for an Italian audience—but English captions are provided.

One of the best-designed galleries of the museum is devoted to a detailed presentation of all technical aspects involved in urban planning the five new settlements built between 1299 and 1350. Full-scale replicas of medieval surveying equipment accompany the explanations of the innovative theoretical tools employed by the Florentines. For example, trigonometry was used extensively in tracing a plan, as specified in the charters for the foundation of these new towns. Instead of simply displaying a copy of one of these original documents, the curators chose to install a computer animation that illustrates the design specifications while one such charter is read aloud. This is an original and effective method for visualizing a complex geometric process.

The following gallery highlights the importance of the central rectangular square—on opposite sides of which the parish church and the town hall were built—and the evolution of the standard city lot. The expansion of the average house is displayed through a series of four models, progressing from the simple two-floor, two-room house built in adobe and wood, with a rear vegetable garden and a well, to a larger brick building with several rooms, which still constitutes the most common typology in San Giovanni and the other new towns.

The final four galleries are centered on the development of a new society. The inhabitants of these towns were attracted by tax exemptions and a higher standard of living. A third video presents a debate among peasants in a feudal manor who are struggling with the decision to move to a town and become free citizens under the protection of Florentine laws, a challenging and dangerous proposition for many. This process is exemplified in the personal history of three generations of one particular family, narrated through documents: the son of a farmer who settled in San Giovanni became a craftsman, and his son in turn obtained advanced social status when he moved to Florence.

The museum does not yet have a catalog; in the meantime, the interested visitor can rely on David Friedman’s Florentine New Towns and the more recent publication Le terre nuove, the seminar proceedings edited by David Friedman and Paolo Pirillo. These fundamental scholarly references provide further contextualization for the material on view at the museum; we hope the catalog will be similarly thorough. In order to enhance the museum’s offerings, it would be advisable to develop a fully functional website and a mobile application to facilitate a visit—virtual or actual—to the new towns, at least those in Tuscany.

The idea of a permanent exhibition dedicated to urbanism is quite new. Museums devoted to the histories of particular cities are common, but usually only temporary shows trace complex historical phenomena in multiple locations, as the Museum of New Towns so successfully does. The variety of media employed and the Pan-European perspective of the museum demonstrate a truly innovative approach, even more so within the context of a small Italian city.

LORENZO VIGOTTI
Columbia University

Note

The White City—Tel Aviv’s Modern Movement

Museum of Finnish Architecture, Helsinki
12 February–30 March 2014

Tel Aviv was established in 1909 on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea, part of the Jewish people’s dream of returning to their homeland, before the founding of the state of Israel in 1948. The Scotsman Patrick Geddes, one of the great pioneers of urban planning, was commissioned in 1925 to design a master plan for the fledgling community, and his plan was to a great extent implemented. The master plan followed the Garden City ideology, but with a more compact layout and combined with the versatile functions of a traditional city center. His planning principles entailed a system of urban blocks based on repeated and varied units, low building heights, hierarchical street spaces, lush vegetation, and public piazzas. Tel Aviv was Geddes’s only city master plan ever to be implemented.

The architecture of Tel Aviv, however, did not represent the eclecticism that Geddes had hoped for. What emerged instead were variations of the architecture of the modern movement European immigrants brought with them. European architectural exemplars were adapted to suit Mediterranean conditions as well as local building methods. Instead of the glass facades of northern Europe, the buildings here would protect their occupants from the glaring sunlight and heat by means of projections and recesses, shady balconies, and various means of natural ventilation. Plot sizes were small, and the permitted ground coverage was no more than one-third of that, allowing only one building per plot with a maximum of four floors. The aim was to make buildings affordable for the newly arriving immigrants. With thirty neighborhood parks, as well as verdant street spaces, vegetation was abundant. The master plan, considered old-fashioned from the modernist viewpoint, proved a fortunate combination, despite its seeming incongruity. A city emerged that was simultaneously urban and intimate. The first inhabitants of Tel Aviv described life there as free spirited: “We walked around in sandals or barefoot.”

Tel Aviv has one of the largest concentrations of modern architecture in the world, with more than 3,700 buildings dating from 1931 to 1948 and approximately the same number from 1948 to the early 1960s. The city was awarded UNESCO World Heritage List status in 2003 for its stylistic homogeneity, the status of its city center, and the fusion of different modernist trends in a local interpretation. The impressive exhibition at the Museum of Finnish Architecture was created ten years
ago to celebrate Tel Aviv’s World Heritage status. Since 2005 the exhibition has traveled to Montreal, Mendrisio, Vienna, Brussels, Frankfurt, São Paulo, St. Petersburg, and now Helsinki.

The exhibition mounted at the Museum of Finnish Architecture was extensive. It offered the opportunity to immerse oneself in a stream of images and focus on various themes of Tel Aviv’s white architecture: balconies, openings, decorative forms, and decorative plasterwork. What stood out was the strong fluctuation between light and shade in the highly sculptural architecture. It was also possible to delve into Geddes’s design principles, and the way in which he fused the urbanism of Ebenezer Howard’s Garden City ideals with his view of Zionism.

On entering the main exhibition space of the museum, one walked over a huge color aerial photograph of modern-day Tel Aviv fixed to the floor (Figure 1). The photo showed the sandy beaches lining the Mediterranean as well as the compact historical city center, with its modernist buildings. The exhibition included scale models and even samples of decorative plasterwork. What was used in Germany. A trace of Germany.

abundance of moving images: in a multi-screen compilation one simultaneously experienced Tel Aviv’s past and its present. Notable buildings were presented not only in photographs but also by means of three-dimensional modeling animations.

Who were the architects of Tel Aviv? The exhibition presented seventy-eight architects, four of whom were women. Some of the architects had come from Eastern Europe during the 1920s. A large group had arrived in the 1930s; many of them had studied at the Bauhaus or the modernist-oriented schools in France, Switzerland, and Belgium, and others in Russia. Several had worked in the offices of well-known modernist masters. There were also a few who were born in Jerusalem but who had gone to Europe to study. Those who had lived in Palestine for a longer time adopted from the newcomers ideas that originated with Le Corbusier, the Bauhaus, and Hannes Meyer. The light-colored buildings, often raised up on pilotis and with roof gardens, perfectly suited the Mediterranean climate, the original inspiration for Le Corbusier’s modernist vocabulary.

Viennese, Dutch, and German models were emulated in the design of workers’ cooperative housing estates. Some estates employed a Zeilenbau layout, as had often been used in Germany. A trace of Germany is also evident in the form of Dizengoff Square by Genia Averbouch, based on her winning entry in a competition in 1934. The circular piazza, with its horizontal emphasis and curves, is a Mediterranean variation of Alexanderplatz in Berlin, redesigned by the Luckhardt brothers between 1929 and 1932. From among the many architects in the exhibition, one who particularly stood out was the Ukrainian-born architect-engineer Dov Karmi. His residential buildings from the 1930s demonstrate a skillful spatial overlap in the transitions from the street space to the interior. The Mann Auditorium from the 1950s was a demonstration of Karmi’s skills at the peak of his career.

A central role model for many of the architects during the 1930s was Eric Mendelsohn. He had fled Germany and, after moving to Palestine, resided and worked in Haifa and Jerusalem but designed only one building in Tel Aviv, the Max Fein Vocational School. The smooth Mendelsohnian curves and “racing stripes” are visible in the architecture of Tel Aviv, which in its overall appearance is softer and more decorative than the often-ascetic European modernist architecture, particularly in single-family houses and villas. Mendelsohn, as the exhibition points out, was not particularly enthusiastic about his disciples’ imitations of his work.

Tel Aviv was born in 1909 as a suburb of Jaffa and was intended as a small settlement for sixty families. The large wave of migration began in the 1920s, and the number of arrivals grew severalfold during the following decade. By the mid-1930s, the population was already around 250,000. Construction came to a standstill in 1937 with the Arab uprising. Many of the architects then left the country, and only a few private architecture firms continued. Construction and immigration resumed after 1949, when interwar modernism was supplanted by Brutalism.

Time took its toll on the earlier buildings, which became hidden under later alterations and extensions. In the wider city panorama one can see immediately beyond the city center several groups of skyscrapers. The White City has swollen to become a metropolis.

Figure 1 Installation view of The White City—Tel Aviv’s Modern Movement, Museum of Finnish Architecture (copyright MFA and Juho Haavisto).
After Tel Aviv achieved UNESCO World Heritage List status, 1,600 of the buildings in the old part of the city were listed for conservation. The conservation plan sets out several requirements. A certain amount of infill building is permitted, following specific guidelines. Preserving the “modernist heritage” of Tel Aviv has required this and other inventive approaches to planning. This exhibition, promoting the architectural and urban values represented by Israel’s capital city, can be seen as both celebrating and reinforcing the importance of that heritage during a time of change.

AINO NISKANEN
Aalto University, Helsinki


Getty Center Exhibitions Pavilion, Los Angeles
9 April–21 July 2013
National Building Museum, Washington, D.C.
20 October 2013–10 March 2014

Overdrive: L.A. Constructs the Future, 1940–1990 was an ambitious exhibition that drew on an earlier initiative by the Getty Research Institute and the J. Paul Getty Museum, chronicling the transformation of Los Angeles from a “fledgling pueblo in the mid-1800s to a vibrant urban center” in the mid-twentieth century. There has not been any major exhibition since the mid-1800s to a vibrant urban center” in the mid-twentieth century. There has been a historical framework for Los Angeles as “seventy-two

Some observers, including Banham, presume that L.A. possesses unique qualities in terms of how its urban growth and various cultural myths (such as the city’s fabled “car culture”) intersect, to the point where its architecture and urbanism could not be sufficiently analyzed with conventional art historical frameworks. This is one city, for instance, where “mobility outweighs monumentality.” The notion of mobility implied a discursive space for futurist self-representation on the part of L.A.’s movers and shakers. In the 1960s, the Theme Building at the Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) sought to simulate the fast-track life of jet-age modernity. And its restaurant, suspended from two intersecting parabolic arms, masqueraded as a crystal ball for those who could not afford an airplane journey. In many ways, Southern California’s landscape-defining freeways, its Disneyland, and the architectural consortium L.A. Ten’s pathbreaking residential designs, among other contenders, were efforts to anticipate, represent, and shape a particular brand of future that would be uniquely suited to L.A.

The task of Overdrive was to map this city. It was not easy, however, to tell L.A.’s gigantic and conflicted story of modernity. While observing the city’s peculiar fascination with automobiles, its fluid sprawl, and investment in aerospace, one must also pause to consider Dorothy Parker’s characterization of L.A. as “seventy-two suburbs in search of a city.” The exhibition’s five sections—“Car Culture,” “Urban Networks,” “Engines of Innovation,” “Community Magnets,” and “Residential Fabric”—organized a vast body of material into an alluring narrative of a city’s dogged pursuit of a hopeful future.

Cocurator Wim de Wit and Christopher James Alexander presented the exhibition with tickling nostalgia. “Los Angeles’s identity is inextricably linked to the automobile,” the inaugural “Car Culture” section informed visitors, providing them with a cultural platform from which to appreciate “Googie” coffee shops, drive-in restaurants, and other architectural typologies suitable for motorized lifestyles.1 With an imposing Disneyland poster, “Autopia at Tomorrowland,” the “Urban Networks” section portrayed the city’s “daring expansion” of water and power infrastructures, “pioneering freeways,” and transportation hubs, which collectively enabled L.A.’s octopus-like urban growth. “Engines of Innovation” outlined the influence of various emerging industries (such as aviation) on architectural materials and construction techniques.

The “Community Magnets” section argued that architectural innovations—including those dedicated to culture, sports, shopping, and even faith—had played a crucial role in Southern California’s unique ability to galvanize different communities. Herbert Ryman’s 1963 drawings of Disneyland, as well as architectural models of various entries for the Walt Disney Concert Hall competition, were highlights of this section. Finally, “Residential Fabric” proposed that “more than any other building type, the private house has made Los Angeles famous for innovation in modern architecture.” Southern California’s comfortable climate and “surfurbia” landscape attracted many prospective homeowners, while motivating architects to rethink the conventions of domestic architecture. Here, John Lautner’s Buckminster Fuller–inspired Malin Residence (Chemosphere, 1960), “levitating” on a steep slope, and the Romanian émigré Haralamb Georgescu’s