





# PITSOU KEDEM BUILDER OF DREAMS

*With innovative materials and  
a bold vision, an Israeli architect  
pushes Modernism further.*

**BY STEWART WEINER**

PHOTOGRAPHY  
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**THE SHAPE OF THINGS  
TO COME** (OPPOSITE) At Kedem's  
home in Ramat HaSharon, circular  
windows pierce raw concrete walls  
to offer unexpected views; the  
dapper architect.







can sense the excitement of the children in the photo (at left)—the girl smiling as she approaches while her little brother peers into a circular window. What they see inside the home is a tidy scene—a palette of white gradations, artwork spaced beautifully on a long concrete-block wall, high ceilings and a deep-toned cement floor.

The kids are too young to be architecture critics but they are seeing the trademarks of Modernism, Israeli style: The light natural, the materials indigenous, the lines simple and clean, with their own crisp logic, desert hues unmarred by jarring juxtapositions or extraneous bursts of color.

In the words of German architecture and design writer Silke Bender, it's a bright, airy space where the people are both "observers and observed."

The house and the children in the photo belong to Israeli architect Pitsou Kedem, the creative giant behind—and often out in front of—a renewed fervor for daring, Modernist architecture in Israel and the man I'm about to chat with.

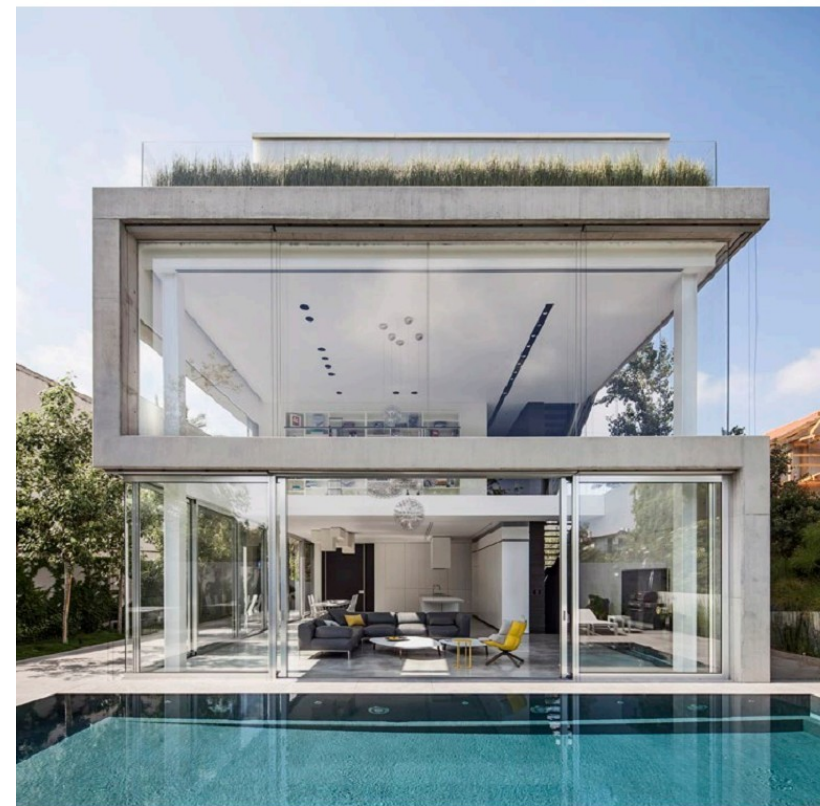
A 2000 graduate of London's Architectural Association, the UK's only remaining private architecture school, Kedem has, for nearly a decade and a half, headed an eponymous firm in Tel Aviv, responsible for a host of celebrated new buildings both residential and commercial, upholding a tradition of Modernist and Brutalist architecture in the Holy Land.

It's quite a tradition: Bauhaus and Jewish architects go way back. After all, it was the rise of Nazism in Germany and Hitler's closing of the Bauhaus Academy that drove the emigration of a number of the great German Jewish architects and designers to this part of the world in the 1920s and '30s. They brought the Bauhaus movement with them, taking over Tel Aviv, and building what is known as The White City, a collection of more than 4,000 Bauhaus-style buildings, the largest such grouping in the world.

"There's a connection between Kedem and local Modernism," Dr. Micha Gross of Tel Aviv's Bauhaus Center says. In this regard, Kedem's firm is quite "outstanding and innovative." Indeed, Kedem, 45, is continuing the legacy of such greats as Arie Sharon, Dov Karmi and Moshe Safdie.

Kedem and most of his team of 11 architects have been together for 15 years, and it is a cohesive group, to say the least. "We're sort of like that [Eagles] song 'Hotel California,'" he jokes. "No one ever leaves." And why would they? The firm is thriving with more than 100 projects currently on the boards, although the owner quickly points out that it's "quality, not quantity."

**VANISHING ACT** (FROM TOP) Kedem at home with two of his children; disappearing walls leave the roof to levitate at the Concrete Cut house in Ramat Gun; stairs appear to be suspended in midair at a Bauhaus-inspired residence in Haifa; (OPPOSITE) the aptly named Float House in Tel Aviv boasts a master bath with a view and an entry court where massive basalt pavers trace a path over a reflecting pool.









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but the materials are advancements.”*





**JUST PASSING THROUGH** (FROM TOP) At the Corten House in Savion, light filters through concrete beams and a laser-cut steel mashrabiya; a wall of pivoting glass doors opens the living room to the pool area at a seaside home in Tel Aviv; (OPPOSITE) a view through the master bedroom to the courtyard and garden at Float House.

that drives the work. One such project in progress is his first building in the US, a luxurious home in Bel-Air, CA.

The firm's reputation is Modernist but Kedem eschews labels. "Clients come to us, and often they want what they see in our footprint," he says. "We try to avoid that. Of course, the clients' ideas are reflected in the buildings, but there have been so many innovations in the past five years, we wish to push all of that forward. The rules may be from the 1950s but the materials are advancements."

Kedem points to the Corten House in Savion, a decidedly upscale Tel Aviv neighborhood, as an example. "The concrete box is exposed," he says, "but what I did was cut the side of the window on the left side. There wasn't the technology in the 1950s for this. But now we can cut the slabs and put louvers in there. We envelop the skin but instead of concrete, we use Corten, a unique steel. We actually put stainless steel inside the Corten square."

It spans nearly a century of aesthetics, but the incompatibility of Modernism with thoroughly modern materials isn't the only myth Kedem wants to puncture. He would also like a word with you about Israel itself. One could get the impression from American evening newscasts, for instance, that the country's cities and towns are piles of rubble after car bombings and rocket attacks. Kedem would like to set the record straight.

"There's so much diversity, especially in Tel Aviv," he tells me. "You wouldn't know it from the politics, but Israelis and the Arabs in Tel Aviv get along. Of course, Tel Aviv is a lot more sophisticated than some other areas, too. People forget we're still such a young country."

Kedem's own history mirrors that of his country. During his mandatory stint in the Israeli army (as a parachutist), he met his future wife, and while the two couldn't have come from more different backgrounds—Kedem, the son of a wealthy real estate developer and his wife, right off the kibbutz—their two-decades-long marriage represents the Israeli way of joyfully merging diverse upbringings.

Before we part ways, I ask Kedem about future projects outside of Tel Aviv. He refers to fellow Israeli architect Sharon Rotbard's groundbreaking book, *White City, Black City*, about the "twin cities" of Tel Aviv and Jaffa. The city of Jaffa, with its Turkish bones, had been neglected as Tel Aviv blossomed, he explains, but that's changing. "I'm personally doing a lot of projects in Jaffa," he says. "It is, of course, still behind Tel Aviv, which is such a diverse city, but it is happening. There's even a W Hotel going up there now."

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