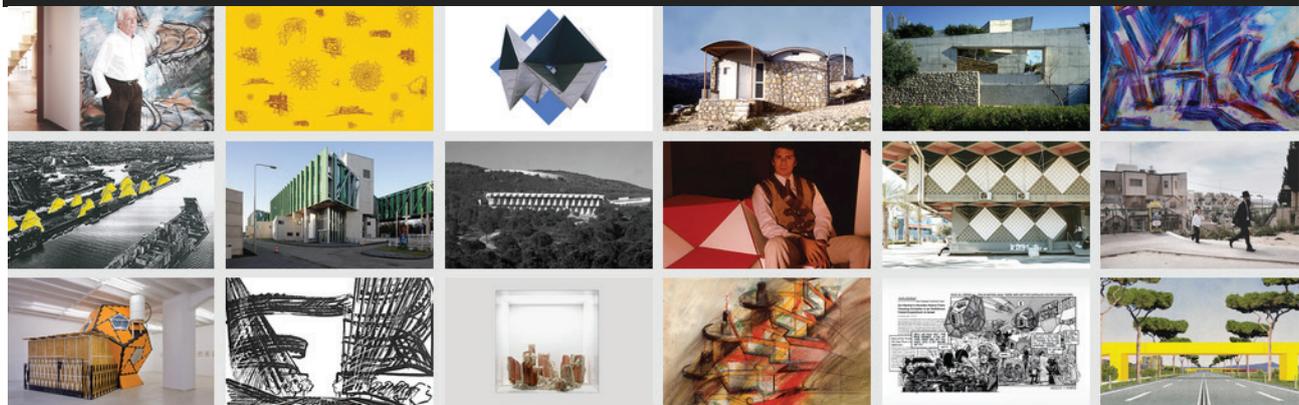


ABOUT **uncube** 



Magazine No. 41  
**Zvi Hecker**

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With the changes in Israeli society that followed the 1967 Six-Day War – during which Israel conquered the West Bank, Sinai Peninsula and Golan Heights, thus more than doubling its size – came massive urban expansion and architecture of a new kind. Rafi Segal traces how the design and construction of a single project, Zvi Hecker's Ramot Polin housing complex on the outskirts of Jerusalem, came to embody and yet defy this nationwide change.

The unification of Jerusalem under Israeli control in 1967 prompted a national building project of urban expansion through the construction of new neighbourhoods and settlements on Jerusalem's surrounding hilltops. These aspired to echo the historic architecture of the old city of Jerusalem and thus establish a direct visual connection between the old and the new. The resulting architectural style of stone façades, arches and other "old Jerusalem" vernacular elements was so dominant that in some cases it led to the dressing of modernist pre-fabricated concrete slab buildings with local stone and arches.

With the focus on the physical and symbolic expansion of Jerusalem came a paradigm shift in Israeli architecture that turned away from the modernism of the 1960s in favour of the "post-modern" Jerusalem architecture of historicised stone façades. Architectural interests also changed – in material: from 1960s exposed concrete to Jerusalem local stone; in form: from abstract geometric expressions to traditional historicism; in construction methods: from pre-fabricated industrial building to traditional mason work; and structurally: from the exposed structures of modernism to concealed and hidden structural systems.

"»Ramot Polin can be seen as a last attempt to resist the new wave of historicised architectural postmodernism in Israel at that time.«"

Needless to say that this paradigm shift left no room for the earlier experimental architecture of the 1960s of which Alfred Neumann, Zvi Hecker and Eldar Sharon were the strongest propagators.

The pre-fabricated Ramot Polin housing complex designed by Zvi Hecker in the early 1970s can be seen as a last attempt to resist this wave of historicised architectural postmodernism (which quickly became mainstream), in favour of an alternative architectural path of new expression and form. It was an almost impossible task. Refusing to accept the old city vernacular as a model for this new complex, he drew on other metaphors, including the form of an open hand. This can be seen in the five-fingered structure of the neighbourhood's layout, as the topography and landscape enter as public space the voids between the "fingers". In keeping with the hand analogy, the number five reappears in the form of the do-decahedral solids that constitute the volumetric units that create the spatial pattern of the Ramot building's main façades.

"»Echoing the wild rock formations of Jerusalem's hills, the project resembles a series of exaggerated wall-like structures.«"

# Neumeister Bar-Am

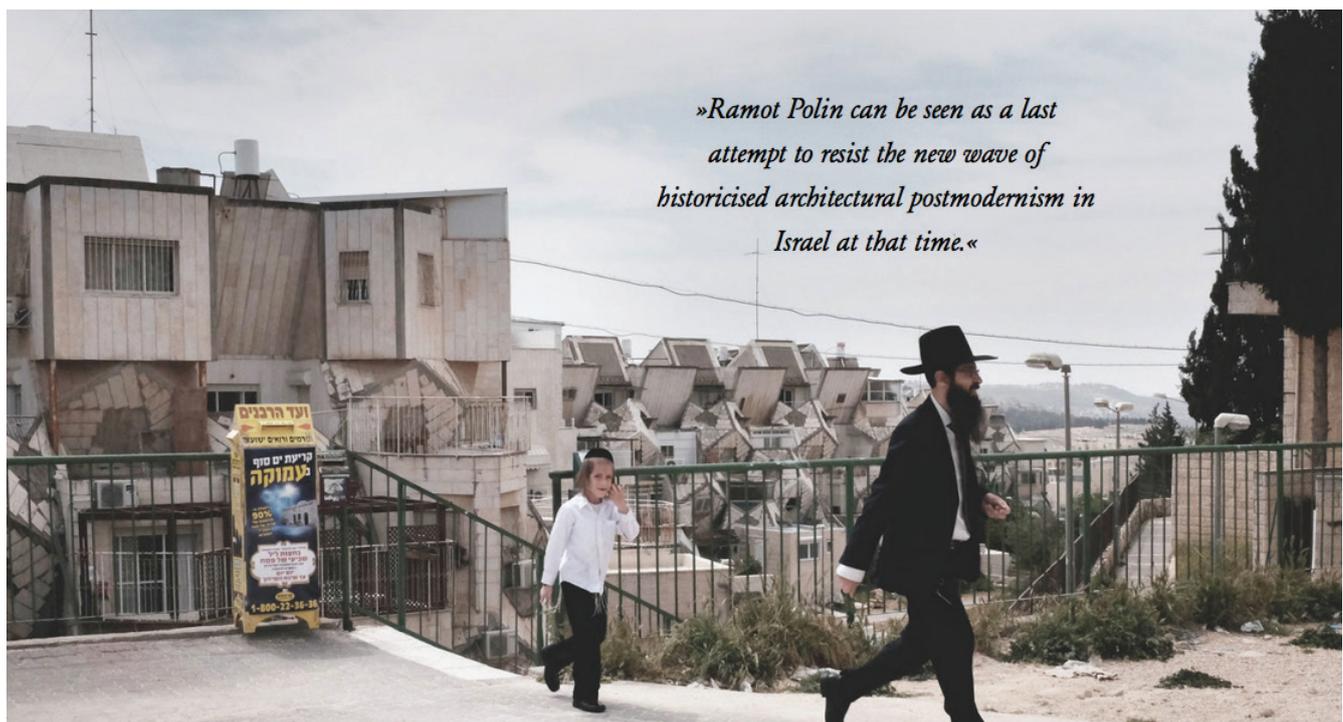
Echoing the wild rock formations of Jerusalem's hills, the project seems to resemble a series of exaggerated retaining wall-like structures and in such a way engages with the landscape like none of the other new "historicised" Jerusalem neighbourhoods built at the time.

Architecturally, the Ramot project followed Alfred Neumann's space-packing approach: a stacking of repetitive spatial elements as a means of creating a deep building envelope to function as a "filter" for the strong Israeli light and climate. This system naturally lent itself to pre-fabrication since the overall building was conceived as an assembly of repetitive units, of room-like size, which could easily be produced from pre-cast concrete elements. The staggering of the buildings' floors enhanced the expression of this stacking while creating balconies open to the sky, a programmatic requirement that enabled the designated tenants – Polish Orthodox Jews – to practice the "Sukka" ritual, in which a temporary hut is built under open skies during the week of the holiday Sukkot.

Ramot Polin spoke a different language of architecture to all the other Jerusalem neighbourhoods built at that time, in form, expression, association and through the concepts it drew on. While the project set out to demonstrate that the rigidity often associated with pre-fabricated construction techniques can be overcome to produce non-conventional (and non-orthogonal) forms, by the time of its completion this argument was no longer relevant. Rather than a catalyst for new and original expression, post-1967 Israeli architecture was now valued for its ability to mimic old forms and create a direct link with past styles, reflecting a cultural preference supported by political-economic forces and a change in the country's labour source.

Israel's government-supported pre-fabricated building industry, which developed throughout the 1950s and 60s in response to a lack of skilled manual labour and the desire to maximise efficiency in producing housing for new citizens migrating to the country, was highly advanced by the end of the 1960s. But the conquering of the West Bank provided cheap, skilled, Palestinian stonemasons and, as a result, the national pre-fab industry declined sharply. In fact, halfway through the construction of the Ramot Polin project the Ministry of Housing replaced the construction company supplying the modular elements with a new one, to finish the work using conventional building methods. This change in the manner of construction led Zvi Hecker to discontinue the original design and produce a completely different one for the remainder of the project.

Therefore, through the architecture of its two building phases, Ramot Polin, upon its completion in 1985, evidences, in a single project, a profound shift in Israeli architecture, namely the end of attempts at new expression and the rise of a nationalist style "historicised" in order to prevail and further conquer.



## A Life in Architecture – Zvi Hecker

SEPTEMBER 17, by Hili Perlson  
2014



Zvi Hecker, Dubiner apartment building in Ramat Gan, Israel, 1961–64; all images courtesy: Zvi Hecker

A profile of the Berlin-based Israeli architect

‘I’m calling it “If We Are Lucky”,’ Zvi Hecker tells me at his office in Mitte, Berlin. He’s holding a sketch of the installation he’s preparing for abc – art berlin contemporary, presented by the Berlin galleries Nordenhake and Neumeister Bar-Am. It’s a free-standing structure some 2.1 metres high and 3 metres wide, sawn by hand from one sheet of plywood that will be painted an earthy, loam-evoking rusty-red. Its organic shape resembles a topographical model collapsed on its side, with each of its spiralling layers extruding like a paper cut out. The structure is held in place by three additional panels which fit into the layers’ slots. ‘It’s a cave,’ he maintains, ‘and I’m sticking images of Paleolithic cave paintings on its walls to make sure there’s no mistaking what it is.’ The work possesses a dark note that shows the 83-year-old architect’s tongue-in-cheek sense of humour: ‘we leave nothing for future generations. The way we exhaust the planet’s resources, it’s only if we’re really lucky that we’d be able to even go back to living in caves. Hopefully it will be for good this time.’

Zvi Hecker, Dubiner apartment building in Ramat Gan, Israel, 1961–64; all images courtesy: Zvi Hecker  
A profile of the Berlin-based Israeli architect

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Bat-Yam City Hall, Israel, 1959–63



Ramot Polin in East Jerusalem, Israel, 1972–75

Zvi Hecker is one of Israel's most prominent architects. He has been the subject of numerous museum shows in Israel and Europe, and represented Israel at the 5th Venice Architecture Biennale in 1991. Hecker's youth was marked by the displacement typical for his generation of Israelis. Born in Krakow in 1931, he spent his childhood and early adulthood in Poland and in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. The Central Asian city's magnificent Islamic art and architecture left a deep impression on Hecker, laying the foundation for many of his later ideas about shape, geometry and a building's relation to its environment. Indeed, these are the three aspects of Hecker's work for which he's become most known, but which have also drawn the sharpest criticism. Hecker's architectural education began in Krakow's University of Technology and continued in Israel, where he emigrated in 1950. There, he studied at Haifa's Technion under architect Alfred Neumann, with whom he would later found a firm together in 1959, along with fellow classmate Eldar Sharon.

Throughout the 1960s, the partners built some of the most conceptually striking buildings in Israel. Their joint projects were beacons of a then avant-garde style of architecture that eschewed the simple geometry and right angles of international modernism, embracing more complex polyhedrons instead.

# Neumeister Bar-Am

Their approach produced such iconic buildings as the Bat-Yam City Hall's inverted pyramid (1959–63), the IDF Officer training school (1963–67) and its synagogue (1969–71) in the southern Negev region, and the Dubiner apartment building (1961–64) in Ramat Gan, where Hecker also took up residence. The impact of these buildings on Israeli architecture is not to be underestimated, as architectural historian Zvi Efrat describes in his comprehensive survey *The Israeli Project: Building and Architecture 1948–1973*. Efrat sees the style as 'paradoxical': the modular, repeated polyhedrons fit the local climate and topography, creating shaded crevices and made clever use of natural light but also reveals, as he puts it, a certain 'enchantment with pseudo-scientific methodology and hyper-industrial production.' This style shaped the very identity of Israeli architecture, Efrat argues, particularly following the Six Day War of 1967, when new borders were drawn and entire neighbourhoods were quickly erected.



IDF Synagogue, Southern Negev region, Israel, 1969–71

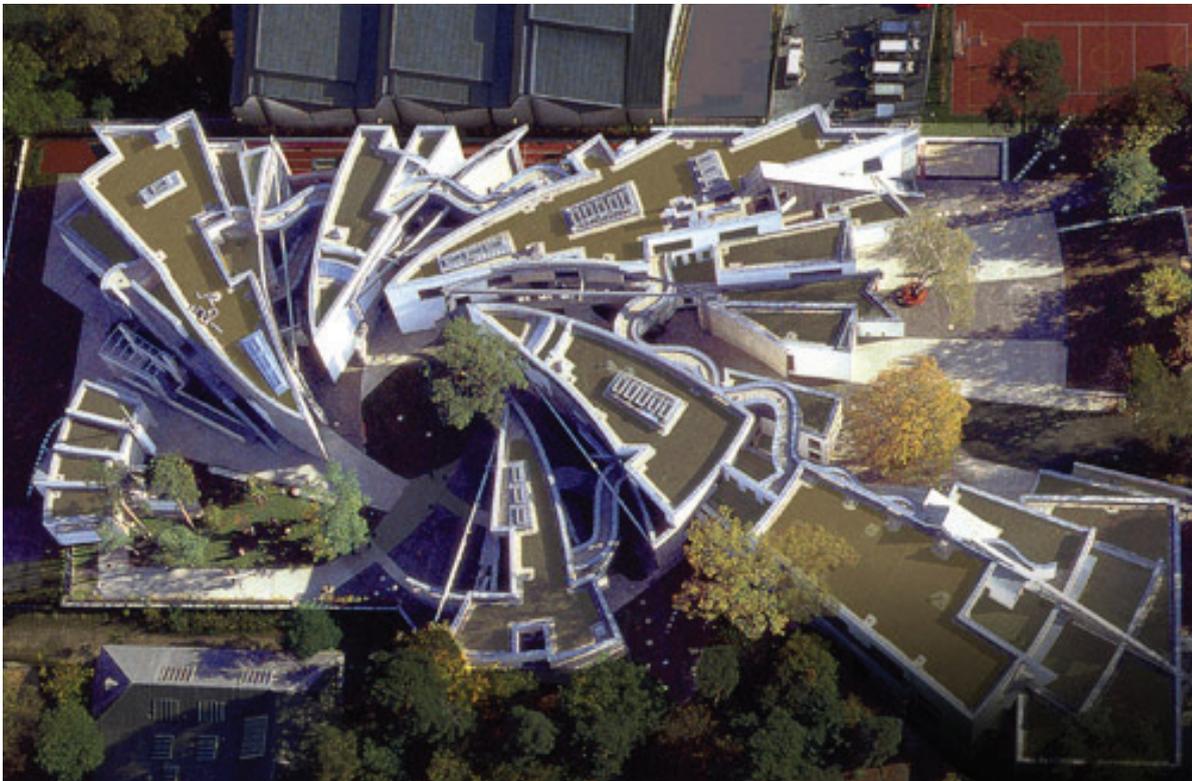


Spiral Apartment House in Ramat Gan, Israel, 1981–86

Such was the case with Hecker's the apartment building Ramot Polin (1972–75), probably his most controversial project. Working alone since 1970, Hecker's proposal for the new East-Jerusalem neighbourhood was selected mainly for its promise of a swift and inexpensive execution. Shaped like a five-fingered beehive, the structure's pre-fab dodecahedron apartments proved impractical for its Ultra-Orthodox Jewish inhabitants – a closed but expanding community – and illegal additions made over the years now obfuscate the original architecture. Hecker's interest in shape eventually shifted too; the spiral would increasingly become a recurring motif in his designs and drawings. His fascination with curves emanating from a central point began when inspecting a drawing that illustrated how logarithmic spirals determine the growth of the sunflower seeds, namely, in the proportion of a golden ratio. His Spiral Apartment House (1981–86) in Ramat Gan was designed to look like a giant set of stairs coiling around an inner courtyard. The unconventional form and the structure's 'unfinished' look were the source of much irritation in the bourgeois suburb, as a macabre but humorous anecdote reveals: during the 1st Gulf War of 1990–91, many of Saddam Hussein's notorious Scud missiles landed in the area. When authorities came to assess the damage, one engineer was overheard reporting that the house – completely intact save for some broken windowpanes – had been 'damaged beyond repair.'

# Neumeister Bar-Am

Hecker opened his second office in 1991 in Berlin, where he still works. Now, his designs have become markedly conceptual; his buildings are not easily walked around – or through – but rather extend the environment in which they're set. Hecker is often referred to as an 'artist-architect', prompting him to define himself as 'an artist whose profession happens to be architecture.' He collaborated with sculptor Micha Ullman and former student Eyal Weizman on the 'Blatt' memorial on Lindenstrasse, which commemorates the synagogue in Berlin-Kreuzberg that was burned down during the Kristallnacht pogrom in 1938. But his most prominent project in the city is the Heinz-Galinski School (1995), the first Jewish school built in Berlin since World War II. Reminiscent of a micro city-within-a-city, the school's many little yards, crevices and curvatures resemble the pages of an open book from above. It was his friend, the painter Moshe Gershuni, who gave him the idea of having a long, snaking corridor wind through the school's complex structure. One wall is left unpainted, still bearing calculations and dates pencilled on the exposed brick – traces left by the people who worked on it. As Hecker explains: 'children should know it was hard work.'



Heinz-Galinski School, Berlin, Germany, 1995

Zvi Hecker, 'If We Are Lucky' will be on show at abc – art berlin contemporary (18–21 September, 2014) presented by Galerie Neumeister Bar-Am and Galerie Nordenhake.

## About the author

Hili Perlson is a writer, art critic and fashion journalist based in Berlin. She writes for Artforum and The New York Times among other publications.

A Life in Architecture – Zvi Hecker

<http://blog.frieze-magazin.de/a-life-in-architecture-zvi-hecker/>

## NORDENHAKE

### Zvi Hecker, "The Thinking Eye-Recent Paintings"

Berlin, March 09th - April 20th, 2013



Untitled, 2011, acrylic and inkjet print on canvas, 108,5 x 91 cm

Galerie Nordenhake is pleased to present an exhibition with paintings by the distinguished architect Zvi Hecker. Hecker started his prolific career in the early 1960s in Israel. Among his best-known projects are the Bat Yam City Hall (realised together with Eldar Sharon and Alfred Neuman in 1963-69), the housing complex Ramot Polin built between 1972-79 and the Spiral Apartment House in Ramat Gan, Tel Aviv realised between 1985-89. In 1995 Hecker was awarded the German Critics' Prize for Architecture for the design of the Heinz-Galinski School in Berlin (1990-95).

GALERIE NORDENHAKE, April 2013

# Neumeister Bar-Am

In 1995 he designed the Frederick Kiesler exhibition at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. His approach is characterised by an awareness of the ever-changing nature of the world and for the archaic origins of humanity. For Hecker "Architecture is an art in constant search for an expression of the human soul in its ever-changing condition".

The exhibition consists of a selection of paintings from the last three years on both canvas and cardboard. His paintings are defined by dynamic geometrical forms—more or less in a state of deconstruction—and their intense sensory appeal. Both qualities can also be found in his architecture. Painting is an integral part of his extraordinary multilayered practice and Hecker describes himself as "an artist whose profession is architecture".

Certain paintings can be seen as further elaborations—on a rather abstract and lyrical level—of the lines of thought that emerge from his architectural projects, whereas others suggest abstract landscapes. As with his drawings, his paintings are also a means to reinterpret the mathematical exactitude of geometry, transforming it into something open and organic. He is interested in the incompleteness and ultimate imperfection of a structure like the spiral. Hecker explored the Fibonacci spiral in its complexity among others in his sketchbook no 5 from 1981-82, while he was conceiving the Spiral Apartment House. A painted sketch of the spiral from the book can be seen as an early version of the untitled painting with a red spiral from 2011, which is on view in the exhibition. The exhibition includes two of the forty-five sketchbooks that Hecker started in 1979. They illustrate how essential forms—within Hecker's complex architectural planning process—like the Möbius band, the spiral or the hexagon—from Hecker's complex architectural planning process re-occur in his paintings. The pages of these books allow for a close reading of Hecker's working process of visual investigation in which drawing, writing and painting are united.



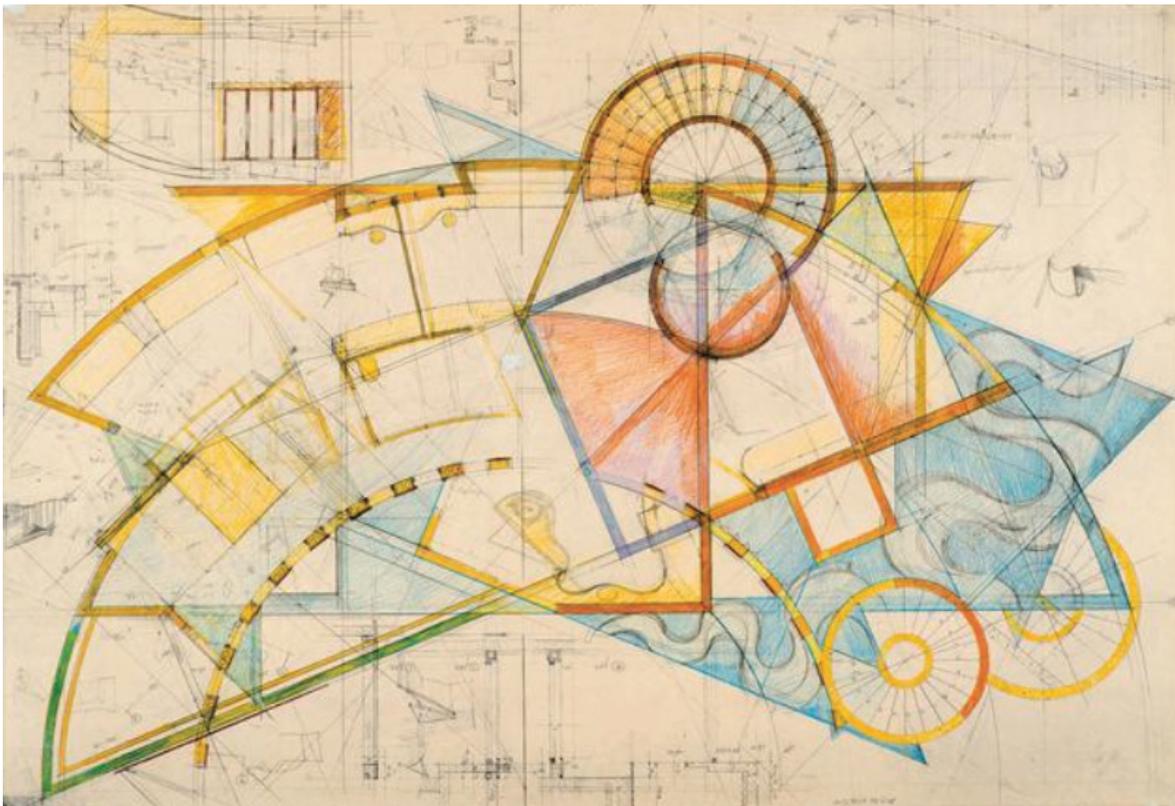
Untitled, 2010/12, acrylic and inkjet print on canvas, 91 x 108,5 cm

GALERIE NORDENHAKE, April 2013



## THE SKETCHES OF ZVI HECKER

31 January 2013 | By Yael Reisner



**An ‘artist whose profession is architecture’, captures 16 buildings’ dynamic in space, emphasising the importance of hand drawings in a creative process which is becoming ever more software-based**

‘Hand drawings help to channel the vague ponderings of the mind into visual images of a germinating concept. It is then up to the eyes to trace and decode its meaning,’ says Zvi Hecker in this new collection. Naturally that’s why sketches were always important and intriguing as they followed one’s mind. These days a lot of architects think with the digital mouse in hand, while using software that quickly facilitates a buildable appeal of almost any design, while there is a great danger in shortening the design process and eliminating the core moments that lead to good architecture. Has the assessment of thoughts visually disappeared from the architect’s design process? Are a lot of architects rushing towards the end game dropping the necessary middle process of design? What will happen to the intuitive immediacy of the hand drawing in days where one’s thoughts are channelled by software?

# Neumeister Bar-Am



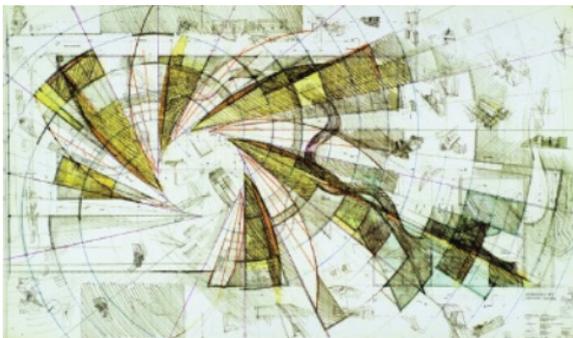
*Learning in 1970 about the logarithmic spiral that underscores the growth of sunflower seeds influenced Hecker's later work, such as Spiral Apartment House plan*

Nevertheless, all is not as it seems; there is confidence among young architects that sketches and drawings are not dead, as some claim, since they are natural and at ease with much software, and seem to be engaged with visual thinking through a wide range of drawing applications that are wider than ever before, leading to a sophisticated architectural output. Or perhaps such antagonistic observations reflect on a clear schism between professional practice and academic circles? In the practice of today, speed and practicality are the main yardsticks, where Building Information Modelling (BIM) for architects and

engineers accelerates dramatically the design process; whereas in the academic context the pursuit of a design process articulated through drawings is highly valued.

Hecker's astute observation clarifies his unique angle: 'I'm an artist whose profession is architecture', and that ambivalent reality was phrased by him knowingly saying 'an architect is always within a schizophrenic situation because, on one hand, he is a professional and, on the other, he is within a creative process of searching and developing the design. The beginning of the process is an experiment – much like creating a dish that is not yet cooked and ready to be served. So the architect must admit that the design is still not perfect and is only in development.'

The brilliant structural engineer Peter Rice would have agreed with Hecker, as he dedicated one of his lectures in the mid 1980s, at the AA, to the importance of creative work not falling into the category of being extremely professional. Most architects will agree with that; this is the very nature of brilliant architecture for hundreds of years, so why is it so troublesome?



In this new book the sketches are mostly Hecker's studies leading to his projects, built and unbuilt, and portray his passion for his work, as well as his sincerity and commitment to architecture – the most complex of all arts. They are hand drawn in pencil, colour pencil, ink and acrylic paint, capturing his laborious thought process with doubts and assertions that can be traced as perceived and developed while drawn on paper, recording his sense of responsibility as well as a relent-

less search for a new aesthetic. His sharp comments are displayed among the visual report of his design process, in short paragraphs: anecdotes, words of wisdom, cynical humour with a few battles illustrated, placing him along other maverick artists who often were misunderstood, and even more so in their hometown.

Hecker has selected studies of 16 projects, starting with one of his first building, the Bat Yam city hall, Israel (1960), and ending with his latest building to come: the Royal Military Police District in Schiphol Amsterdam Airport (2001-13). In all, it represents 40 years or so of architectural thinking by one of the most prominent maverick living architects; work that is often exhibited as art work in galleries, private collections and museums.

Three of Hecker's projects, of which two made him known with the international community, are represented in the book by numerous studies. Each starts with the fascinating sunflower's geometry or mathematics, an interest that was initiated in 1970 when he was given a drawing that showed how logarithmic spirals determine the growth of the sunflower seeds in the golden progression. 'It was Frank Lloyd Wright who first considered geometry as scaffolding, which is later taken off' says Hecker. Similarly, Hecker's plans and sections are his common medium for studies with which he often thinks and works out his moves.

Most of the sketches tell us about Hecker's struggles and rigorous design process, as when the building has been built the decisive acts hide any traces of the thinking. Thus the sunflower's line network is hidden or unseen when you are looking at the buildings, but in the Jewish School in Berlin it retained the potential due to openings that capture and spread daylight into the interior of the school. Naturally, it is a similar case with the Spiral House in Ramat Gan, where one of its most unique and contemporary aspects (in one of its earliest appearances) is that Hecker's interpretation of the organisation captures a spatial depth with many openings cutting through, creating this unique see-through for a building that otherwise is rather heavy and unforgiving. These allow cross ventilation, unusual views, connections between interior and exterior, illustrating a characteristic of all Hecker's work that directs the viewer along a series of progressions and delays through the building – much like a journey through a city.

Hecker's sketches are naked since no materials are expressed, though his use of materials communicates few of his intentions: a cultural critic as in the spiral apartment-block, or touching a nerve of the collective memory as in the Palmach Museum. Hecker's freehand sketches of people, city landscapes, old historical buildings or trees inform us he can draw well naturally with elegant lines that portray the subject. Nevertheless, when designing he avoids being seduced by his lightness of hand, thus the sketches' attraction is more about framing thoughts and early ideas that often are incomplete, and (for an architect who wished to keep this sense of incompleteness through his architecture as well), it's fascinating to see the build up for that. His painterly sketches are three dimensional, capturing the building's dynamic in space, and are often expressive – more about an impression than about the completeness of form (another feature that software cannot handle).

Designing through numerous sketches of plans and sections is a reflection of a 20th-century design medium that is disappearing, where these days the rigorous design is taking place three dimensionally, and plans and sections are often cut at the end of the process, dissecting the end product so as to provide working drawings and building instructions. The three-dimensional thinking is through software and always looks complete, leaving the charm or attraction of an incomplete sketch as a memory from the past.

# ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

## IN ACCORD WITH THE LANDSCAPE

The Hills of Israel Foster a New Organic Architecture

Text by Victoria Newhouse | Photography and illustrations courtesy Zvi Hecker Architect

Sigal and Doron Ofer, the clients for a house in Bnei Zion, and the architect, Zvi Hecker, are among Israel's most prominent citizens. An alliance of the two, however, would be unexpected. Founded three generations ago as a chandlery and shipping agency, the Ofer Brothers Group is now one of the country's largest privately held conglomerates. As CEO, Doron Ofer directs the company's real estate acquisitions. Hecker, on the other hand, is known in Israel as the *enfant terrible* of his profession. The improbable marriage of establishment and antiestablishment recently produced a stillbirth—a house that remains unbuilt.



In the 1960s an act worthy of *The Fountainhead* earned Hecker his reputation. Upon learning that windows other than those he had designed would be installed in one of his buildings then under construction, the architect broke into the site with his assistants one night and destroyed the window frames so as to make the change impossible. Over the years, the uninhibited, fragmented forms of his public buildings and housing have only reinforced this image of an uncompromising individualist.

Hecker's style is, in fact, well suited to the Ofer site. Sixteen miles northeast of Tel Aviv, the lot is situated amid the undulating topography of the Plain of Sharon, in Israel's central coastal region. The architect was not deterred by the modest area left for construction due to an existing orange grove and a pledge to leave intact the former owner's small residence. On the contrary, Hecker points out, "My recent projects are not proper buildings in the sense that one can walk around them and grasp their form, but rather they are extensions of the surrounding reality."

Just so, in model form the four separate, single-story wings, or pavilions, of the Ofer House appear as outgrowths of the landscape. So closely do the long, narrow arcs of the house hug the hill they climb, they might be mistaken for part of the topographical plan. To further integrate the residence with the site, additional orange trees were planned to make the main entranceway more distinguishable.

Intended for the couple, their six children and a service staff, 6,000 square feet of residential, entertainment and guest rooms are distributed in four narrow pavilions of various lengths inserted into the gradual rise in the site. At the foot of the hill, to the south, is a guest wing. Farther up are the two longest wings: one for living, the other for the children's bedrooms. These two segments are connected by a glass-enclosed entrance hall with sliding walls that open to the garden and terraces, with a tennis court and a swimming pool. Projecting beyond the entrance hall, which includes a large study, is the master suite. A 2,000-square-foot semi-basement, used as a playroom and the obligatory bomb shelter, links different parts of the house.

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**“My recent projects are not proper buildings in the sense that one can walk around them and grasp their form, but rather they are extensions of the surrounding reality.”**

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Born in Krakow, Poland, Hecker spent his teen years in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, where historic Islamic architecture inspired his first drawings. It is a heritage that he still admires. The architect describes one earlier, realized project, his Spiral Apartment House of 1981-86 in Ramat Gan, in terms of a small Arab village, with its modernist ramps and courtyards evoking the village's slopes and plazas.

In 1991 Hecker opened a second office, in Berlin, where the Heinz-Galinski School—the first Jewish school to be built in the city since the Nazi era—he completed there four years later is among several of his European buildings that also recall a mini-city within a city. It is an image that could also be applied to the multi-winged house he designed for the Ofer family.

Conceptually, Hecker relates the Ofer House to Frank Lloyd Wright's 1942 project for Lloyd Burlingham in El Paso, Texas. That project, also unbuilt, was a single-story adobe residence

composed of intersecting arcs. It is among several designs fueled by Wright's interest at the time in ideal geometries expressive of place and material, consistent with his philosophy of “organic architecture.” Like Wright's project, Hecker's is closely connected with the land.

Hecker also admires what he calls his predecessor's ability “to compose with nothing.” He describes the Burlingham House as “an early example of Arte Povera. Like the Ofer project, the basic theme is the wall.”

In keeping with the organic character of his design, Hecker planned to use an indigenous fragile sandstone known as kurkar outside and selectively inside. (The architect first encountered kurkar during excavations for the museum he built in Tel Aviv for Palmach, a legendary underground military organization.) For the Ofer House, the concrete skeleton would have been partially exposed and white stucco walls extended beyond each structure to form retaining walls.

Ostensibly, the house was not built due to the clients' postponement of their move from London to Israel. Hecker, ever the enfant terrible, says, rather, a house that was “merely an extension of the surroundings” was probably seen as a poor relation to its opulent neighbors. Notwithstanding its failed implementation, the product of this dialogue between establishment and antiestablishment is a remarkably ingenious design that joins the ranks of great “unbuilts” throughout history.

