

## THE END OF THE TRADITION

The traditional Finnish vernacular architecture is based on timber construction. In the past all building materials were taken from nature and worked at home. Timber (usually pine and fir) was used for walls and beams, planks for floors, ceilings and fixed furniture, birch bark for roofs, moss and mud for fillings, stone with clay mortar for fireplaces, wooden locks or skin film for windows, tar and water paint for finishing work. Only in the eighteenth century the industrial materials came into use: at first iron for nails and green glass for windows. In the course of the nineteenth century the productions of the growing building industry superseded nearly all home-made materials. Sawmills produced boards and panels in small regular sizes, glazed tiles for stoves were made in factories after Swedish and German patterns, factories producing wallpaper and paint were founded in Finland. Asphalt roofing felt, metal sheet, tile and later even asbestos cement, became common roofing materials.

The price of wood increased especially during the First World War, and this led to a considerable expansion of the sawmill industry. The massive timber wall was more often displaced by panelled framework filled with sawdust. At first this happened in towns and industrial centres, then, during the 1930's, even in the countryside.

Also the peasants' way of life became more up to date. The plan of a peasant house with one large living room, a porch and 1–3 chambers (or two large rooms flanking the porch), tracing back to the darkness of the Middle Ages, was good enough till the end of the last century, when the professionally educated designers became for the first time interested in the farm houses. The agricultural societies with their building experts and farming fairs, and various housing authorities with their type houses (usually 1 1/2 -storied) introduced new complicated plans with separate kitchens, sleeping alcoves, wardrobes and modern conveniences. In the 1920's these new professionally drawn plans really got through.

The building of houses fell into the hands of teams of craftsmen and professional constructors. The biggest country houses were soon made by contract and with drawn-up plans. The anonymous self-designed and self-made vernacular architecture lived only in the settlers' farms and in the poor cottage villages of industrial workers up to the 1950's.

## THE CRISIS

The Finnish landscape was in the 1950's still rather homogenous and unified. In the countryside there were villages with light-painted wooden commercial buildings, gentry homes and schools by the roadside together with red timber farmsteads, in the towns large regularly built areas of low wooden houses in the centre and freely grown cottage areas in the suburbs. Then came the crisis: urbanization, industrialization, the rise in the standard of living, commercialization. All building was directed to new production: industry, education, financing, town planning. The tradition, which already had lost its living connections, was forgotten, neglected, even actively done away with as in no other European country.

The maintenance and upkeep of buildings was scarcely profitable; capital was not invested in it. To demolish and rebuild meant bigger consumption, higher interest, better investments for the business world; it meant, however, a loss for the national economy. In town planning the building rights were overmeasured for the profit of the landowner, the existing houses in good condition were demolished to build bigger ones. The protection of cultural heritage was strictly limited to national monuments such as medieval castles and churches.

This general attitude influenced also the countryside: old meant old-fashioned, weary and poor, new meant good, beauti-

ful and rich. Together with the economic growth also the commercial marketing with its advertizing campaigns put pressure on the destruction of the old: one should replace timber by brick and asbestos cement, ridged roof by flat one, cosy six-paned windows by large "thermopane" openings. The villages were broken up, and what the house owners did not attain was done by the business world with its supermarkets and by the near-sighted traffic planning with its parking places and gasoline stations. The former cosy and safe environment was spoilt in the name of economical benefit. One can say without exaggeration that not a single village entity in Finland was spared of the frenzy of innovation.

A reaction against this kind of development formed itself only in the beginning of the 1970's. The general opinion was raised into the struggle and various societies concerned with local culture started to demand the right to have influence upon the planning of their own environment. Then came the depression with the demand to stop the extravagant demolition (in the 1960's for every 100 new dwellings 40 old ones were demolished!). The repair and upkeep of houses was now understood valuable in the viewpoint of national economics. The general atmosphere began to change — one could start to protect the cultural heritage, the little that was still left...

In the following three examples are introduced, which illustrate the general problems and various solutions in the reparation and adaptation of vernacular architecture in Finland today.

*A living farm that has been built in several stages, beginning in the eighteenth century. The existing façade derives from 1910's. Laitila in Kurikka.*







*A stately house waiting for the downfall — the roof is leaking, the weatherboards rotten, the windows smashed. The strange thing is that people are still living in there, just waiting for to build a new house. Kouvo in Jalasjärvi.*



*In the villages old timber houses are ruthlessly demolished to give way to concrete and brick. The village will soon be unknown to its old inhabitants. Alavus.*

### A MUSEUM AND CENTRE FOR RESTORATION

The buildings of Yli-Laurosela farmstead lie in the centre of the village of Ilmajoki. The farm consists now of a big two-storied main house (with a living area of 380 square metres) and twelve domestic buildings: stable, cowshed, storehouses, smithy, sauna, wood-shed. The row of beautiful granaries and many other buildings have gone with the time. The farm was built in 1848–65, and it has very well preserved its original appearance, even most of the oldest furniture is left.

When the last farmers died the heirs offered the lot for sale; in the town plan the site was already reserved for commercial building. But some local people directed the attention of state authorities to the threatening demolition of the house — in Ilmajoki there was demolished few years earlier the biggest Finnish rectory (built in 1812 of wood) in spite of its good condition and the severe efforts of local protectors. The National Board of Historical Monuments made a motion for the protection of Yli-Laurosela by the Historic Buildings Law. This motion was based on the argument that Yli-Laurosela is one of the most remarkable and best preserved monuments of Finnish vernacular architecture.

The Historic Buildings Law was passed in 1965. Its basic weaknesses are that it stresses strongly the rights of the owner and that there are very little funds available for the costs of protection. Thus, if the owner opposes, the protection is usu-

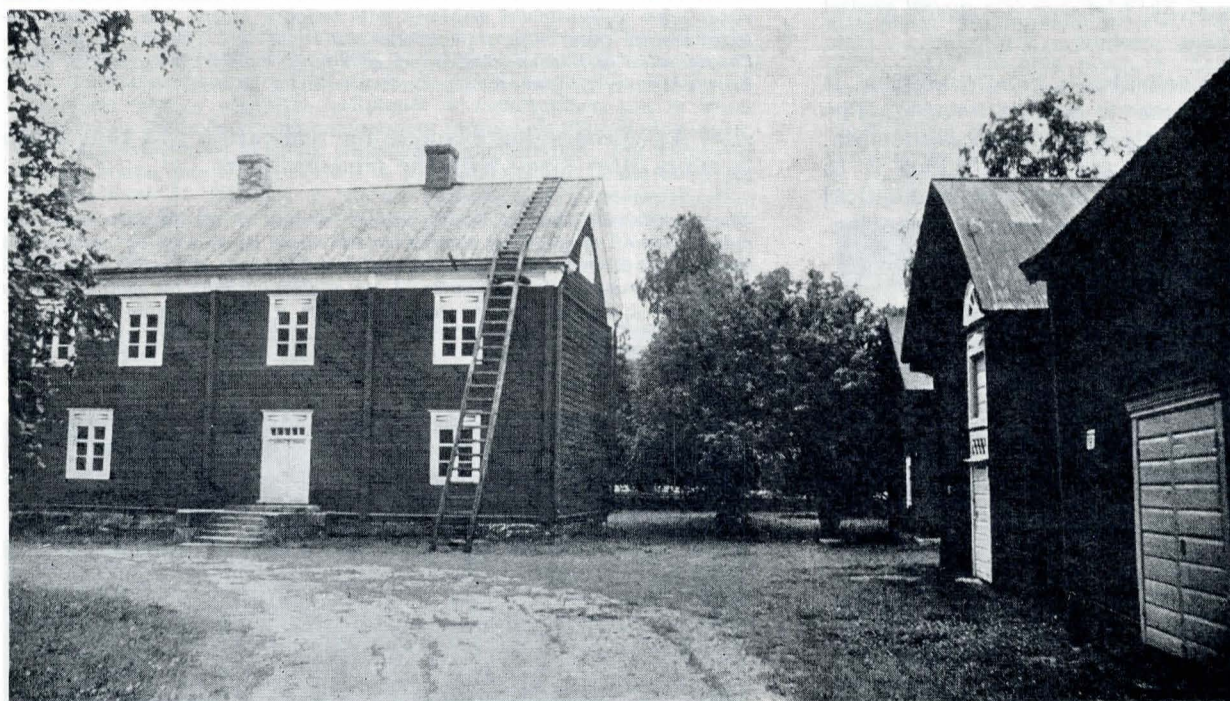
ally not carried out. In the case of Yli-Laurosela the owners did oppose, thinking only the selling price of the building site. The disagreement caused the state to buy the lot for the price asked; the buildings were regarded valueless. Yli-Laurosela fell into the hands of National Board of Historical Monuments; the restoration began in 1972.

Even if the protection of Yli-Laurosela was thus secured, there were unfortunately no possibilities to restore it to its original use. One had to find a new use which were generally useful (to justify the investments in the reparation) and which would demand the smallest possible amount of alterations. Dealing with monuments, in many cases the museal use seems natural. The exceptionally stately Yli-Laurosela is a real vernacular monument in itself, and with proper interior decoration and furniture could the environment of passed generations be partially reconstructed. But the people with their everyday work are still lacking. If a house is intended to be warm and alive, it must be more than a pure exhibit.

So came the idea of creating a district centre for protection and restoration of vernacular architecture. This can operate with exhibitions and collections of fragments, documents and design, with colloques and counselling, with research and publication. It can also collaborate with local or district organizations for culture and tourism. This direction was accepted, and together with a museum a centre for restoration has recently started in Yli-Laurosela.



*The extension of a house is often made following with the modern fashion, in harsh contrast with the old architecture. Kauhava.*



*The manyard of Yli-Laurosela: in the background stands the two-storied main building — during the cold winter only the ground floor was used, to spare in heating. To the right there is the gable of a long and broad cowshed, the two-storied stable for six horses and a row of stores.*

Being a valuable vernacular monument, Yli-Laurosela was restored carefully using original methods and materials whenever possible. But this was only half of the way: the house had to meet the demands of restoration centre activities and those of tourism as well. This offered a good possibility to give an example to the visiting farmers and house owners of how to repair a living house, how to have it warm and well-insulated, how to install modern amenities, how to avoid technical as well as aesthetic disasters. This is told in Yli-Laurosela not only by the permanent exhibition and counselling, but by the restoration work accomplished in it as well.

#### **A LOCAL CENTRE OF CULTURE**

In western Finland the various buildings of a farmstead were grouped around two closed yards: manyard (living quarters, storehouses for clothes, stable) and cattleyard. The two yards were closed with buildings, fences and gates, so that "neither a wolf can enter nor a dog go out". One of the few places in Finland where this old system is still largely preserved is Hämes-Havunen in Kauhajoki.

Like Yli-Laurosela, this house was abandoned for years and near to fall down. Finally the local council bought the farm to be preserved as a monument of local patrimony. The price was not high, much more difficult was to find money for reparations. Monument or not, most of the local council members were not too willing to give out common money "just

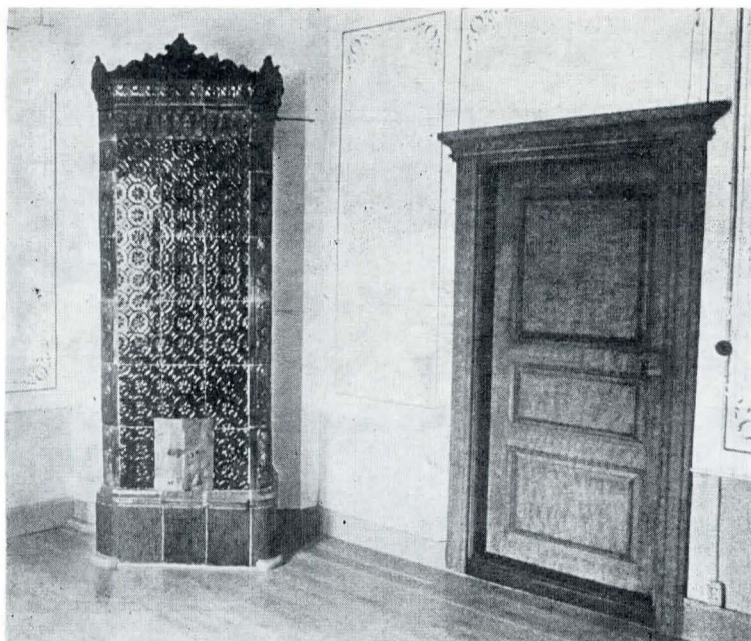
for the culture". The depression gave a helping hand: the state labour authorities were compelled to start more continuation training (free training courses for unemployed workers) for many unemployed carpenters, and by the two existing lines (element installer, furnishing carpenter) a third was founded: restoration carpenter. A very skilful elder master-carpenter was hired to be the teacher, and the first course was started in Hämes-Havunen in 1977.

The general methods of restoration work were the same as in Yli-Laurosela: the use of traditional technics and materials as far as reasonable. The consulting architect made a careful study on original details and adopted modern amenities clearly and carefully. A new building will be erected on the site of one earlier demolished, with exactly the same size and nearly the same outlook. This contains the technical spaces like kitchen, lavatories, central heating plant and the dwelling for the caretaker.

#### **A FARM**

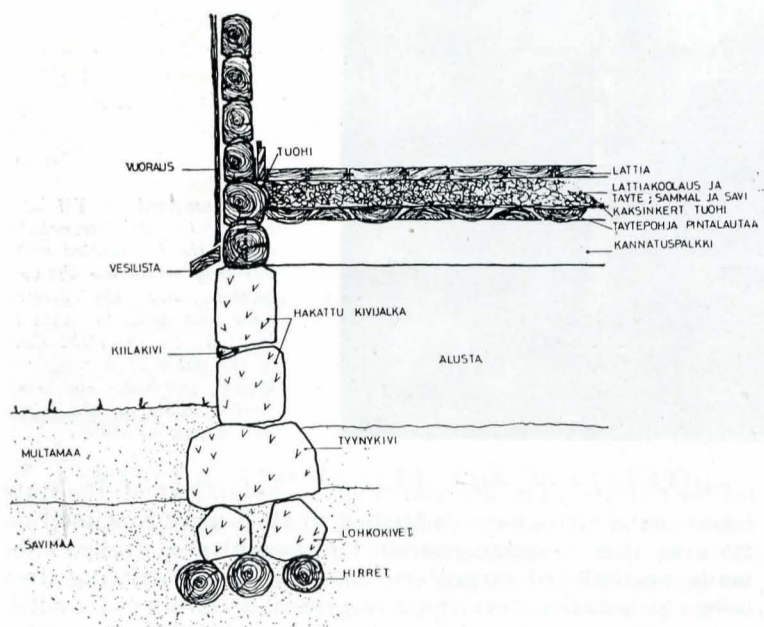
Huhta farm in Lapua is an example of a very typical Finnish house, one of the last built in the traditional manner (in 1934). Its plan is one of the most common in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: a porch with a so called porch-chamber, a large living room, and behind it two chambers. Upstairs there is one chamber in both gables (originally these were necessary to support the timber structure of the gables).





The biggest farms could compete in wealth with smaller manors and rectories. Handsome hand-painted wall decorations were restored in Yli-Laurosela with original gluepaint. The tiled stove is a typical product of local potters.

Though the house is young and also in good condition, it had neither modern amenities nor a central heating. The farmer family wanted to demolish it and build a modern house. The National Board of Agriculture, the aim of which is to preserve existing farm houses for cultural and economical reasons, chose Huhta to be one of the test projects for renovation.



TÄYTEPOHJARAKENNE  
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The high foundation construction of Yli-Laurosela. The type was adopted from gentry buildings in the beginning of nineteenth century. At the bottom there is a bed of timber which keeps well for centuries in the wet ground (it was used already in medieval churches). No nails exist in the floor construction of double beams. Moss and earth birch bark below is used for insulation, and during the winter the whole floor was covered with rag carpets.

The drawings were made by the Board and the owner received for the renovation a normal state loan which covers about 30–60 % of the total expenses. (The state loan for new building is not granted any more to a farm that owns an old house good enough for renovation).

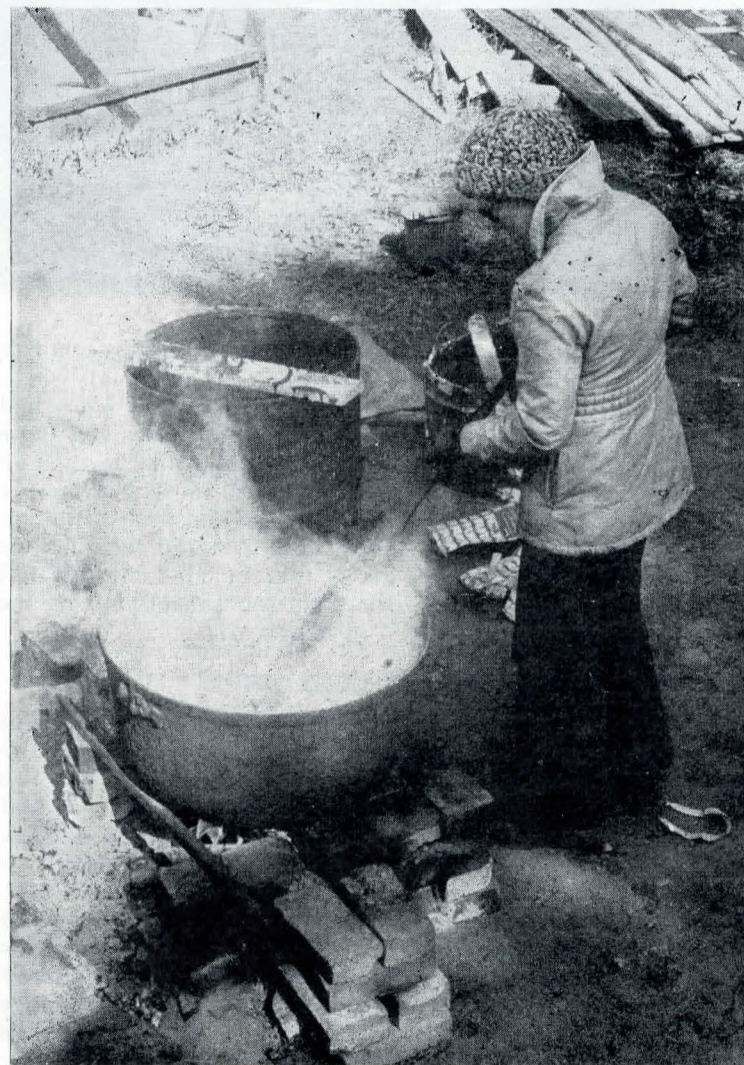
The house was given an extra insulation (5 cm mineral wool) inside, and an electric heating with panels and reserves (placed in some of the old stoves) was installed. The kitchen with a refrigeration room was placed in the porch-chamber, and a sauna with washingroom upstairs. The cost of renovation was less than a third of the price of a new house of the same



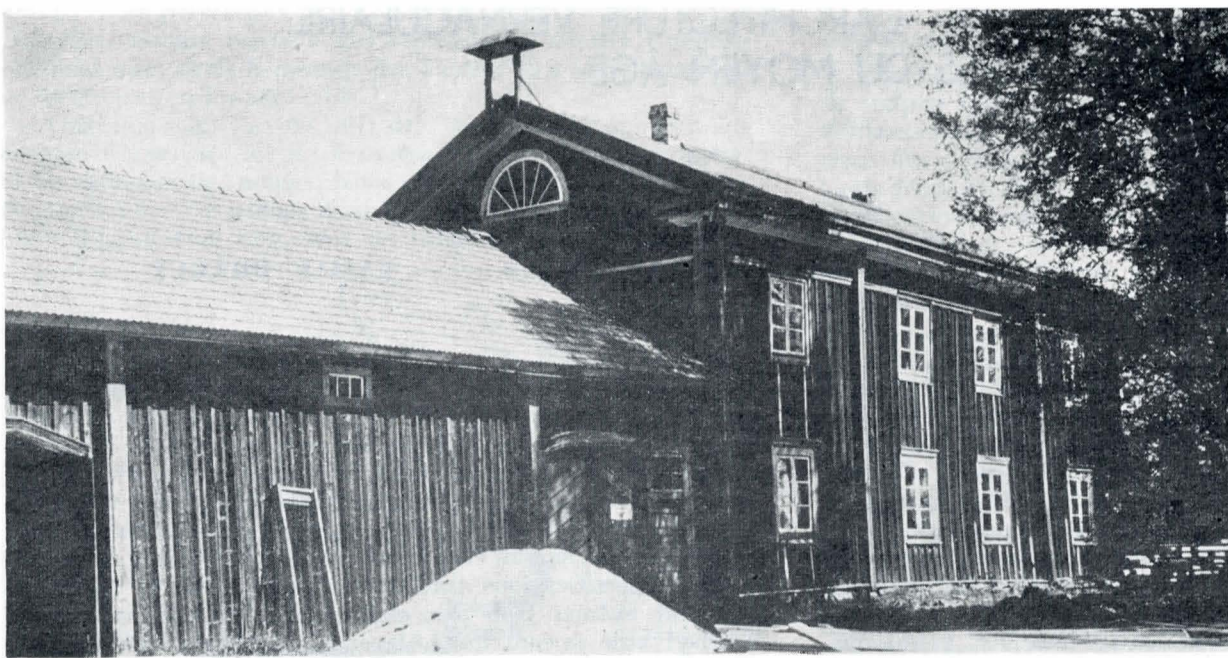
The Yli-Laurosela main building had been roofed with tiles in the 1930's, on the original roof of double boards. The tiles were removed and the worn upper layer of boards was displaced with two new layers. The roof was protected several times with old-fashioned pit-burnt tar. The use of pressure-impregnation with arsene-zinc-copper salts may cause the wood to split easier in sunshine, so it demands a protection with tar as well.

size. An encouraging example for renovation was thus given to many other farms with the same problems.

The traditional colour of houses, known already in the Middle Ages, was red. The habit of painting came down the social steps reaching peasants by the turn of the nineteenth century. In Yli-Laurosela the paint was cooked by the old method: 50 l of water, 2 kgs of iron sulphur for mould and rot protection, 4,5 kgs of fine rye flour for binder, 8 kgs iron oxide red for pigment; cooked for 2–3 hours. This paint is cheap, beautiful, easy to renew and stands for 20–40 years — it is much above all modern latex and alcyd paints!







*The entrance building of Hämes-Havunen. To the left a gateway leads to the cattleyard, to the right you can see a bigger wagon-gate and a smaller man-gate both leading to the manyard. Behind is the main building (1836) with a stand for the „porridge-bell“ rung at meal times.*

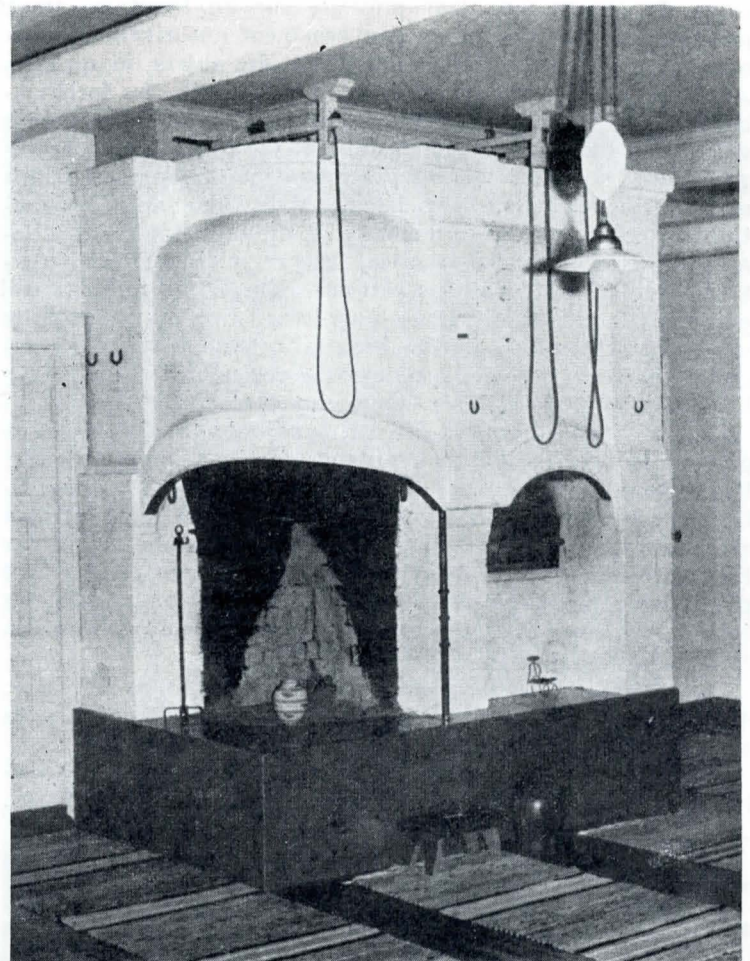
## RÉSUMÉ

La „fin de la tradition“ vernaculaire a été marquée, en Finlande, au XVIII<sup>e</sup> et surtout au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, par l'apparition de différents matériaux industriels de construction autres que le bois employé exclusivement jusqu'alors, par de nouvelles techniques de construction, par la transformation du mode de vie des paysans, par la place de plus en plus importante qu'occupent les artisans professionnels spécialisés. Fin hâtée, ces derniers temps, par l'urbanisation et l'industrialisation à outrance, par l'accroissement du standard de vie des paysans et la commercialisation de l'économie. La conservation des anciens édifices ou ensembles ruraux n'est plus rentable et la protection des biens culturels se limitait, dans les années '50, aux monuments d'intérêt national, comme les forteresses

*For a succesful restoration the old technics as well as materials must be understood and mastered. The craft tradition is carried on in Hämes-Havunen, where carpenters are trained in special courses by a skilful master-builder.*



médiévales et les églises. Le désir d'innover, de moderniser à tout prix gagne tout le monde rural. C'est à peine vers 1970 qu'un revirement a commencé à se produire, que l'opinion publique a été mobilisée contre cette véritable psychose. La crise économique survenue alors contribua à arrêter les excès des démolitions. La réparation et la conservation des édifices est désormais comprise comme une nécessité économique qui se superpose à celle de la protection de l'héritage culturel. Trois exemples significatifs illustrent la politique actuelle de protection de l'architecture vernaculaire finlandaise: la sauvegarde de l'ancienne



*The open fireplace with its oven is still offering warmth and the smell of newly baked bread in Huhta living room, though electric heating and a modern kitchen are also available. Harmony of tradition and modern life.*

et typique ferme de Yli-Laurosela, puis sa restauration et finalement sa transformation en un centre pour la protection et la restauration de l'architecture vernaculaire; la restauration de la ferme de Hämes-Havunen, qui était abandonnée et menaçait ruine; la rénovation, sous contrôle du Comité national de l'agriculture, de la ferme Huhta, à Lapua, que ses propriétaires voulaient démolir et refaire de fond en comble: exemples encourageants pour maintes autres fermes confrontées aux mêmes problèmes.