

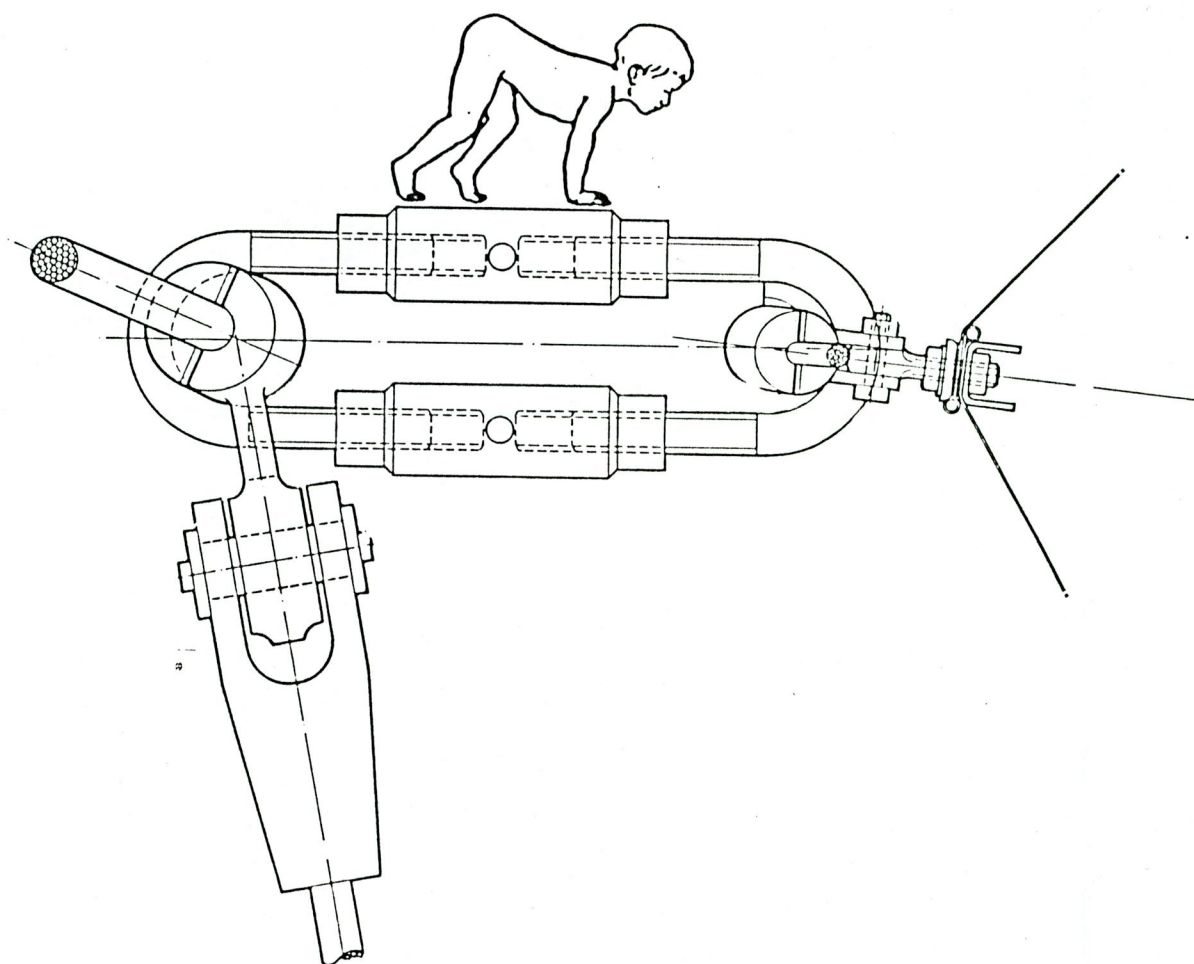
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TO ILLUSTRATE AN EMERGING INCREASE IN  
GENUINE CONCERN AMONG MODERN ARCHITECTS  
FOR HUMAN NEEDS IN THEIR DESIGNS.



EOIN BILLINGS  
INDUSTRIAL DESIGN

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THESIS 90/91

OBJECTIVE:

TO ILLUSTRATE AN EMERGING INCREASE IN GENUINE CONCERN AMONG  
MODERN ARCHITECTS FOR HUMAN NEEDS IN THEIR DESIGNS.

BY EOIN BILLINGS

## INTRODUCTION:

Twentieth century industrialisation is all the time presenting problems to the the modern architect, one of the most important problems being, how to cater for the vast array of modern human needs in todays industrialised society. The very fabric of this is based on peoples need for a home, need to work and need to be entertained. The home is, in its most primitive form, a shelter, a place in which we make our personal mark: it is where we live, our patch of territory, our sanctuary from the outside world, an entirely personal place where we love, laugh, contemplate, eat and learn. To work is to become a neccessary part of that society, to gain respect within it and to possibly exercise some influence upon it. We have an endless need to be entertained, with muti-million pound projects involved in restaurants, theatre, music, film, television and sport.

Three designers, with three quite different approaches can be seen to have attempted to answer such problems with varying degrees of success.



**Alvar Aalto**(1898-1976 (fig 1) struggled with a modern aesthetic and natural materials to produce a unique and beautiful collection of buildings and furniture. **Norman Foster** (fig 2) mastered production techniques to realise some of the most detailed modern buildings standing today.



(Figs.1,2&3)

**Phillipe Starck** 1951 (Fig 3) puts his ingenuity and wit into every-day objects, ignoring production techniques and simply concerns himself with style, humour and fun.

Each one of these architects attempts to cater to a different aspect of the human being. Aaltos' work demonstrates a concern for "flesh and blood humanity". He offers us warmth, comfort, a home, a shelter in which to relax, contemplate, a place in which to live. Foster offers a place in which work is done, beautiful sleek containers in which whole corporations sweat, pulse and crash. Starck deals in emotion, the shallow



side of ourselves, vanity, style, and entertainment.

Each one attempts to cater to a different side of our nature, a different part of our society's needs and interests. Aalto, in his rejection of pure functionalism, treats the individual as a delicate organism seeking protection from the harsh world outside; Foster feeds the corporate need for a strong identity, a modern aesthetic and a working building to contain working people and Starck offers us humour in a, sometimes, all to serious world.

All three demonstrate a concern for our needs in a modern world. Aalto, by turning away from the International Style in favour of a less repetitive, more organic and flexible personal style shows an appreciation of the human spirit. By seeing himself as moving into a new and more mature phase in his work Foster illustrates an emerging sensitivity for the person and his enviroment. And Starck with his witty interiors and fun forms responds to an unquenchable desire for amusement.

Their backgrounds make them what they are as well as their training, the time they were born in and the country in which they live(or once lived). Aalto entered the design world

at the beginning of the Modern Movement, at a time of great change in his own country but, still, with Finland's traditional industries and natural environment greatly effecting him.

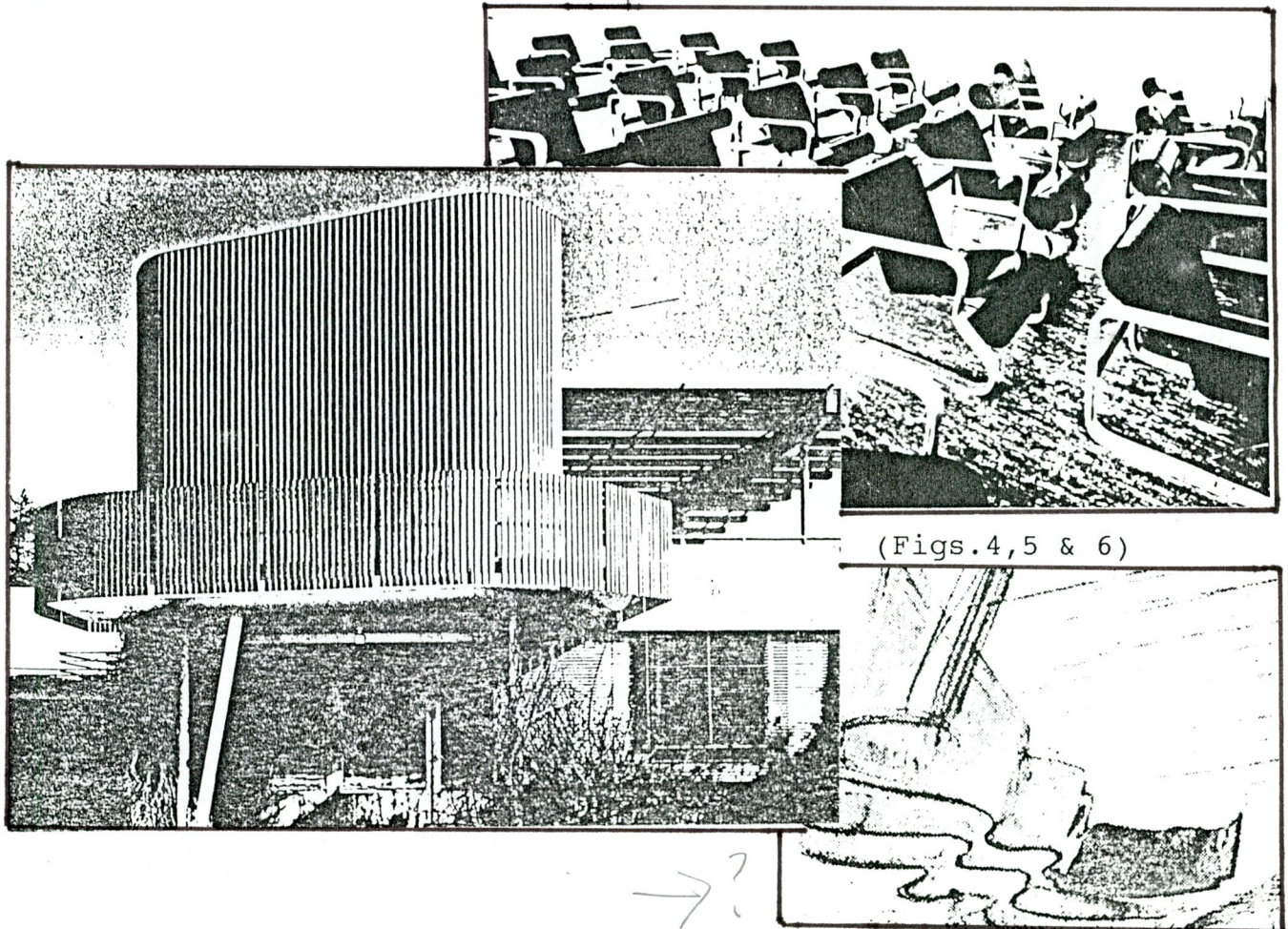
Foster came from Britain, where architects had to contend with the strong criticism of the Modern architectural failures of the sixties, failures that were often caused by a the mis-interpretation and misapplication of Le Corbusiers' theories on beauty, construction and ways of living. Starck arose out of the Post-Modernist phenomena, which was born in the 1960's as a reaction to Modernism, in which symbolism, vivid ornamentation and historical forms are employed to produce a medley of borrowed images, under, or indeed on, one roof.

The emerging concern among architects for human issues in the twentieth century is illustrated by Aaltos' rejection of formal, purist functionalism and the beauty and success of the resulting projects; by Alastair Best's rendering (Alastair ? (Best, Foster Associates; Six Arch. Pro., p2) of Foster as adopting a new and more sensitive approach to his architecture in the latter part of his life; and by the success of Phillipe Starck, the "professional dreamer" who "loves people". *ref.*



**ALVAR AALTO (1898-1976)**

From the variety of styles, reactions and philosophies born out of twentieth century architecture, one man stands out as being genuinely concerned with modern human needs; the Finnish architect **Alvar Aalto**. He has been described as accepting "flesh and blood humanity for what it really is and designing accordingly". Aalto's sensitivity to human needs is demonstrated in buildings such as his **Villa Mairea (1937) (fig 4)**, an almost pure expression of his ideas, his pavillion at **The New York Fair 1938 (fig 5)** and his furniture designs for **Artek (fig 6)**, the Finnish company which he set up in 1935 with Mairea Gullichen.



Aalto began work in the early 1920s in a traditionalist inspired modernist style and then, in the late twenties, influenced by the work of individuals such as Walter Gropius(fig7) in Germany, turned to what has been described as High Modernism. By the mid- 1930s' Aalto had rejected the International Style and developed his own, personal style where he mediates between traditional materials and modern forms to produce his own form of functionalism "Human Functionalism" (Marvin Trachtenburg, Arch. from Pre-History to Post-Modernism, 1986, p176 ).



(Fig. 7)

1883-1969

The strength of his unique approach was, to a large degree, based on the context in which he lived, this involved Finnish tradition, Finnish geography and Finnish politics.

Although Aalto was greatly influenced by the Modern movement, he did not follow the Swiss architect Le Corbusier's (fig.8) taste for the machine aesthetic. are no cold, formal lay-outs, stark, white rooms, or celebrations of airplane parts in Aaltos' buildings.



1 several reasons for this: Aalto worked in the Finnish tradition of fine craftsmanship in natural materials, working in teak or birch taken from the country's large timber lands; The effects of the long, dark and cold Scandinavian winters do not lend themselves to polished steel, clinical interiors and mechanistic details. The occupant searches for warmth and comfort from the harsh enviroment outside.



**Le Corbusier**

1887-1965

(Fig. 8)

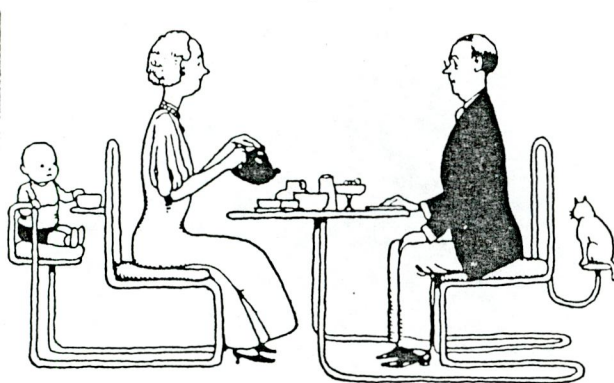
1 Aaltos early training back in The Helsinki Politechnic led him to the works of Yrjo Hirn, Hirn being most interesting for his thesis, "The Origins Of Art", where his main point was, that "Art can no longer be deduced from general, philosophical, and metaphysical principles; it must be studied as a human activity. Beauty cannot be defined as a semi-trancendental reality; it must be interpreted as an object of human longing and a source of human enjoyment." (P.D.Pearson, p )

This thesis must have been instrumental in his final rejection of the International Style, his "transition....to that



highly individualised style with which Aalto became identified" (P.D Pearson, p.150) and the search for a more humane sense in his forms and his details.

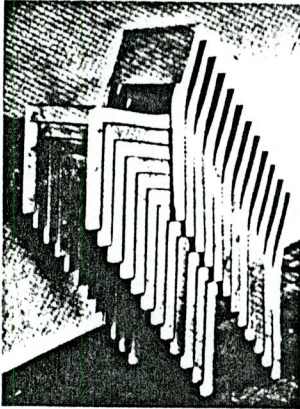
Also he was, possibly, influenced by some of the arguments against the machine aesthetic, examples of which Stephen Bayley amusingly points out in "The Conran Directory of Design". He quotes Sir Reginald Blomfield as saying that Le Corbusiers interiors are only fit to accomadate "vegetarian bacteriologists" and mentions the satire, "How to Live in a Flat" (1936) by W.Heath-Robinson and K.R.G. Browne in which the machine aesthetic is ridiculed, the tubular steel chair, one of the "emblems" of the Modern Movement (fig. 9), receiving the strongest criticism.



(Fig. 9)

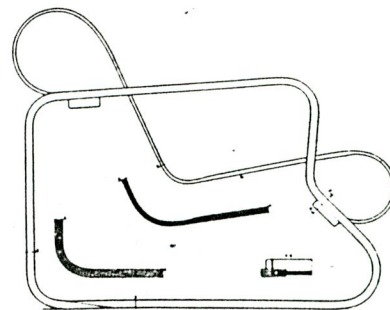
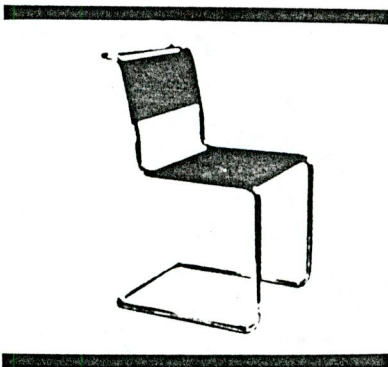
We notice that Aalto worked toward replacing steel tubes with wood. He originally worked with Otto Korhonen, technical director of Huonekaluja Rakennustyotendas Oy (producers of

furniture to the Agricultural Co-operative in Turku, 1928) on a wooden stacking chair (1929 fig.10). Aalto sought further



(Fig.10)

challenges and finally went on to design and produce a chair out of ~~structurally chair out of~~ structurally sound, bent-ply legs, thus replacing the tubular steel cantilevers seen throughout his earlier chairs (figs.11,12).



(Figs.11 & 12)

Aalto did not, however, adopt a neo-classical or traditionalist style. Following the Finno-Russian war, with Finland's recent gain of independence from Russia (1917) and the

civil war which ensued, Finland was searching for its own identity. Designers, artists, painters and politicians alike were searching for an expression for this new Finland. Designers found inspiration in the furniture produced by the simple, Karelian folk of Finland. The style became known as National Romanticism. Eliel Saarinen, one of the better known of Finland's early architects, was a major figure in this movement. He saw the peasants' furniture, houses and lifestyle as being genuinely Finnish (fig.13). Karelians lived in

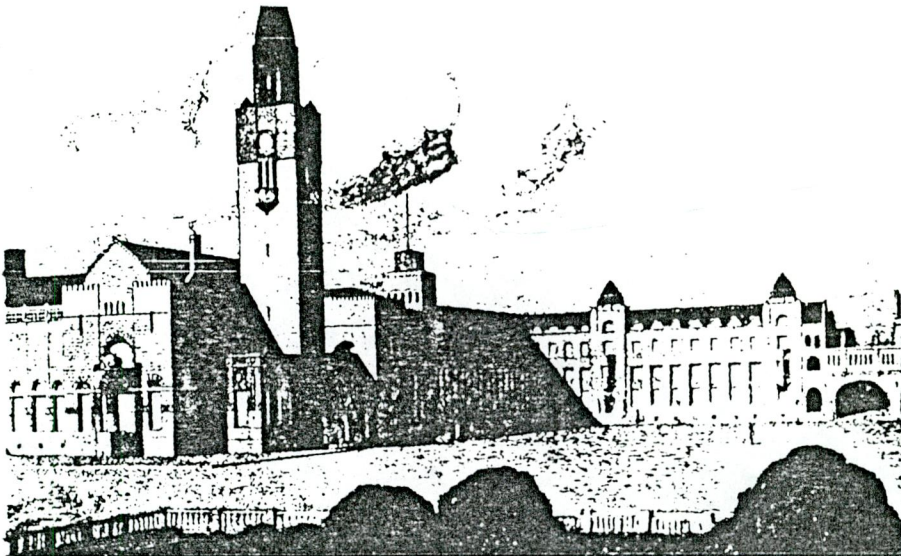


(Fig.13)

traditional log and rough stone houses surrounded by richly decorated, highly functional furniture. The materials they employed were the timbers and granite of the surrounding land and their methods of production reflected the limits of their technology. These limitations, and the warmth inherent in such materials created a nourishing surrounding for the Karelian peasant, who lived in some of the harshest, coldest environments

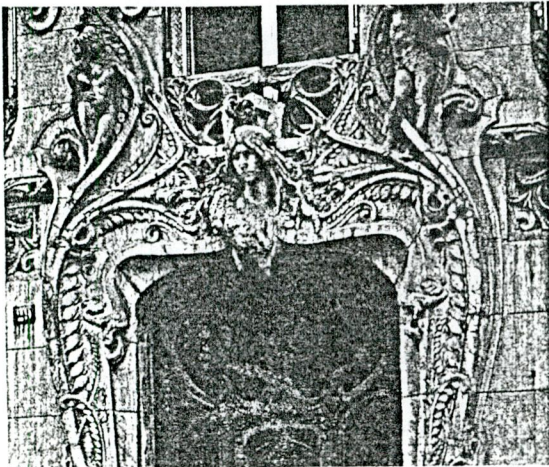


on earth. Saarinen, in admiration of their lifestyle and in search of a national identity, drew from their traditional motifs and simple furniture designs (fig.14) .



(Fig. 14)

National Romanticism was briefly influenced by Art Nouveau, with its highly decorative and decadent style(fig 15). In Finland



(Fig.15)

it was called Jugendstil 'youth style' (Conran Dir. of Des., 1985, p.79). The influence, though short (ending at the 1900 Exposition) bore fruit with the work Saarinen presented at the Paris Exposition of 1900. (S.Hartung, 1990)

Saarinan was dissappointed with his Finnish contemporaries when, in the 1930's, after the Stolkholm Fair (1930), many choose to design in<sup>g</sup> what he saw as<sup>3</sup> a cold and foreign style. Modernism entered Scandinavia and Aalto became one of its biggest supporters. He rejected National Romanticism in favour of Modernism for several reasons.

The Modern Movement with its theories on an International Style, offered a new aesthetic and a strong set of principles which attracted Aalto, who like most of his people, had "high-minded" socialist beliefs. He wished to draw more from the spirit of traditional Karelian furniture than from the form. He was more interested in the simple geometry of the work than the decorative, exterior<sup>g</sup> form.

Walther Gropius, of all the Modernists of the time, was the greatest influence on Aaltos' early work. Traces of Gropius' beliefs, that the function of a building should define its form, his attempts to put these functional elements into a "pleasing compositional effect", and his concern for humane values in a modern, industrial world can be seen in Aaltos early work.



But by the mid-thirties Aalto had turned away from the purist forms and utilitarian techniques of such architects and sought a more compassionate, freer style which caters more for the soft, organic being that we are than the harsh manufacturing processes that we employ. He sought a modern interpretation of what were, essentially, romantic ideals.

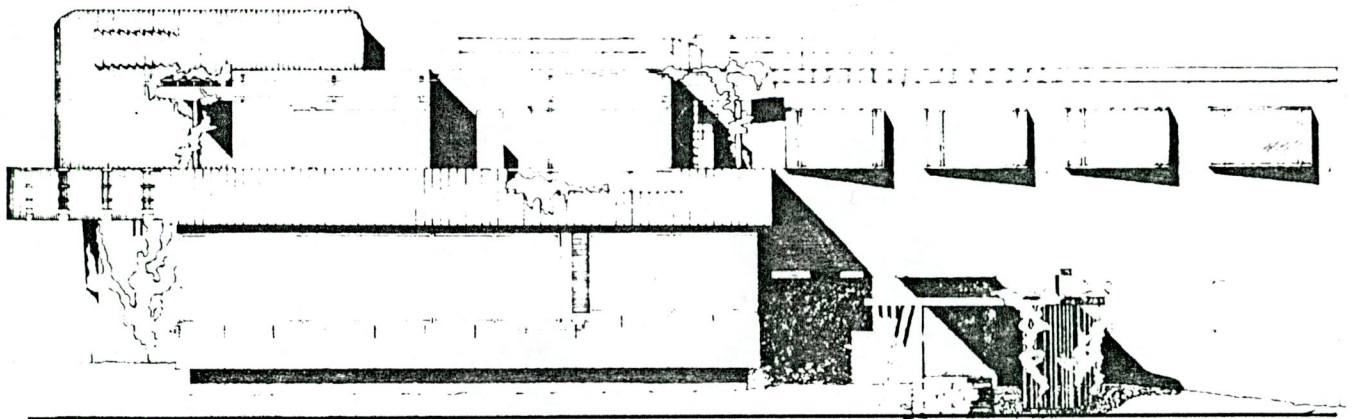
He said that "the trouble with the rational style was that the rationalism didn't go deep enough." He recognised that a totally rational approach was not only "impersonal", but simplistic in its attempt to answer all the problems architecture offered. It led to repetition and monotony.

Aalto also recognised that the International Style was just another fashion and that its "claims to timelessness or permanence proved to be false".

P.D. Pearson puts Aalto's "rapid progress" out of the International Style down to the "unusual opportunity of experimentation with new and untried forms and techniques" afforded him by three almost budget-free projects; the Finnish pavilion at Paris, the New York Fair pavillion, and the Villa Mairea (P.D. Pearson, Alvar Aalto, The International Style, p.150)

### THE VILLA MAIREA (1937)

The Villa Mairea (Fig.16) is Aalto's first private residence for a client. Having completed his own house two years previously, he had a foreknowledge of the inherent problems in designing and building a residence.



(Fig.16)

The Gullichsens, who, along with N.G. Hahl and Aalto, had set up Artek O.Y. in 1935, commissioned Aalto to design a summer house for them on their Ahlstrom estate in Noormarkku, Finland. He was given an absolutely free hand and an unlimited budget.

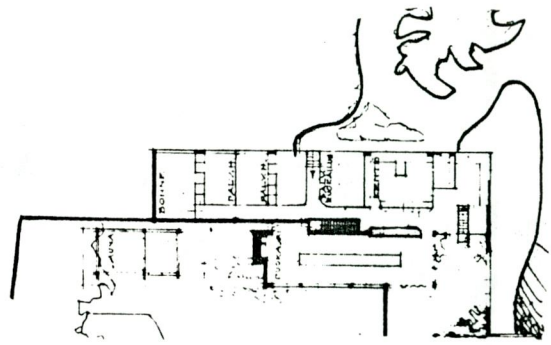
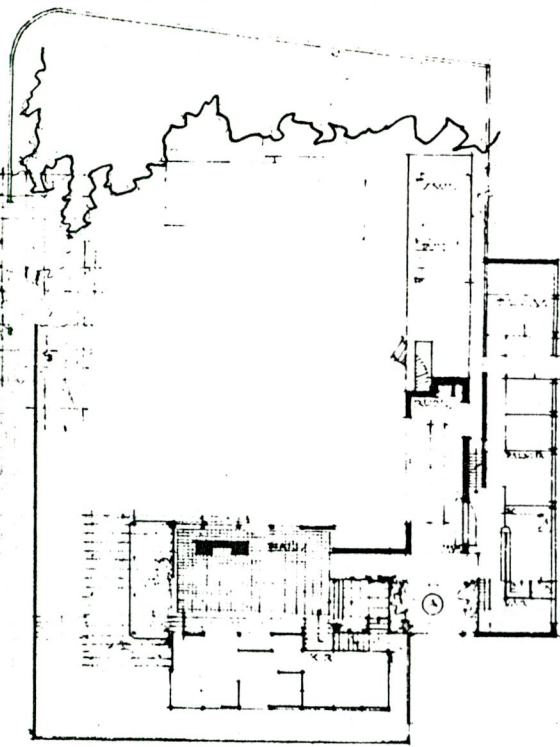
Therefore, with the experience he gained while working on his own house and the fact that money was no object, Aalto was able to go on and produce an almost pure statement of his beliefs.

Aalto first met the Gullichsens when Mairea Gullichsen (for whom the house was named) asked Alvar and Aino Aalto to redesign the interior of her Helsinki apartment. Maireas' husband, Harry, had given her the job of completely refitting their home in a Modern style and to spare no expense in doing so.

The success of that commission led to the partnership in Artek and, most importantly, the unrefusable offer by the Gullichsens to design the Villa Mairea. "We told him that he should regard it as an experimental house; if it didn't work out, we wouldn't blame him."

The method, or approach adopted to design on this project is considered a good example of Aaltos' approach to most projects. Initially, he records all the ideas considered in the first draft. These ideas are pencil sketches, where the designer is working on a purely conceptual level. Then he presents the 'first states' (Fig.17). These are working drawings where all the basic, necessary features of the building are put down on paper, dimensionally correct and in their relative positions. The 'first states' are the foundations for the building's over-all design. In the case of the Villa

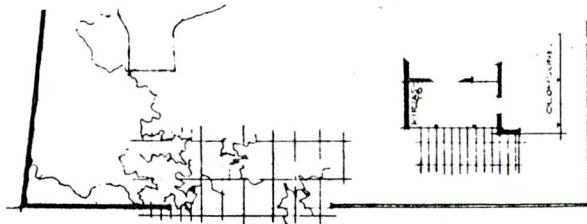




(Fig.17)

Mairea the 'first states' define the rectangular shape of the site, the L-shaped building there-on and the resulting space which is given over to the sauna, pool, lawn and patio. These are the parameters out of which the interim drawings, and eventually, the final design will arise. They are, if you like, the under-lays for the next stage of the design; the development.

During the development or Interim stage we see Aalto working with each architectural element, juggling each part of the composition to arrive at at a "...unique collection of architectonic expressions."(Fig.18) The basic elements are treated with the addition of curves, the softening of line and the strenthening of features.



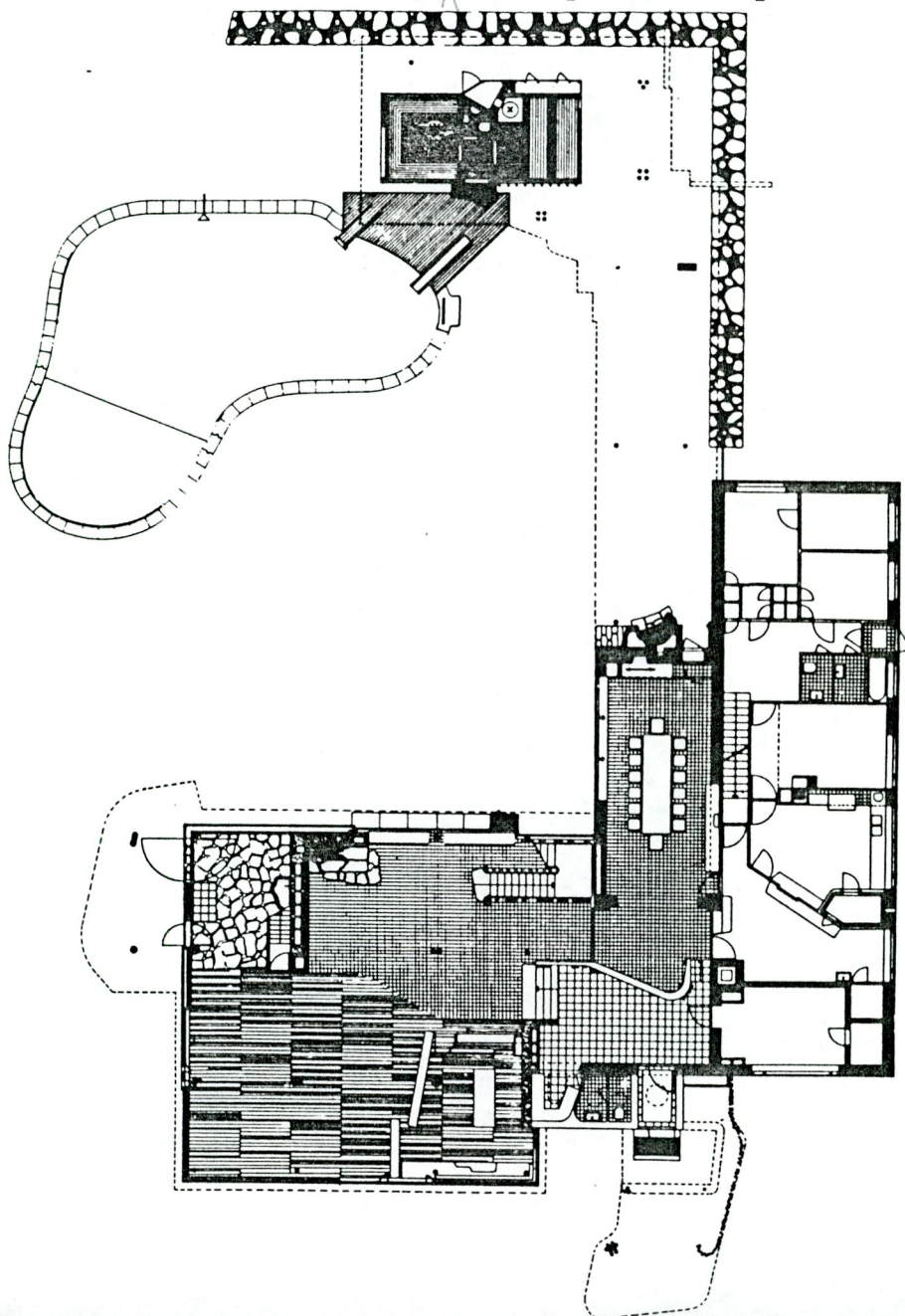
(Fig.18)

The drawings clearly demonstrate Aaltos' approach to the

design process. First he defines the scale and position of the building's components and then, within that framework, attempts to produce a beautiful and original building.

Some of the features or solutions arrived at in the Villa were enriched and incorporated into later buildings.

The building itself is laid out in an L-shape(Fig.19). The entrance hall faces dining room as you enter. The kitchen is



(Fig.19)

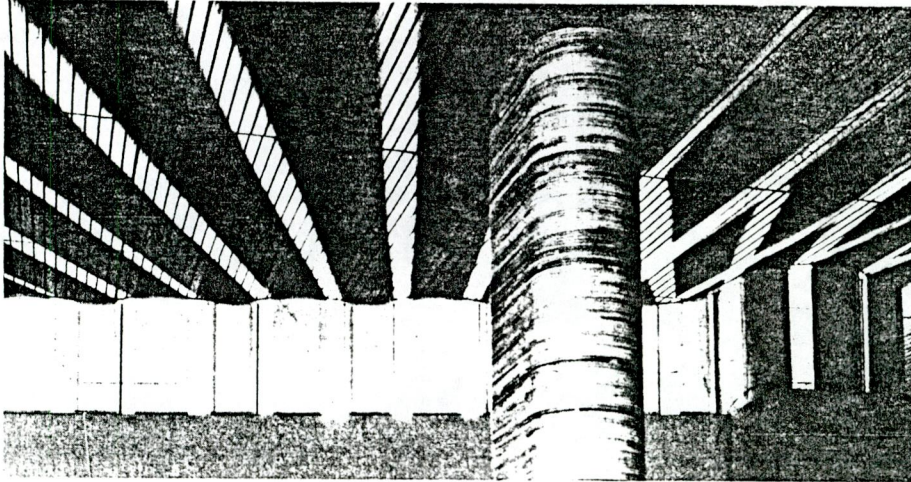


beyond that, and to your right is Maireas' office. Past the kitchen, at the extreme north, is the servants quarters. The southern facing leg of the L features the entertainment and living rooms, on a large open, split-level floor which in the original concept housed a gallery but in the final piece becomes a multi-purpose space with mobile screens. The living room has a huge open fireplace. The westerly corner, behind the fireplace, offers a flower arranging room with an adjoining patio leading into the garden. Above the living rooms, on the second floor, are the master bedroom and the studio. The garden makes up the sites rectangular shape and at its northern end we find the swimming pool. The pool is, in turn, half covered and connected to the main building at the northern end of the dining room by a long, sod covered canopy.

The over-all plan has obvious practical elements such as tiled areas to handle traffic, the dining room connects to the kitchen which in turn connects to the servants quarters. The flower arranging area connects directly to the garden. Flexibility is offered in the southern living room (an important point as it bears direct reference to Aaltos beliefs and influenced later architects such as Foster and Grimshaw). The shapes employed, however, are a series of free-curves, setting off the simple geometry of the main building. The pool is set

off against the sod covered canopy. The studios unsemetrical, curving shape, one of the strongest shapes in the building, is contrasted with the line of the south wall. These important stylistic features do not contradict one another but add spice and life to the villa. They are born out of nature with its shifting, whirling terrain, ever complicated but always rich with imagery. The complicated form blends in with the natural surroundings.

The real beauty of the building is not, however, in its plan. Aalto's real talent comes out in the attention paid to material selection. Teak, pine, Birch, Granite and fired tile pervade throughout. The blinds are teak, venetian strips, which allow the person to select the natural lighting of the interior (Fig.20). All the secondary up-right supports are elegant timber constructions. The major structural elements, steel pipes, are wrapped in canning to warm up their inherently cold exterior. This illustrates a definite turn away from Modernist ideals of allowing the material to speak for itself and points to a greater concern for the occupant than the nature of the building's construction.



(Fig.20)

Aalto takes more pride in the users peace of mind and comfort than the application of rigid, harsh philosophies.

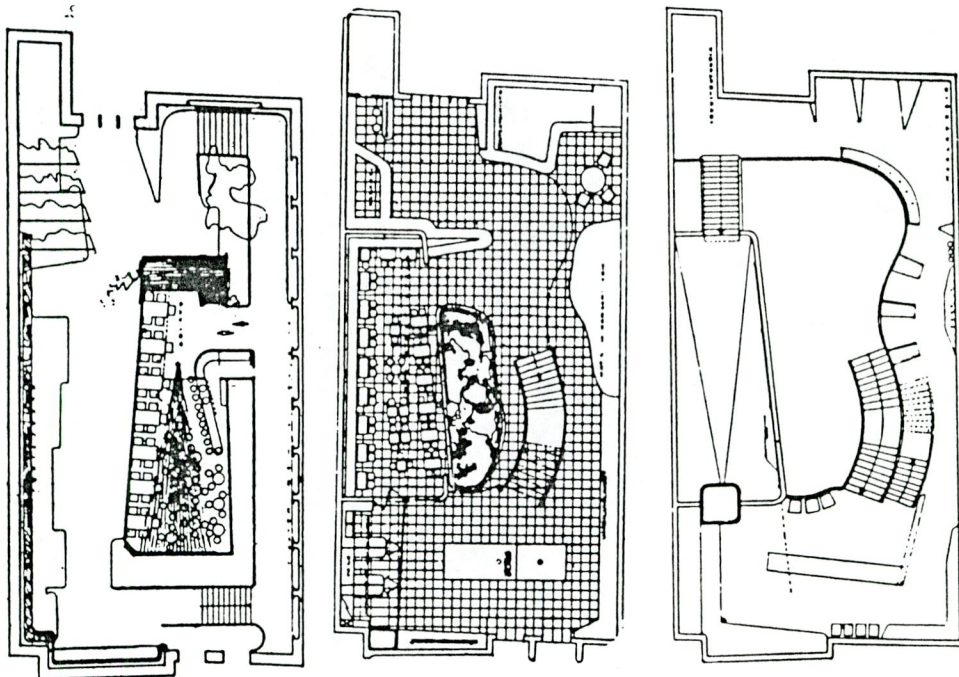
The careful composition of the plan, and overall forms of the villa combined with the treatment and variety of materials combine to produce a wholly natural image, smell and feel. All the senses are provided with a rich and "nourishing" environment.

The Villa Marias' function is to shelter a living, breathing, human being.



## THE NEW YORK WORLD'S FAIR - FINNISH PAVILLION

Aalto, not only won the first prize in the competition to design a Pavillion to represent Finland at the New York World Fair, but also took the second and third prizes (Fig.21).

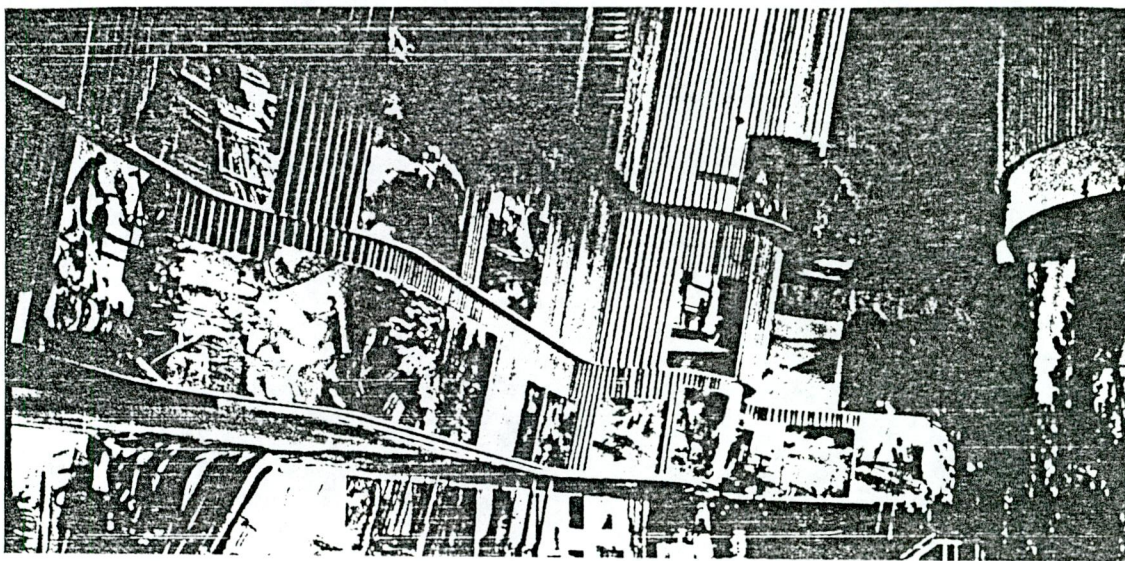


(Fig.21)

This outright win was attributed to the fact that Aalto had already designed a pavillion to represent Finland at the Paris Fair(1936). His experiance as well as his talent put him in a good position to win.

The completed pavillion, though somewhat different to the original concept (the cinema was moved to a position opposite the plywood curtain and raised up onto the balconies) is an example of Aalto's almost absolutely anti-functionalist approach. The primary aim being to explore form, emotion and technical ability.

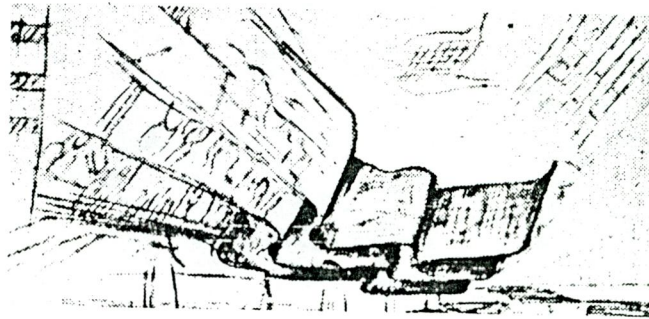
The strongest feature of the building, the huge free-flowing curves described as a "curtain" (Fig.22) (P.D.Pearson, p.184) have no justification other than to enthrall the observer. The massive array of waves (the English translation of Aalto is "Wave") fly across the center of the pavillion like enormous flags in a great wind. The appeal being the romance of nature, not the romance of the machine, but an image whose power relates directly to the natural forces of the earth.



The initial concept, a set of "undulating" (Fig.22) (P.D



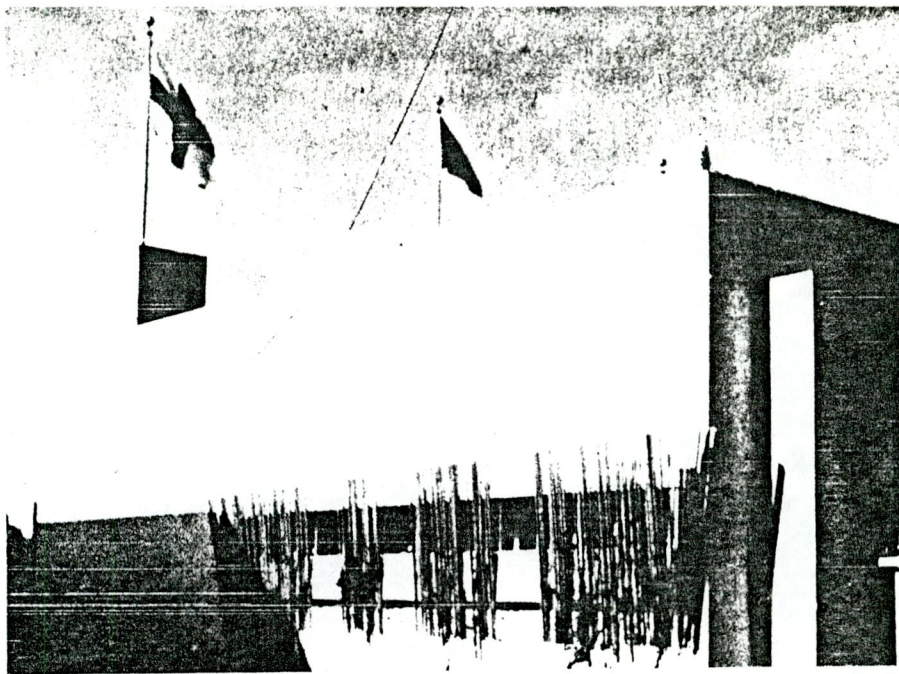
^ Pearson, p.183) wave-like forms may have originated from experimental work during his construction of the Paimio chair where Aalto sculpted with shavings to explore forms in wood. He actually displayed these pieces at an exhibition in London in 1933.



(Fig.23)

The site was located at the end of a row of nine pavilions thus offering the possibility of windows on the end elevation. These windows opened into the restaurant. From outside the building, Aalto explores light and shadow, texture and contrast by obscuring the openings with random vertical wooden poles which act as a crude shading device (copied many times in Irish, middle class suburban housing developments where the architect erects a sun block over the car space). The poles (Fig.25) throw shadows on the white stucco wall, breaking up the blank white space, offering the eye relief from the otherwise dead, blank space. The texture, inherent in the wood, contrasts with the wall, adding more life to the traditional material.





(Fig.24)

There are more and more apparently random features and arrangements; the organic flow of the spiral staircase handrail, unsemmetrical, birch-veneer cut-outs located under the curtain wave forming part of the soffit, the naturalistic shape of the projector housing (similar to the painting studio of the Villa Mairea) and the overall spiralling nature of the building.

Form is arrived through a romantic study of the space provided. Aalto designs from the heart and the soul, to resolve the building. The complex imagery and variety of shapes derive from his appreciation of the natural world. His application of texture lends itself to the touch of a human hand.

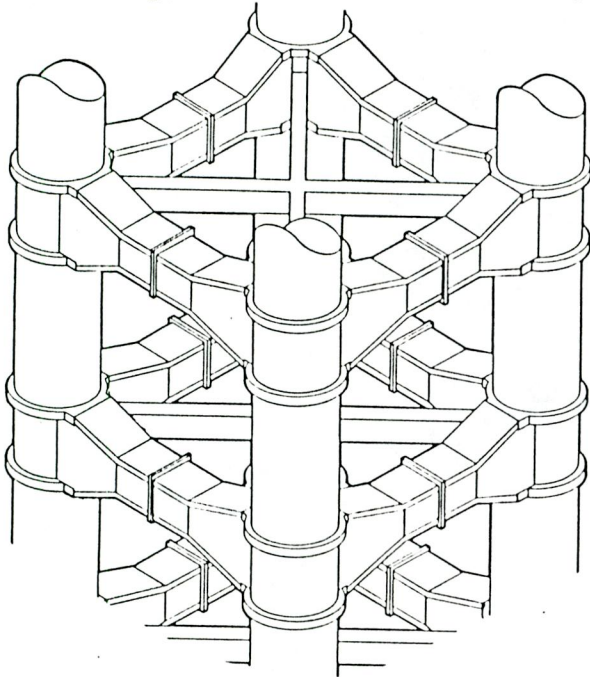
The building's technical innovations, the construction of the "curtains", the laminations, based on Aalto's furniture, and the setting out of the various, spiralled floors, put it on a par with any Functionalist building erected up to that.

Aalto was the first architect to split off from The Modern Movement and take a human approach to designing, planning and building in a modern aesthetic. His philosophy, so complex and subtle in its nature, was impossible for any other architect to successfully adopt and apply.

^ ?

## NORMAN FOSTER

Another man who was born out of the modern movement is **Norman Foster**, one of today's most important contemporary architects. Foster, however, could not be described as being a "human Functionalist" but, as his work demonstrates, is more influenced by a love of technical detail (Fig. 25) and production techniques than the romantic values of Aalto. His buildings are generally concerned with visual impact, unlike Aalto, whose buildings' subtle complexities are designed to gently unfold before the observer. Foster employs modern materials, more commonly found in the fabrication of aircraft or cars than in a building, where Aalto chooses, mainly, craft based materials.

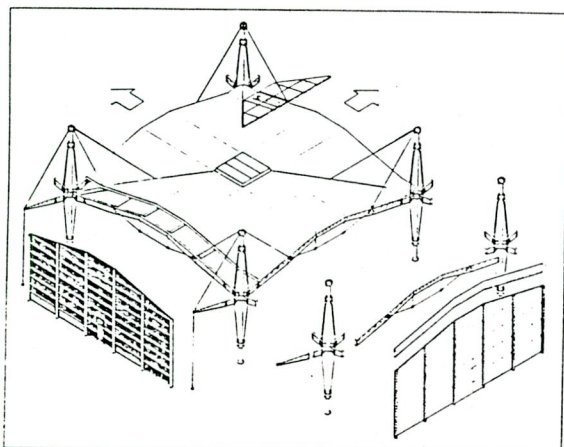


(Fig. 25)

Aalto and Foster do, however, have similar beliefs (some



derived from the Modern Movement of the 1930's). Foster attributes great importance to flexibility, best demonstrated in his Renault Center (Fig.26) which is designed as an organic facility which can expand as the client desires. Closer again to Aalto's idea of multi-purpose space concept behind Foster's floor arrangements in the Hong Kong Bank where a provision is left for the user to adapt his own personal area. Just as Aalto first defines the elements necessary to complete the building or products' function ( although Aalto's definition of "function" is quite different to Foster's) and then attempts to put these elements into a pleasing composition, Foster specifies what is required to fulfill the brief and designs accordingly with an attempt to put this series of architectural elements into one language. Neither are concerned with "...advantageous beautification by means of cover-ups" (Pearson, 150). Both struggle with their materials to find a suitable form. Neither are concerned with historic symbolism or classical architectural answers to new problems.



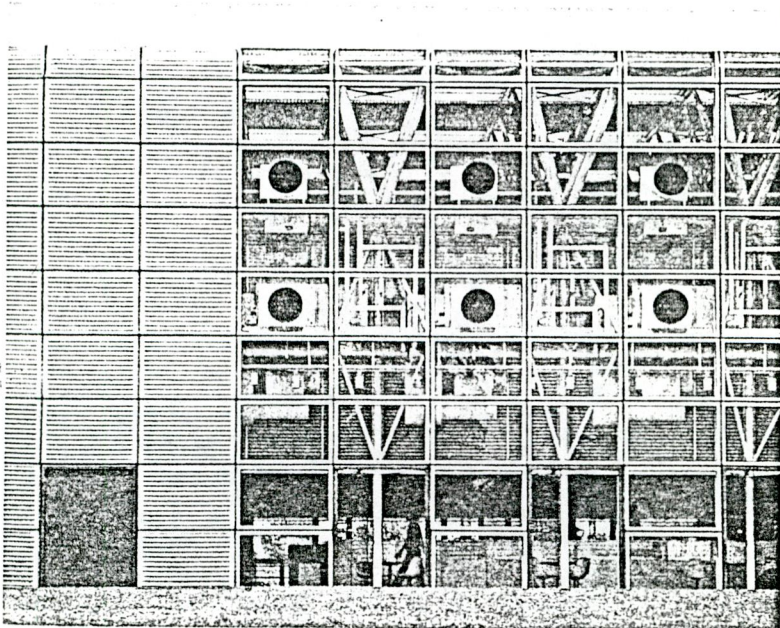
(Fig.26)

Aalto would attempt more natural, traditional materials such as pine, teak or granite to make up the components of his work. Where Foster turns previously harsh, new, industrial materials and manufacturing techniques into sleek modern buildings, Aalto takes old, traditional materials and forges them into a sensitive, modern aesthetic. Foster's 'function' is to produce a container from a host of modern materials, offering the user group alternative shades of privacy. Aalto's 'function' is to create a space in which humans can live, in modest comfort, surrounded by warmth and sensitivity.

Foster claims, however, to have "...always believed that architecture is about people- at one extreme the inner sanctum it can create, at the other extreme the outside public spaces which are created by it. In between such public and private domains the edges can be consciously or self-consciously blurred to create or modify communities by sustaining, erecting or breaking down social barriers." *A 14*

In his work, Foster does show concern for people, but only as a social group, a team, or a corporation. The Villa Mairea demonstrates Aalto's concern for the person rather than the group. Aalto attempts to reach the senses; touch, hearing, smell, sight and intellect. He carves wooden handrails into comfortable hand shapes, insulates walls against noise, fills a

room with the smell of fine timbers and orchestrates each element into one beautiful complex image. Fosters **University of East Anglia( Sainsbury Center For the Visual Arts )**(1978), though a beautiful and highly finished building (Fig.27), is concerned primarily with varying levels of public and private access and the innovative use of structure and cladding to produce a powerful, industrial aesthetic rather than being concerned with creating a human enclosure; a detailed, humane environment.

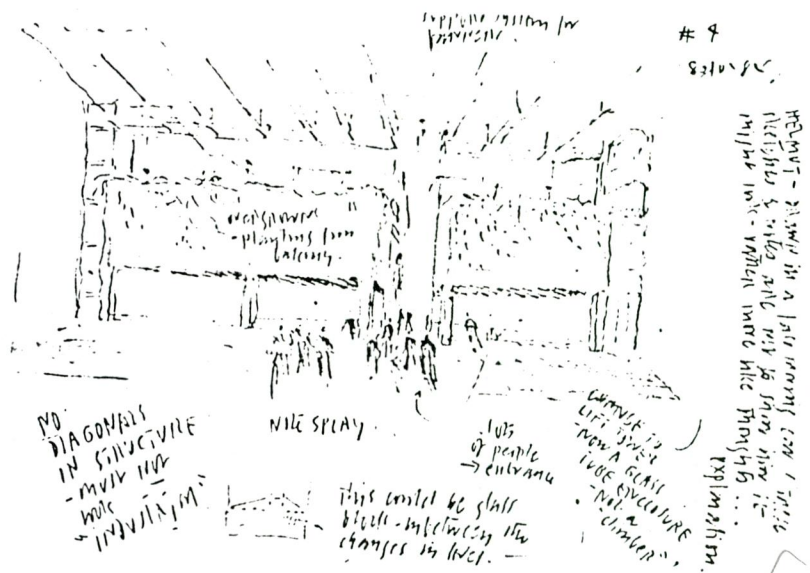
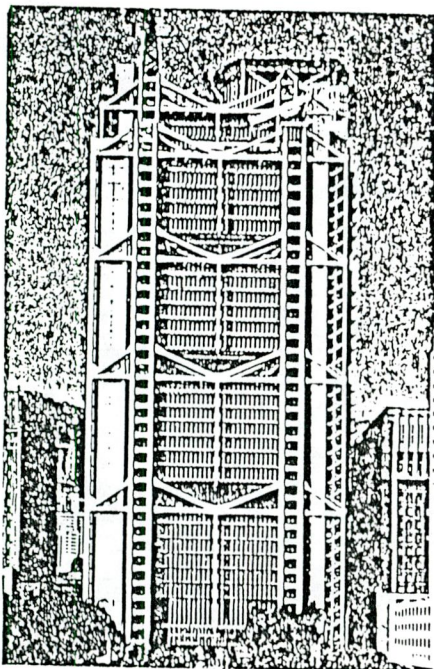


(Fig.27)

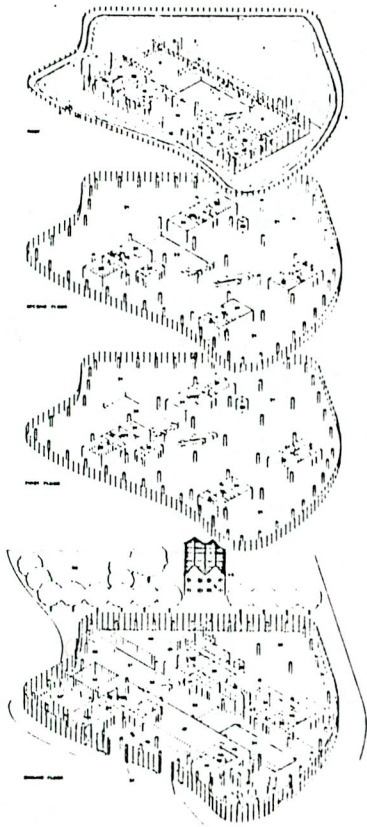
However, in Foster Associates exhibition catalogue of



september 1985, Alastair Best attempts to demonstrate a growing concern for the Human Element in Fosters work. Best argues that the "caricatures of Foster as the heartless technocrat or jet-propelled wunder-kid are now....begining to look out of date." He declares that Foster " has moved onto a richer creative seam." Foster is now dwelling on more "spiritual concerns", there is "Optimism, Joy, Illusion and Tender Loving Care.." rather than neoprene gaskets, Crinkled Tin and extruded subframes; sketch books now contain hearts rather than helicopters. He hails the new Foster, "...the East coast Foster; the Yale graduate who was so impressed by Chermayeff and Alexanders theories of Community and Privacy - rather than West Coast Foster who was seduced by the California schools programme.."; the new Foster who designed the **Nimes Mediatheque** (fig.28) and the **Hongkong Bank**. (Fig.29)



Best paints him as a once young "buccaneering technocrat" who, at the age of fifty is now, with an array of serious jobs behind him, entering a new, more mature phase in his work. He describes the architects' early work, such as the Sainsbury and the **Willis Faber(1975)** (Fig.30) buildings, as being part of Fosters first phase, a stage where a fascination with "extensive prototyping of prefabricated components", aluminium super-forming and neoprene gasket systems prevails over concerns for the more spiritual aspects of design. He sees the Hongkong Bank as, not only, being the technical fruit of the two buildings (The Bank featuring several conceptual details drawn from both his Sainsbury and Willis Faber projects) but also as a definite development in fosters work, moving towards a greater concern for people, their working enviroment and their lifestyle.



(Fig.30)



Whether or not we are witnessing an actual change in Fosters work; whether or not he has, in projects such as the Hongkong Bank or the Nimes Mediatheque, demonstrated a new, more "spiritual" concern for people and architecture, the important point to make is that Foster, one of the most talented of all contemporary "Industrial" architects, by making his change in sentiment a major theme in the 1985 exhibition, by "welcoming" the arguments put forward by Post Modernists and by recognising the important role that the architect has to play in relation to people rather than, or as well as, technical details underlines a definite and genuine concern awakening in a powerful, modern architect; a new sensitivity; a new approach.

Foster, however, as Aalto did before him, is taking on a great challenge. Just as the Finnish architect thought that "a truly serious problem is the discovery of form", just as he struggled with the problems of finding a modern form to suit traditional materials, Foster seeks a new form to suit new materials. In this case the architect must work with harsh, unnatural materials, in an attempt to find a suitable modern form to suit the lifestyles and needs of modern man.

Since the 1970's British architects have been arguing

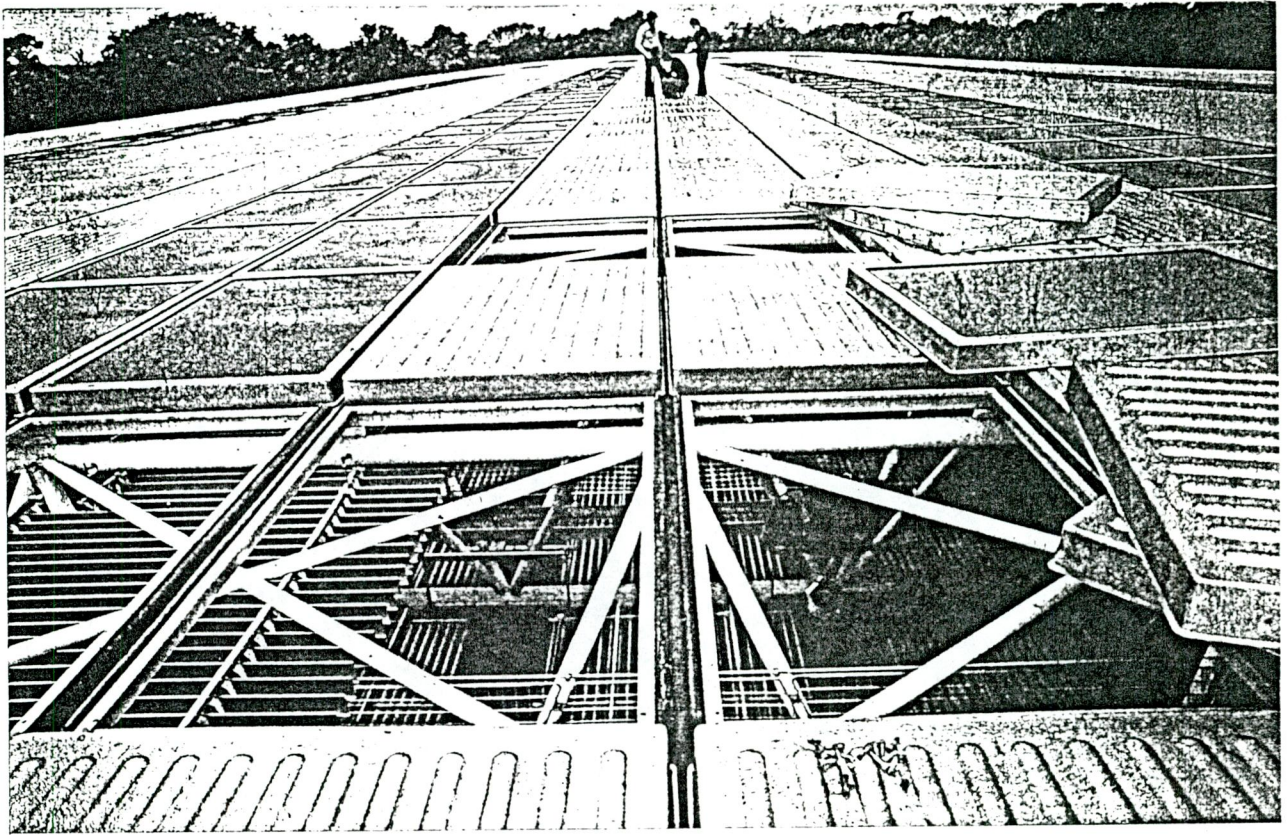


over the correct approach to architecture (Charles Jencks, The Battle of High-Tech, "New British Architecture", 1989, p19).

Foster choose Modernism, an approach which has, recently, caused great debate throughout Britain.

On the one hand there are those supporters of Prince Charles, those who object to living in a world of machines and then have to be "surrounded by buildings that look like machines...". (Prince Charles, New British Architecture, 1989, P.19) and on the other hand those who wish to celebrate function, process, movement and flexibility.

Foster and Richard Rogers both arose out of a niche in the market in the 60's. Manufacturing companies were building industrial sheds all over Britain to house there staff and machinery. A heightening of design consciousness forced the prestige of the company to be expressed in the excellence of their buildings. Image became of great importance. Rogers company, Team Four (whom Foster worked for at the time), worked to produce cheap, attractive buildings out of crude, industrial materials. The work, such as the Reliance Controls Building (1967) which won the Financial Times Award for the most outstanding building for the two years 1966-67, demonstrated that "the humble shed, in the right hands, could be transformed



(Fig. 31)

Foster loves process, the "how, why and what" (Jencks, p20) of the building. He reasons out its structure and then treats the details in such a way that the components, what they do, how they work and what they are made of, are expressed, presenting the building as if it were a book. Unlike Rogers, however, Foster tends to employ cladding (Fig. 32) thus hiding detail. The Hong Kong Bank and Lloyds Building, two of the most expensive and largest examples of Modernist Industrial architecture to date, are clearly different, not only in their finished appearance but in their detailing. The toilet services, in both cases, were prefabricated and simply brought to site and

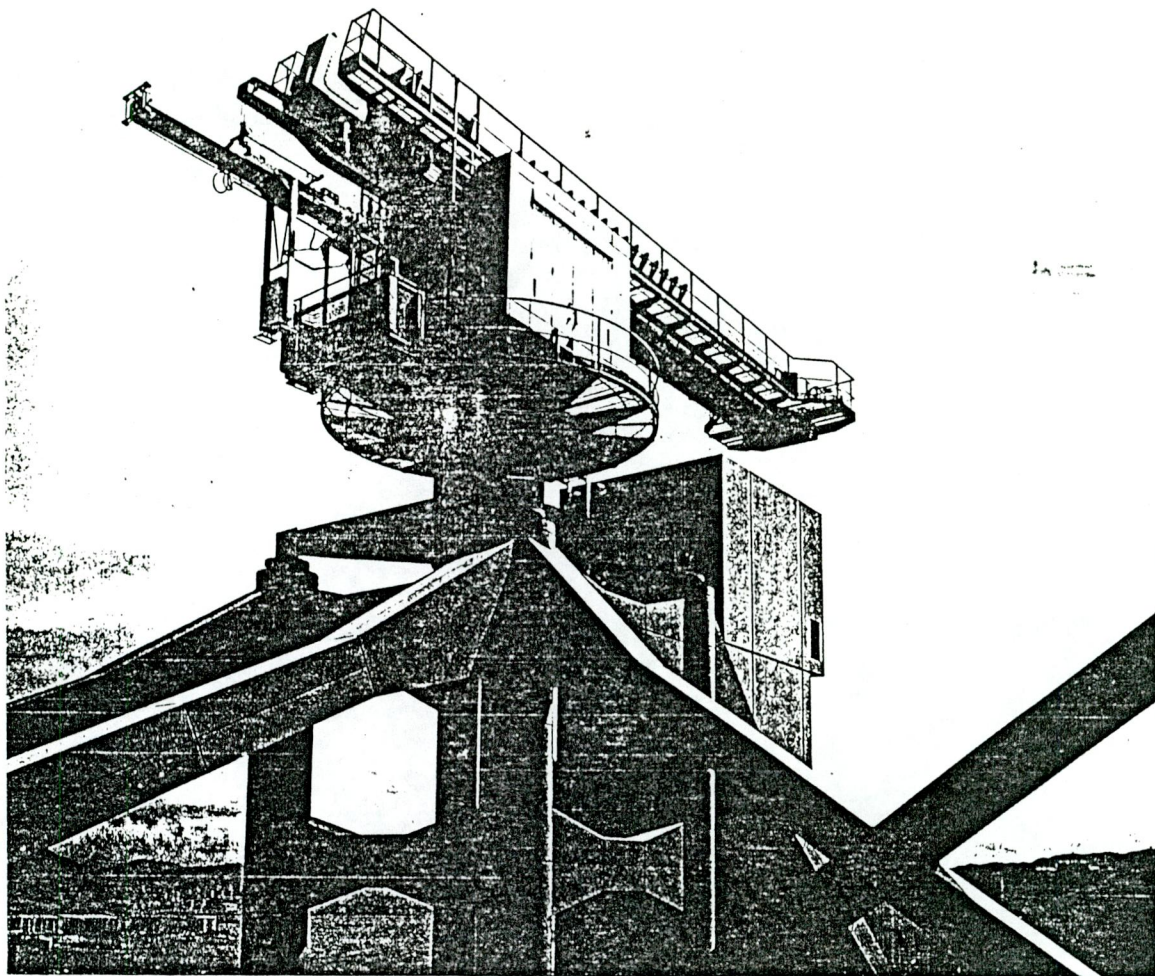


into compelling architecture." (Best,p14)

Foster, throughout his work, loosely follows Jenck's six "basic rules of High-Tech". (Jencks,p19) The building being inside-out, a celebration of process, transparency, colouring, a filligree of tensile members and the development and application of new technology.

The services, such as air-conditioning, toilets and maintainance equipment are always put on the outside of the building. The structure is not always "exposed"(Jencks,p19) as seen on the Sainsbury building where it is hidden beneath a sleek,aluminium envelope(Fig.31). The concept behind this freeing-up of the interior is to achieve the maximum flexibility possible within the available space. Rogers brought this idea further by putting all the lift services on Lloyds of London outside the building, where Foster, in addition to the lifts on the outer shell put considerable expense into escalators running through the center of his Hong Kong & Shanghai Bank. This demonstrates a greater concern on Fosters part for the people in the building, than, as is demonstrated in Lloyds' servicing, a rigid adherence to Modernist design philosophy.





(Fig.32)

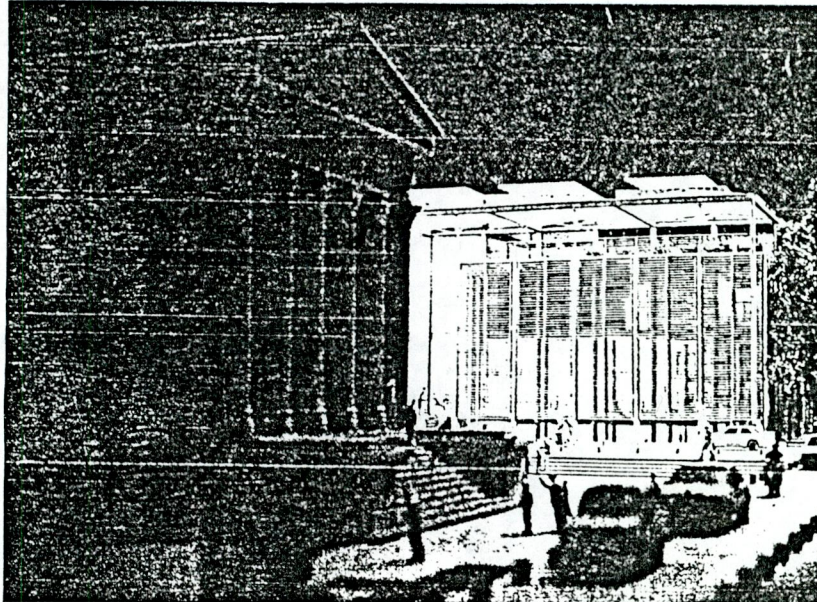
installed, one on top of the other, like Lego. Rogers leaves the services open and still in the same form as the day they left the factory floor. Foster, however, installs the services and then clads them in the same grey, laser-cut, aluminium cladding as used on the main structure. Foster still seeks to express the logic of the building, but, unlike Rogers, is prepared to cover details where they may offend the eye.

"Transparency, layering and movement" are all important features in The Sainsbury Center, The Hong Kong Bank, The Nimes Mediatheque and The Lloyds Building. The Sainsbury Center has an open ended structure, vertically glazed revealing the exhibition space, restaurant and faculty areas. Along its smooth sides Foster puts up a glazed curtain-wall to allow



natural light and to express the structural elements and air conditioning ducts. There is a terrific amount of movement in the Hong Kong bank with the staff bustling around open the "trays" (Jencks, p22), the constant rolling of the escalators and the constant traffic in and out of the building. It is a celebration of people at work.

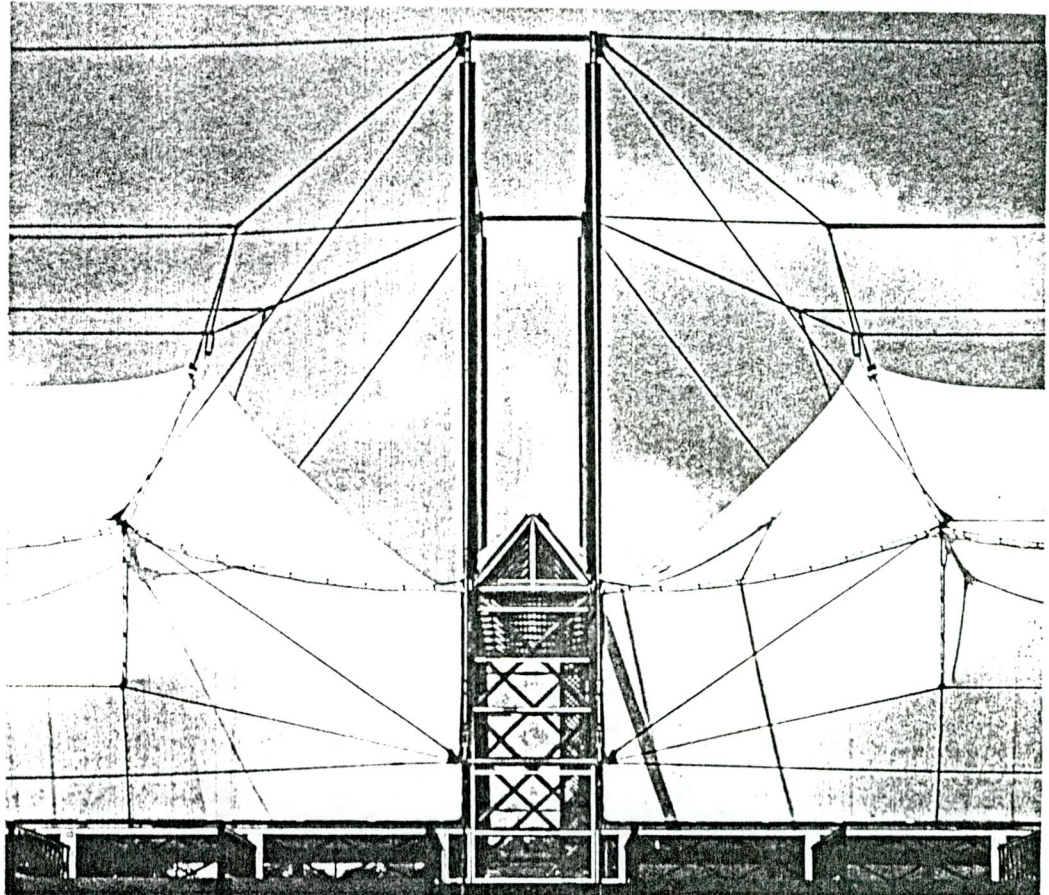
The Nimes Mediatheque (Fig.33) features a glazed, vertically hung wall, broken up by slender aluminium fins letting the spectator see through into the building, but breaking up the flat glass surface. At Lloyds the glass elevators serve to give a fantastic view as well as expressing the workings of the lift to the user (and occasionally giving a good scare).



(Fig.33)

Rogers architecture, however, is much livelier than Fosters, with a much more intricate set of layers, movement and a greater variety of finishes and structures. This can be seen in Rogers Inmos Factory at Newport(1982)(Fig.34). The factory produces micro-chips, thus requiring a clinically clean atmosphere. Each manufacturing plant is hung from a central servicing spine and covered with a tensile, fabric, membrane.

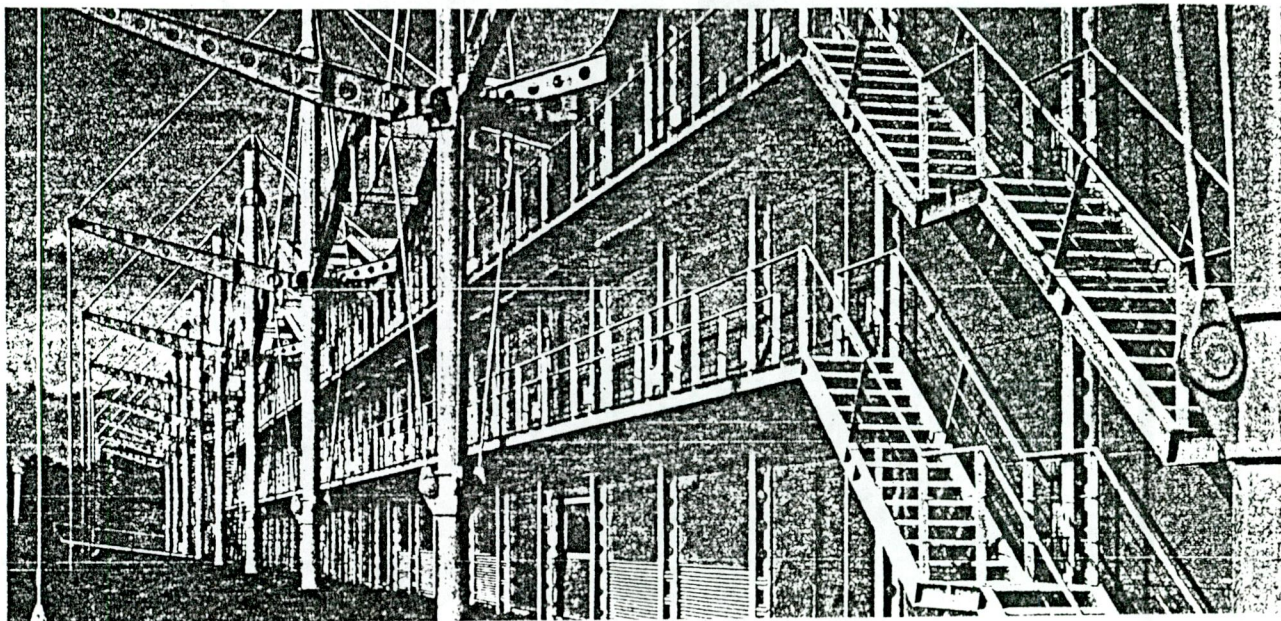
(Fig.34)



Visually, the structure is an exciting array of tension cables and steel pipe members giving a light, nautical feel. The only comparable work by Foster is the Renault Distribution Center at



Swindon(Fig.35). Its "playfully mechanistic"(Best,p14) structure adds life to the buildings exterior, not seen in the huge clad exteriors of the Sainsbury center, or the Hong Kong Bank.



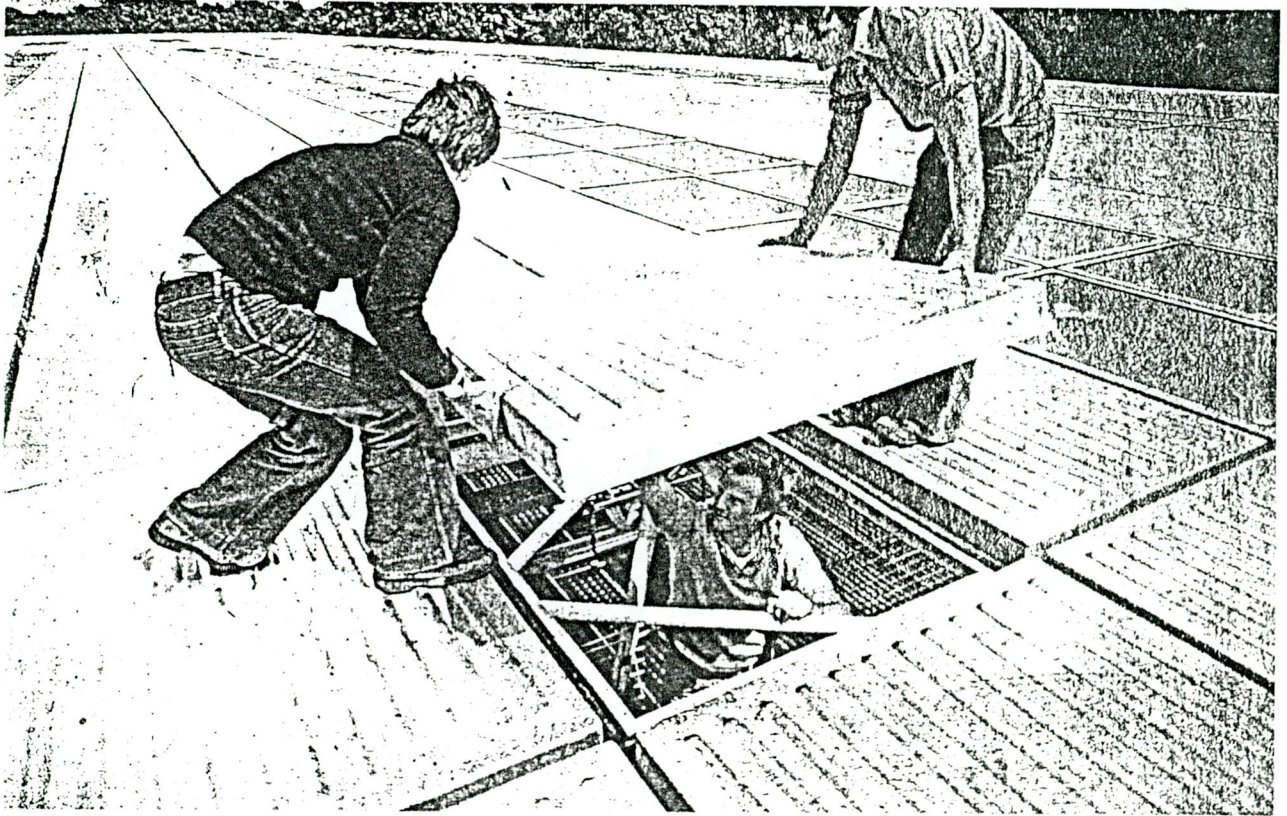
(Fig.35)

Bright simple colours were another important feature of modernist buildings. Rogers choose the primary colours used by engineers to emphasis the various components and further explain the function of each element. The interior of the Inmos building is colour coded in red, blue and green to define the part the particular components have to play in the building. Foster never applied this idea to any great degree. Other than the Renault Center, where the structure is highlighted by painting the it yellow, his buildings are grey, silver and white. Recently, many architects have turned to "The Silver Aesthetic"(Jenks,p23)

turning to the natural polished finish of stainless steel and aluminium. Both Lloyds and The Hong Kong Bank are painted grey, black and clad in polished steel.

All demonstrate an unending desire to use the latest manufacturing techniques, production technologies and technical expertise. Fosters Sainsbury building is clad in super formed aluminium tiles (which failed two years later due to cost cutting) all bolted down to an extremely innovative neoprene gasket "net" (Foster Associates; Working Drawings. UEA.1978). The panels are fabricated off-site and then delivered to be fitted onto the main structure. The net is rolled onto the roof and then, the panels are bolted down, sandwiching the neoprene to form a totally sealed system with guttering in between each composite unit (Fig.36). The system was totally new and has never been used since. This kind of detailing requires teams of engineers and designers and a constant liaison with sub-contractors. However excellent the technical work, the atmosphere of the buildings interior and the surrounding atmosphere are of primary importance. Sainsburys setting is perfect; a green-field site both the industrial aesthetic and the natural surroundings enhance one anothers inherent beauty. The interior, however, has an "acoustic buzz" (Jencks, p21), detracting from the quality of the end product.





(Fig.36)

Foster's Nîmes Mediatheque, when related to Jencks' "rules" illustrates how he has developed a new approach to his architecture, an approach with more feeling for the human side of design. The developments seen in the earlier work, the use of cladding to cover functional elements in the building, the celebration of people's movement within the structure and his subtle use of colour all point toward a more spiritual approach.

Foster won a limited competition (1984) to design and build a library, stores and booking offices (for Bullfights and the Theatre). The building was to be erected on a site previously occupied by a Neo-Classical theatre, destroyed by fire in 1952.



The sensitive nature of the site, being located beside the Maison Caree, the third century AD temple of Caius and Lucius Caesar, led many to believe that Foster would not win. Foster "astonished" (Best, p23) French critics. The concept was approached in a novel fashion for the Modernist. Annotations on early drawings indicate how Foster was thinking. "No diagonals in structure-must not look 'Industrial'" went one terse note. (Best, p23) The final concept is timid in terms of the work that went before. Structural elements such as up-rights and flooring are suppressed into simple poles and elegant horizontals. Servicing is also suppressed, with only a suggestion of air conditioning or ducting existing at all. All the workings are hidden in subtle boxes on the roof. Material selection has also changed. Though the aluminium, steel and glass remain, the concept leaves provisions for stone cladding, a first for Foster, which must have sent him back to his text books to learn about this "new" material.

A Concept

PHILLIPE STARK(1949)

From the sensitivity of Alvar Aalto, with his gentle, modern forms, sculpted from natural, traditional materials, to the carefully detailed, highly polished industrial aesthetic of Norman Foster we move onto the humorous, ingenious and very personal work of the French Post Modernist, interior, industrial and architectural designer, Phillpe Starck.

Where Aalto is concerned with comfort and warmth and Foster is concerned with varying degrees of privacy and public access, Starck is concerned with the humorous, shallower, side of the human being. Where Foster and Aalto "struggle" with the architectural elements, which they so carefully laid down, to compose an answer to their "truly serious problem...the discovery of form.." Starck happily sketches another building, "or is it a door-stop, an orange squeezer.." or "...an Aztec monument?" *ref.*

Starck is not concerned with modern production techniques,

"market factors", anthropometrics or form following function. He is working on a more spiritual level, with "symbolic shape", primitive symbols and "an instinctive approach to ergonomics". His architecture demonstrates this, with one building (Nani Nani) symbolising a monster's head piercing the ground like Godzilla, and the door of another, (Starck's first architectural project) featuring a letter box and door bell arrangement which forms a smiling face, welcoming the occupants and any visitors who may call. Neither of these buildings can be discussed on anything except a human level. The concept of Nani Nani, located in Tokyo, arose out of Starck's need to give an object life, a need to pull a reaction out of the observer, and in this case he used a very simple form, the symbol of a monster picked from Japanese folklore. His attempt was a success, as the building was immediately christened Nani Nani, a colloquial term similar to one of our own meaning "watcha-ma-call-it?".

The emphasis is on how exciting the object is to look at, not how comfortable it is to use. Each product's form, from the now famous orange juice squeezer (1990) to Nani Nani, is almost purely symbolic, not an expression of its purpose, neither are they the clever culmination of modern production techniques, but



examples of Starcks' attempt to put new life in the every day objects of our world, from kitchen utensils to water closets.

Starck puts his instinctive approach and "above all" (Phillipe Starck, The New Modern Design, p13) his speed down to a deep seated American influence which goes back as far as his father, who wore stetsons, on the drawing board designing aircraft. He claims that it is from memories of his fathers work, the aerodynamic shapes and finely finished components of flying machines, that he draws his striking forms.

Starcks work first achieved any form of accolade at the age of seventeen for an inflatable structure which he designed for a stand at the annual Paris Children's Fair(1968). He went on to form his own company, during this time, before working for President Mitterand of France, one of the products he came up with was the "Easy Light" an illuminated baton which sold by the thousand.

International recognition came when he was choosen, along with five other designers, to redesign the interior of the Elysees Palace(1982). His work before that, during the 1970's, mainly consisted of Parisian nightclub interiors, and some industrial design work (no manufacturer would produce his work). His niteclubs gave him an underground following which, regardless of his present popularity, is still there.

He is the "enfant terrible" of France. "I have always done

exactly as I wanted," he says "The only difference is that now I am concious of doing so".<sup>ref.</sup> He produces a phenomenal amount of work, taking a new look at toilets (Fig.37), tables, boats, buildings and offering fresh, beautiful forms. All of these forms offer us life, excitement and novelty. It is Starcks intention to give the object language, let it speak to us, make us happy.



(Fig. 37)

Starck forfills a different element in the array of modern human needs than Aalto or Foster. Where Aaltos' work attempts to create a modern aesthetic in traditional materials, thus offering us a "homely" atmosphere, "...responding more, to the direct needs of modern man than the needs of modern structure,"<sup>ref.</sup> and Foster deals with the more industrial problems such as levels of public and private access, degrees of flexibility and work studies on man and his environment (Natural lighting, air



conditioning, etc.), Starck is more concerned with our emotions; our reactions to his work; whether it be love, hate, intrigue or hilarity.

This side of Starck's work is most visible in what he declared as his last piece of interior design, the Teatriz(1990) in Hermosilla(an uptown area of Madrid)(Fig.38). The building is a converted theatre with a restaurant, private dining/conference room and bar owned by young Spanish entrepreneur Placido Arango, who taking Ian Shrager's advice, owner of the Royalton Hotel in Manhattan and one of Starck's greatest patrons, gave the commission to the Frenchman.



(Fig.38)





It is best described as an indulgence into " quips and jests"(Rick Poynor, Blueprint, June 1990, p46).

Each table in the restaurant has a single, high-backed chair, and the remaining chairs feature low backs(Fig.39), thus placing the group in the possibly embarrassing, but definitely hilarious, position of deciding who sits in the commanding seat, the symbol of power, Starck's "throne". Let them play. Let them fight."(Poynor, p46)



Overlooking the restaurant situated on what was the stage is a conference room, a dimly lit place with a single, long, Baroque dining table (Fig.40). A room which exudes importance, a hum of high powered meetings, the kind of place where one wouldn't be surprised to meet any one of Alan Wickers' famous guests.





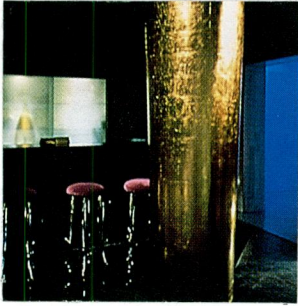
(Fig.40)

The stage is almost completely concealed from the restaurant by huge, velvet curtains which drape down from the high roof. Vision is cut off except for one small crack in the curtains, held open by a huge crutch, taken directly from a Dali painting, which extends from the restaurant floor. Due to the deliberate nature of the lighting, the patrons on the floor can see a glimmer of what goes on up on the stage. They are teased by the slight opening. The important guests can see down into the drum of activity and are invited, by the gap, to take an occasional glance, a quick break from their serious matters, high-flying deals or latest plans, to look down on the ordinary folk below.

The Bar (Fig.41) is a dark, bizarre place concealed beneath the stage where Stark sets an atmosphere of shady deals, risky buisness and sleeziness. The walls are covered in chalk graffiti. The miniature dance area features photo-respsive



plates allowing the dancer to leave a brief mark on the floor.



(Fig.41)

It is Starcks ideal "Underworld haunt; a highly theatrical setting where the patrons become actors in some strange film. A sort of celebration Hollywood movies interpretation of the dark side of our world, the outcast from the "other side of the tracks". It is the world created by the writer William Gibson in his science-fiction novels, "Neuromancer" and "Count Zero", the future bars of Los Angles dreamed up by Ridley Scott in the classic "Bladerunner" (Starcks' favorite movie), it is a place born out of fiction, given life by the "professional dreamer" (Starck, MM, 1990), Phillipe Starck.

The entire interior is a pastiche of paintings, films and books. It contains many references to the original theatre, maintaining the stage, all the over head prop supports remain

and the a curtain still covers the stage.

The clientel are not, however, rockstars, gangsters or high-flyers, they are the normal people of Madrid. Starck offers them a world in which they can become those stars, the soudo-person of their choice. The strenth of the teatrical interior enhances its patrons, brightening up what could have been just another day at the office.

#### THE ROYALTON HOTEL, NEW YORK(1989)

The Royalton Hotel(1989), on the other hand, is the concieved by its owners, Ian Shrager and Steve Rubell, as the "Algonquin of the 1990<sup>0</sup>s", the Algonquin being across the road on 44th Street, a place where New Yorks thinkers, writers and sophiticates gather.(Jillian Burt,Blueprint,Jan.1989,p26).

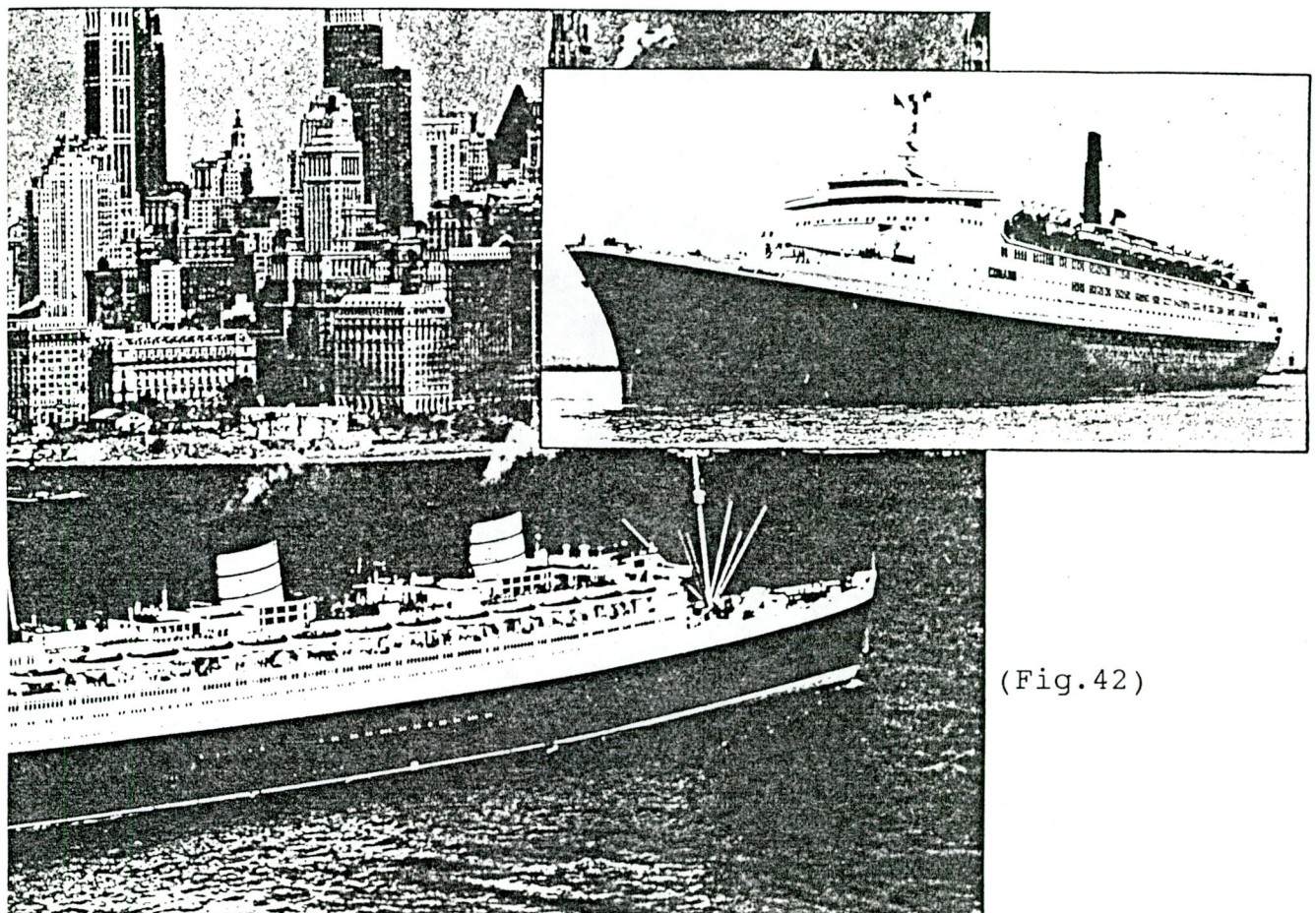
Shrager saw Starck as the answer to his search for a witty, humourous designer to produce a thoroughly original hotel interior("original" being Shragers favourite word)(Burt,p26).

The finished product is a more subtle in its symbolic references than the Teatriz, which followed it. Starck pulled on America's history, a history based on the massive



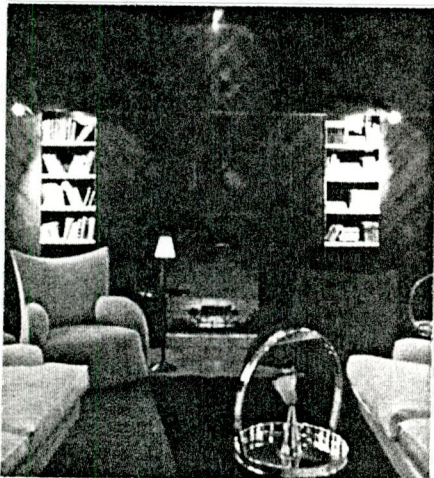
influx of people from different nations who came by sea to find a new world.

The basic theme is "A Journey". You enter the hotel lobby, which is decked out in mahogany and polished aluminium, harking back to the massive trans-Atlantic cruise liners of the 1930,s.(Fig.42) The carpet is an aquatic blue(Yves Klein blue as Starck calls it)(Burt,p25). The colour, in its luminosity, throws up images of a deep, clean, and alive sea. Along its edge we find a stream of "Ghosts"(Burt,p26) suggesting the many travelers gone before.





To go to one of the plush rooms (Fig.43) you enter the lift, which is again fitted out in polished metal and wood, select your floor and the lift navigates its way upward.



(Fig.43)

The doors slide open and you step into a marine world, giving a sensation of "weightless space-walking".(Burt,p26) The aqueous feeling is achieved by the walls being painted exactly the same blue as the carpet.

The end of the journey comes with your arrival at the room. The open-plan rooms are full of Starck products, the fire poker, the furniture and the toilets(especially designed for Shrager).

Shrager and Starck attempted to create a "home-from-home"

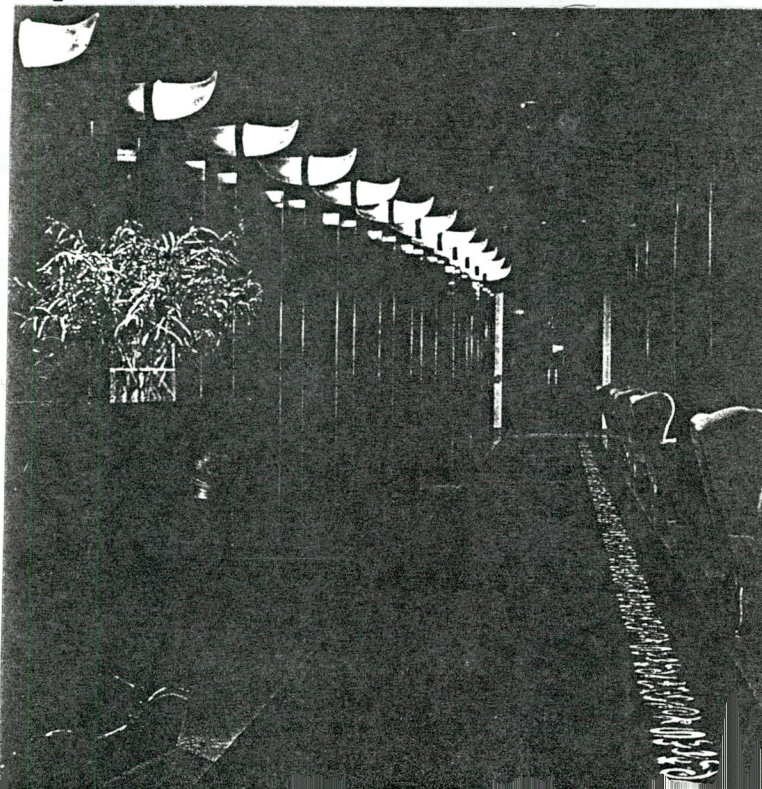
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in the Royalton. The rooms are comfortable, noise insulated, open spaces hoping to entice the guests into feeling at ease.

Although, to feel at ease, surrounded by unfamiliar and very modern designs, the layperson must open their mind somewhat. But this hotel, at \$750 a night is not aimed at the lay-person.

There are some inconsistencies in the theme; the shape of a Viking horn, for example, pervades throughout the building in the light fixtures and door fittings. There is, to this day, no substantiated evidence of Vikings (Fig.44) crossing the Atlantic and colonising the American continent. However, a literary and analytical approach to Starcks work based on what he says or writes seems somewhat fruitless. The genuine wit and humour of the work stands out by itself, it needs no justification. It is style, fun and entertainment laid on for us to enjoy. Criticism can only be based on the works success or failure to make your day a little bit different.



(Fig.44)

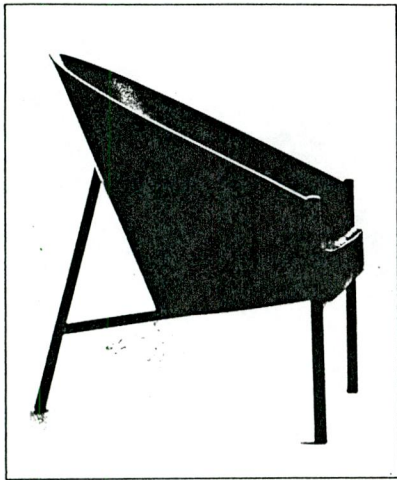




Although the work bears no reference to Aaltos principles of a unified conception, unified design or a unified way of life, and nor does it reflect any "high-minded" socialist beliefs, it does demonstrate a strong concern, like Aaltos' for the person; not, however, the human as flesh and blood but the human as a spirited and curious animal capable of laughing, crying and loving.

His chairs, described by----- as one of the eighties "..icons of design"( / ,MM,1990), such as the Cafe Costes(1984) (Fig.45), are designed around his own shape. They are not the result of a designer and engineer toiling over anthropometric data or working for weeks or maybe years (Herman Miller spent five years developing the Ergon chair(Interview: Rob Harvey, Design Director, Herman Miller, Sept.1990)) in research and development. The design grew rapidly from a thumbnail sketch to a production piece with only two major ergonomic considerations from Starck; the fact that a waiter can navigate through a room full of three-legged chairs easier than a room full of four-legged chairs and whether or not he finds it comfortable to sit in. His main concern is the form, style





Pratfall, Starck's three-legged chair  
from the Café Costes

(Fig.45)

being, as is apparent in nearly all his work, the most important factor.

Starck, does, however, claim that he believes in "modern functional design" and that he could, if asked to explain the Café Costes, "...go through every detail and explain why it is the it is"(Starck, The New Modern Design, 1990, p13). This is a very important point. Starck seeks to justify his work in terms of its function, but as the chair alone displays, this is not the formal functionalism professed by Le Corbusier and rejected by Aalto. It is Starck widening the meaning of the word. He doesn't hope to base the worth of his product on its adherence to production guidelines nor its economic use of materials. His definition of function is based on a much more abstract concept. He looks to Roland Barthes(1915-80), the French writer who broke new ground in design literature, for inspiration. The objects function must not only be to the obvious, simple answer to a

physical problem but must "give pleasure". They must speak.

Starck argues that Barthes felt that objects "carry a range of meanings" that amount to a "...language, ...for an object to carry the appropriate meaning is certainly part of its function" (Starck, New Modern Design, 1990, p13). He says this is the rational behind his work. The objects function is related directly to the persons conception of its form and not its manufacturing techniques or its anthropometric values.

Starck's Human Scale is calibrated by the emotional response of the observer.

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