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MIDDLE EAST**



## A RESILIENT SURVIVOR

James Law talks about the roller-coaster ride of his architectural adventures in the Middle East

## REVISITING THE CITY OF DARKNESS

Greg Girard and Ian Lambot return to the Kowloon Walled City for a new Kickstarter-funded book



HK\$48  
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# ROCK THE KASBAH

Text: Michele Koh Morollo Photography: © Amit Geron

*Located in an ancient kasbah, Factory Jaffa House is a place where the walls have tales to tell*





The ancient port city of Jaffa is one of the oldest parts of Tel Aviv, and mentioned in the Biblical tales of King Solomon, Jonah and Saint Peter. In an essay about modern archeology, Israeli architect and writer Omri Oz Amar examines Jaffa's ancient kasbah — a once backwards and disadvantaged area that was rehabilitated and restored into an “artists quarter” in the early 1960s.

Amar notes that excavation during the reconstruction process unearthed archeologically significant finds such as Napoleon's cannon and sculptures and symbols that date as far back as the time of the Pharaohs; such is the historical heritage of the city.

It is here in this kasbah that one finds Factory Jaffa House, a residential property by Tel Aviv architecture studio Pistou Kedem, housed in a building that could possibly date back to the 17th century. “Its story begins, so it would seem, in the 17th century when Jaffa was resettled. Evidence of this can be seen in construction technologies such as stone arches and vaults, as well as the fact that it is difficult to decide if this was originally a single

building or a structure to which other structures were added over time,” writes Amar.

The house was commissioned by a foreign resident who wanted to own an authentic Israeli home with a strong local character, says the project's principal architect Pistou Kedem. “They wanted plenty of open space, privacy on the two upper floors and a separate room on the lower level for parties,” he says.

The outer shell of the 180 sq-m building is about 300 years old, and Pistou's design team, which includes Razz Melamed and Irene Goldberg, were guided by the desire to expose and exult the original ancient stone wall structure, ceiling vaults and domes with a modern, minimalist interior. “The idea was to restore the structure's original characteristics — the stone walls, the segmented ceilings and the arches including the exposure of the original materials (a combination of pottery and beach sand). The building has been cleaned of all of the extraneous elements and has undergone a peeling process to expose its original state,” says Kedem.

Below With a cross-vault ceiling and a glass panel door, this space is used as an occasional guest room  
Left Factory Jaffa House is set in a building that likely dates back to the 17th century







The staircase floats between an exposed concrete wall on one side and a railing of sleek steel cables on the other





All the doors and windows look out to the Mediterranean Sea for spectacular views

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The entrance to the house is set upon the western slopes of the kasbah, at a crossroad where two alleys meet. All the doors and windows face and look out to the Mediterranean Sea for spectacular views.

“An iron door that preserved the proportions of the original entrance evokes a feeling that we are entering a protected and intimate space. This feeling is further enhanced by the space being slightly lower than the street level of the upper alley, and by the sparsity of openings for light,” writes Amar.

The interior is divided into two sections. The first, with a cross-vault ceiling, is a single room separated by a glass panel and used as a guest room from time to time. The second section is a semi-public gallery-like space that includes a work area and a guest bathroom. From here, a staircase leads up to the upper levels of the house. This staircase floats between an exposed concrete wall on one side and a railing of sleek steel cables on the other. The ribbed surfaces of the concrete wall and the lines of the steel cables complement the verticality created by the height of the building,

which spreads over three levels.

“The historical is expressed by preserving the textures and materials of the buildings outer shell, and by respecting the building’s engineering accord. The modern is expressed by the opening up of spaces to alter the internal flow, and with the use of stainless steel, iron and Corian in the various partitions, in the openings and in the furniture,” says Kedem.

The design concept endows the space with a sense of being frozen in time. Amar observes that a closer inspection of the design process reveals surgical preservation and restoration architectural interventions. “The original arches of vault ceilings were exposed in a number of places within the structure and these have become hallways and wide openings that further enrich the sense of space, the play of light and the sights,” he notes. The original height of the kitchen area was also revealed, and sections of the western façade have been removed allowing for the enlargement of the sea-facing windows.





A white, cream, black and grey colour scheme and carefully selected streamlined, light-framed modern furniture ensure an uncluttered, contemporary atmosphere. "Surprisingly, modern, minimalistic construction styles remind us of and correspond with the ascetic style of the past, despite the vast time difference between the two," says Kedem.

In Factory Jaffa House, the spirit of the ancient Kasbah is captured in the most wonderful way. The mystery and majesty of the archeological structure is preserved and honoured in a contemporary home that is both functional and visually stunning. "Despite the time differences, the tensions and the dichotomy between the periods exist in a surprisingly balanced and harmonic space," says Kedem. ●



*Above* Interior spaces have been opened up to alter the internal flow, with stainless steel, iron and Corian carefully used in fittings and finishes  
*Right* The modern, minimalistic construction styles are a reminder of and correspond with the ascetic style of the past, says architect Pistou Kedem