

# The Tammer era

## From 1929

The history of Tammer begun on October 19th in 1912, when engineer Emil Graeffe suggested that the Tampere Society of Technology ask the town council to reserve a vacant plot situated next to the commercial school for a building for the society. This wasn't the first time the dream of a building for the society had been discussed and a collection for the project, raising 82 Finnish marks, had already begun in 1901.

### The birth of a legend

As Tampere Society of Technology had played an important role in the development of the town over the years, the town council agreed to the request and donated the engineers the plot they requested. After the donation, the society began the task of collecting the construction fund. Finally, in December 1924, architect Birger Federley presented the options: a timber building, whose cost of 180 000 Finnish marks had already been raised, would be sufficient for the society. Alternatively, productive premises could be included in the design, but that would involve building additional floors. Eventually a decision was made to build a house of stone, which would be divided into three uses: part of the premises would be reserved for the use of the society, part would be hotel rooms and in addition, an option was left for building garages with repair shops.

The design of the building was given to the architect Strömmer. He drew up plans for building a hotel as high as five floors. The second floor would be reserved for the use of the Society of Technology. The fact that in the final plan the budget had risen to 5,1 million Finnish marks shows, how the project had expanded. A real estate company called O/Y Tammer A/B was founded in May of 1928. When it was time for capital stock subscription, individuals, companies and industries throughout the town subscribed heavily.

*Tampere Butchers' Society's annual dinner and the homecoming party of demobilized servicemen.*

### Glamour and depression

Bertel Strömmer's creation became breathtaking - a six-floor, top-class hotel building. It had a splendid two-storey ballroom and private rooms, as well as first class hotel rooms. The decoration was exceptionally luxurious. In spite of many technical problems during construction, the society had built an architectural jewel and a high-class hotel in Tampere that bore comparison internationally. The construction was completed in September 1929 at a final cost of 7 682 760 Finnish marks.

Tammer represents genuine "Strömmerism". The ballroom is castle-like, with a finely tinted gold and green colour scheme. Its pillars are decorated with heraldic roses made of copper. Crystal chandeliers and the wooden chandelier in the fire place lobby presented Strömmer with some problems, however, since they had to be specially ordered and thus became very expensive. Tammer was built to be a unique, beautiful building, elegant surroundings for both large dinner parties and intimate meetings.

Although Finland was already involved in the maelstrom of international depression, Tampere was preparing for the 150th anniversary of its foundation in 1929. Three magnificent construction projects had been completed: Hämeensilta bridge with Wainö Aaltonen's sculptures and the Pynikki panorama tower. The inauguration of Tammer was scheduled for September 28th. However, on September 7th 1929, steamship Kuru had sunk in a heavy storm, taking 138 passengers into the cold depths of lake Näsijärvi and all festivities were cancelled, the celebration being replaced by a quiet housewarming party.

After the society building was completed, its hotel and restaurant operation was leased to a St. Petersburg-born French restaurateur, Alexander Adlivankin. He had been running the Alsace-Lorraine hotel in Cannes, and from there he brought furniture, silver and table ware to Tammer. Some of the tableware is still in use today. Adlivankin called his hotel the Grand Hotel Tammer.



*A party of Tammer-Tehtaat industrial plant.  
(From the files of Laina Tamminen)*



**RAVINTOLA TAMMER**  
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The modern decorations in the first night club in town, *Intiimi*, included a fountain.



One of the most notable guests of Tammer, Field Marshall Mannerheim at the hotel door in mid 1940's.

Archiatre Arvo Ylppö signing a petition in 1974 in the 90-year anniversary of Tampere lyceum for restoring the school's old name.



The hotel employed more than a hundred people and the staff were truly international in their background. The manager was French, and the chef was a Japanese who had gained his experience in Paris, St. Petersburg and Constantinople. The cooks came from France and Russia and all the waiters were Swedish. It was said that the only member of the staff who spoke Finnish as their mother tongue was the maid hired to peel potatoes.

Even though the final result was magnificent, Grand Hotel Tammer was completed at the wrong time. Finland was in the midst of the Great Depression, so there were few potential customers to begin with, and the enforced Prohibition Act further depressed the restaurant business. Still, it was said that for special guests there was always "hard tea", "lemonade" and cognac available -prescriptions for pharmaceutical cognac could be purchased from doctors travelling around the country. In May 1930, business was stimulated by founding an outdoor cafe, the predecessor of the summer restaurant, Tammerin Puisto. The park cafe offered brass bands with coffee, tea, chocolate, pastries and ice cream. Even though Adlivankin actively marketed his hotel, the Depression finally destroyed his business and it went bankrupt.

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In the bankrupt's sale the chairman of the board of Tammer, engineer E.H. Liljeroos, bought the hotel furnishings with a private bank loan. He donated it for the use of Oy Tammer Ab on the condition that the loan would be paid back when the hotel was in a position to repay it. Tampere Society of Technology began to run the hotel and restaurant themselves and carried on doing it until the late 1960's, when Kauppakunta Tuotanto, nowadays known as Pirkanmaan Osuuskauppa, bought the majority holding.

### Tammer grows into its reputation

With the help of heavy reorganisation and the abolishment of the Prohibition Act in 1934, the hotel survived the Depression and rose in the golden years of the 1930's. After the Prohibition Act, both beer and liquor started flowing by permission. The restaurant hosted big parties and conventions and offered continental restaurant programmes and performances by well-known artists. The hotel advertised for its own, first-class quartet and found "Chanteclair", a five-men band playing schlagers. The splendid cuisine made sure that each night in Tammer fulfilled even the most demanding expectations. In 1934 Walter Dahlström was hired as the new manager.

The businessmen of Tampere became regular guests. Tammer also offered first-class show rooms for businessmen coming from out of town. Both Finnish and foreign celebrities found their way to Tammer and incidents, some of them funny, couldn't be avoided. There was a baron who traveled the distance from the railway station to Tammer by three horse cabs: the first one was for him, the second for his luggage and the third for his umbrella. After Manager Dahlström died, his widow, Lisa Dahlström, continued his work. At the same time the board made the decision to try and persuade Mr. Alexander Grobowsky from Helsinki to become the maitre d' for Tammer.

When the war broke in 1939, the fifth floor of Tammer was occupied by the armed forces instead of businessmen; the regular clientele became servicemen responsible for the civil defence of industrial plants. Many charities and auctions were held in Tammer, collecting funds for clothing for servicemen. In auctions, the most sought-after item was Swedish coffee, and the price could rise up as high as 1000 Finnish marks per kilo.

Wartime brought rationing and along with it, the black market. Even though it was forbidden to serve potatoes on a rutabaga day, Tammer's special guests were not left in want. They got their serving of rutabaga – and the forbidden potatoes hidden inside a table napkin.

After the war, members of the allied control commission stayed at Tammer. When a member of the commission, a Russian captain, found out that Tammer's porter

Tammer's advertisements from different decades.



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Vihtori Heinonen had been wounded in the war at the Karelian Isthmus, he began to help him carry the guests' luggage into the rooms.

### Mr. Grobowsky

Without a doubt, the most impressive character throughout the history of Tammer is been maitre d' Alexander Grobowsky, who had, prior to Tammer, worked in many of the finest restaurants in Helsinki, such as the Savoy. He was Latvian-born but had been working for Alfred Nobel's company in St. Petersburg before the Russian revolution. Grobowsky's strongly Russian accent and refined appearance were Tammer's true trademark for two decades. He never learned perfect Finnish, but it only added to his unique character. Grobowsky could, for instance, say to a couple leaving the restaurant in the evening: "In Tammer a big party tomorrow. Director come also with my wife."

After the arrival of peace, Grand Hotel Tammer strived for international style and class again. In 1953, Alexander Orlo was appointed as manager and his term of office began with renovation and renewals. At first, the operation was profitable, but by the end of the decade another reconstruction plan had to be devised. A new maitre d' was hired to replace Grobowsky, who had fallen ill. A dance band that had played in the restaurant for two decades was laid off, prices were raised and a new bar was planned.

### The first nightclub in town

When licensing laws in 1963 permitted serving alcohol until 3 a.m., a new nightclub named Intiimi was built. Intiimi became even more popular than expected. However, with the lack of competing nightclubs in town, the clientele wasn't quite what had been hoped for. Soon, an English bar was completed, and in 1960's and 1970's Tammer hosted fashion shows with famous Finnish models.

### Change of ownership

Until the late 1960's, the hotel was owned by factory owners in Tampere. This special relationship came to an end when the unprofitable company was bought by Kauppakunta Tuotanto, nowadays known as Pirkanmaan Osuuskassa. After a lengthy assessment process, separate sales of the premises and furnishings were completed in 1969.

Faith in the way that Kauppakunta Tuotanto ran its first hotel was strengthened with time, but times were changing. No more big parties were held and when the old clientele had left, traditions had to be revised. The 1970's were still the golden era of long lunches. It was customary to continue a lunch in the nightclub and then spend the

night at the hotel. The new culture brought pressure to lower the main restaurant in order to have one extra floor for the hotel. At the time, before the actual planning of the rebuilding work was begun, the board decided to ask for an artistic plan from the painter Kauko Salmela, who was the curator of the Kustaa Hiekkä Foundation, a highly respected art foundation in Tampere. He promised to give his opinion on the condition that the board would do exactly as he said. When the board agreed, Salmi said: "You will not change a thing in the restaurant!" In the nightclub there was a marbled fountain that, according to Salmi's advice, was demolished in the renovation. At the same time the number of rooms was increased and the garage was replaced with a sauna and a pool.

Renovation work continued into the 1980's. More hotel and meeting rooms were built, the private room for the Society of Technology moved to the second floor and rooms with balconies were built on the third floor. A food lift built in the restaurant created an episode of its own; it turned out to be over a meter too high. It was, however, lowered before the National Board of Antiquities interfered.

Long-lasting renovations had just been completed, when the depression of 1990 hit Finland. The preservation of Tammer's spirit was continued by renewing the hotel's furniture with



The bellboys of Hotel Tammer at the staff Christmas party.



Tammer has been the witness of many splendid moments of married couples. Marjatta and Franciscus Vierula on the stairs of Tammer in 1945 and 1995.



Tammer's advertisements from different decades.





Field Marshall C.G.E. Mannerheim, presidents starting from P.E. Svinhufvud in the 1930's all the way to Urho Kekkonen and Tarja Halonen have stayed at the hotel. The guest list contains names such as Russian leaders Nikolay Bulganin and Nikita Khrushchev, opera singer Jussi Björling and variety star Josephine Baker. Field Marshal Mannerheim always kept with him a wine flask and in Tampere, refilling it was the honorary duty of maitre d' Grobowski.

## A renewed hotel and a new restaurant

In the spring of 2009, Tammer was once again fully renewed. The budget of the renovation was 6 million Euros and it was the largest hotel investment of the year in S-Group. The interior decorator, Pirkko-Liisa Topelius, preserved the continental class of Grand Hotel Tammer but brought it into new bloom with vibrancy and cheerfulness.

One of the starting points for the renovation was ecological thinking and as much of the old was restored as possible. All furniture fit for use was repaired and among other things the doors of the hotel rooms are still genuine 1920's panel doors.

Sokos Hotel Tammer has always been beloved among the people of Tampere and with the renovation, a new restaurant, Vihtorin Kirjasto was opened. Both hotel guests and townspeople can spend time and drop in this extended living room. New ideas, high-class materials and respecting traditions are a part of Tammer's past and present. Good food has always played a major role in the history of Tammer. Bar & Bistro Vihtorin Kirjasto continues this nuanced story.

## Tammer is worth experiencing

Tammer wants to cherish tradition and it's history, whilst taking into consideration the needs of today's guest. Therefore, the unique and magnificent milieu at Tammer provides the right ambience for parties and guests who are looking for culture and indulgence. The values born in the 1930's Tammer are still held high. The guests are well looked after and the restaurant is proud of its cuisine. Tammer's smorgasbord has always been famous. Nowadays the traditional buffet is set every year on May Day, Mother's and Father's Day, and, naturally, during the time of Christmas parties.

Tammer has undergone several different incarnations, found it's own role in the highly individual restaurant life of Tampere and grown to be a part of the town. Tammer is known as one of the symbols of Tampere. It is a fascinating place, where the town residents can drop by for enjoyment and bring guests from out of town; presenting the magnificent architecture combined with good food and drink. Tammer's traditions are still very much alive: the 110-year-old Tampere Society of Technology still meets in Tammer.

pieces bought from antiquarians in Helsinki. They were pieces of old furniture that were beautiful to look at, but in many cases not suitable for the heavy demands of hotel usage. Tammer's facade, main restaurant, lobby and the hotel corridors were protected in 1992 under the Act of Conservation of Buildings as a nationally important building.

Tammer made it through the depression with the help of its hotel. At the same time it had become obvious that there was a need for a restaurant for the ordinary residents of Tampere. This is how Scuzzi was born. However, the people in Tampere couldn't accept the change of the traditional restaurant Tammer into Scuzzi, which could no longer be reserved for private functions. Facing the fire station, a bar named Paloposti (Fire plug) served the customers in the 1990's.

## Into the biggest hotel chain in Finland

In November of 1995, the proprietorship of Grand Hotel Tammer was transferred to Oy Sokoteria Ab, nowadays known as Sokotel Ltd. The new owners decided to renovate the entire building, paying special attention to its history. The goal was to have Tammer renovated before the general summit of Finland's EU presidency.

First the restaurant was restored into its original form. The original green/gold colour scheme was brought back and the restaurant offered services again for private parties or smaller groups. Then it was for the turn of the hotel; the plumbing in the building was completely renovated and the rooms equipped with air conditioning. At the same time, some of the smallest rooms were given up and the number of rooms decreased from 90 to 87.

Unfortunately, most of the furniture was so worn-out that it could not be restored. Therefore, new furniture, made of oak according to the old models, was bought. When interior work was finished, it was time to restore the facade. It was finished just in time for the summit of Finland's EU Presidency and Tammer was again able to accommodate notable international guests according to its traditions

During the years, many notable persons have patronized Grand Hotel Tammer:



Interior design by designer Pirkko-Liisa Topelius.



**RAVINTOLA TAMMER**

BANQUET & CONGRESS

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