

Oulu City Council Grants Permission for Aalto's Silos Restoration Project in Finland

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Courtesy of Skene Catling de la Peña

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[Oulu](#) City Council [has approved the AALTOSILO restoration proposal](#) by [Skene Catling de la Peña](#). The concrete structure will be restored and reimagined as a multi-media performance, exhibition space, and “Tar Bar.” The 525 sqm Silo used to be used for storing woodchips and will now become a digitized communication point to connect the building with its surroundings. [Now nearing its 100th anniversary](#), the proposal aims to at least double its lifespan.



Seeking to create an environmental focus in the Silo, [Skene Catling de la Peña](#) imagined a building in close relationship to its surroundings. In addition to the [restoration](#) of the existing structure, discussions with the [Oulu](#) Planning department have also established outline proposals for a new 1150 sqm Research Lab. The lab's core focus is to become an architect's toolkit for sustainable construction. The research lab aims to redefine materiality for the 21st century and tackle the role of industrial heritage in collective memory.



Courtesy of Skene Catling de la Peña

Since [Oulu](#) is the [European City of Culture 2026](#), AaltoSiilo and the Research Lab are aiming to be open by that same year. The only structure designed by Aalto accessible to the public in [Northern Finland](#), the AaltoSiilo project demonstrates the significance and feasibility of repurposing existing concrete structures of industrial heritage. It presents a deconstruction approach and structural guidelines for utilizing local concrete remnants known as 'spolia.' In the spirit of the initiative, the Oulu planning department has identified the source buildings contributing to this type of concrete waste.

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Utilizing concrete 'spolia' in construction creates a unique aesthetic similar to Aalto's Muuratsalo, also known as the 'Experimental House.' This approach combines innovative recycling methods with design. Skene Catling de la Peña and Factum, in collaboration with the Universities of [Oulu](#), Helsinki, and Oslo, have also been exploring the possibilities of carbon-sequestering concrete.

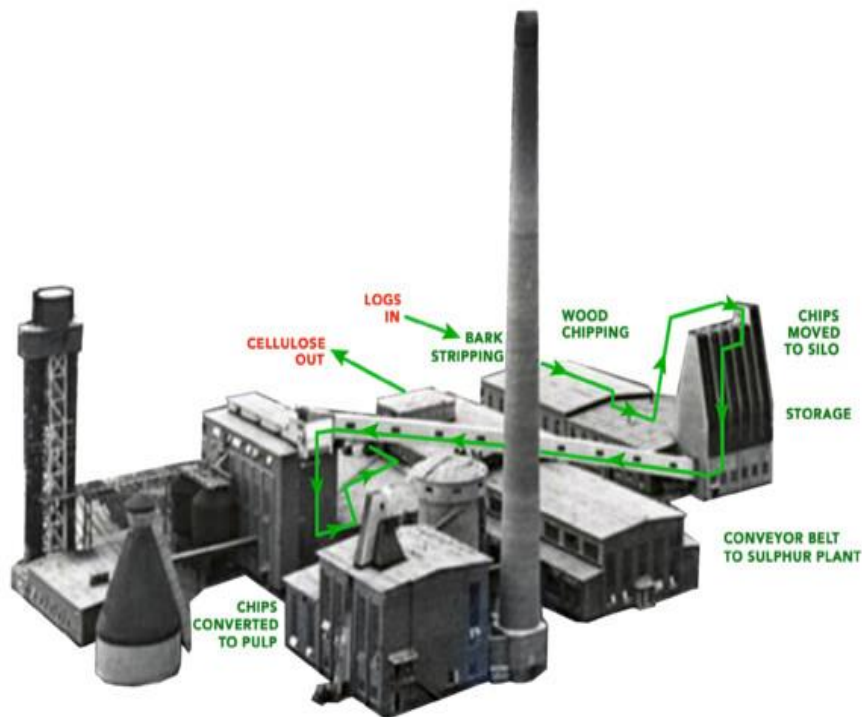
The [restoration](#) of AaltoSiilo develops a language that showcases the building's stages, from conception to deterioration, to its repair process. Furthermore, renovating the Silo interior involves repurposing all timber platforms and structures and the original doors and windows.



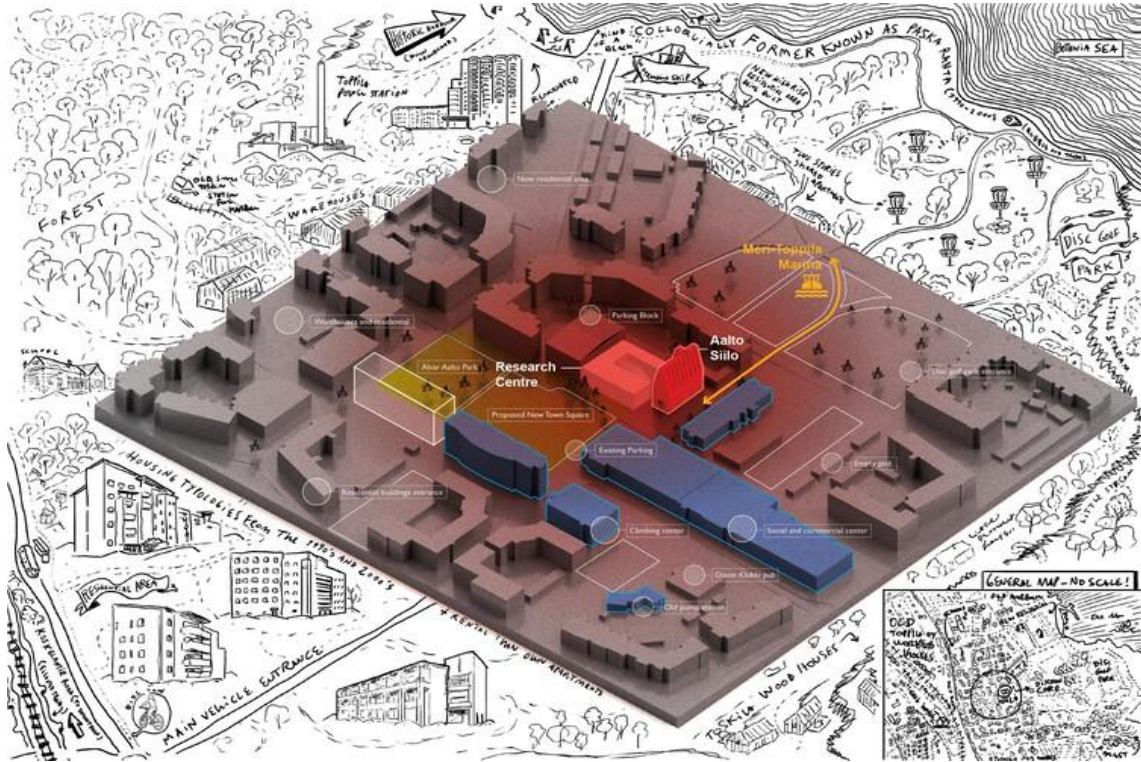
Looking up the 28m high conveyor shaft of the AaltoSiilo, the new route for visitors to the building. Image Courtesy of Skene Catling de la Peña

The AaltoSiilo will establish a dynamic, engaging environment that attracts people and fosters social interactions. The inclusion of a public sauna, cafe, rooftop 'Tar

Bar', and outdoor amphitheater ensures the availability of spaces for social encounters while maintaining economic viability. The building itself, along with its exhibitions and events, will serve as a source of pride, identity, and employment, effectively preserving cultural memory and establishing a positive new identity in the city. Furthermore, the local community will be encouraged to exchange knowledge, and technology will facilitate the development of a new generation of digital artisans. The Research Lab will provide advanced digital skills, drawing from [Factum's](#) successful model in The Valley of the Kings, Luxor, Egypt, where Hassan Fathy's mudbrick building was restored and repurposed as a 3D scanning, archiving, and training center.



Historic route taken by logs arriving by water, through their stripping, chipping, storage and breaking down into cellulose in the sulphur plant of the working Toppila Pulp Mill.. Image Courtesy of Skene Catling de la Peña



Courtesy of Skene Catling de la Peña

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