Aino Marsio-Aalto (1894-1949) the Architect of Interiors and Everyday Objects to Unveil

Fátima Pombo¹*, Pauliina Rumbin²

¹Guest Professor of Department of Architecture, University of Leuven, Belgium and Member of Research Institute for Design, Media and Culture, University of Aveiro and University of Porto, Portugal
E-mail: fatima.teixetrarombo@astro.kuleuven.be, *corresponding author.
²Engineer-Architect, University of Leuven, Belgium.

Abstract
Despite the remarkable success achieved during her lifetime, the Finnish architect and designer Aino Marsio-Aalto (1894-1949) is still poorly addressed in interior design history as a talent on her own and therefore independent of her husband’s praised architectural achievements. Besides the fact that both worked together in a common office and in many common projects till her death, it is not yet completed the research that will allow to acknowledge which was her participation in the corpus of work produced during the Aaltos partnership. If that endeavour will have ever a satisfactory response is also yet a doubt. Our perspective stems from the framework present in all of Aino Marsio-Aalto’s projects from which we construe a statement: based on the simplicity of forms, flawless quality of materials and practical view about dwelling Aino entices a feeling for fruition home in a soft, comfortable and natural atmosphere. With this paper we intend also to draw the attention to Aino Marsio-Aalto as an architect with a clear interest for ‘interiors’ which achievements deserve to be considered an excellent contribution to affirm the Nordic interpretation of modernism. Our case study is the Aaltos’ own house in Munkkiniemi and Villa Mairea without ignoring her significant role in Artek and in other projects conceived throughout her lifetime, once all her activities worked together to the same purpose.

Keywords: interior architecture, interpretation of modernism, dwelling, product design, furniture.

1. Introduction
Alvar Aalto (1898-1976) and his work have been well documented, whereas his wife, Aino Aalto (1894-1949) has little received recognition for her independent work as architect and designer. As early as the 1920’s but mostly during the 1930’s and 1940’s, Aino participated in the architectural projects of the office she shared with her husband. Besides her participation in the architectural design of private houses, apartment complexes or other building projects, she developed a deep interest in interiors and furniture design, which then became her specialty in the Aaltos’ collaboration. Although Aino Marsio Aalto [1] has been partially acknowledged as her husband’s collaborator, there are few studies identifying her participation in his work, let alone her original and individual realizations. However, due to the contribution of mainly Finnish researchers, Aino Aalto is slowly emerging from the shadows and becoming acknowledged as a fascinating architect and designer with importance particularly in the realm of interiors. Renja Suominen-Kokkonen, one of the academics researching and writing about Aino Aalto, believes that it is still very difficult to always specify without doubts the part of Aino in the projects of their office [2]. In effect, regarding the literature review about Aino Aalto, Renja Suominen-Kokkonen stands out as the researcher who wrote more in detail about the Finnish architect [3]. Suominen-Kokkonen notes that the travel diaries of Aino Aalto are important research material to assure that Aino ‘had a significant position in Finnish industrial art and interior design, and cannot be ignored, although she was never placed at the same level as her husband’ [4]. Aino used travel diaries not as notebooks for personal thoughts but as a working tool for professional notes, addresses, sketches and drawings of what she was encountering during the trips that could inspire her or serve as reserve of useful information for the projects in the office. So, the Finnish travel diaries, owned by the family with copies in Artek archives, were to Suominen-Kokkonen an excellent resource for information about Aino’s interest in materials, fabrics, patterns, furniture details, structures, technical issues or professional contacts. In the only monograph dedicated to Aino Aalto [5] are five chapters focusing in diverse aspects of her life, personality and creative work, namely ‘On Aino Marsio-Aalto’ by Arne Heporauta; ‘Aino Marsio-Aalto, architect’ by Mia Hipeli, ‘Aino Marsio-Aalto, Interior and Furniture Designer’ by Kaarina Mikonrantta, ‘Aino Aalto as Photographer’ by

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Marjaana Launonen and ‘The Silent Central Personage, the Architect Aino Marsio-Aalto’ by Renja Suominen-Kokkonen. To build up the profile of Aino as an architect of interiors and everyday objects, the authors rely upon the abovementioned references, sparse information spread in literature (see the list of bibliography), author talks with Renja Suominen-Kokkonen, Tiina Lathamäki, Juhani Pallasmaa, Jaakko Kontio, and the authors’ visits to Viipuri Library, the Aaltos’ house in Munkkiniemi and Villa Mairea. This article intends to contribute to shed light on Aino Aalto as a talented designer in the international arena. As an architect and designer aware of the modern rhetoric, she designed modern dwelling interiors and everyday objects contributing to the Nordic interpretation of modernism as the text aims further to state. She designed buildings, furniture, textiles, fabrics, glassware, ceramics, and lighting fixtures, looking for the harmony between the spaces, the objects and the users. This text focus mainly on two examples of her achievements, the Aaltos’ own house in Munkkiniemi and Villa Mairea. It also calls attention to her significant role in Artek and in other projects conceived throughout her lifetime. Aino Marsio-Aalto was a creative architect on its own merits and the history of interior design owes her rightful place.

2. **Aino out of the shadow**

Arne Heporauta [6] pointed out that Aino’s decision of the profession of architect was at that time unusual because it was very much a male field. Female architects in Finland in the 1930’s were unusual, indeed. Yet the amount of female architects in Finland was more numerous compared to other countries at the time, asserts Suominen-Kokkonen who also provide evidence that by the end of the 19th century six women had graduated as architects and in the early 1900s the amount started to grow [7].

After Aino’s graduation from the University of Technology in Helsinki in 1920, she started to work in the office of Oiva Kallio in Helsinki. Still during her studies at the university she travelled to Europe with her study mates Aili-Salli Ahde (1892-1979) and Elli Ruuth (1893-1975). They went to Germany, Switzerland and Italy and visiting there different cities like Venice, Ravenna, Siena, Firenze and Rome. These trips opened her horizons, challenged her knowledge about architecture, and influenced her interest to keep travelling abroad during her life. In 1923 she was offered a job at the office of Gunnar A. Wahlroos in Jyväskylä, the same town where Alvar Aalto opened his architectural office in the same year. Some months after starting in Wahlroos’ office, Aino accepted work from Aalto, whom she already knew from the university in Helsinki but for whom she never had great sympathy, considering him ‘arrogant and [a] snob’ [8].

Aino was 4 years older than Alvar, had graduated earlier and gained relevant experience in her internships and previous jobs, but she did not have neither the financial possibilities nor the social connections to start her own office. After working together only for a few months, Alvar Aalto proposed to Aino Marsio. They married in the autumn of 1924. The first trip of the Aaltos together was the honeymoon to Italy, which ended up becoming the most important destination for Alvar Aalto. Some other trips followed in the 1920’s and 1930’s and became an important influence to their architectural work. Their first child was born in 1925, and the second in 1927. Aino Marsio-Aalto had to find balance between her career, marriage and motherhood. About that, she said in a late 1920s radio interview, “While our children were small, I temporarily withdrew from the office. But while the children grew older, I continued my career normally” [9]. In effect, in late 1930’s and early 1940’s Alvar Aalto was engaged in lecturing in the United States of America or in architectural assignments abroad and Aino was in charge to run the office alone which meant taking care of the office’s client relationships, employee matters and financial issues. Jaakko Kontio states that it was known that ‘Aino was responsible for all the work at the office when Alvar Aalto was traveling abroad and sometimes the trips kept him long periods away of home. Without Aino, the office would not have survived’ [10]. In 1946 Aino was diagnosed with cancer. Despite her sickness she relentlessly continued her work with Artek and still travelled in 1947 to the first CIAM conference after the WWII in Switzerland. Hipeli pointed out that by the end of 1948, just a few months before her death, Aino had to admit that she was not able to work anymore [11]. So, it seems logic to ask why has been Aino Aalto stayed in the shadow of her husband? Besides general reasons regarding the professional position of female architects in society at Aino’s time, Renja Suominen-Kokkonen [12] provided two other reasons. On one hand the early death of Aino Aalto in 1949 made it more complicated to assess her part in the collaboration once till the death of Alvar Aalto the office remained known under his name. Beatriz Colomina in her article ‘Couplings’ [13] underlines the fact that in a collaborative work like architecture even if it is recognized as a field of team work, usually ‘a single figure is always privileged as author of the work. This is most evident in the case of couples, partnerships of two, whether they are professional or personal or both’ [14]. This seems to be also reality in Aino and Alvar Aalto’s case, as the office was called ‘Alvar Aalto architects’. That typical problem among the female professionals in a partnership, by marriage or not, still remains.

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nowadays. On the other hand, for Suominen-Kokkonen, Alvar Aalto reached a position as an internationally known architect already in the late 1920’s and even if Aino came more into the light after the establishment of Artek in 1935, after her death, again her name faded away.

Henrik Aalto, Aaltos’ grandchild provides another reason for Aino’s relative anonymity, “After Aino died, Elissa Aalto gained influence at Artek and suddenly Aino’s name was erased. After the death of Alvar an “Aalto boom” was starting in Finland with huge amount of literature and exhibitions. However, Aino’s name was nowhere to be found anymore [15]. Jaakko Kontio architect and long term collaborator in Alvar Aalto’s office about the Aino’s death shares the opinion with Henrik Aalto about Aino’s destiny. Kontio declares: ‘When Aino and Alvar were working together people were talking and appreciating Aino and her work, but the real turning point was Aino’s death and Alvar marrying Elissa. (…) Today people are starting to realize what an amazing designer Aino was and they start to appreciate her work’ [16]. According to Kontio, Elissa Aalto managed to erase Aino’s name from Artek and from the office. On the other hand, continues Jaakko Kontio ‘the death of Aino was the hardest period of Alvar’s life. It was very hard for Alvar to lose his wife’ [17].

3. The 1930’s and the handprint of Aino

During the 30’s and 40’s the collaboration of Aino and Alvar Aalto evolved beyond what it had been in the 20’s. Their architectural work had become internationally known thanks to the Viipuri Library (1927-1935) and the Paimio Tuberculosis Sanatorium (1929-1932). From there on the couple’s international contacts expanded greatly. The role of Aino Aalto in the Viipuri Library project is uncertain. But the entrance hall, at least, reveals her handprint. Alvar stated during the opening of the library: “Here my wife Aino has designed the most beautiful staircase in the world” [18]. (Fig.1).

![Fig. 1. The glass staircase in the library by Aino Aalto](image)

The entrance hall of the library is impressive with its glass wall. The glass wall shows a solid staircase which leads to the top floor of the building. Aino’s dairies contain a few notes about Viipuri Library. According to Mia Hipeli [19], few of these ideas were implemented in the design. For Paimio Sanatorium, Aino designed a three-legged stool within the tube furniture collection, whose shape never received any attention, spite the originality of the form unlike the wooden three-legged stool that Alvar Aalto designed together with Otto Korhonen [20]. Moreover, the interiors of the Paimio Sanatorium contained custom-designed furniture by Aino. Suominen-Kokkonen states that Aino Aalto kept all the drawings regarding the Paimio Sanatorium and the Viipuri Library in the Artek archive instead of in the office’s archive. It may support the authors’ speculation that Aino was aware of her peculiar contribution to those projects and therefore intended to separate them from the common collection of the office’s archive. Artek, as it will be stressed further in this text, was a ‘domain’ basically ran by Aino Aalto and during her life it was known like this. According to Heikki Alanen the recent study about Paimio Sanatorium and the Viipuri library and furniture has shown that Aino’s impact was important [21].

In 1931 the Aaltos made a trip to Holland where they visited in Amsterdam the Metz. & Co interior decoration firm where they could see the furniture of Gerrit Rietveld. Aino observed carefully all details and made notes and sketches in her travel diary [22] which shows that she was interested in technical solutions regarding furniture
design. But she was also interested in domestic daily life objects and in 1932, she designed the Bölgeblick series of moulded glassware tinted in various colours (grey, blue, green and brown) inspired by the circles created by a stone thrown in water. (Fig. 2). ‘Initially, the collection only included plates, bowls and glasses, a sugar bowl and a milk jug’ [23], but the success of it encouraged the developing of the collection. The undulating form facilitates stacking the pieces, illustrating both the functional and aesthetical features that Aino was looking for the objects in daily life. The glassware won the second prize in a competition organized by the Karhula glassworks. The glassware series are still being manufactured and sold.

According to Arne Heporauta Aino’s professional identity strengthened greatly during the 30’s and that ‘partly [due to] the establishing of Artek in 1935 and partly the trip she made in 1934 thanks to the scholarship she received from A. Kordelin foundation to explore the design, newest interior art and the modern architecture in central Europe’ [24].

In 1935 Aino Marsio-Aalto, Alvar Aalto, Maire Gullichesen (the text will return to her while addressing Villa Mairea) and art historian Nils-Gustav Hahl founded the Finnish furniture company Artek. ‘The recently discovered store plans show how both Alvar Aalto and Aino Marsio-Aalto contributed to the design. The earliest plans, unsigned but clearly executed by Aino Marsio-Aalto, show the layout with specific furnishings’ [25]. The principal aim of this company was to promote the furniture and other objects designed by Aino and Alvar Aalto and to produce furniture designed by them to their architectural projects and to answer to the commissions of Aalto’s furniture from abroad [26]. But as the name suggests, Artek intended to voice a combination of art and technology and therefore besides the design of modern interiors it was aimed as well ‘to organize exhibitions on modern art, including painting, graphic arts, photography, sculpture, and anthropology’ [27]. Artek symbolized also their vision about design, combining the modernist apology for the standardization and the precision of technology with the Nordic praise for the authenticity of materials, the warmth of wood, the softness of colours, the quality of craftsmanship’s legacy. Artek had (and still has) a showroom in the heart of Helsinki. The success of the sales among the Finns and abroad stress the influence of the company in the promoting of new ideas about interiors, furniture, modern products, and in the developing of a certain taste, and habits for daily life. Celebrating the 80th anniversary of Artek’s foundation the Bard Graduate Center Gallery in New York in collaboration with the Alvar Aalto Museum in Helsinki display from 22nd April to 25th September 2016 the exhibition *Artek and the Aaltos: Creating a Modern World*. A catalogue with unpublished material and scholar essays accompany the exhibition [28]. ‘The exhibition will feature approximately 200 works—many never before on public view—including architectural drawings, drawings and sketches for interiors and furniture, paintings, photography, furniture, glassware, lighting, and textiles. (...) Among the most important of these are Aino Marsio-Aalto’s student sketchbooks; drawings by Alvar Aalto of his wife; and a small selection of signed photographs by László Moholy-Nagy (1895–1946), which he sent to Alvar Aalto after visiting the Aaltos in Finland in 1931 [29].

For Tiina Stenius it was Aino Aalto’s interior design for the Aaltos house in 1934-36 that established a certain direction for the later vision of Artek [30]. This vision started already in the Viipuri Library and the Paimio Sanatorium and developed to its peak in the Villa Mairea. This was possible only through a balanced collaboration between the Aaltos. They signed same visions as well in habitation as in architecture. (...) They learned to cooperate together and analyze critically each other’s work. This continued throughout their marriage’ [31]. However, it is important to note that in 1933 the London Exhibition presented not only the furniture by Alvar Aalto, but also furniture, textiles and glassware designed by Aino. Suominen-Kokkonen writes that this Exhibition in England was advertised by the designers Mr. and Mrs. Aalto [32]. All the major Aalto-furniture in the 30’s was developed for the Paimio Sanatorium and some of the models were designed by Aino Aalto, even though they carry the name Alvar Aalto [33]. For Artek Aino designed a flexible and varied collection of furniture by her own and designed variations from some Alvar’s models in order to extend the design collection to furnish Aalto’s architectural projects. Henrik Aalto gives the example of a picture of the World Exhibition in Paris in 1937, where Artek had its own department designed by Aino and Alvar, where it was to read: *Meubles Maison Artek, composition Aino et Alvar Aalto*. According to Henrik Aalto, this was the format how the Aalto furniture and designs were promoted and presented until Aino died in 1949 [34]. Their daughter, Johanna Alanen (maiden name Aalto), also clarifies the collaboration between her parents in the 1930’s: ‘Alvar often had no time to design furniture, because he was over his head full of architectural works in the office. Aino’s input was not only left on the furniture, but also in interior projects. Besides all that, Aino toiled long day at Artek’ [35]. For the Milan Triennial in 1936 she designed the Artek’s stand which won the ‘Grand Prix’. At the same Triennial her Bölgeblick glassware series was awarded the gold medal. Between, 1941-1949 Aino held the position of Artek’s managing director and was always closely involved in the company’s
growth. It is to read in the catalogue displayed on line of the abovementioned exhibition *Artek and the Aaltos: Creating a Modern World* that ‘the archival research conducted by Ms. Stritzler-Levine [Bard Graduate Center Gallery Director] brings Marsio-Aalto’s work to the forefront of public attention, particularly the interior projects that she designed for many of Alvar Aalto’s most important buildings and independent Artek interior commissions’ [36].

In the following section, two main domestic interiors will be addressed: The Aaltos’ own house and Villa Mairea. These two projects stress the relevant design skills of Aino Aalto in creating modern interiors to dwell according to the Nordic interpretation of modernist International Style: functional, ergonomic, comfortable, sober and resonating a warm and harmonious atmosphere to the dwellers. The work of Aino in these two projects demonstrates again the importance of interiors to the realization of meaningful architectural projects.

The following analysis relies upon the scarce differentiating scholar literature reviewing both projects (despite numerous and repetitive references divulging Villa Mairea), the authors’ visit to both houses and the talks with the curator of Villa Mairea. It aims to show that Aino’s commitment and intense activity in the office she shared with Alvar and with Artek were intertwined with her ideas for designing interiors, namely domestic interiors. Aino Marsio-Aalto was able to display fully in these two projects her agreement with the Nordic concept of modern dwelling, i.e. going beyond the functionalistic ideology of the International Style by approaching interiors through a human-centric design scale perspective.

**4. Aalto’s Own House in Munkkiniemi**

Before the project for their own house, built between 1935 and 1936, the Aaltos owned a modest summer house, Villa Flora, located in Alajärvi nearby a lake, a location where Alvar’s father and family had lived since 1918. Villa Flora was designed by Aino Aalto in 1926 and underwent extension’s work in 1938. The Aaltos, just like any typical Finnish family, wanted their own place to spend the short summer period close to nature, on the shorelines of the lakes. Aino Aalto described it ‘as a holiday cabin for the hottest time of the summer’ [37]. Jetsonen and Jetsonen described Villa Flora as a ‘robust farmhouse’ first built with a living room, a bedroom and a small kitchen with an arcade of wooden columns along the lakeside’s façade. ‘Life at the summer residence was spent with the children and extended family. Aino also relaxed there by painting watercolors’ [38].

In 1934, ten years after their marriage, the Aaltos decided to build their own house where they could integrate the office. It is located on the top of a quite steep rock in Munkkiniemi, a neighbourhood in Helsinki. It was completed in 1936 and remained in the Aalto family until 1998. Afterwards it belonged to Alvar Aalto Foundation and in 2002, after some works of conservation, it opened as house-museum.

The plan for the Munkkiniemi’s house was created by Alvar but the interior design was Aino’s responsibility. The house combined the residential area with the office. To separate these two functions the office was in an own wing. ‘The residential part of the house was divided into the semi-public spaces of the living and dining rooms with utilities on the first floor and the private rooms – the bedrooms and the guestroom – on the second floor. This division for different levels of privacy is accentuated on the exterior, where the most private spaces have a dark-colored wooden envelope, while the living and dining rooms at the heart of the house open generously onto the garden with large windows’ [39].

The interior of the house was a sort of test field for Aino, where she, according to Tiina Stenius, tried some new dwelling’s ideas. Stenius underlines Aino’s vision: ‘her interior design had to find balance with the exterior of her husband’s project’ [40]. She also wanted to design the interiors to meet her family’ needs. Aino believed that the interior of a private home should not be composed of ready-made sets of furniture, rather it should be furnished with functional and beautiful pieces designed with rigor and precision. The textiles, carpets and plants agree with an importance of creating a Modern World that ‘the archival research conducted by Ms. Stritzler-Levine [Bard Graduate Center Gallery Director] brings Marsio-Aalto’s work to the forefront of public attention, particularly the interior projects that she designed for many of Alvar Aalto’s most important buildings and independent Artek interior commissions’ [36].

Although most of the furniture was designed by the Aaltos, the room has some unique pieces not created by them. These include the grand piano which Aino have enjoyed playing, art works of Moholy-Nagy and Fernand Léger and the Moroccan handmade lamb’s wool carpets. The dining room connects with the kitchen, emphasizing
the functional side allowed by the project. The area is accessible through the living room, but also via the servant room at the back.

![Fig. 3. Living room with view to the office entrance](image1.jpg) ![Fig. 4. Living room with view to the dining room](image2.jpg)

The table displayed in Figure 5 was designed by Aino specifically for this house. The chairs, in Renaissance style, were bought during their honeymoon in Italy. According to Stenius those chairs had travelled with them from their home in Jyväskylä, through Turku (where they lived in an apartment) to their Helsinki’s apartment and finally to this house in Munkkiniemi and always made Aino smile. Therefore, they had a lot of sentimental value for Aino [42].

![Fig. 5. Dining room](image3.jpg) ![Fig. 6. Sideboard set](image4.jpg)

An interesting piece of furniture is the ‘double’ sideboard set by Aino Aalto. (Fig. 6) which underlines her attention to the practicalities related to each and every space. In this case the relation between the kitchen and the dining room is facilitated by the existence of this sideboard set. The sideboard has different divisions to accommodate the tableware and shelves in glass to support the glassware as it is mostly required by such a piece of furniture, but its functional side is reinforced through doors from the front and from the back side allowing the tableware to be placed from the dining room or from the kitchen. This idea was inspired by the Aalto’s stay at Werner Moser’s place in Zürich where this kind of “two sided” serving cabinet was used [43]. Upstairs there was to find another living room (Fig.7), three family bedrooms and a guest bedroom. (Fig. 8).
The interior of the house combined objects with sentimental value and new pieces to respond to functional and practical needs along with a pleasant and comfortable use of it. Traditional elements of Finn culture, such as the brick fireplaces in different rooms in the house and the extensive use of wood and other natural materials, completed an intimate, warm interior to shelter the family. The outstanding balance between the architectural quality of the project and the intelligent decisions to juxtapose ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ furnishings gave the house a harmonious atmosphere and familiar ambience. Johanna Alanen says that it was thanks to her mother that they had such a beautiful home [44]. This house anticipates also the project of Villa Mairea displaying signs of Alvar’s romantic functionalism and the skills of Aino as interior designer, but in contrast with the Gullichsen’s residence, the Aaltos’ home is a more modest building.

5. Villa Mairea

During the 30’s the Aaltos got to know managing director of Ahlström, Harry Gullischen (1902-1954) and his wife, the art collector and artist herself, Maire Gullischen (maiden name Ahlström, 1907-1990). The Gullichsens decided to build a new residence in Noormarkku and gave Alvar Aalto the complete freedom to design their home. Villa Mairea was built between 1937-1939 (Figures 9 and 10) showcasing a dwelling of upper middle-class tuned with the modern spirit though in line with traditional models and functions of organizing the living space. Villa Mairea displays separate areas with distinctive character and access for the family, for receiving and entertaining guests and for servants, distributing the space in mainly three zones: the private domain, the semi-public, and servants/services wing.
This house has been extensively reviewed in architectural divulgation literature as a master piece of Alvar Aalto’s genius integrating the vernacular culture of Finish architecture with functionalist solutions according to his own interpretation of modernism. Scholar reviewing is much less extended. In this domain it is important to mention the writings about the relation between the house and the surrounding forest as motivation for detailed interpretations of Aalto’s integration of nature as a paramount feature to experience the movement between exterior and interior [45].

Aino Aalto, by her side, also made a master work in the interior design of Villa Mairea. The book *Inside the Villa Mairea. Art, Design and Interior Architecture* published in 2009 [46] gives account of Aino’s designing talent and knowledge in the accomplishment of this project. The authors’ visit to the house enlightened the understanding of Aino’s skills to fulfill in a very exceptional way the possibilities offered by the architectural quality of the building, contributing to make of Villa Mairea an inspiring project of refined sensuality. Jaakko Kontio states that ‘Maire [Gullichsen] has said that Aino had the most extraordinary taste for homes from all the people she knew around the world. I was working at the team for the first renovation in the 1950s. Aino’s work was huge! She was responsible for the interior and together with Maire Gullichsen they found a way to make an interior that everybody wanted to see at that time’ [47]. The history of the house stresses the friendly relation between the two women during the process of furnishing and decorating it. If the design was of complete responsibility of Aino, Maire Gullichsen had a voice in discussing and accepting the solutions proposed. Aaltos’ daughter, by her side, emphasizes in an interview that: ‘I would say that in the Villa Mairea Aino’s role was remarkable. The villa is so beautiful and this is thanks to Aino’ [48]. So Villa Mairea ended up unfolding a sophisticated and very wealthy atmosphere, showcasing original solutions of Aino for interiors. As for her home in Munkkiniemi, but in a different scale, Aino combined furniture designed especially for the place (some new pieces resulted to be standard products for Artek afterwards), with some pieces previously designed for Artek (by her, Alvar or other designers) and others purchased abroad. The ensemble was also foreseen to integrate the very much valuable collection of art possessed by the Gullichsens. Regarding the link between Villa Mairea and Artek, Suominen-Kokkonen stresses that: “Upon the completion of its interior, the Villa Mairea was without doubt the most refined showcase of Artek’s products for leading Finnish and foreign figures in industry and culture” [49]. An important issue in Villa Mairea’s interiors is also the combination of the best materials extended to the tiniest detail, namely the high quality of the woodwork. As well different sort of leather, bamboo, glass, textiles, fabrics were used and combined in a way never seen before [50]. Figure 11 displays expensive Moroccan carpets spread from the living room floor to the wooden floor on the music room, giving immediately a strong expression of tactility.

Aino designed furniture for all spaces from the hall to the upstairs studio and bedrooms according to rooms’ functions, ambiances and relative position in the whole of the building. The entrance hall is a large open space to welcome guests. The living room is in direct contact with the entrance hall, separated by a small height difference between the two spaces. For the entrance hall she designed a bench lined in a blue fabric contrasting with the orange of the floor’s tiles (Fig. 12).
The living room area consists of furniture placed around the fireplace. In the early years, this included Alvar Aalto’s Paimio armchair No.44, but they are no longer there. In addition to these armchairs, there was Aino Aalto’s Mairea sofa with removable cushions. (Fig. 13).

In the music room, close to the window and to the plants, Aino placed two very simple and modern benches lined in beige fabric without backrest. (Figures 14 and 15). Another similar bench was originally placed next to the fireplace in the living room.

Both the music room and the winter garden were furnished with rattan furniture sets designed by Aino Aalto and similar paper rice lamps which gave a visual unity to the spaces inspired in Japanese materials, also very much appreciated by Mairea Gullichsen. (Figures 16 and 17). The rattan table was originally presented at the Brussels World Fair in 1935 and sold in Artek, acknowledging the interplay of Aino’s actions as a designer.
At the northeast part of the L-shaped ground floor plan was a service wing, connected with a large dining room. Also this part of the house, including the kitchen was designed in the modern spirit. The kitchen and the dining room were also a handprint of Aino Aalto, who cared that each detail would make the tasks of the servants easier and more efficient having as well in mind hygienic standards and other commodities. Tiina Laihomiäki remarked that Aino possibly wanted two separate doors from the dining room to the kitchen, so that the servants could use one door for bringing out the food and the other door for taking back the dirty dishes. This way it would not be any collisions of the two different actions [51]. The dining room is furbished with a long table made out of teak. Aino Aalto designed it uniquely for this space. The chairs around the table are also Aino’s designs. These dowel-back chairs curve lightly backwards and are upholstered with horsehair. The lamp hanging above the table was Aino’s design for the Gullichsens’ Kaivopuisto apartment in Helsinki and brought for the new house when they moved. (Figures 18 and 19).

A very original element in the dining room is the cupboard niche that is at the opposite side of the windows. (Fig.20)
Cupboards are normally placed to hide dishes, but this design of Aino Aalto is showcasing utilitarian objects, but also the finest ceramics and glassware, as well as some expensive art pieces like plates made by Pablo Picasso, giving to the place a glimpse of decorative glamour. Tiina Laihomiäki showed the particular functionality of this
cupboard where movable shelves allow to create a bigger area to place the tableware and food during the meals as it can be seen in the figure 20 with part of the drawer pulleed out. The dining area also has its own brick-laid fireplace with an electric rotisserie mechanism to prepare meat dishes (Fig. 21) Aino received the inspiration to design it from Maire Gullichsen, who saw something similar in one of her trips abroad. Tiina Laihomäki explained that the small wooden table next to the fireplace possibly also designed by Aino was placed there so that the meat could be freshly cut and placed on the rottery [52].

Fig. 20. Cupboard in the dining room  

Fig. 21. The rotisserie and the side table  

Another room in the ground floor with its own atmosphere is the library. For that space Aino designed the large conference table in chestnut, in the same color spirit as the rest of the room. Around the table Aino placed the upholstered in natural brown leather Klubi (Club) chairs in the same model that she has designed in 1935 for the Savoy Restaurant in Helsinki. The green metal pendant lamp was also designed by her. (Fig. 22). The main volume of the villa is connected with the sauna located at the courtyard by a covered loggia. This loggia forms a second, outside dining room. For this dining room Aino designed a dining table and chairs which stand in front of the outside fireplace and stone staircase. (Fig. 23)

Fig. 22. Table with Klubi chairs and green metal lamp  

Fig. 23. Outside dining room table and chairs.

The private floor with Mairea’s studio, the family bedrooms and the guest bedrooms was not available to visit but the mentioned literature about Villa Mairea give insight of that area as an accomplished intervention of Aino Aalto in the same spirit she handled the other spaces. Hence she devoted her detailed attention to the function and use of each room to create tuned sceneries with the aesthetical quality and the character of the house.
Conclusion
Aino Aalto by her studies in architecture, practice as architect, her significant trips abroad as an interested architect and her participation in international exhibitions (namely the 1930 Stockholm exhibition of design and applied arts and crafts), interior design fairs, CIAM meetings, the network of contacts with other European modernist architects and consequently with their work, was aware both of the architecture of the past and of the modernist rhetoric and ideals. Aino Aalto was tuned with the language of the functionalism, rationalism, efficiency and quality for daily life in the way it was performed by the Nordic designers. She chose as well for designing clear and simple surfaces, using natural light wood also combined with fabrics, everyday objects easy to use and to clean, sets of furniture easy to place namely in small family houses. Villa Mairea being undoubtedly an example of architectural sophistication, displays an interior’s ambience that resonates Aino’s creativity to shape spaces for enjoying home life.

Aino’s concept for interiors, in line with the Nordic interpretation of modernism, was not determined only by functionalistic purposes but rather by her own belief of a human-centric design scale in harmony with nature and with a sober aesthetics able to balance form and function. She was particularly interested in offering to interiors comfort and coziness, togetherness and freedom, warmth and serenity combined with sobriety and quality. She contributed strongly to spread the taste for such interiors both for home and other environments among the Finnish society. The co-foundation of Artek in 1935 of which she was the creative, artistic, aesthetic and business soul strengthened the opportunity to achieve a larger public with the export of their products.

Aino Marsio-Aalto left a legacy that asks for more studies in order to enrich the history of design and honour her talent and commitment for creating quality and character in vivid interior spaces.

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Figures Index
Figures 1, 5, 6 by Pauliina Rumbin
Figure 2
Figures 7 and 8 https://greatacre.wordpress.com/tag/alvar-aalto/
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Notes and References
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