



By Nurit Hermon

Photography by Udi Ran, courtesy of "Nature of Things"

Basalt rocks, tuff, flint, granite, dolomite, limestone, sandstone, travertine and quartzite are among the 500 types of rocks brought to the Yarkon Park's Rock Garden, representing all of Israel's geographical regions.

Take a tour through the Israeli landscape and stay in only one garden. Geography, geology, and a journey through time, are yours for the having by a visit to the Rock Garden in the Yarkon Park in Tel Aviv. Here, architect Gideon Sarig and his two collaborators, Mira Ephrati and Mira Jacobson have positioned and sited over 500 types of Israeli rocks and the plants that grow beside them.

Sarig's idea was to make use of native species of plants so as to set the rocks in a most natural manner, the way rocks and plants live together in the wild. Thus, instead of the over-used bright petunias and phlox (which are also water-guzzlers), you will find wild anemones, cyclamens, narcissi, snapdragons, hollyhocks and capers which thrive on seasonal rain alone. This choice of plants makes

a visit in winter and early spring a true delight: the rockeries abound in flowers and the beds look like segments of Israel's fields. A major place is given in the rockeries to healing and flavouring plants such as rosemary, sage, thyme and savory, and the special odours emanating from their leaves satisfy yet another of our senses. Among the trees in the garden are many oaks, palms, acacias, olives, pistaches, common hackberries, ash trees, Judas trees and pretty poplars of a species called Populus Euphratica.

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But the greatest pleasure in the Garden is offered to those inclined towards texture. It is the rocks that

entice you to touch them - beginning with the enormous smooth flint rock outside the gate, whose water, spilling over, serves as a drinking fountain.

Most inviting is the collection of concretions brought from the Negev and Judean deserts. These evoke the image of mushrooms strewn over the hillside, or perhaps of flying objects just landed from outer space. At any rate, they are so perfectly round and smooth, it is hard to believe they are shaped by nature alone. Next in line for touching and admiring are some sandstone rocks with amazing colours: white, turquoise, red, yellow and black. This geological aspect of the park is well explained in both English and Hebrew (under the supervision of Prof.

A. Flexer from Tel Aviv University) on the plates next to the rocks themselves.

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The highlight of the garden both for the eye and the hand is the amphitheatre located at the park's hilltop centre. This amphitheatre forms a perfect 16-foot circle surrounded by five steps made of precisely cut white limestone which looks like marble brought from Mitzpe Ramon in the Negev. The smooth stone in its perfect geometrical circle creates a sharp contrast with the twelve rough and jagged natural looking flint boulders arranged on it.



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Visitors looking for more symbolic significances will not be disappointed. Standing on top of this hill one may discover the biaxial plan of the garden. One axis begins at the spring water rock at the park's entrance, goes through the entry "tunnel", and emerges towards two huge vertical boulders capped by a horizontal one on "Amphitheatre Hill". These boulders inevitably evoke the memory of Stonehenge.

This axis orients the viewer eastwards towards Jerusalem, thus linking Jerusalem with its elements of stone: the Wailing Wall, the Dome of the Rock.

The counter-axis flows from the southern skyline of Tel Aviv - Ramat Gan and the artificial lake just outside the garden through another hill called "observation hill" and away towards the north. It is worthwhile noting the difference between the two hills: the "amphitheatre hill" invites an introverted view - from its periphery to the centre - and is somewhat cut off from its surroundings since no paths on its slopes lead to the top. Its rocks are placed upright on the marble platform and their form suggests symbolic import.

In contrast, "Observation Hill" is open to its surroundings, affording a view outside and beyond itself and the garden. A trail and steps lead up to it and link it to the garden, while its rocks are artificially mounted on metal posts in order to highlight, their artistic and sculptural potential.

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As you walk through the park, meandering along its gravel paths, you will notice certain sites intended to remind you of specific Israeli landscapes: the volcanic

