



# Northern Exposure

The American ambassador to Finland and his wife  
take the chill out of their official residence with contemporary art  
and a casual attitude toward family life

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Winter in the vibrant, charming Finnish capital of Helsinki is, without a doubt, the longest, darkest, coldest season of the year. After all, the northern part of Finland pokes into the Arctic Circle, where most of the inhabitants are Laplanders, reindeer, and polar bears. The Finns are, by and large, members of an extremely well-educated, conscientious, law-abiding, and unfairly beautiful Nordic race, whose radiant well-being belies a horrendous history of invasions by virtually all her more powerful and pugnacious neighbors. The Finns have always held their nation together, survived, and eventually prospered.

Even so, this close-knit and courageous country remains something of a mystery to most Americans—and until a few years ago that group included the United States ambassador to Finland, Earle Mack, a businessman, philanthropist, and ardent patron of the arts, his brilliant and beautiful wife, Carol, and their two children, Andrew and Beatrice.

Carol Mack admits that when she first learned of her husband's Scandinavian posting, "it did seem a bit isolated." Before the family arrived a year and a half ago, however, her research revealed that Helsinki was one of the two safest cities in Europe (the other is Luxembourg). Once they were ensconced, they realized that most people in the country seem to speak English, the natives are more likely to listen to the Rolling Stones than Jean Sibelius, and there's hardly any traffic. It's small wonder that the Macks fell in love with the city.

Now, one of the brightest and coziest spots in town is the ambassador's residence. Because, as soon as the family settled in, Carol engaged Manhattan-based designer Todd Romano and began the task of transforming an austere government property into a family-friendly home.

The building itself has a distinguished American pedigree. It was designed by architect Harry T. Lindberg, a Swedish-American who



Carol Mack in the dining room of the U.S. ambassador's residence in Helsinki, which she decorated with the help of Todd Romano; the painting, *Untitled*, by Eric Freeman, is from the Macks' personal collection, and the chandelier, dining table, and chairs, like much of the furniture in the house, are the property of the U.S. State Department. Facing page: An architect's drawing of the U.S. legation, designed by Harry T. Lindberg and completed in 1940. See Resources.





Ambassador and Mrs. Mack near their residence in Helsinki. Clockwise from top left: A pair of neoclassical armchairs, Donald Baechler's *Untitled* painting, and a trio of oil-on-paper drawings by Antonio Murado above Wedgwood creamware from Carol Mack's collection. *Myrtle*, a painting by Alex Katz, and a side table covered in Surabaya Glazed Chintz from Brunschwig & Fils in the living room. A pair of Mary Hellmann etchings and a drawing by Antonio Murado are displayed in the library; the garden seat is from John Rossell. In the dining room, Ross Bleckner's *Falling Birds 1* and Carol Mack's collection of 18th- and 19th-century Delft porcelain. A pair of ebonized-wood Chinese garden seats next to Todd Romano's Bridgewater chairs upholstered in linen velvet from Christopher Norman; the print on the mantel is Picasso's 1964 *Buste d'Homme Barbu*. See Resources.