2021, five years after the original 18th century wooden church was destroyed by fire. K2S architects were appointed to design the new structure following an open competition. The building was designed by Kimmo Lintula, Niko Sirola and Mikko Summanen. The new church building has been re-oriented to face away from city centre traffic. Charred timber from the old church has been re-claimed and used to create a cross on the site as a reminder of the fire that destroyed it. The building reflects a confident and professionally mature approach to design. The architecture is characterised by its clarity and simplicity; the shapes are considered and the geometries well-judged. The materials, too, have been chosen with care. The imposing brick cladding gives the building a coherent and cohesive appearance, while the roof beams are concealed behind strip panelling executed in a warm tone.

Although the church is imbued with an almost gravitational heft, the most defining construction material here is light. Light floods into the space through strategically placed openings behind the altar and in the roof ridge, inviting those gathered there to reflect on the most timeless and universal of themes.

Finlandia Prize for Architecture

The Finlandia Prize for Architecture is awarded for the design or renovation design of an outstanding new building or building complex that has been completed within the past three years. The prize may be awarded either to a Finnish or foreign architect, or to an architectural firm for a project designed for a location in Finland; or to a Finnish architect or architectural firm for a project designed for a location abroad. The recipient of the Finlandia Prize for Architecture is chosen by a public figure who is a recognised expert in an area other than architecture. The winner is selected from a shortlist of projects chosen by the Pre-Selection Jury. The purpose of the prize is to promote the appreciation of high-quality architecture and to highlight the importance of architecture in generating cultural value and increasing well-being.

The Finnish Association of Architects (SAFA) is a non-profit professional organisation engaged in active efforts to promote architecture and high-quality living environments. Established in 1892, SAFA has approximately 3,100 members, all of whom are architects with a university degree. Additionally, SAFA has around 600 student members.

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