

MY SPACE : SIAN PASCALE

ART FORM : MARILYN SUNDERLAND

DESIGN DESTINATION : STRASBOURG

HOME REVIEW

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HERITAGE CELEBRATED

Design firm Henkin Shavit, renovates and reinterprets an old stone house in a contemporary architectural language that embraces the structure's history and integrates into it, the new world in fluid progression.

It provides no clue at all to what's inside, this classic stone façade of the 18th century abode that sits comfortably amidst its neighbours on the cobbled streets of Safed in Israel. But, once you step in, a different world awaits you - renewed and restored by designers Henkin Irit and Shavit Zohar, the spaces are filled with a bespoke, contemporary elegance.

Text By K Parvathy Menon
Photographs By Assaf Pinchuk

The narrow courtyard feels open and connected to other spaces thanks to the extensive use of glass. An expandable table designed by Henkin Shavit accentuates the linearity of the room.



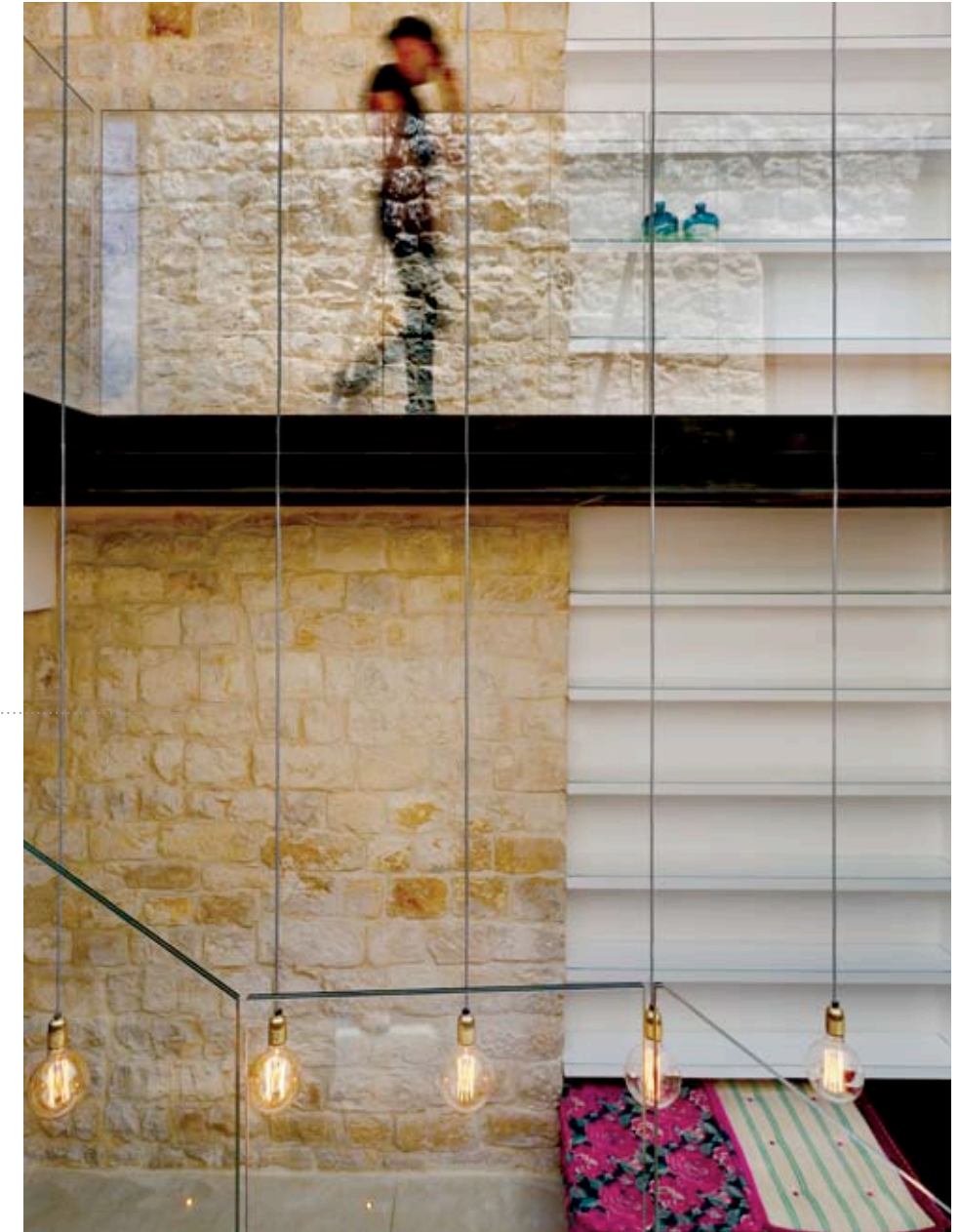
The stone facade blends in with its neighbours on the cobbled streets of the old city of Safed in Israel. Hints of a modern dwelling can be seen only in the geometric openings that infuse contemporary elegance.

When the Israel based design firm, Henkin Shavit took on the restoration project of this 250 year old residence, built in the shape of the Hebrew letter 'Chet' (similar to an inverted u), they knew it would inevitably become a dialogue between the old and the new. They understood early on, that it was important not to let either of the factors - the old structure or the current design - to mar or overshadow the other.

Before beginning, the team stripped the house to reveal its original features – limestone walls, arches, vaults, niches and even a water well. This was followed by an arduous documentation and study of various formative and material aspects of the site, and only then did they get on to the actual planning and renovation.

Well aware, that material choice was going to be detrimental in how the spaces would be perceived, **Henkin Shavit, in their trademark 'more with less' style, limited the material palette to steel, wood, concrete and glass.** This controlled choice, in varied permutations and combinations, enhanced the original structure and also allowed them to push the boundaries in the interiors.

The original structure spanned five levels and was built around an open courtyard. The courtyard was closed off by building a new wall using locally sourced recycled limestone. Now donning a new flexible identity, the courtyard has become the common space linking the different rooms in the two separate wings.



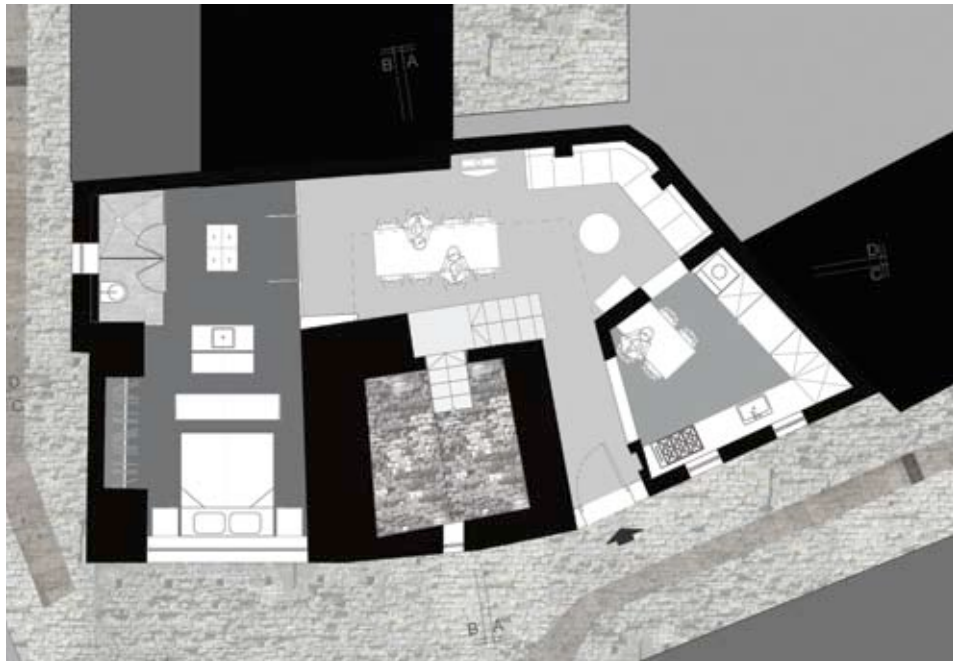


Around the new courtyard space, a layout was re-planned to fit current spatial requirements along with the provision of adequate privacy; the designers spruced up this area with custom made furniture and colourful furnishings. States Henkin Irit, "The program now has a kitchen, salon and a dining corner on the ground level, bedrooms and working area at the upper level and part storage and part playroom for the grandkids at the lower level which used to be a wine cellar."

The team did not alter the original features like the arches and niches, instead it included them into the design - so one might find a bedroom accommodated in a vault or arched niches becoming the focus of a room. Also in some instances the arches are partly covered to become arch windows.

Connecting all these spaces is an original stone staircase in the courtyard that dictates the vertical circulation, through all levels. Intelligence and beauty in architecture are evident in the continuous circulation pattern created by the team, by way of a wood and steel bridge along the stone facade that links the separate wings, and also corresponds with the staircase.

Irit and Zohar envisaged a space that would blend two eras together, and chose glass as the major element. The transparent quality of glass ensured a visual continuity and a feeling of lightness in the interiors. Shavit Zohar tells us, "We used expansive planes of glass to accentuate the ample vertical volume of the ancient limestone structure and create partitions without visibly cutting the space."



Ground floor plan of the Vertical Stone House.



A long skylight, to ensure abundant light into the windowless courtyard highlights the limited material palette of steel, wood, concrete and glass.



Colour is restricted to white, drawing attention to the stone walls, and also becoming a backdrop for the contemporary furniture and accessories designed by Henkin Shavit, who follow a 'total design' methodology, wherein they believe in taking the client from the first stage to the very end.

As the spaces unfold elegantly, emphasising and complementing the volumes are lighting features, which play a critical role in mitigating the effect of the imposing stone walls in the interiors. Another prominent aspect of the restoration is the particular attention paid to the interior and exterior spatial transition. Outside spaces, balconies and decks have been used to connect the different rooms and have been integrated into the design.

Team Henkin Shavit believes that "the design of the house presents the 'old' via original limestone, arches, vaults and niches, while the 'new' gets represented by materials such as concrete, mosaics, steel and tin glass".

It is never easy to reach a conclusive decision when pondering on how to integrate contemporary architecture into an old structure that has remained a 'constant' in the rapidly changing world. The right answer is never simple; quiet often it is a complex solution with many parameters. Henkin Shavit, in a style that extols simplicity, has definitely derived the perfect answer in their renewed plan which blends old and new elements to function as a single unifying design for the 250 year old stone house.

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