

Alvar Aalto and Jean-Jacques Baruël

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Introduction

Alvar Aalto has a prominent place among modern architecture's masters and his widely acclaimed work spanning the decades between 1921 and 1976, with classicist beginnings, a functionalist period and a maturity characterized by the search for a synthesis between tradition and modernity is extraordinary, not only on account of its, but also because of the instruments, methods and reflections about the design process that his works offered: Aalto's architecture, all too frequently contemplated as a purely personal architecture, contains deep-rooted lessons and even its organic approach, if wisely applied, is transmissible.

Aalto's dedicated explorations and refining of significant universal themes in architecture provides an enormous resource for architects in the future. His timeless organic approach to design, rather than historic style ensures his continued relevance.

This article explores Aalto's influence on the career of the Danish Architect Jean-Jacques Barué. The article is divided in several sections. Firstly, the article present briefly Jean-Jacques Barué's career. Secondly, the article will introduce the main distinctive characteristics of Jean-Jacques Barué's architecture and Aalto's influence. It does not to attempt to describe his extensive work and projects, but to point out the central elements in his efforts. There are many ideas in Jean-Jacques Barué's work, which are developed through his works and projects and are presented in this article in four main themes: the light, the piazzeta, the landscapes, the architectonic landscapes and the amphitheatres, exemplified by selected projects.

Jean-Jacques Barué

This research explores Aalto's influence on the Danish Architect Jean Jacques Barué, 1923-2010, who worked in Aalto's office in Helsinki from 1948 to 1954. This research also explores the sources of Jean-Jacques Barué's inspiration and Nordic background with particular regard to Aalto's architecture and provides, also as a tribute, an insight into Barué's work and also his competition proposals as a whole that summarize his lyrical and tenacious career.

Jean-Jacques Barué was born in 1923 in Aarhus, Denmark¹. He studied architecture with Kay Fisker and Edvard Thomsen at the Royal Academy Copenhagen in the forties, a time at which Functionalism style of the early thirties had by now replaced by a functional tradition, a term coined by Professor Kay Fisker as a particular distinction from the Functionalist movement.

As one of the Danish's leading architects of the second half of the twentieth century along with Arne Jacobsen, Jørn Utzon, Wilhelm Wøhlert and Jørgen Bo, Erik Christian Sørensen, Halldor Gunnløgsson, Knud Friis and Elmar Moltke Nielsen or Knud Peter Harboe, Jean Jacques Barué significance is largely due to three major achievements: the Aalborg Art Museum, 1958-72 that illustrates the influential collaboration with Alvar Aalto and his masterworks the Nyköping Town Hall, 1960-1969 and Sønderborg School, 1961-68 both built during his independent practice.



Jean Jacques Barué with Tatjana Mironow, Alvar Aalto and Elissa Aalto at the opening of Aalborg Art Museum.

Danish architects at Aalto's office

In 1948 Aalto's work was presented at the exhibition held in Copenhagen and Professor Edvard Thomsen wrote an article at the Danish Journal *Arkitekten* about Aalto's working method: "One hardly finds a school by building on impressions of nature. Too few people have such talents. If one asks whether Asplund or Aalto is more suitable for forming a school, the answer is not difficult. For it is a special Aalto quality that is important in that respect - it is his working method, inasmuch as he goes to work from the bottom, seeks the preconditions for everything, functionally and technically, then freely forms and creates".²

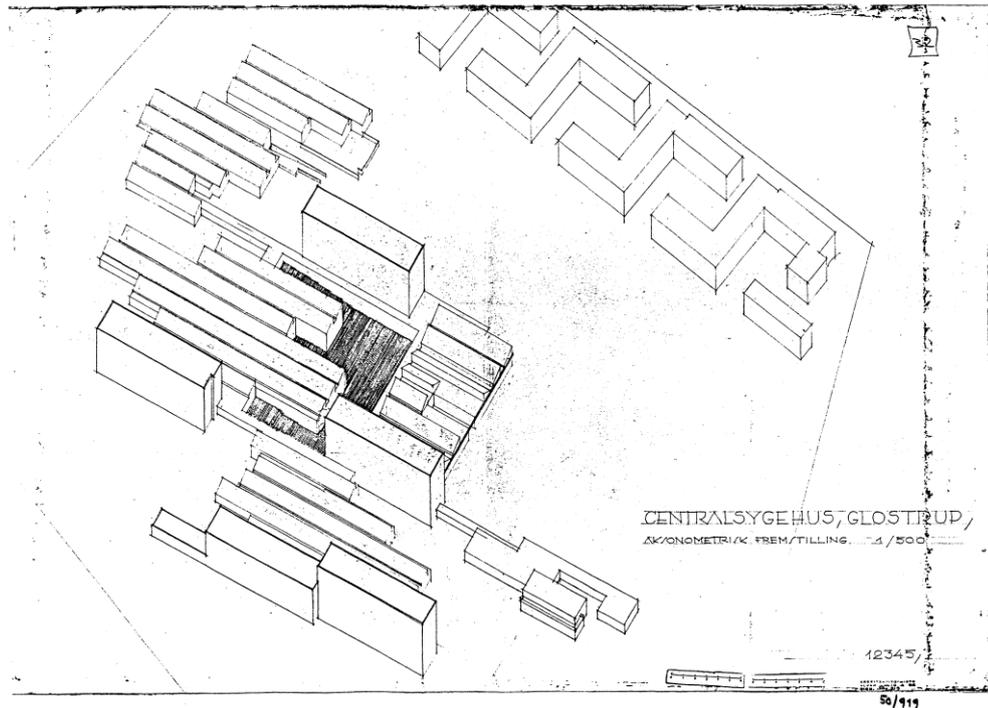
After graduating in 1948 from the Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen and with the support of Professor Edvard Thomsen,³ Jean-Jacques Barué worked in Aalto's office in Helsinki from 1948 to 1954. Barué aroused promptly a deeper understanding of Aalto's way of thinking and his working method. Furthermore, as Göran Schildt recalls, "Their obvious temperamental similarities soon made them friends."

The basic idea of Aalto's humanism rationalism has widely and fruitfully affected the thinking of the next generation of architects. A few Danish architects worked previously at Aalto's office, as Eva and Nils Koppel and Jørn Utzon who was working briefly in 1945. The synthesis between tradition and modernity developed by Aalto influenced Jørn Utzon professional career. Without Aalto his buildings would have been very different. Between Denmark and Finland in the 1950s and 1960s many lines of influence went both ways. It is not difficult to find in the works of many modern architects features that reflect the influence of Alvar Aalto's thinking.

Barué works at Aalto's office in Helsinki

At Aalto's office, Barué worked firstly in the competition project for the National Pensions Institute in Helsinki 1948-57 and the Technical University in Otaniemi 1949-67. Barué firmly adhered to most of Aalto's principles and way of working. Jean Jacques Baruel aroused promptly a deeper understanding of Aalto's way of thinking and his working method.

Alvar Aalto participated a few times in architectural competitions in Sweden together with Albin Stark and in Denmark together with Jean-Jacques Barué. In 1950 Aalto took part in the competition to design Glostrup City Hospital in Denmark. The various volumes attend the demand from the competition brief for possible future expansion of the building. Aalto and Barué respond to the need for flexibility by devising a plan composed of a *mat*-building scheme articulated with multi-storey wings of massive load-bearing brick walls. "The jury did not like the presentation of the project because was not fully completed" recalls Barué.

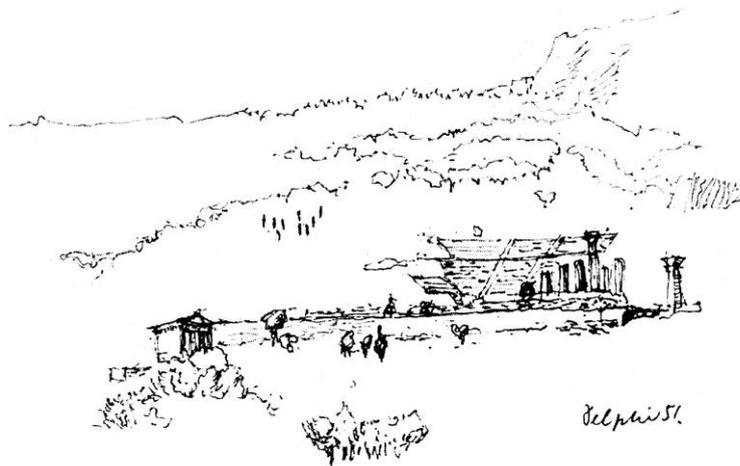


Alvar Aalto. Competition proposal for the Glostrup City Hospital in Denmark, 1950.

Travel sketches

The deep interest of Aalto by the nature and the landscape is accentuated by his trips to the Mediterranean. In his projects, the amphitheatres are a clear reference to the Antiquity and the images of the Acropolis and of Italian hills towns constitute a constant reference in his projects. "I always have a trip to Italy in my mind" recalls Aalto continuously.

Recommended by Aalto, in 1951, Baruël won a scholarship for a study trip to the Mediterranean from the vernacular architecture of Algeria to classical architecture in Greece, Egypt and Italy. Travels sketches illustrates Baruël interest on landscape. Baruël recalls: "I was not interested in the capitals. I was interested in how the buildings were placed in the landscape."



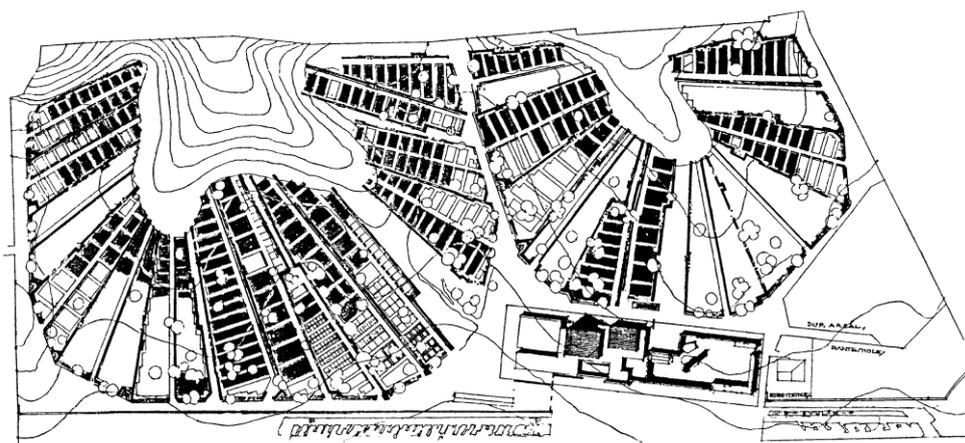
Jean-Jacques Barué travel sketch from Delphi, 1951.

Lyngby cemetery and chapel

Aalto was supremely aware of the site; he fully realized and appreciated the power and beauty of the Lyngby site for the project for the cemetery and the chapel in Lyngby⁴.

Aalto's entry called "Città dei morti" was awarded Second Prize⁵. "The project is based on the terrain as it is" wrote Aalto and Barué presenting the competition project. Aalto's sketch defines the "valleys of the dead" on two existing small dales and the chapel is laid out like an acropolis at the crown of the landscape. A combination of building volumes and terraced earth creates an architectonic landscape. Aiming to transform the place into a built landscape, the proposal pays special attention to the organization of the gravesites, with paths and itineraries, placing special emphasis on its natural condition, and to intensify its lyrical meaning. The arrangement of the graveyard in two dales defines a natural amphitheatre built in the landscape.

A composition drawn from Nordic and Mediterranean landscape tradition of ritual paths leading up to the main chapel and burial archetypes is completed with a water system: "The basic idea behind the plan is a combination of a path system, and parallel to the paths, a flowing water system at terrain level." The water system is a romantic allegory for the flow of life that accompanies the visitors and the funeral corteges in an evocative reference to an historic tradition; but also a conservation aspect as an irrigation system for the gravesites.



Alvar Aalto and Jean-Jacques Barué. Competition proposal for the Lyngby cemetery and chapel, 1951.

Aalto envisaged a sublime architectonic landscape, rich in spirit and meaning, as the narrative of death exerts itself as the water system, “the water of life”, “the Dale of Urns” and the “Città dei morti”. Aalto wrote in the competition report: “As the competition is in-two parts, the author submits two alternatives first and foremost to test different chapel types on the same general plan”. The chapels are the alternatives “A” and “B”.

In the alternative “A”, each chapel is oriented towards the intimate sections of the cemetery, “the Dale of Urns” to facilitate the processional ceremonies along intimate paths that have to leave from the ceremony courtyards of the chapel to come to most of the gravesites sections.

In the second version alternative “B”, the whole complex called “Città dei morti” is clustered by high white walls. Within its enclosed form the proposal has two reception courtyards, one for each chapel, where funeral-guest can gather so that two funeral can occur simultaneously. The two chapels have separate entrances and independent ceremonial patios to permit simultaneous funeral services that do not interfere with each other’s intimacy. These courtyards or ceremonial room were linked to the movement of the cortege towards the burial “valleys”. The chapel marks the beginning of an itinerary whose most significant point is “the Dale of Urns”.

Aalto had in Asplund’s Woodland Crematorium (1935-40) in Stockholm a model for how to use walls, plantings, and separate entrances to conduct ceremonies in several chapels simultaneously. The closed forecourt where participants can gather and prepare for the rite of burial was conceived in an early proposal for Jyväskylä funeral chapel (1930) and developed in the competition entry for Malmi funeral chapel in Helsinki (1950) where three funeral chapels were grouped around a lower service building on basement level with large mortuary cremation furnaces and an elevator to the catafalques in the various chapels.

The Lyngby chapels were to be clad in white ceramic material in combination with sandstone around the fenestration and other major features. In each chapel, the masterful handling of natural light characterizes the inner space. In the major chapel, a diffuse light filtered by a series of lattices creates a lyrical effect. In the minor chapel, the catafalque becomes the focus of the interior space where the light from a skylight has a direct and dramatic effect on it.

Independent practice

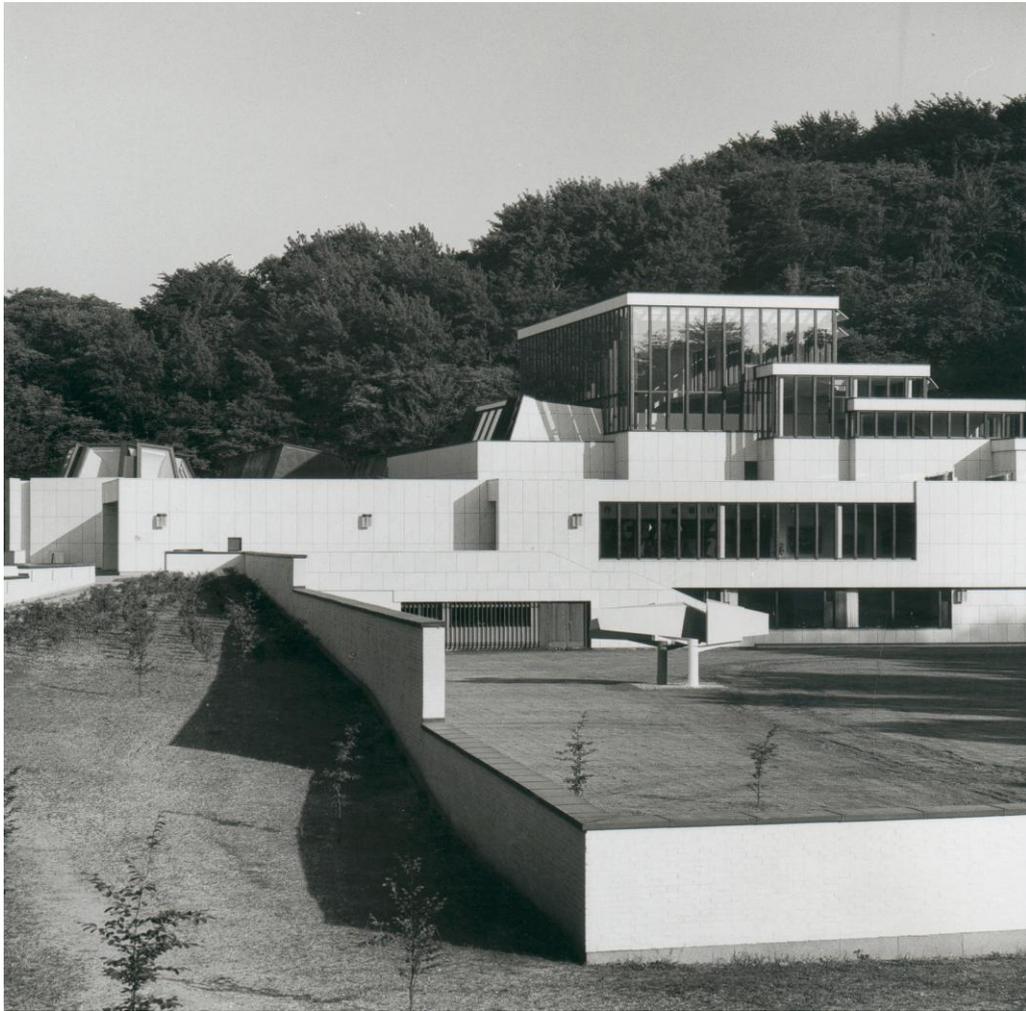
In 1954 Barué set up as an independent architect in Denmark. Having fully developed a vocabulary and a palette of recourses from Aalto's office, Barué applied these during the 1950s and 1960s and the competitions, most of them not built, took up a large part of his career.

Barué explained: "Because as it almost never succeeded it was necessary to try next. Barué although destined and proud to be forever associated with Aalto; his independent practice continued throughout his career and involved frequent collaborations with other architects as Paul Niepoort.

Light spaces

Barué seized by a desire to work again with his former boss once again for the competition for the Aalborg Art Museum 1958-1972. Barué explained: "When the competition started, first I went to Aalborg to see the place, and then I went to Finland to ask Aalto if he wanted to take part in the competition. We discussed it and we came to some conclusions. Then I went home and I did the drawings of the competition and sent to him. He was very busy at that time, building some other big things. This time we won the first prize" explained Baruel.

The jury appreciates its geometric rigor and formal clarity and described the proposal as "perfectly situated in relation to the access roads from the city and it is beautifully integrated into characteristic site. The plan holds a lot of fine details in a very personal unity full of character, making the visit a splendid experience."



Alvar Aalto and Jean-Jacques Barué. Aalborg Art Museum, 1958-71.

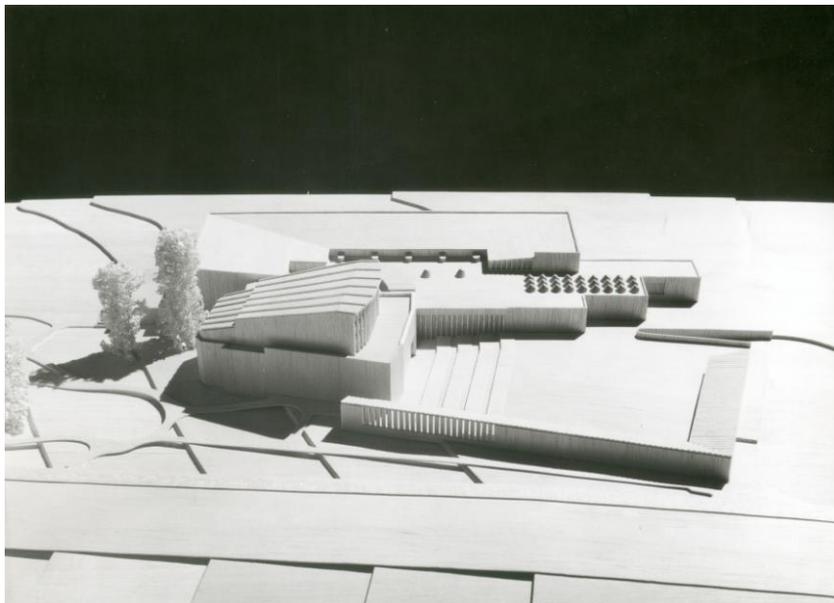
Jean Jacques Barué has explained us that the building “has the shape of a stepped pyramid, rising from the bottom of the valley at the only point in Kong Christians Allé from where the whole site is visible. The intention is that the outlines of the pyramid should form a contrast to the wooded slopes of the surrounding country.”⁶

A complex network of rooms with exhibition spaces of various sizes is grouped around a high exhibition gallery characterized by the sequence of skylights. Aalto and Barué wrote in the competition that “Light to an art museum means the same thing as acoustics to a concert hall.”

Piazzetta

Opening the building's inner spatiality towards the landscape through a defined courtyard space as a spatial transitional figure is a theme which Aalto has developed in his public buildings as Säynätsalo Town Hall 1949-52 or in his own refuge built at Muurtasalo 1953. The piazza remained a central motive to Aalto.

The courtyard open to the landscape as a gathering form was also developed by Jean-Jacques Barué in his proposals for the Gold Medal competition project for a Museum of Art in Copenhagen located in Copenhagen, in his Lyngby High School 1957 and Køge High School 1960 and finally built at Sønderborg High School 1961-68.



Jean-Jacques Barué. Sønderborg High School 1961-68.

The use of the partially enclosed courtyard defines the spatial balance of the courtyard space mediating between open and closed form. The courtyard space, which is the "interior landscape" of the building, has a changeable character respectively as an interior and an exterior and becomes the articulation of the interior spatiality with nature. Therefore the open courtyard becomes an outdoor room and a piece of captured nature.

The *piazza* of Roskilde Town Hall competition proposal 1968 also enhances the transition between the building and the landscape as a way of grounding the building in the place. As Barué has explained, *piazzetta* is "a small square connected to a big square" and refers to the traditional Italian *piazza* of small dimensions. This ancient gathering form offers a paradigm of public space, the *piazza*.

His continuous participation in competitions, expressed in fine drawings and models, helped him to develop his own architectural ideas. Trained in Aalto's office, Jean-Jacques Baruël started out by practicing independently generally in an Aalto's spirit whose influence led him toward organic architecture that characterizes his design method. Baruël's buildings and projects from the 1950s and 1960s are evidence of the continuous development of Aalto's legacy.

The architectonic landscape

The architectonic landscape is another device of Aalto's work. In many of his architectural compositions as Säynätsalo Town Hall 1949-52 combine building volumes and terraced earth to create an image of a landscape in miniature. Images of the Acropolis and of Italian hill towns were a recurrent motive. Jean-Jacques Baruël and Paul Niepoort won the competition for Nyköping Town Hall, 1960-69. The stepped volume, the courtyard and high council chamber evokes the Säynätsalo scheme and also the Seinäjoki Town Hall 1961-1965.

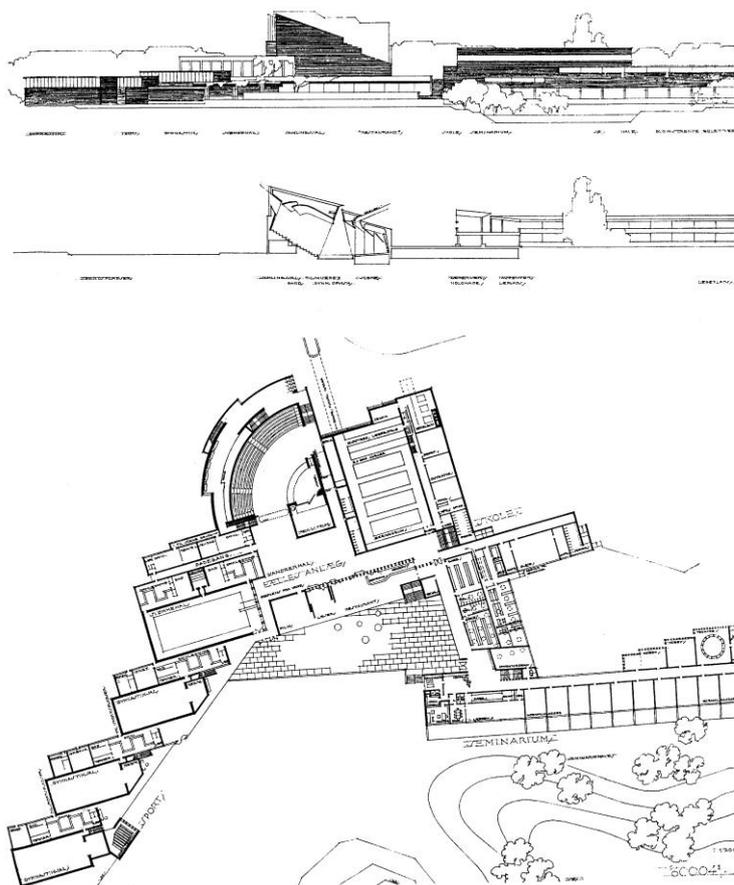


Jean-Jacques Baruël. Nyköping Town Hall, 1960-69.

“I remember when I came there and saw it, I thought there were some low buildings and I saw there is a hole here and big church tower. So it must be something that comes up and I decided that the main element should be there in order to balance this diagonal” recalls Barué about Nyköping Town Hall.⁷

Amphitheatres

The amphitheatre as a place for informal gathering appears as a recurrent motif in Aalto's work. The main building at Technical University of Helsinki, Otaniemi 1953-66 is characterized by the main auditorium with its fan-shaped plan and its sloping roof in the form of a grandstand contrast with the orthogonality of the other structures of the university complex. The external amphitheatre is the project's visual focus and tension point; and the motif is further developed by Jean-Jacques Barué's in his competition proposals for the Odense High School and for the World Exhibition in Amager in the 1960s. The outdoor amphitheatre becomes an architectonic landscape artefact describing the gathering function of the institution and the land.



Jean-Jacques Barué. Competition proposal for the Odense High School, 1960

Landscapes

The sensitivity towards nature, deeply rooted in the culturally defined relationship with the landscape, achieves an intense sense of place, to adapt buildings to the surrounding landscape. "I follow the terrain" recalls, Jean-Jacques Barué. In the Hørsholm development plan 1960 and the competition proposal for the Stockholm University 1961 the buildings emphasizes the geography of the natural valley with a proposal conceived as a valley of buildings framing a natural central gathering place.



Jean-Jacques Barué. Competition proposal for the Stockholm University, 1961.

Detailing

Such evocations of natural forms and textures and the metaphorical landscape evocative of the surrounding forest were a constant in Aalto's work. References to nature and Aalto's experiment with wood introduced a distinctive "forest geometry" in Aalto's work. Aalto and Baruéil filtered the natural forms, structures and detailing derived from vernacular buildings and constructive tradition as sources of inspiration. Alvar Aalto's architecture in favour of natural materials, vernacular details and curved lines becomes a lyrical collage of references to the Finnish Forest. Throughout his career, Baruéil has strived to achieve an authentic architecture, as a synthesis of poetics and pragmatism.

As like Alvar Aalto before him, Baruéil's architecture demonstrates a rare excellence in terms of the combination of detailing, construction, and spatial and aesthetic qualities, where the clear and authentic use of materials and finishes, contributes greatly to the final formal and aesthetic character of the built work.



Jean-Jacques Baruéil. Interior of Villa Voldstedlund, Denmark, 1960.

Conclusion

Jean Jacques Baruéil significance is largely due to three major achievements: the Aalborg Art Museum, 1958-72 that illustrates the influential collaboration with Alvar Aalto and his masterworks the Nyköping Town Hall, 1960-1969 and Sønderborg School, 1961-68 both built during his independent practice. Baruéil followed Aalto's effort for a synthesis of organic and strictly geometric forms, of standard and individual elements, and was interested in more flexible buildings systems inspired by traditional architecture. But his most characteristic feature of his work was the striving for unity.

This research began with meeting Jean-Jacques Baruéil and his wife Tatjana and my thanks go to them for their hospitality at their home in Vedbæk and for the reminiscences of a life in architecture.

¹ Göran Schildt: Alvar Aalto: *The mature Years*, Rizzoli, New York, 1989. Schildt recalls that "Baruéil came of a French Huguenot family which had sought asylum in Denmark during the Wars of religion in the seventeenth century, his background appealed strongly to Aalto's feeling for history".

² Edvard Thomsen: *Arkitekten Ugehæfte*, 1948.

³ In 1948, Thomsen wrote a recommendation letter to Jean-Jacques Baruéil to work at Aalto's office in Helsinki.

⁴ *Konkurrence om Centralkirkegård med tilhørende kapelanlæg for Lyngby-Taarbæk kommune*, 1952. The architects members of the jury were Aulis Blomstedt and the Danish Johan Pedersen, Einar Graae, Elliot Hjuler and landscape architects Georg Georgs and Inger Ingwersen.

⁵ Among the 64 proposals submitted to the competition, the jury awarded first Prize for the cemetery project to the Danish architects Henrik Iversen and Harald Plum, the Second Prize for Edith and Ole Nørgaard and the Third to the proposal of Arne Jacobsen and Knud Lautrup-Larsen. The cemetery proposal submitted by Alvar Aalto and Jean-Jacques Baruéil with Elsa Mäkinieniemi, Keijo Strøm and E. Neuenschwander was purchased. Also, the First prize was awarded to the funerary chapel proposed by Henrik Iversen and Harald Plum, the Second Prize to the chapel alternative "B" by Alvar Aalto and Jean-Jacques Baruéil with Elsa Mäkinieniemi, Keijo Strøm and E. Neuenschwander and the Third Prize was awarded to the chapel proposed by Arne Jacobsen and Knud Lautrup-Larsen.

⁶ In an interview with Jean-Jacques Baruéil, Vedbæk, 2004.

⁷ In an interview with Jean-Jacques Baruéil, Vedbæk, 2003.