



Avi Luzia. Photo: Guy Pitchon

FINALLY ON THE MAP!

TEL AVIV, ISRAEL GETS WORLD-CLASS PARK



Galit Skatepark overview. Photo: Haim Rubinstein

By Haim Rubinstein

The global public skatepark movement planted its flag on the shores of a new land on October 30, 2007 when Galit Skatepark opened in Tel Aviv, Israel. Galit is the largest skatepark in the Middle East, covering 28,000 square feet. For the past 25 years Israeli skaters have been subsisting on plywood construction, pay-to-skate parks in various states of disrepair, a few private ramps and choice street spots that were quickly sessioned until the arrival of the rent-a-cops. Despite its hot, dry climate, Israel has very few swimming pools per capita, and every one we've spotted had squared walls with a square bottom. Ah, yes, there was one miserable attempt to create a mellow bowled skate spot in a Jerusalem park years back. Unfortunately, the local contractor mistranslated the phrase "smooth concrete surface" into "slippery-as-ice surface," and hence, Sacker Park earned its nickname "Sucker Park."

So until now, the only way to skate bowls or pools was to pack your bags and board a plane for a minimum of a four-hour plane ride to Europe. A few of us were lucky enough to travel once in a while for work or family visits, and we'd get to skate several sessions of roundwall each year (yes, that's right, several SESSIONS per year). Most Israeli skaters have not even been that lucky. I'm sure there are some readers out there who can relate.

The conception of Galit Park is a bit different than the birth of most public skateparks. While Israeli skaters dreamed of a park like this for years, it was landscape architect Izak Hail and Zvika Kanonich of Kav-Banof Landscape Architecture LTD., both non-skaters, who actually initiated the project. They recognized the frustration of Israeli skaters and the dire need for proper skate spots and sold the idea to the Tel Aviv officials who were frustrated by the problem of skater-damaged public parks. While many skateparks are built in fenced in areas away from populated areas, Izak and Zvika believe they should be an open integral part of the urban environment, where all members of the community, skaters, pedestrians, bus drivers, and passersby can be part of what's going on. Galit Park, designed under the supervision of chief architect Rakefet Spielberg, is such a place, built in a large neighborhood park surrounded by other unique play equipment.

With this background, the opening of Galit Skatepark was eagerly anticipated. The park is busting with bowls, banks, quarterpipes, rails, stairs, Euro gaps, grind boxes and carve pockets. One side of the street section has three tiers of obstacles leading down into the pyramid, boxes and rails in the center; with a vivid sea scene painted on the top tier by New York tattoo artist Yoni Zilber (see opening spread). The other side rises with several high, steep banks and a seven-foot quarterpipe.



Gili Levy. Photo: Guy Pitchon



Yoav Nagler. Photo: Guy Pitchon

There's a six-foot-deep L-shaped bowl and a 10-foot-deep amoeba-shaped pool with a six-foot shallow end and imported pool coping.

There were some 500 people at the official park opening, including 200+ skaters, and the excitement was palpable. Skaters came from all over the country, some traveling several hours by car and/or public buses to make the event. Even Ron Huldai, the mayor of Tel Aviv, commented at the ribbon-cutting ceremony that the size and enthusiasm of the crowd was clear evidence that this park was long overdue. That enthusiasm grew as the demo got underway to the sounds of AC/DC and the Ramones, with some of the country's best skaters and visiting pros Josh Evin and Dayne Brummet shredding the street section.

Among the highlights were Josh blasting a huge frontside air from the quarterpipe up over the eight-foot-wide roll-in, landing it three feet higher than his takeoff point in the top of the carve pocket. Then Israeli pro Avi Luzia drew the crowd's attention with his frontside 5-0 across the pool coping on the wall ride, high above the street section. This was followed by Yoni Etinger's alley-oop from the quarterpipe to the bank and the mix of rail, stair and flip tricks performed by the team of demo skaters on the street obstacles. After the demo, a popular local band rocked the crowd while the horde of eager skaters broke in the park's obstacles and bowls. There was a hot session going on at the seven-stair set in one corner, and on the other side of the park the bowl coping started to take a beating. The party lasted late into the night and continued the next day with 40+ skaters enjoying the park all morning.

The excitement of the park opening has not died down since then. There have been 100 to 150 skaters in Galit Park every night in the month it's been open. We've even spotted a handful of skaters there on wet, rainy days trying



Tzahi Einat. Photo: Omer Shamir



Boaz Aquino. Photo: Omer Shamir

desperately to get a few runs in between down-pours.

The development of Galit Park had its crisis moments, as does every skatepark. When the construction was about two-thirds completed, the "imported" skatepark construction expert had to leave on short notice. The street section had empty spaces where the transitions were to be poured, the two bowls were big holes in the ground and the local contractor had no idea what to do with them. Elan Freedberg, skatepark advocate and consultant on the development team, put out a distress call at Skaters-for-PublicSkateparks.com, and none other than Mark "Monk" Hubbard and the Grindline crew answered the call. The bowl riders among us knew we were finally in good hands. One month later, the skatepark was complete, with super-smooth, beautifully shaped bowls and transitions. Crisis averted.

This skatepark's impact on the Israeli skate scene is already evident. Skaters have started showing up with new, wider boards, larger wheels and looser trucks. After years of back-and-forth mini-ramp sessions, everyone has started to learn the art of the carve. Skaters closely watch each others' runs, consult about new lines, and all eventually share that wide grin of satisfaction after accelerating around the turns and flowing through the varied transitions, faster and faster each time. Every week the level of skating and use of the bowls jumps another level. Now you see smooth carve lines peppered with grinds, airs and flip tricks.

Avi Luzia was the skaters' advocate during the development and construction of the park. He practically lived on the construction site, making sure all details were just right. When asked about finally seeing the park full of skaters he replied, "Israel has a strong skate community, and I'm thrilled we now have a proper home that offers something for every skater among us. Galit is a world-class skatepark; it is a worthwhile trip by pros and visiting skaters alike." ■