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Russell Langer
What we would need
from a Prime Minister
Burnham [p21](#)

Happy 100th birthday to the king of comedy, Mel Brooks

Howard Jacobson celebrates the film legend – and recalls the day Brooks told him his ‘funniest-ever’ anecdote

COMMENT



► SO THE 2,000-year-old man has made it 5 per cent of the way. The rest should be plain sailing.

I agreed to interview him when he was barely 80 on the understanding that he would retell, face to face, his funniest anecdote – the funniest anecdote – ever.

It concerned his years working at the busiest Jewish hotel in the Borscht Belt when he was a teenager.

His job was to fish elderly Jewish men out of the swimming pool with a giant net. Dead elderly Jewish men. Don't go away. It gets funnier.

The men in question had stepped out onto the pool terrace having enjoyed a meal that was gargantuan even by Catskills standards.

They looked up at the Jewish moon, opened wide their arms, and sang with all the joy of being alive, loving their wives, wearing a tuxe-

do and remembering what they'd just eaten.

They all sang the same song. *Dancing in the Dark*. But without exception they began on too high a note. By the time they got to the second verse it was either sing it soprano or have a heart attack and fall into the pool.

Naturally, they fell into the pool. Hence the young Mel Brooks fishing them out with a net.

Not only did Mel Brooks speak this story into my tape-recorder, he sang *Dancing in the Dark* as the elderly Jews did. How I didn't fall into my plate of sour cream and blinis I don't know. But I haven't dared touch the tape recorder since.

The best comedy is hyperbolic, at once hard-hearted and soft-hearted, just a little bit silly, just a little bit offensive, and as black as hell.

I will have the irrefutable proof of that from its greatest exponent on my tape-recorder for another 1,900 years.

► SEE P8-9



Comedy's 'greatest exponent': Mel Brooks at a Bafta fellowship lunch in London in 2017

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

Starmer hails 'ripping out' antisemitism from Labour as key achievement

BY LORIN BELL-CROSS
POLITICAL EDITOR

► SIR KEIR Starmer used his resignation speech on Monday to hail the action he took against antisemitism in the Labour Party as one of his proudest achievements.

His address outside No 10 came amid feverish speculation about his future following the return to Westminster of Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham.

The prime minister defended his time as Labour leader and said that his actions got the party back into power following repeated electoral defeats under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership.

"Six years ago, I inherited a Labour Party that was politically, financially and morally bankrupt," he said.

"I was told, time and time again, that my party was finished. That we were consigned to history. That a majority at the general election, let alone a land-

slide majority, was impossible. But we proved those people wrong.

"Because we changed our party, ripping out the poison of antisemitism, restoring trust in the economy, defence and national security. And becoming a party that once again stood with, not against, our national flag.

"The hard work of change was with a singular purpose: not power for power's sake, but to change Britain for the better."

Starmer went on to defend his achievements in power since taking office just under two years ago, including "the fastest fall in NHS waiting lists for 17 years, the biggest improvement in rights for workers and renters in a generation, the biggest uplift in defence spending since the Cold War, small boat crossings falling, half a million children lifted out of poverty".

However, the outgoing Labour leader acknowledged that the question now

being asked by his party was whether he was "best placed to lead us into the next general election".

"I have heard the answer of my parliamentary party to that question, and I accept that answer with good grace. Every decision I have taken has been about putting the country I love first. That is why I will resign as leader of the Labour Party."

► CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

New Homes & Interiors

BY ANTHEA GERRIE

THEY WERE born on opposite sides of the world, but Alon Baranowitz and Irene Kronenberg found each other in Tel Aviv. Moving swiftly from workplace neighbours to professional collaborators, they became not only business but life partners – an architect and a designer who constantly find the borders of their expertise overlapping. “When we first met, I’d ask him about architectural details for my projects; he’d consult me about materials and now we don’t separate what we do into categories,” says Irene, who left her native Uruguay at 16 with her mother and arrived in Israel by way of Madrid. Irene made aliyah before her 18th birthday, and Baranowitz and Kronenberg now have a Madrid office employing three and a Tel Aviv mothership with 12.

“We do most of our European projects out of Madrid,” says Irene, while Alon explains it’s word of mouth that has seen them grow from a domestic practice to one with projects in several different countries.

“We designed a bar and nightclub in Tel Aviv for clients who wanted it to feel international, not like anything that was already there,” says Irene. “Being good learners, we flew to New York and spent three nights, each night in 24 different bars and clubs. It was pre-mobile phones so we couldn’t take pictures, so we made sketches to understand the energy of what was going on.”

Alon adds: “The Tel Aviv project was so successful that someone in the UK saw it and called us asking to design his hotel, which made the cover of [hospitality trade publication] *Sleeper Magazine*. And the rest is history.”

In Israel they’ve done everything from flats and houses to the Sacks fashion chain, several hotels and the Pastel restaurant and Helena wine bar at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art. Further afield, AME is a Los Angeles jewellery shop resembling an art gallery, while The Cube is a technicolour transition of a television game show into a real-life gaming and entertainment space in Canary Wharf.

Also in London is the Mr Porter steakhouse, bar and lounge beneath the Hilton Park Lane. Add to this hotels in Ibiza and Amsterdam, a Barcelona restaurant and Paphos beach club and you still haven’t touched the sides of their amazingly varied repertoire.

Yet there is no signature style which distinguishes their work – and that’s deliberate: “We tailor every project we do to our clients, and they are so different that 40 jobs in our portfolio look as if they were done by 40 different architects,” says Alon.

When the pair met, he was already well-established in his career as a bit of a nepo baby. “I was born and bred in Tel Aviv to a prominent family in the real-estate business. I spent my school vacations on building sites, helping with concreting, flooring, plaster or whatever – learning about many different aspects of the building process.”

“There was always money on the table, which I realised the importance of when, with poor grades in maths and physics, I failed to be able to get into architecture school in Israel.”

It was a happy development, he says, because in place of the maths-focused

Building a life together



Projects by Alon Baranowitz and Irene Kronenberg (middle row, left). Top: Helena wine bar, Tel Aviv. Middle row, right: Amsterdam townhouse. Above: Bar area at Mr Porter steakhouse, Park Lane. Above right: Tel Aviv urban retreat centred on Douglas fir. Right: The Cube, Canary Wharf

studies that would have been forced on him at home he ended up at New York’s Pratt Institute, which took a more artistic approach to the architecture he had wanted to study since childhood.

“I arrived there with a lot of practical building knowledge no-one had, not even my professors. They asked me to think in a very abstract way about

architecture, which was hard in the beginning but I am really grateful to my parents for sending me there.”

When he returned to Israel five years later his family invited him to open his own studio and start building for them. “I had all the work in the world I could get, not only for the family business but other people. Israel is a small place and our name was well known.”

Irene, by contrast, having immigrated in 1973, was building up her own practice following a design course at the Technion.

“After working from home for a while I felt strong enough to rent a space in the Florentin [the creatives’ quarter]. There were many artists, carpenters and metalworkers’ workshops at that time, but I was doing important resi-

dential projects and worrying whether it was the right area for my clientele.

“When I mentioned my concerns to the owner of the building he told me there was an architect on another floor I could ask how it was for an architectural practice. That’s how I met Alon 34 years ago.” Over two years they’d meet in the public spaces of their building and work long hours on projects before becoming a professional partnership in 1994. “Then we realised we were good friends who didn’t want to spend time with anyone else,” says Irene. When they met, each had a young daughter from a previous relationship: “and they are like blood sisters, which is amazing.”

The pair approach their residential work like psychologists, says Irene: “We try to get a deep understanding of how our clients design their lives; we don’t do these projects for ourselves but our clients.”

“We let them lead the way, take us wherever they want to take us and we follow,” adds Alon, who believes this is why they have a more diverse style than some other practices.

They designed an urban retreat workspace for a Tel Aviv client who wanted to work from home. “His two young daughters had taken over the apartment to create an indoor den – they had created a mini-world for themselves like kids do when you give them a chance,” says Alon. “We created a completely different world for him next door with Douglas fir which created an incredible sense of nature and felt like a quiet cave full of wood for him to work in.”

They almost turned down the Sacks commission because the notion of a chain of shops with the same look was so alien to them: “I didn’t want to do it; it seemed boring. It wasn’t us,” Alon admits.

But then they did ten shops, which have not substantially changed because the interior elements are designed to be moved and rearranged at will when a fresh look is required.

The couple are surprisingly reticent when questioned about their personal furnishing choices. They have a late-Bauhaus apartment on Tel Aviv’s Rothschild Boulevard in what Irene calls “one of the greatest buildings of the Fifties” and are building a second home in Catalonia.

“Our home reflects our lives through the years, with pieces from 30 years ago as well as new things, all with meaning to ourselves,” says Irene. “It’s not something we feel we need to expose or explain to others.”

They describe their professional approach as storytelling, and their personal domestic lifestyle as “our own private narrative.”

But then Alon ventures an intimate detail which shows how rooted this couple are in their blended family for whom Shabbat is always an event: “Wherever we live we will always have a table which seats 14,” says Alon. “Our family – the children, the grandchildren – are here every Friday night and then our friends come later.”

Irene concedes that, when designing her own kitchen, she asked herself the kind of question about lifestyle she asks her clients: “Are you cooking yourself? Do you like to serve your own guests or have someone do it for you?” “Because I do love to cook!”

More information at baranowitz-kronenberg.com

PHOTOS: AMIT GERON; KASIA GATKOWSKA; TODAY'S BREW; STEVE CAMPBELL; THE CUBE, CANARY WHARF