

Eastern Hadar Ha'Carmel —“Social Bauhaus” in Changing Times

The sprawling expanse from east of Arlosoroff Street to the flanks of HaGiborim Street (Wadi Rushmiya), and from Akiva Street to Judah Leib Gordon and Hehaluts Street, gave Hadar Hacarmel its main room for expansion in the 1930s and the 1940s. The original Hadar Hacarmel, demarcated by Shmaryahu Levin Street on the west to Arlosoroff Street, went through several stages of building that were first typified by an eclectic selection of large villas and afterwards by modest family dwellings. After the “Riots” of 1929, when Jews and Arabs began to separate from each other, the neighborhood grew in strength and density as residents added floors to their houses and the International Style, aka “Bauhaus,” gradually became dominant in the area. Jerusalem and Nordau Streets reflect this development; the streets farther uphill demonstrate the total takeover of the style. It was mainly the affluent—merchants, contractors, bureaucrats, and those of upper-middle class—who concentrated in this area, which became the core of Jewish Haifa. As the tides of immigration of the 1930s waxed (mainly in the Fifth Aliya), Jewish Haifa developed eastward as well, past the historical Hadar Hacarmel, toward Wadi Rushmiya, and also, to some extent, up Mt. Carmel to the district known as “Upper Hadar.” This area was built in a similar style and accommodated the well-to-do and homebuyers more than it did working-class people and day laborers. The latter found their main residential district in Haifa in the eastern part of Hadar, along Michael (Tabor), HaShiloah, Bezalel and Geula, Zebulun and Herzog (Gilead) Streets. This, in effect, became the core district of “Red Haifa,” home to the working, middle, and lower-middle classes, mostly key-money tenants or long-term renters. They were stable families, some religious and others not, mostly from Poland and Russia. Some haredim (“ultra-Orthodox”), too, gathered around the Bet Yaakov Seminary. The building style here was also Bauhaus—in a less decorative mode, simpler and humbler, frugal and introspective relative to the houses in areas of Hadar Hacarmel to the west and up Mt. Carmel. Thus, this is the place where “Social Bauhaus” reflected “Labor Haifa” at its best: schools such as Geula and Yavne, the Scouts and Bnei Akiva youth movements, small vendors of groceries, vegetables, meat, fish, housewares, and writing implements, along with very few businesses that targeted a higher-class clientele.

Although times have changed, this area still seems to reflect a Bauhaus concentration that has similar social characteristics. Once the working-class families established themselves, they were gradually supplanted by religious households and then by haredim, who today account for nearly all the area’s population. The haredim, with their diverse communities, yeshivas, institutions, and way of life, have taken over the area and thus maintained its erstwhile position on the municipal ladder. Again it is a lower-class district whose tenants, settling in hundreds of eye-catching buildings, some done in the International Style, made no impression whatsoever on them. City Hall still maintains the public spaces to some extent but the passageways, the alleys, and, above all, the spacious courtyards have become dumping grounds for garbage, scrap metal, and objects thrown from windows in utter disregard of the residential domain. Incongruous add-ons to the flanks of the buildings and on rooftops, closure of the lovely balconies of the original houses, dark and narrow staircases used to be important functional decorative elements, and most of all, the tenants’ total indifference to the architectural assets that they have entered, attest to the narrowness of this lower class’ world.

Those who search for meaning in “Social Bauhaus” would do well to sightsee in this area and observe the changing times reflected in the social transformations and the cityscape that is steadily taking shape there. The potential remains, but Haifa City Hall, like the inhabitants of this district, seem disinclined to breathe new life into the hidden treasures of the place even if the Messiah, who is so popular among the inhabitants, arrives.

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