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# The “Designed” Israeli Interior, 1960–1977: Shaping Identity

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## ABSTRACT

The concept of a “home” had played an important role during the early decades of Israel’s establishment as a home for all the Jewish people. This study examines the “designed” home and its material culture during the 1960s and 1970s, focusing on aesthetic choices, approaches, and practices, which came to highlight the home’s role as a theater for staging, creating, and mirroring identities, or a laboratory for national boundaries. It seeks to identify the conceptualization of the domestic space during fundamental decades in the history of Israel.

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## Introduction

The concept of a “home” played an important role during the early decades of Israel’s establishment as a homeland for all Jewish people.<sup>1</sup>

This study aims to provide a detailed scholarly appraisal of the conceptualization of domestic interiors between 1960 and 1977, two of the most formative decades of Israel’s history. It examines the “designed” home, its comparative analysis to the “ordinary” home, and its material culture. It focuses on aesthetic choices, methodologies, and practices that highlighted the role of the home as a theater for staging, creating, and mirroring identities, and as a laboratory for national boundaries.

The Israeli home encapsulated a number of the period’s central material, visual, and ideological themes. These themes are related to living spaces, lifestyles, and traditions of the various communities. These formative themes helped to construct a new society in Israel coupled with the heritage they sought to preserve, the image they sought to project and the ethnic and class identity they carried.

The role of domesticity in culture, art, and architecture has captured the attention of scholars, and recent scholarship has already shown that material culture of domestic interiors reflects contemporary aspirations and identities.<sup>2</sup> While the study of domestic culture in Europe and the United States has made large strides in recent years,<sup>3</sup> only recently has the question concerning how practices

and conventions in interior design developed and shifted to other countries been recognized and examined.<sup>4</sup> The process of importing and shifting ideas is particularly relevant to a country such as Israel, which has attracted immigrants from many parts of the world during the discussed period. Yet, while the creation of modernist architecture in Israel has received substantial scholarly attention, the interior spaces within these white architectural shells have been excluded from an academic discussion until recently.<sup>5</sup>

This research comes to fill a gap in the literature on residential interiors. It addresses specific issues related to aesthetics, tastes, and material culture in Israel during a specific time period by addressing key questions. The influences and motives that came to shape the Israeli home following the founding of the state of Israel; whether the Israeli home can be identified as a unique “phenomenon,” meaning, a territory that carried a form of Israeliness; the roles of social, economic, political, and ethnic issues in the emergence of local domestic culture; and the historical causes that advanced the rise of the Israeli home of the 1960s and 1970s. These issues are the focus of this research.

A structural system formulated by the Italian philosopher and critic Umberto Eco is used here to identify and analyze the types of domestic spaces prevalent in Israel. In his essay on the history of Italian industrial design and consumer culture, Eco divides this territory into three main categories in an effort to find a system that would encompass the entire

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spectrum of design (Eco, 1982). Here, these categories are applied to the Israeli domestic arena during the period of study. Eco distinguishes “identified design,” which he defines as the product of theoretical and professional practice; “non-conscious design,” which is produced by amateurs or professionals unconcerned with demonstrating theoretical ground for their design work; and “anonymous design,” which is created for the sake of solving practical problems. In Eco’s study of Italian industrial design, “anonymous design” defines examples of mass-produced household goods and utensils on which no designers’ names appeared. In contrast, “identified design” (i.e., design) is the outcome of an expressed philosophical theory and practice in which the object aims to exemplify explicitly its Eco’s theory.

In applying these categories to Israeli domestic culture of the 1960s and 1970s, the “identified home” resulted from an intellectual search for a formula of a genuine Israeli home; this type of home was created by professional architects and designers and was typically documented in photographs, articles, international magazines, and interviews by those creators. The “non-conscious homes” were those “designed” homes created either by professional decorators or by amateurs, lacking a definitive theoretical ground. These homes, together with the “anonymous homes,” have rarely been documented outside of private family albums.

Without design journals and other media means that showcased designed furnishings and home interiors, the scholar who studies this period, ought to use sources such as private photo albums, a small number of published photos, a handful of guidance books, articles in international magazines, and interiors featured in films. Both later types can be studied from films and television dramas produced during this period, which provide an authentic glimpse into the complex relationship between identities, taste, class, and the domestic space. Because the present article focuses on the Israeli “designed” home, the “anonymous home,” the ordinary “non-designed” home, will be utilized for comparative background.

While Israel has witnessed a wide variety of living situations, the majority cannot be defined as “designed” homes. In her study on Israeli domestic culture, Tula Amir notes the various types of homes available during the period of this study: the village, public housing apartments, small cottages in the Moshava, the so-called Agency cottage in the Moshav, suburban houses, and urban apartments (Amir, 2007).<sup>6</sup> Most Israelis were not concerned with style and design, thus these dwellings stand outside the prevailing narrative of the “designed” home. The majority of Israel’s population during this period lived in modest homes typically furnished with mass-produced Lakol furniture, which was uniformly supplied to them by the government.<sup>7</sup>

Most Israelis during this period were not consumers of designed goods, nor did they actively produce homes with a “designed” identity. Furthermore, “designed” homes did not go hand in hand with the image-in-making and the ethos of the new Israeli, the pioneer who came to work the land and whose culture was designated to fulfill the Utopian ideal of the New Jew.<sup>8</sup> The perception of “designed” homes as excessive or decadent can be seen in the television drama *Hedva and Me*, the most successful of all original-produced dramas of its time, which was broadcast in 1971.<sup>9</sup> It represented young Israelis moving away from bourgeois lifestyle by settling in the kibbutz, and is filled with cynical comments on urban living. The year 1977 denotes the end of the time frame for this article, the Labor Party lost the elections and the right-wing, led by the Likud party won, ending nearly three decades of a liberal government, and marking a new approach to home design. It was not until the 1980s that the culture of the “designed” homes first pervaded the collective consciousness, attaining full social acceptance and gaining entry into the media with the first interior design magazines that were founded during that decade.<sup>10</sup>

## The Rise of the “Israeli” Home

During the 1960s and 1970s, a new type of home that can be defined as Israeli emerged. It began to manifest

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a recognizable mode, shaped by a distinctive taste that was different from that brought by European immigrants before the foundation of the state of Israel.<sup>11</sup> During this time period, Israel was a nation at a crossroads; a small country of disputed boundaries, a multifaceted population, cultures and folklores, complex collective memories, and a short history of sacrifice, death, and longing. Molded and mirrored through these factors, Israel's domestic culture was characterized by complex and unstable discourse, affected by the government's overarching policy of a melting pot.<sup>12</sup>

The design of pre-1948 homes paved the way for the concretization of a design ethos after Israeli statehood. Documentation of homes in pre-state times was even scarcer than during the time span of this study and can be found mostly in private archives of the architects who designed them.<sup>13</sup> The local home of the Jewish sector before 1948 bore a strong Central-European character, as stated in a rare account on domestic interiors published in 1938 by architectural critic and writer Julius Posener. He noted that the local Jewish household had retained the style, mode, and comfort typical to the Central-European bourgeois home that was relaxed, casual, warm, and airy (Posener, 1938, p. 310). Posener was referring to those settlers who left Germany and Austria with the rise of the Nazis, immigrating to Palestine in the so-called Fifth Aliya.

By adopting the principles of the Modern Movement during the 1930s, Zionist architects, occupied with shaping a visual form for the architectural fabric of the Jewish community in Palestine, crafted a unique version of mitigated modernism. This expression of modernism that is largely interpreted today as a symbol of the purity, integrity, and the progressiveness that stood at the core of the Zionist project itself, was distinctive from modernist architecture of other countries in the world.<sup>14</sup> Posener elaborated on the notion that the Jewish population in Europe had a special love for Modernism and therefore, upon arriving to Palestine, had shown a preference for simplicity over the local "Oriental" taste. Whereas buildings manifested in white cubes

and streamlined shells, identifying the European population as "modernized," and "Western," the domestic interiors of the new Jewish immigrants who settled in Palestine adhered to the tradition of the bourgeois homes in Europe, a stylistic mode referred to in the literature as Alternative Modernism.<sup>15</sup>

Yet, with the establishment of the State of Israel, the home began to signify values and social conditions of the day. The first decade following the foundation of the State of Israel (1948) was characterized by mass immigration of Holocaust survivors from Europe and Jews from Arab countries. This was marked by an extensive process of nation-building. The 1960s saw the end of that formative stage. Arab culture became significant in the Israeli experience after the Six-Day War of 1967, when within 6 days, Israel retained control of the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip, the formerly Jordanian-controlled West Bank of the Jordan River, and East Jerusalem.

By the 1960s, the appearance of the domestic space had changed from the relaxed, eclectic, warm, airy, and home-like character of Posener's description to an original language that was born from a search for an Israeli local style. A new type of dwelling that addressed the newly founded state of Israel and its emerging communities was born. Dora Gad (1912–2003), Israel's most celebrated interior designer, suggested that the shift from the European-oriented interiors better reflected Israel's climate, new society, and image. "In a pioneer country like ours, it is ridiculous to use period furniture," she announced, explaining that "for the climate and colors of this country, we need light airy furniture."<sup>16</sup> These considerations inspired the interiors that Gad created, where she sought to establish that particular image.

The State of Israel originated with a population of Ashkenazi Jews, immigrants from Eastern and Central Europe, settling in Palestine in five distinctive waves of immigration.<sup>17</sup> This prominently Western identity began to be challenged with massive immigration of Sefardi Jews from the Arab countries and North Africa in the early to mid-1950s.

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Nearly one million immigrants were absorbed by about 650,000 locals, and they were immediately stereotyped as inferior by the local community, which was mostly of European heritage. They introduced new cultural milieus, customs, norms, beliefs, and tastes in their own domestic space, all of which came to affect the Israeli lifestyle. Half of the Sephardi immigrants settled in isolated development towns, which were the least developed in the newly found State of Israel.

Before the establishment of the State of Israel, the Ashkenazi population sought to differentiate itself from the local Arabs, devising a modernism that contrasted with the existing built fabric while introducing concepts of hygiene and progression that came to be a reflection of the image of the Zionist establishment in Palestine. The immigration of Jews from the local Arab countries in the early 1950s encouraged a more complex process for defining identities. The “designed” Israeli home had emerged as an entity that shaped and proclaimed class and ethnicity, distinguishing between Ashkenazi and Sephardi communities.

The local home became a means of communicating both existing and evolving identities. While it is clear today, when examining the Israeli “designed” home that by the mid-1960s, it was shaped into its own unique character. This was rarely recognized in the period. In a rare article, which examined Israeli style in home décor, Rafi Bloomenfeld, one of Israel’s leading interior designers announced. “There is no Israeli style yet—We have no original materials of beauty that can inspire a style, no great traditions of design like the Dutch and the Danes, no unique life-styles, like the Japanese,” he concluded.<sup>18</sup> But the fact that homes did not possess a high-style modernism did not mean that the Israeli home did not possess a unique narrative. Gad was engaged in an intensive search for an aesthetic expression of an Israeli identity that she perceived as “complex, constantly questionable, subject to the populations and their relationships, to their ethnicities, cultures, and the level of their integration into the Israeli narrative.”<sup>19</sup>

**Figure 1. A living room, ca. 1968 (Meyer & Markin, 1968, 20).**



The Israeli ideal “identified” home was created by professional designers, such as Gad and Bloomenfeld. Its ultimate image is illustrated in the publication *Household Encyclopedia: Our Home from A to Z* (Figure 1) (Meyer & Markin, 1968, p. 619). This image of a combined living-dining space was described as a “reconciliation of East and West” (Meyer & Markin, 1968, p. 45). The text suggested that “there is no reason to include any carved or ornamented object in the home, but only those of modern style of simple lines.” The space is furnished with products reflecting high modernism on one hand and locally made crafts on the other, epitomizing the taste and identity referred to by Gad, as “Israeli.” Nothing in this interior is traditional or reminiscent of the local home in pre-state Israel, but is rather a semiotic expression of progressive taste. The color scheme consists of reds, oranges, yellows, and blues,

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reflecting the fabric of the landscape, while the rich textiles, rugs, curtains, upholstery, and table coverings all result in a cozy, warm atmosphere. In fact, from first sight, this space looks as if it could be in a home in the United States or UK. Yet, the accessories—the mosaic stool, brass kettle, and black ceramic tableware—are the touchstones of local crafts production. They contribute the local flavor into the Scandinavian, or Scandinavian-inspired furnishings, a combination that indicates a sophisticated taste shaped by awareness of interior decorating trends elsewhere.

Similar juxtapositions and aesthetic choices can be seen in an image of a reception room taken by photographer Rudi Weisenstein in the 1960s (Figure 2). Here too, the simple furniture of Scandinavian spirit is enriched by the texture of local rugs and ceramic artifacts on display. Those two images indicated a novel approach to design that was distinctly Israeli and rooted in the specific political climate and aesthetic tastes of the newly formed nation.

*The Household Encyclopedia: Our Home from A to Z* recommended shopping for ethnic crafts in the various Druze markets and bazaars, particularly those located in Daliat el-Carmel (Meyer & Markin, 1968, p. 50). An image of the various goods offered in these markets shows colorful fabrics, plain earthenware vessels, brass lanterns and other artifacts, sisal rugs made of local plant fibers, and a woven rug of the same type displayed in the rooms described above (Figure 3).

Another source for decorating the home with locally crafted accessories and textiles was Maskit, which produced and marketed rugs, textiles, and decorative objects of ethnic character, handmade by skilled craftswomen.<sup>20</sup> Founded by Ruth Dayan in 1955, this governmental fashion/design house provided employment for new immigrants from Tunis, Morocco, and Tripoli, as well as Arabs and Bedouins who created artifacts by practicing their own traditional and ethnic crafts.

**Figure 2. A reception area of an office, ca. 1970 (Photography Rudi Weisenstein, Archive of Zalmania, Tel Aviv).**



The local home's transformation from the bourgeois European-inspired entity of the pre-state period into its own genuine character was the result of various factors including climate and local aesthetics described by Gad. First, a change from an interior décor paradigm into an architectural treatment of the interiors, an approach that has come to define Israeli interiors to this day. This was rooted in the type of training available in Israel for those practicing interior design, which was late to enter Israel's educational institutions.<sup>21</sup> In pre-state Israel most practicing architects, trained in Europe before immigrating to Palestine, were experienced in traditional interior décor, upholstery, window treatments, custom-made furniture, wallpaper, and other forms of décor.<sup>22</sup> The new Israeli-trained generation of architects, however, did not have that training. So without training in interior design, this discipline was not practiced on a substantial scale for decades. Consequently, interior design was late in achieving its own professionalization in comparison

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**Figure 3. Display of assortments of Druse crafts, ca. 1968 (Meyer & Markin, 1968, 12).**



with both architecture and industrial product design. The latter had been fundamentally and officially conceptualized during the early years of statehood, as noted by Hadas Kruk in her pioneering study on industrial design.<sup>23</sup> Interior design, on the other hand, did not become popular nor did it enter the national consciousness until well into the 1980s.<sup>24</sup>

An additional factor that came to shape the Israeli home was the reduction in the size of the average apartment, which resulted in an emphasis on multifunctional spaces. The role of the living room shifted from a formal space intended exclusively for entertainment and leisure, to a multifunctional area. The design advice guide *Habayit (The Home)*, published in 1965, suggested to furnish the integrated living room with “a sofa, arm chairs and book

shelves that act as a separating device, dining table, chairs, sideboard, and a tea cart.”<sup>25</sup>

And finally, a crucial factor in the transformation of the Israeli home relates to the importation of furniture and furnishings and to the exposure of Israelis to influences of modern design movements, as importation of household goods was newly introduced to Israel in the 1960s. In 1948, the newly formed State of Israel was lacking in food and foreign currency, thus a regime of austerity was formulated. Part of this austerity included a government ban on importation of all products. Consequently, homes were typically furnished with locally made, rational furnishings produced by governmental factories, mostly lacking any identifying stylistic character. With limited choices, many houses appeared quite similar. With the legalization of importation in 1964, imported furniture transformed the local taste and flair of the Israeli home.

Imported Danish modernist furniture was first introduced to Israel in the early 1960s, and like millions all over the world, Israelis were captivated by the fresh Scandinavian aesthetic.<sup>26</sup> It succeeded in transforming local taste almost overnight, and was considered to be a chic and stylish choice for any home. At first, the high custom taxation made it impossible for the average Israeli to acquire imported products, but local furniture companies, such as Hazorea, soon adopted Danish designs to their production.

The introduction of well-designed Danish furniture to the Israeli home is credited to Jeff Tolman, an immigrant from South Africa. Recognizing an economic potential in encouraging modern design in the market, Tolman established a showroom in 1962, called Danish Interiors, which offered furnishings exclusively to new immigrants who were the only ones eligible for acquiring imported goods upon their arrival to Israel.<sup>27</sup> When importation was legalized, Danish Interiors opened its doors to everyone, and immediately became Israel’s center for upscale furnishings and taste-making. From a small showroom containing mainly catalogues, it became a store that stocked furniture, expanding

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its activities into providing services of interior décor when Tolman's future wife, Tamara, an interior designer and an immigrant from Argentina, became involved.

Danish furniture together with fabrics by Marimekko created distinctive interiors, defined by a bright color palette and simplicity that stood apart from the traditional locally made furnishings. By the 1960s, this vocabulary had become synonymous with the young, fresh, and modern style worldwide. In fact, in Israel this vogue became so popular that the advice guide *Habayit* promoted the Danish "look" as the touchstone of the idealized Israeli home.<sup>28</sup> *Habayit* noted that Danish furniture fashion was "popular for its quality, cutting-edge design, and for its comfort and beauty."<sup>29</sup> The book is heavily illustrated by photographs of Danish furniture taken from the catalogs featuring Arne Jacobsen, Hans Wagner, and Poul Cadovius, all of whose designs were available at *Danish Interiors*.

Whereas the Scandinavian influence came to play a central role in shaping the Israeli home during the first half of the 1960s, the Six-Day War of 1967 marked another period of change. Israel gained control over the entire historic Eretz Israel and the impact on the material culture of the domestic space was significant. As a result of the victory, industrial development, together with an increase in travel, were influential factors in a new "demand for good design," as noted in an article on Israeli design and taste in the *New York Times*.<sup>30</sup> During the inter bellum period between the two wars, from 1967 to the Yom Kippur War of 1973, a thriving economy resulted in a significant demand for a market of luxury household goods. Consequently, the Israeli home acquired a new appearance with a deeper indigenous character.

The Six-Day War of 1967 opened up new markets that left their mark on the local taste. Almost overnight Israelis could purchase Bedouin rugs from Gaza, locally made Islamic ceramics, and olivewood vessels from the Old City of Jerusalem, Hebron glassware, wicker chairs, and Arab traditional furniture inlaid with mother of pearl and metal

strings, all of which became key components of the domestic space. The Israeli home began to develop a new personality, reflecting the new physical boundaries of the State of Israel; even Maskit began to employ Arab women living in the newly occupied territories' towns of Bethlehem and Gaza. Gad embraced that new reality: "Our market has been enriched by Arab crafts," she announced when describing their potential in creating a unique style in the Israeli home. Gad perceived the Arab aesthetic not as contradicting, but as complementing the latest modernist design.

The apartment of the Minister of Education and Culture and Vice-President Yigal Alon in the Old City of Jerusalem, manifested these changes (Figure 4). The home, featured in the architectural journal *Tvai* was done by Eliezer Frenkel, one of the most ambitious architects of the time and one that took the role of renewing the Old City's Jewish Quarter after the war.<sup>31</sup> Frenkel's design language showcased a new Israeli taste, juxtapositions of opposing features: rough plaster and stone architectural surfaces against soft, handcrafted textiles, locally made poufs, hairy rugs, and a brass lantern, all products available at the local Old City's Arab market, which had not previously been accessible to Israelis. The furniture manifested a strictly European entity.

## The "Designed" Identified Home in Israel

The appearance of the professionally designed "identified" home was born in Israel with a campaign for a genuine local style lead by Gad.<sup>32</sup> As Israel's leading interior designer, Gad had become the ambassador of Israeli design during the 1960s and 1970s. She designed commercial public spaces, embassies, libraries, department stores, terminals, ships, some of Israel's leading hotels, and the interiors of Parliament, the Knesset. Gad received an international recognition after completing the interiors of SS *Shalom*, an Israeli liner constructed in France, in which she said that she strived to create

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**Figure 4. Home of Minister of Education and Culture and Vice-President Yigal Alon in the Old City of Jerusalem, designed by Eliezer Frenkel, ca. 1972, Tvai.**



“an Israeli atmosphere.”<sup>33</sup> But it was Gad’s own home in Caesarea, perhaps Israel’s most celebrated and publicized house that epitomized her ideas. She presented her home as a laboratory for formulating a genuine Israeli home. Gad often said that her Brutalism-style house was the expression of her own version of “Israeli aesthetics” and the substantiation of her search for “a genuine Mediterranean house.”<sup>34</sup>

The design of Gad’s residence is rooted in the power of contrasts to convey a personal style, where eclecticism is manifested in a scheme of contradictory textures and materials, “concrete against wood, soft rugs

and vibrating textiles against cold stone, marble, or glass.”<sup>35</sup> Her approach to interior design was architectural, and she tended to apply “the same principles of space, function, and the use of material,” in her words, whether designing “a building or its interior.”<sup>36</sup>

Gad’s residence was featured in a special issue on Israeli homes in a series on households in different countries in the German magazine *Architektur & Wohnen*.<sup>37</sup> Intending to address domestic homes as a cultural prominence and central aspect of lifestyle in a new country of “immigrants from all over the world with no common domestic culture,” the editor agreed that the local home manifested in a distinctive, local appearance. The “Israeli home,” he concluded, “had transformed spaces into local realities, merging ‘east and west,’ in a unique style shaped by local factors such as climate.”<sup>38</sup>

All interiors featured in the magazine were situated in white Brutalist, fortress-like architectural shells; the benchmark of upper-class identity. With little light penetrating through small windows, the Israeli home of the 1970s appeared protective and uncommunicative. This quality can be seen in the images of the Dubiner Apartments House in Ramat Gan, designed in 1963 by Zvi Hecker, one of Israel’s radical architects, who came to be renowned for using the crystalline geometry of nature as a metaphor for his projects (Figure 5).<sup>39</sup> Designed for his mentors (and later partners) Alfred Neumann and Elder Sharon, Hecker lived in one of the apartments, where geometry plays a crucial role in dictating the division of the interior spaces. The interior scheme evoked mystery and glamour with a clear reference to European 1970s’ trends in furnishings. The built-in seating system covered with cushions in various bright colors referenced postmodernist vocabulary that communicated notions of youth and flamboyancy.

The “identified” home, created by Gad and her generation, was predicated upon the pursuit of an expression of the Israeli identity, eventually becoming the main source of inspiration for creating the Israeli



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**Figure 5. Living room at the Dubiner House, Ramat Gan, ca. 1974, designed by Zvi Hecker (Jahreszeiten Verlag, 1975, 71).**



home by the Do-Yourself (DIY) method, which was not as organized a movement as it was in Britain.<sup>40</sup> But the advice guidebook, *Habayit*, demonstrates that the DIY methodology was a crucial factor in the fabric of everyday life by providing descriptions of the ideal Israeli home of its time.<sup>41</sup> *Habayit* sought to educate Israeli middle-class housewives on “how to turn a house into a home.” It was extremely popular and found in many households during the 1960s and the 1970s.<sup>42</sup> *Habayit* was eventually republished in the 1980s, this time less successfully.

This advice guide served as a key source of information on the fabric of daily living, choices regarding home decoration and consumer goods, and concepts in home-making, design, furnishings, and popular taste. *Habayit* provided advice about choosing a suitable home, about elements pertaining to good taste, decoration, furnishings, table setting, hygiene, and managing a budget. While illustrating a level of relaxation and informality that characterized the Israeli home, it demonstrates that the typical Israeli household was informed by the principle that aesthetics and good taste were secondary to practicality and utility. The attitude of *Habayit* to domestic living was affected by its conceptualization of the domestic home as a feminine realm, directing its advice to the housewife and never to a male audience.

It adhered to the concept of the ideal home, offered by Gad and the other professional designers, with advice such as “buying vintage furniture is like buying old clothing, therefore it is not a wise decision.” Instead it recommended the acquisition of furniture that was “flexible, well-designed, and stable.”<sup>43</sup>

### The Non-Conscious Home

Unlike the “Identified” home, which tells the story of a generation of pioneer interior designers, struggling to define a distinctive home of “Israeliness,” the “Non-conscious” home developed in an entirely different direction. The “Non-conscious” home embodied aspects of social, ethnic, and class issues that came to shape the Israeli society of the study period. Whether created by professional architects, amateur designers, or home owners, the “Non-conscious” home came to accommodate an emerging upper-class Ashkenazi population, striving to define themselves as the nouveau-riche class, with financial means to afford palatial homes.<sup>44</sup>

The reparations agreement between Israel and West Germany in 1952 provided compensation for confiscation of Jewish property during the Holocaust.<sup>45</sup> This brought in an influx of foreign capital, allowing this new section of society, preeminent in commerce, banking and industry, to invest in furnishings and home decor. The income from reparations, along with the economic growth at the time, increased the financial gap between the European immigrants and the Sephardic Israelis.<sup>46</sup> Consequently, this led to greater and more distinct differences between the domestic cultures of the two major Israeli communities. The European nouveau riche had “Non-conscious” homes, whereas the homes of the Sephardic fell into the category of “anonymous.”

The line between the “Identified” home, which was created by professionals, and the “Non-conscious” home, during the study period, is clearly defined. While the “Identified” home was characterized by sophisticated attempts to create

*Films produced at this time provided an authentic glimpse into the relationship between identities, taste, class, and the domestic space, illustrating the home as a definition of cultural, ethnic, and economic status.*

**Figure 6. A living room, ca. 1970 (Photography Rudi Weisenstein, Archive of Zalmania, Tel Aviv).**



stylistic attributes of “Israeliness,” the “Non-conscious” home demonstrated taste identified with nouveau-riche class and identity. Archival photographs and films show that the design of the typical “Non-conscious” home was rooted in an old-world, English lexicon, associated with regality that was foreign to the local reality. Rudi Weisenstein’s photograph depicts one corner of a living room, furnished with European antique reproductions, demonstrating aesthetic choices of the new upper-class Ashkenazi, seeking to define themselves as the emerging upper class in a new society that had a strong agricultural orientation (Figure 6). This space features eclectic styles of antiques—an Empire-style chest of drawers, Rococo-style side tables and a side chair, and a Colonial-revival tea cart—all set in an all-white room, further emphasized by the rich hues of an Oriental rug.

To further explore and study the “Non-conscious” Israeli home, films also offer reliable and available sources of information. Art historians, as well as

design historians, have long utilized the feature film as a valuable source in communicating broad social and cultural discourse.<sup>47</sup> While the typical interior settings in Hollywood movies might be staged by those designers seeking to invoke specific impressions, they are thus unreliable sources for a study of authentic material culture of the time. However, Israeli films of this period were mostly made in “authentic,” “inhabited” homes, and therefore may be considered a legitimate source of information for a study of the culture of the domestic space.<sup>48</sup> The films produced in the study period simultaneously reflect reality and relay an Israeli narrative. They provide an authentic glimpse into the relationship between identities, taste, class, and the domestic space, illustrating the home as a definition of cultural, ethnic, and economic status. These interiors are to be read and interpreted as a system of signs that highlight Israel’s social and cultural structure.

The so-called bourekas film is the genre most relevant for an exploration into the material culture of the domestic interior.<sup>49</sup> These films reflected a fundamental aspect of the Israeli society, where identities were negotiated through a complex language of home design. These distinctive films first appeared in Israel in the early 1960s and became the most dominant and popular type of cinema between 1967 and 1977. Melodramatic and often comedic, they focused on the ethnic customs and cultural tension between the various social classes of Israeli society, particularly the Ashkenazi and Sephardi communities. Emphasizing stereotypes, the target audience of these films was the Sephardi population.<sup>50</sup> In her study on Israeli cinema, Ella Shohat interprets the social distinctions and stereotypes in the bourekas films as reflecting the “snobbish and hypocritical egotists” of the Ashkenazi in contrast to the “warm, familial, lively, trustworthy, and affectionate” character of the Sephardi.<sup>51</sup> These characters were given a prominent voice in the interior space.

Homes featured in the films clearly defined social, cultural, and economic hierarchies, illustrating the variations in taste that characterized class and racial

distinctions in the domestic space. The bourekas films typically stereotyped homes of both the affluent Ashkenazi and the working-class Sephardi, in which the Ashkenazi were nouveau-riche inhabitants of the “Non-conscious,” palatial home while the Sephardi lived in modest, “Anonymous” homes; none of these homes was affected by the ideal “Identified” home and the pursuit of authentic Israeliness that was led by Gad. Instead of exploring new ways to express and mirror Israeli identity, the “Non-conscious” home sought to highlight the differences between the various communities of new immigrants from Central Europe, Eastern Europe, Morocco, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Tunisia, while idealizing the Europeans as the most powerful. All of these communities brought new influences to the Israeli home, resulting in a redefinition of the domestic space not only as a place of production and shelter, but also as an incentive for maintaining, preserving, and informing ethnic and class identities. This process was particularly important to the unprivileged sections of the Israel society, because the melting pot policy did not succeed in bringing the Sephardic culture into Israeli narrative (Gutwein, 2004; Zamere, 2012). The homes of these immigrants concretely reflected their ethnic and cultural identities.

The distinction between the two types of domestic situations were illustrated in *Charlie and a Half*, a typical bourekas film that features the “Non-conscious” home in juxtaposition to a typical working-class, “Anonymous” home. Both types express the cultural and ethnic character of the people who inhabited them, their tastes, and aesthetic choices.<sup>52</sup> The narrative of the domestic space characterizes the privileged as Ashkenazi and the poor as Sephardi, while in the background, the film illustrates discrimination against immigrants from the Arab countries and North Africa. Because the Sephardi communities experienced loss and displacement, they longed to articulate their own identities, memories, and culture. The only place they could fully express these realities was in their homes.

The film illustrates the social tension that stood at the core of Israeli society. *Charlie and a Half*,

**Figure 7. Home of Charlie, from the film *Charlie and a Half*, 1974.**



Charlie is the son of an Iraqi family living in a poor, unidentified neighborhood, and in a home that reflects the visual aesthetic and lifestyle of the unprivileged. All members of the family typically gather in a multifunctional room in the center of the house, which appears to be furnished with used and salvaged furniture, a mix of colorful curtains, upholstery, and wallpaper with patterns that are not compatible with each other (Figure 7). During the day, the common space functions as a combined living/dining room, while at night, the sofa turns into a bed transforming the entire room into Charlie’s bedroom. Typical to the bourekas genre, he falls in love with Gila, the beautiful daughter of a wealthy Ashkenazi family, who vehemently objects to the relationship. Gila’s “Non-conscious” home is a Brutalist white fortress, representing the type of houses owned by upper-class Israelis, proud of their prosperity and of their power to define their own identities. The film demonstrates a narrative that shows, through the home, how two sections of Israeli society cannot be reconciled.

With its formality, spaciousness, English and French antique reproductions, and reserved color schemes, Gila’s home evokes glamour and power inherent in the “Non-conscious” home. The living room is furnished with dark-wood English-style antiques of

*The “Israeliness” of the domestic space was shaped by ideas, attitudes, and principles lying deep at the core of the social, political, and historical issues of the time.*

**Figure 8. Living room at Gila’s home, from the film *Charlie and a Half*, 1974.**



an imposing scale, exemplified by the Queen Anne style chairs set around the dining table and topped by a large antique-style chandelier (Figure 8). The heavily upholstered antique reproductions that were so remote from the Israeli reality, the Oriental rugs, the stone-covered wall, and the Brutalist architectural shells became the signatures of the wealthy Israeli home of the city and suburbs. A Renaissance-style desk and the dark color scheme propose a language that stands in contrast to the light color scheme that Gad promoted as the most distinguished element of the genuine Israeli home.

Gila’s suite, situated on the second floor of the spacious house, represents the language of a glamorous lifestyle favored by the youth. Its red and blue color scheme, suggests the Pop design revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, and it expresses her identity as a daughter of a privileged family. The wall-to-wall light blue rug, the blue walls, the red-and-white furniture, and the posters on the wall, all convey a particular taste popular among Israel’s trendsetting youths. This taste was promoted and disseminated by the country’s first department store, opened in Tel Aviv in the early 70s. The Shalom Department Store played a role in introducing a new “Pop,” Eurocentric style.<sup>53</sup>

## Conclusion

The “designed” interior of the Israeli home during two of the most formative decades in the country’s history, the 1960s and 1970s, played a historical role in generating, shaping, and mirroring identities of the local society. Woven into the fabric of Israel’s narrative, its boundaries were created and shaped through a search for identity and by socio-economic structures. Two types of homes emerged: the “Identified” and the “Non-conscious.” These two types represented and reflected different forms of “Israeliness.”

The “Identified” home was the product of professional practice and a sophisticated, theoretical framework resulting from a search for an expression of national identity. It was shaped by international trends in interior décor, particularly the craze for everything Scandinavian, as well as by historical events, such as the 1967 Six-Day War. This seminal war resulted in an introduction of Arab material culture into the Israeli consciousness. This combination formed a home of distinctive personality that was considered “Israeli.” The “Non-conscious” home, on the other hand, was shaped by social, economic, and ethnic issues in domestic culture, reflecting efforts of the nouveau-riche, upper-class Ashkenazi to define themselves through taste and taste in home design.

The “Identified” home expressed a search for a genuine and progressive local style, emerging from the basic question of what it meant to be an “Israeli.” It resulted in sophisticated and original aesthetics, while the “Non-conscious” home communicated a conservative taste that evoked palatial European homes, of the type associated with definitive upper-class customs.

Both the “Identified” and the “Non-conscious” homes stemmed from a complete lack of tradition in interior décor, academic training, specialized stores, museums and galleries, which were not present in Israel at the time. Rather, the “Israeliness” of the domestic space was shaped by ideas, attitudes, and

principles lying deep at the core of the social, political, and historical issues of the time. The domestic space was equally fashioned by collective memories of the various communities forming the local society, which themselves have been key factors in constructing Israeli identity in the first decades of Statehood.

The period of study was characterized by the nascence of consciousness of domestic culture. The local home came to be further defined upon undergoing a substantial transformation after 1977. Oz Almog explains that from 1977 onward, Israeli identity shifted and became molded after the Western model of capitalism and the collective values of the typical Yuppie (Almog, 2004). Western customs and lifestyles, the rising standard of living, and extensive overseas travel all played a part in affecting the domestic interiors of the Israeli home. Nevertheless, the “designed” home of the 1960s and 1970s remains as evidence of the formation of Israeli identity.

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**Notes**

<sup>1</sup>This paper is based on a course I taught at the Department of Interior Design at the Holon Institute of Technology in Israel, which challenged the students to search for the roots of the poorly documented local interior design and to explore the notion of Israeli identity as expressed in the area of the interior. I would like to thank the class of 2011.

<sup>2</sup>For the study of the relationship between domestic interiors and identities and the way in which individuals and societies have formed their own identities through their spaces, see McKellar and Sparke (2004), Bryden and Floyd (1999), Atfield (2007), and Friedman (2010).

<sup>3</sup>The most ambitious studies of the history and theory of the interior, which takes place in current academic inquiry, is mainly advanced by three institutions: Centre for the Study of the Domestic Interior (CSDI), the Modern Interior Research Centre (MIRC), and the Brad Graduate Center: Decorative Arts, Design History, Material Culture (BGC). The London-based CSDI, active between 2001 and 2006, partnered with the Royal College of Art, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the Bedford Centre for the History of Woman at Royal Holloway, University of London; MIRC (Modern Interior Research Center) at the Kingston University, Surrey, fosters research on modern interiors; BGC (Bard Graduate Center: Decorative Arts, Design History, Material Culture) in New York, is a graduate research institute committed to studying the cultural history of the material world. A symposium entitled “Moving Home: Exploring Future Agendas for Research in the Domestic Interior,” was a project undertaken by the three institutions, considered a cornerstone in the research of this field. Papers presented were published in: *Decorative Arts* 16, no. 1 (Fall-Winter 2008–2009).

<sup>4</sup>The question of whether patterns and aesthetics in interior design practice have changed according to local conditions and how theory and practice is transposed to “distant lands,” shifting from one place to another was addressed at a symposium entitled “Interior Spaces in Other Places.” It was organized by IDEA (Interior Design/Interior Architecture Educators Association), held by the Interior Design/Interior Architecture Educators Association in February, 2010, hosted by Queensland University of Technology in Australia.

<sup>5</sup>Here is the list of studies on design and interiors during pre-state as well as after the establishment of the State of Israel. Kruk (2003) surveys the development of the industrial design profession in the light of an American assistance program that sought to promote Israel’s industry; Hanany (2004) discusses the shift in domestic culture among urban middle-class Israelis, based on a single women’s magazine, which had served as a source for advice on home design; Vinitzky (2010) focuses on

the reorganization of the carpentry industry by the Jewish population in Palestine; Shchori (1997) is a monograph on Israel's leading interior designer; Smith (2010) examines interwar hotel design as a mirror for Zionist national identity; a forthcoming issue of *Journal of Israeli History* (2014) is devoted to the study of the Israeli home from an interdisciplinary approach.

- <sup>6</sup>On public housing in Israel, see Shadar (2004); on the various urban and rural living situations, see, for example, Yacobi (2002) and Wintraub, Lissak, and Eisenstadt (1969).
- <sup>7</sup>The governmental production of Lakol is yet to be studied from the vast archival material at the Israel State Archive.
- <sup>8</sup>On the image of the Sabras, the first generation of Israelis, born in the Zionist settlement in Palestine into the ethos of the Zionist labor movement, on their norms, and their influential culture on the Israeli narrative, see Almog (2000).
- <sup>9</sup>The television drama *Hedva and Me* was a milestone in the history of Israeli culture, based on a novel by Aharon Meged, and telling the story of the Israel experience of the early 1970s.
- <sup>10</sup>*Habayit*, Israel's earliest interior design magazine, first published in 1981, and *Binyan Vediur*, followed with the first issue published in 1982.
- <sup>11</sup>After Statehood in 1948, a new type of home emerged and the domestic space became an illustration of the one of many facets of Israel's cultural, social, and economic narrative, and it is the focus of this study. However the Jewish communities, while immigrating to Palestine from Central European countries during the 1920s and 1930s, already established their own distinctive homes. Before the establishment of the State of Israel, the typical European immigrant's home was closely linked to traditional values and the aesthetics that was left behind in their owner's countries of origin and was created by a handful of active interior decorators working in Palestine, who specialized in fulfilling the needs of immigrants from Central Europe. On the cultural heritage of the immigrants from the German-speaking world in pre-state Israel, see Gelber (1990).
- <sup>12</sup>On the official Melting Pot Policy in early statehood, see Gutwein (2004).
- <sup>13</sup>The two archives holding visual materials of domestic interiors of the period prior to the foundation of the state of Israel are two small archives, the Rechter and the Wittkover archives, both are situated in architectural offices in Tel Aviv.
- <sup>14</sup>For a discussion on the relationship between Zionist ideology and Modernism, see, for example, Nitzan-Shifan (1996), Heinze-Greenberg (), and Ingersoll (1994).
- <sup>15</sup>On the concept of "Alternative Modernism" in domestic interior in the German-speaking world of the prewar era and its association with the Jewish bourgeois home, see Strizler-Levine (1996).
- <sup>16</sup>Gad in an interview with Ruth Seligman, see Seligman (1979, p. 13).
- <sup>17</sup>Ashkenazi Jews are descendants of medieval German Jews and the Sefardie are the descendants of medieval Spanish Jews.
- <sup>18</sup>Quoted in Pett (1972).
- <sup>19</sup>Quoted in Shchori (1997, p. 43).
- <sup>20</sup>Maskit (1955–1994) was created by Ruth Dayan with a mission of helping immigrants earn their living by producing artifacts and applied arts while practicing the crafts of their traditions. For a monograph on Maskit, see Eretz Israel Museum (2003).
- <sup>21</sup>The first educational program dedicated to interior design started at the New Bezalel in 1962, founded by Ruth Melamed. For 3 years she headed the department, which offered studies in product design, and in 1965, Arthur Goldreich, who was trained in architecture in South Africa became its director, renaming the Department for Interior and Industrial Design. The agenda focused on designing for social causes, with structures and objects for the kibbutzim and hospitals. In 1969, with the reorganization of institution under its new name Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, the small department, which was transformed into the Department for Environmental and Product Design, completely eliminated interior design from its curriculum. That transformation was initiated by Shimon Shapira, who aimed to model the department after its counterpart at the University of California, Berkeley. It was not until the 1980s that education in interior design had revived. The pioneering institute was the Center for Technological Studies. Known today as the Holon Institute of Technology, it had opened its design department in 1980, and offered a specialized program for training of interior designers in 1987. On the program in Bezalel, see Tartakover and Ofrat (2006, pp. 202–205).
- <sup>22</sup>Among the notable architects working in pre-state time and creating interior décor were Alfred Abraham, Werner Joseph Wittkover, and Zeev Rechter.
- <sup>23</sup>See Kruk (2003); for an exhibition catalog based on Kruk's work, see Kruk (2006). Kruk notes that in the 1950s, the entire field of industrial design was promoted by American agencies funded by the American government as a part of an aid program during early statehood. Industrial design had received formal recognition with the foundation establishment of two significant offices, the Israel Institute of Design, and the IPDO—Israeli Produce Design Office.
- <sup>24</sup>The study of the Israeli home of the 1980s is beyond the scope of this work, but should be studied as a part of the entire story of Israeli domestic culture.
- <sup>25</sup>Yedioth Ahronoth (1965, 54).
- <sup>26</sup>On the success of Scandinavian furniture in the UK and the United States, see, for example, Davies (1997), Sparke (1986), and Jackson (1994).
- <sup>27</sup>Danish Interiors was founded in Trumpeldor Street, Tel Aviv in 1963. Two years later, it was moved to a temporary space in Tel Aviv's Exhibition Grounds before moving to a spacious showroom of 1000 square feet in Ramat Gan, where it was situated until sold in 1981 to Rim. Tolman founded another store, Tolman's, which although no longer owned by the family, is still one of Israel's leading furniture store. Interview with Tamara and Jeff Tolman, March 2011, Tel Aviv.

- <sup>28</sup>The Finnish Marimekko, one of the great success stories in the history of 20th-century design, was founded in 1951 by the visionary textile designer Armi Ratia and her husband Viljo, and grew into an international phenomenon. On Marimekko, see Aav (2004).
- <sup>29</sup>Yedioth Ahronoth (1965, p. 7).
- <sup>30</sup>Pett (1972, p. R2).
- <sup>31</sup>The architectural journal *Tvai* was founded in 1966 by architect Abba Elhanani who acted as the editor.
- <sup>32</sup>For a monograph on Gad, see Shchori (1997). The archive of her work is set at the Colman College, Rishon Lezion, Israel.
- <sup>33</sup>Plumb (1963).
- <sup>34</sup>Fitzgibbons (1978).
- <sup>35</sup>*Ibid*, 90.
- <sup>36</sup>Seligman (1979, 32).
- <sup>37</sup>Jahreszeiten Verlag (1975, pp. 59–88).
- <sup>38</sup>*Ibid*, 65.
- <sup>39</sup>On Zvi Hecker, see, for example, Klein (2002) and Yagid-Haimovici (1996).
- <sup>40</sup>On the DIY movement in Britain, see Atkinson (2006).
- <sup>41</sup>Yedioth Ahronoth (1965).
- <sup>42</sup>According to my own memory and interviews with people living in this era.
- <sup>43</sup>Yedioth Ahronoth (1965, chapter "Furniture," p. 7).
- <sup>44</sup>*Ibid*.
- <sup>45</sup>The Reparations Agreement between Israel and West Germany was signed on September 10, 1952, and entered in force on March 27, 1953. According to the agreement, West Germany was to pay Israel for the slave labor and persecution of Jews during the Holocaust, and to compensate for Jewish property that was stolen by the Nazis.
- <sup>46</sup>On issues of culture and economy of the Ashkenazim versus the Sefardim, see Smooha (1993).
- <sup>47</sup>On design in film, see, for example papers in a recent symposium entitled "Design in Film," published in *Design and Culture* 1, no. 2 (July 2009). On the study of architecture through film, see Covert (1993) and Handa (2010).
- <sup>48</sup>A conversation with Kuly Sander, one of the most prominent set artists working on Israeli films during the 1970s. November, 2010.
- <sup>49</sup>For the most comprehensive study of that genre of bourekas films, see Shohat (1989).
- <sup>50</sup>On the analysis of the target audience, and the makers of the bourekas film, see Naaman (2001).
- <sup>51</sup>Shohat (1989, p. 131).
- <sup>52</sup>The script of *Charlie and a Half* was written by Eli Tavor; the film was directed by Boaz Davidson in 1974.
- <sup>53</sup>Israel's first department store was situated in the Shalom Meir Tower, the first skyscraper built in the country, and at the time, the highest in the Middle East. The skyscraper was built on the site previously occupied by the Herzliya Hebrew High School, among Tel Aviv's first icons and designed by the architect Gideon Ziv who sought to model it after the lever House. On the place of the Shalom Meir Tower in the evolution of Tel Aviv, see Klein and Kark (2008, p. 111).

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