

# How to improve accessibility in historical buildings

## – From accessibility audit to design case

### Case Ainola, the home of Aino and Jean Sibelius

Niina Kilpelä, architect (M. Arch.), The Threshold Association

#### History

The Ainola residence was designed by Lars Sonck for Jean Sibelius, one of the greatest symphony composers of all times. It was completed in 1904. The lower floor had a study for the composer, a dining room, two bedrooms, a kitchen and a room for servants. The upper floor was completed in 1911. It comprised a bedroom for the parents, a study with a better view of the lake and a guest room. Part of the upper floor remained as an open loft for storage. At the same time the downstairs study was converted into a saloon.

Ainola was the home of the Sibelius family for more than 60 years. The interiors and furnishings of the building date from various decades, the oldest being heirlooms from both sides of the family and the newest dating from the 1930s and 1950s. Aino Sibelius lived at Ainola for a further 12 years following the death of her husband. The present state of Ainola is an authentic representation of the house at this time. The building is now a museum and the lower floor is open to public during the summer months.

#### Accessibility audit

An accessibility audit was carried out in 2008. It included the accessibility of moving, seeing, hearing and understanding both in the buildings and the surrounding areas. The focus was on visitors' point of view. Several suggestions to improve accessibility were made. The level differences at the main entrance turned out to be the biggest barrier. The accessibility audit report was used as an input data for the design.

#### Accessibility improvements

After careful studies, a platform lift was mounted at the entrance of the main building in 2010. The café and accessible toilets were located in the service building. The DVD presentation about Ainola includes the architect's comments on the design work. The duration of the DVD is about 8 minutes. Subtitles are in English.

#### Facts in brief:

Ainola residence, Järvenpää, Finland. Completed in 1904.

Architect Lars Sonck (1870–1956).

Accessibility audit 2008 by The Threshold Association, architect Niina Kilpelä.

Accessibility improvements by architect Simo Freese and

The National Board of Accessibility, completed in 2010.

DVD Now we get in! The Finnish Association of People with Physical Disabilities, Accessibility Centre ESKE. 2011.

