Edition Axel Menges GmbH
Esslinger Straße 24
D-70736 Stuttgart-Fellbach
tel. +49-711-5747 59
fax +49-711-5747 84

Nili Portugali

The Act of Creation and the Spirit of a Place. A Holistic-Phenomenological Approach to Architecture

248 pp. with 596 ill., 450 of which in colour, 217 x 278 mm, hardcover, English
ISBN 3-936681-05-8
Euro 59.00, sfr 89.00, £ 39.90, US$ 69.00, $A 98.00

In this book Nili Portugali presents her particular interpretation of the holistic-phenomenological world view in theory and in practice, a world view which has been at the forefront of the scientific discourse in recent years and which is closely related to Buddhist philosophy.

The purpose of architecture is first and foremost to create a human environment for human beings. The real challenge of current architectural practice is to make the best use of the potential inherent in our modern technological age.

Yet, modern society has lost the value of man and thus created a feeling of alienation between man and the environment. Contemporary architecture sought to dissociate itself from the world of emotions and connect the design process to the world of ideas, thus creating a rational relation between building and man, devoid of any emotion.

Portugali argues that in order to change the feeling of the environment and to create places and buildings we really feel »at home« and want to live in, what is needed is not a change of style or fashion, but a transformation of the mechanistic world view underlying current thought and approaches. Based on Christopher Alexander's basic assumption that behind human architecture there are universal and eternal codes common to us all as human beings, and that there is absolute truth underlying beauty and comfort, Portugali demonstrates how this approach, as well as her unique planning process stemming from it (based on the way things actually exist already on site), generates that common spiritual experience people undergo in buildings endowed with soul, no matter where or from what culture they come from.

That she demonstrates in a variety of projects, in relation to the physical, cultural and social reality of the place they were planned and built on, an Israeli reality which reflects a unique interface between the orient and the west, a cultural interface she personally represents.

Portugali is a lecturer at the Bezalel Academy of Art & Design in Jerusalem and a practicing architect working in Israel for more than three decades. Her work has focused on both practice and theory. She studied at the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London and at the University of California in Berkeley, and worked and participated in research with Christopher Alexander at the Center for Environmental Structure in Berkeley.

Distributors

Brockhaus Commission
Kreidlerstraße 9
D-70806 Kornwestheim
Germany
tel. +49-7154-1327-74
fax +49-7154-1327-13
menges@brocom.de

Gazelle Book Services
White Cross Mills
Hightown
Lancaster LA1 4XS
United Kingdom
tel. +44-1524-68765
fax +44-1524-63232
sales@gazellebooks.co.uk

National Book Network
15200 NBN Way
Blue Ridge Summit, PA 17214
USA
tel. +1-800-4626420
fax +1-800-3384550
custserv@nbnbooks.com

059.00 Euro
089.00 sfr
039.90 £
069.00 US $
098.00 $A
ISBN 3-936681-05-8
56900
9 783936 681055

Nili Portugali

The Act of Creation and the Spirit of a Place

Menges

Nili Portugali

The Act of Creation and the Spirit of a Place

A Holistic-Phenomenological Approach to Architecture

Edition Axel Menges

In this book Nili Portugali presents her particular interpretation of the holistic-phenomenological world view in theory and in practice, a world view which has been at the forefront of the scientific discourse in recent years and which is closely related to Buddhist philosophy.

The purpose of architecture is first and foremost to create a human environment for human beings. The real challenge of current architectural practice is to make the best use of the potential inherent in our modern technological age.

Yet, modern society has lost its sense of the value of man and thus created a feeling of alienation between man and the environment. Contemporary architecture sought to dissociate itself from the world of emotions and connect the design process to the world of ideas, thus creating a rational relation between building and man, devoid of any emotion.

Portugali argues that in order to change the feeling of the environment and to create places and buildings we really feel “at home” and want to live in, what is needed is not a change of style or fashion, but a transformation of the mechanistic world view underlying current thought and approaches. Based on Christopher Alexander’s assumption that behind human architecture there are universal and eternal codes common to us all as human beings, and that there is absolute truth underlying beauty and comfort, Portugali demonstrates how this approach, as well as her unique planning process stemming from it (based on the way things actually exist already on site), generates that common spiritual experience people undergo in buildings endowed with soul, no matter where or from what culture they come from.

That she demonstrates in a variety of projects, in relation to the physical, cultural and social reality of the place they were planned and built on, an Israeli reality which reflects a unique interface between the orient and the west, a cultural interface she personally represents.

Portugali is a lecturer at the Bezalel Academy of Art & Design in Jerusalem and a practicing architect working in Israel for more than three decades. Her work has focused on both practice and theory. She studied at the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London and at the University of California in Berkeley, and worked and participated in research with Christopher Alexander at the Center for Environmental Structure in Berkeley.

Residential neighborhood in a kibbutz

Structural changes in kibbutz life require a new concept of housing

Kibbutz Maagan Michael, Israel
Completion date: stage 1 2001,
stage 2 2005

From quantitive uniformity to qualitative equality

The social, economic and physical structure of the collective known as a "kibbutz" was founded in Israel in the early 20th century. Its uppermost value since its very beginning was *equality*, translated in most realms of community life not as equality of opportunities, in its qualitative sense, but rather in its *quantitative* sense, as formal uniformity. This dogmatic equality obliterated the self-identity and uniqueness of the individual and saw him only as part of the collective.

In recent years, however, this old conception of equality has been redefined in many respects. The social structure reverted back to the nuclear family, with children raised at home, and no longer in a communal house where they were regarded as the possession of the community as a whole. Wages, previously based on the notion that every member contributed according to his or her own ability, but was supported according to his or her needs, have now become differential, based on one's contribution.

Housing in the kibbutz is perhaps the last fortress of the old and simplistic conception of equality, a conception that now more than ever can change. According to this conception, houses are regarded as static *models* of *predetermined* uniform shape, arbitrarily positioned on the building site. Environmental factors, such as the direction of light or the angle open to the view on any specific plot, are disregarded, and the result is that all houses have an identical plan, including the same elevations. Thus a tenant whose window *happens* to face the orchard has the advantage on the one whose window faces the cow shed.

This approach created a qualitative inequality between the houses and inequality of opportunities among the tenants. Moreover, the outcome of this dogmatic approach was that houses built in the desert environment of the Negev or the hilly Galilean environment were exactly the same.

The new model I implemented in the design of the new houses in kibbutz Maagan Michael was *fundamentally* different. The planning process I adopted was based on patterns that were common to all the houses, patterns that grew out both of the social structure of the kibbutz and the geographic location facing the sea. When these *common patterns* were used in *different site conditions*, *a variety* of houses emerged, sharing one architectural language.

Kibbutz Maagan is situated on a hill, with the new neighborhood on the western side that faces the sea.

House type A.

House type B.

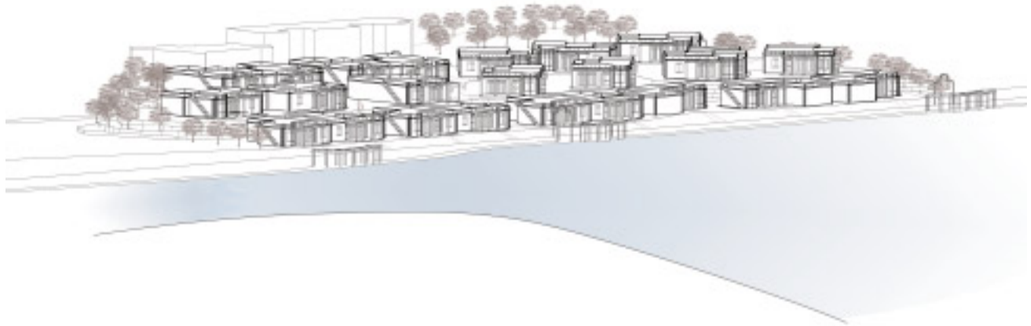
Planning the neighborhood on the site

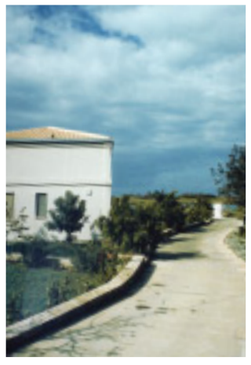
Each planning decision, from the positioning of the house on the site, through the determination of the direction of its entrance in relation to the path, and unto the location of each window, was taken *on the site of each plot*. The position of each house in relation to the others was determined so as to ensure that each one has an open view of the water and can enjoy the breeze coming from the sea. To determine the level of each house so that one could see the sea while sitting on the terrace, I used a crane to lift me up to where I could see the sea. This height was measured and the level of the house was determined accordingly.

An open view to the sea in-between and through the houses.

Site plan. The position of each house was determined on the site, in relation to the other houses, so as to ensure an open view of the sea.

At the center of the neighborhood, a path was planned connecting the promenade that runs along the water and the path that runs from the communal dining hall at the heart of the kibbutz to the neighborhood. What dictated the course of the path was my wish to see the water from every spot along the path. The houses were arranged in small clusters, sharing a communal open space. Unlike the traditional pattern in the kibbutz, where all open spaces, called “the lawn”, are communal and the buildings are dispersed arbitrarily in-between, here the secondary paths running between the houses defined in a non-formal way, with no fences, the “private” zone of each family. This sense of “private territory” unexpectedly created a new reality in which each family started to grow its own garden. This new pattern of behavior could not have developed in the traditional model, where the open spaces in-between the houses were planned as a property used and maintained by everyone, and therefore of no one.





To determine the level of each house so that one could see the sea while sitting on the terrace, I used a crane to lift me up to where I could see the sea.

At this stage the site plan was completed. The position of each house in the neighborhood in relation to the paths and its position in relation to the sea *produced different types of house plans*. On plots where the entrance from the path was in the same direction as the sea view, type A plan emerged. Here the entrance was through the main garden to the living-dining area that faced the view. On plots where the entrance was from the opposite direction of the sea view, type B plan developed, and the entrance was through the opposite side of the garden and living areas.

In front of each house there is a bicycle rack (the only means of transport allowed within the boundaries of the kibbutz). Next to the entrance door a place for muddy boots was allocated, a symbol of the kibbutz.

The walls are all whitewashed light blue, complemented by regionally quarried sandstone characterizing the construction details.

The introduction of a conceptually new model in a very rigid social framework became possible now, as a result of an overall change in the reality of the kibbutz communities.

Type A – entrance floor.

Type B – entrance floor.

Type B. The entrance to the house from the path is from the opposite side of the garden and has a direct view of the sea through the living room and dining area.

Panoramic view. Stages 1 and 2.

The windows are the eyes of the building. The window at the dining area is framing the sea view.

Type A. The entrance to the house from the path is through the garden. Both are in the direction of the sea view.

The construction details stem from their unique functional role within the whole.