



Market recovery Helsinki

Preface

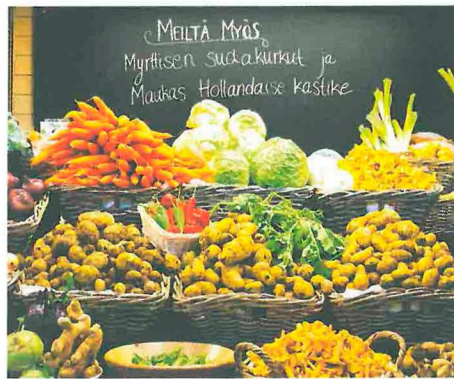
The restoration of the Finnish capital's fresh-produce hub has put it back at the heart of the city.

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Photographer

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As Baltic-bound ferries chug through Helsinki's South Harbour, the doors of the city's portside food market open as they have most days since 1889. Plump gulls circle overhead eyeing scraps of food as traders unload vans and lug boxes of fish, bread and coffee beans from the dockside towards the filigree-framed doors of the low-slung market hall.

The Vanha Kauppahalli building's long history has mirrored Finland's own. Through Russian rule, war, independence and upheaval – scarcity and prosperity – the traders here have furnished Finnish tables with produce for more than 120 years. In February 2013, however, the doors of the old hall closed as the city reinstated the then shabby shell to its former glory. A €15m, year-and-a-half revamp later and the neo-renaissance pile in Helsinki's administrative heart is once more the focal point of a community – as well as becoming an embassy for Finland's increasingly exciting culinary offerings.

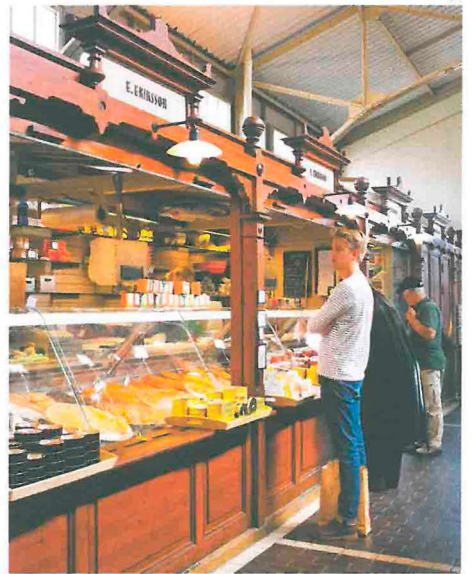
Inside, intricate pinewood stalls house 24 independent businesses. Many of the traders have occupied pitches here for decades but, because of the hiatus prompted by renovations to the building, others have left for good. This has made room for new entrepreneurs to fill



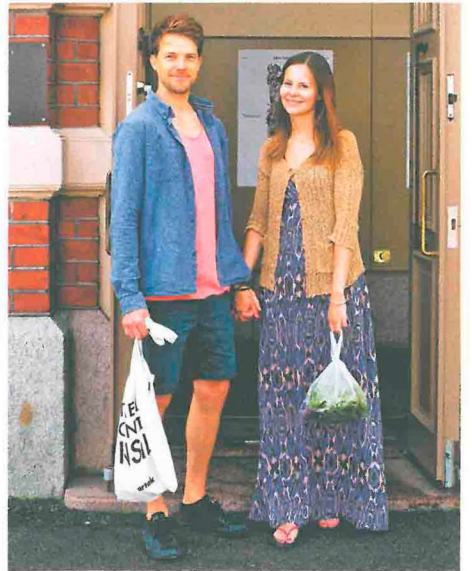
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Birth and rebirth

1889 The Gustaf Nyström-designed building opens to the public

1918 The end of the First World War, civil war and Finnish independence signal hard economic times and a downturn in the market's popularity

1939 After relative prosperity in the 1920's rationing is reintroduced during the Finnish Winter War

1955 Black market trading threatens the old hall's existence and traders rally to keep the market going

1995 EU membership boosts tourism and the diversity of produce on offer. Unpasteurised cheeses and other international delicacies also make their first appearance

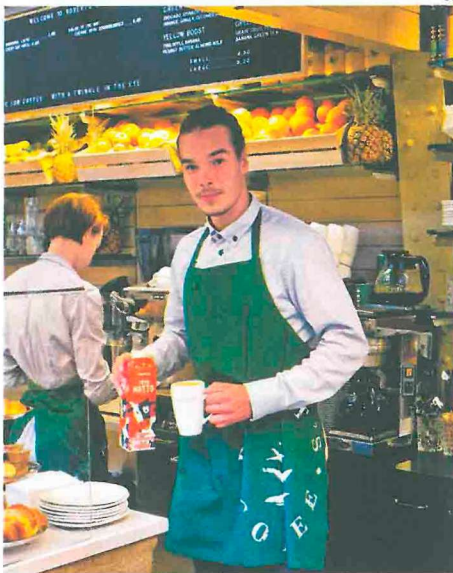
2013 The market closes for extensive renovation work at a cost of €15m

2014 Finland's oldest market hall re-opened for business this summer

- 01 Neo-renaissance Vanha Kauppahalli building
- 02 Produce at Merja Valo
- 03 Customers at E Eriksson
- 04 New signage at the market's southern entrance
- 05 Butcher Anna Härö, 26
- 06 Shoppers Iiro Muttillainen, photographer and Anni Ojanen, interior architect
- 07 Friends enjoy a glass of white
- 08 Story's central berth in the market hall
- 09 Barista at Robert's coffee
- 10 Friends share a coffee and a view of the harbour
- 11 Kaarina Petäjä at the Vegetaari smoothie stall
- 12 Outdoor seating at the market's eastern façade



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their spaces and create competition as well as a lively atmosphere.

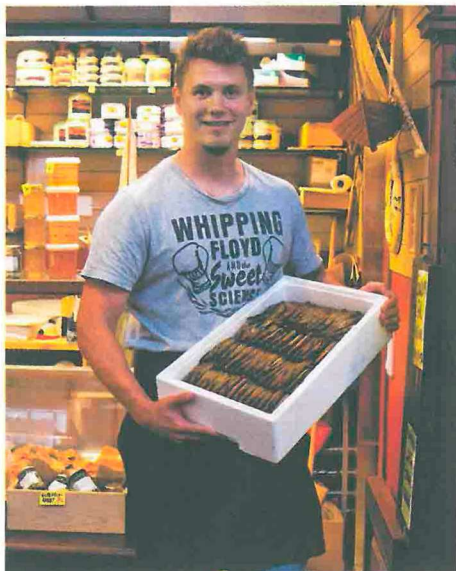
Anna Härö is a poster girl for the new generation of traders. Having worked in a nearby stall for six years, the 26-year-old took a loan from her father to secure a vacant shop in time for the market's reopening this June.

"Opening up a store here is a huge opportunity," Härö tells MONOCLE over the counter of Annan Villiliha, her butcher's shop. "When I found out, there were 25 companies competing for the free spot and it was less than a month before it was due to open. But I knew it was now or never." As she talks, a steady stream of locals queue for seasonal game, eyeing tender cuts of moose or cold-smoked reindeer as well as the free-range poultry, beef and tender lamb on show.

The market's narrow walkways meet in a high-ceilinged central atrium, which opens to reveal rafters, a corrugated roof and large windows that frame the passing ferries outside. The Story coffee shop opened here in June. Through a hatch behind its service counter, busy chefs in smart aprons can be seen adding the finishing touches to a procession of dishes that range from traditional *kermainen lohikeitto* (creamy salmon soup) to tasty clams destined for tables nearby.



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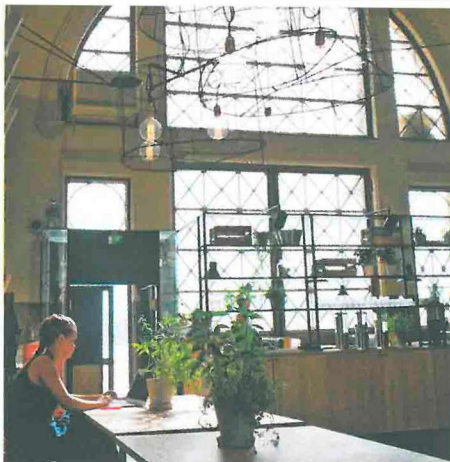
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Co-founded by restaurateur Anders Westerholm, the owner of a nearby wine bar and a local sushi spot, the space adds an airy modern touch to the otherwise traditional interiors. Here friends clink wine glasses at sturdy wooden tables beneath up-cycled *katiska* (fish trap) lampshades and polished pendant lamps.

"New stall holders such as Story are bringing a younger generation of customers to the hall," says Timo Taulavuori, the managing director of the city's wholesale food market department. "Before the renovation the market was a bit tired."

For many visitors, the market is the first taste of the Nordic nation's storied, but not always savoured, cuisine. A few hundred metres from its door is the jetty, where holidaymakers come ashore in search of dishes fabled for their unusualness; bear pâté and smoked herring are demanded in accents from across the globe.

Although rustic delicacies *can* be found here, the market presents an altogether more sophisticated take on Finnish food today. Near its northern entrance is Merja Valo, a fruit-and-vegetable shop whose eponymous owner has been here since 2009. Valo rises at 03.00 each morning to scour the wholesale market for plump aubergines, colourful radishes and fragrant dill to pile high in rows beside her cloudberry and fig preserves and Finnish honey. "I love the business and I love working here," she says. Although Valo is not the only grocer under the market's roof, she is up first to catch the early trade and not a customer passes without catching her eye and a sing-song greeting of "*Moi*".



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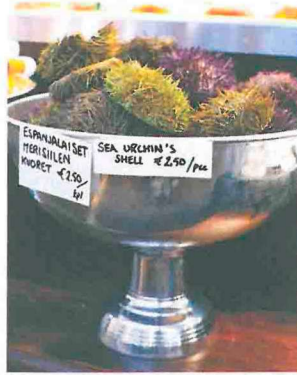


Seven flavours to savour

- 1 **Liquorice:** Retro-packaged *Vanhan Viipurin lakritsi* from Bahram is a tasty reminder of why Finns love the black stuff.
- 2 **Sea buckthorn chocolates:** German firm Café Röntgen and Konditorei's confectionery is notable for using the locally beloved shrub.
- 3 **Rye bread:** Since 1903 family bakery Hongiston Leipomo has stocked over 50 varieties of breads, pies and pastries.
- 4 **Vendace:** This bite-size breaded fish from fishmonger E Eriksson is served with a side of mayonnaise.
- 5 **Strawberries:** Marja Putilin has been selling vegetables here for 48 years; her Finnish-grown strawberries are a must.
- 6 **Tsaar's salmon:** The black pepper, cumin and fennel blend from Petri and Maria Nätti's specialist fishmonger is right up there with the best.
- 7 **Smoothies:** Kaarina Petäjä's recipes have been 25 years in the making at Vegetaari, where her barley-grass-topped smoothies are a particular highlight.



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- 01 Olli Andström shows off a box of Baltic herring
- 02 The market's central atrium
- 03 Pike loaf and new potatoes from Story
- 04 Tytti Rekosuo from confectioner Kultasuklaa
- 05 Traditional Finnish liquorice
- 06 Service at Story
- 07 Timo Taulavuori, managing director of the wholesale food market department
- 08 Sea urchin shells for sale
- 09 Friendly service at the Hongiston Leipomo bakery
- 10 Reinstated pine market stalls
- 11 Breaded vendace and a glass of blood-orange juice
- 12 Selection of Finnish-made sweets
- 13 Kristina Korhonen and Aleksandra Hellberg at Story

Fishmonger and longtime stall holder E Eriksson has added a small seven-seat bistro and raw bar to its existing pitch. Under the long glass-fronted fish counter are the mouthwatering reasons for the fifth-generation company's longevity. Delectable tranches of salt-and-sugar-cured gravlax sit next to smoked herring and peppercorn-strewn whitefish. On Thursdays, oysters arrive from France, along with shrimp from Sweden and condiments that range from strong Finnish *etikka* (vinegar) to flaked Swedish rock salt flavoured with chilli, lemon or wild garlic.

A quick survey of the remaining stalls reveals the market's variety. *Banh mi* buns and spicy Vietnamese soups compete with colourful smoothies for passing trade. Karelian pastries (made with potato or brown rice) cool at Hongiston Leipomo bakery, as the smell of fresh rye bread tempts passing tourists.

Although the new and resettled stallholders are taking the headlines, the facelift wouldn't have been possible without funds from city administrators. And Vanha Kaupahalli's rebirth isn't an isolated project: the painstaking renovation of the city's markets will continue with Hakaniemen Halli.

"They are the heart of the city. We have sellers who have kept their stalls for generations," says Ritva Viljanen, Helsinki's deputy mayor, from the city's Town Hall opposite the market. "It's important to keep them while encouraging new ones." It sounds straightforward enough but it's the careful touch with which the city is honouring its culinary past that is whetting our appetite for its future. — (M)