

MANSION

BALANCE SHEET

A Finnish Couple's Empty-Nest Villa

The two build a minimalist home on a Turku island, and warm it up with wood and furnishings

BY J.S. MARCUS

AN EMPTY-NESTER couple on Finland's southwest coast has coaxed the coziness out of their modern home's precast concrete walls.

They warmed it up by combining their walls with oiled-oak floors, textured ceiling tiles, over-size windows and landscaping.

Kari Leino, a 50-year-old executive at Martela, the Finnish office-furniture company, and his wife, Anne-Maarit Alho-Leino, a 53-year-old marketing executive, finished their 2,314-square-foot villa in fall 2012, not long before their two daughters left for college. They made it larger than necessary, says Mr. Leino, with an eye toward reselling it later as a family home.

Set on an island in the historic city of Turku, the three-story home rests on a bluff above the Baltic Sea. The couple spend most of their time on the top floor. It features an open-plan living and dining area dominated by a huge iridescent dining table—made of concrete poured on site—and has eye-popping views of forest and sea.

The two spent about \$1.28 million—\$341,000 for the land, and \$939,400 for construction and furnishings—on the three-bedroom, 1½ bathroom villa, working with Pekka Mäki, the main partner at Sigge Architects, one of Finland's largest architecture studios.

Mr. Leino would have preferred to pour the concrete walls on site, he says, but couldn't find the expertise he demanded. As a concession, they ordered up indentations in the factory-made components, mimicking the effect left by molds.

While saving money on their walls, the couple splurged on an unlikely item—their toilets. Instead of conventional white ceramic commodes, they opted for institutional stainless-steel ones.

"The white stuff doesn't fit here," says Mr. Leino, of his sleek, gray industrial bathrooms. He says the toilets cost about \$2,800 a piece and are typically made for use in prisons and army barracks.

The couple paid a hefty premium for their lot because of its 36 feet of shoreline, says Mr. Leino. They saved on landscaping by finding someone to cut down trees in exchange for wood.

Enough was left over to supply the family with firewood for a decade, adds Mr. Leino.

Mr. Leino further saved on landscaping by doing some of labor himself, including moving tons of rocks, by bucket, from one side of the property to down around the pier. It took him four weeks, he says.



FINNISH LINE The \$1.28 million, 2,314-square-foot villa, above, rests on a lot with a 36-foot shoreline on the Baltic Sea. Right, from top: a low sofa and shag rug warm a 'cavelike' living room; a 'must-have' sauna; the master bedroom with acoustic tiles that cut down on echoes.



FELIX ODELL FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (G. BOTTOM EXTERIOR IS A COMPOSITE)



ISLANDERS Kari Leino and Anne-Maarit Alho-Leino, left, built their home as their daughters prepared for college. Center, from top: one of the two \$2,800 toilets; the home's exterior of precast concrete walls. Right, the iridescent dining table is made of concrete poured on site.

The sloping lot now has five sitting areas, some of which combine concrete elements with similarly colored gray boulders, making the concrete seem as natural as stone.

"I wanted to minimize the number of colors and materials," says Mr. Leino, who oversees design projects at Martela and took an active role in the design of his house.

On the top floor, the closest thing to decoration is a candelabra resting on a concrete cabinet that hides a sound system. Instead of art, the two make do with the views of nature, visible on all four sides.

In the living area, a funky Danish shag carpet also warms up the cold concrete walls, and a low, oblong Danish sofa lends atmosphere. The black-leather piece was an early purchase in the project. Mr. Leino says the space needed the unusually low sofa to play off the relatively low ceiling, which the couple chose for its "cavelike" effect.

The second-story bedrooms are less than 175 square feet—small, but not by Finnish standards, says Mr. Leino. Finns think of bedrooms as a place to sleep rather than relax, he says. The top two floors get a much-needed muffling affect, from

textured acoustic tiles from Austria.

Mr. Mäki is known for his acclaimed public buildings, such as Finland's wooden-clad Berlin embassy, opened in 1999. He occasionally does villas, but rarely has a client as involved as Mr. Leino.

"It was really fun for me," says the 46-year-old, based in Turku.

Mr. Mäki says he suggested the wood floors, as opposed to the concrete ones Mr. Leino had imagined. And Mr. Leino proposed altering Mr. Mäki's original layout, which put the three levels in a crisscross pattern—later rotated to align the top two floors. (The bot-

tom entrance level has storage, utilities and a gym area.) Mr. Mäki describes the kitchen, which has no overhead cabinets, as "macho."

The couple bought the property in 2010, and spent two years planning the villa in exacting detail. "I felt at home immediately," says Ms. Alho-Leino.

Now that they've settled in, they are daydreaming about their next project. "When we retire in 15 years, we will sell this and move to Italy," Mr. Leino says.

He says he already has a house planned. Meanwhile, the two have started Italian lessons.



COSTS

Construction
\$287,000

Landscaping,
including pier
\$61,000

Heating/Electricity
\$138,000

Prefab walls/tiles
\$283,700

Bathrooms
\$20,700

Oak floors
\$31,000

Kitchen/table
\$27,000

Furnishings
\$46,000

Architect
\$45,000

TOTAL
\$939,400

THE SPLURGE

The couple decided to spend big on stainless-steel, institutional-grade toilets that cost about \$2,800 a piece.