



# The Sponda Legends walking tour

Enjoy the summery Helsinki and learn  
fascinating stories about city centre's more  
than a hundred years old buildings!

SPONDA

## **Take a peek at the history of Helsinki and see city centre buildings in a new light!**

Do you know which city centre building has housed the most glorious party ever held in Finland? Or which building was designed by an architect who suffered a tragic fate? Or do you know which building's ownership was included in the peace terms of the Second World War?

**The Sponda Legends walking tour will provide you with answers to these questions.**

The tour will help you see familiar buildings in a new light and to take a peek at the history of our capital in a fascinating way. The historic buildings involve astonishing stories, magnificent architecture and heartbreaking fates.

The tour is independently done and in your own time, so you can also visit the buildings in the order of your choice.

**Spondan  
Legendat**  
Sponda Legends

**#SpondanLegendat**

We invite you to share your favourite buildings on social media with the hashtag #spondanlegendat

# Sponda Legends – style, art and stories

## **Fennia – Mikonkatu 17**

High-society sparkle

**1**

## **Mikonkatu 19**

From a machinery dealer to a casino

**2**

## **Yrjönkatu 31**

Temperance society restraints

**3**

## **Yrjönkatu 23**

Ideas from America

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## **Mannerheimintie 16**

A pioneer of cinema

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From a gymnasium into a nightclub

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A superior staircase

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Business at the best spot

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A triumph of national romanticism

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## **Korkeavuorenkatu 45**

A union between the old and new

**10**



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Fennia. Mikonkatu 17

2

Mikonkatu 19

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Yrjönkatu 31

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Yrjönkatu 23

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Mannerheimintie 16

6

Mannerheimintie 6

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Bulevardi 1

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Erottajankatu 5-7

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Korkeavuorenkatu 35

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Korkeavuorenkatu 45



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1898

# Mikonkatu 17

Did you know that the Viennese-baroque-style Fennia building next to the Helsinki Railway Square has served as a hotel, a place for the cream of the society to make an appearance, a filming location for a film based on a play by Minna Canth and even, briefly, the headquarters of Red Finland during the Finnish Civil War?

Completed in 1898, during the period of Russification, the Fennia-building was a strong political statement in itself. The name of the building means Finland in Latin, and the names of European capitals carved into its exterior underlined Finland's association with the Western European cultural sphere as opposed to the Eastern sphere.

The building entered its golden age in the 1900s when businessman **Karl Edvard Jonsson** established Grand Hotel Fennia on the premises. The opening guests gasped with amazement at the splendour of the hotel. Its luxurious winter garden turned into a society meeting place, which also served as a venue for sumptuous parties. In 1914, Fennia housed “the most glorious party ever held in Finland”, organised in honour of actress **Ida Ahlberg**. The party was so spectacular it brought tears to the star's eyes.

The green marble interior of the hotel lobby was created in 1927 and 1928. The lobby furniture and lighting was renovated by Sponda in 2020, honouring the original architecture. Take a look at the historic lobby – or read more below about the fascinating history of the Fennia building:

[www.bit.ly/Mikonkatu17\\_EN](http://www.bit.ly/Mikonkatu17_EN) »





1912

# Mikonkatu 19

The land under the historic building in Mikonkatu used to be a bottomless bog. The life in the neighbourhood was transformed by the completion of the railway in 1862. The railway square next to the building became a traffic hub, and the area attracted new shops, accommodation businesses and restaurants.

In 1912, **machinery dealer Aatra** constructed a five-storey commercial building in late Jugend style on Mikonkatu. The business in the building sold farm and factory machinery, and Leijona bicycles manufactured by Aatra. Later, the building became the property of the Nikolajeff car shop, which gave it its current name.

A number of restaurants have also been operated in the historic building. The Kansanravintola restaurant, established in the building in the 1910s, advertised itself as follows: “A new, modern restaurant is now open in the Aatra building, featuring a spacious and neat dining room. The food is nourishing and tasty, and the portions are large. Thorough cleanliness is observed in the preparation of the food and the cleaning of the tableware.”

Later, the building became a site of entertainment. At the turn of the 2000s, the Bio City cinema offered European arthouse films to cinema enthusiasts, and in 2004, Grand Casino Helsinki moved to the building. Did you know that this historic building still has its original doors? Read the whole story of the building below and discover its other architectural gems:

[www.bit.ly/Mikonkatu19\\_EN](http://www.bit.ly/Mikonkatu19_EN) »



# Koitontalo – Yrjönkatu 31

Does a teetotal servant violate their pledge by serving alcohol at their master's command? Can the wife of a restaurant proprietor join a temperance society?

These were some of the questions discussed at the meetings of temperance society Koitto, which, in its early years, promoted religious and patriotic values. Founded in 1883 and gaining broad support in society, the society constructed an impressive building for itself on the corner of Simonkatu and Yrjönkatu in 1907.

The imposing, Jugend-style stone building was designed by architect **Vilho Penttilä**. In its first decades, the building's history was marked by a power struggle between communists and social democrats. In the 1920s, the building became a hub of the underground activities of the banned Communist Party of Finland. The political wrangling continued in the 1930s. Among other incidents, a metal wall decoration in the building was vandalised by the far-right group Lapua Movement. Sculptor **Wäinö Aaltonen** later reattached it even firmer than before.

The luxurious banquet of the building hall also provided a place for the theatre group Koiton Näyttämö, which turned professional during the 1920s. Ironically enough, the building, where dancing was banned for a long time, came to be later known as a popular dance venue and school. Read more about the fascinating history of the Koitto building below:

[www.bit.ly/Koitontalo\\_EN](http://www.bit.ly/Koitontalo_EN) »





1908

# Yrjönkatu 23

In 1908, two residential buildings were completed at Yrjönkatu 23, connected by a modern central kitchen and food lifts serving each apartment. Originating from the United States, the idea of a central kitchen was to ease family life at a time when mothers began to work outside the home and many households no longer employed domestic help.

The building was designed by architect **Gunnar Stenius**, and its symmetric brick facade represented a new type of architecture with Danish influences. The most outstanding feature of the building was the staircase of the main entrance, which is currently regarded as an architecturally and historically significant, comprehensive work of art.

Among other businesses, the building provided premises for a draper's shop operated by tailors. It was rumoured that its customers included **Mr F. Ålander**, the tailor of composer Jean Sibelius. The building also provided a splendid place for the activities of the Nordic Art Association, a networking organisation of Nordic artists.

Later, the building became part of the Forum business complex, but even today, it offers a sense of nobleness brought on by years of cultural heritage. The arcade stretching from Yrjönkatu to Kukontori is partially glazed and includes a small stream-like construction, the design of which was awarded in the 1980s.

Read more below what the staircase in the Yrjönkatu building looks like:

[www.bit.ly/Yrjonkatu23\\_EN](http://www.bit.ly/Yrjonkatu23_EN) »





1890

# Mannerheimintie 16

The residential and commercial building that was constructed in 1890 is more familiarly known as the Capitol cinema building. The Capitol was opened in the building in 1926, and with its 938 seats and modern cinema technology, the cinema was the largest and best in the country. The 1929 premiere of the first sound film screened in Finland, *Sonny Boy*, was a special event in the city.

The ground-floor business premises were remodelled into a cinema by several architects in 1925, and some of the most famous artists of the time were charged with creating the interior decorations. Therefore, it is no surprise that the Capitol is considered to be the most sophisticated work of interior design of its era and a comprehensive artwork in the 1920s classicist style.

The history of the Capitol also involves political elements. After the Second World War, the Capitol served as a stage to show Soviet cinema, and its ownership was passed to Soviet hands as part of the peace terms of the war.

The cinema underwent renovations in 1966 and between 1982 and 1985. Despite these renovations, the interior of the Capitol has maintained its architectural value. Nowadays, the grand building provides premises for a nightclub and a restaurant.

Read more about the history of the Capitol below:

[www.bit.ly/Mannerheimintie16\\_EN](http://www.bit.ly/Mannerheimintie16_EN) »



1884

# Mannerheimintie 6

Did you know that the building in Mannerheimintie 6, originally called the Gymnasium of Alexander, was the first Russian school in Finland? The gymnasium was founded at the request of Emperor Alexander II of Russia in the late 19th century as the Russian population living in the capital of the Grand Duchy of Finland wanted a grammar school for their children. The widely admired school building was created by architect **Frans Anatolius Sjöström**.

In 1919, the ownership of the building was transferred to Finland's most famous art dealer Gösta Stenman, and the former school building was transformed into an art salon. The opening ceremony of the sumptuous art palace was attended by the cultural elite of the country as well as independent Finland's first president **K.J. Ståhlberg**.

When Stenman sold the building in 1927, the restaurant Cafe Pagod was opened in its banquet hall. The temple café was mostly advertised to female customers. Nowadays, the building is an office and commercial property, but it still has its staircase renovated to its original splendour, including steps that the boys of the gymnasium ran up and down more than a hundred years ago.

Read below a description of the impressive interior of the art palace published in Helsingin Sanomat in 1919 – and see how the building has changed over the decades:

[www.bit.ly/Mannerheimintie6\\_EN](http://www.bit.ly/Mannerheimintie6_EN) »





1890

# Bulevardi 1

The building on the corner of Mannerheimintie and Bulevardi is a masterpiece designed by **Theodor Höijer**, the hottest architect of his time. **Josefine Frenczell**, the widow of renowned businessman **Frenczell**, originally constructed the four-storey stone building for residential use, but over the years, it has been transformed into commercial and office building that fits many purposes.

While the Neo-Renaissance facade, cast iron pillars, arched windows and beautiful entrances created an imposing exterior, the building's most impressive feature was found inside the building. Even by today's standards, the building features the most magnificent staircase of this walking tour.

The wall paintings in the staircase were the creation of the decorative painting company **S. Wuorio**. The Pompeii-style decorative paintings reflect the hierarchy inside the building. The first floor is the most richly decorated, while the upper floors, originally used by servants, have a more modest appearance.

Do you notice that the fifth floor of the building has been constructed afterwards? In fact, the protected building has undergone many facelifts, the first of which took place in the 1920s. The top attic floor was built in the 1970s. Discover below what is new and what is old in the building – and all the phases of the building in Bulevardi 1:

[www.bit.ly/Bulevardi1\\_EN](http://www.bit.ly/Bulevardi1_EN) »





1880

1911

# Erottajankatu 5 ja 7

## Erottajankatu 5

Cigar manufacturer **Karl Fredrik Wickholm** constructed the originally residential building in Erottajankatu 5 at the end of the 19th century. Even today, the building has an air of historical dignity, and the magnificent staircase in particular, restored to its original appearance, is worth making a visit. The property was designed by architect **A. Boman**. Nowadays, it serves as office and business premises. The building is also home to the theatre Teatteri Avoimet Ovet, founded by Liisi Tandefelt in 1994. Read more about the history of the building below:

[www.bit.ly/Erottajankatu5\\_EN](http://www.bit.ly/Erottajankatu5_EN) »

## Erottajankatu 7

The late-Jugend-style building in Erottajankatu 7 was built in the Kaartinkaupunki neighbourhood in 1911, replacing a two-storey wooden building. Even then, the location offered pioneering business opportunities – the businesses operated in the surrounding wooden buildings included the colonial goods shop Hemmi, for example, which sold exotic and expensive imported fruit. Later, the neighbourhood has come to be known as a media and banking sector hub, as well as a promised land for design and restaurant businesses.

The building's architect **Valter Thomé** designed several splendid buildings in Helsinki city centre before his career came to a tragic end. He and his two brothers were killed by a Red Finland company in Vihti during the Finnish Civil War in 1918. Read more about the phases of the historic commercial building below:

[www.bit.ly/Erottajankatu7\\_EN](http://www.bit.ly/Erottajankatu7_EN) »



1907

# Korkeavuorenkatu 35

Do you know what the building in Korkeavuorenkatu 35, the Tampere Cathedral, Jean Sibelius's home Ainola and the Eira hospital have in common? They were all design by Lars Sonck, one of the foremost names in natural stone architecture.

In 1901, Sonck was tasked with the design of the head office, equipment rooms and housing units of the Helsinki telephone company HPY. As there was no frame of reference for the building in Finland, it was suggested he should find examples from abroad. The grandiose National Romantic stone palace was completed in 1905.

The noteworthy features of the building include its magnificent staircase and the facade's granite coating made of stones of various colours. The main entrance is framed by a triangle reminiscent of Sonck's design for the Tampere Cathedral. An ornamental ribbon across the bay window of the tower serves as a reminder of the building's original purpose. The stone palace was modernised in 2012, honouring the original architecture. During the modernisation, each stone of the tower's facade was removed by hand and numbered, and then placed back stone by stone. The work was enormous in scope, since the largest rocks may weigh hundreds of kilograms.

Read the fascinating story of the stone palace in Korkeavuorenkatu below:

[www.bit.ly/Korkeavuorenkatu35\\_EN](http://www.bit.ly/Korkeavuorenkatu35_EN) »





1913

# Korkeavuorenkatu 45

The residential and commercial stone building in Korkeavuorenkatu 45, completed in 1913, was designed by the renowned architect **Albert Alexander Nyberg**. The construction of the building was part of a structural reformation of the area, whereby wooden buildings were replaced by valuable stone buildings. Before the wooden buildings, the green and hilly area had been popular among young people in particular – they used to gather in Juhannusvuori and Kasavuori to celebrate the midsummer by burning fires.

Korkeavuorenkatu 45 has had numerous tenants. One of the earliest was the Suomen kansan ryhtiliike association, which promoted better Finnish drinking habits. The aim of the organisation was to improve Helsinki citizens' drinking habits and behaviour – especially before the 1952 Olympics held in Helsinki.

Nowadays, this masterpiece of Nyberg, representing late Jugend architecture, houses the head office of Sponda. In 1982–1984, the building underwent a major modernisation, which combined old architecture with novel spatial solutions in an interesting way. One of the most impressive details is the water-themed light shaft in the new part of the building, which provides the natural light required by legislation for official office space.

Read the intriguing story of the building below:

[www.bit.ly/Korkeavuorenkatu45\\_EN](http://www.bit.ly/Korkeavuorenkatu45_EN) »





# Premium properties tell stories of Finnish history

Sponda owns many buildings of historical significance in Helsinki city centre. During the last hundred years, many properties that initially were private homes have been transformed into retail and office premises. Each one of these buildings that are over 100 years old have their own stories that deserve to be told.

Sponda plays a key role in preserving the cultural heritage of its high-value properties dating back more than a century.

If you want to know more about us, visit our website:

[www.sponda.fi/en](https://www.sponda.fi/en) »