

During the second half of the 1930s

Haifa was a large, prosperous city whose architecture reflected its industrial and commercial ambitions. Architects who came to work in Palestine between 1933 and 1939 played an important role in the development of the country's modern architecture under the British Mandate. Many of them, recently qualified, formed a generation looking for new means of expression in a new world, a generation which sought to break from existing traditions.

Architects and developers alike were open to ideas of modernism. At Hadar HaCarmel (the centre of Jewish development) they found an area without any real architectural tradition. They were inspired by high-quality architects already working there and took heart from the large number of modern buildings constructed in other cities and settlements around the country. At Hadar only two buildings represented the British classical tradition: the Law Courts and the Town Hall.

By 1939 most of Haifa's new building belonged to the Modern Movement. Modernism became local, vernacular, and was almost wholly accepted. Haifa's modern architecture was expressed in all types of construction, as much in private housing as in large public and urban schemes. Eclectic buildings became the exception. The most important influence was Germany, where a large number of the architects who set up in Haifa and took part in the city's cultural life had been trained.

So, many Haifa buildings reflect early Bauhaus developments as seen in Walter Gropius's first houses and the houses of others who taught in the Bauhaus school at Dessau. Compositions combining simple cubes, fluid plans, small windows, flat roofs sometimes with small cornices, modest stairwells, simple ramps and vertical fenestration are the most common elements.

Shops and housing, corner of HaMeginim Avenue and Shivat Tzion Street – Architects: Benjamin Orell and Yeheskiel Zohar, 1930s

A five-storey block consisting of shops on the ground floor and apartments above. The development was undertaken by Saib Salam in the 1930s. This remarkable building creates its dynamic via a series of rounded forms. The facade is of interest for its horizontal continuum created by windows and balustrades. Its fluidity shows the strong influence of Eric Mendelsohn. Shadows created by the canopies further stress the horizontal lines. A successful combination of stylised elements made the most of a problematic triangular site set amongst busy streets.



The House of Glass, communal apartments, 21 Bar Giora Street – Architect: Theodor Menkes, 1938-41

The House of Glass was built for bachelor war veterans as communal living which offered residents privacy while encouraging group participation. The building has 12 basic apartments, each of 35 sqm. Every unit has an entrance hall, a bathroom, a small kitchen and a bedroom opening onto the sitting room. This form is reminiscent of buildings designed for students at Dessau by Walter Gropius.

The concept of minimal provision offered a rational solution to the functional demands of the building while making the most of tight spaces. The House of Glass also included shared spaces – a swimming pool and a tennis court on the roof (covered by a net to prevent balls falling over the side) inspired by Le Corbusier. An external staircase led from the communal terrace to the courtyard.

Inside the apartments glass brick walls separated kitchens from bathrooms while others led along the communal corridors. From the outside one can make out the stairwell metal-framed walls which at the time included glass bricks, claustras on top of the external walls for ventilation, and the plant sprinklers from a joint system built around gangways on each storey. The building had central heating and a communal dining room on the ground floor



with a dumb waiter to take meals to upper floors. The boiler and the swimming pool pumps are in the basement.

Such details, unusual for the period, reflect the care taken in design and construction. You also see here an attempt to solve the problems posed by the warm climate: openings are smaller, ceilings higher and particular attention is given to air circulation – all local adaptations of the Bauhaus vernacular. Today much has been altered but tenants still enjoy a fine view over the bay.

Three private houses, 25-27-29 Tchernichowsky Street

Architect: Moshé Gerstel, 1935-38

At Stella Maris, south-east of the Carmelite monastery on the headland, high-quality houses in stone were built in the 1930s along today's Tchernichowsky Street for well-to-do Arab families. The use of cut stone did not affect their



modern appearance. Three were built alongside each other by the architect Moshé Gerstel – no 25 for J. Asfour, 27 for Jamil Habibi and 29 for Agnès Khouri. The Italian architect Giovanni Borra, who designed Carmelite buildings in the lower town, also worked on no 29. Gerstel's aim was to match European elements with local characteristics. The roof terrace and pergola are part of modern architecture's vocabulary but also have a vernacular resonance. The semi-rounded balconies, the metal balustrades and the vertical stairwell windows are essential features of European modernism.

Copper House, corner of Hahursha Street and HaTishbi*Built by Harkohba*

This building, containing four apartments, was imported prefabricated from Germany. It is one of several such in Haifa resulting from the fact that Jews were forbidden to transfer capital from the Third Reich, while exporting German goods was allowed. At the time there were no local facilities for constructing pre-fabricated houses. In Germany, Walter Gropius pioneered the genre as a



consultant to Hirsh Kupperwerke, which manufactured prefabs of this type. Along with the houses, iron frames made by Bohler in Berlin were imported.

These houses were not well-suited to the region's climate. Haifa's architects were well aware of the need to adapt them by creating smaller windows, higher ceilings, and better natural air circulation, as with the House of Glass.

Apartment block, 2 Boulevard Nadiv*Architect: Nahman Syrkin, 1930s*

This elegant block is made up of two horizontal wings – the right-hand one being set slightly further back from the street – and a central tower carrying the main entrance and the stairwell. The central feature has a rounded top jutting out over a long vertical window divided by a structural column. The entrance door and the rounded canopy punctuate the composition. Originally built as private apartments, the block now also contains offices.

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