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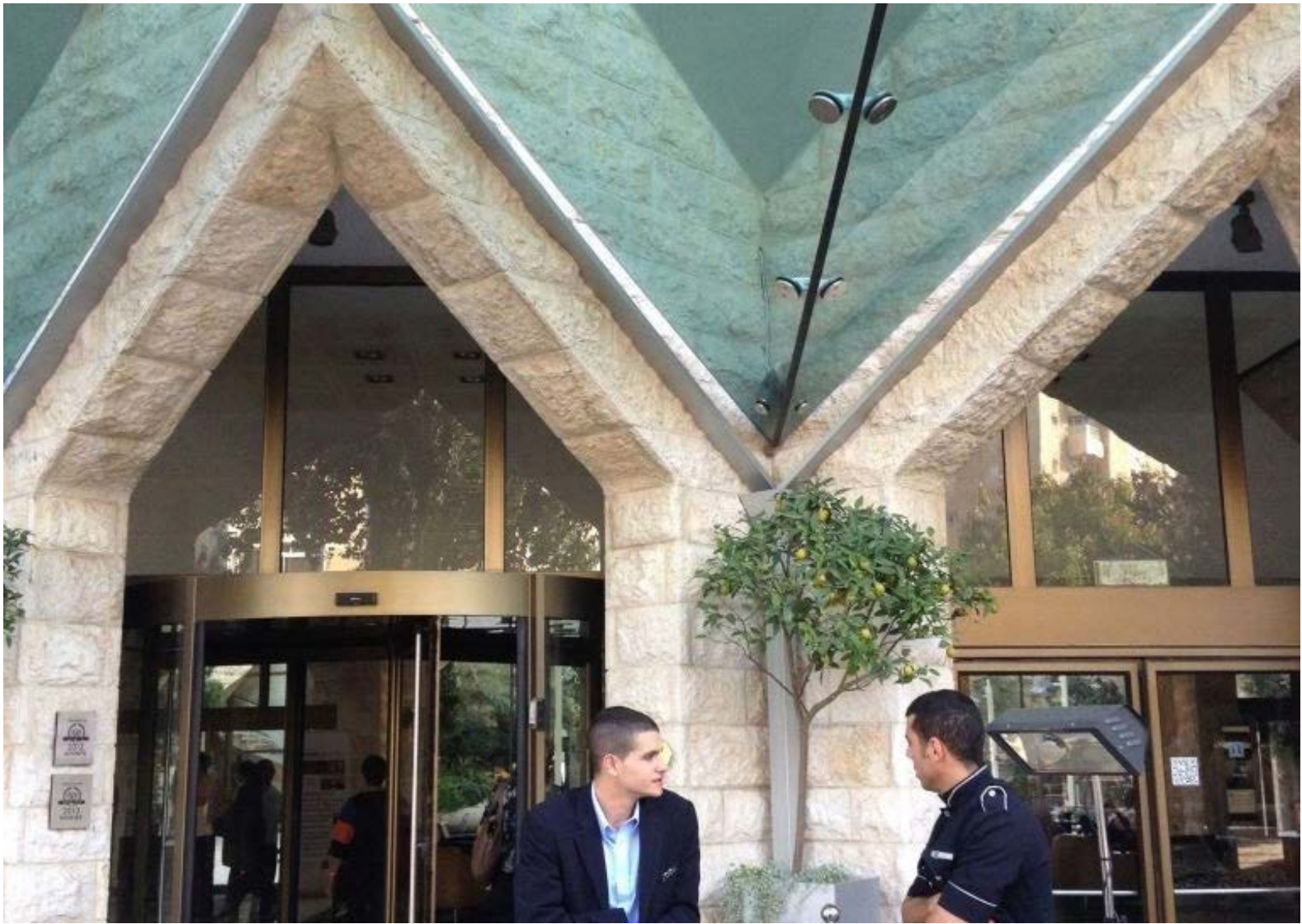
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# A Jerusalem landmark renovates for a new era

The Inbal Hotel, with an eye on local competition, updates its iconic look

BY JESSICA STEINBERG | December 21, 2013, 3:37 am | 3

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Jessica Steinberg covers the Sabra scene from south to north and back to the center.

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Hotels can be sterile, bland spaces, their rooms featureless even with high thread-count sheets and thick bath towels. The neutrality may be necessary, but it makes it tough to stand out.

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So when Jerusalem's Inbal Hotel was looking to renovate, anticipating the arrival of the Waldorf Astoria up the block on top of the friendly competition that characterizes the city's hotel industry, it was glad for its noteworthiness.

"We're a landmark, and we have a great location," said Alex Herman, the hotel's vice president of marketing. "Most hotels are a square box, but we were designed by Yacov Rechter, the Israel Prize winner. We're very proud of that."

Rechter was the son of Russian-born architect Ze'ev Rechter, one of the founding fathers of Israeli

Inbal architect Michael Schwartz worked with the stone arches, designing glass panels that created a more dramatic entrance to the hotel (photo credit: Jessica Steinberg/Times of Israel)

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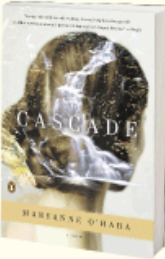


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Rechter the son became known for

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Brutalism, a cheap construction method that aligned him with the international trend and also worked well in Israel at the time.



Yakov Rechter's Zichon Yaakov serpentine Mivtachim Sanitarium (Courtesy Wiki Commons)

The 30-year-old Inbal Hotel was one of his later projects, originally designed as a 20-story structure. But when residents of adjacent Talbieh, a historic neighborhood filled with landmark family homes, protested the height, Rechter adjusted the hotel to its current sprawling design of a squat square set diagonally, with truncated arches — a modern interpretation of the traditional Jerusalem arch — jutting out at regular intervals.

And unlike Rechter's raw concrete work, the Inbal facade — and some of the interior walls — were done in Jerusalem stone, the pale limestone required by Jerusalem's municipal laws to cover all buildings in an ordinance that dates back to the British Mandate period.

“It's a building that belongs in the landmarks department,” said Michael Schwartz, the Technion-trained architect handling the hotel's current renovation. “It's an example of modern Orientalism, with an internal courtyard that acts as a central core and a three-dimensional facade that takes in the Old City views as well as Talbieh.”

Occupying a junction between downtown Jerusalem and the southern end of the city, on the way to [Montefiore's renovated windmill](#), the refurbished First Station or the German Colony (where the Four Seasons hotel is reportedly under construction) the Inbal is certainly well-placed. For Schwartz, the challenge was to beef up its look, taking advantage of its nearly block-long sprawl and distinctive facade.



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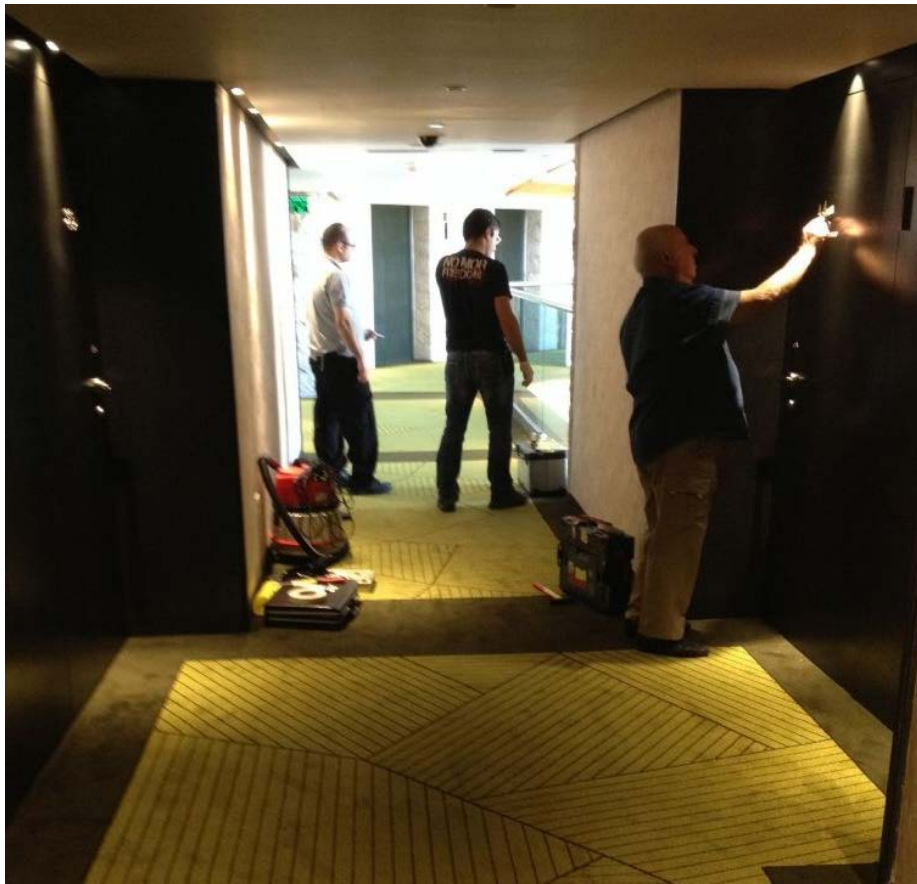
A view of the Inbal from the inner courtyard (Courtesy Inbal Hotel)

He also wanted to figure out what other details Rechter had planned for the hotel but ended up shortchanging, presumably because of budget cuts.

“It’s hard to know what he really wanted to do,” said Schwartz, looking at the renovation plans. “He created this modern interpretation of architecture, making it three-dimensional, playing with the light and the stone. But it was monotonous, and that’s what we wanted to work with.”

For the hotel management, the challenge of the renovation was to sustain the Inbal’s mix of modern and ancient Jerusalem detail. Known as a warm, family-friendly hotel that welcomes all kinds of groups, locals looking for a worthwhile business lunch and hordes of guests over Sukkot, it’s a five-star hotel, said Herman, but with a friendly attitude. And that’s something he wants to sustain.

“I’m not Mamilla or a W, and I don’t want to be,” said Herman, referring to the W chain of luxury hotels. “The Waldorf is a trigger for the renovation, but we have to do this all the time. The needs of our guests demand it.”



Notice the chartreuse carpeting on the floor? That's all about enhancing the Jerusalem stone interiors (photo credit: Jessica Steinberg/Times of Israel)

So besides the enhanced architectural details, there is also a newly deluxe executive suite floor (each suite with its own espresso machine, considered de rigeur these days), Carrera marble bathrooms in all the rooms, bicycles and helmets for rent to ride around Jerusalem, a full-service spa, a new, environmentally-friendly bubble over the pool and plans to extend the terrace outside the dining room to meld more naturally with the pool area and Liberty Bell Park next door.

"We want to take advantage of the access to the outdoors, to the greenery of the park and around us," said Schwartz.

He began the renovation with the hotel's front entrance, which had sufficed with a nondescript portico for many years. He wanted to "define" the entry, playing up the "origami-like" stone that juts out from the hotel's outer walls.

"You could never tell where the entrance was, it just blended in with the building," said Schwartz.



Michael Schwartz shows the hotel's renovation plans, which includes redoing the inner lobby with more intimate seating and work areas (photo credit: Jessica Steinberg/Times of Israel)

He designed glass panes that extend several of the stone panels, echoing the angles of the stone while creating a striking entrance. The panes, weighing one ton each, they were made in Holland.

Schwartz also wants to change the front garden, a wide, nearly block-long expanse of flower boxes, stone paths and benches that he feels could blend better with the sidewalk, creating a mini-park that would draw people inside.

Heading inside, to the first lobby that greets guests, Schwartz redid the inner windows, removing the vertical, floor-to-ceiling windows that opened to the inner courtyard and instead echoing the front entrance panes, angling the windows out and thereby creating a more seamless opening to the courtyard. Courtyards are Schwartz's specialty, having worked for the last twenty years with the American Colony Hotel in East Jerusalem which is known for its verdant, flower-filled courtyard that draws visitors throughout the day.



A look at Schwartz' plans for the lobby, as seen on his iPad (photo credit: Jessica Steinberg/Times of Israel)

“The courtyard looks like a desert,” said Schwartz, “and you want to have an interaction between the inside and the outside. The stone is beautiful if there’s something to contrast with it.”

Now that the courtyard is more visible from the inside, Schwartz wants to “green up” the Jerusalem stone, add cushioned outdoor seating and play up the natural light that hits the stone at different times of day by placing small lights at the bottom and top of various pillars. He calls it “kinetic lighting” that enhances the building’s three-dimensional effect.

The hotel also hopes to add more floors, a request being deliberated by the municipality in the context of a fierce debate regarding too-tall buildings versus the need for more hotel rooms,





In the hotel business, it's all about constant upgrades, which is why the Inbal recently added a fleet of bicycles for its guests (photo credit: Jessica Steinberg/Times of Israel)

Given all the changes, Schwartz said he sees the renovation as a collaboration between architects of several generations.

"We're not always building new buildings; we're often adding to existing buildings," he said. "You have to be respectful, especially for buildings with iconic value — you have to be generous to where it came from and be mindful and to infuse it with where you think it can also go."

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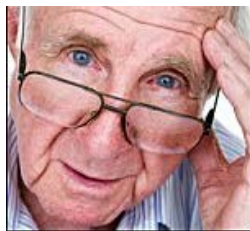
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