

# Such Great Heights

Berlin is a playground for world-class architects who have taken the city to the next level. Here, buildings are impressive feats, each housing stories that mix the past, present and future.

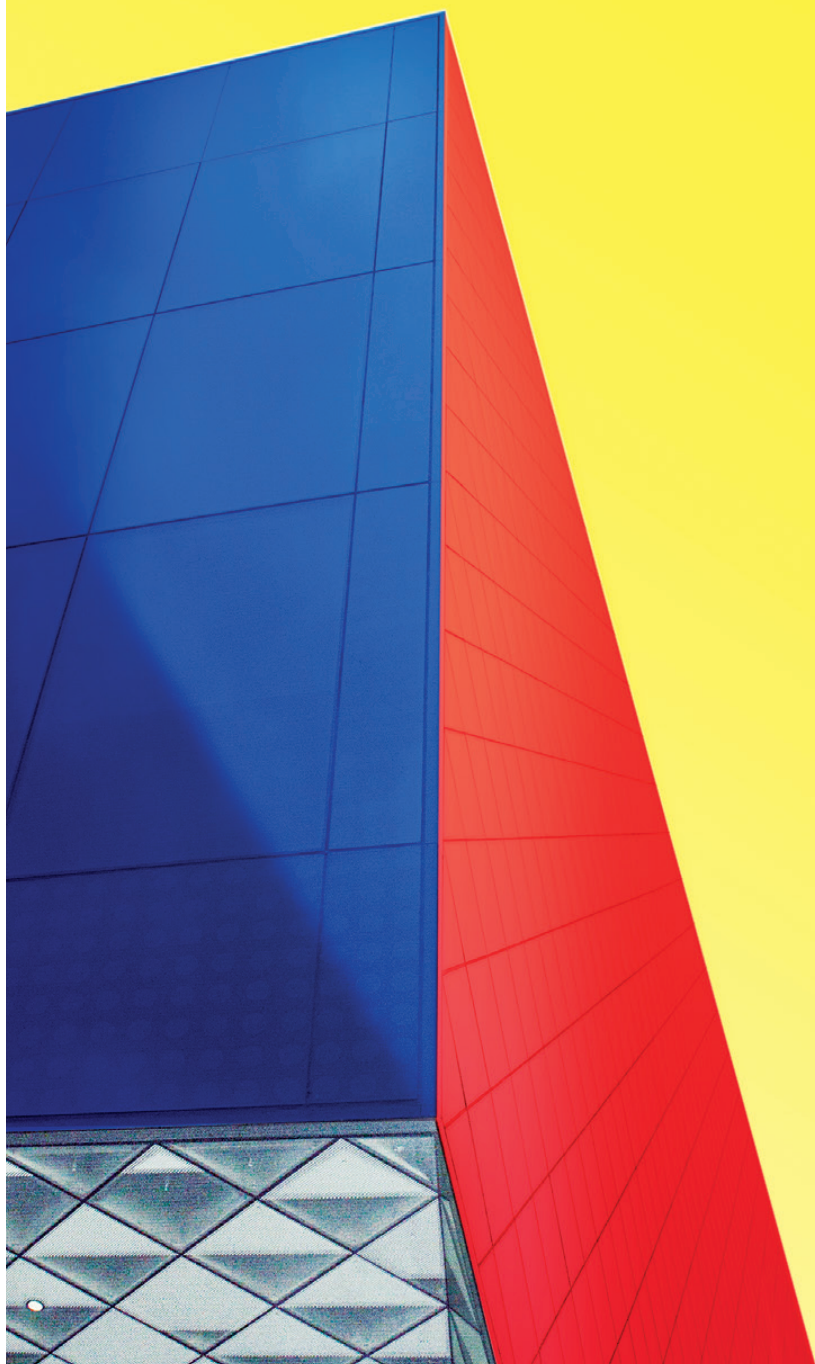
*By Christopher DiRaddo*

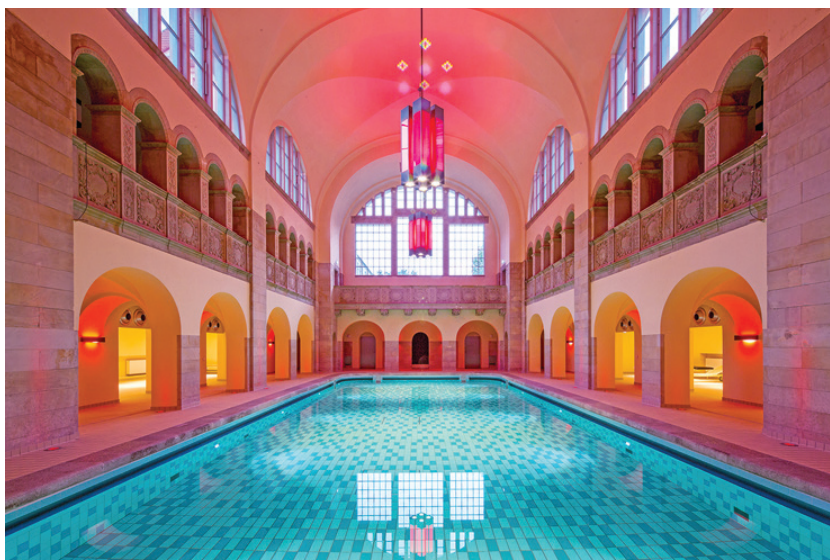


*Photographs by Simone Hutsch*

**German Historical Museum  
Exhibition Hall**

Much like world-famous architect I.M. Pei's pyramid entrance to the Louvre, this glass and steel spiral staircase and gallery serves as a reverential extension to the German Historical Museum, a stunning 300-year-old work of Baroque architecture. ●





TOP TO BOTTOM: After being closed for three decades, the Hotel Oderberger's historic three-story swimming hall reopened in 2016; At Pauly Saal, conversation starter "Miss Riley," by artist Cosima von Bonin, demands your attention.

**T**

hrough the windows of Berlin's Barenboim-Said Akademie, instruments can be heard warming up; horns and flutes are competing for space as a trickle of young musicians run into the imposing classical structure, late for practice.

It is here that Miriam Bers starts her tour today. As owner and co-founder of GoArt!—an agency that offers expert-led art, food and design tours of the city—Bers and her team regularly escort architecture addicts on customized tours of some of Berlin's best builds. And this world-famous music school is a good place to start.

"One thing that makes Berlin exciting is the juxtaposition of old and new, of past and future," says Bers, referring to the block-long building the academy calls home. Originally used as a storage depot for the Berlin State Opera's sets, this commanding structure was all but destroyed in the Second World War before being rebuilt in the 1950s. Today, the school, which opened in 2016, is home to up to 90 young musicians from many of the world's

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF HOTEL ODERBERGER • JUIE MUELLER



### **Futurium**

A laboratory and exhibition space where scientists, artists and the public come together to consider what life will be like in the future, this building's impressive facade is made up of more than 8,000 panels of both folded metal reflectors and ceramic-printed cast glass. ●





#### Hotel Am Steinplatz

Opened as a guest house for Eastern European gentry in 1913, and renovated and reopened as a luxury property in 2013, Hotel am Steinplatz offers quiet accommodations for those looking for something outside the tourist areas. Located in the West, in a largely residential neighborhood around Charlottenburg's Savignyplatz, the 87-room masterpiece combines modern Art Deco elements, Moorish architecture and the spirit of the 1920s (Berlin's golden era). No two rooms are alike, with the most exclusive being the Spa Suite, complete with an in-room sauna, free-standing bathtub and a separate rain shower.

Their award-winning Bar am Steinplatz serves 10 signature cocktails, all served as a clear liquid in the same cordial glass. Try the Meteoro (Mezcal with mandarin, lime water and agave) for a taste that is smoky, sour and fruity. ■



#### Boros Collection

A five-story, 32,000-square-foot former Nazi bunker, the Boros Collection's building is as fascinating as the privately owned artwork inside. Guided tours tell the story of the tomb-like structure and profile the contemporary artists whose work has been specially chosen to fit the space. ▲ ●

war zones, including Israel, Palestine and northern Africa. "Barenboim is Argentinean-Israeli, and Said was Palestinian-American," she explains of the school's namesakes. "Their goal was to connect the world through music."

Evidence of that goal can be found in the Pierre Boulez Saal, a 682-seat concert hall designed by Frank Gehry as a home for academy performances (and where Gehry himself celebrated his 90th birthday this past year). The room is a stunning 360-degree multipurpose concert hall with ovals of red and blue textured seats surrounding the performers. Gehry believed in the academy's mission of reconciliation through music so strongly that he designed the room for free, creating a space that is at once the combined vision of architect (Gehry), conductor (Barenboim) and theorist (Said). "Maybe this is the point of everything," says Bers. "That art, architecture and music can link us together in a peaceful way."

**T**his idea of the power of the interconnectedness of the arts is not a new one in Berlin. Germany, after all, is the birthplace of the Bauhaus movement, which celebrates its centenary this year. The famous school, founded by Walter Gropius in 1919, may have only lasted 14 years before it was shuttered by the Nazis for its perceived communist leanings, but one hundred years later its guiding philosophy of "form follows function" continues to have a profound influence on art, architecture and design around the world.

To celebrate, Berlin has planned a series of events and activities this year, from exhibits to shows, to tours of the most important buildings in the cities where everything began (Weimar, Dessau and Berlin). Bers herself is setting up visits to the city's famous designs, from Haus Lemke, a timeless residence designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe before he fled to the United States, to Hufeisensiedlung, the horseshoe-shaped social-housing settlement where visitors can book a stay overnight in a restored 1920s flat.

Those looking for longer-term lodging might want to visit Das Bauhaus. Now under renovation, this former women's clinic from the 1930s was purchased by frozen pizza magnate Ernst Freiberger to become part of Forum an der Museumsinsel, a refurbished grouping of residential and office buildings within walking distance of Museum Island. Its facade is unmistakably Bauhaus: a simple, clean, three-floor design that runs the length of the street, ending in a rotunda with large windows and a glassed-in terrace on the roof. The owner won't be selling the apartments, though; he'll be renting them, making them the most coveted rental addresses in the city.

Like many of the buildings on Bers' tour, Das Bauhaus is located in the former East, in Mitte, not far from Scheunenviertel (or the Barn Quarter) where many of the city's contemporary art galleries and ateliers are located. "It's important to understand where was West and where was East," says Bers, who also offers private tours of some of the city's more than 300 galleries. "When

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF HOTEL AM STEINPLATZ (TOP)



### Eastgate

A shopping complex located in the Northeast of Berlin, in Marzahn, the Eastgate Mall is a marvel at night, lit up like a pinball machine. ●



**James Simon Gallery**

Part of a 20-year master plan to unite the five museums on Museum Island through an underground Archaeological Promenade, this recent David Chipperfield design is expected to welcome upwards of 10,000 visitors per day. ●





### Hotel de Rome

Designed by Tommaso Ziffer and Olga Polizzi, this 145-room Rocco Forte property offers an elegant combination of historic and contemporary design. The former headquarters of the 19th century Dresdner Bank, the building was refurbished and opened in 2006. Efforts were made to preserve traces of the structure's past, turning four historic bank manager offices into well-appointed suites, replete with high ceilings, leather-clad doors and original oak- and mahogany-paneled walls. Elements of the former bank's jewel vault can also be seen in its basement swimming pool and spa.

Located in the Mitte district, the hotel is within walking distance of the Brandenburg Gate and Museum Island, and its front rooms overlook the Bebelplatz. This public square, home to the State Opera, was the site of the 1933 Nazi book burning. A memorial to the infamous event can be seen in the center of the square, where a glass-topped subterranean chamber holds a series of empty bookcases large enough to hold the 20,000 destroyed titles. ■



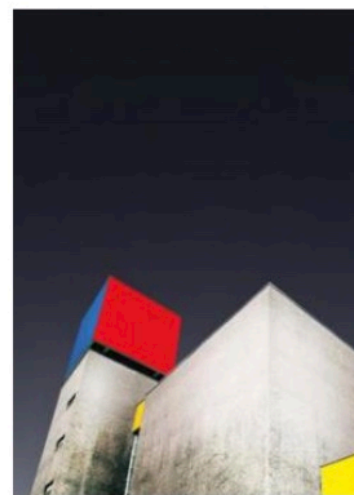
the wall fell, everything in the East was run down but very inexpensive. The old houses were empty because people preferred to live in pre-fab builds with heating—so the artists came.”

A prime example is the former Jewish girls' school on Auguststrasse. Occupied by the Nazis in 1930 and later serving as a deportation center and hospital, this five-story red brick building, built by Jewish architect Alexander Beer, stood empty for decades before being turned into the Haus für Kunst und Esskultur (House of Art and Dining Culture) in 2012 by gallery owner Michael Fuchs. Today, the building is home to a number of contemporary art galleries and two restaurants, the Jewish deli Mogg and the Michelin-starred French restaurant Pauly Saal. The latter's elegant dining room is outdone by the striking 20-foot-long red-and-white missile sculpture over its kitchen. And along the front of the building, a series of brass plates are embedded in the cobblestone, each one marking the last residence of a victim of the Holocaust. All poignant reminders of Berlin's tragic past.

**B**erlin's buildings have so many stories, one is reminded with every visit—each construction clamoring to tell its tale. The stories all sound familiar: A historic building gets damaged or seized during the war only to fall into disuse and disrepair behind the iron curtain. But then, after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, there's hope—an incredible opportunity to reclaim and reimagine the city. “When the wall came down thirty years ago, a totally new architectural context came into life,” Bers says. The challenge was to find a way to connect the disparate styles of the East and the West, to acknowledge both the city's legacy and complicated past while also finding innovative ways to tackle the empty spaces.

“We knew we could never have a homogenous townscape, like Paris or London,” says Bers. After the fall, world-class architects like I. M. Pei, David Chipperfield and Renzo Piano, among others, began to put their own marks on the buildings in what would turn out to be, in some cases, decades-long projects (some of which are only wrapping now). And whether it is Pei's clever use of a spiral staircase for his extension to the Baroque-style German Historical Museum, or Chipperfield's overt tribute to the Parthenon in his central addition to the five antiquities museums on Museum Island, the new work finds a dignified and understated way to pay tribute to the history of these buildings without overshadowing them. “Their idea was not to compete with the designs, but build a bridge between past and future,” says Bers.

Somehow, all of this work makes the face of this centuries-old city feel impossibly young. But still, Berlin does not shy away from its scars. It puts them on display, so no one forgets the past. “Berlin would not be Berlin if it didn't have an open mind,” Bers says. “The reuse and redevelopment of historic buildings—in Berlin often linked to war—adds a new meaning. And after all that has happened, you have to look forward. Art and architecture are important tools to do so.” ✦



### König Galerie

Located in St. Agnes, a former church built in the 1960s in Brutalist style, König Galerie is the brainchild of Johann König, a visually impaired gallerist and dealer who credits his disability with helping him develop a keen sense for the value of art. ▲ ■ ●