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Much ado about....

Meir Dagan on the Ofer scandal, a new-old hotel in Ein Kerem, kudos for the Rubinstein piano competition winner, and a 'L'haim!' in Japanese

GRAPEVINE
• By GREER FAY CASHMAN

■ OF THE scores of people from all over the country who made their way to Jerusalem's picturesque, historic village of Ein Kerem – set high in the hills amid lush greenery – some who had previously been to the museum that was once the home of Jaber and **Alegra** Rachil were amazed by the change that the addition of modern amenities had wrought without destroying or even intruding on the beauty of the past. The property where the Rachils lived with their three children is now a boutique hotel developed by **Yishai Malka** of Herzliya and architect **Gaddie Delman**, a Jerusalemite who operates an architectural firm in Tel Aviv.

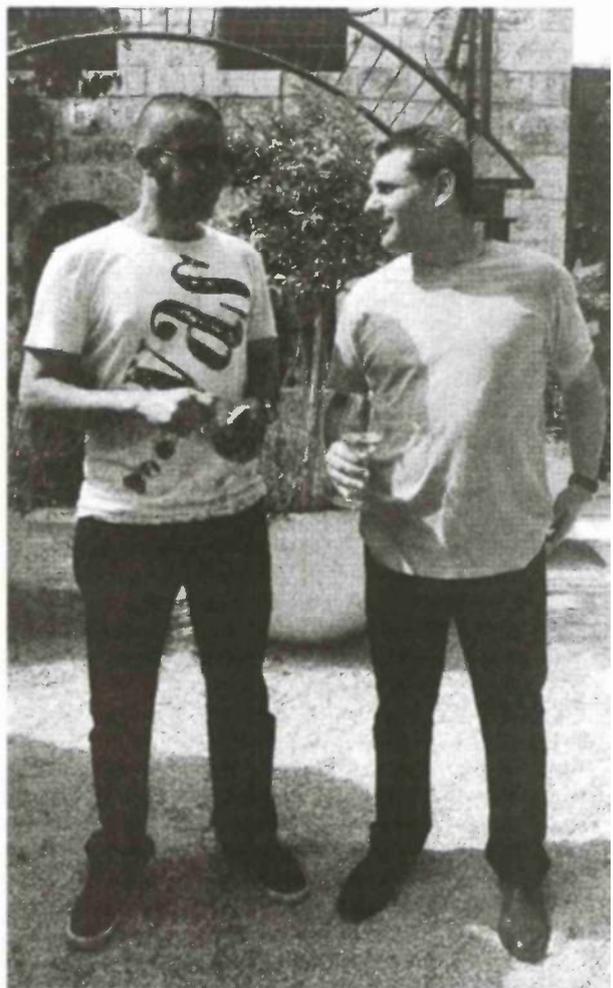
Jaber Rachil was the son of a wealthy, Christian Arab family and **Alegra** the daughter of a Sephardi rabbi. When the young man and woman fell in love, his family protested and hers disowned her. In fact, her father sat shiva for her as if she were dead. The couple eloped to Bethlehem, where they were married. **Alegra** converted to Christianity, and after being away from Jerusalem for some years, they returned to Ein Kerem in 1930 to live in the house there.

Though banished by her family, **Alegra** Rachil continued to keep track of her relatives, and when her father died, she took her three children and, dressed as an Arab woman, went to pay a clandestine condolence call on her mother, who immediately recognized her and threw her out of the house. In 1948, together with most of the Arabs in the village, the Rachils fled, never to return. In the 1960s, the house served as a synagogue, then in the 1990s as an outdoor museum.

Now, what was once known as The House of the Jewess has taken on yet another identity as the Alegra hotel. Regrettably, the cuisine at the hotel is not kosher, though someone in management referred to it as "kosher lite," explaining that there was no shrimp, no pork, no mixing of meat and dairy products – but also no separate dishes for meat and dairy.

Among the hordes of people who kept coming all afternoon last Friday was Israel Hotel Association President **Ami Federmann**, whose family has the controlling interest in the Dan chain of hotels. Federmann came with his wife **Michal**. Also present were former MK **Shmuel Flatto Sharon**, who owns Dizengoff Center; **Harel Wizel**, the CEO and chairman of the board of the Fox Group; lawyer **Arieh Toussia-Cohen** and his wife **Efrat**; **Ilan Roman**, a member of the Association of Israelis of Central European Origin executive; and graphic artist **Ofer Zemach**.

Every room in the hotel is named for a famous pair of lovers. The luxurious beds are all on raised parquet platforms, and each bathroom is individually designed, with different-shaped baths in different colors. The restaurant features an open kitchen, and the dining area seats a total of 18 people. However, the outside is full of patios and dining niches on different levels surrounded by trees, vines, bushes and flowers. The stairs are a little steep, but that's a minor inconvenience. The only jarring note aesthetically was the bright yellow espresso machine in each bedroom.



HISTORIC HOME. Alegra hotel developer Yishai Malka (left) and architect Gaddie Delman stand outside the new Ein Kerem establishment, which used to be a museum and home of the Rachil family. (Courtesy)