

**Artur Jasiński**

Department of Architecture and Fine Arts, The Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski Krakow  
University College

## COLOUR MANIPULATION AS A TOOL FOR CREATING THE CITY IMAGE ON EXAMPLES OF MIAMI BEACH AND TEL AVIV

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### MANIPULACJE KOLEM JAKO NARZĘDZIE KSZTAŁTOWANIA WIZERUNKU MIASTA NA PRZYKŁADACH MIAMI BEACH I TEL AWIWU

#### **Abstract**

The two famous, coastal cities – Miami Beach in the United States and Tel Aviv in Israel – have much in common: they have a similar history, topography and architecture. Their contemporary image was shaped relatively recently, in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thanks to the changes to the originally grey colour scheme, the sordid and unkempt cities were transformed into world-class tourist attractions and trendy style icons. That is when their current reputations were established: Miami Beach as the pastel-shaded hub of American Art Deco and white Tel Aviv as the symbol of modernist, Bauhaus-like architecture.

**Keywords:** colours of the city, creation of image, urban identity

#### **Streszczenie**

Dwa sławne nadmorskie miasta: amerykańskie Miami Beach i izraelski Tel Awiw, łączy wiele wspólnego: posiadają podobną historię, topografię i architekturę. Ich współczesny wizerunek został ukształtowany stosunkowo niedawno – w drugiej połowie XX wieku. Dzięki manipulacji dokonanej w ich pierwotnej kolorystyce szare, brudne i zaniedbane miasta zostały przekształcone w globalne atrakcje turystyczne i modne ikony stylu. Ukształtowane wtedy zostały towarzyszące im obecnie legendy: mieniącego się pastelowymi kolorami Miami Beach, stolicy amerykańskiego Art Deco, i białego Tel Awiwu, symbolu modernistycznej architektury rodem z Bauhausu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kolory miasta, kształtowanie wizerunku, tożsamość miasta

## 1. The origins of Miami Beach

The City of Miami Beach was built on a sandy oceanfront shielding the port city of Miami from the East and was located at the southern tip of Florida. The first settler to move onto the land belonging to Miami Beach was John Collins, a farmer from New Jersey who came there to establish a vast mango and avocado plantation. It was the Lummus brothers, investors and developers, who operated there on a bigger scale. In 1912, they founded the Ocean Beach Realty Company and bought 500 acres of land. They had the mangrove forests cleared, had the land drained and parcelled out to create luxurious housing estates. Another leading investor was a landowner tycoon, Carl Fisher. He had quite a different view on development: he built small summer-house estates designed for middle-class American families and brought sand to create the famous beaches. In 1915, the City of Miami Beach was officially incorporated and expanded in 1924, when its administrative limits were moved north and reached 87<sup>th</sup> Street. This is when the town grew to its current size [17, p. 219].



Fig. 1. Miami Beach: housing development along Ocean Drive, as in 2016 (photo by the author)

During the interwar period, the southern and central part of Miami Beach, up to 44<sup>th</sup> Street, became built up. Most buildings were erected during the so-called Great Florida Land Boom in the 1920s and the so-called Depression Era Land Boom in the late 1930s. Local architecture was dominated by two main stylistic movements: Mediterranean Revival and Art Deco. The buildings of the 1920s were put up predominantly in a Mediterranean style. They were characterized by arcades supported by columns, arched windows, balconies with forged,

cast iron railings, white elevations, stone details and roofs covered with red tiles. Examples of such architecture can be found in the Spanish Village, along Española Way.

The second half of the 1920s saw the introduction of Art Deco in the United States, which owes its popularity to the influence the *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* of 1925 in Paris had on American architects. Buildings in the Art Deco style can be found in many American cities. Probably the most famous of them is the Chrysler Building built in Manhattan in 1930 according to William van Alen's design. Art Deco reached Miami Beach with the second wave of rapid development of the city in the late 1930s. The late type of the American Art Deco style, known as Streamline Moderne, was more austere in terms of style and made use of the achievements of industrial design, promoted during the *America World Fair* in 1930. Its local variation, known as Tropical Deco, also used motifs inspired by the tropical flora and fauna, as well as details from ship architecture, thus strengthening the coastal and vacation atmosphere of Miami Beach (<http://www.mdpl.org/about-us/about-miami-beach-design-styles/what-is-art-deco/>, access: 13.08.2017).

After World War II, Miami Beach developed yet another local style, which was a variation on modernism called MiMo (Miami Modernism). The idea behind it was to adapt the international style, traditionally taught in American design schools of the times, to the local conditions. It was characterized by asymmetric structures, round window openings, metal blinds and brise-soleil, often made out of aluminium or copper sheets, and walls covered in ceramic mosaics, open balconies and catwalks. A local typology of apartment buildings was created (the so-called Garden Style) in which the apartments, accessible through open galleries, were built around a centrally-positioned garden.

After the post-war surge of investments fuelled by cheap loans in the 1940s and 1950s, there came a long period of stagnation and degradation. Only in the second half of the 1980s did Miami Beach start to grow rapidly once again and its original skyline formed by short buildings was deformed by numerous high housing estates and hotels. The most colossal ones were put up on the southern tip of the city (South Point Tower, Y.H. Lee Associates 1986; Portofino Tower Group, Sieger Architectural Partnership and Skidmore, Owings and Merrill 1994-2008). Further major projects are being carried out and planned, mainly along the coastline and the port area in the western part of the city (e.g. Waverly at South Beach, Architectonica 2001). In 2000, the city of 7.1 square miles had a total population of 88 thousand inhabitants.

## **2. The origins of Tel Aviv**

It is usually said that the origins of Tel Aviv date back between 1906-1909 when a group of local notables supported by the National Jewish Fund established the Ahuzat Bayit neighbourhood just a few kilometres north of Jaffa. It was a well-thought-out and a professional urban planning project, modern in character and inspired by the idea of a garden city. The author of the project, which served as the basis for the parcelling out of the first 60 plots of land, was engineer Avraham Goldman, while the guidelines were laid down by the famous

Zionist activist Arthur Ruppin. The axis of the neighbourhood was Rothschild Boulevard and the main side street was named after Herzl. The plots were large, much bigger than in Jaffa, amounting to 500 metres square each and the density of buildings was limited to 33 percent. Development lines were created and moved away from the frontage, so that each detached house had enough access to air and light [7, p. 17]. In 1909, another housing estate, Nahalat Binyamin, was built by the sea upon the nearby dunes. The one-storey houses had simple shapes, gable or hip roofs, and entrance porches with upper balconies. Additionally, the elevations were adorned by stylised ornaments. From the front side, there were forged fences supported by stone pillars. The only public building erected in the new housing estate was the Herzliya Hebrew Gymnasium, a monumental building in eclectic style with numerous references to the art of Islam, designed by the architect Joseph Barski [8, p. 122].

When the new neighbourhoods started merging, they were given the common name of Tel Aviv (in Hebrew: spring mound), which derived from the title of the Hebrew translation of Theodor Herzl's *Altneuland* [15, p. 4]. In 1920, in order to ensure the harmonious growth of Tel Aviv, the architect Richard Kauffmann was asked to come up with a spatial management plan for its northern part. Kauffmann introduced a block-based regulation system, which exists until today and consists of a network of main roads built on the coastline along the north-south axis, intersected by a network of perpendicular streets going from the hills towards the seashore. After the violent riots between the Jews and the Arabs which broke out on May 1, 1921, many Jewish families based in Jaffa moved to Tel Aviv in fear of persecution. In the same year, Tel Aviv received city status and in 1922, six neighbouring Jewish districts were annexed into Tel Aviv, including the eclectic Neve Tsedek.

A strong impulse for Tel Aviv's development came with the influx of Jewish immigrants from Palestine who started settling under the *haawara* agreement reached between Zionist organisations and the Nazi German government in 1933 [16, pp. 23-26]. These were mainly wealthy middle-class citizens, rich bourgeoisie and professionals. Many of them settled in Tel Aviv where they posed a challenge to the traditional lifestyle and collectivised economy. It is thanks to those immigrants that private enterprises started developing, new shops and malls were being opened, as was the stock market. This is when German-language newspapers started coming out, a number of cafés and a philharmonic hall were opened and the city of Tel Aviv, which had been a provincial town until then, finally started resembling a cosmopolitan metropolis [16, pp. 51-52]. Among the architects who arrived in Palestine in the 1920s and 1930s were young kibbutzniks who had studied architecture in Europe. It is the second generation of the Yishuv – Yoseph Neufeld, Zeev Rechter and Arie Sharon – who, upon their return to Tel Aviv, established the influential architects' club called "Chung" (in Hebrew: circle, ring), which was actively promoting modernist style in architecture, associating it and linking it with the ideas of Zionism [14, p. 23].

For young architects educated in Europe, the rapidly growing Tel Aviv was not only a perfect place to start their professional careers, but also an ideological battlefield, which allowed them to introduce the rules of Zionism into the architectural practice: to design a new form for a new nation. The modernist idea of breaking all ties with history also provided them with the best possible opportunity to cut themselves off from the local building tradition,



“contaminated” by centuries-long Arabic influences, as well as from colonial architecture and the European diaspora, which Zionist activists considered bourgeois and rotten. For the first time in centuries, Jews had a chance to break free from the influences of foreign cultures and to build – literally and metaphorically speaking – their own, Jewish home. The International Style architecture, drawing on Mediterranean traditions, became a convenient and ideologically-potent platform, which made it possible to combine the ideals of the modernist style in architecture with the left-wing, pragmatic and often rough in style Labour Zionism of *Eretz Israel*, represented by the two most influential Zionist organisations at the time: the centre-left labour party Mapai and the trade union movement Histadrut. The rules of the new architecture proposed by Le Corbusier received an original touch in Jewish Palestine and, in the late 1930s, Tel Aviv was heavy with hundreds of modern buildings designed in the local, simplified version of the International Style.



Fig. 2. Tel Aviv. Gottgold House on the corner of Allneby Street and Sheinkin Street, designed by Yehuda Magidovitch, 1935. As in 2014 (photo by the author)

Contrary to the label they later received, Tel Aviv’s modernist buildings were never white. The buildings were covered with plaster and their elevations usually painted in bright colours: from shades of beige to shades of grey and sandy brown, and sometimes even rich colours were used, examples of which are the currently non-existent buildings of the “Blue Villa” at Bialik Street designed by Genia Averbuch and the “Red House” at Hayarkon Street. Some buildings were decorated in fancy ways; particularly interesting were the architectural details of arcades, entrances and stairways, which were often finished off with decorative terrazzo.

The spacious Tel Aviv was supposed to be the opposite of the Arabic tightness and untidiness. The aim of the Zionists was to create a place *full of energy and vigour, beautiful and built in accordance with Hebrew law. The new Jewish city was supposed to naturally dominate over the neighbouring Jaffa and become the hub of business, industry and trade, as well as leisure, health, sports, tourism and administration* [10, p. 195].

Adam LeBor [9] claims that the entangled histories of Jaffa and Tel Aviv can be seen as a metaphor for the contemporary history of the two nations: in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Jaffa, which at the time was the hub of Palestine’s economy and Arabic culture, was inhabited by very few Jews, while today, the old Jaffa is merely a tiny enclave in Tel Aviv, a tourist attraction of sorts, with the city’s population reaching almost half a million inhabitants, less than 5% of whom are Arabs. Due to the high prices of real estate in the snobbish Jaffa, the Arabic population inhabits the neighbouring district of Ajami, but even there, they are gradually being pushed out. The ratio changed not only in terms of space and demography; the importance and symbolism of both cities, merged into one urban organism in 1950, changed as well: the old Arabic Jaffa became the *picturesque, artistic neighbourhood where you can escape the hustle and bustle of the jam-packed Tel Aviv*<sup>1</sup>, while Tel Aviv, which was meant to be a clean and hygienic, European-style antidote to the mess of the oriental Jaffa, turned into a noisy, partly shabby and dirty cosmopolitan metropolis.

### 3. The use of colour to shape the city image

In the 1970s, South Beach was a run-down residential district inhabited by pensioners of mainly Jewish origin. The wealthy ones moved north, while the poor ones stayed there without any hope for a better life. American historian M. Baron Stofik once called this place “God’s waiting room” [12, p. 128]. The old buildings were either falling into ruin or were gradually demolished to make room for building investments planned along the seacoast. At the same time, drugs, crime and poverty were running rampant in the streets.

This is the city that Barbara Baer Capitman, art historian, journalist and urban activist from Chicago, saw when she arrived in 1973. When her husband, a professor of economics at the local Florida International University, died two years later, she

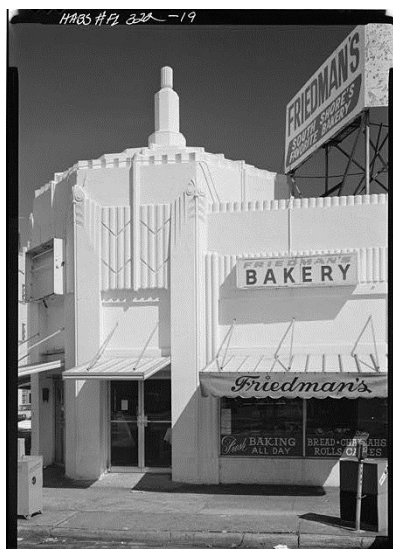


Fig. 3. Friedman's Bakery (on the corner of 7th St. and Washington Ave.) circa 1980, before being painted with Leonard Horowitz's design. Source: Library of Congress, HABS FLA, 13-MIAM, 5-19

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by: [www.izrael.badacz.org/turystyka/telaviv\\_jaffa.html](http://www.izrael.badacz.org/turystyka/telaviv_jaffa.html) (access: 15.08.2017).

focused all her attention on the protection of the architectural heritage of Miami Beach. She received help from Leonard Horowitz, a student of architecture from New York who was fascinated by Art Deco architecture. Together, they founded the Miami Design Preservation League in 1976. She created an inventory list of period buildings [2] and made sure that in 1979 the Miami Beach Architectural Historical District – now popularly known as “Art Deco District” – was listed in the National Register of Historic Places. It was the first urban complex built in the USA in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to be officially recognised as a historical monument.

Capitman was a fighter who did not make any compromises. She led demonstrations and protests and she organised sit-in protests to prevent the demolition of buildings she viewed as valuable. Her distinctive, screechy voice and high-handed manner did not gain her many friends, nevertheless, she was consistent and persistent. In 1980, she invited a famous avant-garde artist, Andy Warhol, to Miami Beach and gave him a tour of the historic buildings. This was the first event to attract the wider public’s attention to the architecture of Miami Beach, but the demolitions kept on; already a month after Warhol left Miami Beach, Boulevard Hotel was taken down, as was The New York Hotel a year after. It was only the premiere of the cult TV series *Miami Vice* in 1984 that brought a halt to this destructive trend. Miami was then the centre of drug trafficking and the cocaine trade, which was the central issue of many of the show’s plots. The series was shot on the streets of Miami, against the backdrop of Art Deco buildings on South Beach, and the show’s intro was inspired by the neon signs of the local hotels. The dynamic film shot with a hand-held camera brought fame to the actors and the city of Miami Beach alike. Jumping on the show’s bandwagon, Capitman and Horowitz travelled all across the United States to promote Art Deco architecture and convince the Americans see its value. In 1988, Capitman published a book *Deco Delights: Preserving The Beauty and Joy of Miami Beach Architecture* and in 1994, a few years after her death, another important publication was put into print – *Rediscovering Art Deco: A Nationwide Tour of Architectural Delights* – which she had written with Michael D. Kinerk and Dennis W. Wilhelm. In 1996, the central part of Tenth Street in South Miami Beach, between Washington Avenue and Ocean Drive, was named after her [5].

The key tool used in the renovation of the historic buildings of Miami Beach was the colour palette created by Leonard Horowitz in 1980 and applied for the first time during the renovation of the Friedman’s Bakery. Horowitz drew inspiration from the colours of the sand, the sea and the sky at sunset. His ideas were supported by the city council, which allowed him to carry out his

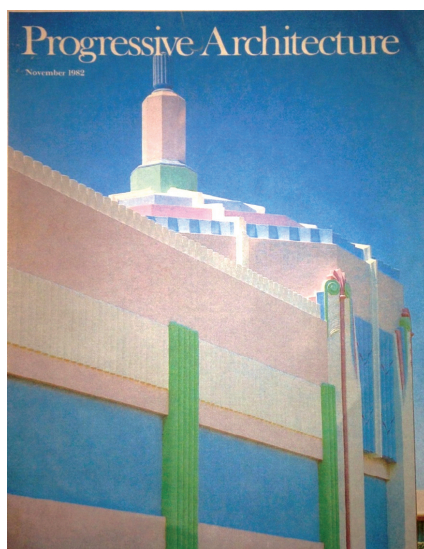


Fig. 4. The cover of Progressive Architecture magazine from 1982 showing Friedman’s Bakery after it was painted according to Leonard Horowitz’s design. Source: <http://wlrn.org/post/meet-man-behind-all-those-south-beach-pastels>

first project. It involved repainting the white building with Friedman's Bakery at 686 Washington Avenue using a pastel colour palette. The initial reactions were rather critical: a woman passing by the newly renovated building commented: *This is not us. This is not what I remember for as long as I've lived here. Deco schmeco.* The most pointed remark said: *I hate that building. It looks like a whorehouse* [6]. However, when in 1982 a picture of the renovated elevation of Friedman's Bakery made the cover of an influential magazine *Progressive Architecture*, the new style of Miami Beach gained enormous popularity and spread across the streets of the city. The pastel-coloured, geometric Art Deco buildings with distinctive architectural details reflected the postmodern trend in American culture and architecture and attracted a number of celebrities, fashion photographers, as well as film crews to Miami Beach. Horowitz died of AIDS at the age of 43, a year after the release of the documentary film *Pastel Paradise* depicting his accomplishments and the history of South Beach renovation. A person who used to be considered an eccentric shaped the contemporary landscape of Miami Beach, the international style symbol, where over 150 buildings have already been repainted on the basis of his pastel colour palette. The once declining city which had been home to both pensioners and mobsters transformed into a fashionable, bustling resort swarming with tourists from all over the world.



Fig. 5. The Horowitz's Pastel Palette created in 1980 by Leonard Horowitz. Source: <http://wlrn.org/post/meet-man-behind-all-those-south-beach-pastels>

Israel's modernist architecture was discovered in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to an exhibition held in Tel Aviv in 1984 entitled *White City. International Style Architecture in Israel*. The exhibition was accompanied by a catalogue written by its curator, an Israeli



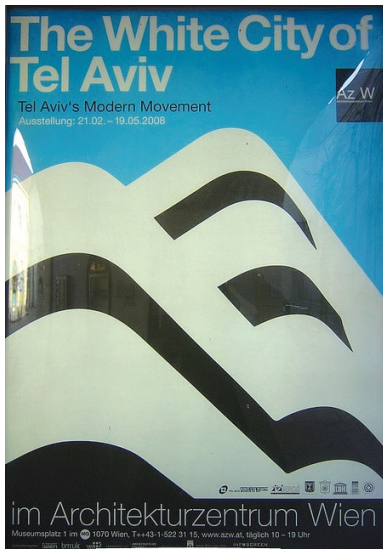
architecture historian Michael Lewin, in which he describes the development of the agglomeration of modernist buildings in Tel Aviv as the symbolic birth of Israeli architecture. It cannot be stressed enough how important the exhibition and Lewin's short publication were to the great surge of fascination with modernist architecture in Israel and the beginning of the world-wide success of the term 'White City'.

As a result of the exhibition, the topic of International Style architecture in Israel was raised by popular magazines. Esther Zandberg, the only architecture critic at that time, presented the modernist heritage of Tel Aviv in a series of articles under a shared title *White Box*. At that time, the buildings erected in the 1930s were gradually falling into ruin, being rebuild, altered or demolished to make room for new projects. Zanberg's writings had a huge impact on the way architecture and city planning were perceived by regular citizens, contributed to raising historical awareness and inspired protests against the demolition of the old buildings for the purposes of redevelopment, which started appearing in Tel Aviv in the 1960s and 1970s.

Another person who substantially contributed to the preservation of modernist architecture was Nitza Metzger-Szmuk, a conservator-restorer educated in Italy. Soon upon her return to Israel in 1990, she was offered the position of the city conservator of historic buildings and was put in charge of cataloguing and preserving buildings put up in Tel Aviv during the 1930s. She was an unwearied promoter of modernism who gave lectures and organised exhibitions; she also authored a monumental, bilingual book *Dwelling on the Dunes: Tel Aviv – Modern Movements and Bauhaus Ideals* published in 2004.



Fig. 6. Renovated buildings on Rothschild Boulevard in Tel Aviv, 2014 (photo by the author)



Thus, International Style architecture became the official element of Israel's national heritage and a must-see stop in all tourist programmes, reinforcing the myth of Tel Aviv as the “white city built on sand” and concealing – conveniently for the Zionists – the centuries-long, colourful history of the neighbouring Arabic Jaffa [15, pp. 11-12].

Fig. 7. The poster for “The White City of Tel Aviv” exhibition, held in Vienna in 2008. Source: <https://pl.pinterest.com/pin/214061788513159861/>

#### 4. Conclusion

The new narratives developed in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century based on sophisticated colour schemes had ground-breaking implications for the contemporary history of Miami Beach and Tel Aviv. Not only did they contribute to shaping an appealing media image of the cities and to develop the interest of public opinion, but also led to increasing tourist traffic, reviving the economy, boosting real estate prices and, finally, to transforming the landscape of both cities. This is because the schemes were actually put into practice: the centre of Tel Aviv turned in part into “the white city”, as many modernist houses were repainted white, and the majority of historic Art Deco buildings in Miami Beach were painted in keeping with the pastel colour palette designed by Leonard Horowitz. In that way, the cities started actually resembling, to a certain extent, the legends that had been built around them.

Creating the pastel-coloured myth of Miami Beach was aimed at bringing a halt to the surge of demolitions and inspire a revitalisation of decaying buildings, but it also brought about the city's economic revival and sparked the public opinion's interest in the short, yet prolific and successful style in American architecture, namely the local variation on Art Deco. During the wave of popularity of the city's architecture in the 1980s, Miami Beach became a style icon, the summer capital of Florida and a major tourist destination.

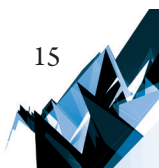
The contemporary myth of Tel Aviv as the “White City”, apart from marketing and economic significance, has ideological and political meaning, is supposed to contrast with the dirty and “black” Arabic Jaffa. Sharon Rotbard, an Israeli architect and critic, writes: “to change the city, we must first change its history” [15, p. 4]. The Israelis are therefore rewriting Tel Aviv's history anew, referring predominantly to its 20<sup>th</sup>-century, modernist roots, erasing its colonial past, diminishing the importance of the centuries-long history of Jaffa and avoiding any mention of its previous Arabic inhabitants. The old Jaffa, stripped of its original character,

turned into a themed imitation for tourists and a culinary centre of the cosmopolitan Tel Aviv, which is currently advertised as the world capital of entertainment and nightlife.

The changes that occurred in both Miami Beach and Tel Aviv shared a similar, distinctive rhythm and dynamic: after the stagnation of the 1960s and 1970s, they both saw a period of revitalisation and growth, which later led to massive commercialisation and gentrification. This applies particularly to the historic districts and the coastlines: South Beach along Ocean Drive and Collins Avenue in Miami Beach and the central neighbourhood in Tel Aviv along Rothschild Boulevard and the old Jaffa's coastline. During the revitalisation of the cities, the major impulse for change was brought by manipulation on its original colour schemes. As a result, the cities not only reshaped their images, but also reconstructed their original identities.

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