



Israel, Frank (1945-1996)

by Ira Tattelman

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One of the most extravagantly gifted architects of his generation, Franklin D. Israel imbibed the influence of the great modernists but developed his own distinctive vision that translated the urban experience into physical form.

Israel was born in New York in 1945 and grew up in New Jersey. He studied architecture at the University of Pennsylvania, Yale University, and Columbia University, where he received his Master of Architecture degree in 1971.

After traveling to Italy as winner of the Rome Prize in Architecture and working on the East Coast, Israel moved to Los Angeles in 1979. He taught at the School of Architecture at the University of California at Los Angeles and designed sets for Paramount movies such as *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979) and *Night Games* (1979).

Israel went on to design private houses for a number of prominent gay and straight Hollywood figures and offices for independent film production companies. One of the "Santa Monica" architects, he died on June 10, 1996, aged 50, of AIDS-related complications.

Israel was open to various approaches to design and aware of the urban traditions to be found in Los Angeles, New York, and Rome. Influenced by great modernists such as Rudolf Schindler and Frank Lloyd Wright and inspired by California's free-form, vernacular buildings, he used fragmented forms that echo both the shifting, unstable landscape and the fractured texture of the cityscape.

Israel believed in additive design and he frequently juxtaposed innovative structures with existing buildings. By the time he died, his work commented on and contributed to the creative and heterogeneous culture of Los Angeles.

Israel was responsible for the headquarters of Propaganda Films (1988), Limelight Productions (1991), and Virgin Records (1991), as well as the Art Pavilion in Beverly Hills (1991) and the Fine Arts Facility at the University of California at Riverside (1994). Among the private homes he designed were those of Robert Altman, Joel Grey, and Howard Goldberg and his partner Jim Bean.

The Goldberg-Bean residence (1991) was designed as a series of pavilions linked by a long, blue curvilinear wall. The corridor functions like an urban street, offering unexpected views and experiences. Each of the pavilions faces toward a specific view of downtown Los Angeles, Hollywood, or Santa Monica. Seeking to bridge the gaps in scale between hallway, individual building, and urban context, Israel designed "cities within," interior spaces with variety, color, and surprise.

Inspired by the anxieties and tensions of contemporary life, Israel created work that is bold and edgy, beautiful and challenging, abstract and inventive. He translated the urban experience, including a loss of equilibrium, into physical form.

Israel also used basic materials in imaginative ways. For example, in the Goldberg-Bean residence he placed lead coated copper panels near mustard-yellow pigmented stucco and juxtaposed fir plywood with redwood battens against concrete block walls.

Israel's 1996 retrospective exhibit at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art served as a guide to his body of work. The sculptural environment he designed for the exhibit created ambiguities between wall and ceiling, scale and function, flat and folded, myth and reality. Mirroring both the chaos of the city and its pockets for repose, simple forms collided with each other, opening up new spaces to be explored.

Once diagnosed with HIV, Israel worked hard to be imaginative and distinctive. He took greater risks in the profession and began educating people about living with AIDS. He was survived by his long-time companion, Thomas Haase.

Israel attributed some of his imaginative freedom and openness as a designer to his experience as a gay man. His life and work, the subject of several books and articles, remain provocative and a source of inspiration for other architects.

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Ira Tattelman is an architect, artist, and independent scholar living in Washington, D.C. He has published in such books and journals as *Queer Frontiers: Millennial Geographies*, *Genders and Generations*, *Public Sex*, *Gay Space*, *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance*, *The Best of The Harvard Gay & Lesbian Review*, *Lambda Book Report* and *Journal of Homosexuality*.