

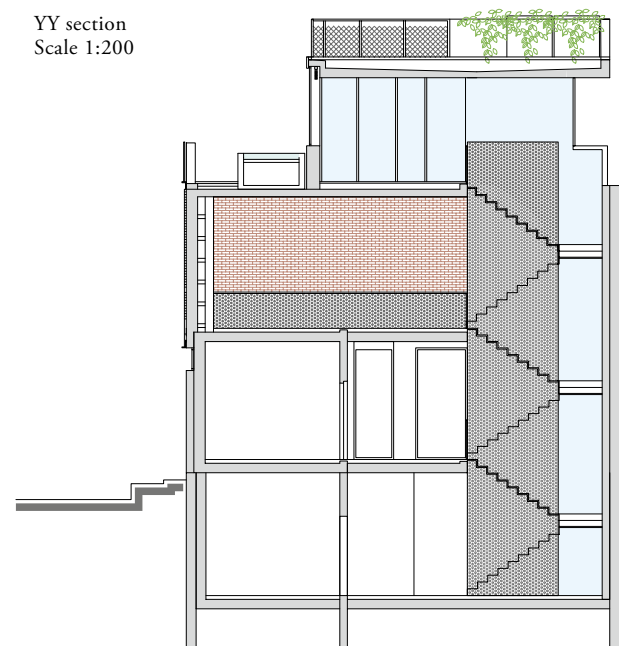
TERRACOTTA
TOWNHOUSE
A PARADIGM
FOR AN
URBAN HOME
JAFFA, ISRAEL



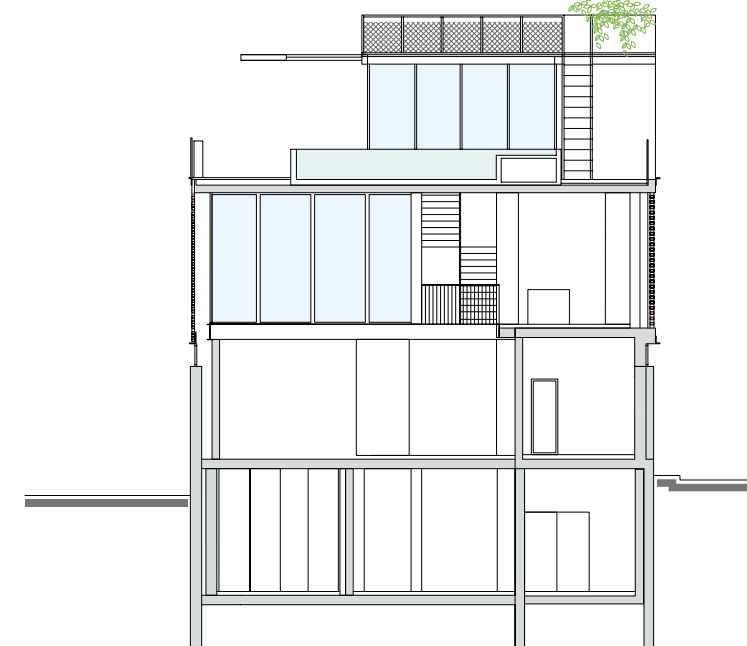
Pitso Kedem
Architects



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As the name implies, the private Terracotta Townhouse in Jaffa, a city on the Israeli coast that boasts one of the world's oldest ports, is wrapped in a hallmark brick shell. Nowadays incorporated into the urban area of Tel Aviv, Jaffa stands on a natural promontory overlooking the sea, complete with an Aeolianite hill. The plot on which the home is built lies in the heart of the old town, in an old Islamic neighborhood characterized by typical Arab architectural styles, featuring many buildings constructed from local stone. Over the years, the Pitsou Kedem Architects design firm has worked on a number of historic buildings of this type, respecting the buildings' original characteristics. But with the new-build Terracotta Townhouse design, the firm opted for a contrasting architectural stylistic approach. Although still predicated on using natural materials found in the local context, the practice created the building to be a multi-story urban residence rather than a multiple housing unit complex.

Commissioned by a couple who have a daughter, the house was built adjacent to a neighboring building after having demolished a previous low-value property. Since the project lot occupies a corner position flush with the street, it was not possible to incorporate a garden around the dwelling. There was, however, scope to carve out green space within the volume in the form of a full-height patio, protected from traffic noise yet exposed to natural light – a design solution that ensures comfort and privacy for the homeowners, while maintaining contact with nature in this private outdoor space.

On an exposed concrete foundation, the residence's upper portion consists of a brick shell laid as either a solid wall or a perforated screen, providing a kind of second skin outside the windows that open onto the perimeter walls; the brick construction also separates the inner courtyard from the public street. A total of 14,000 bricks were used for the project. Custom-designed in a contemporary shape and proportions, two holes in the bricks allow them to be stacked on stainless steel bars. The brick blocks' grid configuration reinterprets the traditional Islamic *mashrabiya*, a passive cooling system adopted widely in the Arab world, commonly made from small inlaid wooden elements assembled in geometric patterns. Designed to handle the typically hot summers in this part of the world, *mashrabiya* have been popular in the Jaffa region for over 300 years, ever since the Ottoman period. Through forced-ventilation, they regulate the penetration of sunlight into the indoor spaces and protect residents' privacy, while at the same time offering filtered views toward the outside.

The dwelling is accessed via a door with a metal finish located on the west front, that is, the side facing the sea. Inside, each level

of the house is dedicated to a specific functional area. The basement is reserved for sleeping, featuring two double bedrooms each with its own bathroom. Another small bedroom is located on the ground floor, alongside a study with a relaxation area, a double-volume room offering a sightline to the second-level dining room and kitchen. The main living area occupies the top floor, where large windows look out toward the sun where it sets over the Mediterranean. This level is extended by an outdoor terrace that offers spectacular views of both the seascape and harbor. Alongside the living room is an infinity pool, directly connected when the windows are open. Invisible from street level, the pool juts out toward the sea, almost as if seeking to flow into it. A stainless steel structure renders this feature lighter and less bulky, carving out as much space as possible for the pool itself. At the top of the building, a green roof bordered by a glazed balustrade brings further immersion into the surrounding natural and urban landscape.

The dwelling's intimate, inward-looking lower level is lit by windows that look onto the interior patio with a central frangipani tree. A ribbon window runs around the top of the walls on the ground floor, sandwiched between the façade's concrete and brick portions. The window panes here may be opened using special handles custom-designed for the project. Perforated brick walls offer passersby glimpses of the tree from outside, as well as creating an ever-changing interplay of light and shadow, further amplified by a sheet metal mesh wall positioned along the staircase.

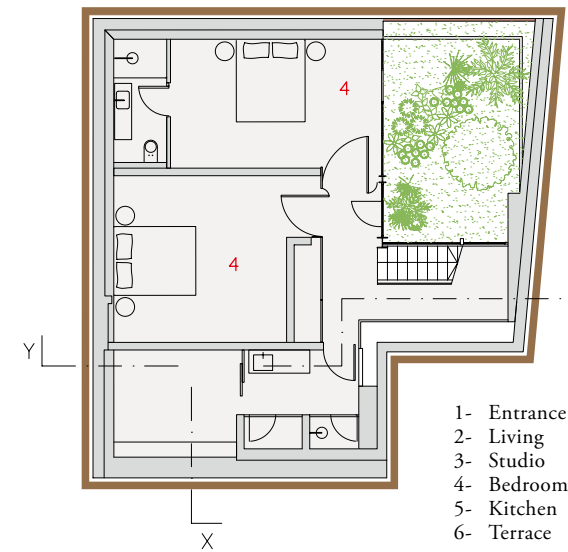
The home's appearance changes depending on the time of day and weather conditions; in the evenings, it resembles a mysterious lantern. The home's materials combine brick and steel, with exposed double-T girders conveying an industrial flavor. The kitchen cabinets and custom-made sliding doors separating the dining room from the service toilet on this floor are also made of metal. In counterpoint to a powder-coated metal finish characterized by a slightly roughened look, brick walls dialogue with wood paneling, polished concrete flooring, and exposed concrete walls and ceilings.

The undisputed common thread that runs through Terracotta Townhouse is the originality of its unconventional and successful design. Pitsou Kedem set out to redefine the paradigm of urban living, leveraging an unprecedented mixture of materials, unusual bedroom placement at the base of the building, an evocative interplay of light and, despite the property's limited size, the idea of carving out an internal patio.

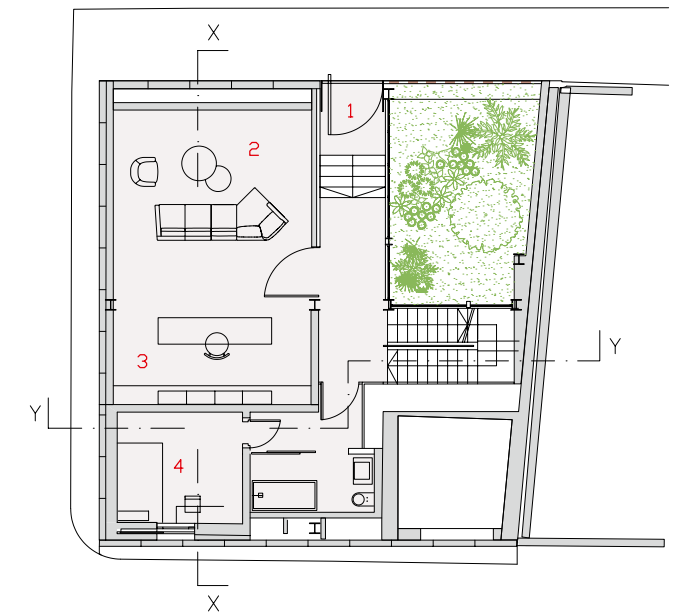
Elisa Grossi

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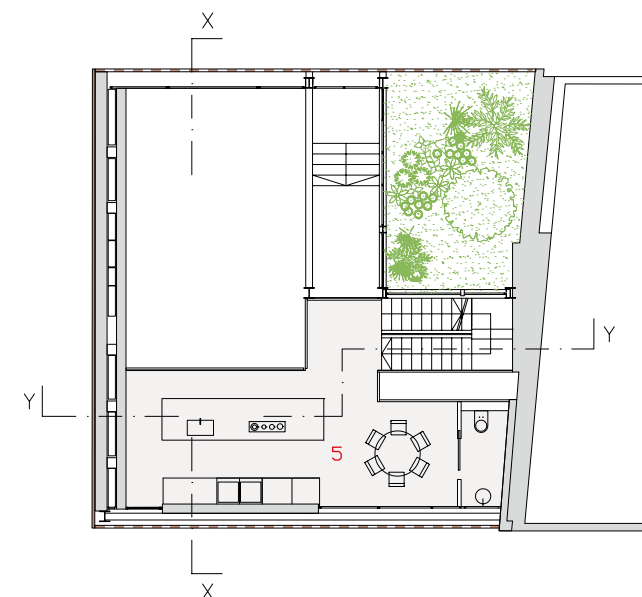
Basement floor plan – Scale 1:200



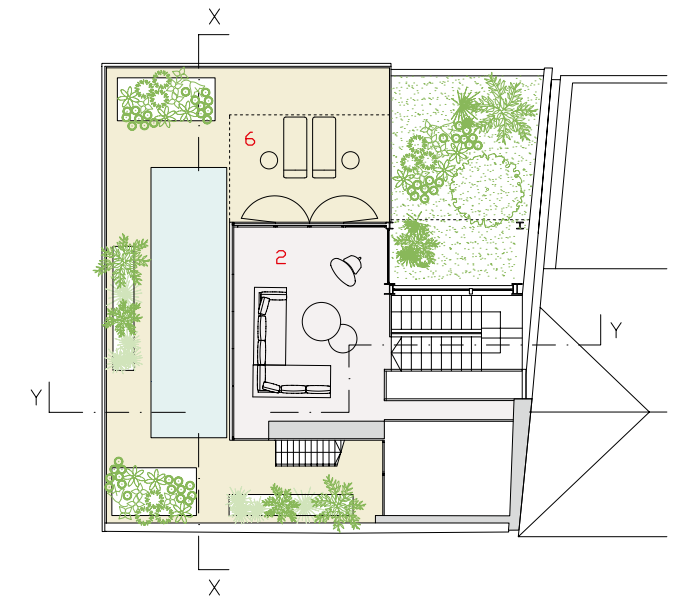
Ground floor plan – Scale 1:200

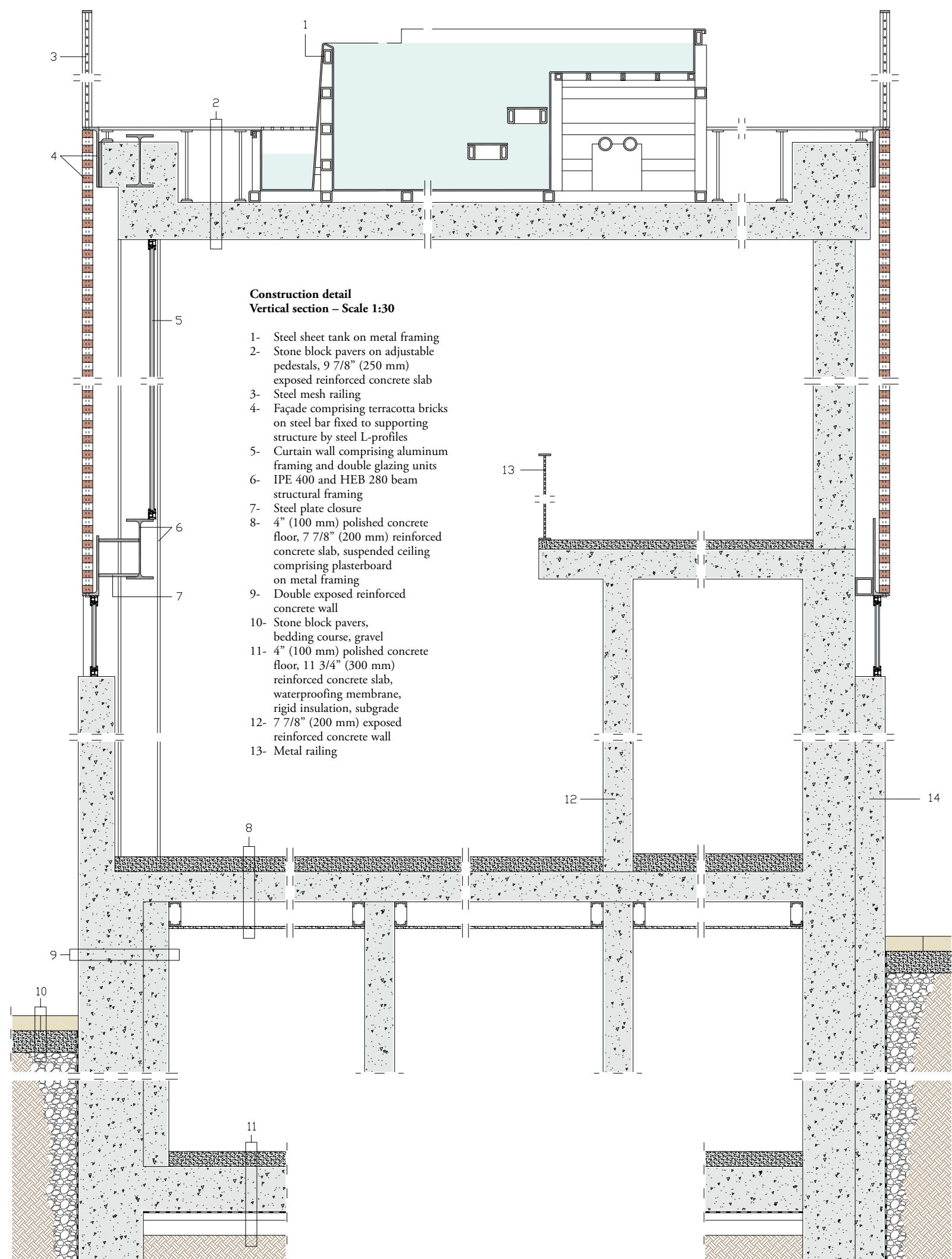


First floor plan – Scale 1:200



Second floor plan – Scale 1:200







CREDITS

Location: Jaffa, Israel – **Completion:** 2024 – **Gross Floor Area:** 250 m² – **Architect:** Pitsou Kedem Architects – **Design Team:** Pitsou Kedem, Hila Weiss Sella – **Lighting:** Orly Avron Alkabes

Photography: Amit Geron
All images courtesy of Pitsou Kedem Architects

