

The Azrieli Center: Story of an Icon

© All rights reserved

Author: Boneh Tirosh

Photographs by Albatross photographers: Duby Tal, Lynn Counio,

Barak Brinker, Yuval Harel, Ron Gurel, Nimrod Aronov, and Melina Brumiger

Photography Flight: Moni Haramati

Hebrew editor: Noga Panai

English translator: Baruch Gefen

Advisor, English edition: Naomi Azrieli

Editor, English edition: Arielle Berger

Studio: Barak Brinker, Lynn Counio

Print: A.R. Printers

Publisher: Albatross Aerial Photography Ltd.

The views expressed herein are the sole responsibility of the author.

No part of this book may be reproduced, photocopied, recorded, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means, including mechanical, electronic, photocopying, recording, or otherwise.

Commercial use of any kind of the material included in this book is absolutely forbidden without the explicit written consent of the copyright owners.

First edition.

Published in Israel 2012

ISBN: 978-965-7558-03-4



CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1	: There's a Place	8
CHAPTER 2	: Who Are You, David Azrieli?	28
CHAPTER 3	: Planning the Shalom Center	44
CHAPTER 4	: The Tender	60
CHAPTER 5	: The Arbitration	72
CHAPTER 6	: American Skyscrapers and Malls.....	94
CHAPTER 7	: The Trial	104
CHAPTER 8	: The Work Commences	116
CHAPTER 9	: Building	132
CHAPTER 10	: The Façades	162
CHAPTER 11	: The Marketing Campaign	174
CHAPTER 12	: Follow the Money – The Financing Saga	200
CHAPTER 13	: The Interchange	206
CHAPTER 14	: The Leasing Campaign	216
CHAPTER 15	: To Be Square	228
CHAPTER 16	: The Icon	242



1 THERE'S A PLACE

“The Azrieli Center tells a fascinating urban and architectural story. Even more so, it represents a tale of human struggles, great fortunes, and diverse difficulties alongside dreams and creative forces that together form a success story. More than anything, I enjoy observing the towers at the Azrieli Center from different angles; they intermittently hide each other, gently spinning as I circle them. And when they rest for a moment, they are encircled by the sky, the sun, the lights at night, and the changing seasons. It is as if the towers reflect us all.”

This poetic passage was written by Shamai Asif, a professor of architecture and urban planning at the Technion who served as the city of Tel Aviv's chief engineer when the decision was made to build the Azrieli Center – or the Shalom Center, as it was known then – and to assign the project to David Azrieli. The Azrieli Center is considered the State of Israel's largest and most important construction project of the last two decades. It not only changed Tel Aviv's skyline, but it was also the forerunner of significant urban change as the city's main business center moved north and east over the past 15 years. The Azrieli Center set a new standard for construction in Israel, and its three towers soon became Tel Aviv's new icon.

Thousands worked in physically building the Azrieli Center, hundreds labored on planning it, and several dozen were in charge of executing the plans, but it was still a one-man project: David Azrieli was the visionary who financed the entire project and saw its construction through, from top to bottom. He left his mark by being involved in all of the design and planning stages and by closely supervising every aspect of the actual work. People often wondered about his level of involvement

MUNICIPALITY OF TEL-AVIV-YAFO

Invitation to Real Estate Developers
to participate in the

TEL-AVIV SHALOM CENTER

Israel's Largest Commercial and Office Complex

The Municipality of Tel Aviv-Yafo hereby invites experienced and established real estate developers to supply information about themselves and their experience and financial capabilities with a view to participate, eventually, in the acquisition of rights and development of the **TEL-AVIV SHALOM CENTER**.

THE MUNICIPALITY OF TEL AVIV-YAFO is the owner of a free and vacant tract of land of about 8.25 acres, situated in the heart of the developing northern business and office zone of the city. The land is adjacent to the Tel-Aviv central railway station and the EL-AL city terminal, and is situated between the Ayalon expressway and Petach-Tikva Road. These two major routes connect Tel-Aviv with the Southern (Jerusalem) and the Northern (Haifa) parts of Israel.

The Town Planning Scheme (to be approved) allows to construct on the land about 1,500,000 square feet of leaseable floor area (out of which approximately 300,000 square feet are for commercial and services purposes, and 1,200,000 square feet are for offices).

The Municipality of Tel Aviv-Yafo may eventually enter into an agreement with a developer for the acquisition of rights in the Shalom Center and the planning and development of the project to a high standard and within a reasonable time.

Developers with experience and expertise in the development of similar or larger business and office centers, and with financial standing adequate for such a project, and who show interest in developing the **SHALOM CENTER** are required to apply and furnish the following information:-

- 1. General description of the developer, his corporate structure and activities.
- 2. Previous experience of the Developer in planning, developing and managing of business and commercial centers.
- 3. Financial data as to the developer.

The information should reach:

EZRA UBIZARON (HOUSING Co.) Ltd.
105 Petach-Tikva Road, Tel-Aviv 67012, Israel.
(Tel: 03-210785, 03-260357;
Telex 361174 "SHALOM"; Teletax: 260357)
Not later than March 31st, 1988.

For further information and meeting kindly call the above address.

The Municipality of Tel Aviv-Yafo reserves the right to request a limited number of applicants to bid for the acquisition of rights, the planning and development of the **SHALOM CENTER**.

Shlomo Lahat
Mayor of Tel Aviv-Yafo

The Tel Aviv Municipality's
invitation to real-estate
developers to compete in the
tender for the Shalom Center

and intervention in even the finest of details, but it was only natural for a person who was building his life's project. "I wholeheartedly believe," he once said, "that the Azrieli Center is the most important and significant project I have ever built or will ever build. I always knew that Israel would be the place of my life's project. The Azrieli Center is that project."

The Beginning

In 1985, the city of Tel Aviv published its plan to build the Shalom Center project in an elegant brochure. Its centerfold offered a panoramic view of the project's location and vicinity, showing the IBM building and the three Hadar Dafna buildings towering above unassuming residential buildings. The old Ichilov Hospital was tall as well, though it was certainly not a skyscraper, and Tel Aviv's municipal building stood out in the background – a giant among three and four-story buildings.

Today, this picture looks very strange. The Azrieli Center has become such an organic and inseparable part of Tel Aviv's skyline that it is hard to imagine its absence. It would be similar to the Old City walls being erased from a picture of the Jerusalem landscape, or the Eiffel Tower being removed from the Paris skyline.

At the forefront of the 1985 picture there is a row of one and two-story industrial buildings next to a large and packed parking lot. At first glance, it seems like a pastoral picture of a tree-covered lot on the west side of the Ayalon Highway, next to Shalom Bridge. All in pastel colors, it is quite hard to notice that the vehicles in that lot are actually garbage trucks. This was the site at the heart of the architectural project that the city put out for competitive tender.

David Azrieli first heard of the city's intention to build an ambitious project on the site on September 7, 1984 at a meeting with then Tel Aviv Mayor Shlomo Lahat. Azrieli had asked to meet with Lahat because, after years of building outside of Israel, he was now actively looking to build a project there.

Azrieli was born in Poland and, after many difficult journeys, arrived in Israel during World War II. Tragically, his parents, sister, and one of his brothers perished in the Holocaust. After fighting in the War of Independence and studying at the



The lot had huge
development potential due
to its size (33.5 dunams, or
360,590 sq. feet) and location
(at a major intersection and
right next to the Ayalon
Highway and the railway)

Technion, Azrieli left Israel in 1950, determined to come back with funds to invest. In the 1960s and 70s, he established himself as a prominent entrepreneur and builder in Canada. By the early 1980s, he decided the time had come to start building in Israel and, among other things, he hoped to build the country's first shopping mall. In fact, Azrieli came up with the Hebrew word for it – *Canion* – a combination of two words: shopping and parking.

When Azrieli met with Mayor Lahat, they discussed the possibility of a commercial center and later examined several potential sites, including the Dolphinarium area, which they ruled out because it was better suited for beachfront and recreational activities. After looking at other locations, they arrived at a shortlist of three sites: across from the Wolfson Hospital Building; at the junction of Salame Street and Jerusalem Avenue in Jaffa; and the Holtz School compound. Although the discussions of those locations didn't amount to anything in the end, Mayor Lahat also brought up the Shalom Center project, which turned out to be the most relevant part of the meeting.

The Shalom Center was to be built on a lot alongside Shalom Road at the junction with Petah Tikva Road, now known as Begin Road. Mayor Lahat had asked Ezra uVitzaron, a municipal construction company then headed by Lior Dushnitsky – an engineer who specialized in managing private-sector projects and who had managed the construction of the Dizengoff Center – to locate sites with development potential around the city and to initiate projects that could tempt private entrepreneurs to further develop Tel Aviv.

The lot at the junction of Petah Tikva and Shalom Road served as the parking lot for the Tel Aviv Municipality's Sanitation Department at the time, which had chosen it specifically because it was on the outskirts of the city and didn't bother anyone. Ezra uVitzaron felt that it was this distance from the city center that now made it ideal for the construction of office buildings that would become part of a new business district for Tel Aviv.

The site had huge potential not only because of its size (33.5 dunams, or 360,590 square feet) and location (at a major intersection and right next to the Ayalon Highway and a future train station), but also, and primarily because, the city owned it and could do with it as it pleased.

The plan was dubbed the Shalom Center project due to its proximity to Shalom Road. Yet, when the name leaked out, the Mayer brothers, who owned the department store Kolbo Shalom, protested, arguing that *Shalom* was a name already taken by their own building (which they had named after their late father). City Hall tried to explain that no one would ever confuse the two sites, but the

brothers wouldn't budge and the name remained in dispute for some time. Over time, David Azrieli solved the problem in his own way.

First Plan

In 1983, Tel Aviv was on the verge of losing its identity as a residential town. Rising housing prices were driving the young out, kindergartens and schools were closing down, and the city's residents were aging. At the same time, Tel Aviv was establishing itself both as Israel's business and trade capital, and, in competition with Jerusalem, as a government center, so the number of offices opening in the city had risen dramatically. Since it was not hard for companies to pay the asking prices for residential apartment buildings, neighborhoods in Tel Aviv were slowly turning into business centers, and entire streets became dead and silent after office hours.

Mayor Lahat was trying to fight this non-residential takeover. "Sheinkin Street, the very center of the city, was almost empty of residents," he said. "In the day, it was all business and offices, while at night it was taken over by prostitutes and drug dealers and other horrible things – and right in the heart of the city, next to a school." Since it was actually illegal to open offices in apartment buildings, Lahat tried to fight them with eviction orders, which helped here and there, but it was not a true solution.

With City Hall now actively interested in promoting the development of the Shalom Center project, it put out feelers for entrepreneurial interest. At the September 1984 meeting between Azrieli and Lahat, the mayor asked him for a proposal for the construction of an urban complex that would combine an office building, a shopping center, and a parking area. The idea at the time was for a barter – the city would give the entrepreneur the land in return for one-third of anything that was built on it.

On March 23, 1986, Azrieli presented the Tel Aviv Municipality with a proposal for a project comprised of a parking lot for 2,400 vehicles, a 14,000m² (approximately



The Azrieli Center Figures

Stairs

966 square tower

1,050 triangular tower

1,144 round tower