



Designing textiles for Marimekko with nature in mind

Description

I came across the extravagantly bright and engaging world of [Marimekko](#) several years back whilst strolling ‘ through the Skandium shop on Marylebone High Street in London. A gem of dream destination for Scandinavian design lovers. Marimekko made important contributions to the fashion industry in the 1960’s with its bright and bold designs of stripes and large colourful florals some of which are still in production. In the US, the company was introduced to a mass audience by Jackie Kennedy who bought eight of their dresses and wore them during the 1960s Presidential elections. A Barnes and Noble relationship followed which continues to this day. Today Marimekko stands as a giant of success and yet for me, what attracted me to their designs was the continuous search for innovative solutions with care and beauty in mind, and their undeniable relationship to nature as their primary source of inspiration. Simple, bold, humane, curious. Their home collections continue to blow my mind, to really challenge me as an illustrator and a mother who loves beautiful objects in her home. One ought to browse through not just their textiles, but also their extensive dishwear and porcelain collections with simple and striking lines and memorable colours. It is a world I became very curious about and I am thrilled that [Aino Maija Metsola](#), who in my opinion continues to make the most extraordinary and yet humbling and beautiful designs for them has

opened up to share her own world with us.

Masha: Tell us a little about yourself and what you do.

Aino-Maija: ‘I’m an illustrator and print designer based in Helsinki, Finland. I design prints for [Marimekko’s interior fabrics](#), clothes, bags, accessories, tableware, stationery and children’s products.

M:’ Where is home?

A: ‘Home is on an island just out of Helsinki Finland. It’s a small village with a 15 minutes ferry ride from downtown Helsinki.



M:’ As a fellow illustrator your job at Marimekko is a dreamy horizon, what is it like on a usual day at the office? Tell us about the beginning.’

A:’ ‘I work both at my studio at home and at Marimekko where I share a room with fashion designers Tuula Pääjärvi and Sofia Järnefelt. Usually I do most of the drawing and painting at home where I have peace and all the equipment I need. When I’m at Marimekko I choose colors for my prints, check samples, talk about new ideas with the design team, clean and process my designs on computer and meet people.

At the moment I work as an invited in-house designer at Marimekko but I have designed prints for Marimekko as a freelance designer since 2006. I studied graphic design and ended up designing prints almost by accident. I took part in a design competition organized by Marimekko in 2005. The company liked my print Mäkki that I sent in and took it in their interior collection. I noticed that designing for Marimekko was something I really liked and wanted to concentrate on that together with illustration.

M:’ Are you formally trained?

A:’ ‘I studied graphic design at the University of Art and Design Helsinki, currently called as Aalto University. I received my master’s degree in 2008.



M: *A lot of your designs feature nature in its many forms and colors, how important are natural surroundings to you as an individual and an artist?*

A: ‘Nature has always been important to me. I grew up in the countryside where my home was surrounded by forests and agricultural landscape. Nowadays I live on an island and I can see the sea outside my window. So I find the inspiration for my work from scenes that surround me.’

M: *What is your proudest achievement in work?*

A: ‘I love when I can work on a bigger concept like with the Weather Diary

that consists of textiles, tableware and other interior products. Also the theme and style of this concept felt very natural and personal for me so I feel it was a very rewarding design process.

There are also some other personal favorites like the print Juhannustaika that I use as my summer curtains. I think I like it mostly because it was designed so effortlessly and that's why I think it looks fresh and full of feeling.



M:’ *Do you have a mentor that has guided or influenced you?*

A:’ ‘I have been a freelance designer and illustrator for years but concentrating mainly on Marimekko. As a designer it has been a great learning and growing process and I’m very grateful for all the people who

have supported me during these years.

M: 'What is the process like from brief to fabric?'

A: 'I always start working by hand. Sometimes there is a brief and sometimes the process starts from completely personal inspiration. I sketch, draw and paint a lot, often without a very clear idea in my mind and then I see what comes out of it. Once I have produced enough good material I start processing it. I scan and clean the image then I work on the repeat and on the colors.

When the design is approved in the collection I deliver it to the artwork studio at Marimekko. They are in a very important role producing the final file that is ready for production. At this stage I talk a lot about the technical details with the artwork studio professionals. Next the screens are made and I choose the exact colors from the hundreds of color samples that we have. I don't like using pantones so much, they feel too limiting, so I'm very grateful that we have all our color samples printed on fabric.

One of the most fascinating stages of the process is when I see the fabric printed for the first time. At this point I might make some adjustments in the colors until I'm happy with the design and then the final printing can start.



M:’ Do you get involved in production?

A:’ ‘We have the printing factory in Helsinki in the same building as the Marimekko headquarters which I think is great. That is where most of the interior fabrics and some fashion fabrics are printed. My room there is just next to the factory so I can observe the process very closely. We have all the technical knowledge under the same roof so it’s ‘ easy to discuss about the details of production with the right professionals.

M:’ Is the printed fabric the final stage for you or do you sew anything out of the textiles you create?

A: ‘ ‘I try to keep most of my fabrics in shelves in nice order for portfolio purposes. But sometimes I also use my designs at home for example as curtains. I used to sew more but for some reason haven’t done that much lately. I like to knit a lot though.



M: *How important is feedback from people who buy and use your fabric?*

A: ‘ ‘It’s always very rewarding if someone says that my design evokes feelings in them. I design things for people to use and want to do things that people will love, hopefully for years. That is the ultimate goal and reason why these things are made. But I think during the actual design process my way

of working is mostly based on some kind of intuition.

M: 'What makes you laugh?

A: ' 'People who are bright and honest. And my dog.

M: 'Recommend a book or a poem that has changed your perspective on life.

I don't read so much, I think I should do it more but all the other things seem to fill my life at the moment. I remember when I read Anna Karenina some time ago it had a deep impact on me, maybe it was just the right book for that moment.

M: 'Do you have a life philosophy?

Well, I think I try to be a good person. I want to respect and love life in it's different forms.

M: 'What does success mean to you?

A: ' 'To be able to do things that feel meaningful and important to you.

CATEGORY

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Date Created

February 18, 2014

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