

## Old Ditch — New Water

BY MIKKO HEIKKINEN

The following keynote was presented at the 12<sup>th</sup> International **docomomo** Conference that took place in Espoo, Finland, in August 2012. The title refers to the lecture given by an American artist James Turrell at the symposium *Permanence in Architecture* organized by Virginia Tech in 1998. In architecture and in all arts the new is eroding the old earth and slowly reforming tradition. “Survival of Modern” could be seen as an effort to use the built “modern” environment in a sustainable way. Mikko Heikkinen believes that our challenge is not only to make iconic masterpieces of the Modern Masters to survive but even more what to do with the vast mass of contemporary buildings not found in the architectural guide books. In his presentation, Mikko Heikkinen listed five different cases – five different strategies to make modern to survive: 1) recycling, 2) preserving and restoring the historical milieu, 3) creating a historical and functional collage, 4) preserving a historical fragment and 5) contradiction.



01 © Mikko Heikkinen.

### Five different cases — five different strategies to make modern survive:

#### Recycling

The developers and investors are speaking about “tired properties”, buildings which don’t meet anymore the changing demands of location, technical services or image: offices from 70’ies, empty industrial premises too close the city centers, old warehouses where the harbor or railway has moved away. Are these structures doomed to be demolished?

The University of Art and Design (now a part of Aalto University) is located in the old industrial premises of Arabia Ceramics in the historic section of Helsinki, where the city was founded in 1550. The area has a long tradition in industrial design manufacture. With ceramic production moving into modern technologies, vacant parts of the old factory buildings were available for new uses.

The Mediacyenter is partly incorporated into renovated manufacturing structures old Arabia factories designed by architect Erik Lindroos in 1946. Technically more sophisticated operations like film and television studios, a black-box theater, and an auditorium, were located in a new addition outside the old structures. The extensive building complex projected can be seen as a small town, which is organized hierarchically into squares and *boulevards*, back alleys and service areas. The renovation of the old manufacturing structure retains its original roughness and authenticity, an approach that fits the practical needs of its new function.

The project included rearranging the main entrance of the university as well. A glazed gallery connects the new entry across the block to the main square of the Arabianranta residential suburb. The gallery is used for exhibiting student projects and it also serves as a lobby for a 400 seat auditorium and an experimental theater.



### Preserving and Restoring the Historical Milieu

The most inspiring experiences of architecture are made not by single objects but milieus of harmony and consistency of style, material or function. Industrial block close to the center of Helsinki by cooperative firm *Elanto* was built from 1920's on in several stages consisting of a bakery, a dairy, offices and warehouses. Most buildings were designed by architect Väinö Vähäkallio. The main target for the city planners and Helsinki City Museum controlling the process was not to restore the individual buildings but to save a unique fragment of Helsinki seafront.

Our project included the renovation of a former vegetable warehouse and the construction of a new office block linked to the old building. The users were the Senate

Properties and the Headquarters for National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (STAKES).

The design solution aims to unify the red brick façade towards the sea — the characteristic feature of the early industrial Helsinki seascape. The modern office concepts emphasizing transparency compromise with the old industrial milieu.

The massive brick walls, the concrete silos and the dense grid of mushroom pillars of the former warehouse create a unique frame for the architecture of the offices. The original monumental and austere character of the warehouse has been preserved. The enlargement of the old narrow windows is camouflaged by brick colored copper grilles in





such a way that the characteristics of the façade stay essentially the same. The old courtyard wall is dismantled with a new glass façade to provide light into the deep building frame. The silos are used for functions that don't need openings for natural light. The railway tunnel crossing the volume is preserved and used as a part of the entrance.

The street and courtyard façades of the new building are laid in brick *in situ*. The window openings of the office rooms are connected to the rhythm of those of the warehouse by similar copper grilles. The walls of the new building follow the height of the eaves of the warehouse. The uppermost floors of the new building are clad in copper and recessed from the street front to maintain a continuous eaves line.

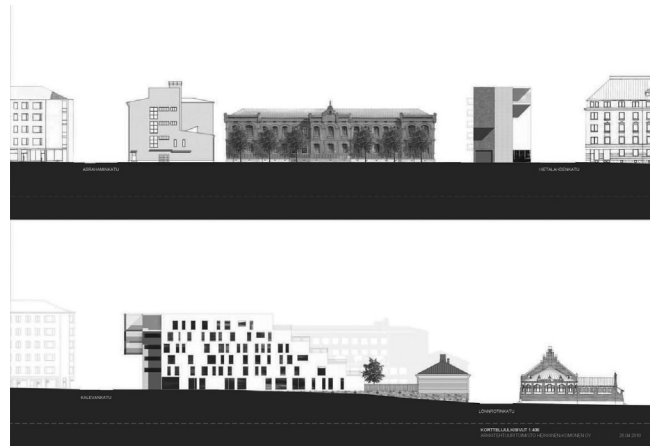
### Creating a Historical and Functional Collage

The history of the city creates dissonances, surprising juxtapositions and unplanned layers making in the end — at its best — urban adventures. The eaves lines don't have to always match. The Guards Hospital Block in the middle of today's Helsinki is a good example of this. The block consists of buildings constructed in different periods during the last 200 years. The result is a rich palette of architecture of various styles, authors, materials and functions. Though the entity could not be more heterogeneous, the buildings close a harmonious oasis in the midst of the city fuss.

Our project was to research new uses for the old buildings and to study the parking arrangements and to test possibilities for additional constructions. Two wooden storages



11 Heikkinen-Komonen Architects, Mediacenter LUME for the Helsinki University of Art and Design, Helsinki, Finland, 2000, © Jussi Tainen, 2000.



12 Heikkinen-Komonen Architects, Redevelopment Study of the Guards Hospital Block, Helsinki, Finland, 2006. © Heikkinen-Komonen Architects, 2006.

in the western corner of the block, which did not have any specific architectural or historical value, were proposed to be moved from the site. A new residential volume was outlined to match in height the surrounding cityscape and to give functional mix to the site.

### Preserving a Historical Fragment

When the Port of Helsinki moved to its present location in Vuosaari the seafront of the city started to dramatically change and large areas were released to new functions, mainly for housing. Jätkäsaari peninsula, accessed before only by harbor traffic, is now a vast construction site and will be a new suburb for 16.000 people in the middle of the town. But not all the past will be swept away. A row of old terminals and warehouses will be preserved and renovated for new uses as fragments of the history and to give to the young neighborhood temporal depth.

Previously, when a ship sailed into harbour, men would

rush into the Huutokonttori to apply for work in unloading the cargo. With the advent of cargo containers, the need for manual labor in the harbor lessened noticeably, and the use of Huutokonttori was discontinued. The older part of the Huutokonttori was designed in 1937 by city architect Gunnar Taucher. The annex was finished in 1958. It was designed by architects A. Hytönen and R.-V. Luukkonen.

The new life for Huutokonttori was chosen to be a local Rescue Station and an Information Center for the Jätkäsaari city planning and housing projects. Zoning regulations prevented to alter the building in such a way which could “reduce its architectural, historical or urban value or change its architectural character.” The new functions obliged to make major changes in the interior, but the main stair, where the stevedores queued the job of the day, was restored to its original state as well as the gym in the attic floor and the large spaces in the 30’ies part of the building were dismantled from the later additions and material layers.



13 Gunnar Taucher; A. Hytonen and R.V. Luukkonen, Emergency Service Center Jätkäsaari, Helsinki, Finland, 1937; 1958. Photo of the building before our renovation as in its original use. Photographer and date unknown.



14 Heikkinen-Komonen Architects, Emergency Service Center Jätkäsaari, Helsinki, Finland, 2011. The main elevation before the renovation (above) and after (below). © Heikkinen-Komonen Architects, 2011.



15 Heikkinen-Komonen Architects, Tali-Ihantala Center, Lappeenranta, Finland, 2009. © Heikkinen-Komonen Architects, 2009.

On the exterior much of the fenestration had to be redesigned, but colors and scale in the details were preserved. The elevations are new, but look like the old ones, perhaps even better...

### Contradiction

The battle of Tali-Ihantala was the largest battle ever fought in the history of the Nordic countries and it was decisive for the final military and political arrangements for Finland in the end of WW2. An architectural competition was launched in 2009 to design an entrance pavilion and a multimedia theater to exhibit this historical momentum. The location for the project was between two army barracks in the 18th century fortress of Lappeenranta close to the present Russian border.

Our entry was to make a clear contradiction towards the architectural vocabulary of the 18th century fortress and its historical buildings made during the following centuries

within its walls. A rusted, tilted box coated with corten steel was sinking into the ground like a huge sarcophagus or demolished military bunker. The surface of steel plates was engraved and laser-cut exposing the strategic military maps used during this battle. ■

### Mikko Heikkinen

(b. 1949, Savonlinna, Finland). MSc in Architecture (1975), Helsinki University of Technology, Finland. Partner at the Heikkinen-Komonen Architects and professor for Basics of Architecture and Theory at the Aalto University. The firm's references include the Finnish Science Museum "Heureka" near Helsinki (1988), the Finnish Embassy in Washington D.C. (1994), the European Film College in Denmark (1993), the Max Planck Institute of Molecular Cell Biology and Genetics in Dresden (2001) and schools in Guinea, Africa (1994-99). Heikkinen was an Artist Professor for Architecture (2003-2008) nominated by the Arts Council of Finland and he is Honorary Fellow of the American Institute of Architects. He received the Finland Award (1996), the Aga Khan Award for Architecture (2001) and the Heinrich Tessenow Gold Medal (2003).