

iYew Towns Bloom in Israeli Desert: New Israeli Towns Test Planning in Negev Desert

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New Towns Bloom in Israeli Desert



“Pyramid” apartment block in Beersheba, Negev desert town that was planned as a “garden city” 20 years ago

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE
Special to The New York Times

BEERSHEBA, Israel—Every year the Israelis push the desert back a few more miles, and it is a miracle that people come from all over the world to see. The new towns and cities, some only 5 or 10 years old, rise like mirages in the Negev wilderness of the south—the strange, dry hills through which the Israelites wandered millennia ago.

On every side the desert presses against the settlements that Israel is building to distribute her population and cultivate her resources. The line

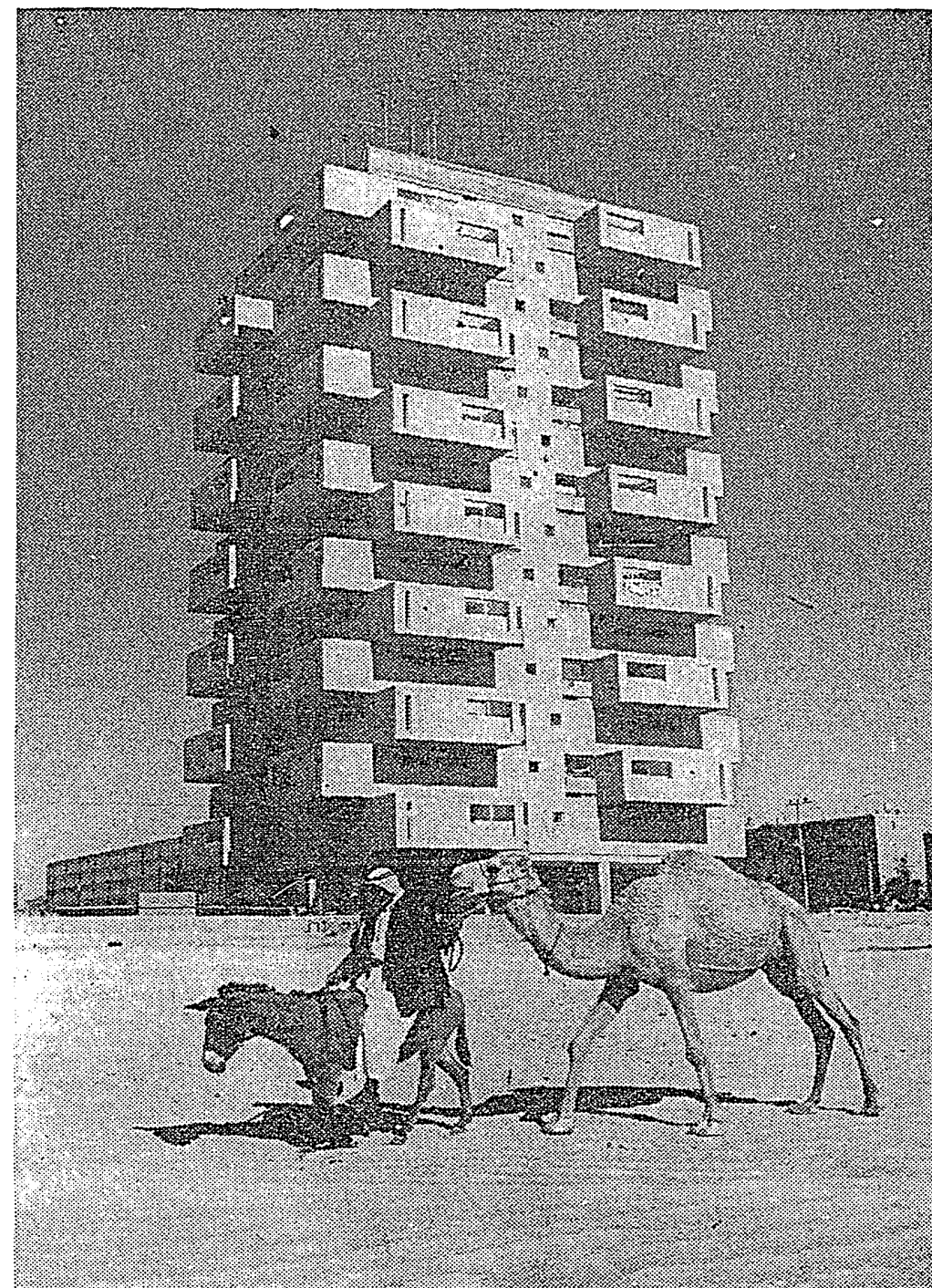
between man's world and the wilderness is sharp. The latest and most closely watched of these settlements is the new town of Arad. The sun-baked site consists of 4,200 acres on a plateau that rises 2,000 feet and then drops more than 3,300 feet to the shores of the Dead Sea. It is 25 miles from Beersheba, one of the first and largest of Israel's new towns, begun in 1950 on an ancient city site.

In the words of a Negev regional planner, David Livneh, Beersheba, now a city of 70,000, is “a museum

of planning errors.” Arad is the bright new model on which the nation pins its development hopes.

Almost everything that was done in Beersheba is being reversed in Arad. Beersheba was designed as a garden city — an English example brought to Israel from Europe, where the English planners' gospel of a home for every man on his own green plot on winding country roads in widely spaced communities was the admired

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A Bedouin rides to market past Beersheba's new 14-story apartment building.



In Arad, the Negev's newest city, clustered apartment buildings like these are going up



Autos are not allowed on pedestrian malls that are lined with dwellings and shops in Arad

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prototype of the first decades of this century.

It was fine for Englishmen escaping from sooty 19th-century industrial slums. And it was fine for England, where it rains. In the Negev, except for seasonal cloudbursts, it does not rain. The land is open, brown and sere.

In Beersheba, desert dust blows through the planners' open spaces, unplanted except where costly and difficult cultivation has nurtured vegetation maintained only as a constant battle against the odds of nature. Beer-sheba's "garden city" neighborhoods of 20 years ago have no green lawns. It is impossible to create and maintain them.

The rambling plans entail an expensive spread of utilities and services. The large areas marked on blueprints for community centers are still unfulfilled focuses of urban life. They leak out onto ring roads beyond brown wastes labeled "greenbelts."

Beersheba is correcting its mistakes where it can. It now displays one of the country's most advanced apartment towers, a new neighborhood of patio housing and an unusual "pyramid" apartment block.

Today the town of Arad is held up as the latest in Israeli planning theory and practice. It clusters its houses closely and turns them inward toward central courts protected against the desert winds. This design also provides for economical concentration of utilities and services.

The community center of shops, schools and activities buildings is no longer a void on a map marked for future development. It is built along with the housing, advancing in a strip as the housing itself advances.

This "linear" center can be built to serve all the needs of the town as far as it has grown at any point. It grows naturally with the city.

In Arad there will be six neighborhoods along this strip. Planning began in 1962 and construction followed immediately. The first neighborhood is complete and the second is being built now.

Construction is proceeding at the rate of about 400 housing units a year, or a neighborhood every two

years. That is practically instant city. One of the oddities of this ancient land is that this kind of planned development has made Israel virtually an instant country, containing some of the newest and the oldest cities in the world.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the start of the planning that followed the establishment of the state of Israel and that has brought about the fantastic changes of demography and geography that coexist with Biblical vistas and conditions.

There will be 25,000 people in Arad's six neighborhoods when they are completed and another 25,000 in adjoining, lower-density areas. The first 4,000 residents are living in the first neighborhood unit.

Life in a new desert town is not easy, but there is a noticeable sense of pride.

"We feel as if we're growing up with the town," one family says. They believe that the town is important to the nation.

Arad, an experiment in social as well as physical planning, is the result of trial and error in the new towns of both north and south. Every feature represents a lesson learned.

Unlike the earlier Negev towns, which were largely transit camps for new immigrants from Mediterranean areas, built under great pressure and often to minimum requirements, Arad's social structure is as carefully controlled as its site plan.

The town was begun with a nucleus of Europeans and native Israelis in a calculated effort to set predetermined administrative and cultural standards. Other Negev towns have had a population that was 80 per cent Eastern Mediterranean immigrant, and self-government and achievement levels have lagged. Arad will have a balanced mix.

Sections of Arad's neighborhoods have been handled by different architects and they vary in success and character. One of the first sections, by D. Best and A. Eyal, has an inviting felicity of scale and detail, with a notably pleasant quality in its buildings and spaces. It adjoins a section in which these qualities are noticeably absent.

The town's most attractive

feature is a wide pedestrian street that runs through the center of each neighborhood like a continuous paved and planted plaza. It is flanked by the apartment blocks that enclose it, and is bordered by arcaded shops. Cars are kept to surrounding roads.

The neighborhood housing

is Government-built. Half is prefabricated, using a system now applied nationally. On the adjacent hills several hundred small houses or villas are being put up by individuals.

Recently discovered phosphate deposits about 10 miles south of Arad promise

well for an industrial area being located southwest of the town.

To the northeast, a kind of convalescent and tourist center is under construction overlooking the color-warmed lunar landscape of the Judean hills. They stretch beyond the edges of the town

as far as the eye can see, toward the tablelike rise of Masada, the dramatic archaeological site of the Jews' last stand against the Roman conquest.

This is a special world of bizarre and desolate beauty, and Arad is a special kind of pioneer town.