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Aalto's buildings often blur the boundaries between indoors and out, creating plazas and forest spaces in living rooms and lobbies, and a sense of enclosed domesticity in gardens and grounds.

right
Jyväskylä Workers' Club,
Jyväskylä, 1924–1925.
Upper lobby and entrance
to the theatre.

opposite left
Villa Mairea, Noormarkku,
1938–1939. Entrance hall,
living room and main
staircase.

opposite right
Jyväskylä University
(formerly The Institute of
Pedagogics), Jyväskylä,
1952–1957. Stairway
and foyer.





Experimental House,
Muuratsalo, 1952–1953.
The courtyard as an
outdoor living room.



Aalto House and Studio,
Munkkiniemi, Helsinki,
1954–1956. The outdoor
space alludes to an
amphitheatre.



ALVAR AALTO
THROUGH THE
EYES OF
SHIGERU BAN



ENCOUNTERS WITH AALTO

AN INTERVIEW WITH SHIGERU BAN

Questions and compilation by Tomoko Sato
with Jun Matsumoto

1 Emilio Ambasz is a New York-based architect and designer renowned for the harmonious integration of buildings in nature.

2 Coined by Philip Johnson and Henry Russell Hitchcock, the term was first used in 1932 at an exhibition organised by the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Curated by Johnson and Hitchcock, the exhibition charted architecture from 1922 to 1932; the term is often used as a synonym with the Functionalist architecture developed in Europe during the 1920s and 30s.

3 Influential architect, artist and educator, John Hejduk (1929–2000) spent most of his life in New York. Heavily influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright and Mies van der Rohe, Hejduk was widely regarded as a 'hard-line' Modernist but his later work shows elements of a freer style. He was Dean of The Cooper Union of Art and Architecture, New York, during the years 1975–2000.

4 Founded by the architectural photographer and writer, Yukio Futagawa, *GA (Global Architecture)* is an influential magazine in Japan and abroad specialising in architecture and design.

previous page
Library of a Poet, Zushi,
Kanagawa, Japan, 1991.
This was Shigeru Ban's first
permanent building made
of paper tubes.

opposite
Paper tubes—the material
which Ban developed to be
used in a structural capacity.

ENCOUNTERS WITH AALTO

TOMOKO SATO: How did you become involved in the Aalto exhibition at the Axis Gallery, Tokyo?

SHIGERU BAN: In 1983–1984, while I was a final year student at The Cooper Union, New York, I began to work with the Axis Gallery in Tokyo as a consulting curator. I proposed to the gallery three exhibitions of the artists I was interested in at the time: Emilio Ambasz, Judith Turner and Alvar Aalto.¹ Around that time, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, was touring the exhibition, *Alvar Aalto: Furniture and Glass*; I negotiated to bring the show over to Japan. The exhibition was realised at the Axis Gallery in 1986, and I curated and designed the show.

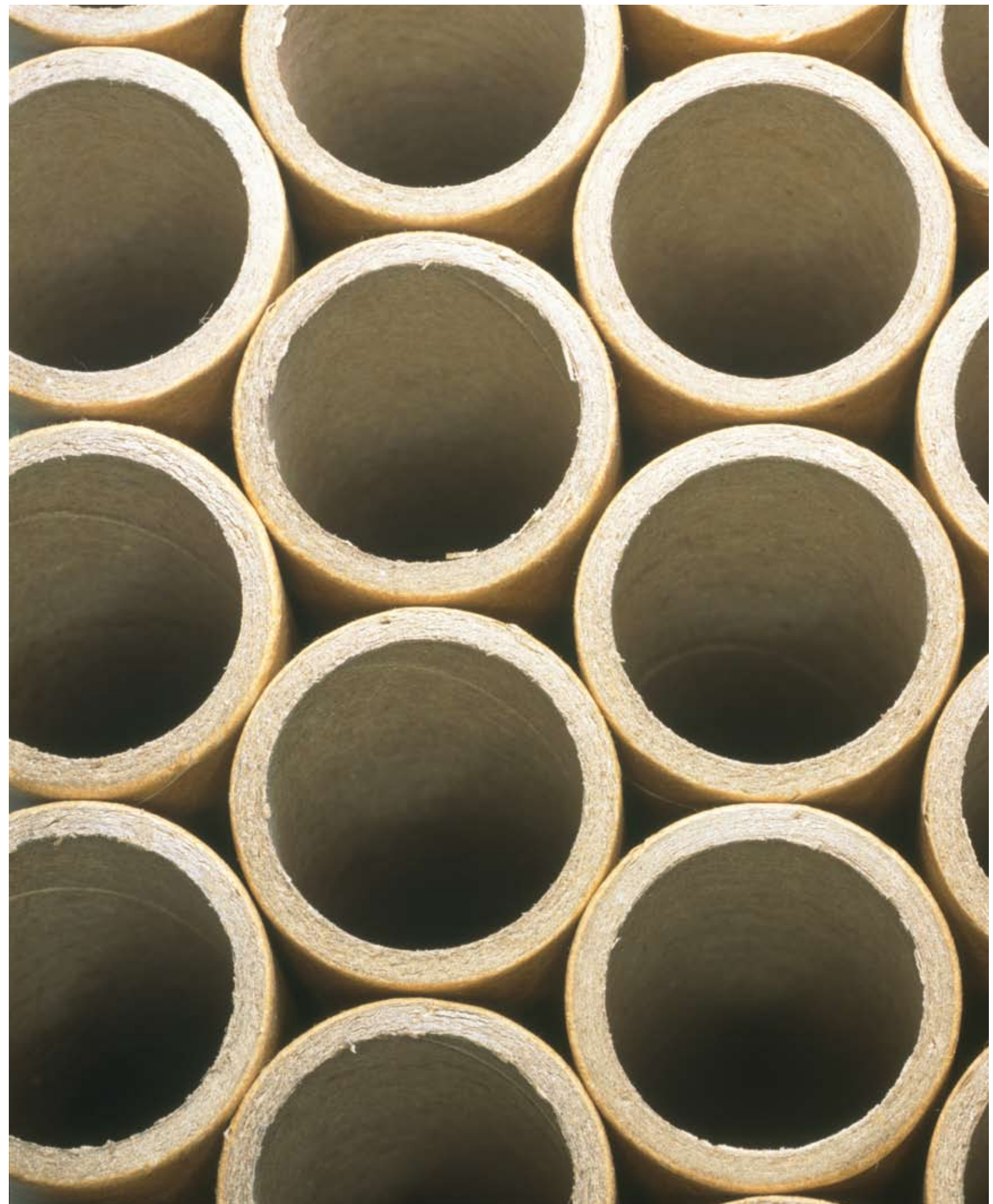
That show happened ten years after his death, in 1986. What was his standing internationally at that point? How was his work evaluated?

The Aalto show at the Axis Gallery was one of a series of exhibitions organised by the Museum of Modern Art, focusing on the key architect/designers of the twentieth century, including Charles and Ray Eames, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Marcel Breuer. Within this context we can see that Aalto was by that time already positioned as one of the masters of twentieth century architecture. In the past, he had somehow been regarded as an 'outsider' of the mainstream of Modernism dominated by the so-called International Style.² However, with the increasing awareness of the problems of 'modernisation', it became necessary to look at alternative directions: it was time to re-evaluate Aalto's approach to design, which emphasised the use of natural and local materials, as well as organic forms.

In one of your previous interviews you said "it was such a shock to discover Alvar Aalto's architecture". What was that 'discovery' and how did the encounter with Aalto impact upon your career?

As a student, to be honest, I was not very much interested in Aalto's work. At The Cooper Union, under the tutelage of John Hejduk, Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier were the two giant pillars of architecture.³ None of my colleagues talked about Aalto. I studied these two masters extensively and used their vocabulary for my work. I was, of course, aware of Aalto's work through architectural books at the time but I was not particularly impressed by the reproduced images of his buildings.

However, this all changed when I actually saw Aalto's architecture in person for the first time in 1984. After graduating from The Cooper Union, I was in Finland, working as an assistant to Yukio Futagawa, photographer and editor of *GA* magazine.⁴ In Aalto's architecture I found a space created to complement its context. It was the kind of space that one wouldn't be able to comprehend through photographs and text in a book; one would need to experience it on the spot in order to understand the quality of it.





The interior of the Odawara Pavilion. This paper structure was produced as a temporary exhibition space for the Odawara Festival, 1990.

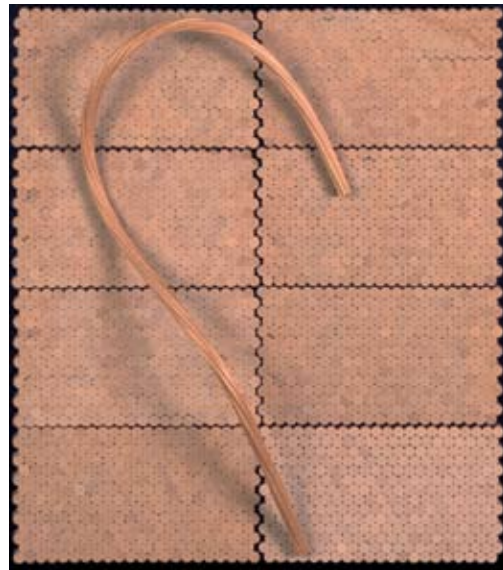
Villa K, Chino, Nagano, Japan, 1987. This is one of Ban's early buildings, in which the influence of John Hejduk's geometric style is clearly apparent.



opposite
Dressing table with three revolving drawers, as part of the bedroom suite shown at the Turku Industrial Exposition, 1929.

left
Chair, 1932, with the seat, back and arms made of a single piece of bent plywood, which was produced in a special mould.

right
Chair, 1930, with a tubular metal base and padding.



top
Experiment with bent wood,
early 1930s.

bottom
'Z-leg' chair with backrest,
1947.



top
Cantilevered 'Tank' armchair,
first shown at the Milan
Triennale, 1936.

bottom
'Paimio Chair', also
known as 'Closed-Framed'
chair, 1932.

