

TENTS

by Ram Eisenberg

1992

Habitat In The Desert

Living in a tent means to actually live in the environment, the tent is merely an instrument for living outside. In a tent you are very exposed to the effects and forces of the environment, the sun, the wind and the night. Your true habitat is the landscape.

In the desert landscape, one's own impermanence is contrasted with the eternal quality of the elements. The tents as a habitat thus provide a living metaphor for our life's impermanence and insecurity.

Our concrete city houses give us a sense of stability and the illusion of security. But this illusion vanishes when life storms up around us, or when the hand of death gets near. At such times we become aware of the true thinness of our skin and the fragility of all our constructions. Compared with concrete houses or stone buildings, which have a lot of flesh, a tent is just the bare skin and bones of what is a habitat. The tents described hereby are not meant to be an alternative way for modern men to live. Rather they were designed to provide an essential experience, an encounter with life's naked truth, a balance to the illusion of security.

The tents were designed for the specific needs of "Succah in the Desert", a sanctuary from the overstimulation of living in modern society, located 7 kilometers west of Mitzpe Ramon. The "Succah" is carefully planned and maintained by its founder, Rachel Bat Adam with a view to keep the fine equilibrium between man and nature. It is a place for balancing oneself, for a "recreation of the soul," where guests come to tune in to the silence of the desert and to get in touch with their inner voice.

Living in this naked landscape sensetises ones being. The nakedness of stones and earth is like that of human flesh, in all its magnificence and vulnerability. Even a jeep passing leaves a scar that remains for a millenium. Being conscious of this makes one very humble, it requires extreme caution at every intervention with the environnement.

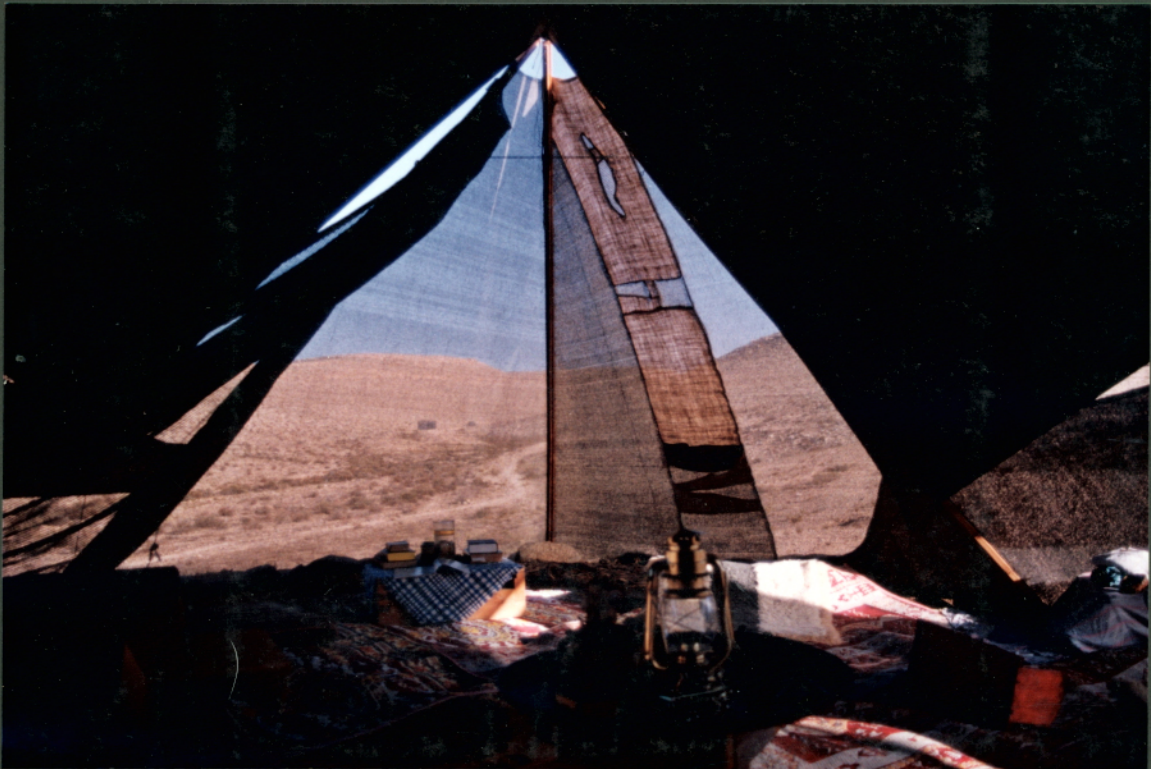
The tents barely touch the ground, they leave no traces behind when they are dismantled. Their fragile structure is strong enough to withstand the forces of the desert, but only to a certain degree. The Desert is the stronger partner in this game; the tents are more vulnerable to the effects of the deserts forces, then the environment is affected by their presence.





The tents play a game of contradictions with the desert. They act as a prism, fragmenting distinct qualities from an undivided continuum. They frame the view, thereby creating specific compositions and giving focus to details. They transform the wind and light into breeze and shade.







The pure geometric form of the tents - expresses the cultural abstraction of mankind, it counteracts with the virgin wilderness of the desert and the softness of the hills.



Contrasts and contradictions, are also found in the tents interior, where "high-tech" synthetic materials are combined with cheap, soft organic materials.



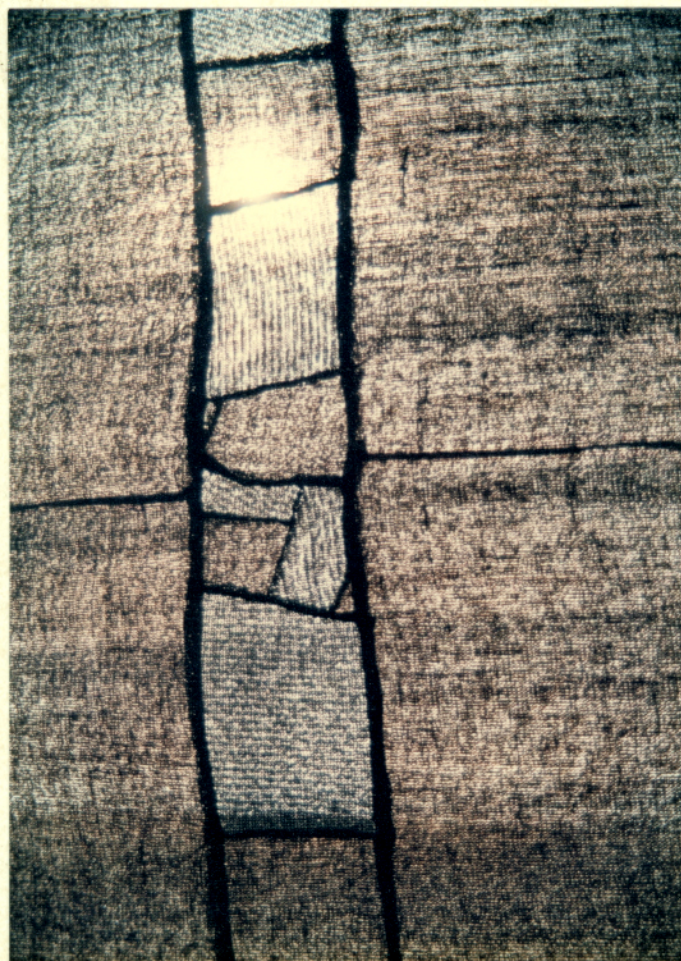


The structure of the tents is minimalistic. The frame consists of three wooden legs strengthened by a steel band. This makes them elastic and capable of withstanding even the strong winds of winter.





The doubled envelope is made of nylon mesh and burlap, creating variable patterns of transparency, light and shade. The black mesh inside soothes the eyes against the daytime glare.





The natural fiber on the outside blends with the colours of its surrounding and absorbs the night dew; but it has the disadvantage of being heavy and not sufficiently durable.





The tents can be folded and transported very easily, and set up by one person (provided there isn't too much wind). A peg goes into the ground through the bottom of each leg and the tent is firmly rooted. The whole operation requires just a few minutes. There are no protruding elements around the tents, so that even in the dark there is no danger of stumbling on ropes or stakes. Frame and envelope are one strong unit, which need no other accessories.







The tetraheadral form is geometrically just one point above a two dimentional plane. It is the most elementary solid, a quality which makes it the most stable shape there is.



The tents can be erected on extremely difficult surfaces, such as a cliff face, or a sharp slope, making a disadvantage a benefit - by creating a multilevelled space inside.

The atmosphere inside the tetrahedral tent is very different from that inside a rectangular house, which by having a flat ceiling, gives the impression of being "cut off" from the sky. Inside the tents, a "gothic" quality is achieved by the effect of the triangular walls which lead the eyes up to their joining point at the apex, through which the stars can be seen at night.



The sides of the tents are 4.00m long, creating a height of about 3.20m. These proportions are exactly right for placing two mattresses on the ground, leaving enough space for a small table and a carpet - the bare essentials of a home. The inner space of the tents frames the natural dance of ordinary daily movements. The outer proportions lend scale to the incalculable immensity of the desert without.



The seven small tents can be combined to form countless soft and transparent chambers, walls, courts and halls. Additional materials can be attached to the frame to create new varieties every time.

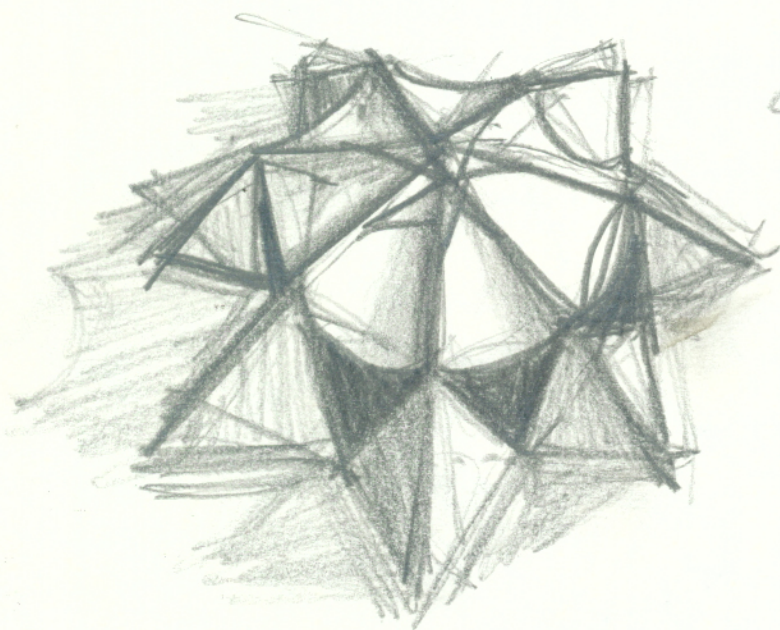
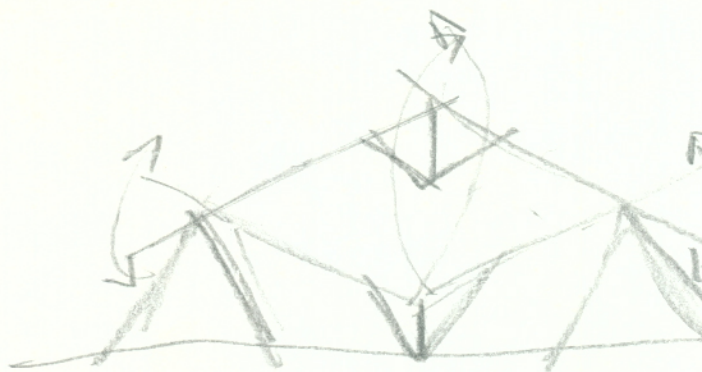
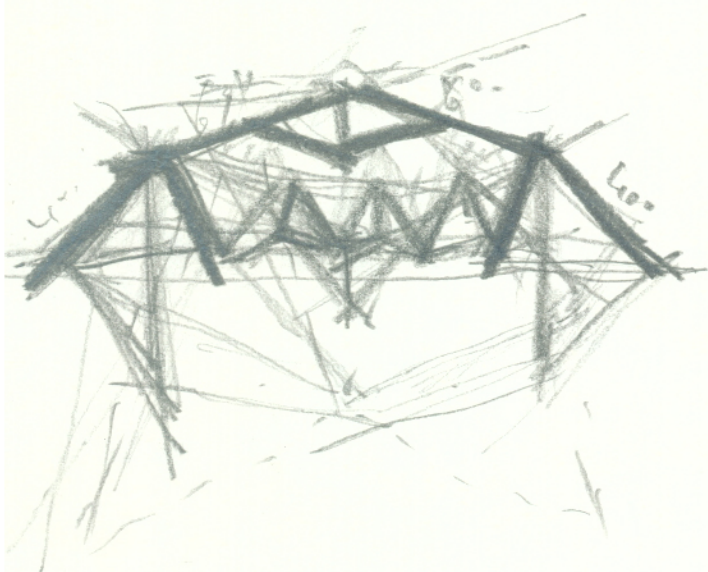








One option of combining the seven tents was designed specifically for the accommodation of workshops. They are arranged around a common court in the form of a seven pointed star (see illustration), and covered by a large canopy (150sqm). The beams of the canopy are 6.00m long, each of which rests on the apex of one tent and joining together in the center. The whole canopy can be manipulated by one man, and opened as an umbrella to be suspended in the air resting solely on the tips of the tents, without any extra supporting accessories. Due to lack of funds it is not yet completed.



The tent project was designed and made by Ram Eisenberg, in the winter and spring of 1992. The physical making of the tents was done on site, using a solar powered sewing machine and manual tools. They have been in use throughout the past summer.





