

NEW AND OLD IN HARMONY

THE MAIN BUILDING OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI



UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI



THE NEARLY 200-YEAR-OLD BUILDING HAS ALWAYS ADAPTED TO THE NEEDS OF CONTEMPORARY PEOPLE.

A NEW LAYER IN THE CONTINUUM OF HISTORY

The main building of the University of Helsinki is an essential part of the history of the capital and the national legacy of education in Finland. The older section of the building was constructed along the Senate Square in 1832, as the Imperial Alexander University was relocated from Turku to Helsinki and needed new premises for its operations. The building was designed by the architect C. L. Engel.

The Imperial University was renamed as the University of Helsinki in 1919 after Finland gained its independence. As the number of students was growing, an extension designed by the architect J. S. Sirén was built in 1937 to help with overcrowding. Low wings were constructed on the street-facing sides of the building, joining the old section with the new.

After the extension had been completed, Sirén was in charge of the renovation of the older section, which was a hundred

years old at this point. A need to renovate the older section again arose fairly soon, as the building suffered damages during the bombings of World War II. As the number of students was growing dramatically in the 1960s and 1970s, parts of the building's large lobby areas were parcelled out and turned into office spaces. A new era of massive renovations came in the 1990s, as the most extensive renovation yet was completed in the building.

Now, in the 2020s, the building is facing a new chapter, as it is undergoing a full renovation. The main building will also continue to serve as the hub for the university's activities and academic traditions after this endeavour. It is the home of most of the City Centre Campus' lecture rooms and the university's festive and conference facilities, which serve as the main stage for various celebrations and promotions inherent in the university tradition as well as for hosting seminars and conferences.

PART OF THE SENATE SQUARE ENVIRONMENT

The main building of the University of Helsinki is part of the nationally significant built cultural environment of the Senate Square. The old section of the main building forms a symmetrical pair with the Government Palace, which was completed in 1820. In 1859, the Helsinki Cathedral was the last of the buildings around the Senate Square to be completed. The University Library building, completed in 1840, is also located on the north-western side of the square. All the buildings framing the square were designed by the architect C. L. Engel.



BRINGING TECHNICAL AND FUNCTIONAL SOLUTIONS UP TO DATE

The renovation aims to improve the functionality, accessibility, and safety and security of the main building. The new solutions will bring the building up to today's standards while treasuring the architectural features and character of the premises.

The biggest transformation in the old section can be seen in the lobby on the Aleksanterinkatu side. The lobby now has two windows that display a view to the courtyard. The lobby includes furnished lounging areas and a café that will also remain open during the second phase of the renovation. Meanwhile, restoration work that has involved conserving some of the interior surfaces has been carried out in the building's most notable indoor facilities, the festive hall and the vestibule.

After the renovation, the division of the spaces will better serve the needs of building users. The restaurant and kitchen facilities are now located in the two-floor Sirén's extension wing, while some of the smaller festive halls have been combined to create larger ones.

In teaching facilities and working spaces, emphasis has been put on multi-purpose use. While the teaching facilities look unchanged, a lot of modern technology is hidden within their double wall structures. The facilities have modern audio-visual equipment and some also enable livestreaming lectures. Some spaces have also been reserved for group work, and the university is piloting different solutions in them, including co-working browsers.





ACCESSIBILITY AND CONDITIONS AT THE FOCUS

The renovation improves the accessibility of the main building in many ways. The most anticipated changes include a lift constructed on the old part of the building and a hallway that joins the southern- and northern-most parts of the building. The lift can be reached accessibly from the north courtyard entrance. Constructing the lift on the old part of the building was a highly demanding task that involved performing some drilling work in the indoor area. The technology used in the lift is hidden within the building structures.

Accessibility has also been enhanced by new toilet facilities, lighting fixtures and solutions improving acoustics. The

lecture rooms and other conference spaces have also been equipped with audio equipment and induction loops.

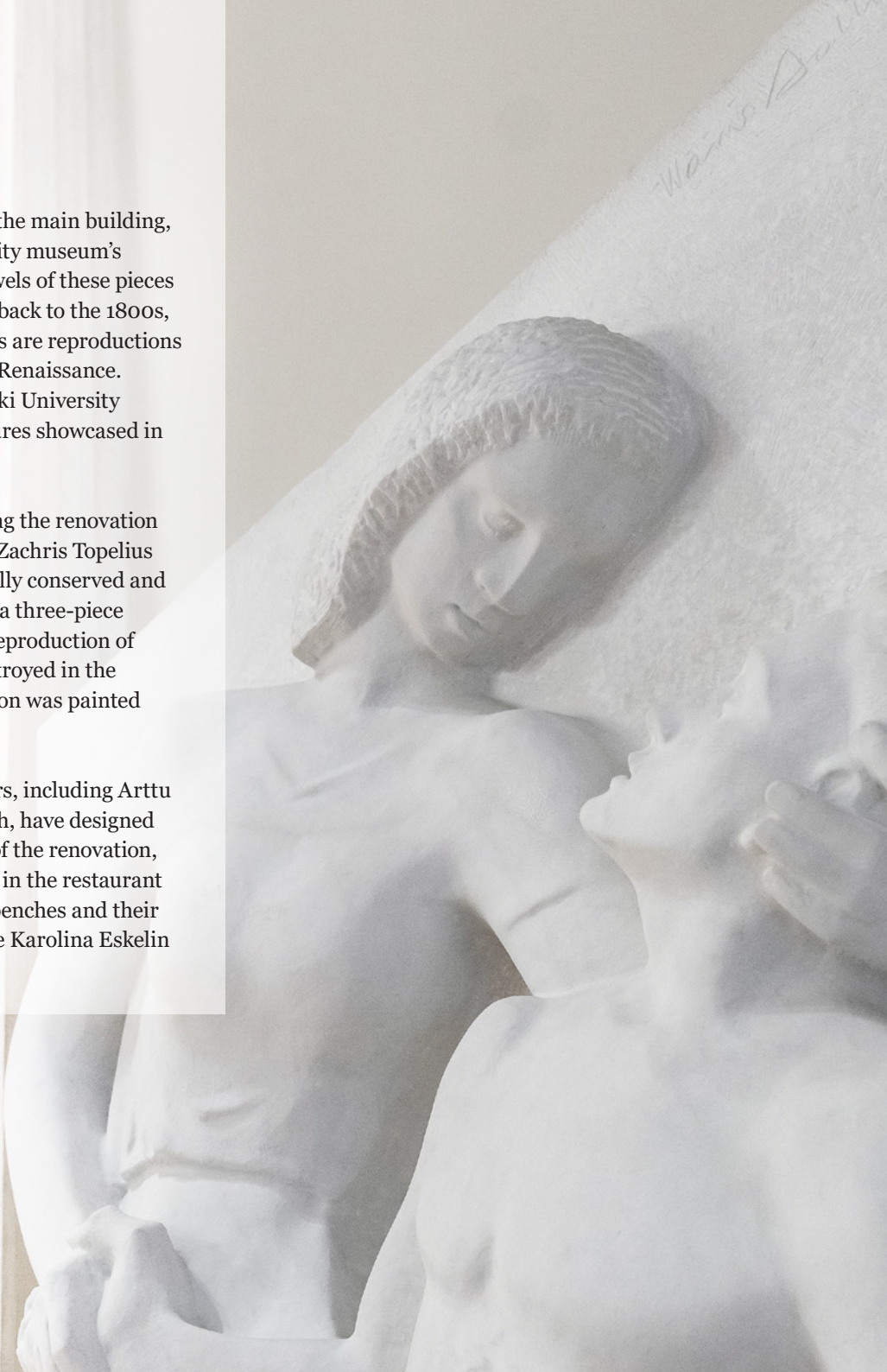
The building services engineering system of the old section has been fully updated. For example, the ventilation and cooling systems have been tailored to today's needs, which makes spending time in the premises more comfortable than before. The system was installed in a way that avoided unnecessarily penetrating the building structure. This was accomplished by encasing ventilation ducts, electrical wires and other technology in double wall structures, for instance.

ART ON DISPLAY

Numerous works of art are a fixed part of the main building, and there are also pieces from the university museum's collections in the premises. Among the jewels of these pieces is a collection of plaster sculptures dating back to the 1800s, also rare in international terms. The pieces are reproductions of sculptures from classical antiquity and Renaissance. During the renovation process, the Helsinki University Museum conserved the embrittled sculptures showcased in the vestibule of the old building section.

Other works have also been restored during the renovation project. For instance, the 1889 portrait of Zachris Topelius painted by Albert Edelfelt has been carefully conserved and will be returned to the Christina Hall and a three-piece mural to the Festive Hall. The mural is a reproduction of Edelfelt's original triptych, which was destroyed in the bombardment of Helsinki. The reproduction was painted by Johannes Gebhard.

Over the centuries, many renown designers, including Arttu Brummer, Runarg Engblom and Elli Ruuth, have designed furniture for the main buildings. As part of the renovation, these pieces of furniture have been placed in the restaurant and festive spaces. Some of the old, fixed benches and their accompanying tables have been kept in the Karolina Eskelin Hall.





THE VÄINÄMÖINEN PLAYS KANTELE RELIEF BY C. E. SJÖSTRAND ENCIRCLES THE VESTIBULE.



RESPONSIBLE BUILDING

The University of Helsinki requires for the renovation of its main building to comply with the RTS Environmental Classification criteria. RTS is a Finnish classification system that helps taking sustainability and responsibility aspects into account in all planning and construction phases. The classification shows those using the facilities that issues such as moisture control have been effective during the construction process and the choices made promote good indoor air and energy efficiency.

IMPLEMENTATION AS AN ALLIANCE PROJECT

The renovation of the University of Helsinki main building is carried out in two phases between 2019 and 2023. At the first phase, the renovation was focused on the old section and low wings of the building, which were completed in autumn 2021. The renovation of the newer section is set to be completed in 2023. There are also plans to cover the building's south-facing courtyard to create a lobby and assembly area joining the old and new parts of the building.

The highly demanding renovation is implemented as an alliance project whose partners are the Helsinki University Funds, Jeskanen-Repo-Teränne Arkkitehdit Oy and YIT Finland Ltd. As the outdoor and indoor spaces of the main building are protected under the city plan and building-specific protection orders by the Ministry of the Environment, the planning and renovation are carried out in close cooperation with the Finnish Heritage Agency.



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