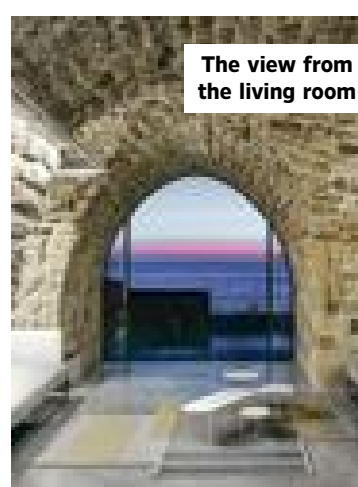


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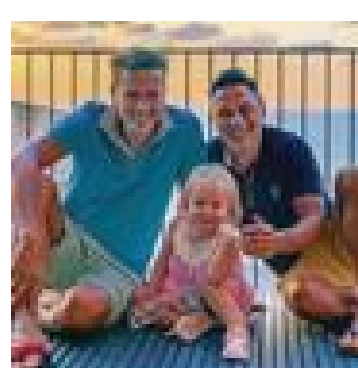


PURCHASE PRICE
\$1.9 MILLION
RENOVATION
\$2.9 MILLION

Centuries-old sandstone walls, reinforced with high-quality plaster



The view from the living room



Jeffrey Hansen, left, David Barashi and Emma Barashi-Hansen.

INSIDE STORY

A Home for the Ages in Tel Aviv

By J.S. MARCUS

With an eye on the future, a Tel Aviv couple chose a ramshackle, centuries-old unit to convert into a bright, open-plan smart home with sea views and courtyard dining.

David Barashi, a software-engineering executive who grew up in Jerusalem, and his husband, Jeffrey Hansen, a psychiatrist from the U.S. Midwest, paid \$1.9 million in 2014 for the 3,000-square-foot space in Old Jaffa, a district south of Tel Aviv's center.

They then worked with local architect Pitsou Kedem to complete a \$2.9 million transformation of the multilevel space, previously an architect's office and residence. They wanted their new home for the coming school years of their 3-year-old daughter, Emma Barashi-Hansen, and for their own eventual retirement. Currently, they divide their time between Portland, Ore., and Israel.

Mr. Kedem reduced the number of levels in the unit to two, creating the main home upstairs with several doors leading to a 900-square-foot courtyard, and then carved out a downstairs guest

apartment with a separate entrance. The rear of the home was opened to the sea, bringing in more light.

Mr. Barashi, 49, says the guest apartment was originally a donkey stable. "Donkeys were the main means of transportation here," he says of Old Jaffa's still-narrow alleys that wind above the Mediterranean.

The unit itself likely dates back some three centuries to the midpoint of the Ottoman period, when this part of the Middle East was loosely ruled from Istanbul.

Before buying the home, the couple had been regular visitors to Tel Aviv. They discovered Old Jaffa during runs on the beach. Dr. Hansen, now 52, was especially drawn to the district. Finding the right space was a matter of luck and perseverance.

"Each unit in Old Jaffa is completely different," says Mr. Barashi. "Some are like caves, some don't have sea views and some are on several levels."

When Mr. Barashi first saw the unit, it was divided into a number of small spaces and separated by several sets of steps and a few staircases, and some of the archways were walled up with concrete or stones. Nevertheless, he says,

"Something about it was magical."

He says there are some 220 residential and commercial units in Old Jaffa, which has traces of civilizations dating back several thousand years. The formerly walled harbor town served for millennia as the main port of entry for what is now Israel. Roman garrisons, Christian pilgrims, Ottoman dignitaries and Jewish pioneers had to pass through to make their way to Jerusalem, 40 miles inland.

Following Israeli independence in 1948, the port of Jaffa was supplanted by the booming city of Haifa to the north. Jaffa became part of greater Tel Aviv. Its historic heart, Old Jaffa, was left largely derelict and later developed into an artist's colony. Gentrification over the past few decades has been controlled by a strict vetting policy for prospective homeowners.

Renovations in Old Jaffa are a challenge. Material and debris had to be moved by hand from the nearest parking areas a quarter mile away. Building costs in Old Jaffa can be 20% higher than in more accessible historic areas of Israel, says Mr. Kedem.

It took nearly two years for the



Bulthaup kitchen, Miele appliances

couple to secure permits for the renovation and an additional three years to complete the work. The family moved into the finished apartment in spring 2019.

The courtyard, which has an outdoor shower as well as a large dining area, is the focal point of the home, with access to the kitchen, a bedroom and an adjacent sitting room. The main living areas of the home have sea views, as does the alcove master bedroom, which can be closed off with a screen.

The apartment has thick walls made from local sandstone, known as kurkar, which is found along the eastern Mediterranean coast. In contrast to the limestone used in Jerusalem, kurkar was long regarded as a cheap, substandard building material. But many now

consider its rough-hewn earth tones as an ideal foil for contemporary minimalist furnishings.

The couple opted for a number of luxury details in the décor, including poured-concrete floors, a designer kitchen from Germany's Bulthaup and LED track lighting, which runs through the home on white tubes.

The sandstone walls are some 3 feet thick, keeping the home warm in winter and relatively cool in summer, when they use their air conditioning to blunt Tel Aviv's notorious humidity. Heating, cooling and lights are all controlled by smartphone.

Dr. Hansen let his husband fine-tune the interior on the condition it include a comfortable reading chair, which now sits in a corner library. Mr. Barashi opted for Spanish designer carpets with dashes of yellow to play off the kurkar beiges and ochers, and gray Italian designer sofas that go with the concrete floors. The couple commissioned a space overlooking the kitchen as a wine gallery, accessed by ladder and outfitted with custom-built cabinets.

In contrast to their Portland condo, which is filled with artwork and extra storage space, the couple make due in Old Jaffa with near-naked walls and a few dressers. "We didn't overload," says Mr. Barashi. "We wanted the architecture to shine."



AMIT GERON (PHOTOGRAPHY); AVITAL SHENHAV, PITSOU KEDEM (DESIGN); AVITAL SHENHAV (ON CHARGE ARCHITECT); ORLY AVIRON ALKABES (LIGHTING DESIGN); DAVID BARASHI (PORTRAIT); MAP BY JASON LEE

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