

insider tip

From walls to accessories, stick to a limited palette of colours in a smaller room – you'll get a far greater sense of space if the colours flow throughout



a home in the life

'Work for me is a pastime'

The Finnish designer Eero Aarnio is well known for his innovative furniture, particularly the Bubble Chair, which he admits is one of the best items in his house – he has two of them

Q How did you come to live in this house?

A Well, I designed and built it myself. This is our 17th home but I don't know if it will be our last one. The house is built around an oak tree, you might say. They are rather rare here in Finland. It was the only tree on the lot and I wanted to save it. The idea of the design started and flowed from that tree. The lot slopes down to the lake and so does the house. This was the second house I designed from start to finish. It's simple and its functional.

You seem to have achieved a tension, a contrast between the simplicity and functionality of the interior and the rocks, trees and water just beyond the glass. My first thought when I saw this site was what a wonderful view there is here; I've got to build a house of glass. Because of the road and a neighbour two sides are shut off but, towards the south and the west, this house is glass from floor to ceiling. It brings nature inside and takes me out into it. It creates a kind of drama. And, since nature is so beautiful, so colourful and diverse, everything in here is simple and white. Both black and white create such good backgrounds for all other colours. Everything here is white, not because white is my colour of choice, but because all the other colours are what I really want to see. Colours are so fabulous.

What is your own favourite space in this house?

You can almost always find me there at my drafting table. Work for me is a pastime. It's just fun. The table is where the technical work takes place. Actually, I tend to wander around. The real work, the creative part, takes place here and there, while I sit and gaze out over the lake, or in bed before I get up in the morning. I visualise my designs very vividly. I have a computer but the fastest computer is my head and my pencil. I carry them around here all the time.

And the space your guests favour?

First-time guests tend to gravitate towards the sofa in the living room. It's in the middle of everything. However, in our daily life we have a lot of close friends who are good cooks, who drop by in the evenings and we whip up something to eat and



Eero Aarnio's house has hooks in several places to hang his Bubble chairs from. 'I tend to move them around, even put them outside. Right now they are hanging in the entrance hall.' Henrik Kettunen / The National

sit in the kitchen and talk and enjoy ourselves while the rest of the house stands empty. Maybe its like that in most families, that the kitchen is the place for friendship and warmth.

Do you have an object or piece of furniture here that has special meaning for you, some special attraction?

I always say that my favourite object is the next one that I will design. I get excited about new designs and my mind and thoughts revolve around them. Having said that, I'll admit that one of the best items in this house is my Bubble Chair. I have two

of them and there are hooks here and there to hang them from. I tend to move them around, even put them outside. Right now they are hanging in the glassed-in entrance hall.

Is this house, this environment, reflected in your work?

Not directly but, perhaps, in a way. My work is about creativity. This house, any house, should grow out of its surroundings and be an organic part of what's around it. There is no one single right way to build a house and no house can be designed to fit into just any landscape. It also has to be suitable for the individual

family and for their activities. Functionality is terribly important in both architecture and in many of my designs. But my ball chair was designed when we lived in a tiny flat. I've found that the surroundings don't make a big difference. Still, for the way I live, I want to make sure that when there's half a metre of freshly fallen snow, I can get to the garage with as little shovelling as possible.

You said this may not be your last house. Do you have a dream house? Oh, my dream house today is completely different, a lot wilder in

concept and more rustic than this one. The centrepiece of my dream house is a massive fireplace, like in a castle, built of field stone. The house, and life in it, would revolve around the fireplace. I love the old castles of central Europe. I'd use lots of massive wooden beams. I fail to understand why architects here in Finland don't seem to comprehend what a wonderful material wood is. This house, though, is very logical, very sensible, very functional. That's what I wanted. Most of the furnishings are my own designs, starting from the bookcases right through to decorative pieces.

What makes a house into a home for you?

My wife, Pirkko. We are at home wherever we are together. The smallest home we've had was just twelve square metres of floor space. We had a bed, my drafting table and Pirkko's loom. We have always discussed furnishings, even though I'm the professional in the family. My wife has always been my first critic and my first client. Many an idea of mine has ended up in the waste-paper bin thanks to her.

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