



HYON-SOB KIM AND PETER BLUNDELL JONES VILLA MAIREA, THE LOST MEMORIES

Villa Mairea (1937–39) has long been regarded as an important house. To clients Harry and Maire Gullichsen (1903–54; 1907–80), it was the statement of an ambitious younger generation in a small town, Noormarkku, and was intended to surpass earlier houses of the Ahlström family. To the architect Alvar Aalto (1898–1976), the project was an incomparably good opportunity because of the freedom permitted and the generous budget. Since both the clients and the architect considered the house an experimental laboratory, it could pass through various metamorphoses with countless sketches before definition in an optimised final plan. Nonetheless, most studies on the Villa Mairea up to now have concentrated mainly on the final building without much consideration of the development. This is at least partly due to the limited access for outsiders to Aalto’s drawings and documents during his lifetime.¹ Only after Aalto’s death in 1976 could the material start to be ordered by his friend Göran Schildt with the help of the Alvar Aalto Foundation and Archives, and it was only in 1994 that Garland Publishing, Inc. published Aalto’s drawings from 1917 to 1939, making them available to general researchers.²

Before this publication, some researchers – PEARSON (1978), PORPHYRIOS (1982), PALLASMAA (1985), SCHILDT (1986) and WESTON (1992) – presented various early versions of the *Villa Mairea*. But only a few drawings – often different ones in each book – were shown and they were not described in depth because the writers’ main concerns were not the house’s design process. In 1998,

▲ (Fig.1) Aalto’s first proposal for the *Villa Mairea* in late 1937 (PORPHYRIOS, 1982, P. 37).

the Alvar Aalto Foundation and Mairea Foundation with Juhani Pallasmaa as editor published a monograph on the house attempting to cover all the design phases, but analysis and interpretation was restricted in relation to the multitude of drawings printed.³ There is room, therefore, for a further look at the evolution from the initial sketches to the final plan.

From egg to trout: design evolution of Villa Mairea AALTO (1948) compared the process of designing a building with the growth of a trout. Just as a trout needs a long time to grow up from a tiny egg among thousands in the spawn, so the *Villa Mairea* was created through a long process from a number of initial ideas. The nearest thing we have to an egg is a first proposal for the house as a rustic hut with a rectangular plan and a pitched roof dated late 1937 (Fig.1). Strangely, this preliminary version is found only as a single plan in Porphyrios’s book. Nevertheless, it is important because of the implied vernacular reference. The plan shows an access road paved with rustic stone, a living room with a fireplace, a tiled space (possibly a bathroom), a staircase, several other rooms and a slightly protruding large room attached to the right side of the main block, possibly a studio. Porphyrios claims that MAIRE rejected this proposal because she wanted “something Finnish but in the spirit of today”, and from then on,

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