

Residential Building in Tel Aviv

Design: Nili Portugali, Architect A.A Dip (London) Israel

A Holistic-Phenomenological Approach to Architecture

– A different approach to the design of apartment buildings

The purpose of architecture, as I see it, is first and foremost to create a **human environment for human beings**. Yet, modern society has lost the value of man and thus created a feeling of alienation between man and the environment. An apartment building is much beyond shelter; its Timeless test is in its capacity to create emotional experience and human relationship between man and environment – a sense of belonging.



images courtesy of Nili Portugali Architect

The residential project designed by me in Tel-Aviv was built on a site assigned for an ordinary apartment building. As opposed to the common apartment buildings being built today, which normally create an anonymous and uniform environment, here a fundamentally different approach was made.

The intention was first to create a place where the tenants will feel **at home**, from the moment they enter the site until they reach their private apartment, and secondly to create a building that will contribute significantly to the public space of which its boundaries it defines. As in any organic system, each building has its own uniqueness and power, but at the same time always functions as part of a larger environment for which its existence and wholeness it is responsible for.



At the foundation of all those places in which man feels at home are absolute ‘**physical patterns**’ that’ve always been responsible for the dialogue between man and environment- to the ‘feeling’ of the place. The secret concealed within the beauty of a place at any level of scale lies in the nature of its details: the balconies; the high windows; the building materials, etc. At the same time the details are not conceived as a random collection of designed elements, but as a structural part, deriving from a **generative language**, in which **the building and the interior are one continuous system**.



The Walk from the public street to the private apartment is through a continuous system of open spaces that opens one into another leading gradually to the private apartment, not via an alienated lobby, but through an “internal outdoor street” to which the apartment’s façade overlook. The “internal street” was an appropriate solution for isolating the apartments from the busy streets alongside the site. Each apartment has direct and private access from the “internal outdoor street”. The garden apartments via a private courtyard and the upper apartments via a private

entrance balcony connected to the open stairs and the external elevators, creating a sense of connectedness to the ground.

The developer realized that but by adopting and trusting this uncommon approach to architecture was not only a human response to those living in the project and a value to the environment as a whole, but can be transformed into economic viability, and that despite the location at a crossroads of two busy streets.



Extract from Review by Architect and Critic Michael Jacobson:

“How many architects can be clearly identified? In here the identification does not stem from a whimsical and fashionable design, but rather from a profound, informed, powerful and structured approach presents throughout all the stages of the design process, an approach that is expressed from the layout of the wings of the building on the site, through the treatment of the façade, the interior, the movement, and down to the very small details []

In the Israeli scene the number of those talented architects is rather limited. Architect Nili Portugali, who has been working for almost 40 years, is undoubtedly part of that group.

A distinct example of her approach [] is this apartment building in Tel-Aviv [] A perception that is expressed in Portugali’s holistic approach that appears in other buildings she designed. But in the case of this apartment building in Tel- Aviv it even surpassed the previous ones, especially in terms of the layout and the structure of the building and its landscape design.

This is not a public building expected to embody a festive appearance or impressive halls, but rather a daily residential building that is not unusual nor in its location, its budget or its tenants. In residential developments most efforts are made in the design of luxurious villas while apartment buildings are not given any special attention, its design relies on existing copy paste models. Here Portugal is coping with impressive success with the field that should be highlighted again and not be satisfied with the conventional shelf solutions.



The project represents a unique and distinct language: the choice to divide the building into two wings, the “Internal outdoor street”, the external stairs and elevator towers, the balconies [] the lighting fixtures, the railings and fences [] All these represent the distinct and holistic language inherent in Portugali’s personality, as well as closely related to Architect Prof. Christopher Alexander’s approach with whom she worked and participated in research at the ‘*Center for Environmental Structure*’, Berkeley.

The universal approach she implemented in relation to the local reality so much so, that her buildings often looked as though they had been there forever []

Its impressive appearance attracting the attention of the people passing by, arousing their interest, enriching the public space in a meaningful way, an inspiration for the entire environment”

Nili Portugali biography / Short



Nili Portugali is a well-known practicing Architect; senior lecturer; Researcher, published author & film director.

Her multidisciplinary work both in practice and theory is closely connected to the holistic-phenomenological school of thought.

She is 7th generation descendant of a family living in the holly 'Kabbala' city of Tsefat, Israel since the early 19th century.

She was a senior lecturer at the **Bezalel Academy of Art and Design**, Jerusalem and at the Faculty of Architecture and Town Planning at the **Technion, Haifa**.

She is a Guest lecturer at MIT, Harvard, Carleton University, Oxford University, TU Stuttgart; TU Dresden; TU Delft, Tsinghua China; Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Her first book: *The Act of Creation and the Spirit of Place: A Holistic-Phenomenological Approach to Architecture* / Edition Axel Menges Stuttgart / London, was listed in the **books of the year** selected by the Royal Institute of British Architects (**R.I.B.A**)

In the book Review by URBAN DESIGN *International* / Palgrave Macmillan Journals:

"Portugali's quiet revolution may be the one that passes the ultimate test of time"

Her second book published: *A Holistic Approach to Architecture, "The Felicja Blumenthal Music Center and Library"* Tel Aviv / Edition Am Oved Tel Aviv

Her third book published : 'And the alley she whitewashed in light blue - The secret of all those timeless places where one feels »at home« Film * Architecture * Art' / Edition Axel Menges Stuttgart / London (The book includes a free streaming access to watch the film)

Her work is documented in books, in the **Dictionair De l'Architecture Du xxe Scielle** / Hazan Publication France, in professional journals, in the press and on TV.

Graduated: A. A. School of Architecture - London; **Post G selected studies:** Architecture & Buddhism - U.C Berkeley; Selected Film studies - Tel-Aviv University.

Research work with Christopher Alexander at the 'Center for Environmental Structure'/ Berkeley.

Among the buildings she designed is the world-known "**The Felicja Blumenthal Music Center and Library**" at the historic heart of Tel Aviv.

Her work was exhibited in the **Venice Architecture Biennale**, Barcelona Spain, Linz Austria, **San Paolo Architecture Biennale** etc.

Her feature Hybrid film "**And the alley she whitewashed in light blue**" of which she wrote its script, directed, edited and did the production design. Was world premiered at the International Mumbai film festival. India

The film can be seen as the third of a trilogy following the buildings she designed as an architect and the published books she wrote.

For more details see: www.niliportugali.com