

JOANNA LAAJISTO

After spending over eight years in the US working for a large international architectural firm, interior designer Joanna Laajisto decided to make her mark on the retail scene in Helsinki. She has since created successful spaces inspired by New York and Amsterdam, while remaining true to her favourite source of inspiration: Finland's great outdoors.

WHAT IS THE BACKGROUND OF YOUR STUDIO?

I founded it after I moved back home to Helsinki in 2009, after spending eight years on the West Coast of America. I had been studying to become an interior architect, as well as working for an architectural firm in Los Angeles. The studio focuses on designing commercial spaces, including restaurants, retail and workplace environments.

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU?

My work is driven simultaneously by functionality and aesthetics. A space needs to function well, but, more importantly, to evoke feelings. I try to spend a lot of time in a space to sense the mood it should have before working out what it should look like. I like places that have a soul. It can be ultra-modern or very old, as long as it feels like it has always been that way. I also get a lot of my inspiration from travelling. I love big cities such as New York, London and Paris. I just came back from Amsterdam, which is also a great city.



THESE PAGES Intro restaurant and nightclub, Kuopio





OPPOSITE Story – Old Market Hall restaurant, Helsinki, Finland

BELOW 'Lundia System' storage unit



WHAT DOES FINNISH DESIGN MEAN TO YOU?

It is minimalist and functional. Each piece has to have a purpose in the space. We are very practical here, so my personal designs are also very practical. I never just decorate. But with that said, I also try to add warmth and layers to the designs, so that they are not cold and sterile, as some Finnish design in its purest form can be.

WHAT IS YOUR DESIGNING PROCESS LIKE?

My biggest mission as a designer is to slow down the fast pace at which design ages today. This has a lot to do with blogs and social media. Design becomes like fast food: disposable. People get bored quickly, because they keep seeing the same things. They get the urge to continually change their environments and buy new things, which is not very eco-friendly. I want to design objects and spaces that last, and are classic enough to be timeless. You need to get past the trends, but still stay current and interesting. This is the key driver of our design philosophy.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT SO FAR?

That we have been able to create financially and socially successful concepts – not just pretty places – for our clients. One of my missions when returning from the US was to make Helsinki a bit more lively and interesting for both residents and tourists. By being able to design environments for our retail and restaurant clients, we have been able to do that. One project at a time, it makes me feel that there is a greater meaning to what we do.

DO YOU HAVE ANY FAVOURITE PLACES IN FINLAND?

Definitely the outdoors. I need to be surrounded by nature regularly; it is the only way I can really clear my head. I spend a lot of time in the Finnish archipelago with my family. But I also love just hiking in the forest and cooking on the campfire.

WHAT DOES NORDIC DESIGN TODAY MEAN TO YOU?

Local craftsmanship, honest materials, ecological values and an ethical way of thinking.