

Oodles of space

The Oodi Library in Helsinki is not only an imposing building but is also home to a fabulous series of artist-designed rugs, reports **Karen Burshtein**



Photo: Thomas Uusheimo



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Matti Pikkujämsä

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Marika Maijala

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The Helsinki Central Library opened in December 2018 and has quickly become a major attraction for locals and visitors. Oodi (Finnish for Ode) Library is noted for its daring design (a spruce-clad undulating building) and equally provocative ideas about what a library is: there are relatively few books, all relegated to the top floor, a.k.a. Book Heaven. The rest of the space is used for activities such as makers' studios, 3-D printing workshops, and sewing centres. Its progressive ideas were rewarded when Oodi won the 2019 Public Library of the Year award by the World Library and Information Congress of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions.

The central idea is that the library should work as a kind of civic sitting room, welcoming all to hang out in the middle of the city. People lounge around on Eero Aarnio's Space-Age *Ball* chairs, or on plush settees. And, like all good living rooms, this one has fine carpets. Indeed one of the most intriguing concepts of Oodi is its collection of seven fine, elegant carpets, each designed by a prominent Finnish designer or artist. The carpets share a common theme: famous Finnish writers or single works of literature. Each one also designates a specific area in the library.

Laura Merz's rug is an homage to iconic Finnish author Tove Jansson, creator of the beloved

children's Moomin series. Though she's a children's book illustrator, Merz focused her carpet design on Jansson's sexually liberated outlook, a provocation in its day. Aamu Song and Johan Olin's red and mauve-toned carpet artwork is based on Aleksis Kivi's Memorial Cottage in Tuusula. 'Walking on the rug gives you a glimpse into Finland in the 19th century,' the designers said.

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Designer Piia Keto's carpet is an homage to the author Minna Canth and focuses on women's role in handicraft. In her design, the end of ribbon turns into a fire-breathing dragon. Sakke Yrjölä's striking work is inspired by the rhymes describing the mythical powers of the northern pike in a swath of symbolism-meets-romanticism. Jenni Rope's rug was inspired by Mika Waltari and his 1929 travel book *Lonely Man's Train*. Matti Pikkujämsä's rug depicts the Finnish poet, author and translator Pentti Saarikoski.

Though they are woven works of fine art, the carpets are hardly cordoned off from the public. Visitors are invited to use them in any way that

makes their reading experience comfortable. You see people sitting on the carpets or curling up with their kids to read a book.

It might make a fine carpet connoisseur uneasy to see these luxury pieces used so freely in such a public space, but it's in keeping with the Finnish tradition of treating carpets as well-loved household items; Finns take pride in the patina that comes from wear. Carpets are often passed down in families. (Finland actually has carpet cleaning stations around its lake and seashore lines.)

The Oodi carpets are 80% wool and 20% polyamide, making them durable as well as inviting. They were hand-tufted by artisans from northern India and were made in cooperation with the designers, and Koolmat Finland, and produced by German luxury carpet manufacture Kymo's custom service The Atelier.

Kymo's designers Eva Langhans and Katharina Tannous worked with the Oodi designers at all stages of the design process, bringing to life colour, pattern and story while maintaining high manufacturing standards. Kymo's managing director Denis Türker said: 'It fills me with pride when I walk through this wonderful library and see how our carpets make their own contribution.' As they have throughout history, the carpet artisans use carpet design to tell a story: this time it's a story of a fascinating, next-generation library.

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