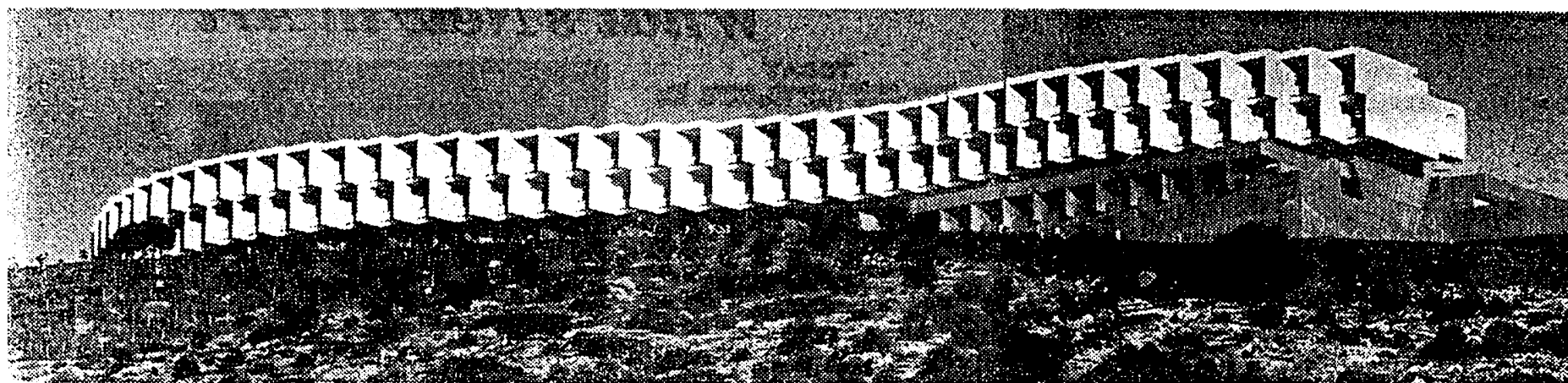


The Second Israel

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

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Architecture



Today's Israeli architects will not settle for spurious crafts or chauvinism. Here a new rest home caps a Carmel hill

TEL AVIV.

ABOVE the rows of four-story stuccoed buildings that line Tel Aviv streets in the pleasant garden city pattern laid out in the 1920's by the English planner, Patrick Geddes, a second Tel Aviv skyline is beginning to appear. Its scattered tall structures rise abruptly over the first layer of the city, which, measured generously, is only about 60 years old. This is one of the youngest cities in one of the oldest parts of the world.

The first Tel Aviv was built by immigrants, architects and speculators in the 1920's, 30's and 40's, on a base of turn-of-the-century Jewish settlement that started the city as a suburb of the historic port of Jaffa. Today, the garden city plan is strangling, and the four-story houses are a modern architectural historian's textbook of pre-World War II crumbling Bauhaus style, or early European-inspired modernism.

Rent control laws and a somewhat Levantine attitude toward maintenance have made this a shabby city. But it is softened by avenues of trees that turn omnipresent balconies into green bowers in spring, with the added beauty of the solid purple bloom of jacaranda trees and the scarlet flowers of the poinciana.

The large new structures breaking scale and style mark the beginning of the second Tel Aviv. Unlike New York,

where most big buildings are speculator-built from cut-rate designs, the important new construction in Tel Aviv and north to Haifa is the work of the country's leading architects. It is excellent work by any standard.

This is not the sociological architecture of housing and new towns. That is a matter with which Israel continues to struggle with greater or lesser success and sensitivity. The rapidly produced, badly built housing of the immigrations of the early 1950's scars the landscape and has turned into today's slums. Recent experiments in terraced housing that respect the splendid slopes of Judea and Galilee are just beginning to be less destructive of what once seemed to be an unspoilable setting.

The new, large-scale construction is of a different kind. This is the commercial and institutional building that is an increasing urban necessity and an indication of a growing cosmopolitanism. It is still in small supply, but there is nothing tentative about it. The design and technical execution, remarkable here, would be outstanding anywhere.

The second Tel Aviv, or second Israel, is being built

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by a second generation of architects whose fathers built the first Tel Aviv before them. The fathers — Arie Sharon, Zeev Rechter and Dov Karmi — were among those who came from Europe to shape Tel Aviv and set its style. Sharon studied at the Bauhaus, the German school that trained a generation of modernists and influenced another generation around the world. Rechter worked with Le Corbusier, and put Tel Aviv houses on Corbusian *pilotis*, or stilts, so that there would be shade beneath them — an eminently sensible idea in the Israeli climate. Tel Aviv is probably the only vernacular 20th-century city in the world.

Rechter and Karmi are dead; Sharon — vital, six-foot, blue-eyed — is still hard at work.

Their sons, Eldar Sharon, Yacov Rechter and Ram Karmi, lead a new school of architecture today. They are close, but without the intense friendship and friction of the pioneers. They are part of, and designers of, a different world.

It is an international world, architecturally. The visitor to Ram Karmi's Negev Center in Beersheba, a strik-

ing new housing and commercial complex in the 20-year-old new town in the Biblical wilderness of the south, can imagine himself in Boston's City Hall.

Karmi studied in England, where the style of rugged, raw concrete called the New Brutalism that appeals so strongly to architectural cognoscenti, was born. It is not out of place in the desert, which has a strength to match it.

The work of Yacov Rechter has a technical polish and suave elegance that makes much United States work look provincial or pretentious. Materials and forms are used boldly and simply, and are well detailed. A rest home in Zichron-Yacov, built by his firm, Rechter, Zahry, architects, and Peri, engineer, for the Workers Union in 1948 crowns a high hill of the Carmel range with equally high drama.

The Sharons, father and son, have two notable large buildings going up in Tel Aviv. A handsome, 20-story exposed concrete double tower for the General Federation of Agricultural Workers and the cooperative for sale of agricultural produce is nearly complete, with B. Idelson as associated architect.

At Tel Aviv University, which has sprung out of the ground in the last six years, Avraham Yasky is building bold student dormitories that are studies in the sculptural textures and forms to be explored in reinforced concrete.

Inevitably, Tel Aviv now has its American-type "skyscraper" with top floor restaurant and observatory, a 32-story building called the Shalom Tower. No city is, complete without one. Another tall building under construction already has a department store in its base.

In spite of intense Israeli national pride, none of the best of this new work is nationalistic, in the sense of seeking a "national style." It shows no sign of the heavy arts-and-crafts or "broken menorah" look that has conspicuously characterized everything from building decoration to objects for export. In one observer's opinion, there should be a law against it in any form. It is ugly, dated and spuriously indigenous.

Today's architects will not settle for chauvinism. They have an equally passionate sensitivity to their art and to their country. They are establishing the best standards of structure and style that modern building and contemporary creativity and their own sophisticated education and taste can offer a developing nation.