

Scottish Sculpture Workshop Sauna

Why and how to build a sauna?

In many cultures, sauna is considered to be a part of the family. But how does it become one? Of course, there are materials needed, all the practicalities how to make a good, comfortable sauna. But most of all, it's build together, as a family or community from experiences, experiments and from some kind of sacred everyday.

In spring 2015, we decided to build a sauna at Scottish Sculpture Workshop. There were many reasons to do so and one very practical being: it's cold in Scotland!

I had just taken my first steps in training to give sauna treatments in collaboration with different tree species. I was developing a project called *Beat to the Balance* to make this never-ending learning process part of my emphatic inter-species communication practice. To put it simple, the idea is to go to sauna and combine the psycho-somatic and spiritual features of sauna with the healing powers of the trees as well as other plants. Whisking or leaf bathing creates a holistic, sometimes even fierce touch and together with the sauna steam can connect us with the forest communication system, opening locks of trauma that we carry due to human exploitation of this planet. This sounds of course good, but first of all sauna needs a community to become and exist.

Scottish Sculpture Workshop was the location for Camp Breakdown Break Down initiated and organised by artist-activist Brett Bloom. This was a perfect setting for SSW sauna. The camp was organised in July 2015 and the idea was to explore fossil fuel culture and perceive the Lumsden landscape to develop skills for post-fossil world. Sauna is truly an environment of empathy, and communicating with the trees and other plants is an essential post-fossil skill.

One stone at the time

The human-animals don't really need to dig up much more natural resources than there already are in use. That's why SSW sauna principle was to build most of it out of used or recycled materials. This is not only a decision based ecological systems thinking: local, recycled materials also create the existence for the sauna by melting it to the environment, creating the relationship with the local communities. The materials of the sauna already have a story that is now adding the story of the sauna.

I have been to many saunas but built only one before. Planning and building a sauna takes a lot of effort and patience. It used to be said in the Finnish tradition that you need to listen to the spruce before starting the construction work

('kuusta kuuleminen') and sleep one night under the tree close to the planned building site. The spruce will then tell you if it's good to build the sauna. Sauna was usually built before the house. It offered shelter, warmth, warm water and a place to cook while the home was being built. SSW sauna was built to be also whisking-friendly which created more challenges with dimensions etc. We planned together with SSW technicians Eden Jolly and Uist Corrigan. Eden and Uist have open-minds, endless creativity and true devotion to the construction of artwork. It was also a honor that sculptor George Beasley was part of the design and construction! They really wanted to build a sauna. The outer walls of the sauna were made out of used whiskey barrels from a local company that manufactures furniture out of them. Wool was used to insulate the wall, and the wood to built the inner walls, benches etc. was from a local sawmill. The sauna stove was built out of a metal stove and there was a frame dwelled on it for the rocks. The SSW director at the time was Nuno Sacramento and he provided the stones for the stove. He practiced Deep Mapping in the area collecting stories and documents. He found a bridge going over a stream that became an important place to him. From there, he and Brett Bloom, found the stones and brought them for the sauna one by one. Natural stones are perfect for any sauna. The only thing to remember when collecting sauna stones, is to hit them together first to see if they are durable. If the stones are not strong enough, they'll explode when water is thrown on hot sauna stones.

There's always something poetic, spiritual, ritualistic or aesthetic in sauna but at the same time, it's very practical. Example of this is the ventilation system or the micro-climate that enables the breathing of the sauna. We talked with Eden and Uist for some time about this and what the sauna steam means. In most of the Finno-Ugric languages, there's a word for sauna steam. They all have a same root word ('lewl') meaning spirit. The sauna spirit, the steam that comes from hot stones, is water that connects earth, fire and air. How the steam moves in the sauna, depends a lot on how the sauna breaths air in from outside and breaths out trough ventilation. In SSW sauna, there are two ventilation hatches, one of them is located in slightly the wrong place. But we learned later on why we made the mistake: Camp Breakdown Break Down started, and one of the participants had a broken leg. She could still enjoy the sauna because she was able to stick her casted leg out of the "wrong hatch". SSW sauna welcomes everyone, also those who need to leave one limb out of the sauna.

SSW sauna windows were also recycled. The panoramic window opens to the landscape, and makes the difference in between somehow small. The door shuts automatically. There's a rope going trough the whole sauna and in the end of the rope is a stone that pulls the door close. I think this was yet another great idea from George Beasley.

Bathing in care and skinship

Whisking or leaf bathing is a direct and intensified connection to: the forest, community of the trees and the whole ecosystem. One tree is not an individual. It's part of the great oneness, the rhizome of mycorrhizae and other symbiotic entities. The forest is a living, tangible example of the fact that everything happening to you happens to everyone else and visa versa. For example, rivers have been given human rights on the basis that everything hurting the river, hurts also the human. There should be all entities rights.

The connection can be experienced with the touch of the leaves and the steam together with other human-animals in the sauna. Skinship (Japanese 'sukinhippu') originally meant the special, deep relationship in between a parent and a child, formed with care. This kind of relationship is formed also in sauna: through equal nakedness without status, the connection in between trees and steam. Touching with the leaves can create an empathetic connection to the other. Through skinship and sweating together we can learn to respect the other, understand their experience and to build up love in the world that is suffering from greed and cruelty. The human-animal has invented and created our narrative on how we live on this planet. Thus, it can be also changed. We can live the story of interdependence. One step towards the change can very well start from sauna and trees - from the union of eternity and this moment.

With all of me, I thank the beautiful, thoughtful and understanding travel partners Uist, Eden, George, Nuno, Brett, Yvonne and everyone in SSW who made this sauna a family member.

Muchos love,
Mari Keski-Korsu
artist and professional steam bath whisker