



Joanna Laajisto

ON INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE

Studio Joanna Laajisto is famous for its warm and welcoming interior design, with projects ranging from individual spaces to scalable interior concepts that include service design, retail design and visual merchandising. Joanna's work is simultaneously driven by functionality and aesthetics. Her philosophy is not to clutter this world with unnecessary things but to find the hidden beauty of a space and to enhance it with creative solutions.

Photographer: Mikko Rytönen





AM Joanna Laajisto, a wife and a mother to two daughters living in Helsinki. I run a small design firm, Studio Joanna Laajisto, which specialises in commercial interiors in the fields of hospitality, retail and workplace, as well as product design.

After ending my career in snowboarding (yes, I used to be a professional snowboarder) I wanted to live in California and go to school. I'd always been doing something creative: I went to high school for performing arts and used to dance etc., so a career in design was a natural choice for me. It took a while to decide if I wanted to pursue fashion or interiors, but eventually I concluded interiors would be more permanent, less consumerist and therefore have less environmental impact. After completing my studies in California, I accepted a job at Gensler architects in Los Angeles and worked there for five years designing large scale commercial projects. I lived in LA for eight years before I moved back to Helsinki, had my two daughters and set up my own firm in 2010. Now we design interiors and concepts, not only for Finnish, but also for international brands, mostly in Europe.



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THINK the most Finnish thing about my work is the values I have regarding design — the honesty, the practicality, the use of real, natural materials. The timelessness. At the same time, I think my previous life as a travelling snowboarder and my years in LA have influenced my design as well. But then again, I have never considered myself — or anybody else that I look up to as designers — a representative of that particular country. I design from my heart and soul and I don't think my origin necessarily has much to do with it.

Ever since I was a little girl, I have felt very strongly against consumerism. I have always hated junk, those unnecessary things that the world is unfortunately full of. This makes my job very challenging but also works as a foundation for my design principles. I only design objects that are needed, if I can't find one after researching. There are too many things in this world already. The same goes for interior architecture. I never just decorate; every design decision needs to serve a purpose, every object in the space needs to fill a need or be part of the story. And the design needs to last a long time. I think that if you design practically and beautifully, you'll create something you don't want to change or throw away.

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NO MATTER what project, I try to give the object or the space a personality. First I get to know the client, the end consumer, and their needs very well. I often use service design methods for that. Then I get to know the space. I think it's very important to spend time there, to feel the space, sense the spirit of it. When you get to know it, you know how to cherish it. I believe that every space has a soul and the worst spaces are the ones where that has been suffocated. You see and feel that a lot, especially in public interiors. They are just branded spaces without any soul.

After getting to know the space, I create its personality. Sometimes it comes immediately, other times it takes longer. I love this part of the design process. I can't rush it, it just needs to evolve in my head and in my heart, and finally, when I feel it's ready, I make sketches. When designing concepts for retail or restaurant chains implemented across many locations, for example, to achieve this personal feeling in each space is more challenging. Then it's important to focus more on the core values and identity of the company you're designing for, and draw inspiration from there. However, I like to add a little special touch in each location for the chains too.

