



The living room of architect Alex Meitlis and artist Ivo Bisignano's penthouse loft in a former industrial building in the Florentin neighborhood of Tel Aviv, Israel. The Eames chair and ottoman are vintage, and the shelf is topped with a collection of Qajar dynasty ceramics from Iran. The sculptures are by Bisignano, and the painting is by Ido Bar-El.

**OPPOSITE:** The loft's design was inspired by Tel Aviv's trove of Bauhaus architecture; the home is filled with artwork by Bisignano and the couple's artist friends.



# FROM BAUHAUS TO PENTHOUSE

In Tel Aviv, a creative couple's live-work loft is a paean to the city's international style.

BY KAREN CHERNICK PRODUCED BY INGRID ABRAMOVITCH  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY SHAI EPSTEIN



**W**HEN AN ANCIENT CAVE COLLAPSED IN A PARK OUTSIDE of Jerusalem, Italian artist Ivo Bisignano and his husband, architect Alex Meitlis, knew that meant at least one thing: They would be sharing their Tel Aviv loft with a collection of wooden roommates for a while longer. It was Meitlis who had convinced Bisignano to exhibit his sculptures in a Judaeon-era grotto. But in the fall of 2019, before the pieces were installed, the cave collapsed. “For the next three months, we were sleeping with them,” says Bisignano, a former fashion director for *Vogue Italia*, of his towering figures. And then the pandemic hit, throwing the couple off their usual rhythm of three weeks in Tel Aviv and two in London, where Meitlis oversees the design of restaurants for his longtime friend, Israeli chef Yotam Ottolenghi. For months, he and Bisignano quarantined in their loft with their timber houseguests taking over the living room, terrace, and studio. They did eventually get

their sunlit breakfast nook back after securing another cave; the exhibition, “Human Forms,” opened last August in Beit Guvrin national park, a man-made quarry dating back to about 112 B.C. For this creative couple, life is always an adventure—starting with the loft they share in a former industrial building in Florentin, a gritty neighborhood in south Tel Aviv. It’s been Meitlis’s home for more than three decades. As a young architect, he rented a tiny studio in the 1950s structure for his nascent practice. “My god,” he thought then, gazing out the window at

the bustling streetscape, “how lucky I would be if I could afford to buy this place.” Soon, he did. Then the one next door. Within a few years, he owned all nine workshops on the top floor, tearing down walls to create a penthouse loft. Still, when Bisignano arrived from Milan five years ago, his welcome via a concrete courtyard tagged with layers of graffiti made him think he’d made a horrible mistake. “I took the elevator, I said what the *hell*,” Bisignano admits. “Then I opened the door, and it was a completely different point of view.”

The steel-framed windows are all that remain from the original building. Meitlis started with an L-shaped blank slate and fashioned it into a live-work apartment: One branch is filled with bedrooms while the other houses offices for Studio Alex Meitlis, his architecture and design firm. The two arms meet at a chameleonic corner room, where, pre-COVID, an oversize wooden table was used to host meetings by day and dinner parties by night. The space opens in all four directions, including onto a leafy terrace.

Glass steel-framed doors outfit every threshold, accentuating a sense of infinity amplified by the strategic use of white on every surface, from the ceilings to the Carrara marble floors. Meitlis loves how white glows in the Mediterranean light; it’s also a wink at the Bauhaus architecture for which Tel Aviv is renowned.

The loft’s fluid identity hinges on this feeling of boundlessness between home and office, art and design, inside and outside. “You don’t know where it’s finished, the space,” says Bisignano, who originally trained as an architect. “Is this the bathroom? No. This is the bathroom *and*. This is the bedroom *and*. There is no limit.”

Indeed, the stark minimalism of the penthouse is what convinced Ottolenghi to adopt a similarly modernist style for his restaurants in London. “Alex’s Tel Aviv apartment was, right from the start, a brilliant showcase of the power of long, clean lines and outstandingly beautiful objects in making a space that is both welcoming and striking,” says the chef.

When he moved in, Bisignano doubled down on the creative energy of the space, adding an art gallery and sculpture studio to an already multihyphenate list. His artworks are everywhere, and together the pair has designed the majority of their home’s furniture. They are constantly tweaking and creating: The furnishings they made together on Bisignano’s arrival are already being swapped out in favor of new bronze seating. There’s also an array of artworks by notable Israeli artists—from Ido Bar-El to Moshe Gershuni—many of whom Meitlis has known as friends, teachers, or classmates.

The neighborhood, too, is constantly evolving. Today it’s a funky enclave where young graffiti artists spray stencils in the hopes of becoming Insta-famous, with many tagging the concrete entryway to the couple’s building. It’s a far cry from the botanical sgraffito plasterwork that the couple recently restored when they converted a 19th-century Florentine palazzo into the Hotel Calimala.

But on the inside, their aerie is a pristine backdrop for work and play. And that gallery-like flexibility is their idea of heaven. “It’s a white box, at the end of the day,” Meitlis says. “And our personal Eden.” ■

PORTRAIT: LIRAN SHARABI

**RIGHT:** Bisignano (*left*) and Meitlis in front of an artwork by Eitan Zektser in the living room. A pair of Indian rosewood pedestals hold papier-mâché sculptures by Bisignano. **OPPOSITE:** Meitlis designed the living room’s Indian rosewood sofas, armchair, and cocktail tables. The 1907 chairs (*left*) are by Josef Hoffmann, and the wooden sculptures on the shelf are by Bisignano.





**ABOVE:** The dining room's Efraim Kastiel & Sons table is made of a solid tree trunk, and the chairs are Meitlis's prototypes for London's Nopi restaurant. A Pinchas Cohen Gan artwork hangs above a custom oak console, the chandelier is by XAL, and the works on paper (left) are by Dorit Bearach. **LEFT:** Drawings by Meitlis and artworks by Igaël Tumarkin line the walls of a private gallery. The Eames chair is from Herman Miller. **OPPOSITE:** Bisignano's studio is filled with his sculptures, including brass pieces suspended from the ceiling. A Niels Diffrient for Humanscale chair pulls up to a custom desk. The Syrian cabinet is from a flea market in East Jerusalem.





**OPPOSITE, FROM TOP:** In the primary bath, the tub is by Efraim Kastiel & Sons, and the sculpture is by Bisignano. The bathroom's vanity and floors are in Carrara marble, the sink and fittings are by Duravit, and the mirror is custom. **ABOVE:** The primary bedroom has a custom bed in Indian rosewood. The heart lamp (left) is by Ingo Maurer, the papier-mâché sculpture (right) is by Bisignano, and the framed artwork is by Moshe Gershuni. For details, see Resources.