

# HUSH HOUR

THEY SAY THE FINNS DO SILENCE BETTER THAN ANYONE ELSE IN THE WORLD. WE TAKE THE ALL-ELECTRIC I-PACE - THE MOST SILENT JAGUAR EVER - TO FIND OUT WHY

STORY: *Nathaniel Handy*

PHOTOGRAPHY: *Alexander Rhind*





Previous pages and below:  
The I-PACE at the Kamppi Chapel,  
a dedicated silent space in the  
centre of Helsinki, designed by  
architect Mikko Summanen  
(below right). Above: treading  
lightly in the Finnish wilderness

**M**odern life is white noise. Whichever way you turn, there is something asking for your attention – your smartphone, an advert, a TV screen, the sound of passing traffic. It can be hard to find real silence, especially in the urban jungle. It's no surprise then, that at a time of stimulus overload, a broad trend towards greater quietude and mindfulness is emerging. From New York's Calm City mobile meditation trucks to smartphone apps that aim to get us offline and zoning out, silence might just be the new buzz.

Finland, however, has always been at the forefront of the notion of mindfulness. This is a vast country where – proportionally – there's a comfortable 2km<sup>2</sup> for every three citizens: plenty of room to stretch out, take a moment and breathe. Even the capital Helsinki sits on a peninsula in an extensive archipelago of islands, many of them covered in forest. Every Finn you meet will acknowledge that small talk isn't their national sport. This may be a big country with a small population, but it's also a place where two people are perfectly comfortable just sitting in silence. It's not shyness; just cultural. It can catch the unwitting visitor off-guard.

This serene capital is the perfect habitat for Jaguar's all-electric luxury SUV, the I-PACE – the most silent Jaguar ever. With no sound save for the crunch of tyres on winter snow, the I-PACE glides into the heart of downtown Helsinki.

Market Square – the busiest commercial hub of the Finnish capital – might seem a perverse place to go in search of silence, but it's not. The city council identified this spot as a place to build a striking new chapel – the Kamppi Chapel, which has become known as the Chapel of Silence. Its popularity goes well beyond churchgoers, and it can be seen in many ways as a temple to the Finnish love of silence.

The idea of the chapel, initiated by Helsinki's ex-deputy mayor Pekka Korpinen, is to give people a place to pause. "We studied the flow of people in this part of the city," says Mikko Summanen of Helsinki-based K2S Architects, who designed the chapel. "The form of the building is like a whirlpool or an island in that stream of people."

Covering a diminutive footprint of only 75m<sup>2</sup>, the sides of this entirely wooden structure soar upwards in an ever-expanding curve. Outside, traditional spruce is covered with a new bio-wax designed using nanotechnology to penetrate the grain and preserve it against the harsh Finnish winter. When you step inside, the effect is transformative. Light, perfectly flush lengths of alder wood roll upwards in one smooth, tactile surface. The city vanishes.

"Once you're inside, you don't hear the city. Even the natural light is indirect," explains Mikko. "We wanted →

“ONCE YOU'RE INSIDE, YOU DONT HEAR THE CITY... YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE, BUT ALSO ELEVATED”





## DESTINATION DRIVE

people to feel comfortable, but also elevated by the space.”

Though a Lutheran chapel, this is a place of silence for everyone. While ash wood pews line the space, there are cushions for meditation, prayer mats and even a qibla mark indicating the direction of Mecca. When you do enter, you can talk not only to a priest, but also a social worker, or of course, you can simply sit in silence. “I know many people who come here on their way to downtown offices,” says Mikko. “They come up from the metro station and just come here for a few minutes, to relax and be with their thoughts.”

“There are silent places in all cities, like libraries,” agrees the chapel’s manager, Nanna Helaakoski, “but this is something unique. This is the busiest area in the whole of Finland, but it’s a silent space anyone can easily enter.”

Finns seem to do such time-out spaces well. Almost in sight of the chapel, the new Oodi central library, opened in December 2018, is another soaring wooden structure redefining the centre of Helsinki. Inside its boat-like beams, Oodi has created not simply a library, but a communal space for quiet personal work and reflection. Over three floors, there are endless armchairs, maker workbenches with sewing machines and 3D printers and ‘break-out spaces’ where you can simply lounge on the carpets with your laptop. Bare wood, potted trees and soft, diffuse light from ceiling portholes heighten the sense of natural serenity. It feels like the right direction for the future of a modern city.

Helsinki is a city that holds the silence of the wilderness close, especially in the wintertime, when it is covered in deep snow. If you were to stand in its central square and draw a radius of 40km, you’d encompass an archipelago of forested isles, a rippling coastline of bays, spits and estuaries and two national parks.

Given that the Jaguar I-PACE has a range of 470km (on the WLTP cycle) on a single charge, that’s a whole lot of nature within our grasp. Recharging is also a lot quicker than you might expect. The rapid charging CCS plug can get the battery from zero to 80% charge in about 45 minutes. A warming lunch in a roadside diner was the perfect amount of time to get the car charged up, too, and ready to explore.

“HELSINKI IS A CITY THAT HOLDS THE SILENCE OF THE WILDERNESS CLOSE, ESPECIALLY DURING WINTER

Departing the city for the Nuuskio National Park, it’s not only the electric Jaguar’s silence that strikes you, but its effortlessness. Without a traditional gearbox, there’s no lag in acceleration. The battery is positioned low between the axles, planting the car firmly on the ground, and providing a punchy 400PS of peak power.

Our destination is Haltia, the headquarters of the Finnish national parks system. It’s housed in an extraordinary building that, when you look beneath the wooden surface, has a lot in common with the I-PACE. The I-PACE stores its energy in high-density lithium-ion pouch cells in its 90kWh battery. Haltia combines solar and geothermal energy systems to be largely self-sufficient in energy use. Holes have been drilled 11km deep into the bedrock beneath the building. Heat from the solar panels is pumped into the rock during the summer, replacing cold air that comes up to cool

the building. When winter arrives, the previous summer’s heat warms things up again. As the centre’s director, Tom Selanniemi, puts it: “It’s like the ultimate natural battery.”

Everything in Finland seems to lead back to the forest. Like the Kamppi Chapel, Haltia is made entirely of wood. In fact, it’s the country’s largest public building made solely of wood. Like Kamppi, the wood is merely waxed – not painted or lacquered – so it breathes.

And like Kamppi, it has an organic, almost egg-like structure. “We’re trying to combine elements from our history, our mythology, from science, from art and from nature,” says Tom. “Haltia is shaped like the Goldeneye (a sea duck common to Finland), with an egg as the centrepiece of our main exhibition space. The reason is that we Finns know that the world started from the egg of the Goldeneye.”

Tom smiles wryly as he offers this revelatory news. He’s recounting part of the Kalevala – the Finnish national epic poem that tells of the origin of the world and all life, embedding Finnish culture back into the lakes and forests that are its heartland.

A recurring theme among Finns we talk to is the return to nature; specifically the silence of the country cabin. Almost everyone in Finland has access to a cabin, usually next to a →



Whether exploring the wilderness with guide Markku Janhonen (below) or visiting modern buildings like the Oodi library (left) or Haltia (right, with director Tom Selanniemi) the I-PACE proves a graceful companion







Wild forager Pauliina Tovainen (left) and Everfells founder Robert Nuorteva (above) are symbolic of the deep connection Finns have to the outdoors and nature. Below: The I-PACE is a serene way to explore this aspect of Finland



lake, some hours out of the city. It's just an assumed part of life here. We meet Robert Nuorteva in a cosy coffee shop in Helsinki. He is the founder of Everfells, a start-up that connects wilderness guides with people seeking wilderness experiences. Robert recognises this collective Finnish urge.

"Every Finn knows the feeling when you drive to your cabin from the city," he says. "You step outside your car, close the door, and you're hit by the silence. It's never so silent, even at night, in the city - there's always background noise. In our cabins it's truly silent. Perfect silence."

Driving the I-PACE out into the Finnish taiga forest, the silence hits you long before you get out of the car. Electric really does mean a silent drive. The first drive for someone brought up on the combustion engine feels slightly unreal. Did I miss something, you ask yourself? Can it be this easy? But it is this easy. Half an hour into the forest, the fact that it is 'this easy' starts to hit home. I can see from the Head Up Display on my windscreen that we're travelling swiftly, but my ears convey only the soft rhythm of tyre on snow.

There is no silence like the silence of the Arctic winter. Finns talk of five seasons, since there is midwinter and 'spring winter'. In midwinter, the sun barely rises at all. People return to their cabin, heat up their traditional smoke saunas, and break holes in the lake ice to bathe. Saunas are perhaps the original blueprint for a lot of the modern architecture in Finland, with their distinctive wooden structure. As wilderness guide, Markku Janhonen - a native of the wild eastern Karelia region - explains, the sauna is an almost sacred space to Finns. "It's normal for us to be quiet in the sauna," he says. "It's a silent place to sit and relax and observe the lake."

The sauna has been a sacred space for Finns since before Christianity - a place of reflection and even, since it was warm and clean, a place where children were born. There is something in the Finnish silence, and the heightening of the senses that such silence produces, that seems to hark back

to older knowledge. For instance, Markku explains the importance of pitch when cross-country lake skating during winter. "The sound of the ice as you skate over it tells you its depth," he says. "When the pitch rises, the ice is thinner."

Similarly, wild food forager Pauliina Toivanen, of Helsinki Wildfoods, speaks to us of the sense of smell. "Your smell memory is pretty important," she explains. "Learn the smells of poisonous and non-poisonous plants. Once you know the difference, you can't really confuse them."

There may be nothing to forage when we meet her, but even the harshness of winter is good news for her. "Plants grow stronger in these conditions," she says. "In fighting the cold, berries actually build more polyphenols." She's waiting for birch sap - the first forage of spring. After that, she will eat birch buds and leaves, dandelion, nettle, ground elder, rowanberries and fireweed.

Pauliina recalls the time she went out riding a horse at night in Kuusamo, her ancestral area in the north of Finland. "It was an amazing experience for the way the nighttime and the silence heightened my senses. The horse was naturally able to

navigate at night, but soon I noticed my perception started increasing. By the end, I could see more clearly and my hearing had become more acute. Snapping twigs now sounded really loud against the silence of the night."

It struck us then that this was our experience too. The Jaguar I-PACE is naturally silent, and when you sit in its cabin, that silence is further enhanced by clever encapsulation of the motor, acoustic lamination on the windscreen, and aerodynamic design that minimises wind noise. It, too, is a calm that heightens the senses.

When you stop the I-PACE, step out, and close the door behind you, you begin to hear the little things: the crunch of the snow beneath your boots; a woodpecker hammering on a distant trunk; the wind catching the tops of the pines. But most of all, you hear the sound of silence. ■

“THE SILENCE HEIGHTENED MY SENSES. I NOTICED MY PERCEPTION STARTED INCREASING”