

THIS IS **FINLAND**



2025–26

AURORA ALERT

Good years ahead!

4 WAYS TO BUILD PEACE

“SHE WORSHIPPED THE SEA”

Catch the spirit
of Tove Jansson
and Moomins

3 × My favourite SAUNA

Actor Alma Pöysti
**“AS LONG AS WE
HAVE COMPASSION,
WE HAVE HOPE”**

THIS 4 IS



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From our contributors

“We wanted to shoot the cover story in a location that would both align with the theme of Alma Pöysti’s interview and display Finnish design history and culture at its best. The studio home of design power couple Vuokko and Antti Nurmesniemi was the perfect match for this. The 1960s building is a timeless masterpiece. Even on a cloudy day in November it surrounded us with comfort and peace.”
ART DIRECTOR EEVA VÄRTÖ

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FINLAND

TEXT MIKA HAMMARÉN PHOTOGRAPHY NINA KARLSSON

HOW TO CELEBRATE MOOMIN STYLE



This year marks the 80th anniversary of the Moomins, the creation of the multi-talented artist **Tove Jansson** (1914–2001). The first ever Moomin book, *The Moomins and the Great Flood*, was published when Europe was recovering from the Second World War. It is a story of Moomin family looking for missing Moominpappa and a peaceful place, Moominvalley, that they could call their home.

Their quest resonates in the times we are living. There are days when most of us would probably like to escape to Moomin Valley and join an extended, loving family of fantastic creatures.

Jansson spent her life wanting to build her own paradise, and Finland provided the best possible backdrop for this. Finland was the first country in the world to grant full political rights for women, which meant that Tove belonged to the first generation of women free to do what they wanted.

Furthermore, everyone's rights – allowing anyone to enjoy nature regardless of land ownership – had been established. Jansson took trips to the archipelago, pitched her tent on small islands and built a makeshift hut with her brother **Lars**. These liberating and empowering adventures had a profound effect on her art.

Today, Tove Jansson and her art still represent freedom and courage to be yourself. It doesn't matter how you interpret the Moomins, who your favourite character is or which type of cake you prefer – a celebration of Moomins should always be a celebration of peace, nature, equality and freedom.

2025 — 26



EDITOR-IN-CHIEF **Mika Hammarén**
EDITORIAL BOARD **Mika Kukkonen, Samuli Laita, Peter Marten, Meira Pappi, Salla Salovaara, Tuula Sjöstedt**
EDITORIAL STAFF **Sanoma Content Studio**
COVER PHOTO **Mikael Niemi**
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ACROSS boundaries

For the award-winning actor Alma Pöysti, culture is a force to be reckoned with. It helps people understand each other in a polarised world in at least four ways, she says.



At young age Alma Pöysti decided she would read all the books in the world.

IN EARLY 2024, actor **Alma Pöysti**, b. 1981, shifted from the silver screen to the audience – not to watch herself, though, but to observe the reactions of the viewers. She was on the international promotional tour for her film, director **Aki Kaurismäki's** *Fallen Leaves*, and noticed something quite special.

“No matter where we were in the world, people were amused and touched by the same things in the film,” Pöysti recalls. Her portrayal of Ansa, a working-class woman moving from job to job, earned her a Golden Globe nomination.

Now, fresh from rehearsal for an upcoming project, Alma Pöysti sits down to discuss how, exactly, one reaches that sense of cultural universality, and how that can bring us closer to each other.

1. CARING

“As long as we have compassion for one another, we will have hope.”

Before nominations, awards and foreign press, there were plays, domestic projects, and voice acting. Pöysti's breakthrough performances have come relatively late in her career.

While promoting *Fallen Leaves*, Pöysti had a rare opportunity to witness how a film resonates with its audience. Despite being filled with inherently Finnish references – silent bars, pints and the needle drop of legendary Finnish rock band *Hurriganes* – the movie managed to touch audiences in the United States, Japan, Mexico and elsewhere.

“I think the movie's magic lies in its humanity,” Pöysti says. “As long as we have compassion for one another, we will have hope.”

She is referring to not only the main romantic dynamic between her and **Jussi Vatanen's** characters, but to all of the relationships in the film – and in life in general.

“Care isn't just about romantic relationships. It also extends

to dogs, friends, colleagues and nature. The world operates through connections.”

The dog she refers to, by the way, is her *Fallen Leaves* co-actor, coincidentally also called **Alma**. She's a stray that Ansa rescues. Pöysti puts down her cappuccino and gushes.

“Such a wonderful colleague. Very, very talented. Has a great sense of humour and rhythm.”

In *Fallen Leaves*, the connections are built through gestures and blink-and-you-miss-it moments. Rescuing a dog. A shy smile, a subtle wink, a hand squeeze. Movies can drown the theme of love under a swelling soundtrack, overflowing dialogue and fireworks, but when you strip all that away, what remains is the core: caring.

Pöysti's recent and upcoming film projects touch on relationships, caring and different phases and forms of love in one way or another. In *Tove*, she plays Finnish artist and writer **Tove Jansson** as she meets theatre director **Vivica Bandler**, one of her great loves. In *Four Little Adults* she stars as Juulia, who opens her marriage to explore polyamory, and in

the upcoming thriller *Orenda*, she portrays a widow. The stories may be different and the themes unfamiliar, but the underlying experiences are widely shared.

“Everyone can recognise what loneliness is. And how difficult it is to fall in love or be shy, while still needing to be brave.”

Because if you're not, nothing changes.

2. EXPLORATION

“We should never rush to conclude that things are this way or that way.”

When Pöysti landed the role of Tove Jansson in director **Zaida Bergroth's** acclaimed biopic, she knew it would be a challenge. Portraying a beloved figure with a well-documented life and career came with high expectations.

“I remember Zaida saying, ‘Listen, Alma. It's clear that we can only fail at this. But let's fail in an interesting way,’” Pöysti recalls.

With this, they not only granted themselves permission to fail but also a clean slate. It allowed them to explore the idea of Tove Jansson

and present her in a new light. The approach worked. As a critic in *Helsingin Sanomat*, the largest daily in the Nordic countries, sums it up: When Jansson dances, the viewer can feel her shaking off the expectations and demands the outside world places upon her.

It's clear that Pöysti is willing to challenge both herself and the creative process. She doesn't want to view any situation or thought as fixed; instead, she approaches the artistic process as an ongoing exploration.

“We should never rush to conclude that things are this way or that way. Exploration and curiosity are healthy things: without them, you risk getting stuck. That can be quite dangerous in life, culture, art or politics,” she says.

One of Pöysti's favourite methods of exploring new points of view is reading books. Ever since childhood, she's been a voracious reader: first listening to her mother read to her out loud, later secretly reading in her room under the covers by flashlight.

“I decided at a young age that I would read all the books in the world. I was very excited

“EVERYONE CAN RECOGNISE HOW DIFFICULT IT IS TO FALL IN LOVE OR BE SHY, WHILE STILL NEEDING TO BE BRAVE.”



One of Alma Pöysti's co-actors at *Fallen Leaves* was a dog whose name also happens to be Alma.



Alma Pöysti's photoshoot took place at the studio home of design power couple Vuokko and Antti Nurmesniemi.

about it for a while, until I realized I would never have enough time for it," she says.

3. LISTENING

"Our ability to listen and communicate is our greatest chance for survival."

Every spring, some of the most prominent literary figures in the world gather for the translation literature festival Helsinki Lit. For the past three years, Pöysti has hosted the festival. While Pulitzer and Nobel winners take the stage, it's the audience and the fact that the tickets sell out as soon as they're out that leaves Pöysti in awe.

"People listen to these discussions between authors and translators so intently," she says.

"It brings me a lot of solace. Despite how it feels sometimes, we're interested in other humans and other worlds."

Creating art during a time of global turmoil, pandemic, economic hardships, war and the climate crisis has often left Pöysti feeling like her faith is

being tested. Yet, it's moments of connection that give her hope – like witnessing how the festival audience is ready to listen.

Or moments of appreciation from moviegoers for the way *Fallen Leaves* handles Russia's attack on Ukraine: in several scenes, the characters listen to radio reports about the war. Viewers have appreciated that the war is addressed as part of the film's narrative and Kaurismäki's courage to do so, says Pöysti.

"We need to be able to talk about everything, the dramatic things, too. If we don't, they fester, and we will never learn from our mistakes. Our ability to listen, remember, communicate and feel empathy is our greatest chance for survival."

However, there is a certain beauty in quietness, too. Some journalists and viewers have grappled with the amount of silence in *Fallen Leaves*. The characters themselves are at ease with it, drinking colourful cocktails or listening to karaoke in comfortable silence. So is Pöysti.

"When there's little

dialogue, you get the opportunity to listen to the silence. That's quite special."

But when there is dialogue, it gives voice to the underdogs. Pöysti thinks this is something Tove Jansson and Aki Kaurismäki, both globally recognized Finnish artists, have in common; they defend the quiet people and their shyness.

"Through their works we get to hear the creatures and the people who don't get their voices heard," she says.

And then there's the power of culture and art, which operates beyond words. Pöysti speaks fondly of how music can help unlock doors for which you may not yet have the keys. When she was younger, she played the clarinet, and still reads sheet music and scores. She narrates operas and fittingly plays an opera singer in *Orenda*.

"Music and dance allow you to reflect on something beyond logic and reason. Anything that's not verbal or visual is crucial, as it nurtures the imagination; especially since we live in such a visually dominant world."

4. UNIVERSALITY

"When you're brave enough to dive deep within yourself your work becomes universal."

In screenings of *Fallen Leaves*, viewers laugh at the deadpan delivery of lines and the absurdity of watching a zombie apocalypse movie on a first date. These aren't exactly knee-slappers, jokes that make you howl with laughter, but they're subtle, and they're realistic. Life is absurd.

This is Pöysti's first Kaurismäki movie. While the director didn't want his actors to prepare much for their roles, she re-watched all of his films in order to place her character and the story within a continuum of his works. Does Pöysti agree with Kaurismäki's portrayal of Finland?

"Well, yes, we definitely have dive bars," she says with a little laugh. But then she becomes more serious.

"We have these sorts of people and these silences. But we also have so much more: our humanity, our quirks, our vulnerabilities. And those are nothing to be ashamed of."

Instead, culture manages to cross boundaries when it taps into this weirdness and vulnerability. You don't need to speak a certain language or read subtitles in order to identify with a character who's experiencing loss, falling in love or feeling ashamed.

"When you're brave enough to dive deep within yourself, your work becomes universal," Pöysti says.

If you try to please everyone and ensure that everyone understands and likes us, we can easily end up with generalisations that don't amount to much.

"Here in Finland, people might look at Kaurismäki's movies and not love the way he represents us. But I don't think we understand how widely beloved he is. There are so many people who get him, who speak the same language." ■



Watch Alma's video
interview:





AURORA AWAITS: THE GOLDEN AGE OF NORTHERN LIGHTS BEGINS

Sodankylä Geophysical Observatory might seem like a bunch of humble buildings in the middle of nowhere. Yet, there a team of top scientists works to unravel the mysteries of the Northern Lights. The director, space physicist Eija Tanskanen, has good news for aurora spotters: the active years have just started.

The alley to a wooden building is lined with pine trees. A traditional, unpainted fence forms a square behind the trees. Unlike in many places around here, the fence is not for keeping the reindeer out but for catching something that can't always be seen with human eyes.

The appearance of the buildings is also misleading. More than forty people, scientists and engineers from all around the world, work here at Sodankylä Geophysical Observatory (SGO). Together they want to understand something that humans can only observe in the dark polar sky: the Northern Lights.



Eija Tanskanen, the director of the SGO, has studied the Northern Lights and magnetic disturbances in the atmosphere for more than 30 years.

As a child she would lie down in the snow and wonder what the Northern Lights actually were. Before settling in Sodankylä, Tanskanen worked in various research, teaching and management positions, including at NASA Goddard Space Flight Center (NASA/GSFC).

Science has progressed a lot since Tanskanen's early years, benefiting all of us. Giant leaps in navigation technologies – in compasses and airplanes – are due to increased knowledge on magnetic fields and disturbances.

"We understand the atmosphere much better now," Tanskanen says.

Understanding the Northern Lights is closely related to

understanding magnetic fields. The Northern Lights occur approximately 100 kilometers from the ground, in the upper atmosphere, when the Sun's solar wind carries magnetic storms towards the Earth. The lights follow the Earth's magnetic fields. In northern regions it's called aurora borealis, and in southern regions, aurora australis.

What do birds see?

Outside the observatory Tanskanen walks along the sandy road. She keeps gazing up so she can see the sky. That has been her constant position since her early years: eyes toward space.

For her PhD, Tanskanen studied the sun's energy budget, or, as she frames it more practically, "from where the Northern Lights get their energy."

Located 120 kilometers north of the Arctic Circle in Finnish Lapland, the Sodankylä

observatory has served as a base for scientific geophysical measurements since 1914.

Today, the observatory is an independent research department of the University of Oulu. From the very beginning, the Earth's magnetic fields have been measured here.

"All things that are related to navigating or going in some direction, such as planes and compasses, are based on measuring the magnetic fields," Tanskanen says.

The magnetic poles are places where the magnetic fields are vertical. The Earth has two magnetic poles: in the north and south. The Northern Lights are only visible for the human eye around magnetic pole areas when a solar storm hits the planet. Migratory birds use magnetic fields for navigation. They can see the magnetic fields like humans can see roads.

Watch Eija's video interview:





Sodankylä provides the perfect conditions for studying the Northern Lights, says Eija Tanskanen.

MIGRATORY BIRDS USE MAGNETIC FIELDS FOR NAVIGATION. THEY CAN SEE THE MAGNETIC FIELDS LIKE HUMANS CAN SEE ROADS.

Polar expeditions ahead

The geophysical science community has a problem. The locations of the magnetic poles are in constant movement, and their exact geographical points are currently unknown. They are not the same as the geographical poles and at the moment they should be about 500 kilometres from each other.

The insufficient knowledge of the magnetic poles' location causes inaccuracy in navigation especially in polar areas.

"We know that the magnetic north pole left Canada's archipelago at the end of last century and that it is moving somewhere in the Arctic Ocean towards Siberia," Tanskanen says.

The solution for the problem is to go and find the wandering magnetic poles. In September 2025, a polar expedition will start its journey from Sodankylä to an unknown spot somewhere in the middle of the Arctic Ocean to find the Earth's magnetic north pole.

A similar trip to the south will be done in February 2026.

"The explorers don't know where the pole is, nor what the conditions will be."

The explorers might need to ski or even swim to reach the pole. To add to the challenge, reaching the exact location of the pole is not enough. The explorers must somehow let the rest of the world know the location from the edge of the world.

"We don't know yet how it will be done," Tanskanen says.

What is certain though, is that the most important equipment for these expeditions will be made here in Sodankylä. A special, ball-shaped compass that will point down at the exact location of the magnetic pole, to mention one.

Connected to the universe

Around the observatory area, red huts house magnetometers that measure the magnitude, power and direction of the magnetic fields. They connect Sodankylä to the world.

"Actually, to the whole universe," Tanskanen corrects.

Here, the sun never sets during the summer, whereas in the winter, there are only a few hours of daylight. These extreme light conditions make Sodankylä and the Lapland region an excellent travel

destination for people wishing to see the Northern Lights, but also an ideal location for geophysical research.

"Every time somebody wonders why we want to do science in the periphery, I say that this kind of science has to be done in a place where you can hear the voices of nature over the voices of people," Tanskanen says.

Good years ahead

Tanskanen has fantastic news for everyone who dreams of seeing the Northern Lights: starting from 2025, the amount of the Northern Lights will increase until 2028.

This is because the sun's face will turn angry. Sounds more ominous than it is, Tanskanen explains.

The solar cycle has reached the point when there are large sunspots on the sun's surface.


Schools in Lapland operate their own Northern Lights cameras

When astronauts look at the Northern Lights from space, they see green “tails” moving like a snake across the Earth’s magnetic north and south poles.

This kind of image had been missing from Sodankylä Geophysical Observatory’s (SGO’s) data collection, but director Eija Tanskanen had an idea: with Northern Lights cameras around the Lapland region, it would be possible to combine pictures taken by them into one image just as vast and comprehensive as the ones taken from space. With the help of this image, we could understand the Northern Lights better.

Today, all 15 high school yards in the east and northernmost parts of Lapland have a special SKY-I automatic time-lapse camera directed at the sky. They observe and capture the Northern Lights and other night-sky phenomena and send the pictures to the SGO.

Pupils follow the cameras on a regular basis, get familiar with the data collected and have the Northern Lights included in their physics studies. To make the picture even more accurate, more SKY-I cameras will be installed in high schools in the western parts of Lapland, probably also in high schools in Swedish Lapland.



“THIS KIND OF SCIENCE HAS TO BE DONE IN A PLACE WHERE YOU CAN HEAR THE VOICES OF NATURE OVER THE VOICES OF PEOPLE.”

One sunspot can be the size of the planet Jupiter.

“Solar radiation is cyclical. The most commonly known cycle is 11 years, another one is 22 years. The sun’s north pole and south pole change places every 11 years, so that the north is north, and the south is south every 22 years.”

Tanskanen shows a picture: At the beginning of each cycle, the sun is more or less evenly yellow. Around years 4 and 5 of the cycle, the surface gets many small dots.

“It resembles the moment just before water starts to boil in a pot and you see many small bubbles on the bottom of the pot,” she illustrates.

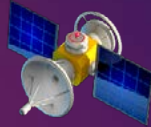
In 2025, we are around that point. The sun is about to boil,

and the small sunspots bubble, and some burst out of the sun. When they hit the atmosphere and the Earth’s magnetic field around the north and south poles, the Northern Lights appear.

In 2025, the Northern Lights should be rather simple and green. Around 2026–2028, that is, during the years 6–7 in the sun’s cycle, the number of sunspots reaches its peak.

That’s when the storms really start, Tanskanen says.

“And that’s when we say the sun has an angry face. It looks like it’s grimacing. At this point, there will be more Northern Lights, and they take on more complex forms and colours, like red and blue.”



Finnish space technology and exploration companies to keep an eye on

Huld

is a technology and design house with more than 30 years of experience in developing software for the most challenging space missions led by the European Space Agency (ESA).

ICEYE's

synthetic aperture radar (SAR) satellite constellation allows them to provide insights for sectors such as natural catastrophe response and recovery, security, maritime monitoring, insurance and finance.

Kuva Space

builds an extensive hyperspectral satellite cluster and uses advanced AI to deliver near real-time spaceborne insights for its customers.

ReOrbit

provides software-defined satellites. They offer ready-to-go space systems and avionics for flexible and timely missions at any orbit.

Solar Foods

grows an all-purpose protein called Solein from the air we breathe. In 2024, Solar Foods won the international category at the NASA Deep Space Food Challenge that seeks innovations to feed astronauts on long space missions.



How to spot the Northern Lights

WHEN? The Northern Lights are visible for human eyes only when it's dark, the sky is clear and cloudless. In Finnish Lapland they can be witnessed from late August until early April.

WHERE? Choose a location where you can see the northern sky with an unobstructed view. If there are lights around, make sure they are behind you in the south. During the winter months, there are only a few hours of daylight in Lapland, which makes it an excellent destination for spotting the Northern Lights.

HOW CAN I TELL THEY REALLY ARE NORTHERN LIGHTS?

Social media is full of colourful Northern Lights pictures, but the most common colour is light green, which can be easily confused with clouds. However, Northern Lights move faster and more irregularly than clouds.

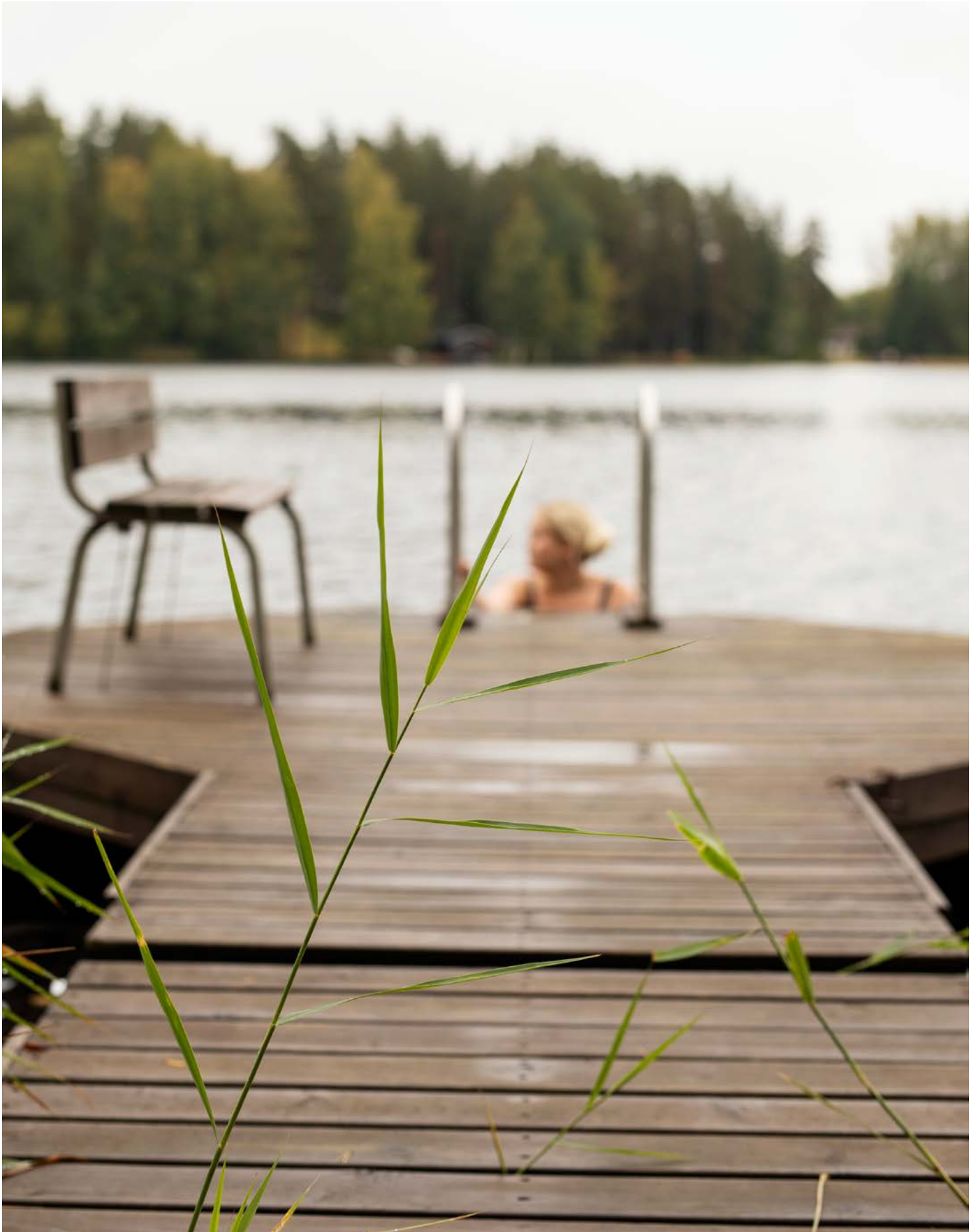
HOW TO CATCH THEM ON CAMERA? You can take photos of the Northern Lights with a camera or with a smartphone. Just remember to adjust the ISO, for example, to 800–1600 and set the shutter speed to several seconds. The modern camera lens sees the Northern Lights better than the human eye, so it is possible to get a photo of the Northern Lights without actually seeing them yourself. ■

“FOR ME THIS IS A SACRED PLACE”



In Finland almost every building has a sauna. Three sauna enthusiasts tell what makes their favourite sauna so special.

TEXT NINNI LEHTNIEMI PHOTOGRAPHY HELI BLÅFIELD



**Nea Mänty, 24, student, 1950s cottage
sauna in Vihti by lake Myllylampi.**

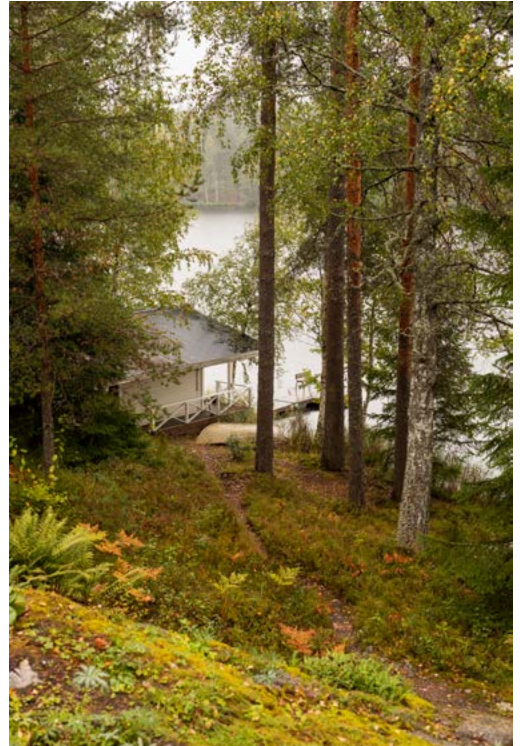
“ At the cottage we go to sauna every day. It's an essential part of our family's cottage life. The sauna is small but effective. It heats up in half an hour and fits five people.

In the city I try to go to sauna at least once a week. Electric saunas are ok, but nothing beats wood-heated ones like this. When you light the fire and feed it yourself, you feel a different kind of ownership for löyly (sauna steam). My best friend is also a sauna enthusiast. When she's visiting, she always builds a fire under the washing water tank while I take care of the fire under the *kiuas* (stove). It's turned into a little routine that just flows.

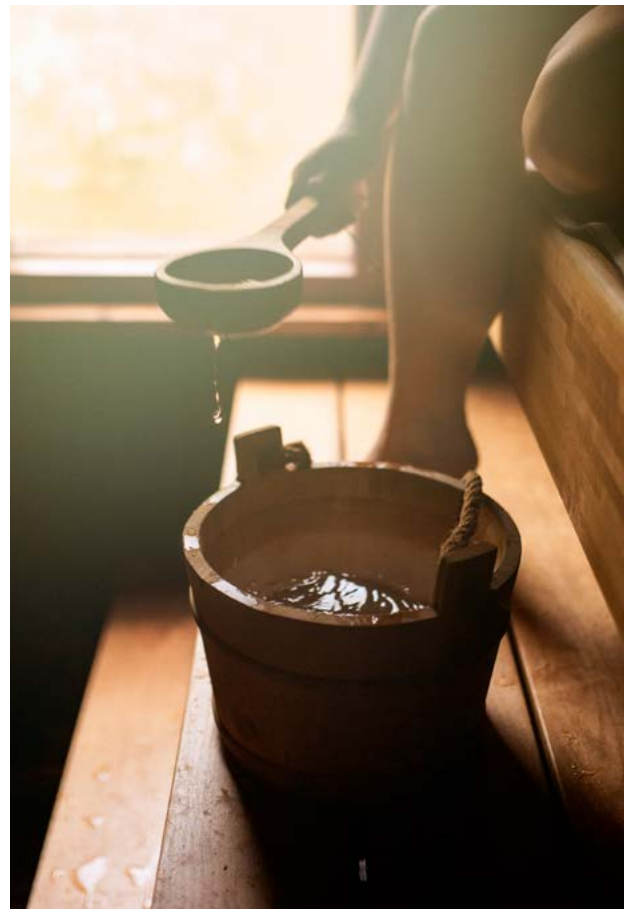
Not everybody likes sauna scents but my mother and I use them especially when days get darker towards the winter. A drop of tar or eucalyptus in löyly water creates a lovely atmosphere.

I like to throw water on the hot stones so that I can really feel it in my back. Then I go for a swim in the lake and repeat this about five times. Swimming is great for winding down if I'm stressed.

For me this is a sacred place. When I was a kid, my mother told us a story about a sauna-elf to make us behave in sauna. If you didn't, you would upset the elf. As a young adult it's no longer about the elf, but if I ever happen to slip a swearword when talking with my friends in sauna, I scold myself immediately. It's important to maintain everyone's sauna peace.”



"When you light the fire and feed it yourself, you feel a different kind of ownership for löyly."



Ari Johansson, 68, retired, Rajaportti sauna in Tampere, the oldest public sauna in Finland

“ I’ve been going to Rajaportti for 68 years now. When I was a baby, my mum would take me to the women’s side, and when I got a bit older I joined my dad and went to the men’s side. I’ve never gone to any other public sauna, except when Rajaportti has been closed for renovation.

In those days people in the surrounding area, Pispala, lived in very small flats and didn’t have their own washing facilities, so a public sauna was a necessity for them. Now it’s become a place where people come to relax. Rajaportti’s secret is that it has this perfect balance of humidity and heat.

In 1989 the city was planning to replace the sauna with a parking lot. As a response the sauna-goers set up Rajaportti Sauna Association and told the authorities they would like to start running the sauna on their own. They were laughed at but given permission to play with it for a year. Nowadays Rajaportti is a big tourist attraction with visitors from all around the world.

Public saunas like Rajaportti are very much about community: you don’t just wash your body, your mind gets purified too. At Rajaportti men and women have separate steam rooms and have their own chats there. Outside there is a shared area for cooling down between löyly. That’s where another set of talks takes place. Topics usually include sports and current events. We try to avoid discussing politics, because no-one should get their feelings hurt in sauna.”

Watch Ari’s video interview:





"Public saunas like Rajaportti are very much about community: you don't just wash your body, your mind gets purified too."



**Tapu Haro, 56, copywriter, shared sauna
in an apartment building in Espoo.**

“The best thing about this sauna is this awesome view. From the terrace you can see the Harmaja lighthouse, and on a clear day you can get the view all the way to Tallinn, Estonia over the sea.

These shared saunas have traditionally been located in basements with little natural light, but rooftop saunas like this one are getting more popular, especially in new buildings.

Since our kids were born, we've always had sauna booked for Friday at 6 pm for the family. The boys are now 16 and 14, and Friday sauna is still going strong. I think it's the only family tradition we really have. Friday sauna sets off our weekend. It's the perfect reason to leave the office or after-work drinks with colleagues. At Friday sauna I let go of whatever I have in mind after a work week, and we relax together before cooking a family dinner.

When the boys were small, our Friday saunas could be quite hectic, as the boys couldn't sit still for long. They had their bath toys, juice boxes and some snacks in the dressing room to keep them happy. Now we've all come to appreciate the peace and quiet in sauna. We also don't always necessarily go to sauna all four at the same time.

Having shared saunas in apartment buildings is a brilliant invention. When I was younger, we had excursions to explore communal saunas of the houses my friends lived in. Not all of them were that glamorous, but some were amazing. A group of friends shared a flat in central Helsinki and the communal sauna in their house even had a swimming pool.

In the 1980s and 1990s private saunas were built even in 20 square meter studio flats, which obviously didn't make any sense. Since then, shared ones have had a revival. Building and maintaining them is a great way to enhance, if not the monetary, at least the social value of the house. ■



"Since our kids were born, we've always had sauna booked for Friday at 6 pm for the family. The boys are now 16 and 14, and Friday sauna is still going strong."



LOUD AS A LIBRARY

From reading dogs to 3D printers, Finnish libraries are reinventing what it means to be the home for learning and information. Here are some activities you can do in many Finnish libraries.

TEXT TAINA AHTELA

MUSIC TO ALL EARS

What? Music & recording studios

Why? Not quite ready for the Abbey Road Studios with your band? No worries, you can start recording in Finland, and it's free. Finnish libraries have music studios that can be used for playing, recording and mixing music – some even host workshops for mixing and mastering music. Most studios have both acoustic and electric instruments like guitars, drums and piano. Who needs a garage when there are public practice rooms in libraries?

If you prefer to stick to just listening and cherishing those good old Beatles albums, many libraries provide tools for listening and digitalising LP records, cassettes and VHS tapes.

CREATORS WELCOME!

What? 3D printers

Why? 3D printing is a useful way to create something you need, like a detail to a doll house, prototypes or any missing parts that are made of plastic. Moreover, it is also a fun and subtle way to learn new digital skills such as 3D modelling.

Many Finnish libraries have workshops or makerspaces with 3D printers that are free to use. All you need to do is bring your own design on a USB drive (models can be downloaded for free online) and let the machine print it from non-toxic, biodegradable PLA plastic. The library staff is there to assist with printing, as with other digital tasks.

Other facilities in library workshops typically include sewing machines, vinyl cutters, laser cutters and laminators.

WEAVING TALES

What? Book club meets knitting club

Why? According to science, handcrafts are good for the brain, stimulating several parts of it. Contrary to what many might assume, our thinking doesn't happen only in the brain: there's also something called embodied cognition. Working with our hands can make us more vigilant – or relaxed. Either way, making things is a perfect combination with listening to stories.

Literal translation for “Novellikoukku” is Short story hook: it is a club where people gather to crochet, knit or do other handicrafts while listening to short stories read aloud. It is a social event in a soothing atmosphere, a great example of what many Finns consider cozy. Plus – you can join even if you don't have a handicraft! The same goes for several other story-telling sessions libraries offer for both kids and adults.



FROM CHESS TO SPACE INVADERS

What? Games and game rooms

Why? Finland has one of the largest and most vibrant game scenes in Europe. It is no surprise that Finns take gaming very seriously, even when it comes to libraries. Finnish libraries offer a wide range of games from traditional board games to digital games and game consoles, along with spaces to play.

Go visit the lobby of Oodi library in Helsinki any given day, and you'll see people of all ages playing chess. Fancy some games but have no one to play with? Join one of the game clubs that several libraries host.

Games can also be borrowed and taken home with a library card just like books. And not just latest or current games are available but also retro games from the 1970s.



THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL

What? Award-winning architecture

Why? There's something very Finnish in the fact that some of the most renowned architectural landmarks in Finland are libraries. Libraries are public spaces cherishing education, literacy and culture, some of the most valuable foundations of Finnish society.

The city libraries of Helsinki, Turku and Tampere are all must-visit places for architecture admirers, but there's also award-winning architecture by leading Finnish architects in smaller cities and towns, like the Fyry library in the southern town of Kirkkonummi.

For lovers of architectural history, Lapland boasts Rovaniemi library, designed in the 1960s by **Alvar Aalto**, the master and grand old man of Finnish modernism. Going even further in history, the National Library by C.L. Engel from the 19th century is a hidden gem and a tranquil retreat on a busy university campus, right in the centre of Helsinki.

READING BETWEEN THE TAILS

What? Reading dogs

Why? Library dogs, or reading dogs, have an important job: being present. They listen when people, mainly kids, read to them. They don't judge slow readers, nor do they comment or correct mistakes. According to studies, reading to a dog relieves stress and improves reading fluency and comprehension. This is especially useful for people who have problems with reading.

Library dogs are carefully chosen and trained for the job, and the activities are based on the voluntary work of their owners. The first reading dogs entered libraries in 2011, and nowadays there are also reading ponies or even cows, though not on library premises.

Other library activities that run on a voluntary basis include "reading grandmas and grandpas", as well as language cafés: informal discussion groups where speaking Finnish – or other languages – can be practiced. ■

ONLY LOCAL INGREDIENTS

When chef Remi Trémouille returned to his roots in Eastern Finland he discovered the importance of a strong local community. All ingredients in his kitchen come from nearby producers, which means the menu sometimes surprises even the chef himself.

TEXT **LOTTA HEIKKERI** PHOTOGRAPHY **TIMO VILLANEN**

Pinecones and milk. That's what the menu said last summer at Restaurant Solitary.

When chef Remi Trémouille started his first own restaurant a few years ago, his goal was clear: take traditional Finnish ingredients and turn them into exciting new dishes, source everything as near as possible and build the frequently changing menu around whatever is available at any given time.

The vision has become a globally acclaimed fine-dining restaurant in the small town of Rantasalmi. It has inspired Trémouille's team to create dishes with ingredients that have taken even the seasoned chef by surprise.

"Since opening the restaurant, I've truly understood how many ingredients are out there. But the pinecones were the biggest surprise by far."

The candied green pinecones and homemade mozzarella with early-season green strawberries became an instant hit. Even though, faithful to the concept, the dish was on the menu only for a short period of time, customers are still asking after it more than a year later. Trémouille has just received a message from a Central

European couple who have been in the restaurant over ten times, asking if there is any chance to enjoy the pinecones again on their upcoming visit.

"I still have some ten pinecones in the freezer reserved for very special guests," he reveals.

A surprise homecoming

Starting a restaurant in a town of roughly 3,000 inhabitants in the Southern Savo region of eastern Finland was not Trémouille's original plan. Growing up, he couldn't wait to leave Rantasalmi. He quit school, started working at restaurants, moved to Helsinki and worked his way up in the capital's Michelin-starred restaurants. For years, he lived and worked in Australia and Bali.

When the pandemic shut down fine-dining restaurants, Trémouille found himself out of work. Then, he received a call from his first boss, Markus Heiskanen. A luxurious new

resort, Kuru, was in the works in Rantasalmi, and the entrepreneur asked if Trémouille would be interested in working there.

"I asked my wife Laura, who was born and raised in Helsinki, if she would mind if we moved to Rantasalmi. She said OK, and here we are," he laughs.

Returning to his old hometown to start his own restaurant meant returning to his roots in more than one way.

Trémouille was born in France to a French dad and a Finnish mom but spent his formative years in Rantasalmi. Fishing on the lake with granddad and cooking local dishes with grandma are some of his fondest childhood memories. Returning to the small town, now to start his own family, felt right.

"I left Rantasalmi because, at the time, the nearest good restaurants were in Helsinki. Nowadays, there are great restaurants across Finland, all the way to Lapland."

Founding Solitary meant taking a new approach to traditional Finnish ingredients. The restaurant's core idea is to source everything from local farmers, fishermen, hunters or producers. The staff also

**"ONCE, WE HAD TO
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Chef Remi Trémouille believes that going to “source zero” is the best way to ensure the highest quality ingredients.



The commitment to only seasonal and available ingredients means diners never know what will be on Solitary's menu.

picks wild herbs that grow just outside the restaurant, and if there's brown hare on the menu, it's most likely brought in by Samuli Kuronen, one of Solitary's chefs and an avid hunter.

The commitment to working with whatever is in season and available means that diners never know in advance what will be on the menu. This sets Solitary apart from many other restaurants, where "local" ingredients are sometimes sourced from far away because the menu promises a certain dish throughout the season.

"We make do with what we have. If the ice on the lake is too thin for the local fishermen to go and cast nets underneath using ice holes, we won't have fish on the menu that week," Trémouille explains.

The approach presents both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, it pushes Trémouille and his team to be creative and resourceful, but on the other, it can sometimes be a little stressful.

"Once, we had to change the menu six times in one week. To be honest, that wasn't ideal," Trémouille says with a laugh.

It takes a village

To make his concept work, Trémouille had to create strong connections with local people. Building networks has taken a lot of time and footwork, but Trémouille proudly says that Solitary is now the biggest customer for many producers in the area.

The impact of using local ingredients in haute cuisine can extend beyond one restaurant's supply chain.

"When we use traditional ingredients to make something a little trendier, I hope we inspire people to use those ingredients more. That, in turn, helps

"I LIKE TO SAY WE HAVE OVER THREE THOUSAND AMBASSADORS HERE WHO WISH US WELL AND WANT TO SPREAD THE WORD."

to develop local production and creates jobs. The trickle-down effect can be significant."

Trémouille believes that going to "source zero" is the best way to ensure the highest quality ingredients. The producers, who Trémouille always calls only by their first names, are invested in making sure everything they deliver to the restaurant is as fresh as possible. Working closely with locals also offers greater flexibility. Just the day before, a farmer dropped off some freshly picked cherry tomatoes in Trémouille's carport while the family was away for the weekend.

"This wouldn't be possible if we sourced our ingredients from wholesale."

As word of the restaurant and its philosophy has spread, locals have started to offer their produce spontaneously. That's why there are 40 litres of damson, a subspecies of plum, waiting at the restaurant.

"My childhood friend's parents brought them. They had a massive harvest this year and

said no-one in their family could take any more. They asked if I could use them. Damson is a completely new ingredient for me. We had already planned our menu for the week, but now we'll just have to figure out something," he says, grinning.

The restaurant also fosters a sense of community. People come to talk to Trémouille at the local store and are eager to direct visitors to the resort.

"The locals are very proud of our restaurant. I like to say we have over three thousand ambassadors here who wish us well and want to spread the word."

After years of living in big cities, Trémouille has found the right balance of work and family life in Rantasalmi. Here, he can pass on his love and appreciation for nature and local ingredients to his children.

"We spend a lot of time outside, exploring what nature has to offer. I've also taken the kids to the local sheep farm, so they understand better where food comes from. ■

Remi's picks for the best flavours for each season



Winter Root vegetables, like potatoes and beets, are the foundation of many dishes. The hunting season continues for brown hares. Burbot is an excellent choice of wintertime fish.



Spring This is the season for wild herbs, like nettles, and using buds from various trees. Early potatoes and other first vegetables of the season are delicious.

Between seasons

There are always good flavours and interesting ingredients. Late summer and autumn, for example, are excellent times for crayfish.

Autumn Early autumn is a treasure trove for fruit, vegetables and mushrooms. Autumn also marks the start of the hunting season for elk, deer and various birds.



Summer The flavours are at their purest and lightest. Fish, especially vendace here in Savo, is at its best. We also use a lot of wildflowers.





Tapio restaurant is run by Johanna Mourujärvi and Connor Laybourne. Last year Tapio became the northernmost restaurant to receive a Michelin star.

NATURE ON YOUR PLATE

Fancy getting the taste of Finnish nature? Head to one of these restaurants!



Nolla, Helsinki. This zero waste restaurant offers a menu that is led by local and organic products throughout the year. The food showcases the season's best Finnish ingredients while combining the founder trio's Southern European roots and traditions to the cooking.

IN THE FORESTS AND ARCHIPELAGO AROUND TURKU YOU MIGHT BUMP INTO CHEFS ERIK MANSIKKA AND SIMO RAISIO FORAGING INGREDIENTS.



Vår, Porvoo. The collective operating the restaurant cherishes traditions but also strives to present their playful version of modern Finnish cuisine. They use fresh local ingredients, with wild fish, vegetables and the finest Finnish dairy products as the basis of the menu.



Grön, Helsinki. Despite their urban location, Grön owns a farm that supplies their vegetables and greens.



Nokka, Helsinki. The chef and owner Ari Ruoho harvests, hunts and fishes to secure the best ingredients. One of their specialties is rockweed, a native seaweed.



Aanaar, Inari. The kitchen creates dishes unique to Lapland, using everything from lichen and the traditional Sami herbal plant Angelica, to reindeer and Lake Inari's fish.



Kaskis, Turku. In the forests and archipelago around Turku you might bump into chefs Erik Mansikka and Simo Raisio foraging ingredients. The menu always features wild herbs in some form.



Niinipuu, Okkola holiday resort. The restaurant is situated in an old barn on an island in Finland's biggest lake, Lake Saimaa. The menu prominently features local fish.



Skörd, Helsinki. All ingredients and beverages come from Finnish producers. Skörd's menu features wild herbs and berries picked by hand, as well as game, fish and ecologically farmed lamb.



The children's playground next to the Sibelius monument in Helsinki has steel instruments for making music. It's one of Keisteri's favourite places.

Watch Teemu's video interview:



NO RULES FOR CREATIVE EXPLORATION

Everyone's an artist in Teemu Keisteri's family, no matter if they're four or almost forty. Father and son get creative together and explore Finland's vibrant children's culture scene.

TEXT **LOTTA HEIKKERI** PHOTOGRAPHY **SABRINA BQAIN**

Last spring, the European television audience was captured by a moustachioed man sporting very short denim shorts and a curly blond mullet.

"No rules!" he sang, dancing around with boundless energy in the beloved Eurovision Song Contest.

Doing your own thing and ignoring made-up boundaries is more than just a catchphrase for Windows95Man – and the man behind the character.

Teemu Keisteri is an artist who knows no rules when it comes to artistic expression: he's a trained photographer, painter, animator, gallerist, DJ, musician... In the art scene, he's known for his Ukkeli character, a yellow figure with a big yellow butt, seen in playful paintings, murals and clothes.

One of Keisteri's fondest childhood memories is of children's art club, where he started at only five years old. His teacher there encouraged artistic freedom and exploration.

"She said: 'Teemu, when you draw, you don't have to use an eraser, mistakes don't exist.' I remember being super stoked about that."

Now, he tries to encourage the same creative and boundary-ignoring spirit in his four years old son.

Experiences that stick

Keisteri's creative streak was encouraged throughout his childhood. His engineer parents took the kids to art shows and cultural events from an early age.

Keisteri still remembers the awe he felt walking around Töölönlahti Bay in Helsinki during the Night of the Arts, an annual celebration of culture open to everyone. People, art pieces and a floating stage where musicians played children's music all mixed up in the summer night.

**"THERE ARE SO MANY
ACTIVITIES AVAILABLE
FOR CHILDREN, OFTEN
FOR FREE."**

"These things have stuck with me since."

Exposure to culture in all its forms was transformative for him, so he's trying to pass the same experiences on to his son.

Keisteri and his wife, Dutch artist **Annick Ligtermoet**, share a studio close to their home in Espoo, in the Helsinki capital area. The four year old spends a lot of time there, too, doing his own thing. Keisteri proudly says he has become a skilled DJ, mixing songs like "No Rules"

by his old man and tunes from *Star Wars*.

"It's important to let him explore. I want him to have the freedom to be himself and experiment on his own terms."

Father and son often get creative together, painting photorealistic watercolour versions of the son's favourite *Star Wars* characters and hanging them on his bedroom walls. The duo also takes photographs with an old film camera.

"It's a fun, slow activity; we take photos of interesting things, send the film to be developed and wait for the photographs to arrive. It's a good alternative to screen time."

Culture for kids and adults alike

Finnish fathers are actively involved in their children's lives. Sometimes, Keisteri takes his son out of kindergarten for the day so the two can visit a museum or an activity park. Keisteri and other local dads also have a WhatsApp group for event suggestions.

"There are so many activities available for children, often for free, at least here in the capital region. Almost every weekend, we head out and stumble upon something interesting."

The Finnish children's culture scene is vibrant, with exhibitions, plays, concerts, workshops and other events for kids of all ages. Keisteri and his son especially enjoy activities where they can get active, creative and playful together. One of their favourite places is the playground next to the monument of composer Jean Sibelius, where children – and playful adults – can make music with steel instruments.

Keisteri admits he dreams of building his own playground.

"It would combine play and art, and kids could climb and explore art physically. And it would definitely have a yellow butt slide," he says, laughing.

"I try to keep a childlike playfulness in everything I do. Also my art is all about playful experimentation." ■



Teemu's tips for Finnish children's culture

LEIKKI – THE MUSEUM OF PLAY

"A fantastic museum in Espoo showcasing the history of play and toys. You can of course play inside the museum, and there is a lot to see and do for smaller kids, too."

CHILDREN'S BAND FRÖBELIN PALIKAT

"We often put their music videos on the big screen and dance along. In summer 2024, the band played for thousands of adults at Ruisrock, one of the biggest festivals in Finland."

THE SIBELIUS MONUMENT PLAYGROUND

"An incredible open playground next to the monument of Jean Sibelius, Finland's most famous composer. There are swings and climbing structures, and kids can play different kinds of steel instruments."

5

REASONS TO LOVE POTATOES LIKE A FINN

In Finland, spuds and taters have no haters. There are countless reasons to love the humble potato – here are five.

TEXT VEERA KAUKONIEMI
ILLUSTRATION HILLA RUUSKANEN

Their versatility is off the charts

How many different dishes can you make with just one root vegetable? When it comes to potatoes, the possibilities are nearly endless. Spuds originate from the region of modern-day southern Peru and northwestern Bolivia. They found their way to Finland in the 18th century, brought by German tin-smiths. Thanks to the educational efforts of early potato enthusiasts and a few priests, they won the hearts of Finns. The idea of potatoes conquering Finland has been so intriguing that a comedy film (*Peruna*) was made about it in 2021.

Nowadays Finnish potatoes come in many shapes, sizes and compositions; flaky, floury and starchy potatoes with their incredible capability to transform into a silky-smooth mash; firm little ones for a hearty soup or stew; or big and bold ones that can be cut into fries. With the right toppings, a humble baked potato can be transformed into a complete balanced meal. They are amazing in cheesy gratins, boiled with good butter and a pinch of salt, or potato soups.





They are a reliable source of food in the changing climate

In a world in desperate need of climate-friendly options for food, potatoes are one of the most sustainable choices. International research has recently shown that potatoes are more environmentally sustainable than pasta or rice. They are in the top ten of the most land- and water-efficient crops with the lowest carbon footprint, and are easy to grow.

Potatoes are hardy and adaptable and thrive almost everywhere, making them the ideal plant to grow in different climates. With enough water and nutrients, they grow easily without much maintenance all over Finland, from the lush, greener south to the harder, less nutrient-rich terrain of the north. You can also grow them in a raised bed or even in a bucket.

They carry comfort, tradition and joy

Finnish potato dishes are the ultimate soul food. They bring a sense of togetherness to happy occasions and a touch of comfort and familiarity to sad ones. The taste of potatoes carries us through life. Potato purée is often the first solid food a Finnish baby tastes.

Including potatoes in the feast on celebratory occasions is so rooted in Finnish culture that it's become almost intuitive. On the First of May holiday, Finns celebrate the arrival of spring with picnics and potato salad. At Midsummer, the first new potatoes of the season adorn the spread. And at weddings, many people opt for an entree with boiled potatoes and salt-cured fish. Potatoes are also present at funerals, as a main ingredient in delicacies such as Karelian stew, salmon soup or reindeer soup.

They – deservedly – have a festival

Every spring, Finnish potato lovers wait eagerly for the first potatoes of the summer. In 2011, potato enthusiasts from Turku in southwestern Finland decided to celebrate new-season potatoes and founded the New Potato Festival. The event highlights that potatoes are not just a reliable everyday staple in the kitchen, but also a unique gastronomic specialty. At the festival, celebrated chefs prepare a range

of dishes, from stir-fried and cold-smoked potato delicacies to potato desserts. According to the festival's founders, potatoes deserve the same sort of attention as wine. What potatoes and wine have in common is that terroir – the combined effect of soil and climate – creates their distinctive flavor profiles. As one looks at the potato selection in a Finnish supermarket, you have to agree. There's a potato with unique characteristics for everything and everyone – as there should be.



They spark innovation

The many possibilities of potatoes have inspired Finnish food enthusiasts to develop new products. For a great example of potato genius, we need only look as far as the Åland Islands, an autonomous, Swedish-speaking archipelago that is part of Finland. The area also happens to be the unofficial potato chip capital of Europe. If a flavour exists, you can be sure that a matching potato chip is already manufactured there.

One of the best-known potato innovations of recent years is the Frex potato. What started as a one-man mission to develop the perfect potato led to potato varieties appreciated by Michelin-starred

chefs and home cooks alike. The Frex brand emphasises natural and sustainable agricultural practices, aiming to produce potatoes with a genuine, rustic look and a delicious, authentic flavour. These potatoes are part of a broader initiative to return to the roots of genuine taste and ecological farming, combining modern technology with traditional methods to enhance soil health and nutrient circulation. At the moment, three different Frex potatoes are grown in Finland. The innovator of Frex, **Tapio Knuuttila**, has stated that one of Frex's goals is to create more jobs in rural Finland while respecting traditions and natural values. ■

Four Finnish peacemakers share the secrets of their methods for building dialogue, understanding and trust.

TEXT **LAURA IISALO** PHOTOGRAPHY **OUTI TÖRMÄLÄ**

WAYS TO PEACE

Equal through digital

Johanna Poutanen works as the head of Women in Peacemaking at CMI – Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation. Digital tools can help make peace processes more equal, she says.

“Whether it’s an international conflict or a domestic affair, the first step is always listening. Too often we focus only on the stated demands. Instead, we should try to understand what are the needs and interests underlying those demands.

To come up with sustainable solutions to conflicts, women must be included in the peacemaking process. Women form over half of the world’s population, yet their viewpoints are underrepresented.

Our job is to ensure that the high-level mediators have the tools, skills and practical strategies in place for gender-inclusive mediation.

We have been applying digital platforms and tools in peacemaking at CMI for a decade. Technology can bring new layers to the dialogue globally and involve people that we wouldn’t be able to reach otherwise.

We use digital platforms to identify key priorities and interests of a wide range of participants. In face-to-face dialogues they’re utilised to enhance participatory analysis and collective sense-making. By offering anonymity, these platforms help equalise power dynamics among participants.”

Unity in diversity

Gutsy Go is based on the idea that working for the good of others improves one's own wellbeing, as well as promotes peace in society. Founder Aram Aflatuni tells what makes the method so special.

"According to research, 80–90 percent of youth consider their most important task is to change the world for the better. Ten years ago we decided to create a model by which all schools can teach peace skills like creating social action projects for the welfare of people and enhancing unity in diversity in a group.

Gutsy Go has trained thousands of young people and teachers in over 20 locations in Finland. Students have, for example, developed a food service for those in need, crossed the generation gap by organising outdoor activities for elderly people, taught IT skills to released prisoners and eliminated fears of going to school with immigrant children.

Each project is documented on video and shared on social media. The most popular ones have reached over one and a half million viewers."



“Constructive and respectful conversations happen through listening.”

Everything starts with dialogue

Timeout is a method for building a respectful dialogue. It is important that everyone can share their views without interruptions, says the CEO of the Timeout Foundation, Laura Arikka.

“Before joining the foundation, I was a human rights expert working in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. Working both in conflict areas and multicultural projects, I learned what makes or breaks a dialogue.

The Timeout method allows people to be seen and heard. We have made Timeout as accessible and easy to use as possible. The materials and tools are available for free on our website.

Constructive and respectful conversations happen through listening. It is important that everyone can share their experiences and viewpoints without interruptions. The method can be used in workplaces, communities, schools or cities, to name a few, to gain better understanding of a chosen topic.

Sometimes the goal is to gain insight to be used in decision-making. The prime minister’s office used the method to create a report on the future of Finland. Over 300 people aged between 12 and 85 from over 50 cities, and from various backgrounds, took part in the conversations to share their views and life experiences.”



Peer power

At **VERSO programme**, young people and children are trained as mediation experts. Director Maija Gellin sees every conflict as a learning situation.

“In the 1990s, I worked with young people with special needs and I learned that many young people’s lives go in the wrong direction due to bullying at school. However, there was no method that would give young people an active role as mediators or that understood the positive power of a peer group. So, in 2000 I developed and launched VERSO with my work group.

In the VERSO programme, children are seen as experts in solving daily disputes as soon as they arise. We train young people and children as well as school and kindergarten staff to see every conflict as a learning situation. Often someone has been left out, there has been gossiping or name-calling. Instead of looking for the guilty, the idea is that each person is a valuable expert in solving their own conflict.

Through dialogue, children and young people learn to understand each other’s experiences, and recognise the needs behind the conflict. Only after this can the parties find solutions to which they commit. No one is punished or stigmatised, but the focus is on solving the problem in order to build a better future.” ■





THE WHIMSICAL HUMANITY OF TOVE JANSSON

The creator of the Moomins was much more than just a cartoonist. Her body of work could fill several lifetimes. She lived a long life shaped by love, freedom, sea and adventure – all of which can be read and felt in her works.

TEXT KRISTIINA ELLA MARKKANEN PHOTOGRAPHY PER OLOV JANSSON / MOOMIN CHARACTERS LTD

In one of Tove Jansson's books we meet Muskrat, a grumpy philosopher temporarily living with the Moomin family. A cake has mysteriously gone missing from the dining table, but Muskrat couldn't be bothered – he's simply trying to ruminate in peace in the corner. After some investigation, we discover he's sitting on the very cake.

Muskrat's antics are just one of countless examples of Jansson's ability to capture the essence of what makes us human. Best known for her Moomin characters, she was a prolific and multi-talented artist – painter, illustrator, cartoonist and writer. Her body of work could easily fill several lifetimes.

"Her pen stroke is vivid, soft, beautiful and inimitable. It is one of the finest things in the world," says the art historian and non-fiction writer **Tuula Karjalainen**, the author of *Tove Jansson: Work and Love*, a biography.

To live freely

In Jansson's beloved novel *The Summer Book*, Grandmother teaches Sophie about the importance of making one's own choices, saying, "everything is fine as long as one can just be free." This sums up Jansson's life philosophy quite nicely.

Freedom is a significant theme in Jansson's works, often embodied by her characters. For example, there's the Moomin character Snufkin – a solitary wanderer who sleeps in a tent and plays a melancholic harmonica. When summer is over, he packs his belongings and leaves Moominvalley for the winter.

Although her works have become widely loved by audiences around the world, Jansson painted, drew and wrote only for herself. This was a way of living freely; the fight she fought for her entire life.

As a child, she was allowed to roam around the family's home by the seaside in Helsinki on her own. The Jansson family spent their springs and

summers on an island east of Helsinki surrounded by the archipelago's wild nature. Although she would later study at the prestigious École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, among other institutions, she struggled with early education.

"She was more interested in the thrilling stories of adventures her mother read to her than school," Karjalainen says. As it happens, there is no school in Moominvalley.

Love letters to the sea

Most of Tove Jansson's life was set against a maritime backdrop. Perhaps it was the sea's boundlessness that Jansson herself wanted to embody. The sea does what it wants:

"foaming recklessly, raging furiously, but somehow tranquil at the same time," she writes in *Moominpappa at Sea*. The same body of water that provides a refreshing oasis for Moomins to frolic can suddenly turn into an unpredictable and even frightening force that can sink a boat or tear a tent apart.

"She worshiped the sea. She could spend long periods alone in the archipelago, even though she was afraid of the dark. The sea strengthened her sense of freedom," Karjalainen says.

Some of Jansson's writing took place literally in the middle of the sea, on an island that greatly influenced her. Jansson spent many summers on Klovharun Island in Pellinge, in

the archipelago east of Helsinki, with her long-time life partner, graphic artist **Tuulikki Pietilä**.

The small, rocky Klovharun was difficult to access, and there was no electricity or running water. Yet Jansson and Pietilä felt drawn to the island and built a cabin there. When it finally stood on Klovharun, it was exactly as the partners had hoped: four walls, four windows, and a shared desk where they could draw and write.

One long dance of rich adventure

Jansson's relationships and experiences seeped into the pages of her books and comics. The inseparable Moomin duo of Thingummy and Bob represents Jansson and theatre director **Vivica Bandler**; the wise and steady Too-ticky, in a striped shirt, is modeled after Pietilä. Jansson's 1968 book *Sculptor's Daughter* is based on her own experiences as a child.

"She never wrote a single sentence that she hadn't lived or felt herself. Nothing was superficial, whether it was descriptions of nature or articulating her inner life."

During the Second World War, Jansson fell in love with Vivica Bandler. Being in love with a woman was a new and unfamiliar experience, but Jansson wrote to her friend: "It seems to me so absolutely natural and genuine. These last weeks have been like one long dance of rich adventure, tenderness, intensity."

Today, many view Tove Jansson as a queer icon and a trailblazer in LGBTQ+ issues, and rightly so: she went against the mainstream in a time of strict normativity. Homosexuality was illegal in Finland until the 1970s, decades after Jansson first engaged in a lesbian relationship. She never married or had children. Her life was solely her own, not anyone else's.

"She didn't carry protest signs or banners. For her, it was just a natural life that she answered for herself," Karjalainen says.



Katajanokka and Kaartinkaupunki, Helsinki

Tove Jansson was born in 1914 and spent her childhood in Katajanokka, a maritime neighborhood in downtown Helsinki. She often painted there at the foot of the Uspenski Cathedral, the largest Orthodox cathedral in Western Europe. A nearby park is named after her.

As an adult, Jansson worked and lived in a high-ceilinged atelier at Ullanlinnankatu 1 in Kaartinkaupunki. A permit from Moomin Characters Ltd is required for group visits but passers-by can admire a relief of the young Jansson on the building's exterior.



Klovharun Island The Pellinge archipelago near Porvoo profoundly influenced Jansson's life and work. She spent 28 summers on Klovharun Island with her life partner Tuulikki Pietilä, later donating their cottage to the local heritage association. Klovharun and the surrounding islets form a nature reserve.



Teuva Church Teuva municipality near Seinäjoki, western Finland houses the only altarpiece Tove Jansson ever created. *Ten Virgins* was painted onto the church's stone wall, its bright colors still vibrant 71 years after its completion.



Rankki, Kotka Jansson's *The Summer Book* has been adapted into a movie that came out in 2024, starring Oscar nominee Glenn Close. The main filming location was the former military island Rankki, off the coast of Kotka.

Return to the dark roots of the Moomins

Moomin Characters Ltd is the company that owns all Moomin rights. There will be no pancake party to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the Moomins at their headquarters, says Managing Director **Roleff Kråkström**.

“We’ve always felt a bit awkward about commercial celebrations.”

Instead, the company returns to the first Moomin book, *The Moomins and the Great Flood* from 1945. It’s a story in which the Moomin family is looking for Moominpappa.

“The great flood can be interpreted as an allegory for the war that had just ended in Finland and Europe. Almost every family had lost a father, a son or a brother.”

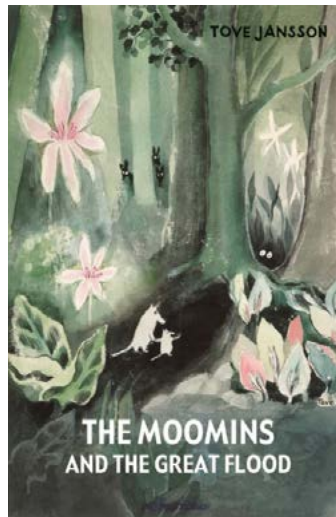
Many elements introduced in this first Moomin book later became characteristics of Moomin stories, says Kråkström. “Tove Jansson uses looming catastrophe as an element of drama that brings out archetypal behavior in the characters. She also introduces the concept of flexible family. On their quest the family encounters creatures of which some join the family for a while, others become permanent family members.”

The family’s approach to these creatures can be seen as a cornerstone of the Moomin philosophy: they are accepted as they are, but also required to take full responsibility for themselves.

“Courage is important in the Moomin stories. Many of us are afraid and need to find the courage in ourselves. We need that courage to be free and to achieve something. Only then we can be generous, face others as they are and help them.”

Eighty years on, the story of a displacement is, unfortunately, still very topical, says Kråkström.

“There are more than 200 million refugees in the world today. A huge number of children are displaced and their futures uncertain.”



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To address this issue, the company is licensing a purpose-designed set of artworks based on Jansson’s original illustrations from *The Great Flood* for their partners to use for merchandise. A portion of the proceeds will be donated to the Red Cross. The goal is to raise a million euros for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent.

The Moomins and The Great Flood ends with the family finding both Moominpappa and the Moominhouse of their dreams. As part of the anniversary celebrations and Refugee Week in the UK, Moomin Characters Ltd has invited contemporary artists in four cities to create their interpretations of the Moominhouse, together with the local refugee communities.

“They probably won’t look anything like a blue cornet but reflect what home means for them,” says Kråkström. ■



Moominland, Naantali The official Moomin theme park in Naantali, western Finland, opens its doors every summer. Visitors get to meet Moomin characters, visit their houses and explore Moominvalley and all its marvels.



The Moomin Museum, Tampere The Moomin Museum is an experiential museum for Moomin fans of all ages. In fact, it’s the only Moomin museum in the world. It hosts both permanent and temporary exhibitions, including a collection of three-dimensional scenes by Tuulikki Pietilä.

