A Glimpse of Helsinki
Christian Strauf
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The Dilemma of a Passerby — a Foreword

I am not a person who travels frequently. But from time to time I have the opportunity to go to places for a short time that I would not go to otherwise. Visiting a city for a small timespan is not a good way to get to know both city and people. This is what I call the „Dilemma of a Passerby“. I would never lead someone to believe that I know a place because I have been there for a day or two. At most I got a glimpse of the location. I decided to start a series of zines about those glimpses of places that I have visited. They are not and will never be comprehensive and they are not meant to be. They show what I saw in the short period of time that I visited a place. They do not necessarily show the usual tourist attractions or sites that you are used to see in travel magazines (though they might, who knows). I hardly ever have the opportunity to wait for the best light or the best weather to shoot my pictures. I am a passerby. I merely take a glimpse. And I am starting with A Glimpse of Helsinki.

Technicalities

Everything you see in this zine is shot on film. Film is my favourite medium. It slows me down in a good way. It makes me think about light and composition. It is as organic as the sounds and smells of the place that I document with it. I used my Canon F-1 (manufactured between 1976 and 1981) with two lenses, the Canon 35mm f/2 and the Canon 85mm f/1.8. All images are shot on Fomapan 400, very often with an orange filter.

Thank you for joining me

Come and join my short trip to Helsinki. I hope that you enjoy this short excursion to the lovely capital city of Finland.

C. Strauf
The City of Islands and Sea

The most notable feature of Helsinki is that it is not only a seaside city, it comprises of several islands which adds to the feeling that you are on the seaside all of the time. A constant sea breeze seems to fill the city. A lot of the city’s life takes place near the sea. You can have a drink or a meal near the water and roam the several different harbours that can be found all around the city. I enjoyed the wideness and the calmness that the sea adds to the city.
A Ride to Suomenlinna
Due to the maritime nature of Helsinki it is no wonder that ferries belong to the public transport system. Do not spend your money on an expensive tourist boat tour. Just grab the public ferry to Suomenlinna for a few euros and enjoy the sights you can see from the water and maybe even meet locals and have a chat with them. I hardly ever photograph people because I do not want to invade their privacy. However, on the ferry to Suomenlinna I had a quick chat with Tiina who allowed me to take her photo in the evening sun.
The Skyline of Helsinki

While most cities boast with a very characteristic skyline, Helsinki seems to be more modest. The only widely visible characteristic features you can make out from the seaside are the beautiful Helsingin tuomiokirkko, the white cathedral, and maybe also the Sky Wheel and very few others. Does this make Helsinki less attractive? I do not think so. On the contrary. There are no skyscrapers, there are no obtrusive landmarks that force themselves on your view of the city. I like it. This makes Helsinki loveable and modest.
The Little Things
It is always the little things that catch my eye. On the evening that I went to Suomenlinna I found a cat that rode in its box in the cargo net of a pushchair and a bike that was parked in a naughty way. What do you think the person abandoning the can of Fizz was doing? Did he or she attach a padlock next to the others? Who knows…

Cat passenger

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„No bike parking”

Fizz
The Look of the City

Helsinki has a very particular look. Its buildings seem to be on average six stories high, very seldom are they higher. The buildings’ architecture spans all ranges between Neoclassicism, Art Nouveau and Functionalism. There are also parts with very modern architecture but I always had the impression that there is no harsh mix of styles that would strain an observer’s eyes. Most quarters that I visited gradually change architectural styles as you wander through them with the odd exception. People may find the architectural uniformity in some parts boring, I find it very calming. I particularly like the brick stone buildings around the city.
The sea gull watcher

Bricks’n’bike
C. Strauf

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View from Senaatintori
Around Uspenskin katedraali

The Uspenskin katedraali is a brick church that is located on the Katajanokka island. It is said to be one of the largest orthodox churches in western Europe. It is an impressive building with its 13 cupolas with golden tips. Since it is located on a large rock it is towering over the surrounding area, making it an easily visible landmark. Katajanokka itself has a yacht harbour. On your way from Kauppator to the yacht harbour you walk along a line of lovely brick buildings which house bars and restaurants.
The roof of the Uspenskin katedraali

Reflections
Valtioneuvoston kanslia

Helsingin tuomiokirkko
The Final Word

I thoroughly enjoyed creating this zine. Very often I have the feeling that, even though they are short and fleeting moments, the glimpses that we have of places are precious and we need to conserve the memories. Chances are that we will not go there anymore or if we go there, the place might have changed significantly. I tried to conserve my impressions of Helsinki in this zine. I hope that you enjoyed the images.

— Christian Strauf
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