

FUNKY TOWN

Former MediaCorp Radio Gold 90FM DJ **STEVEN SHALOWITZ** is on a round-the-world journey after leaving Singapore. Having completed his tour of Libya, the Chicago resident turns up in Tel Aviv to admire the architecture.

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explore with attitude

WHEN I hit the ground in Tel Aviv, I knew I wouldn't blend in.

I didn't have a goatee, tattoo, shaved head, or a heap of hair pulled back in a ponytail. I didn't have an earring, eyebrow ring or any other body part pierced — revealed or hidden. I was neither a dog owner nor a smoker.

After settling into my hotel, I took a walk to stretch my legs after the 50-minute ride from Jerusalem.

The beach was packed — on a Tuesday — with local sun worshippers and frisbee throwers while the Mediterranean was as blue as the ink scribbled on my notepad.

Sidewalk cafes were filled with young women who took their fashion cues from *Sex and the City's* Carrie Bradshaw. Engaged in laughter and conversation, they gestured wildly and sipped their "afuhs" (Hebrew for latte which literally translates to "upside down").

Antiquarians stood beside boutiques selling scented soaps while jostling for space at one street corner, vegans demanded animal rights, dog breeders sold their puppies, and a teenager with a blaring stereo hawked fresh bagels out of an old cardboard box.

ODD PASTICHE: Tel Aviv is a strange and wonderful mix of old and new, where sidewalk cafes jostle for space with buskers.



If this is the Holy Land, I thought, then Tel Aviv surely must be God's version of Funky Town.

BEHIND THE BAUHAUS BUILDINGS

While biting into my oversized sandwich picked up at the uber-hot Bar Gurion (a play on Israel's first Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion), I meandered block after block through central Tel Aviv, admiring unpretentious white geometric buildings fronted by gardens screaming with purple bougainvilleas and scarlet roses.

With more of the sandwich's content on my fingers than in my stomach, I carefully pulled out my holiday reading from my backpack — *Wind, Sand and Stars* by Antoine de Saint-Exupery.

I turned to one of the many quotes in the book I enjoyed and was determined to commit to memory: "In anything at all, perfection is finally attained not when there is no longer anything to add, but when there is no longer anything to take away."

Although Saint-Exupery was referring to an airplane, *The Little Prince* author could easily have been describing Tel Aviv. Compared to a vanilla tourist like me, Tel Aviv is a city of pistachio characters. And it seems the story is as much in the simple backdrop as in the cast who play out life's drama.

I wanted to learn more about these mostly cube-shaped structures and serendipitously stumbled upon the Tel Aviv Bauhaus Centre on buzzing Dizengoff Street.

Over a fizzy fruit drink made at the bar on the premises, I engaged Micha Gross in conversation and learned that the Swiss native is the unlikely force behind the Bauhaus Centre.

A biologist working with patients suffering from sleep disturbances, Gross partnered with neurologist Asher Ben-Shmuel, to open the centre in 2000 at the suggestion of Gross' Israeli-born tour guide wife, who realised there was no resource for those with questions about Tel Aviv's Bauhaus heritage.

LIVING LIKE A KING IN A CASTLE

Gross explained The Bauhaus School of Design first operated in Weimar, then in Dessau Germany from 1919 to 1933, under the guidance of renowned architect Walter Gropius.

At a time when egalitarian principles were prevalent in the young and socially-conscious Tel Aviv, city planners embraced the Bauhaus movement given its emphasis on function over ornamentation, modernity over tradition, and importantly its ideology of equality.

The Gross' weren't the only ones who recognised Tel Aviv as a treasure trove of buildings designed according to Bauhaus (also referred to as the International Style) principles.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) designated "The White City" of Tel Aviv a World Heritage Site in July 2003, in part given the city is home to the world's largest concentration of Bauhaus buildings — some 4,000 structures.

For someone who treats sleep walkers, narcoleptics and insomniacs, Gross — affectionately called "Mr Bauhaus" by his two children — never researched the effects a Bauhaus building has on counting sheep.

Nevertheless, he offered that Bauhaus architects built according to climatic conditions.

In Tel Aviv's case, buildings were positioned for the wind to enter an apartment from the direction of the sea to keep it cool — especially during Tel Aviv's steamy summers — thus ensuring a good night's rest.

Seeing me to the door, Gross pointed out the extensive collection of books

THE BAUHAUS MOVEMENT

Originating in Weimar Germany, the Bauhaus style of architecture — which emphasises function over ornamentation, modernity over tradition — was embraced by city planners in Tel Aviv.

Today, the city is home to the world's largest concentration of Bauhaus buildings — some 4,000 structures, including these:



PHOTOS COURTESY OF STEVEN SHALOWITZ

and Bauhaus-inspired housewares and *object des arts* for sale within the centre.

For Gross, the most rewarding part of the Tel Aviv Bauhaus Centre is the response from the public.

"Locals living in Bauhaus buildings who don't know much about them come in and take our Friday walking tours" he said. "When it's over, they realise they're living in a castle".