

# portrait of a head | interview with architect yitzhak laiwand

Ami Ran

Yitzhak Laiwand - graduate of the Technion, 1972, was until last year the Head of Tel Aviv University's School of Architecture. His classmates were well known figures like Bracha Chiutin, Prof. Baruch Baruch, Prof. Rivka Oksman, Baruch Yoskowitz and Ilan Pibko. After working for several years in Moshe Safdie's office, he opened his own practice where he designed various projects, prominent among which is the Amal Community Centre in the Bokharan Quarter – a post-modern building inside a conserved structure from the beginning of the twentieth century. Laiwand's tenure marks the end of the period when 4 out of 5 Heads were from Jerusalem and a transition to the era of "digital architecture", which is actually everything but architecture. The interview took place in his new home on Kibbutz Adamit.

## **What brings a Jerusalemite architect to the other end of the country... to a simple house with the landscape and air of Switzerland?**

I am first and foremost an architect and only then a Jerusalemite. The move to the Galilee is an old dream come true. Although at my age one no longer buys "green bananas", the desire for change and renewal is still alive and kicking. Air and landscapes are not exclusive to the Swiss – evidently, there are places in Israel that can save the trip. We found one of these and immediately fell in love. The house is in the expansion of Kibbutz Adamit - actually a build-your-home neighborhood, with all that this entails. From here we can see the entire Western Galilee, Haifa Bay, the Carmel and Upper Galilee. Sometimes, we can see two opposite weathers – torrential rain and darkness on one side, and bright clouds and a shining sun on the other.

Anyway, I don't like the word simple... the house was designed together with my life and work partner, Malca Eger. The design process was long and not without disagreement. We dealt with the problem of locality, something that today preoccupies almost every self-respecting architect. The question was how do we design a contemporary house with

a connection to the place, in a place without architectural tradition... We were looking for a way to avoid the eclectic construction typical of Israel in general and the build-your-house-project in particular.

Our natural choice was to focus on the context – and I mean specifically environmental conditions, which probably constituted the starting point of historical designers who were there hundreds of years before us.

We are particularly proud of the internal schema and its underlying connection to the garden. We created a block type building, similar to the Arab Liwan, organized around a central space onto which all of the rooms open. We then determined the openings according to the climate and nearby and distant landscape, the presence of which is constantly felt in all spaces of the house. The dining table, center of everything happening, begins with a pergola in the kitchen that ends outside. The living space borders on a reading room closed off with double-sided bookshelves to serve as a den for the younger generation. Above is a study that overlooks the entire house.

**Israeli schools of architecture suffer from a lack of "masters". I mean architects who**

**are worthy of being a model for imitation and respect... not to mention adored...**

The prevailing belief is that it's preferable for teachers to be famous architects. But my experience as head of a school does not bear this out. I have not come across a bad architect who is a good teacher, but good architects do not necessarily make good teachers. Most schools in the world, and specifically the best ones, are not run by practicing masters and I think this is for the best, because an over-large ego often prevents the teacher from allowing a student to grow. When the school of architecture was established, Daniel Liebeskind was contacted, but nothing came of it, and I'm not convinced we'd be better off today if he had been the head of our school.

**Eran Neuman who came after you is a researcher with no practical experience...In fact your very opposite...**

When I ended my tenure I hoped someone young and dynamic would come in - someone professionally active who wouldn't put his professional ego in the foreground. I welcome Eran's appointment; he is able to devote time and energy to the job, which is impossible for someone who is running an active office, and