

Helsinki By Design

By Monique Burns

Helsinki, Finland's captivating capital on the Baltic, has been named World Design Capital 2012 by the **International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID)**. The biennial honor, conferred upon Torino, Italy, in 2008 and Seoul, Korea, in 2010, recognizes the city's use of design for cultural, social and economic improvement.

Though the designation is fairly new, the honor seems long overdue. Helsinki has been a design center since the mid-1870s when the Design Forum, the world's second-oldest design industry organization opened. Architects like Eliel Saarinen (father to Eero of St. Louis' Gateway Arch fame) constructed such Art Nouveau masterpieces as Helsinki's Central Railway Station at the turn of the century. In the Thirties through Sixties, architect Alvar Aalto designed everything from glassware (including his iconic Aalto vase) to concert halls and convention centers. Textiles were all the rage in the 20th century, and in 1951 along came Marimekko, whose bold geometric designs still capture the imagination of global trendsetters.

The theme for Design Year 2012, "Open Helsinki—Embedding Design in Life," couldn't be more apt. Here, as in many cities, visitors can see major architectural landmarks, and view glassware, textiles, jewelry and other decorative arts in museums. But few cities integrate design so seamlessly into everyday life.

Year round, visitors can explore the Design District, with its **Design Museum** (www.designmuseum.fi), and nearly 200 designer studios, clothing boutiques, galleries, jewelry shops and antique dealers clustered in 25 streets (www.designdistrict.fi). Here also are trendy restaurants, and several "design hotels" like **Sokos**



HELSINKI DESIGN MUSEUM

Helsinki Design Museum

Hotel Tori (www.sokoshotels.fi/en), recently refurbished in Art Deco and Art Nouveau styles, and **Klaus K Hotel** (www.klauskhotel.com) whose modernistic interiors, owners say, were inspired by the "mysticism, passion, desire and envy" of The Kalevala, Finland's national epic. Amble through the quarter on your own, or take the two-hour Design Walk guided tour (www.helsinkiexpert.fi), offered Monday and Friday, June through the end of August, and by appointment at other times.

During Helsinki Design Week, created six years ago, visitors can participate in various events showcasing the city's design heritage. In 2010, Design Week is August 26 - September 5. Also in September, celebrations mark the 300th anniversary of the birth of Augustin Ehrensvärd (www.ehrensvar300.com), who built Suomenlinna Maritime Fortress on several of the many lovely islands surrounding the capital.

For general information on Helsinki, log on to www.visithelsinki.fi. For the new Travel Agent Manual, visit www.tourist.marketing@hel.fi. For information on travel agent fam trips, contact www.tourist.fam@hel.fi. For details on the upcoming Design Capital 2012 celebrations, visit www.wdc2012helsinki.fi & www.worlddesigncapital.com



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