

## TALKING ARCHITECTURE

Upon project completion - 54 HaYarkon St., Tel Aviv - a luxury boutique building that is currently under construction at the HaYarkon and HaYarden junction - will join the impressive and diverse "Bar Orian Architects" project portfolio. In an interview with Gidi Bar Orian, who founded the firm with his wife, Tal, he reviews the milestones that led him to become a leading architectural firm, his worldview and his vision, which are always directed forward and toward innovation.

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Tal & Gidi Bar Orian, Photographer: Moti Milrod, Haaretz

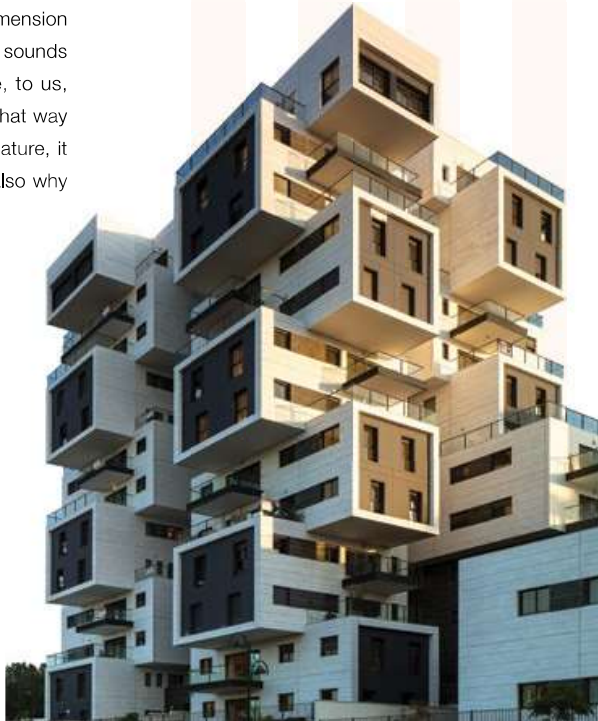
Almost three decades have passed since Tal and Gidi Bar Orian founded "Bar Orian Architects" and its imprint in Tel Aviv cannot be missed. The firm's extensive works present a wide and diverse array of projects reflecting a large typological range including preservation, perimeter block building, construction additions and new construction, saturated construction, public and office structures, towers and commerce and, recently, hotels as well. Concurrently, the firm is involved in urban construction and the preparation of new UCP's for lots and compounds.

Tal and Gidi met as students at the Technion School of Architecture and City Planning and, throughout our interview with Gidi, he says that their firm's extensive urban renewal activities were not a predetermined decision "It was an ongoing process. As a young firm, just starting out, we took small projects, like apartment design and renovation, and a bit of commerce. One day, we were presented with a preservation project. We planned private homes as well but the preservation project actually thus marking our "love affair" with the field and led us to specialize in it and marked a turning point in our work. However although



we performed and continued to perform quite a few projects that involve preservation, we do not consider ourselves preservation architects per se. What interests us in the preservation process is connecting the old with the new, giving the past the honor it deserves and reintegrating it in the contemporary setting".

The firm reached another milestone in 2003 when, together with Architect Gabi Schwartz (among the owners of Schwartz Besnosoff Architects), they won the tender for planning the "Advanced Student Village" at the Haifa Technion - dorms for students of advanced degrees. As the saying goes, the rest is history - the firm established itself as a leader with increasing projects and a growing team - currently consisting of 60 employees - and relocated from Neveh Zedek to Rothschild Blvd. "I tend to classify ourselves as a large boutique firm, i.e. a firm based on quality and service and, despite its relative size, the firm maintains the personal dimension that is so important to us. I know it all sounds nice, but it's not that simple because, to us, each project is unique and we treat it that way throughout the entire process so, by nature, it requires a great deal of work. This is also why



we plan very few private homes, perhaps one a year, since we consider it a comprehensive process that includes interior design down to the last item, requiring us to dedicate ourselves and a great deal of time. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, both of those are "commodities" that are difficult to fit into our scope of operations".

Relating to the dorm project at the Technion, substantially responsible for the said scope of operations, Bar Orian says that it was very challenging. "The project required us to deal with a complex topography of a slanted slope with extensive greenery and, in order to avoid damaging the environment, all of the seven buildings were planned perpendicular to the ground layout. The construction process excluded support walls, integrating a set of bridges that

winds through the plants, links the structures and floats above them, also serving as a promenade". The Technion dorm project was, apparently, an omen of the future seeing that Bar Orian and Schwartz were called upon to cooperate again in planning the student dorms at the Be'er Sheva campus, that are currently under construction. "The architectural concept was to blend in with the construction in the area, derived of the desert climate and consisting of low structures with connecting yards and alleys. We focused on creating a climatic comfort that is so important for the southern city, while meticulously planning the directions and precise shading angles".

When asked about sustainability, which is a current and important issue on the architectural agenda and which also appears in projects

designed by the firm (nature preservation which guided the dorm project in Haifa; preservation which takes up a large portion of his works; or his belief in urban density in favor of public spaces), Bar Orian prefers to avoid sweeping declarations about a sustainable world view. "I tend to avoid definitions and I believe that sustainability means correct and reasoned planning. As someone who "reads" the lay of the land, addresses it and provides an educated solution. In general, I believe in good planning in its most basic and pure semantic sense. What I mean is spaces and areas that "know how to work well", to retain flexibility, enable convenient movement and properly serve the users and this is my belief for any plan of any scale - whether a private home, an apartment, office tower or campus dorms".

Bar Orian's principle of urban densification calls for intense and dense, but not tall, construction. According to him, building up to 8-9 floors "is more appropriate for a city, because it enables utilization of the space while creating public and open spaces. Densification and tall towers are not necessarily essentially equal and densification is

also possible in perimeter block building, which maintains the quality and nature of the urban tapestry".

The 54 HaYarkon St. Project, currently under construction, is such a structure. The building was designed especially for Nitzan Group Orian, with which he collaborated in planning five other projects that are currently underway. The project is at the corner of HaYarkon and HaYarden Streets, near the Herbert Samuel beach across from the Opera Tower, part of which will become a hotel. Another "neighbor" located nearby is the "Tayelet David Towers" Project, consisting of two towers - one residential and the other a hotel that will be managed by the international Kempinsky hotel chain. The building is located on a lot that previously consisted of an old 2-story building that was demolished and it was planned as a luxury boutique structure adhering to the Tel Aviv standard in a prestigious and desirable location. The tower will consist of 6.5 floors and 11 apartments, most overlooking the sea, an underground parking lot and commercial ground floor, as is obvious considering HaYarkon Street's



nature as a commercial street. The impressive structure embodies Bar Orian's architectural language, which he calls "Tel Aviv's next evolutionary stage": a language that derives of styles existing in the city, such as Bauhaus or Brutalism, and is based on the characteristic white box, developing it through the use of materials, volumetric maneuvers, using large openings and more. "As a mass, the structure fits in nicely with the area and the city, while displaying evolutionary elements such as the large openings, steel balconies or extensive use of aluminum. We constantly aim to innovate, to take another step forward".

A new chapter to his resume, building bridges, presented itself to him similarly to the preservation building, which dropped in the firm's lap and developed into an extensive and significant part of its operations. It began with a request that he design the Wauchope Bridge. The bridge led to other bridge projects, including the new Maccabiah Bridge, HaTaaruha Bridge, Reading Bridge and the "Double Spring" bridge in Be'er Sheva, introduced in 2016. He and his partners, "Rokach & Ashkenazi Engineers and Consultants", in designing the bridge in Be'er Sheva, attended an international conference in Berlin, Germany,

where they were awarded the prestigious 2017 Footbridge Award in the long bridge category.

The bridge, connecting the northern train station with a hi-tech park, displays technological innovation and progress at its best with a sculptural dimension. The geometrical shape leans on four steel arches that seem to create a pair of spatial eyes and beyond the functional-architectural element, it has an impressive presence in space. "The bridge in Be'er Sheva involved "planning for the soul", because it combined sculpture with a floating-dynamic dimension that buildings do not have", said Bar Orian, adding that "of all of my projects, it was the most complex and oriented detail, all the way to the smallest screw". The bridge was planned with 3D software, processed into a model with meticulous calculations for all elements and then submitted entirely to a metalworker. "The bridge project was a fascinating opportunity to be involved in "different" planning and we never miss an opportunity to learn something new. Our philosophy is that we already know how to do what we've done, so a field in which we are less experienced will always spark a new interest and a desire to investigate".