

# The 1950s and 1960s Modern Home

## Magazines as research material

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This article is based on my keynote lecture at the architectural research symposium held at Aalto University on October 25, 2018. The lecture dealt with my doctoral dissertation: *Modern Home. Single-family housing ideals as presented in Finnish architecture and interior design magazines in the 1950s and 1960s.* (Sanaksenaho, 2017)

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### Introduction

The concept of the Modern Home has inspired both film makers and writers of interior design books and magazines for decades. For example, in the film *Mon Oncle* by Jacques Tati, Monsieur Hulot gets acquainted with a modern kitchen with all its machines and automation. It may be humorous to show humans as users of new technology, but it raises the question of how new ideas in modern architecture and living in homes were received. There is rather little scientific research on modern homes and single-family houses, at least in the Finnish context. My research responded to the need for knowledge about the post-war period of architecture of single-family houses, when the new modern ideals of living on one level, with big windows, sliding doors, open fireplaces and bar kitchens full of domestic appliances were presented. By choosing magazines as my research material, I was also able to study family life in these houses as it was presented in the family and interior design magazines of the time.



*"I hope that it is clear, that the architects of this century have always actively engaged in an interdisciplinary discourse that uses the media to blur the line between the high and low culture, art and commerce, and that the house is their polemical vehicle. To think about architecture of the twentieth century will be to rethink the house/media interface."*  
(Colomina, 1995)



**Figure 1.** In the row house Koulukallio architect Viljo Revell, the living room connects directly with the kitchen. Photo: Finlandia-kuva, MFA.

The aim of my dissertation was to study, through material found in relevant magazines, how the ideals of modern living were formulated in the 1950s and '60s in Finland.

KEYNOTE SPEECH

The research questions were:

*What was typical of Finnish single-family housing architecture during those decades?*

*How did the magazines describe and create the single-family housing ideals in the 1950s and 1960s?*

I also studied the change in the role and position of the architect in the design of single-family houses and the changes in the family concept in the 1960s and later, comparing it with the situation at the beginning of the 1950s. Houses, as architecture of everyday life, and also as lived-in spaces, were among my preoccupations as well as the material forms they took. Single-family houses were chosen as a typology of living because their residents could more freely choose and influence the housing conditions. For the architect, the design of houses also often represents a playground for new ideas and technologies.

## Research material and methods

My research material included both professional and family magazines. I checked whether the ideals of living differed between the architectural and the more popular magazines, but the study showed that the popular family magazines had also been written by specialists of the period and were similar kinds of tributes to “good taste”. Architects, interior designers and art historians wrote articles for *Kotiliesi* (Home Stove) and *Kaunis koti* (Beautiful Home), which were Finnish magazines in my data that covered homes in the 1950-60s. I also included the professional magazine *Arkkitehti* (Architect) as well as the exhibition catalogues of *Suomi rakentaa* (Finland Builds) showing Finnish architecture of those decades, in order to obtain a broad picture of the professional ideals behind single-family houses of the 1950s and '60s.

The circulations of the chosen magazines were: *Arkkitehti* approx. 3200, *Kaunis Koti* 22 300, *Kotiliesi* 176 000, and *Avotakka* (an interior design magazine, founded 1967) 24 000 (Tommila, 1992). The popularity and number of readers of family magazines was 55 times greater than the number of readers of *Arkkitehti*. Nevertheless, the single-family housing ideals seem to be quite similar in all the material. The question then follows: how were the modern housing ideals presented and sold to the public?

The research material thus consisted of articles and illustrations concerning single-family houses in the magazines *Arkkitehti*, *Kaunis Koti* and *Kotiliesi* from 1950–70 and in *Avotakka* from 1968–70. The advertisements for model houses in the magazines were also included in the study. There were in total about 250 articles with illustrations and 35 advertisements. The study was a qualitative analysis that aimed at finding culturally significant semantics in the text and image material, and ways of studying architectural representations. I used both text analysis (Halliday, 1994; Fairclough, 1995) and image analysis (Kress-Van Leeuwen, 1996; Seppänen, 2005) for the magazine material, but the methods more familiar to me as a trained architect were scrutiny of the drawings and explanations in the representations of single-family houses. An architect acting as a researcher does not follow the same process as an art historian, media or cultural researcher or a social scientist. I read and analysed site plans and their contexts, the plans, room divisions, orientation and circulation, and I figured out the building materials, typical details and structural solutions within the limits set by media presentations. I also analysed how architects explained their designs in the articles. The structure of the thesis fell into two parts: 1. Architectural representations and 2. Home (family life) representations. Two cross-sectional themes emerged from the data. Firstly, changes in family life and in the role of women in the home and, secondly, changes in the role of the architect designing single-family houses.

## The background of single-family houses in the research context

In the history of detached houses two paths can be seen: the bourgeois private villa surrounded by nature and the working-class model house. The ideal of living in single-family houses is related to garden city ideology with its belief that living close to nature is healthy and good for children. These ideals were originally from England and came to Finland via Germany and Sweden. In the bourgeois villa, the spaces for family, guests and servants were strictly separated. In general, the private spaces, such as bedrooms, were upstairs while the more public spaces and household spaces were downstairs (Saarikangas, 2002). Alvar Aalto's Villa Mairea still represents a typical private bourgeois villa, in which public and private spaces are separated, although its architecture is new and modern, with, for example, direct access to the garden from the living room. In working class houses all the spaces were meant for the family.

International influences can clearly be seen in the housing architecture of the post-war period. The influences on single-family houses came especially from the United States, Denmark and Sweden. For example, in Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House, the boundaries between private and public space are especially vague, and the residents' privacy is questionable considering its glass walls. Nevertheless, the house has been a model for many architects and big glass windows and walls became one feature of modern housing architecture. The Case Study House programme launched by John Entenza and *Arts and Architecture* magazine in the United States from 1945–1964 was an experiment in residential architecture. Richard Neutra was one of the architects who created the houses. His Mountain Home shows typical features of 1950s houses: interior spaces sliding into each other; big windows from the living room to the nature; open fireplaces, flat roofs and a roof structure visible in the ceiling. These features were widely copied in Finnish architecture and Neutra's Mountain Home was published in *Arkkitehti*.

Housing exhibitions were frequently written about in the magazines of my research, both in the professional as well as the family magazines. The most remarkable housing exhibitions in the research period were H55 in Helsingborg, Sweden, and Interbau in West Berlin in 1957, and international influences were spread by such exhibitions. One new or re-found housing typology in the Interbau exhibition was the atrium house, in which the spaces of the home were set around a courtyard. It was a housing typology that became popular later in the 1960s in low and dense housing areas. Eduard Ludwig's atrium house in Berlin was published in Finland under the heading: "The open courtyard is the core of the future single-family house" (Kaunis Koti 5/1957) (See Fig. 2). There was also an exhibition entitled *America Today* in Helsinki in 1961 which presented new inventions and kitchen appliances. In post-war Finland, the USA was greatly admired and part of this was the desire to mark the difference and separation from Russia. America meant freedom and progression in the new consumer society that followed the earlier agrarian one.

In Finland, the 1950s was a time of positive development and growth. Construction was strong and fast because new factories, hospitals, schools and apartments were needed. Finland's war reparations had been paid by 1952. The housing policy in Finland was based on the measures of the state housing committee (ARAVA). The ARAVA committee gave loans for reasonably-priced houses and the floor areas and features of these houses were strictly controlled. The influences of the ARAVA norms can still be seen in Finnish housing production. In the 1950s houses, the efficient use of floor area was important, so that family apartments were supposed to be less than 99 m<sup>2</sup>, which can be seen in the efficient floor-plan solutions of the houses of the period.



**Figure 2. Kaunis Koti 5/1957:**  
"The open courtyard is the core of the future single-family house."

## Professional magazines presenting the architecture of single-family houses

Out of my analysis of the professional publications dealing with housing architecture (*Arkkitehti* and *Suomi rakentaa* exhibition catalogues) arose four main types of houses: private villas in natural surroundings, row houses, atrium houses, and the modular constructivist houses of the 1960s.

At the beginning of the 1950s, private houses were designed as unique villas surrounded by nature and the location of the house was chosen according to the heights and orientations of the site. Villa Ervi, a house designed by the architect Aarne Ervi for himself, was widely published in all the magazines of my research. There were many new technical inventions, such as underfloor heating, and the room division was like a modern home, although there still remained a room for a domestic help. There was a hobby room in the basement downstairs, which became typical in the 1950s (*Arkkitehti* 9-10/1952) (See Fig. 3).



**Figure 3. Aarne Ervi: Villa Ervi.** Photo: Aarne Ervi, MFA.

The row or terraced house is a building type which became popular in the 1950s. The first examples of this were built in the early 1900s in Finland, but they were first known mainly as workers' housing. The row house was a compromise between a flat and a house, and it was said to provide a good environment, especially for children. In the 1950s, the row houses were situated according to the landscape and its contours. Hilding Ekelund was one of the masters of housing architecture in the 1950s and his terraced house in Munkkivuori was part of a composition of two lamella houses and a garage building. The house plans were pile-shaped, widening out towards the living room and the park. Later in the 1960s, there was a return to the grid plan and the gardens of the row houses were fenced off instead of being open to the larger landscape.

Tapiola, a garden city district of Espoo, was important for my research period because it was a turning point in housing design. Low, single-storey modern individual houses offered homes for families in a green environment within walking distance of services. Swedish housing districts, such as Guldheden in Gothenburg and Friluftstad in Malmö, were the inspiration for the designers of

Tapiola. The same architects designed both the town plan and the apartment blocks and for this reason new housing typologies could be created. Houses by the architect Jorma Järvi were presented in the magazines *Arkkitehti*, *Kaunis koti* and *Kotiliesi*. The row house, Koulukallio, designed by the architect Viljo Revell, has all the living spaces upstairs and garages downstairs. This was such a new kind of architecture that it received criticism in *Kaunis Koti* magazine. However, connecting the living room directly with the kitchen was a reflection of the new family life, where there was no live-in domestic help and it was the mother who was working in the kitchen. There was no need to hide this any longer (See Fig. 1).



**Figure 4. Aulis Blomstedt: Chain houses.** Photo: Heikki Havas, MFA

The room layout in the row houses typically consisted of a living room, kitchen and dining room on the ground floor with the bedrooms upstairs. Aulis Blomstedt designed row houses for Tapiola that were called “chain” houses (*ketjutalot*) (See Fig. 4). In *Kaunis koti* magazine there was an interview with a resident of a chain house who had been surprised that there was no longer a room for a domestic help, so one was made in one of the upstairs bedrooms (Kaunis koti 5/1954). The architects Heikki and Kaija Siren also designed many row houses in Tapiola. New technology, such as wooden prefabricated wall elements, was used in the row houses on Kontiontie road. Craft manufacturing was changing to industrial prefabrication.

Atrium houses, as one type of row house, were typical of the changes of the 1950s and '60s. They were said to be peaceful oases in cities, family houses that were close to nature. Cell-like apartments were part of the bigger entity and structure of housing areas. The density of the atrium house districts was close to that of the districts of apartment blocks. The architect Jaakko Laapotti, who was a professor of housing design at Helsinki University of Technology, designed

many atrium houses, such as Tonttukallio, Haukilahti and Bergåsa. They were white minimalistic houses with horizontal volumes and black details. In the Haukilahti atrium houses, the view from the courtyard was above ground level.



**Figure 5. The atrium house, Tonttukallio, architects Jaakko Laapotti and Toivo Korhonen.**  
Photo: Heikki Havas, MFA

Amongst the single-family houses, there were also atrium solutions, such as Marjatta and Martti Jaatinen's house, also in Tapiola. It had a square plan, with the service spaces and kitchen in the middle and the other rooms around it. It was exceptional in the Tapiola garden city area, because its courtyard was strictly fenced. Toivo Korhonen's own house in Lauttasaari was based on a modular grid and in the middle was a Japanese-style inner courtyard (See Fig. 6). Korhonen wrote in *Arkkitehti* magazine: "We live our own life in peace" (*Arkkitehti* 4-5/1961). The modular grid became a trend in the 1960s houses.

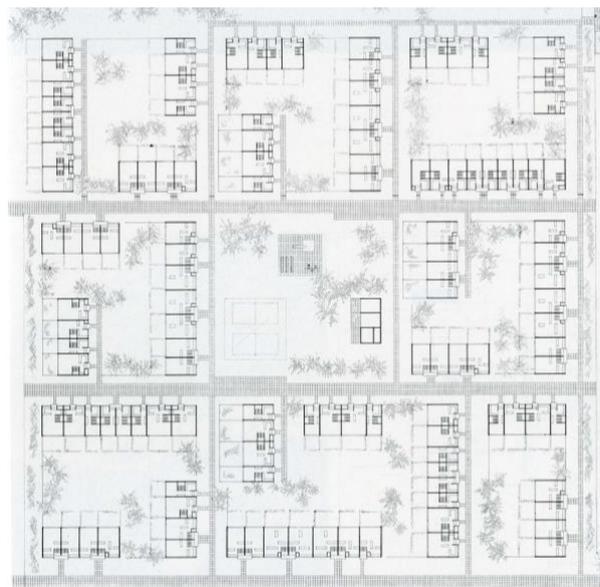


**Figure 6.**  
**Toivo Korhonen:**  
**The architect's own house.**  
Photo: T.Korhonen,  
*Arkkitehti* 4-5/1961

Architects became interested in modular constructivism and building systems in the 1960s as a counter-reaction to heroic expressive architecture. Social housing and urbanism became a mission for young architects and modular systems and dimension coordination were a big interest. Aarno Ruusuvuori was a professor at Helsinki University of Technology and his thinking inspired many students. Aulis Blomstedt was another fore-runner for the new generation of architects. Modular experiments were carried out, especially on single-family houses and summer-houses. The architect Kirmo Mikkola's atelier row house and House Thorsbo were examples of these. Gullichsen and Pallasmaa's Moduli 225 was designed for summer use. Pre-fabricated Domino Houses designed by Raimo Kallio-Mannila and the Bungalow House system were general construction systems in which the same building parts could be used to create many different solutions.

In the changeover to the new decade of the 1970s, Space and future utopias were being widely discussed in the magazines. Alongside the rectangular modular systems, round forms began to appear in both architecture and furniture design. Plastic and fibre-glass were used in buildings, such as the Futuro house designed by Matti Suuronen. Futuro as well as Eero Paloheimo and Yrjö Kukkapuro's atelier were also published internationally. Traditions were being questioned and mobile housing and movable housing units in the city structure were regarded as possible future scenarios. The British Archigram group even suggested that a human house is like clothing, in which you connect heating, energy sources and information. Architecture is no longer needed. However, in practice, the houses of the 1960s were often prefabricated and standardised. The same house type was used for an entire housing district, built by a construction company. Suburban districts were built, such as Hakunila and Seutula in Vantaa and Puisto-Kaarila in Tampere.

Bengt Lundsten and Esko Kahri's entry in the Kortepohja town planning architectural competition in 1964 in Jyväskylä was a turning point. The grid plan was designed in a multidisciplinary team of sociologists, traffic planners, structural engineers and landscape architects (See Fig. 7). The new housing area was described as beautiful, extraordinary and fresh (Kotiliesi 22/1969). In 1970, single-family houses were now said to be selfish and to take up too much space. The first Finnish housing fair was organized in 1970 in Tuusula with the aim of re-awakening the production of single-family houses because apartment blocks were dominating the construction.



**Figure 7.**  
**Bengt Lundsten & Esko**  
**Kahri:**  
 Row houses in Kortepohja.  
 Arkkitehti 3-4/1967

## Family magazines presenting homes

The part of my research that dealt with interior design and family magazines rested on the most common topics of the magazine articles: housing exhibitions, international influences, Tapiola, material and form experimentation, and standardised house types. The presentation of the features of the modern home in my thesis was based on the various room functions. It is notable that in the magazines the residents of the house were present in the images, whereas in the professional magazines the houses were shown as objects without people.

In a typical modern home, the living room opened up towards the outside nature through big windows. There was also usually an open fireplace. The dining space was part of the living room and, behind sliding doors, there would be a bedroom or work room. The father's place was usually in living room, sitting on the sofa reading the newspaper or watching the fire. The bedroom was the most private space in the home, and if anybody was there, it was a woman (See Fig. 8).



**Figure 8. Bedroom in the row house, Koulukallio, architect Viljo Revell.**

Photo: Finlandia-kuva, MFA

Children's rooms were part of the contemporary discussion in the 1950s concerning mothers who worked outside the home. At that time, it was still believed that a good mother stayed at home with the children. Women were, however, seen as 'experts' in the home, who therefore needed appropriate working conditions. Children's rooms were also specifically designed for them, including the furniture. The hobby room, which was a new space in the '50s houses, was usually in the basement or garden wing, and it appeared to be meant for men and boys. The need for a hobby room was also part of the contemporary discussion about family life. When there was something for everybody to do at home, the unity of the family was preserved.

Rational workspaces and kitchen appliances were typical of the modern home. The rationalisation of housework had been in focus since the 1920s when the functional laboratory-style kitchen had been developed. The kitchen was standardised and new materials, such as stainless steel and laminate tops, were easy to maintain. Bar kitchens had already arrived in the USA in the 1940s, but they first came to Finland in the 1950s, as can be seen in the Tapiola homes.



**Figure 9. Children were most frequently in the garden images.**  
House Lammin-Soila, by architects Reijo ja Tyyne Lammin-Soila.  
Kaunis koti 6/1962

In the magazine images of the kitchen, there was usually a woman. In my data, there was a man in the kitchen in only one picture, and he was bringing his fishing catch home. Practicality was also regarded as an ideal in the design of service spaces, such as cloakrooms, cupboards and laundry spaces. Washing machines arrived to alleviate the housework and walk-in closets were new inventions in 1950s Finland.

Saunas have been connected to the Finnish bathing culture for centuries. They had earlier been in separate buildings in the yard or garden, but, in the 1950s, saunas started to come inside the houses. Swimming pools became common in Finland in the 1960s. Energy-saving and water consumption were not issues at that time, and having a swimming pool inside the house was described as “a friend for the sauna and substitute for a lake” (Kaunis koti 4/1966).

During this period, the garden changed from being part of the larger landscape into a small fenced area with a limited view. The plants chosen were flourishing and big-leaved, such as rhododendrons. The design of the gardens was based on the contrast between natural elements and simple architecture. In the images, the people in the garden were generally children (See Fig. 9).

Regarding the number of persons that appeared in the magazine images of the homes, most frequently there were children (56), then women (45) and lastly, men (28). Women were mostly depicted in kitchens, men in living rooms and children in their own rooms or in the garden.

## Discussion

Two themes emerged from my analysis of the research material: family life and changes in the role of the architect. It was possible to observe, in the articles and accompanying images, the ways that family members used the home spaces and possible to see the ways in which the position and role of the architect changed in the design of houses from the end of the 1960s.

At the end of the 1960s private villas had come to be regarded as elitist commissions and it was said that architects should concentrate on solving societal problems and focus on town planning. There were demonstrations in the Department of Architecture at the University of Technology in 1968 and the professional architecture magazine was politically left-minded. Previously, the architect was regarded as the master of the building project and the name of the architect was always mentioned in the presentations of houses in the magazines. However, at the end of the 1960s the names of architects disappeared, at least in the advertisements of model houses. Thus, anonymity in architecture and design increased and it was even questioned whether it was a misuse of architects' time to design private houses.

In my research data, single-family houses and modern homes are simply representations of real homes. We don't get the full picture from the magazines of what living was actually like in the houses at that time because we only see ideals of homes. What was essential about the modern home was the division between public and private space. The boundaries between public and private were not only visible in the plans of the houses but also in the way housing was related to the media. Rooms started to merge into larger living spaces and externally through big glass windows and doors to the garden, and gardens became part of the greater context of the neighbourhoods. The line between private and public space became vague (See Fig. 10).

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The architecture of houses developed in parallel with urban design and town planning. In the 1950s the houses were situated freely and related to the natural surroundings, whereas in the 1960s the grid plan returned and houses were designed according to modular principles and system thinking.

The phrases and words that were repeated in the texts of the magazines of the 1950s included practical, functional, spacious, simple. In the 1960s, the words changed to inexpensive, light, pre-fabricated. In the journalists' texts of the 1950s, the professionalism and reasoning behind design solutions were based on such phrases as "The architect says..." or "According to scientific research...". However, by the end of my research period in the 1960s, the professional was no longer equally valued, and it was even suggested that private individuals could design their own houses.

The research showed that there is a cyclical process in housing ideals and family values. The ideal of family housing in the 1950s, that is, a single-family house in a garden-like district, became, in the 1960s, a prefabricated apartment in the suburbs. The construction of single-family houses increased again in the 1980s, which became its most active period after the War.

The media that deals with housing has increased enormously since the 1960s. In Finland alone there are nowadays around ten magazines focusing on living and interior design, in addition to several TV programmes and numerous related blogs. Reading through some current interior design magazines, I noticed that family members have changed their places in the home since the 1950s and '60s. Men can be seen playing with children and women might be sitting on the sofa with a laptop. The family is more of an equal unit than it was in the illustrations of the 1950s.

The media had and continues to have an important role in conveying housing ideals. Nowadays, we, the general public, produce our own representations of ideal homes for the social media. The residents themselves have taken on the role of reporters, choosing for themselves what to show, and how. Nevertheless, the ideals of living still continue to be constructed through texts and images.



**Figure 10. Row house, Otsonpesä, in Tapiola, architects Heikki and Kaija Sirén, 1959. Photo: Pietinen, MFA**

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