Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Sideways 71

Rick Meghiddo · Wednesday, April 29th, 2020

The world will be radically transformed by Covid-19. And so will architecture. We must start to prepare now for the times after Covid-19. Density will have to be recalibrated. Housing will have to find a new vocabulary. Access to self-produced food near home shall become commonplace, integral to human habitat. The working place shall be close to home or at home for most people. We must rethink continuous education for all ages. New human settlements may surge in now unsettled areas, such as deserts and oceans.

Recalling a trip made almost half a century ago may offer some clues about possibilities for the future. Moshe Safdie's Habitat, Frei Otto's tensile canopy structure and Buckminster Fuller's dome at Expo 67 in Montreal can be reinterpreted at a new larger scale. Understanding John Johansen's "jump into space" in Oklahoma City should be seriously reconsidered. Reviewing Frank Lloyd Wright and other visionary architects before reinventing the world of tomorrow is advisable.

The photographs that follow are shown here for the first time. They have been digitized from negatives and slides stored in our archives.

Sideways along The Wright Way

THE PLAN

The "Wright pilgrimage" we made during 1971 to visit and photograph more than one-hundred works by Frank Lloyd Wright – see **The Wright Way** – demanded months of planning. The idea was to set an itinerary, schedule meetings, and include along the path meaningful works by architects other than Wright. It was to be a 25,000-mile trip, 18,000 miles flying and 7,000 miles driving. We allocated to it four months, at an average cost of $500 per month for lodging, food, and gas (it was then possible!) We equipped ourselves with cameras (a Rolleiflex and an Exacta) and film (35 mm in rolls of 20 feet, to cut and set into self-made cartridges) and bought a Pontiac Grand Prix 1960 for $1,000.

BACKGROUND

Soon after graduation as architects in Rome, we returned to Israel. We got a job in Tel Aviv, at the office of Ram Karmi, considered at the time among the country's top architects. We got our hands into large-scale projects. Ruth worked on the University of Jerusalem new campus, and I immerse myself in the working drawings of Tel Aviv's Central Bus Station, said to be the world's largest.

Karmi treated us differently than he did to other employees. When he hosted Louis Kahn, he invited us to join Kahn and his wife for diner at his home. Before leaving, he asked us to pick up Kahn the following day at his hotel, tour him around Tel Aviv, and show him the bus station under construction.

Although we had good chemistry with Karmi, we were still under the influence of Pellegrin, who once told us: "***study Wright for six months, and you will get an architectural education.***" We decided that the time to make a trip and see Wright with our own eyes was now. We also thought to include works of architecture famous at the time along the way.

ENGLAND

In September 1971, we departed for a week in London. We wanted to visit some British architecture before landing in New York and to meet with our friend, architect Viviana Campajola from Rome, who would join us for part of our itinerary.

Since the late 1960s, Great Britain had been the leader of what later was ill-labeled "Brutalist Architecture," which gave it a negative connotation. Inspired by Le Corbusier's social ideas and poetic work in "béton brut," then considered an inexpensive material, many architects created sculptural spaces in exposed concrete. The Pimlico School (completed in 1970, demolished in 2010) designed by John Bancroft was a good example of it.

Our other main target was the History Faculty in Cambridge, with its magnificent central atrium, designed by James Sterling. And London kept us busy with its streets, parks, museums, and theaters.

Pimlico School, 1970, London. Architect: John Bancroft. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

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History Faculty, Cambridge, 1968. Architect: James Stirling. Photo: R&R Meghiddo

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IN AND AROUND NEW YORK

Besides Wright's masterpieces along the way, our main targets in and around New York were Kevin Roche and John Dinkeloo's Ford Foundation (1968) with its covered park in New York; Louis Kahn's Richards Research Laboratories (1965) at the University of Pennsylvania campus; and John Johansen's Morris Mechanic Theater in Baltimore (completed in1967, demolished in 2014.) We included within the itinerary museums and art galleries (we met Leo Castelli at his gallery in SOHO.)

We had also scheduled some important meetings. Edgar Kaufmann Jr, who at the time was director of the Industrial Design Department at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) invited us for lunch, gave us advice on Wright's works along the way, and opened for us the door of Fallingwater, "to spend there as much time as we may need."

John Johansen received us at his studio in a warehouse by the harbor, showed us around the drafting tables, and then took us to the building's roof, filled with a collection of sculptural outdoor kitschy fountains and sculptures made in gypsum. Before leaving, he presented Ruth with a collar made by him with bolts and nuts.

Ada Karmi-Melamede, Ram Karmi's sister, who was then a professor of architecture at Columbia University, invited us for an informal diner at her apartment in the Upper East End. By pure coincidence, she also had James Starling as a guest, whose library in Cambridge we have seen a few days before. We all sat at the kitchen table, eat pizza (Sterling eat a whole large pizza all by himself,) and talked architecture.

We also had a fortuitous encounter. While photographing one of Wright's homes in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, a man approached us, curious to know what we were doing. He introduced himself as Malcolm Wells, an architect. After a long chat, he invited us to have dinner with his family. In entering his partially underground house-studio, we learned that he was "the father of earth-sheltered eco-friendly architecture.

Ford Foundation, New York 1968. Architect: Kevin Roche & John Dinkeloo. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

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Richards Research Laboratories, Univ. of Pennsylvania 1965. Architect: louis Kahn. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

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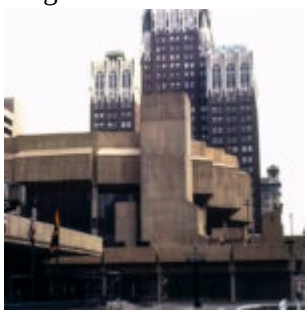

Morris Mechanic Theater, Baltimore, 1976. Architect: John Johansen. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

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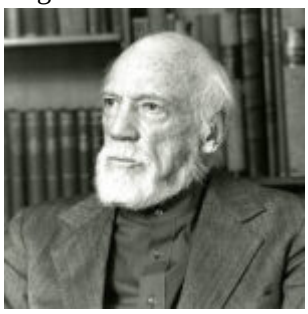
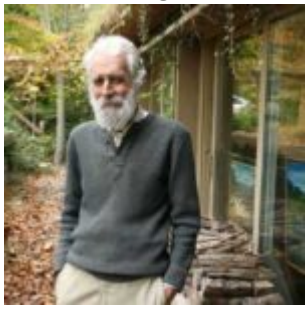
Edgar Kaufmann Jr. with Olgivanna Wright.



John Johansen

Ada Karmi-Melamede and Ram Karmi

James Stirling



Malcolm Wells

NEW CANAAN / WORCESTER / BOSTON

Searching for Wright's so-called "Tirrana House" in New Canaan, we discovered by chance, hidden from the street behind a stone wall, Philp Johnson's Glass House (1949.) Although he was in New York, his Spaniard housekeeper (speaking Spanish helps) let us in and opened for us every door of Johnson's large estate. Besides the famous architectural icon, we were surprised to

discover Johnson’s almost windowless guest house, and two galleries for his private art collection, one partially underground, covered with a glass roof, and one totally subterranean (1965,) with electrically powered walls rotating around a central pivot that permitted seeing paintings in a compacted way.

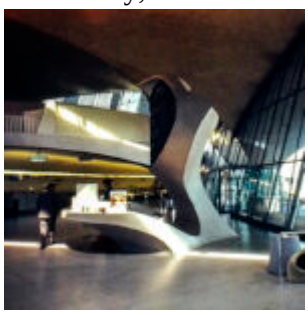
At Yale, we visited Eero Saarinen’s Ingalls Rink (1958) and Paul Rudolph’s Art and Architecture Building (completed in 1963, burned by arson in 1969 and renovated in 2000,) and in Worcester MA we visited John Johansen’s Goddard Library at Clark University.

In Boston, the monumental City Hall (1968) designed by Kallmann, McKinnell & Knoweles took a considerable amount shooting. It was followed by Alvar Aalto’s Baker House Dormitory (1948,) and Saarinen’s Chapel (1956) at MIT, and by Le Corbusier’s Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts (1963) at Harvard University.

Glass House, New Canaan, 1949. Architect: Philip Johnson. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

Art Gallery, New Canaan. Architect: Philip Johnson. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

Art Gallery, New Canaan. Architect: Philip Johnson. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.



TWA Terminal, New York, 1962. Architect: Eero Saarinen. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

Ingalls Rink, New Canaan, 1958. Architect: Eero Saarinen. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

MIT Chapel, Boston, 1956. Architect: Eero Saarinen. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

Art And Architecture School, New Canaan, 1963. Architect: Paul Rudolph. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

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Goddard Library , Worcester, 1969. Architect: John Johansen. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

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Boston City Hall, 1968. Architect: Kallmann, McKinnell & Knoweles. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

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EXPO 67, MONTREAL

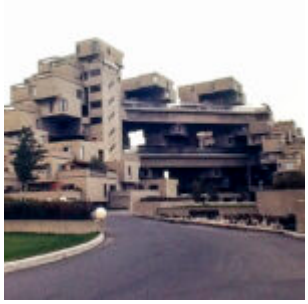
The 1967 International and Universal Exposition, known as Expo 67, held in Montreal, is still considered the most successful World's Fair of the 20th Century. When we visited it, four years later, it was closed. However, a policeman accompanied us to photograph some of its buildings. Our primary interest focused on the Italian Pavilion (demolished;) on Buckminster Fuller's Biosphere Dome (destroyed by fire in 1976 and rebuilt in 1995;) on Frei Otto's German Pavilion (demolished,) a tensile canopy structure, an experiment in lightweight architecture; on Man the Explorer and the Producer pavilions (demolished;) and, still relevant today, on Moshe Safdie's Habitat 67.

The Italian Pavilion was created by a unique convergence of prominent architects, artists and art and architecture critics. They included the Passarelli brothers, Leonardo Rici, Bruno Munari, Carlo Scarpa, Emilio Vedova, Arnaldo Pomodoro, Giulio Carlo Argan (later Rome's Mayor) and Bruno Zevi.

Habitat 67 included 158 prefabricated dwelling units of varying sizes and configurations, arranged in various combinations and reaching 12 stories in height. Each unit is connected to at least one private terrace, 225 to 1,000 sq. ft. in size.

Habitat 67. Architect: Moshe Safdie.

Expo 67, Montreal



Habitat 67. Architect: Moshe Safdie. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

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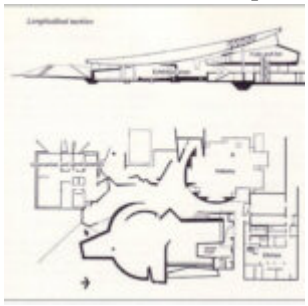
Habitat 67. Architect: Moshe Safdie. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

Man the Explorer. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

Expo 67 – Italian Pavilion

Italian Pavilion. Sculptor: Arnaldo Pomodoro.



Italian Pavilion Plan and Section.

Italian Pavilion. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

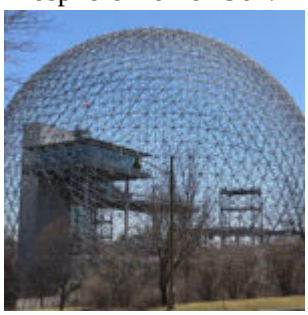
Italian Pavilion. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

Italian Pavilion. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

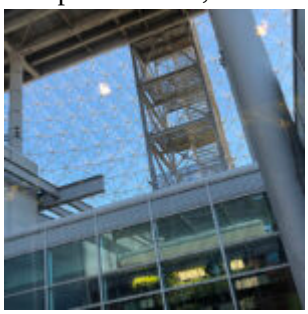
German Pavilion. Architect: Frei Otto. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

German Pavilion. Architect: Frei Otto. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

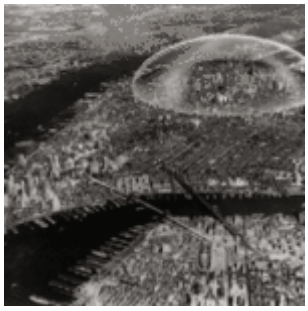
Biosphere Dome 1967. Architect: Buckminster Fuller. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.



Biosphere Dome, Montreal, 2018. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.



Biosphere Dome, Montreal, 2018. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.



Biosphere Vision

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO SCARBOROUGH

A public research university and a satellite campus of the University of Toronto, it was designed by John Andrews and completed in 1964. The interiors were made to mimic the streets of a city, with wide hallways and balconies on the upper floors.

Toronto City Hall, 1965. Architect: Viljo Ravel. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

University of Toronto, Scarborough, 1964. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

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CHICAGO

Our journey in Chicago was based in Oak Park, where many of Wright's works were located. Yet we did spend some time in Downtown Chicago. We visited the Art Institute of Chicago and went to a concert at Sullivan's Auditorium Theater in the Auditorium Building (1889.) We also photographed the lobby of the Rookery Building (1886) designed by Burnham and Root, with the lobby redesigned by Wright in 1905. And we rushed to take a few shots of Sullivan's Old Stock Exchange before it was gone (completed in 1894, demolished in 1972.)

Carson Pirie Scott Building, 1899. Architect: Louis Sullivan. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

Carson Pirie Scott Building, 1899. Architect: Louis Sullivan. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

Carson Pirie Scott Building, 1899. Architect: Louis Sullivan. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

Rookery Building, Chicago, 1886. Architect: Bunham and Root. Lobby by Wright, 1905. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

Rookery Building, Chicago, 1886. Architect: Bunham and Root. Lobby by Wright, 1905. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

Rookery Building, Chicago, 1886. Architect: Bunham and Root. Lobby by Wright, 1905. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

Stock Exchange, Chicago, 1894. Architect: Louis Sullivan. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

Stock Exchange, Chicago, 1894. Architect: Louis Sullivan. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

Stock Exchange, Chicago, 1894. Architect: Louis Sullivan. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

SULLIVAN'S BANK IN COLUMBUS, WISCONSIN

The Farmers and Merchants Union Bank, 1919, is considered a "jewel box." Its construction was personally supervised by Sullivan.

Farmers and Merchants Union Bank, Columbus, WI, 1919. Architect: Louis Sullivan. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

Farmers and Merchants Union Bank, Columbus, WI, 1919. Architect: Louis Sullivan. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

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Farmers and Merchants Union Bank, Columbus, WI, 1919. Architect: Louis Sullivan. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

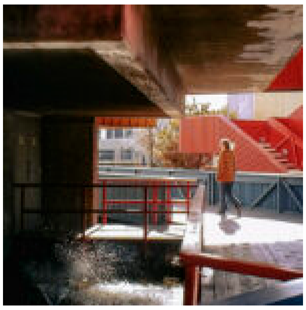
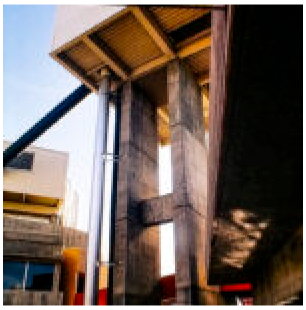
OKLAHOMA CITY

We drove from Dallas to Oklahoma City to photograph John Johansen’s Mummers Theater (completed in 1970 and demolished in 2015.)

John Johansen (1916-2012) said of the Mummers Theater, “the finest thing I’ve ever done.” It was an extraordinary building that today still sends a powerful message for the future of architecture. “Action- architecture of pieces and circuits,” Zevi wrote of it. He put one of our photographs on the cover of his 700-page “Spaces of Modern Architecture” (Einaudi Editor, 1973.)

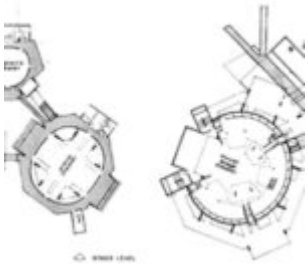
Johansen’s buildings explored how new technologies would affect our lives and, more important, affect our minds, our perception of the world. Rather than concerning himself with creating heroic architectural masterpieces, Johansen focused on designing processes and behavioral patterns.


Mummers Theater, Oklahoma City, 1970. Architect: John Johansen. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

Mummers Theater, Oklahoma City, 1970. Architect: John Johansen. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

Mummers Theater, Oklahoma City, 1970. Architect: John Johansen. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

Mummers Theater, Oklahoma City, 1970. Architect: John Johansen. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

Mummers Theater, Oklahoma City, 1970. Architect: John Johansen. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

Mummers Theater, Interior.



Mummers Theater, Plan.

Johansen’s 3dD Bubble Diagram

John Johansen

He was a true forward-thinker with some incredibly innovative ideas that were ahead of their time. As early as the 1980s, Johansen was studying the transition from traditional hierarchies to networks and the potential implications this would have on architectural space. He was also interested in non-standard mass production, electromagnetic levitation, and the architectural uses of nanotechnology. His conceptual work anticipated the deterritorialization of information. Before architects and scholars could even start fretting about high-speed fiber-optic networks dissolving traditional spaces and building types, Johansen was working on creating buildings for a brave new world: reprogrammable space. The designs that resulted from these explorations are uncompromising structures that, like the best science fiction, challenge us and gives us something to which we can aspire.

For a description of Johansen’s ideas by himself, watch video (09:57.)

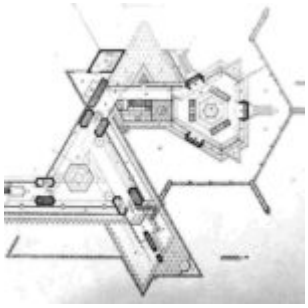
BARTLESVILLE, OKLAHOMA

From Oklahoma City we drove to Bartlesville, to visit Wright's Price Tower (1956.) We arrived there on a Sunday before Christmas. The building was closed. In trying to get access, a neighbor gave us the phone number of Harold Price. I called and told him about our desire to visit the tower. He invited us to come to his house. When we arrived, we realized that he lived in a house designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. After visiting the house, Harold Price sent us to his brother, Joe Price, who had a penthouse on the Price Tower but was living in the country. He could give us access to the tower.When we arrived at Joe Price's house, we were shocked by its astonishing architecture. We realized that was the work of Bruce Goff, the Joe and Etsuko Price House and Gallery, built in 1966 (destroyed by arson in 1996.) Price asked us to go around the house for half an hour, feel free to take some photographs, and then to come back. When we did, he was with another man standing by him. "Let me introduce you Bruce Goff," he said. We couldn't believe it! When we went back to Rome, we connected Goff to Zevi, who subsequently dedicated one of L'Architettura's monthly issues to one of Goff's just-completed works.

Price House, Bartlesville, 1966. Architect: Bruce Goff. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

Price House, Bartlesville, 1966. Architect: Bruce Goff.

Price House, Bartlesville, 1966. Architect: Bruce Goff.



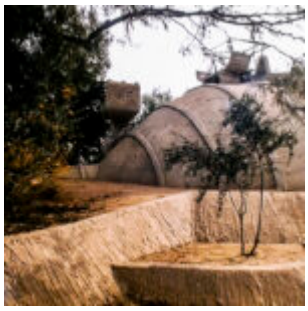
Price House, Plan.

Bruce Goff

Joe and Etsuko Price

SOLERI

Back in the late 1940s, Paolo Soleri (1919-2013) spent a year and a half in fellowship with Frank Lloyd Wright at Taliesin West, in Arizona. Then he returned to Italy and came back to Scottsdale in 1956. While he started to plan Arcosanti as “an urban laboratory,” he made a living selling ceramic and bronze bells. We had then our first encounter with him. A few years later we hosted him and his daughter in Tel Aviv. The last time we last saw him was in Los Angeles before he died.



Soleri’s Home and Studio in 1971. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

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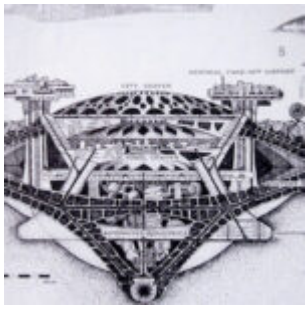
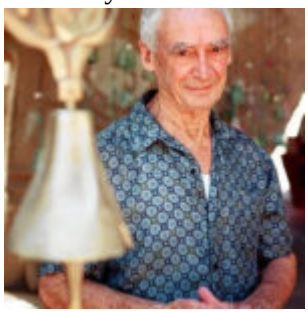


Vision by Soleri



Paolo Soleri

L.A.

We flew from Phoenix to San Francisco, our first landing in California. After wandering around the Bay Area, driving to photograph Wright’s Marin County Civic Center, and meeting with an old companion from the Technion in Haifa, Avigdor Agran, we south drove to Los Angeles. Our encounter with L.A. was love at first sight! We could not understand why it had such a bad reputation among architects in Italy. Based on a motel in Santa Monica, a friend from Israel brother who lived by the beach in Venice took us around L.A. day and night. We thought it was a great city, notwithstanding wad was said about it. We photographed all the houses by Wright, and some of the works done by his son, Lloyd Wright, whom we visited at his studio on Doheny Drive. We visited several houses designed by him in L.A. and found the Wayfarers Chapel glass sanctuary in Rancho Palos Verdes his masterpiece

Wayfarers Chapel, 1951. Architect: Lloyd Wright. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

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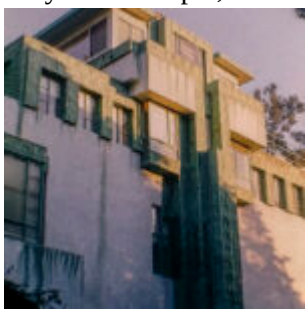


Samuel Novarro House, 1928. Architect: Lloyd Wright. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

Manola Court Apartments, 1926-39. Architect: Rudolph Schindler. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.


Lloyd Wright and Frank Lloyd Wright

MEXICO

We ended our trip in Mexico City. We loved its people and the city's markets, which sold fruits that we had never seen before. Besides a visit to the National Museum of Anthropology, our interest was on its murals. We saw several at the city's university, and, most importantly, at the Polyforum Siqueiros, which had just opened one month before we arrived.

Our self-taught history of architecture experience could not end without a visit to Teotihuacan, the ancient Mesoamerican city located in the sub-valley of Mexico, about 25 miles from the capital.

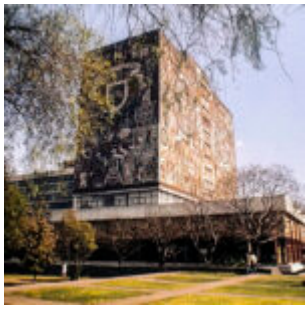

Teotihuacan. Photo: R&R Meghiddo


Teotihuacan. Photo: R&R Meghiddo


Teotihuacan. Photo: R&R Meghiddo CAMERA

Teotihuacan. Photo: R&R Meghiddo

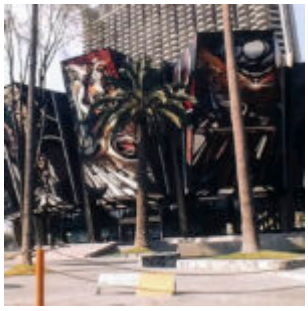
Rick – National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City. Photo: R&R Meghiddo



Ciudad Universitaria, Mexico City. Mural by Juan O'Gorman. Photo: R&R Meghiddo

Ciudad Universitaria, Mexico City. Mural by Francisco Eppens. Photo: R&R Meghiddo

Ciudad Universitaria, Mexico City. Mural by David Alfaro Siqueiros. Photo: R&R Meghiddo



Polyforum Siqueiros, 1970. Photo: R&R Meghiddo.

Polyforum Siqueiros, Interior. Photo_ Irving Caballero Sierra.

NEW BEGINNING IN ROME

From there, we planned to stop in Rome to visit Zevi, Pellegrin and our friends, before returning to Israel. But our plans changed. We remained in Rome another sixteen months working for Luigi Pellegrin. It was one of the most enriching and formative periods of our life. The trip had changed our perception of architecture. Pelegrin understood that and helped us to grow and to discover ourselves.

Luigi Pellegrin reviewing a project. Photo: Ruth Meghiddo.

ARCHITECTURE IN THE TIMES OF COVID-19

The time for the rethinking of architecture is now. We must rethink our live-work relationship. We must rethink mobility. We must rethink density. We must rethink how to build faster and cheaper without losing architecture’s poetical dimension.