



Michael Gorbatjov said in his speech at the inauguration of Bet Gabriel: "I came the same route as Jesus, but he came as the world's first communist and I come as the last."



Photo: Per Nagel



BET GABRIEL

Culture- and Peace Center at the Sea of Galilee

**Architects: Ulrik Plesner and Dan Wajnman,
Arthur Spector and Micha Amisar**

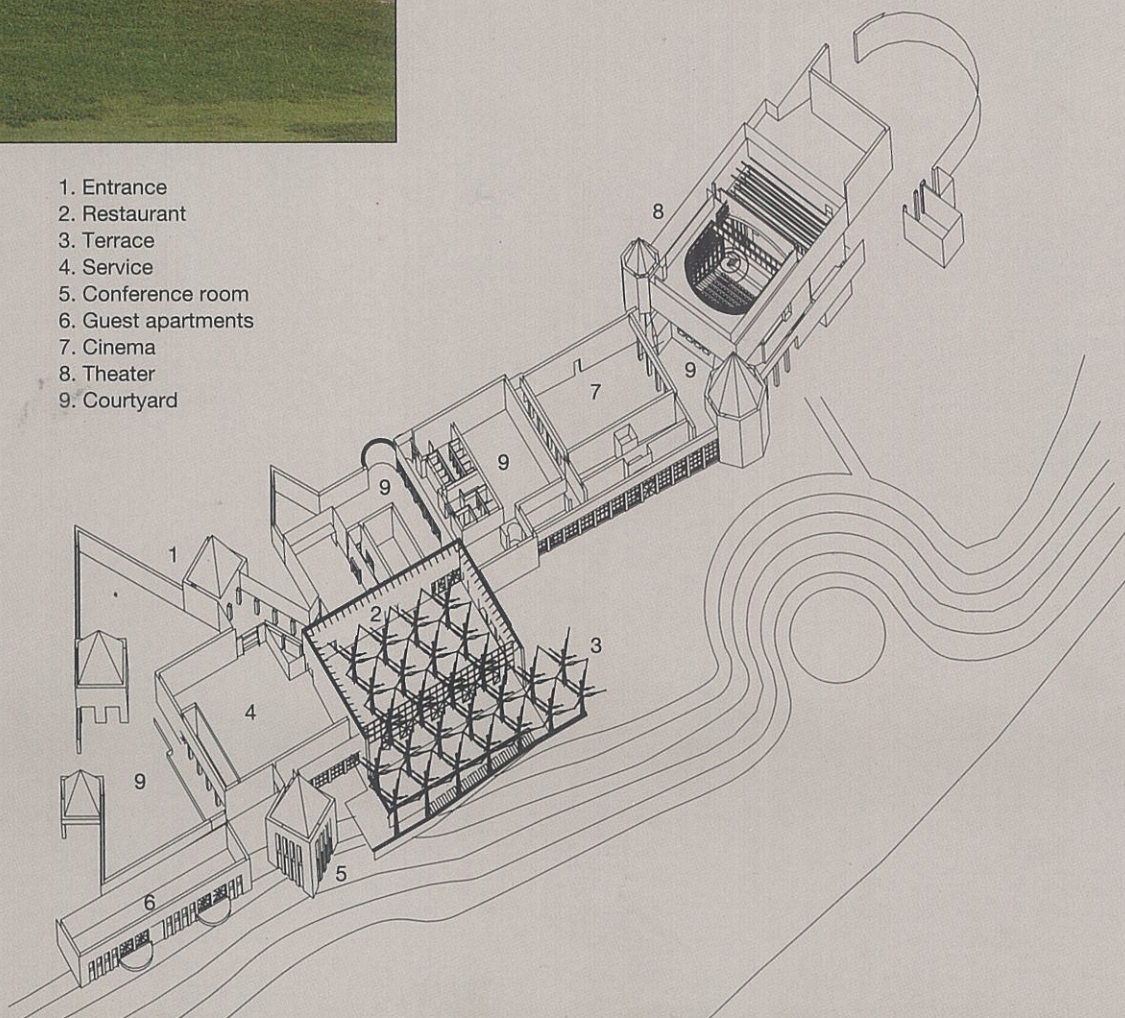
On the lush banks of the Sea of Galilee, which lies 200 meters below sea level in northern Israel, some of the first kibbutzim were established. The area has a great natural beauty and is located between Galilee and the Golan, with Tiberias as the main city, which at the time of Jesus was a completely new town.

The Bet Gabriel cultural center was built on the southern bank of the lake. The scheme consists of an inner main street and a group of richly varied buildings, which give the impression of a solid urban structure.

This new gathering place was bestowed on the 30,000 local inhabitants by Gita Sherover in memory of her son Gabriel, who died too early in life.

Several years earlier, Mrs. Sherover made a magnificent first memorial for her son: The Gabriel Sherover Promenade, which is a wonderful garden and promenade on a mountainside in Jerusalem opposite the old walled city.

1. Entrance
2. Restaurant
3. Terrace
4. Service
5. Conference room
6. Guest apartments
7. Cinema
8. Theater
9. Courtyard



The building has many small "oases" in the form of garden courts with lush tropical plants. In this courtyard, there is a curved wall decorated with a relief by Yudit Meir.





On the edge of the Sea of Galilee, the architects were asked to create a high-quality framework for the activities that meant so much to Gabriel: Dance, theater, film, music and delicate food. Primarily a place where people can meet, talk and enjoy life together.

The building lies at the place on the lake that Gabriel loved to spend his time, a place of great and captivating spiritual beauty.

Outwardly, the scheme seems quite modest: closed walls that join the inner courtyards with the various cultural functions such as the 300-seat theater, the cinema for 100 spectators, the large restaurant, administration and the three guest apartments for visiting artists. Along the inner street are the library, exhibition hall, book shop, and a special peace room, from where there is a view toward Israel on one side and Syria on the other.

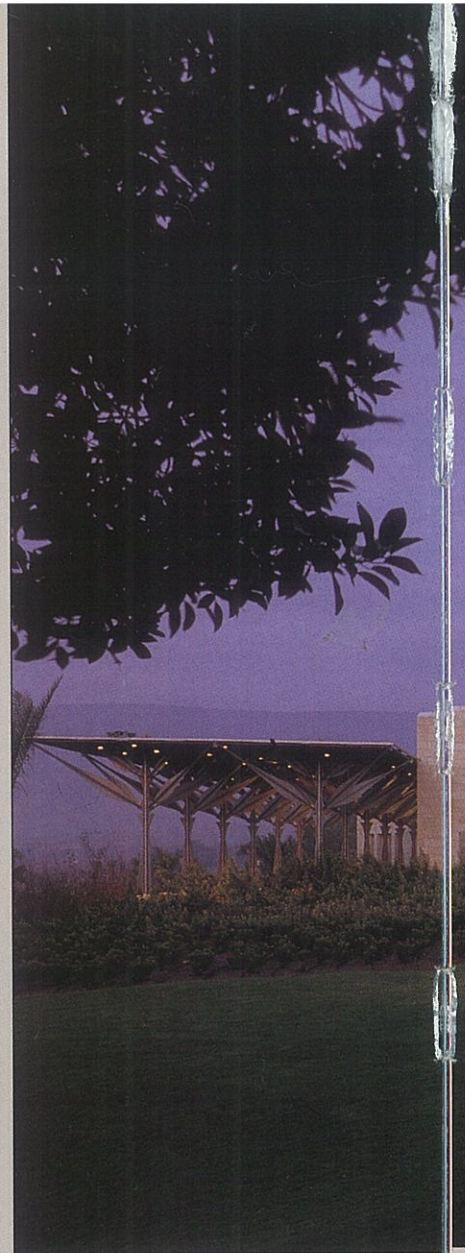
This room waits expectantly for the signing of the peace treaty with Syria.

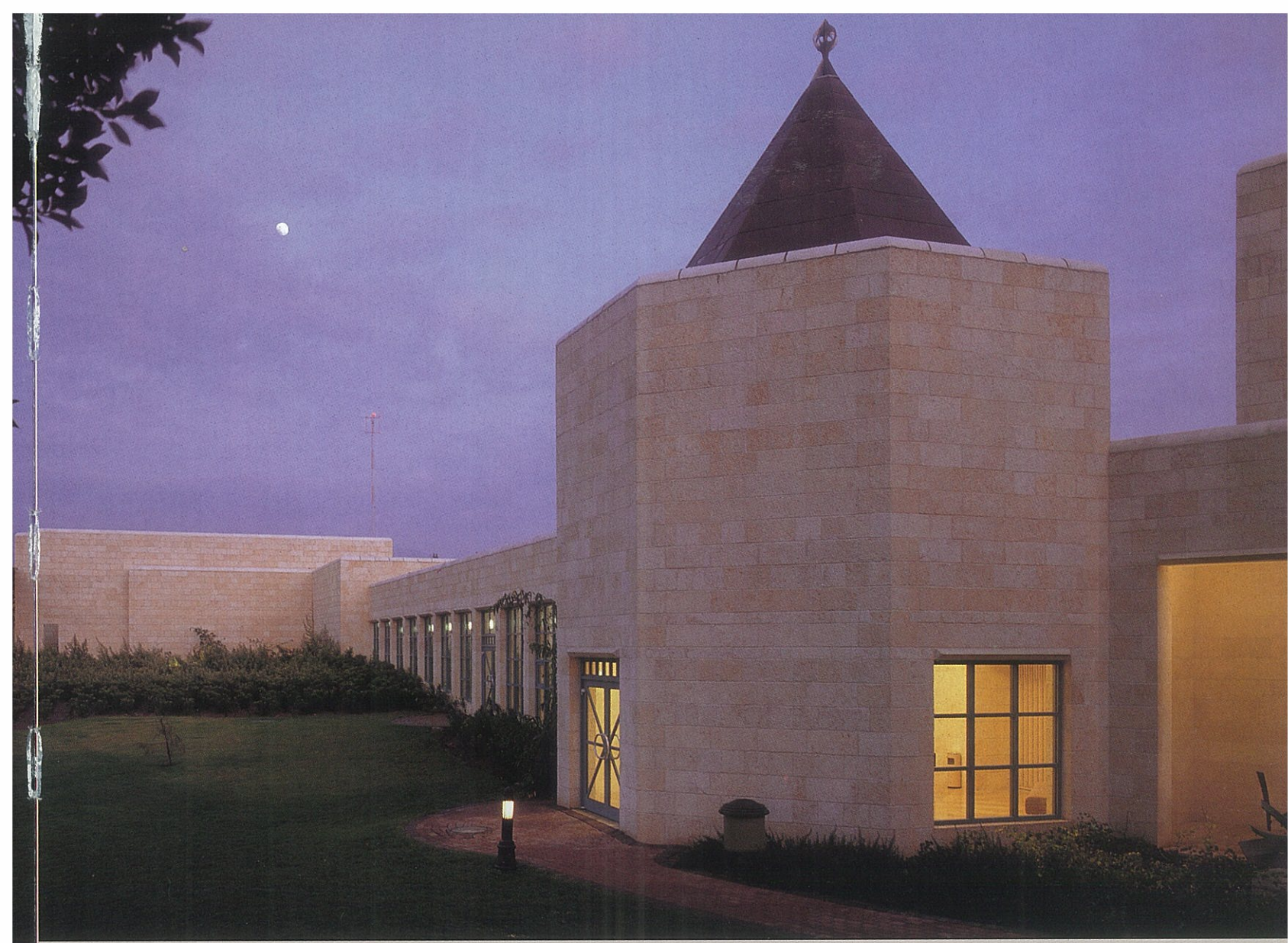
In the area between the buildings and the tall date palms along the banks of the lake, the architects have

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On the grassy slope running down toward the sea, is an amphitheater where hundreds of spectators can enjoy outdoor events.

The long peaceful "street" that runs through the length of the building has large, mullioned windows, which offer a constant view of the Sea of Galilee as one wanders through the center.





created a fantastic, almost scenographic "Magic Forest". These enchanted woods are constructed of galvanized steel, which gives some exciting color and textural effects. These "trees" support the perforated roof deck, which creates a fascinating mixture of light and shadow. A wonderful screen from the sun on this hot, cauldron-like site.

The steel forest forms a dreamlike transition between in and out, between the glass-enclosed restaurant and the terrace. The glass repeats the forest as a mirror image. It is a new experience with a strong artistic effect.

Steel and glass are present, but basically the center is built of the beautiful, pale Hebron stone from the Judean Mountains. Each stone was meticulously hand hewn and after great consideration, given its own

place in the walls of the scheme. The light causes the stone to radiate, almost pure white, however the colors actually range from pale honey to almost red, an enchanting textural effect. This stone has been employed according to the ancient artisan traditions, where stones of varying size can be combined. This makes the walls a distinctively powerful motif.

Bet Gabriel exudes high quality in every way and the architects were given a free hand in the design of the main form, the rich variation in the different buildings, the wonderful lushness of the courtyard gardens and the sense of enclosure produced by the walls. Dora Gad was responsible for the interior design. There is a promenade along the lake and an amphitheater in the park, which also encour-

The conference room has a view over the sea and the Golan Heights. There are hopes that a peace treaty between Syria and Israel will be signed here some day.

Bottom this page and opposite page. The "column forest" is a strong and creative architectural element in the building. With its galvanized steel "treetops", it supports the roof over the restaurant and terrace.



ages outdoor activities. Despite the somewhat unusual, exotic impression a northern European senses on the first visit, it still has a pleasant, homelike ambience. The architects have meticulously cultivated the theme, maintaining a high quality and have completed the scheme in such a convincing way that it has an air of seduction. Both Plesner and Wajnman are Danish architects, and this work method, which we in moments of great optimism consider to be Scandinavian, is evident in many of Ulrik Plesner's buildings, no matter how far from Denmark they may lie. Another example of this is his extensive work in Sri Lanka, reviewed earlier in *Living Architecture* No. 5.

The scheme covers 5,000 sqm, and there is a lively complexity between the closed wall facing the road and the open magical forest facing the lake. The forest seems to grow outwards, rooting itself in the surroundings. But the surroundings are also appraised through this rare for-



est, which has the same function as the columns in a temple. It is through these tree trunks that one views the majesty of the lake, the inner allure of the buildings and the distant mountains. The "Magic Forest" gives the scheme its distinctive and strong personality, a contrast between rational doings and irrational dreams. In this way the forest makes an artistic intrusion into the building's real function: a place for art and a home for artistic development.

Ulrik Plesner has expressed it clearly: a place for the soul and a good cup of coffee!

Bet Gabriel is a convincing example of what one could call "Value through Design", the concept that an object of quality will continue to increase in value in terms of experience and joy.

The center lies near the place where Jesus walked on the waters. He came across from Tiberias, sailing toward the site of Bet Gabriel, a place characterized by strong winds that suddenly blow up, churning the waters, only to disap-





pear with the same suddenness. British researchers have discovered that during these wind storms, the water in the lake can be forced 200 to 300 meters away from the shore. They propose that it may have been during this natural phenomenon, that Jesus walked across the shallow waters. However, this biblical account naturally has a far greater import, another reality, and in this sense the Bible is like good architecture: It always hides something more, something that should be seen with the heart.

There is always a well in the desert – and here it is called Bet Gabriel.

Henrik Sten Møller

