

JOANNA LAAJISTO



Warmly Rooted in Both Modern International Life and Local Traditions

Helsinki-based designer Joanna Laajisto creates inviting interiors for shops and restaurants, fusing classic Scandinavian style with bold, yet natural color choices and an international outlook.

When working on commercial interiors, the designer's task is to make people who will spend only a short amount of time there feel welcome as soon as they step through the door. In Helsinki, Joanna Laajisto has mastered this challenge, orchestrating stores and restaurants that give their visitors a sense of peace and relaxation. By mixing classic elements of Scandinavian style—plenty of natural materials like wood, clean lines, and warm lighting—and enhancing the usual pastel and neutral color palettes with more vivid or dark colors, she has become one of today's most intriguing ambassadors of Finnish design.

Finland's history is filled with the stories of many well-respected furniture designers—Joanna admires Tapio Wirkkala, Yrjö Kukkapuro, and Antti Nurmesniemi in particular—but few historic icons are also widely known for their interiors, Alvar Aalto being the rare exception. Before the digital revolution, Finland did not export its creative talent the same way Sweden did, which has become one of the great soft powers in design during the last century. But the most eastern Scandinavian country has started to catch up. "The internet has changed everything in Finland; the world feels very small these days," Laajisto finds. "Growing up in a Helsinki suburb in the 80s, I experienced Finland as not very worldly—the choice in fashion, music, and food was quite limited. Whenever I traveled to Stockholm, I could see such a great difference to home."



Today, she is contributing to the rise of the local design scene. But before she turned her business into a success story, she took a break from Finland. An early career as a professional snowboarder led her to move to California, living there for eight years. When she left the slopes behind for good, Joanna decided to stay and study interior design in Newport Beach, followed by a job at architecture giant Gensler in Los Angeles.

After returning to Helsinki, the mother of two set up her own studio, focusing on commercial interiors. Her style shows a passion for European design pieces, arranged in spaces full of Nordic sensibility for warmth and openness. "Scandinavian design is based on pure and solid values: →

Joanna Laajisto's style shows a passion for European design pieces in spaces full of warm and open Nordic sensibility.



functionality, sustainability, and equality,” which she suspects to be the reason for its global success. “Also, the simple and classical aesthetics of many design pieces from here don’t lose any of their attraction, even after decades.”

Another important factor in the success of Joanna’s interiors is the mix of materials. Many of her spaces are laid out with timber flooring, and occasionally she also decides to add wood panelling or tiles to the walls: “People just feel more comfortable being surrounded by honest, natural materials like wood, stone, metals, and textiles. Touching them, or even just looking at them, evokes memories and feelings and creates a sense of comfort.”

While embracing influences from many places in the world, she also wants to stay connected to her roots: “Finland has quite a strong native heritage and we are proud of it, too. Many Finnish designers, including myself, draw inspiration from traditional mythologies like *Kalevala*.” Perhaps it’s also this trace of magic that explains why Joanna’s spaces are perfect for modern life. ○

“Finland has a strong native heritage and we are proud of it. Many Finnish designers, including myself, draw inspiration from traditional mythologies.”

Helsinki’s JACKIE BAR is influenced by 1970s Italy and summarizes Laajisto’s international, yet distinctly Nordic style.

