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

Opus 71
Ram Karmi and Ada Karmi-Melamede, Supreme Court of Israel, Jerusalem
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Distributors

Brockhaus Commission
Kreidlerstraße 9
D-70806 Kornwestheim
Germany
tel. +49-7154-1327-33
fax +49-7154-1327-13
menges@brocom.de

Buchzentrum AG
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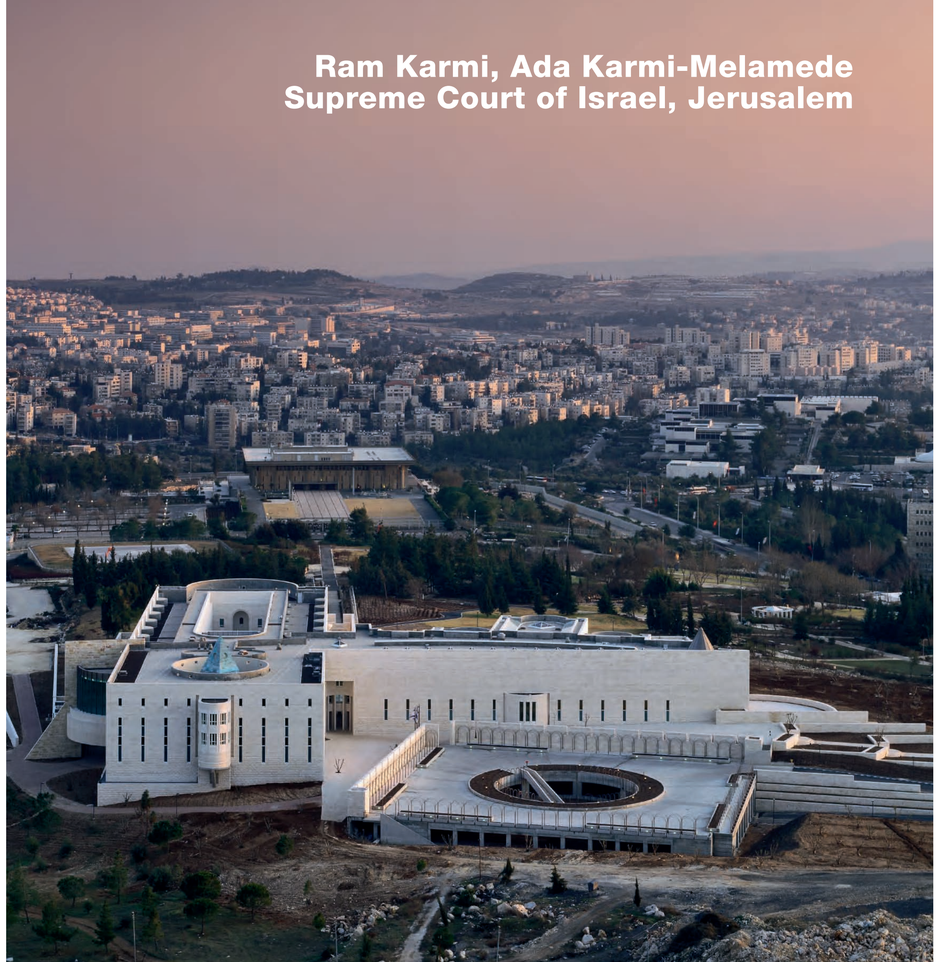

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Anne-Catrin Schultz

Rational poetry – the Israel Supreme Court building

Judaism looks back on a history of thousands of years, while the state of Israel is still young. In this context, designing the Supreme Court building was a complex and difficult task, which, in addition to solving urban and programmatic relationships, needed to honour the past, be rooted in the present and have the potential to grow into the future.

Since the founding of the state of Israel in 1948, the Supreme Court had been housed in temporary quarters in an 1863 Mission Building in the Russian Compound in Jerusalem. This courtyard structure was originally built as a hospice and was characterized by a series of architectural features that the judges had grown fond of and hoped their new building would reference. Yosef Sharon described the »old« court building: »The building, which was rented to the British at the time, and which still houses the Magistrate's Court, was the Supreme Court's residence for 44 years. The Supreme Court was located in part of the building and was reached via a corridor, which was also used as a waiting and recess area. The spaces beneath the arches along the second storey corridor served as benches. From that vantage point one could observe the internal courtyard. The Russian Mission and several Russian monks were quartered in the east wing. The unique architectural properties of the building, whose structural elements include stone, iron and glass, are familiar. In the modern Supreme Court building Karmi-Melamede and Karmi sought to ›convey‹ the same sensation of thick walls which characterized the old Supreme Court, and other buildings in the Russian compound.«[1] The government of Israel had been contemplating a new Supreme Court building since the 1960s and had started construction on a site on Mount Scopus, but the project was never completed.

The architectural competition

In the 1980s, centennial celebrations were held for the establishment of the first agricultural colonies in Israel, which had been supported by Baron Edmond de Rothschild. At that time, his wife, Dorothy de Rothschild, initiated the festivities with a symbolic gesture: the endowment of a building of national significance, which would be the Supreme Court. With this gesture, she was executing the wishes of her late husband, who prior to his death had considered such an endowment for a permanent home for the legislature. At that time, in the 1950s, Rothschild decided to endow the Knesset (parliament) building, and Dorothy envisioned fulfilling his vision by providing a new Supreme Court building. Yad Hanadiv, a foundation set up in 1957 before the death of James de Rothschild, coordinated the family's philanthropic activities. In 1981, its trustees offered to finance a new building for the Supreme Court. Due to disagreements about the potential site, the gift was not considered until 1983, when the new president of the Supreme Court, Justice Meir Shamgar, approached Yad Hanadiv to renew its initiative for a Supreme Court building. The 10-acre site selected for an international competition was situated at the top of Government Hill.

The competition was launched in 1986. The first round was open to all Israeli architects – 174 participated, from which four were chosen, together with three invited firms from Israel and three foreign firms, to proceed to the second stage. The jury included five architects: Bill N. Lacy (chair), Cesar Pelli, Charles Moore, Daniel Havkin and David Reznik. In the second stage, Chief Justice Meir Shamgar, British philosopher Sir Isaiah Berlin, Financial Times critic Colin Amery and the Hon. Jacob Rothschild joined the jury. The building program outlined all functional spaces necessary to operate a court building, but left the public areas to the designer's discretion. The involvement of architects from all over the world was common for master planning and construction in Jerusalem, because the nation stood at the heart of a discussion about Modernism versus historic vernacular architecture. After the 1967 War, Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kollek fought against government plans to extend Jerusalem's boundaries into the occupied territories (East Jerusalem and the Old City, formerly governed by Jordan, were occupied by Israel at that time). He invited luminaries such as Richard Buckminster Fuller, Louis Kahn, Lewis Mumford and Bruno Zevi as members of the Jerusalem committee established to discuss Kollek's master plan. The discussion largely revolved around the topic of how to preserve Jerusalem's natural beauty and also expressed the desire to tie any new architecture and planning activity into the city's historic context.[2]

Several architects submitted proposals for the Supreme Court competition. Among others, Richard Meier submitted an L-shaped complex rotated on a square grid system, Ricardo Legoretta contributed an informal atrium scheme, Moshe Safdie created a series of triangular courtrooms with a strong sculptural parti, and James Freed presented a great courtyard with a rotunda inside. None of the 10 schemes submitted in the final round displayed direct historicism. Arthur Fried, a Yad Hanadiv trustee, had asked Ram Karmi and Ada Karmi-Melamede to participate in the 1986 architectural competition. They partnered for the design of the Supreme Court, combining their individual skills with their intimate relationship with the City of Jerusalem.

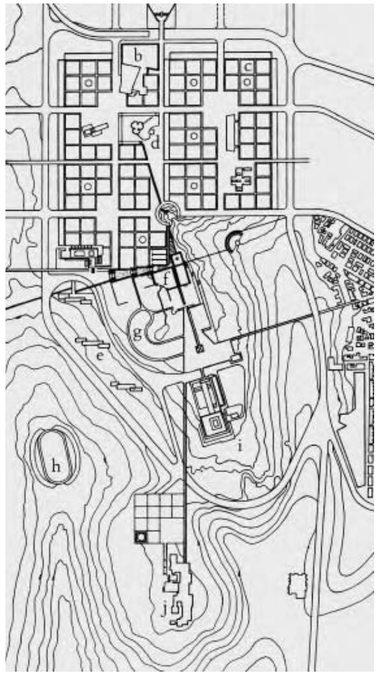
An excerpt of the architects' statement submitted with their contribution to the competition describes their aspirations and design ideas:

»Three broad themes determined the design of the Supreme Court building. The first is location and site: its location in Jerusalem commands the urban fabric of the city, and its site mediates between the Judean desert to the east and the Mediterranean Sea to the west. Secondly, the building aspires to reflect its unique historical cultural significance in modern Israel, and endeavours to represent the basic values of law, justice, truth, mercy and compassion. Finally its character evolved from biblical images in the tradition of Jewish law. The approach to the building reveals the juxtaposition of two grids. The inclined angle of the parking area responds to the city grid, while the orientation of the building responds to the Knesset axis. People arriving by public or private transport are gathered along the Dorothy de Rothschild Promenade which leads to the outer gate.

From the entry, one ascends in a grand stairway similar to a Jerusalem stone alley towards a curved glass

1. Site Plan showing the relationship of three axes at the time of the Supreme Court competition. Key: a bus station, b Binyanei Ha'uma, c proposed expansion of Government Hill, d Hilton Hotel, e executive buildings, f Supreme Court, g Rose Garden, h University campus, i Knesset, j Israel Museum.
2. Austen St. Barbe Harrison, Rockefeller Museum, Jerusalem, 1930–38. (Photo: archives of Ram Karmi and Ada Karmi-Melamede.)
3. Covered walkway in Old Jerusalem. (Photo: Alfred Bernheim.)
4. Absalom's Monument, Jerusalem, 1st century A.D. (Photo: Alfred Bernheim.)
5. Mary's Tomb, Jerusalem, 12th century. (Photo: Alfred Bernheim.)

Photos 3–5 taken from: Henry Kendall, *Jerusalem, the city plan; preservation and development during the British Mandate, 1918–1948*, London, 1948.



curtain wall at the ›public level‹ (on which all administrative services are located) where a panoramic view of the city is revealed. The space beneath the ›pyramid‹ beyond acts as the inner ›gatehouse‹ to the Supreme Court and serves as a turning point after which one encounters the actual entrance hall. The pure ›pyramid‹ form tapers toward the apex allowing a column of light to penetrate. The library, because of its important function housing the collective memory of the law, which was historically located at the ›gatehouse‹, is tiered about this space and is defined by a curved façade, a continuation of the large curved window.

The wing comprising the courtrooms is separated from that of the judges' chambers, and administrative offices, so as to differentiate between the place of public hearings and the place of contemplation and deliberation. The judges' chambers, each opening to a private patio overlooking the city to the east or to the Knesset axis to the west, envelope an internal arcaded courtyard which forms a quiet place that allows for seclusion and introspection.

The judges descend to the courtrooms; the public enters at the courtroom level while the accused, if any, ascend from below. The courtrooms appear to be set in niches formed by the natural terrain. They are faced inside with smooth stone in contrast to the roughness at the outside retaining walls. The courtrooms are designed to separate the outer shell from the inner room. Natural light of varying intensity filters down between these two layers. In contrast to the brilliant light of the courtyard, the reflected light within the courtrooms is soft and tranquil.«[3]

Karmi and Karmi-Melamede won the competition and were awarded the commission. The architects had selected four images related to Jerusalem that they desired to convey in the new building:

the courtyard of the Rockefeller Museum,

a white-stuccoed, thick-walled alley typical of the Armenian quarter,

Absalom's Monument, a small structure named for King David's rebellious son built in the first century A.D., and

Mary's Tomb in the Garden of Gethsemane.

These images capture the inclusive perspective the architects chose for their exploration of a building intended to breathe some of the essence of the country it was to serve. The winning design comprises a complex series of limestone volumes tied together by site relationships and circulation. Karmi and Karmi-Melamede designed a building that gives a framework to the Israeli judicial system of a living law based on precedents, while displaying a clear hierarchy of elements that leave space for the unpredictable moments that characterize monuments that reach beyond themselves. The building represents »a conceptual image of the urban memory«[4] and the designers' »deep consciousness of the City in a building whose architecture would reflect the personal map imprinted in each individual.«[5] Taming and taking advantage of the intense light of Jerusalem was a major premise for the design of the Supreme Court building.

The selected project underwent an extensive refinement process: between late 1986 and the middle of 1987, the program was modified, resulting in 16 alternate schemes that were presented and explored before arriving at a final design. The main features and goals outlined in the architects' statement, however, were preserved in the final executed scheme.

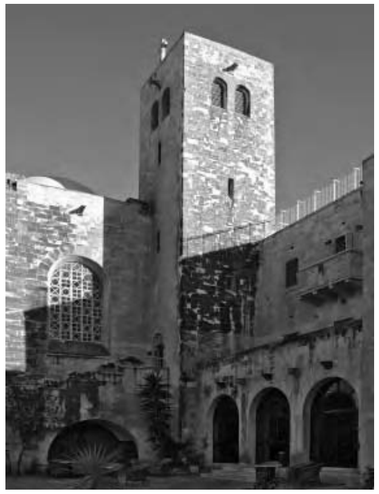
Half architecture, half landscape architecture, the new Supreme Court building is deeply anchored in its site and reaches out beyond its own walls. Four main program elements – the library, the judges' chambers, the courtrooms and the parking area – are located in four volumes arranged along two organizing axes. These four volumes are linked by a main foyer stretching in an east–west direction, which separates the judges' chambers and the courtrooms on the south side from the parking lot and the library on the north. The southern section is constructed of load-bearing stone walls reminiscent of Jerusalem's architectural history, whereas the northern section (i.e., the library, the »tent« and the foyer) uses a modern language of architecture that is highly dependent on new technology and structural systems. The positioning of the volumes leaves spaces in between for circulation, shaped by structure and light while providing urban scale and quality.

The Supreme Court building's plan employs efficient functionality while a refined Raumplan unfolds in section. The structure exhibits a mature emotional language related to architectural knowledge that emerges from the past. The Supreme Court's architecture is rooted in a solid and logical approach to design that in its spatial rigor allows for complex metaphors and poetic moments that integrate the structure into the context of historic Jerusalem while looking into an open future.

Biblical scriptures describe justice as a circle provided by god, while »law« or »truth« is described as a line made by man. The Supreme Court geometrically plays out the conflict of the two concepts, describing them in metaphorical spaces and patterns. The solidity and authority of the structure ties into the historic nature of Jerusalem and its surroundings. The state of Israel (founded in 1948) does not have a complete written constitution – the judiciary system is based on precedents, using Jewish, Turkish and British law. The fact that there is no jury in the Israeli justice system makes the library the central piece – it holds the precedents and with that the law.

In an interview with Ziva Freiman, Chief Justice Meir Shamgar, who was a member of the jury for the competition, writes about the Israeli judicial arm the following way: »The independence of the judiciary, contrary to common belief, doesn't serve the judges, it serves the citizen who is coming to court. The judges, being brought up in a certain tradition, are normally not afraid of pressures surrounding them. But when you have the Knesset building on the one side, and the government ministries on the other hand, and then the highest level of the judiciary sitting in a decrepit old Russian monastery, there could be a misunderstanding in the eyes of the man in the street that this is some kind of inferior body.«[6]

In the end, Karmi and Karmi-Melamede's contribution clearly stood out from the other entries in the competition. Instead of proposing a monumental scheme, the winning architects came up with a coherent site-specific building that roots itself to the land, continues the historic language of stone construction typical of Jerusalem and relates to the region's uniquely vibrant light.



Israel's search for architectural identity

A brief overview of the recent architectural history of the region illuminates the path of today's Supreme Court building. Israel's architecture of the 20th century is defined by its position between the cultural traditions of east and west. The architecture of Israel has been highly experimental over the course of the country's recent history, and thus open to linking contemporary experience to past schemes. Architectural development has been characterized by the search for a national identity for a relatively young country in a desert climate. The search for expression has been influenced by waves of immigration and a heterogeneous population of coexisting factions as well as the need to overcome scarcity of materials and an inadequate workforce. Around the turn of the 20th century, a simple southern Mediterranean style was often combined with local Arabian elements in the region, such as stucco or stone exteriors combined with clay tile roofs and shuttered windows. Sometimes villages were characterized by the origin of the people who established the settlement, for example, France or Germany. During the next decades, the country saw a search for a »new style« that would express the Hebrew culture in its own land. Lacking a consistent architectural tradition themselves, the pioneers sometimes were inspired by local Arab traditions, featuring domes, terraced roofs and arched windows attempting to evoke biblical times. With consecutive waves of Zionist immigration, the search for a satisfactory style has leaned toward »Oriental Eclecticism«, the use of local styles in combination with contemporary functionalism.

During the British Mandate (1917–48), Austen St. Barbe Harrison (1891–1976), an intellectual relative of the Supreme Court architects, was the chief architect of the department of public works. He was knowledgeable and passionate about Arab traditional architecture, which inspired his own structures. Harrison's Rockefeller Museum (begun in 1930), a dignified stone structure revolving around an interior courtyard, inspired the Judge's Courtyard of the new Supreme Court building. Another influence was the British architect Clifford Holliday, who designed the Scottish Church in Jerusalem, a building of medieval strength and 20th-century clarity with a sensual interior that uses light as a major design element. Both architects and their work were inspirations for the new Jerusalem Supreme Court building.

Historicizing tendencies dominated the activities of Ronald Storr, who was British Governor from 1917 until 1927 and who wanted Jerusalem to remain »a city unparalleled in the world, with an appeal to the imagination that not Rome, or even Athens could rival. Even in its appearance ... there was an impression of something strong and moving,« Storr wrote. »The austere gray walls and battlements, stone-built on hills of stone, commanded and dominated the Judean plateau. Travelers would pass the ancient walls, whose stones were hewn from the quarries of Solomon, and climb the Mount of Olives, from whose summit they could look over the city, of which, through its towers, pinnacles, and minarets wore the work of more recent ages, the general appearance was, and he hoped would be allowed to remain, very much what it was 2000 years ago.«[7] Storr issued decrees prohibiting the use of stucco and corrugated steel as well as red tiles within the city walls, denying the city any links to the modern and the Western as well as to the Arab villages. As Governor, Storr also mandated the use of native stone and fostered a highly selective approach to history and political identity by choosing certain architectural features to be preserved over others. His efforts were an attempt to reinvent a romanticized historic Jerusalem, in the process erasing some of the architectural history that he believed did not »fit in«. For example, he initiated the removal of the Turkish clock tower from the Jaffa Gate and the repair of a breach in the wall there (created when Kaiser Wilhelm II entered Jerusalem in 1898).

6. Erich Mendelsohn, Salman Schocken residence and library, Jerusalem, 1934/35, Jerusalem. (Photo: Alfred Bernheim.)
7. Clifford Holliday, Scottish Church, Jerusalem, 1927 to 1930. (Photo: Anne-Catrin Schultz.)
8. Dov Karmi, school of the Armenian Convent, Jaffa, 1930s. Exterior view. (Photo: Ytzhak Kalter.)
9. Dov Karmi, school of the Armenian Convent, Jaffa. Entrance hall. (Photo: Ytzhak Kalter.)
10. Dov Karmi, apartment building in Tel-Aviv, 1931. (Photo: Ytzhak Kalter.)

Parkland was also established around the old city walls to isolate it as a distinct preserved artefact. Storr's strategies were aimed at renovating the city as »old« while eliminating and resisting any new development.

Meanwhile, a crop of architects whose approach was merely rational was working in Israel. These architects included Richard Kaufmann and Leopold Krakauer, who arrived from Germany (both became known for kibbutz buildings and an interest in adapting new architecture to the local climate). Yohanan Ratner, a German educated in Czarist Russia, exhibited a strictly unadorned rational approach, as can be seen in his massive Jewish Agency building in Jerusalem, which lacks decoration and expresses a direct simplicity that paved the way for contemporary Israeli architecture. With declining immigration, a contraction of construction activity at the end of the 1920s nevertheless saw an influx of architects influenced by Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius and other architects of the Bauhaus in the 1930s. Among those, Arieh Sharon's outstanding work represents much of the Bauhaus influence present in Israel. Early Modernism such as Sharon's was a rejection of the past. Similarly, in the 1920s, several architects in Palestine had consciously renounced traditional forms and construction in favour of a »modern« style. Erich Mendelsohn, a friend of Kaufmann, arrived in Mandate Palestine in 1934. Mendelsohn brought together the use of local stone with an expressive massing of volumes that were reminiscent of the Modern Movement. His house for Israeli president Chaim Weizmann in the city of Rehovot (1936) adheres to strong geometric relationships with some axial emphasis and a De Stijl type of compositional balance. The house is of heavy stone featuring an inward-facing courtyard with a modern canopy and steel columns penetrating its entire length. Regardless, it is a modest and restrained place with a connection to nature, as its courtyard opens on one side to an orange grove and to the landscape beyond.

Mendelsohn's Schocken house and library in Jerusalem seems related to the Supreme Court in its attitude toward the surrounding city and landscape and its use of stone-clad façades with a balanced set of openings and volumes. The emergence of Israel as a sovereign state brought the development of new ordinances and codes suitable to the young, dynamic nation. Immigration again created the need for mass housing, sometimes at the expense of carefully considered long-term strategies. After 1955, a rising number of construction projects were awarded to private companies, paving the way for a few mature housing projects, which often adapted the »International Style« to climatic conditions prevalent in the region.

Furthering the Israeli search for an architectural identity, the award-winning architects, Karmi and Karmi-Melamede, emerge from a long tradition started by their father, Dov Karmi, who was intensively involved in architecture in the city of Tel Aviv and in the shaping of modern Jerusalem. Dov Karmi was an immigrant from Russia and had set up his practice in Tel Aviv in 1936. He studied at the School of Architecture and Engineering in Ghent, Belgium, and in 1957 was the first architect to receive the Israel Prize in architecture. Numerous public buildings, office buildings and housing complexes ranging from a clear Modernist style inspired by Le Corbusier to an expressive Brutalist style in the 1960s and 1970s are the work of Dov Karmi. In all of his buildings he exhibits a strong sensitivity to materials and complex proportions as well as an in-depth understanding of the city as a changing and ever-adapting fabric. Dov Karmi's architectural production reflects the struggle for

straddling two architectural traditions, a regional one and an international one. Michael Levin describes two examples: »The attempt to combine an innovative vocabulary of forms with Oriental influence is reflected in an apartment house constructed by Dov Karmi at 9 Gordon Street in Tel Aviv. Its narrow façade faces the street, while the wider one faces the sea. The building has all the obvious signs of the International Style. At approximately the same time Karmi began planning the the school of the Armenian Convent in Jaffa, a stone building designed with arches. The prominent arch at the entrance to the school constitutes an utter negation of the glass door shaded by the first-storey ceiling.«[8]

Although the 1960s and 1970s saw a very assertive style in architecture, the 1980s and onward experienced a shift from the international tendencies of »New Formalism«, »Brutalism« and »neo-Expressionism« to a more logical architecture with simple forms and geometries, lean structures and what Amiram Harlap calls »clean-cut geometric forms« devoid of exuberant decorations and with a concentration on strong concepts, excellent execution and clear articulation.[9] A renewed search for a late-20th-century architectural identity manifested itself after the 1967 war, when Jerusalem mayor Teddy Kollek invited the elite of Western architecture to discuss his master plan for the City of Jerusalem. Under Kollek's direction, Israeli architecture took on an international component that it has never lost and that is continued by the Jerusalem Seminar. The Supreme Court competition and the resulting building constitute an important milestone along the path toward an architectural identity, not only for Israel but for the end of the 20th century as well.

The architects of the Supreme Court

As mentioned, the winning team, Ram Karmi and Ada Karmi-Melamede, are closely related to contemporary Israeli architecture through their father, Dov Karmi. Like his father, Ram Karmi attended the Technion – the Israel Institute of Technology – and the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London; later, he began his career working in his father's office. Ram Karmi was involved in numerous projects, among them the Negev Center in Bersheeba in 1960 and later the Tel Aviv bus station, which was started in 1967 but did not open until 1993. From 1974 to 1979 he was the chief architect at the Israel Ministry of Housing and Construction, where he was involved in public housing projects. While practicing Ram Karmi developed an academic career teaching at the Technion in Haifa and giving guest lectures at several American universities. Following a similar educational path as her father and brother, Ada Karmi-Melamede was also trained at the Technion and the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London. She joined her father's firm in 1964 and later spent 15 years teaching and practicing in the United States, returning to Tel Aviv to practice in 1985.

The urban context

Jerusalem is located between the Judean Desert to the east and the Mediterranean Sea to the west. The Old City of Jerusalem is located on a hill within a densely textured wall, which in turn is surrounded by mountains; its tight urban pattern in many instances acts as one extended building, resembling a fortress. The Supreme Court sits at the top of Government Hill, to the northwest of the Old City. Government buildings and the Knesset surround the Supreme Court site. Three main axis systems meet at the centre of the Supreme Court. The »official« north–south axis runs along the ridge, connecting the central bus station, the modern city gate, the Binyanei Ha'uma Convention Center and Concert Hall, the Hilton Hotel, the Knesset and the Israel Museum. A »green« east–west axis connects Sacker Park, the Wohl Rose Garden and Givat-Ram (the Hebrew University Campus). A third, less functional but ideological axis connects the Old City to Government Hill and in the future will connect the Rockefeller Museum and the Rose Garden, tying together Damascus Gate, the Russian Compound, Zion Square, Ben Yehuda Mall and the Supreme Court buildings. The Knesset building is only one example of how deeply the Karmi family is associated with architectural discourse and production in Israel – both Ram Karmi and Dov Karmi were involved in the complex and controversial design process that in the end was completed by Joseph Klarwein and several other architects. The Knesset building, which houses the legislative branch of the Israeli government, was also made possible by the philanthropic activities of the Rothschild family and was the outcome of a public competition launched in 1956. The Knesset plays an important role in the axis system and site relations of the Supreme Court building. It was part of a master planning process for Givat Ram, Government Hill, and was begun in 1949 when Arieh Sharon, the head of the Planning Section, proposed a location for the Knesset and the Kongress Hall.

After a competition, the jury granted the prize for the Knesset to the architect Joseph Klarwein, an architect of Polish origin who was educated in Germany and worked for the Public Works Department. The decision caused a fierce debate about favouritism and, with its scheme displaying classical references, raised the issue of modernity. Klarwein's initial contribution to the competition was basically a simple rectangle surrounded by columns alluding to a Greek temple, where the columns form a screen surrounding the cella walls. Despite intense protests by local architects, a committee of specially appointed experts decided to proceed with Klarwein's design and set up a team to assist with the process. In the process of developing the design, Klarwein was sent abroad to study similar buildings. However, during Klarwein's absence architect Zvi Cohen, a member of the project team, began making profound changes to the project that involved altering the entrance and overall size and proportions of the building. The process remained extremely complicated, with the involvement of various committees and never-ending discussions and opposition from different factions. In 1960 it was decided to invite architect Dov Karmi, Ram and Ada Karmi-Melamede's father, to act as mediator. Ram Karmi, Dov Karmi and the British architect Bill Gillitt set out to develop a new plan that re-configured the scheme. At the end of 1960, the architects presented their proposal to the Implementation Committee, showing a finely articulated building combining concrete and the reddish Jerusalem stone. Again, the heated discussion about finding an appropriate design for the parliament involving the materials used as well as the number of columns and their organization continued without agreement. Meanwhile, Ram Karmi left the team to take on a project for a parliament building in Sierra Leone. When Dov Karmi died unexpectedly in May 1962, the project continued, executed by Joseph Klarwein and several other architects who had authored the design.[10] The complex process of the Knesset competition and execution of the project show how important the architectural representation of Israel was considered at the time and how strong opinions were about the references a public building should display.

The Supreme Court building

The building that resulted from the Supreme Court competition is a careful assembly of volumes arranged along a coordinate system of two axes that relate the structure closely with the juncture of Jerusalem's city fabric and Government Hill.

In a story dated 13 August 1995, in the *New York Times*, Paul Goldberger summarized the essence of the building: »The foundations of architecture here are threefold: a fondness for simple geometries, a reliance on the traditional vernacular of the Middle East and a tendency toward pragmatic, no-nonsense directness.« This directness can be felt at any scale, on an urban level as well as in every detail including the furnishings. Landscape architecture and architecture work closely together in the project, the result being that the building is imbedded in the surrounding fabric of landscape and city. A coordinate system, similar to a Roman Cardo and Decumanus, anchors the parking area, which consists of a low, square volume with a circular opening set at an angle to the rest of the court building. This parking garage develops downward from the arrival level into a circular void, a horizontal oculus. Its geometry is linked to the urban texture by a bridge that leads to the National Precinct plaza and a parking lot. The remaining parts of the building include the library, the chambers and the courtrooms. These are articulated in separate volumes or groups of volumes, which themselves are dovetailed into the surrounding garden. The axis of the court building is set at an angle to the entrance road and the parking garage, connecting directly with the Knesset. The void created between the joints of the two geometric systems forms the entrance road. The square of the parking garage is countered by a smaller square element, the end piece of the long rectangle of the judges' chambers and the library. Beyond the library and the garage, a softer, curved element enters the plan, as if the building is fanning out into the park; here, overlooks and curvaceous lines evolve. The volumes, designed with much geometrical precision, remain crisp. The larger geometry makes space for individual geometric events in several locations: the »pyramid« projecting out of the roof plane, the library stairwell protruding outward toward the north and the so-called »wall of kisses« (which will be described in more detail later) protruding from the enclosed vessel of the building's east elevation.

The north–south axis separates the building into two parts. The eastern part (including the judges' chambers, the administration wing and the library) is introverted and intended to relate to the desert. In contrast, the western part (including the courtrooms and the parking area) is associated with the Mediterranean, being green and more open.

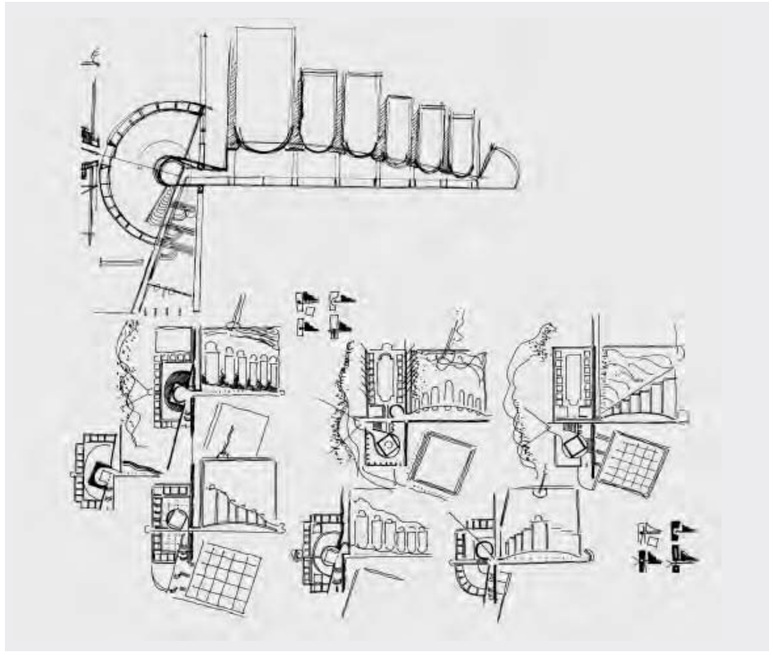
Every facet of the building is part of the overall concept, the roof plane exhibiting as much consideration and formal attention as the vertical façades. On the south façade, thick walls, acting as oversized planters, stretch out into the park as if they were tethering the building to the ground. The walls step up between the courtroom volumes, a group of semi-circular apse shapes of varying sizes. Volumes in the form of semi-circles, diamonds and pyramids populate the roof, and the surrounding walls act as light catchers for the spaces below.

The overall compositional system (working with precise geometries and relationships) gives the impression of a modern version of the balanced proportions found in Renaissance buildings. The building is representative of Jerusalem and suggests aspects of the Old City, being a city itself with streets, paths, plazas and separate »buildings« for different parts of the program. The architecture of the Supreme Court alludes to larger (intellectual) systems, corresponding to the profound dualisms of the Israeli landscape – ocean and desert, east and west, past and present, contraction and expansion. The entrance to the building is situated at the zero point of the double-coordinate system, creating a void with a circular gesture that unites all the parts. A semi-circular recess in the building volume allows access to the interior, where the journey continues.

The interior: thresholds

Inside, the building continues to suggest city structures and textures. The Knesset Path diverges from the entrance area, serving as an urban-style connector between two walls of the building, the judges' offices on one side and an enclosure wall that faces the courtrooms on the other side. Turning to the east, along the east–west axis, one climbs a staircase toward a glazed curve that opens up to a panoramic view of Jerusalem. Streetlights line the stairs, along a wall of rough-hewn limestone, called kisses – made from the untreated ends of the slabs as they come naturally out of the quarry. In an interview with Ziva Freiman, Ada Karmi-Melamede explains the relationship of two types of circulation experienced simultaneously: »You could say that circulation is an order-giving element in everything I do, because I think that spatial experience has a lot to do with what your eyes see and what your feet experience. Usually the plan deals with the feet, the shortcuts; the section always deals with the long cuts. For all my buildings the numbers of sections I draw is many times bigger than the number of plans. The reason is that I am always trying to elongate the sightlines within the building and maybe to shorten – or fix – if you want – the trail the feet will take.«[11] Contemporary security concerns have restricted the intended open access and distribution inside the Court building, so that now one has to pass through a new kind of gate, an X-ray machine. Although the scanning of one's entry will most likely remain a permanent feature, it seems foreign to a building that does not exhibit any of the technology that is implemented in the security screening.

How one experiences the building evolves in a series of thresholds and gateways that organize the program but also initiate mental transitions to the different realms of the judicial system that one is about to experience. Once having climbed the stairs, one turns and arrives at



11. Ada Karmi-Melamede, Supreme Court of Israel, Jerusalem, sketch, 1986.
12. Ram Karmi, Supreme Court of Israel, Jerusalem, sketch, 1986.

the true entrance hall, the gatehouse, then continues through a circle of columns crowned by the »pyramid«-shaped roof, passing through a tent-like room to either proceed into the library or transition into the foyer of the courtrooms. The tent-like space of the »pyramid« stands as a place in and of itself with its continuous white plaster walls and a floor pattern that gravitates toward the centre of the space.

The »pyramid« is positioned at the point of transition to the court, a space that focuses inward with an oculus similar to that of Rome's Pantheon in that it admits rays of light that move and change throughout the day. According to the architects, this is a place of delay, where the petitioner is supposed to pause for thought for the last time before reaching the court.

The library is a central space surrounded by a wall of books and forms an elevated threshold to the entire building.

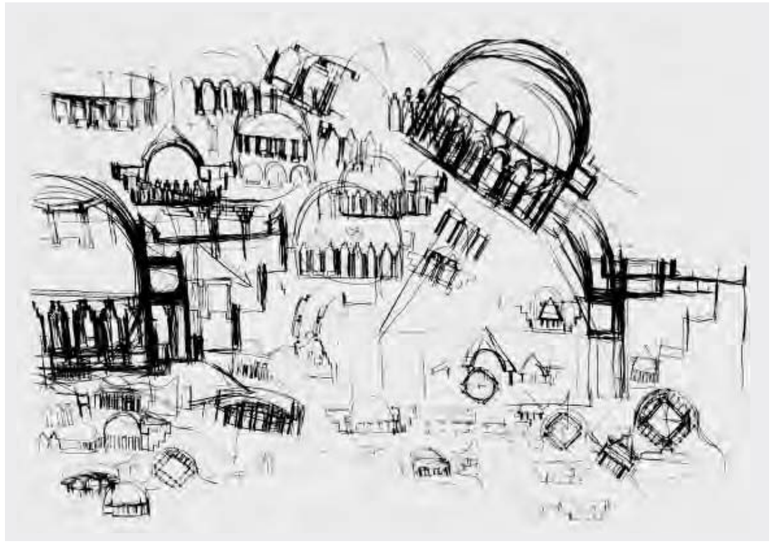
The foyer in front of the courtrooms is a vertically elongated space that stretches between the city-like grid and the curved wall, announcing the wings of the building containing the courtrooms and the areas housing the administration and the judges' courtyard. The curved wall is an extension of the rough stone »wall of the kisses« that accompanies the stairway up from the entrance, drawing a gentle curve through the entire building. In the foyer, the duality of two tendencies comes together: the light and Modern architecture dominating the northern section of the building meets the heavy and more traditional language of the southern section. The contrast between the two themes is heightened by the infiltration and reflection of light into the space, which makes the space different and surprising each time it is experienced. The stone wall appears to continue indefinitely by joining a mirror slightly below floor level to descend into the earth. The curve marks the transition of the two worlds – the judge's world on the south and the public world that is oriented toward the city on the north side. Half-round teak benches along the wall across from the courtroom entrances are extended upward to skylights that reflect the sunlight, preparing one for the introversion of the courtrooms. A circular staircase leads down to a cafeteria that opens onto the terraced park around the Supreme Court. The stone wall that forms a spine and holds the courtroom portals is separated from the roof by a strip of daylight, as if allowing one last glimpse of the sky before entering the court for a verdict. The portals symbolize the city gates, the biblical place where law was spoken, between the city inside and the country outside. The foyer forms a mysterious space with strong contrasts of lit and shady areas.

The five differently sized courtrooms, basilica-type spaces with vaulted ceilings accessed through carved gateways, continue the building's use of light to define the spatial zones for guidance. An illuminated buffer zone contains the circulation leading to the actual seating area of the auditorium and offers respite to anyone involved in hearings or court procedures. In the largest courtroom, which seats 150 people, a half-domed ceiling above the judges' alcove joins a barrel vault over the public section. The various courtrooms reveal a more individual signature of the brother and sister team, as they approach direct historic references more than the rest of the building.

The administration is located in the eastern wing of the building, the block that starts with the library, and is interrupted by the main staircase and stretches out into the garden. Offices and registry line a rhythmic hallway that faces the path to the Knesset. Hallways are not just unstructured corridors; they evolve in a regular rhythm as if measuring time from one point to the next. The judges' chambers are located above the administration level, as Ada Karmi-Melamede describes: »The judges' section is linked to the library by a bridge that crosses over the ›Jerusalem stone alley‹ through which one enters the building. The judges' courtyard is formed by two parallel rows of chambers surrounded by a stone wall. A single axial opening, looking south towards the Knesset, offers a visual connection with the outside landscape.«[12] The judges' chambers are elevated from the courtyard level and open onto the courtyard, which is bisected by a narrow water channel passing down its centre. In the courtyard, where the paver's joints are made of glass, the space is monochromatic and silent, reminiscent of the great courtyard of the Alhambra in Granada, Spain. However, the space quotes the courtyard in the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem as well. The conference rooms at the southernmost semicircle are carefully developed microcosms featuring a central axis organized around the focal point of a large table. An elongated oval concentrates the forces in the very centre of the space. Programmatic relationships are intensified by the architect's interpretation of the judicial process. For example, Karmi and Karmi-Melamede intended to separate the courtrooms from the judges' section to create distance between the place of public hearing and judgement and the place of contemplation and deliberation.

Materials and structure – layering

The Supreme Court building is composed of inhabitable layers where the transitions between different states (of participants in the legal process) are made into spaces themselves, which serve as reflective areas in which to pause for a short amount of time as one becomes aware of the surroundings. The building's different types of layers unfold with a strong emphasis on load-bearing walls that are solidly grounded on the land. Several seemingly massive stone volumes enclose stucco-enveloped interiors. The thresholds between the two systems mark important points of transition in the functions of the building and the processes people go through when occupying the building. Ada Karmi-Melamede explains: »When you create layers – many of the buildings I am working with are extremely layered – you don't create them in order to give an illusion of depth. You create them in order to have depths that are more than skin deep. I think that most buildings have a body. Within the body, there are skins or layers, and between the layers we can bounce light and we can walk.«[13] Hence, almost every space separates into multiple layers – for example, the library is layered into books, wood, glass and plaster, and the materials define a complex spatial layering. The functional hierarchy is reflected in the horizontal strata: the library's lowest floor is public, the second floor is for the judges and the third floor is for judges who are on leave or retired. The Supreme Court building walls are –



like the Old City of Jerusalem – constructed of heavy limestone, which does not reveal itself as »hung«, as is common in contemporary structures. Instead, the stone cladding is treated as if it forms a load-bearing wall with stones that turn the corner simulating the use of a masonry technique. In these applications, the thickness of the stone cladding is concealed. To help achieve this effect, the domestic limestone on the walls is applied with four different types of hammered finishes. Hammered limestone is also used for the pavements of the exterior pathways, whereas a polished surface is used for the interior floor surfaces – in some areas articulated with glass or brass joints. The metal window frames are recessed behind the stone cladding, maintaining a monolithic appearance and creating a direct proximity of stone and glass. The stone treatments are carefully anchored into the reinforced concrete structure, truly merging the wisdom of traditional stone masonry with 20th-century construction technology.

The sculpted interior plaster vaults are supported by steel frames, which form the structural skeleton; the vaults are covered in steel mesh, articulating sculptural shapes, which are covered in a layer of plaster. Wood wall coverings and built-in furniture form the surface layer and allow inhabitation of the walls.

The architects have written about their concept: »One of the interesting aspects in the movement through the building: you enter and advance towards the courtrooms, and this progression entails a regression in time. You enter through a world of Modern architecture; you pierce the great wall – and go back in history.«[14]

The language of the architecture also pays respect to the old city with its arcades and cornerstones. The weight of the stone contrasts with the areas of glass and light, making visible the contradictions – opaque and transparent, heavy and light. Within the stone shell, and its system of walls, arches, paths, courtyards and openings, are layers of imbedded plaster, in sequences of spaces that echo what went before while alluding to what is to come.

Like the lighting that is dispersed throughout the building, HVAC and any equipment necessary to communicate within the spaces and control the environment are subtly integrated. Thus, air-conditioning and audio systems are hidden in the courtroom's cornices, a measure that leaves the building visually connected to its ancient predecessors and allows a timelessness to be expressed in the architecture. The precise geometry of all the spaces comes to life with the ever-changing light (the third of the main building materials after stone and plaster), as it plays the building like an instrument over the course of the day. The architects describe the role of light: »The justice that was brought down from Mount Sinai is unequivocal, and burning. It brooks no concessions; it is absolute. And the light in Jerusalem is likewise absolute, desertlike and cruel. It is so bright that you cannot look up. In a sense, the light represents justice. In this building you don't get justice, you get the law, which is manmade. Light enters as reflection, and thus becomes ›man-made‹. It is possible also to say that the light enters the ›pyramid‹ of the library as a bright shaft, which can be likened to an internal enlightenment. The light there symbolizes the enlightenment of the judge seeking a just judgement.«[15] Light traverses the building like the hand of a giant clock, illuminating the materiality of the Supreme Court as the sun passes across the sky. Because of details such as these and the desired perfection in the execution of them, a high level of skills was required, not only of the engineers but also of the masons, ironworkers, plasterers and carpenters involved.

After the Supreme Court

After the completion of the Supreme Court, Ada and Ram pursued different quests.

In Ram Karmi's Yad Layeled Museum and memorial to the children of the Holocaust in the Kibbutz Lohamei Ha'getaot, the architect created a magic place that seems to whirl and grow out of a Roman aqueduct. To achieve this effect, Karmi constructed a narrative of light that fades as one progresses through the museum in a downward spiral toward the darkness to reach the light again. Strong geometries are combined with a richness of meaning and emotion that is rare to find in contemporary architecture. In addition, the Rosemarine Condominiums in Herzelia is a residential development organized around a central courtyard with complex spatial interiors taking advantage of views and light and a subtle historicizing language that defines its place.

Ada Karmi-Melamede has since worked on numerous private residential and institutional buildings. Her Life Sciences Teaching Laboratories building for Ben Gurion University in Beer Sheva is based on a master plan she developed in the 1990s continuing a design by Avraham Yaski in the 1960s. The finely detailed and perfectly executed concrete building with rhythmic vertical openings works within a complex topography. Like the Supreme Court building, the architecture of the Life Sciences buildings is closely intertwined with the surrounding campus context and urban circulation. The building also connects to a landscaped park and introduces an orchestrated composition overlaid by a playful symphony of light and shade. The Life Sciences buildings display formality and strength in the public spaces while allowing space for private, more human-scaled zones. Karmi-Melamede's Beit Avi Chai Center counters two neighbouring Mandate Period buildings from the 1930s with skilful urban designs: the Jewish Agency (1927) and National Institutions building, the seat of power of the state-in-the-making, planned by architect Yohanan Ratner; and the Yeshurun Synagogue, designed by Alexander Friedman and Meir Rubin. The Beit Avi Chai Center forms a U shape that wraps around a courtyard and responds to the strong urban gestures outside while allowing for an open, light and transparent interior. Another of Karmi-Melamede's projects is the visitor centre for the Ramat Hanadiv Gardens on the road that leads from Zichron Ya'acov to Binyamina (2002–07), which could be described as a building turned garden. The building consists of an earth mound with an internal road in the form of a stone-clad path through the spaces of the visitor centre. In this building, of a smaller scale than the institutional examples, the sensitive discourse between public and private seems even more pure, the system of village turned building even more convincing.

1 Yosef Sharon, *The Supreme Court Building Jerusalem*, Jerusalem, 1993.
2 See Alona Nitzan-Shiftan, »Modernisms in conflict«, *Modernism and the Middle East – Architecture and Politics in the Twentieth Century*, Seattle, 2008, for more information.
3 Ram and Ada Karmi-Melamede, *The Israel Supreme Court Building. Project Data Book*, November 1992.
4 Ram Karmi and Ada Karmi-Melamede, lecture given in1992, in: *Technology Place & Architecture – The Jerusalem Seminar in Architecture*, edited by Kenneth Frampton with Arthus Spector and Lynne Reed Rosman, New York, 1998.
5 Ibid.
6 Ziva Freiman, »Representing the institutional client. Chief Justice Meir Shamgar discusses some of the tenets underlying the Supreme Court's design«, *Progressive Architecture*, 4, 1993.
7 Sandy Isenstadt and Kishwar Rizvi, *Modernism and the Middle East*, Washington, 2008.
8 Michael Levin, *White City – International Style Architecture in Israel*, The Tel Aviv Museum, Tel Aviv, 1984.
9 Amiram Harlap, op. cit. (note 7).
10 See also: http://www.knesset.gov.il/building/architecture/eng/art1_2years_eng.htm).
11 Ziva Freiman, »Gravitational Pull«, *Architecture*, May 2003.
12 Ada Karmi-Melamede, »The Supreme Court Building, Israel«, *Perspecta*, 26, 1990.
13 Ziva Freiman, op. cit. (note 12).
14 »Architects Ram Karmi and Ada Karmi-Melamede reveal some of the thinking behind their decisions«, *Progressive Architecture*, 4, 1993.
15 Ibid.
16 Ami Ran, »Supreme Court and Rosemarine, editorial«, *AI* (*Architecture of Israel*), no. 14, Dec. 1992.
17 »Retrospective – about the new Supreme Court building, participants of the seminar«, *AI* (*Architecture of Israel*), no. 14, Dec. 1992.
18 Ibid.
19 Ram and Ada Karmi-Melamede, *The Israel Supreme Court Building. Project Data Book*, op. cit. (note 3).
20 Ram Karmi, »Rosemarine Condominiums. Retrospective – About the New Supreme Court Building, participants of the seminar«, *AI* (*Architecture of Israel*), no. 14, Dec. 1992.

The Supreme Court over time

In 2009, the Supreme Court was said to be the second-most-visited building in Israel, which shows how important the structure is to the identity of the nation. Over time, it seems to have grown into its location while the location has simultaneously merged into it – in other words, it has aged well. The building's opening was celebrated in 1992 with a gala organized by the Yad Hanadiv Foundation. This symposium started the tradition of the Jerusalem Architectural Seminar, which has grown into a biennial three-day forum where renowned architects and critics present their work and discuss current issues in architectural practice.

The magazine *Architecture & Interior Design Quarterly* published an article in December 1992 that featured the Supreme Court and other works by Karmi and Karmi-Melamede. The story described a mostly enthusiastic reception by the public and the professional world but also noted some criticism: »For example, the overly modest entrance which is practically hidden from view, the difficulty of finding one's whereabouts, particularly in finding the way out; slight shoddiness in the finish in particular around the glass works; a pathway that leads to beneath the steps in the parking lot; excessive use perhaps of arches and traffic lines that are particularly long. Apart from these comparatively minor shortcomings, the building is obviously the result of deep thought and first-rate planning, a rarity in recent years.«[16] On the other hand, Romaldo Giurgola praised the structure, calling it »a memorable and beautiful building in which the architecture is parallel to the nobility of its content; an architecture in which its space give form and identity to an itinerary of ›places‹ as seldom occurs nowadays with hurried and fleeting images.«[17] Similarly, Josef Rykwert proclaimed the building »a triumph, of course: not just over the adversities with which a project such as this is inevitably beset, but over the much greater difficulty of giving material substance to the sublime ideas of justice and equity.«[18]

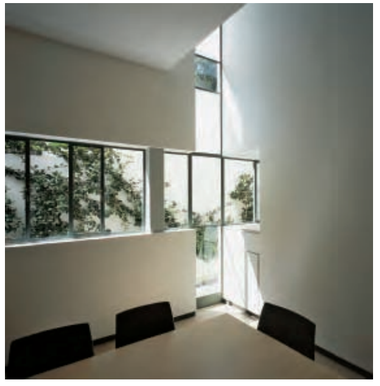
A tour of the Supreme Court building in 2009 afforded enjoyment of the narrative journey through the diverse spaces emphasized by the ever-present reflected light. While one becomes aware of the gravity of its use, at the same time the building has the air and dignity of a university, or a study centre for law. One wishes to be allowed to use the building for an extended period of time, to explore it as one would roam around a historic downtown. A sensation of dwelling in a space between yesterday and today is enforced when passing through the outdoor spaces, the path to the Knesset with its view up toward the balconies of the judges' chambers and their stepped cone-shaped planters is a precise, re-imagined version of old Jerusalem's streets, and the judge's courtyard is a restrained nod to history. Once one has passed security at the entrance, contemporary technology seems strangely absent except for a few monitors with information about the schedules of the courtrooms. None of the outlets or metal grilles that usually dot walls and floors are to be seen. Furnishings in most cases are part of the building, a built-in layer of beech wood offering warm, inhabitable surfaces. The views to the exterior that provide a clear connection to Jerusalem on the way up the main staircase become less panoramic, more introverted once entering the main foyer leading to the courtrooms. All surfaces display a texture that invites touch and almost start a physical discourse. However, the public, who are not here to enjoy the architecture but to actually attend court proceedings, might have different concerns than the analysis of tactile qualities. Accordingly, every space is respectful of the user, providing the highest quality surroundings as possible, especially in the waiting areas where people might linger. Thus, the public realm that the competition left to the architects to define has become the main character of the building. In any case, the play of light in the building certainly offers a welcome way of passing time, a distraction like watching trees in the wind.

On a more pragmatic note, the cafeteria, on the lowest floor and connected to the foyer by a circular staircase, opens onto the park surrounding the building, and terraced rings bring the grass down to a patio. This seems to be the most functional, least architecturally controlled area, where one deals with everyday needs like food that seem absent in other parts of the Supreme Court building.

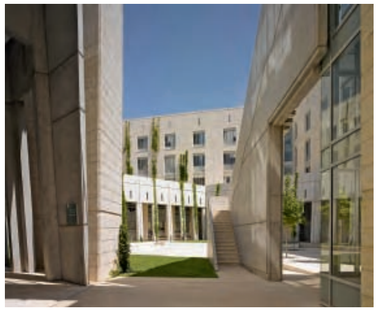
It is understandable that in a country with ever-changing lines of demarcation, buildings might take on the communication of clear borderlines – even more so if the building houses a Supreme Court that applies the laws but ultimately seeks justice. The building holds a place in the architectural history of a young state and, after decades of use, holds up its promise as formulated in the architect's competition statement: »the building aspires to reflect its unique historical cultural significance in modern Israel, and endeavors to represent the basic values of law, justice, truth, mercy and compassion.«[19]

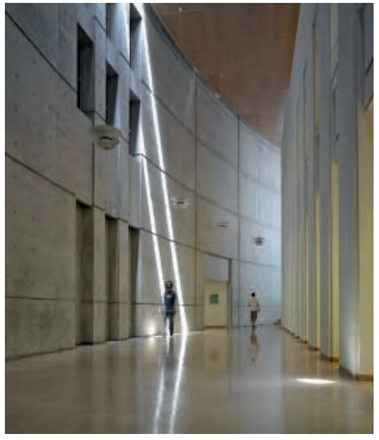
With the Jerusalem Supreme Court, Ram Karmi and Ada Karmi-Melamede treated architecture as an intellectual endeavour as well as a craft, two forces that cannot be separated and that simultaneously require historic and contemporary literacy, intellect, sensibility and technical knowledge.

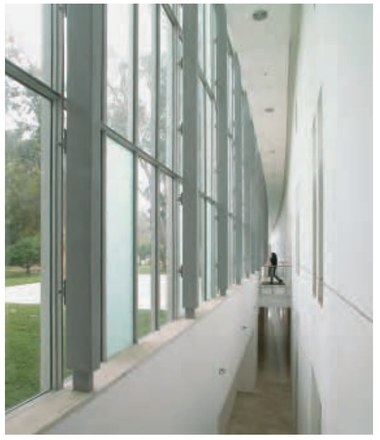
As Ram Karmi summarized in an article about his Rosemarine Condominiums, »Architecture is the sound of water in an enclosed court, the effect of breeze across the skin, the way a patio is a window to the sky. The odor of plaster, the touch of stone, the feel of wood, the scent of orange and lemon blossom, the unseen formulated by the unconscious. One arrives at simplicity in spite of oneself by approaching and discovering the real sense of things ... to understand the arcade as a place of human agreement, the rhythmic gait of walking in the echo of steps ringing from the stairways, terraces, platforms, passing from glare to shadow, from light to dark, discovering the courtyard as a place of rest which gives sense to the movement of man, a pace where the vision of the outside will not disturb the tranquility inside.«[20] This poetic summary of the essence of architecture comes true in the Jerusalem Supreme Court building, where the gestures expressed stay in close communication with the search for the real sense of things.

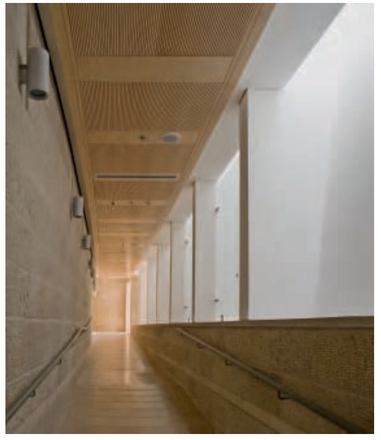


1–3. Ada Karmi-Melamede, Kaufmann house, Tzahala, 1992–94. (Photos: Marvin Rand.)
4–6. Ada Karmi-Melamede, Gotenstein house, Ramat Hasharon, 1997–2000. (Photos: Ardon Bar-Hama.)
7–9. Ada Karmi-Melamede, The Open University of Israel, Raanana, 1998–2002. (Photos: Richard Bryant.)
10–12. Ada Karmi-Melamede, Lauder School of Government, Policy and Diplomacy and Arison School of Business, Interdisciplinary Center, Hertzliya, 1997–2000. (Photos: Amit Geron.)
13–15. Ada Karmi-Melamede, Ramat Hanadiv Gardens, visiting center, 2002–07. (Photos: Amit Geron.)

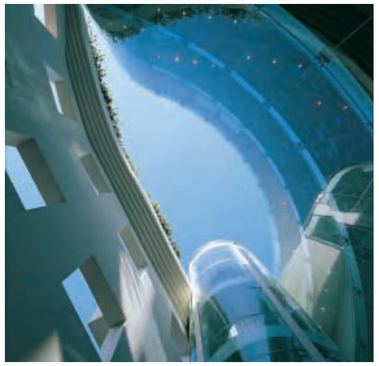


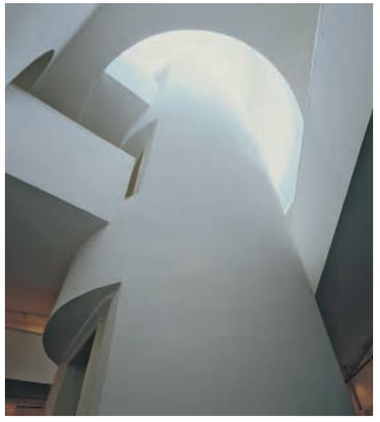


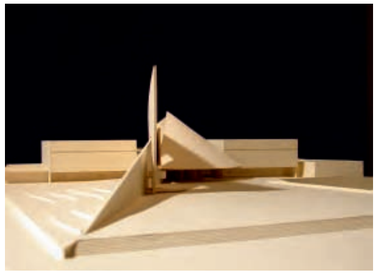


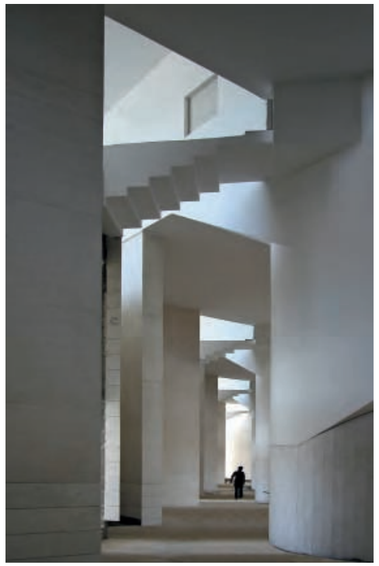


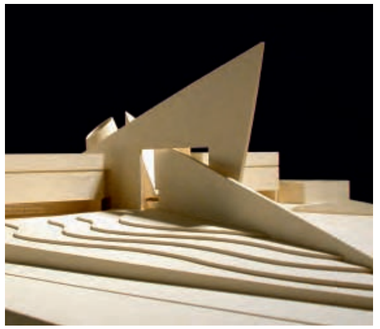
16–18. Ram Karmi, office building in Tel Aviv, 1992–95. (Photos: Amit Geron.)
19–21. Ram Karmi, Yad Layeled Museum, Kibbutz Lohamei Hagetaot, 1995–99. (Photos: Amit Geron and Albatros.)
22–24. Ram Karmi, City Village, Tel Aviv, 2002–05. (Photos: Ami Geron.)
25–27. Ram Karmi, National Art Gallery, Rishon Letzion, 2006–10. (Photos: Amit Geron.)
28–30. Ram Karmi, Rambam World Visiting Center, Jerusalem, 2008–. (Photos: Amit Geron.)

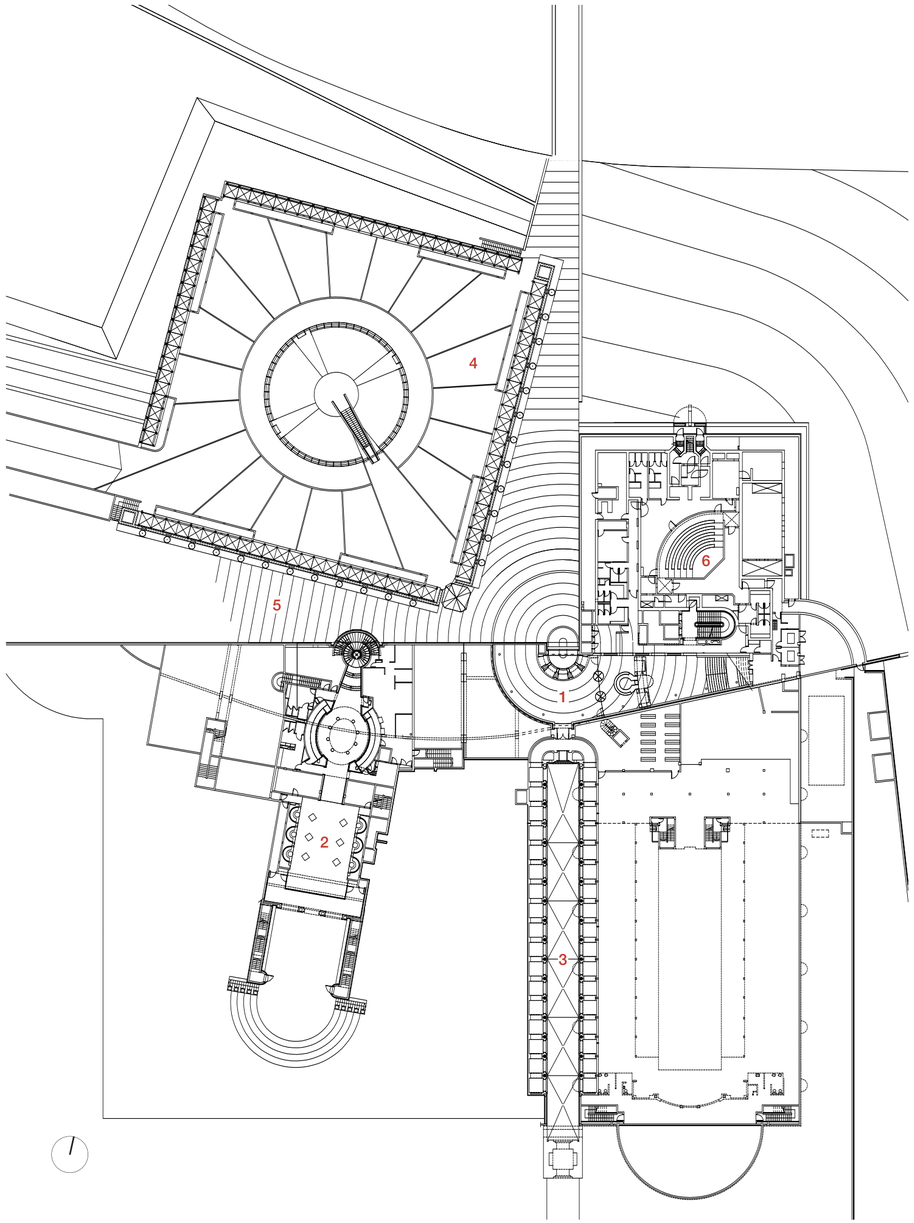






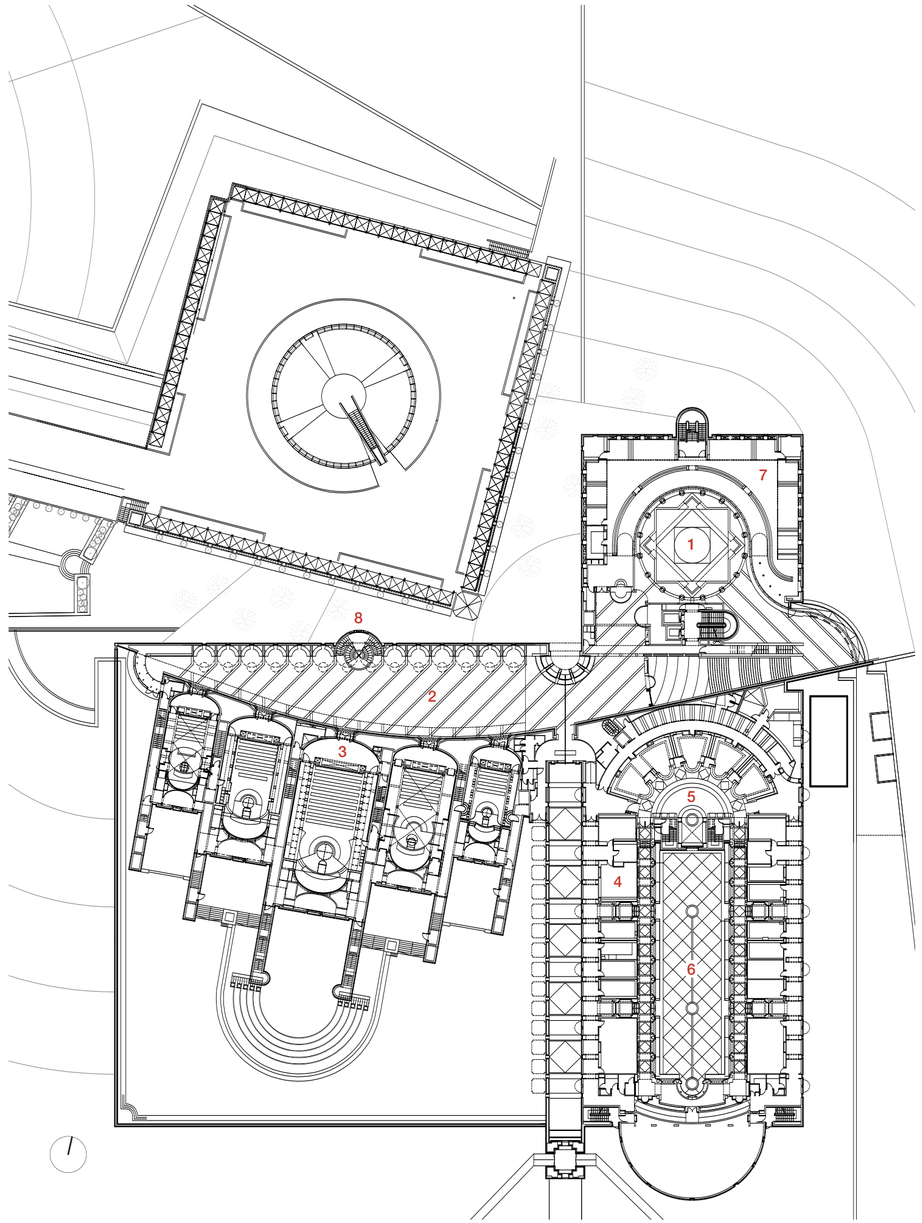


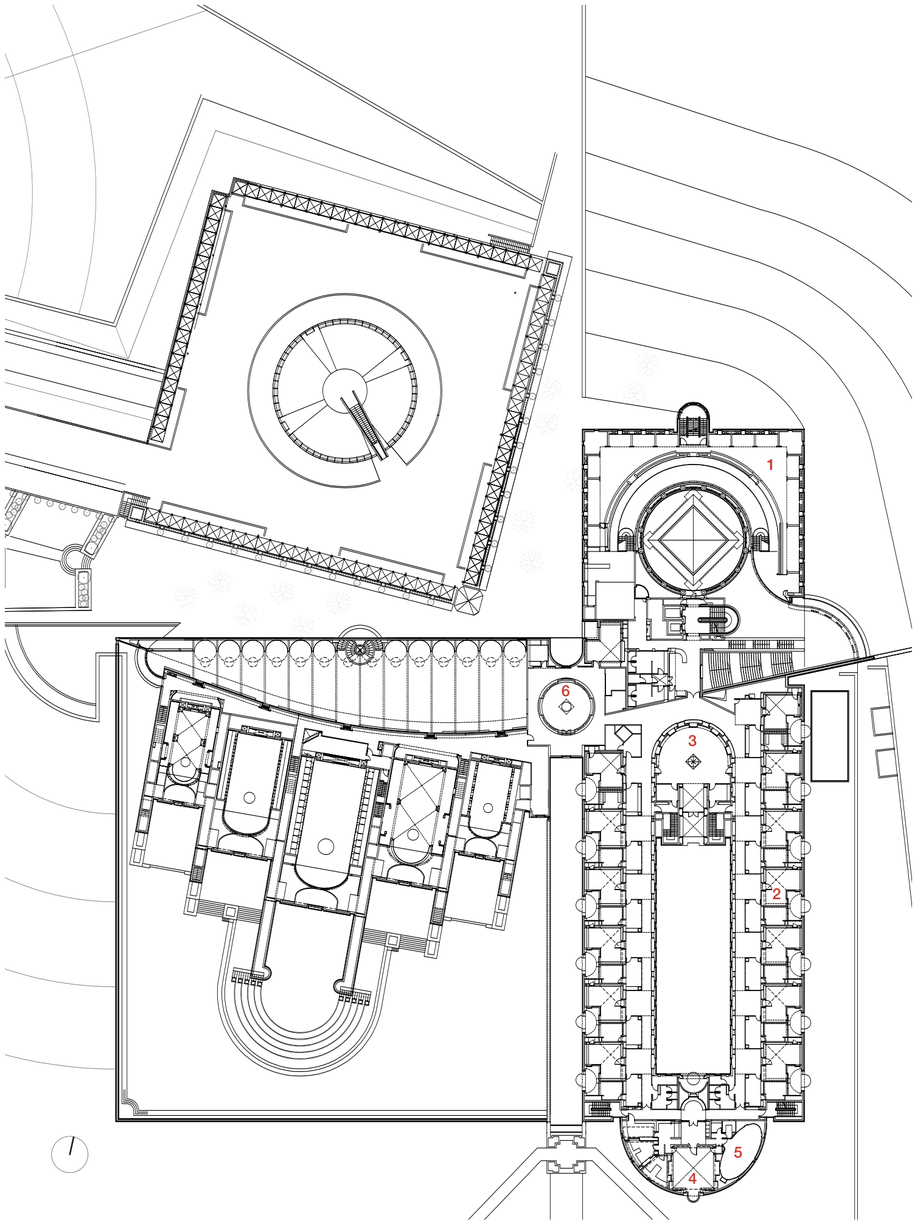




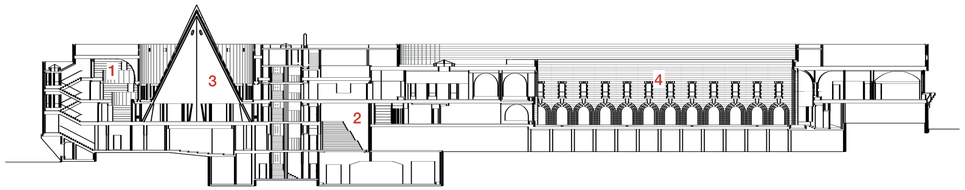
1. Plan of the entrance level. Key: 1 entry, 2 cafeteria, 3 route to the Knesset, 4 parking, 5 Dorothy de Rothschild Promenade, 6 multi-purpose auditorium.

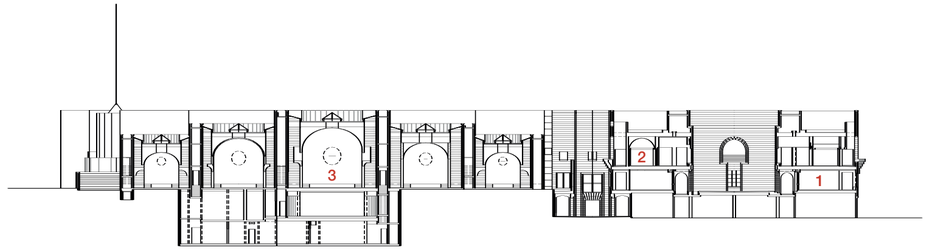
2. Plan of the public level. Key: 1 library foyer, 2 courtroom foyer, 3 courtrooms, 4 registry, 5 administration, 6 judges' courtyard, 7 library: public level, 8 stair to cafeteria.

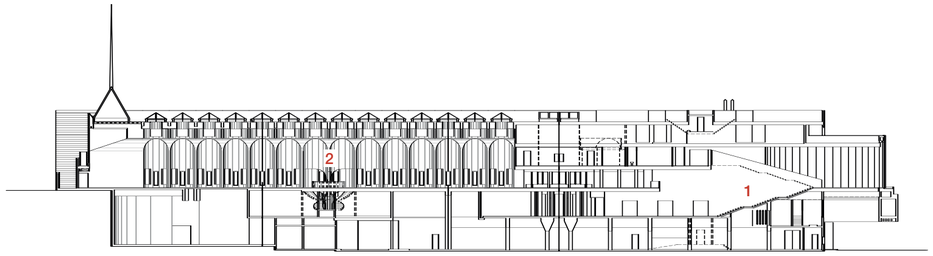


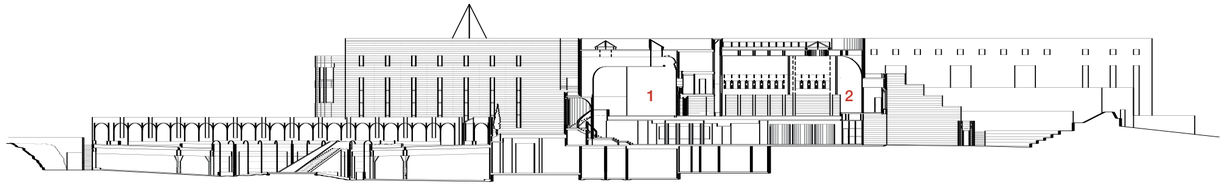


3. Plan of the judges' level. Key: 1 library: judges' level, 2 judges' chambers, 3 judges' club, 4 president's office, 5 small conference room, 6 large conference room.
4. North–south section through library and judges' courtyard. Key: 1 library, 2 grand staircase, 3 atrium, 4 judges' courtyard.
5. East–west section through courtrooms and administration. Key: 1 administration, 2 judges' chambers, 3 courtroom.
6. East–west section through foyer. Key: 1 grand staircase, 2 courtroom foyer.
7. East–west section through the large courtroom and parking area. Key: 1 courtroom foyer, 2 courtroom.







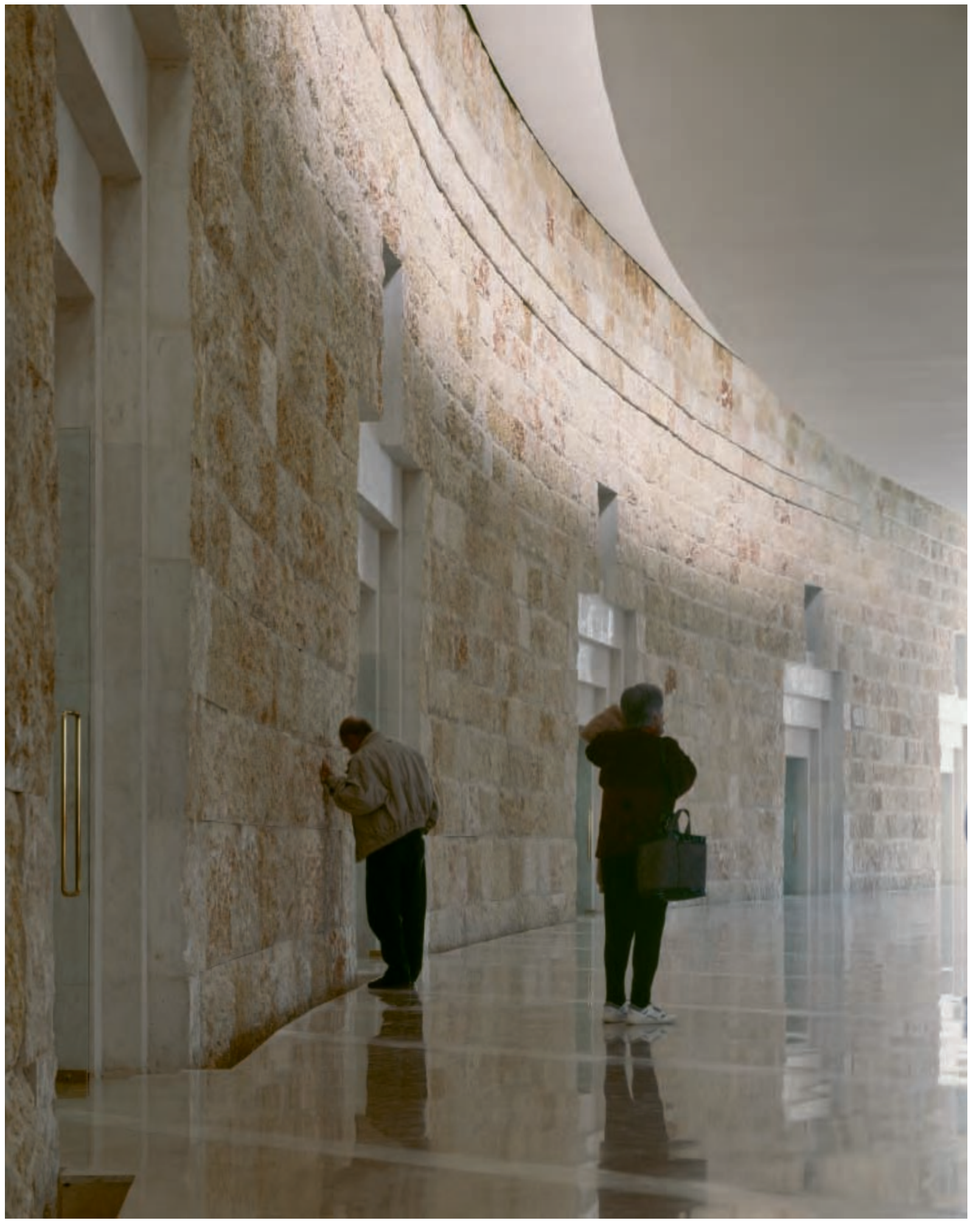


1. General view from the north with the Knesset in the background.

4. Detailled view of the north-west corner. The window is the end point of the courtroom foyer.

5. Cascading wall on the south-west corner linking the building to the garden.

8, 9. Route to the Knesseet on the west side of the south wing housing the registry, the administration and the judges' chambers.



20, 21. The courtroom foyer looking west with the courtroom entrances to the left.

24, 25. Courtroom no. 3. This courtroom with 150 seats is the largest (280 sqm) and the most representative. The public section is covered by a barrel-vault which ends in a half-domed ceiling over the judges' alcove. Natural light is provided by roof lights above the side wings.

26. The library in the north wing.

27. The conference room adjacent to the president's office.

Supreme Court Building of Israel, Jerusalem

Client project supervision
Yad Hanadiv Foundation, Jerusalem (chairman: Arthur W. Fried)

Architectural consultant
Arthur R. Spector

Architects
Karmi Architects, Ltd. Tel Aviv (principals: Ram Karmi, Ada Karmi-Melamede; staff: Alan Aranoff, Daniel Azerrad, Meir Drezner, Zvi Dunsky, Tzadik Eliakim, Simone Friedman, Iftach Issacharov, Ruth Rotholtz-Van Eck, Motty Shyovitz, Rami Yogev)

Construction management and coordination
E. Rahat Engineering/Management/Coordination, Jerusalem (principal: Eliezer Rahat; staff: Moti Kobi, Yigael Kurtzweil, Ann Mintz-Cohen, Dimitry Perlin, Shimon Yerushalmi)

Structural engineering
Eliyahu Traum, Haifa

Mechanical engineering
B. Schorr & Co. Consulting Engineers Ltd., Saviyyon

Electrical engineering
G. Itkin, E. Blum Electrical Engineering Ltd., Jerusalem

Lighting
Jules Fischer and Paul Marantz Inc., New York

Plumbing
A. Yosha Consulting Engineers, Jerusalem

Acoustics
S. Greenbaum, Tel Aviv

Kitchen design
Kibbutz Nacshon

Graphics and signage
Peter Smuk, Tel Aviv