

## Japanese Architecture in Hebrew

### The influence of Japanese Architecture on Israeli Architecture

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“The International Style,” so coined for its worldwide quick and deep spread in the post-world war II years, has its origins in the European modernism and the vocabulary further developed by the Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier.

Its influence reached Israel and Japan simultaneously during its forming years from the late 1920's to its peak influence after World War II. Architects from both countries were deeply influenced by the "international style," both directly through the European sources, and through their contemporaries.

It is important to note that both postwar Japan and Israel after its Independence war (1948) went through decades of very fast building. After the first wave of building, which was preoccupied with residential architecture, there came in both countries a second important wave, of public buildings – city halls, museums, concert halls, and universities.

It is important to understand that in the 1960's, the projects of Le Corbusier (1887 – 1965) were the main source of inspiration, not to say – of copying. But his projects, being too few, were not enough, so the attention went to his followers and pupils. Among his direct disciples one can count two prominent Japanese architects: Kunio Maekawa (1905 - 1986) and Junzo Sakakura (1901—1969). Both worked for Le Corbusier in the late 1920's and early 1930's, went back to Japan, and played a very central role in the Japanese architectural scene in the postwar years.

The Japanese architects, during the 1950's and 60's, turned very quickly from followers to leaders, as well recorded also by Reyner Banham in his *Age of the Masters* of 1976.

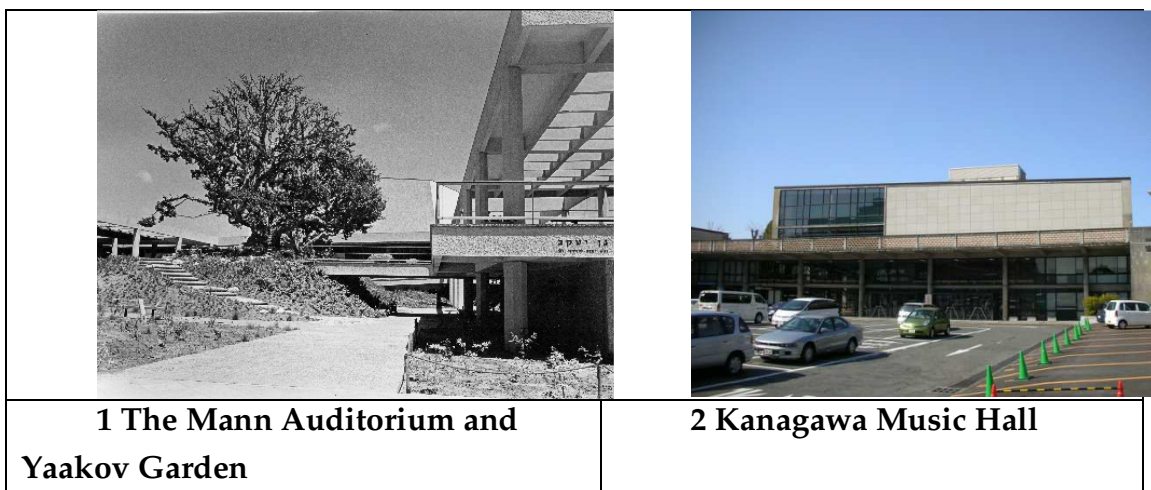
Architectural magazines worldwide started to expose, and later admire, the architecture that came out of Japan during these years. Soon the main source of information about Japanese architecture – the Japanese magazine

*Shinkenchiku* (literally “new architecture”), was translated and retitled *Japan Architect*; was sold in the West and got very popular.

*Shinkenchiku* quickly found its way to the private libraries of contemporary Israeli architects, as well as the Tel Aviv Museum Art Library, and more importantly, to the library of the only architecture faculty in Israel up to the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century at the Technion.

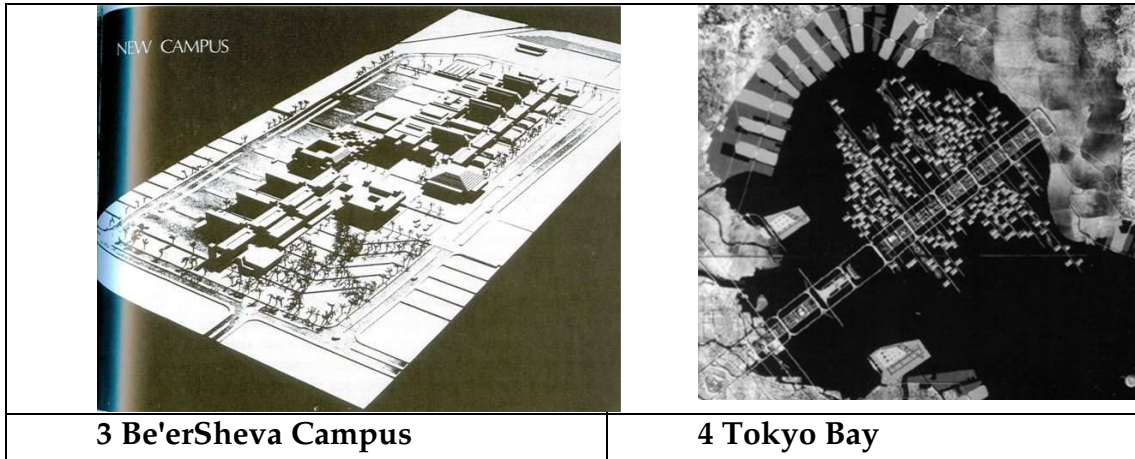
Although Israeli architecture was directly and strongly influenced by Le Corbusier and other European examples, this paper argues for the direct influences of Japanese masterpieces on certain Israeli projects. Following, this paper traces some of the masterpieces of Israeli architecture of the late 1950’s and 60’s, and focuses especially on projects by Professor Al Mansfeld (1912 — 2004).

**Mann Auditorium** (Tel Aviv) was designed by Dov Karmi (1905 – 1962) and Zeev Rechter (1899 - 1960). It opened in 1957, just a few years after the opening and publication of the Kanagawa Music Hall by Kunio Maekawa. The long terrace on the second floor, connecting the Mann Auditorium and Ginat Yaakov garden space, resembles Maekawa’s similar solution in Kanagawa (cf. ills. 1&2). As mentioned before, Maekawa worked for the legendary Le Corbusier in the late 1920’s. His post war projects were well known and well published by the time the Mann Auditorium took shape. In later years the art critic Motoko Sugase wrote about Ginat Yaakov as a “Japanese Space.”<sup>1</sup>

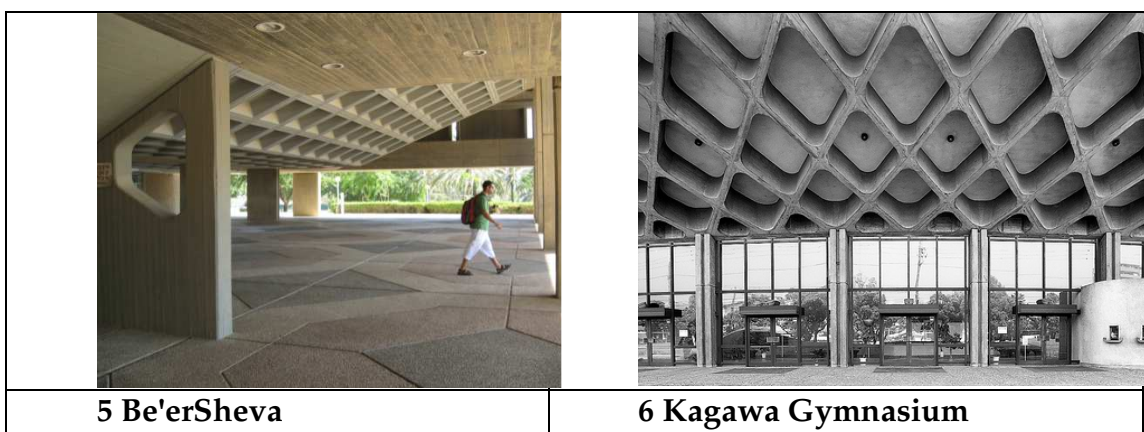


**Be'erSheva University campus** was designed initially by Professor Avraham Yasky (b. 1927) in the early 1960’s, and opened in 1969. Working at his office in those years was architect Yaacov Gil, soon to become a partner. In

an interview I conducted with Architect Gil for this article, he remembers that the *Shinkenchiku* magazines were always in the office. Furthermore, he remembers that KenzoTange's plan for Tokyo Bay was taught and discussed intensively in its time (1961). A few years after Tange's Tokyo Bay scheme, Yasky and Gil proposed a similar layout for a new campus for Be'erSheva's new university (cf. ill. 3&4).





Examining their architectural details, the Be'erSheva campus' buildings are all thoroughly "Corbusian." In an interview for his eightieth birthday, Yasky tells reporter Esther Zandberg that "Le Corbusier was our bible." Well, if Le Corbusier was the "Messiah," then his disciples could as well help out. Namely, there are clear influences of KenzoTange in the Be'erSheva campus, specifically from Tange's Hiroshima Peace Memorial (1954) and his Kagawa Gymnasium (1954), both widely published (cf. ill. 5&6)



**Tel Aviv University Campus.** Coinciding with the Be'erSheva University, the Tel Aviv University campus was quickly evolving. In 1969,

Nadler, Nadler, Bixon& Gil Architects completed the main library building, using direct visual references to the Tokyo Bunka Kaikan by KunioMaekawa (1961)(cf. ill. 7&8).

References to this well-published Maekawa building can be found also in more contemporary buildings in Israel. One example is the TAAS office building on DerechHashalom in Tel Aviv, designed by architect GershonZippor in late 1960's.

	
<p><b>7 Tel Aviv University, Main Library</b></p>	<p><b>8 Tokyo Bunka Kaikan</b></p>

**Professor Al Mansfeld**, was a key figure in the Israel architectural scene. He studied architecture in Berlin starting in 1931, and then moved to Paris as a student of August Perret (1874 - 1954), a pioneer of concrete construction and an important influence on Le Corbusier.

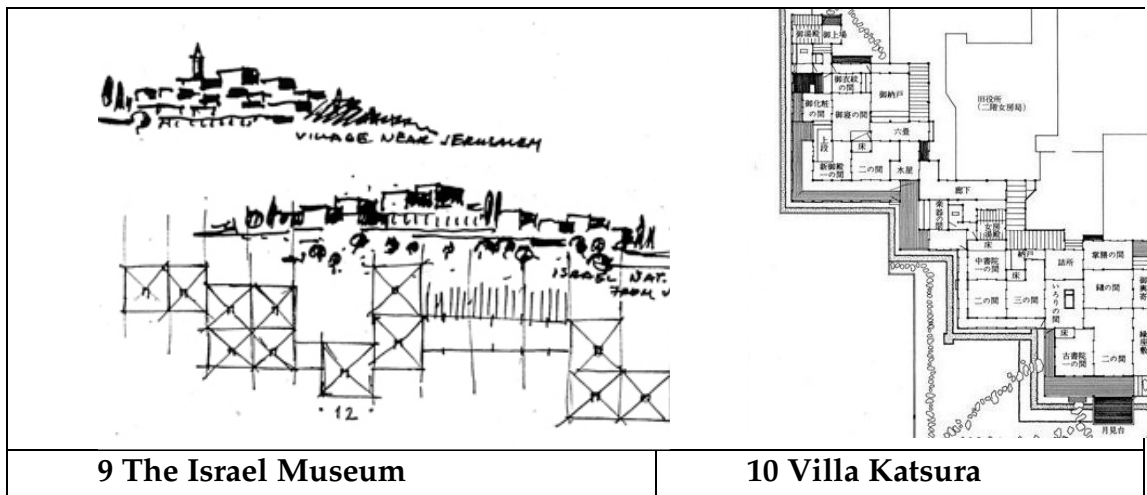
Mansfeld immigrated to Israel in 1935 and started his career here. Between 1954 and 1956 he acted as dean of the (only) school of architecture in Israel at the Technion. He continued teaching for many years, and was very influential both through his teaching and his works.

I recorded two personal evidences of the attraction Professor Mansfeld held towards Japanese culture. The first is by Dr. Eli Lancman, the former manager of the Tikotin Museum of Japanese Art in Haifa (1966-1992 ). Dr. Lancman was a close friend of Mansfeld, and they shared an appreciation for Japanese culture, art, and architecture.

The second interview was with Mansfeld's son – the architect Michael Mansfeld. He remembers his father's deep interest in Japan and its culture, an interest also well reflected in the content of Al Mansfeld's personal library.

In the early 1960's Prof. Masfeld started the design of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, opened in 1965. Mansfeld's initial concern was the spatial arrangement of a huge building on a prominent hill in Jerusalem. For his main inspiration, he referred to the image of the Arab village – a set of small cubical stone volumes spread on the topography. His sketches show clearly the transformation of the village's skyline into a large museum.

When in need for detailed planning, derived from the initial sketch, neither the vernacular architecture, nor the classic, and none of the modern examples, could provide a model for reference.



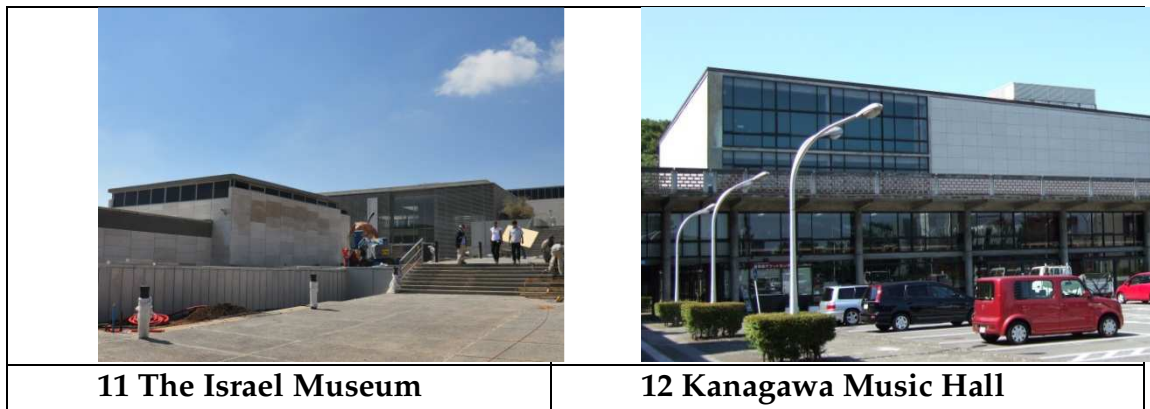
9 The Israel Museum

10 Villa Katsura

Here, to my opinion, the Villa Katsura came to Mansfeld's rescue. The "Villa Katsura" (or Katsura Detached Palace), built in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, served as a model for generations of Japanese architects and was then discovered by the early modern architects of the West. Although there is no reference to Katsura in Mansfeld's or in his critics' writings about the Israel Museum, the Villa Katsura was very well-known to modernists, starting with Frank Lloyd Wright (1867 – 1959) and further on to Bruno Taut (1880 – 1938), Gropius (1883 – 1969), Mies van der Rohe (1886 – 1969) and others.

I argue that it was the Japanese palace, as demonstrated in Villa Katsura, which was utilized as a raw model for spreading the built mass in smaller volumes, creating an asymmetrical yet well-interconnected layout. The overall sketch for the scheme of the plan suggested by Mansfeld has a clear resemblance to Villa Katsura's plan, but to no other Western precedent.

Examining the architectural details of the individual volumes of the Israel Museum's buildings, I found a direct visual reference to the Kanagawa Prefectural Library and Music Hall of Yokohama (1954) designed by Kunio Maekawa (this building was mentioned before in the context of the Mann Auditorium as well). There could not be a doubt that Prof. Al Mansfel was familiar with this Maekawa building.



An additional source of inspiration is implied by the resemblance to the very famous work by architect Junzo Sakakura (1901—1969) - The Museum of Modern Art of Kamakura (1951). Sakakura was a colleague of Maekawa, and literally replaced him at Le Corbusier's studio; he worked there longer, and got to a higher position before coming back to Japan. Sakakura was praised in the following words:

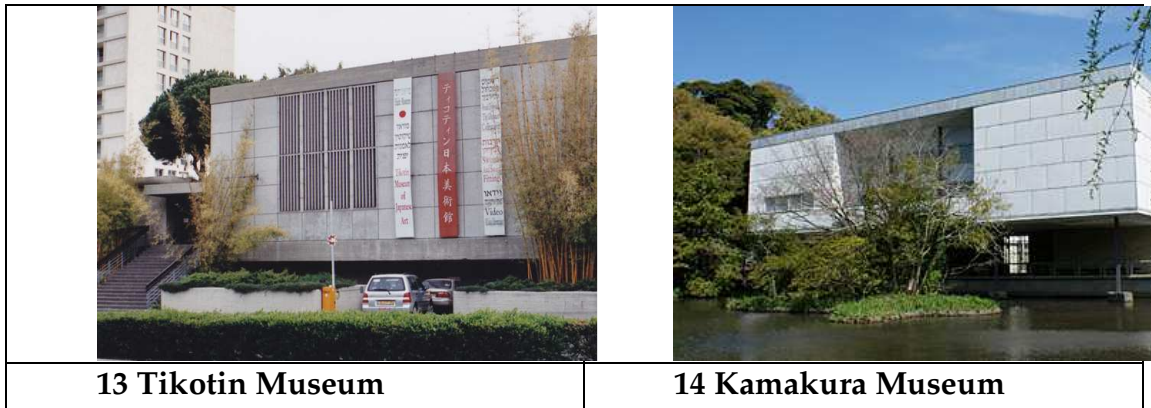
"Within the course of the Modern Architectural Movement, if Sakakura does not rank with the towering figures of Mies, Wright, and Le Corbusier, he is certainly on a par with such men as Finland's Alvar Aalto..."

Hamaguchi Ryuichi, December 1969

"In Grief - Over the Loss of Junzo Sakakura" *Japan Architect*

The Kamakura project displays an interesting balance between international modernism and traditional Japanese architecture, by utilizing the traditional thin columns over a water pond (ills. 14). More than its influence on the Israel Museum, I would like to argue that Al Mansfeld's Tikotin Museum Annex in Haifa is a direct tribute to the Kamakura Museum and to Sakakura. A large wall on HaNashi Blvd. in Haifa,

the Tikotin Museum's main façade, is a direct reference to the Kamakura Museum; its proportions, the blank stone-clad wall with its large opening, and the concrete lines framing the wing, characterize both museum buildings. The romantic overhang above the water pond in Kamakura is replaced by a small overhang above the parking level, yet the direct reference is obvious (cf. ills. 13&14). Built in 1995, about twenty-five years after Sakakura's death, the building seems to me as a deliberate tribute to this master by Mansfeld.



While trying to detect influences of Japanese architecture on Israeli examples, none of the discussions above comes to deny the creativity of the architects mentioned. The 1960's saw the zenith of the "International Style" thanks to the international openness and flow of influences.

In addition, I would like to note that the Japanese influence during this era was not special to Israel, and was in itself an international phenomenon. For example, in his book *Twentieth Century Architecture*, Doordan elaborates on the influence that Japanese architects had on Great Britain.

As a final note, I would like to stress that in the 1960's traveling was still rather rare, and thus the agents of these great international influences were books and magazines.

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<sup>1</sup> על מוטיב ה"מא" בגן יעקב, ניתוח תפישה יפנית של חלל דרך גן יעקב, מוטוקוסוגאסה, "רשות הרבים",  
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