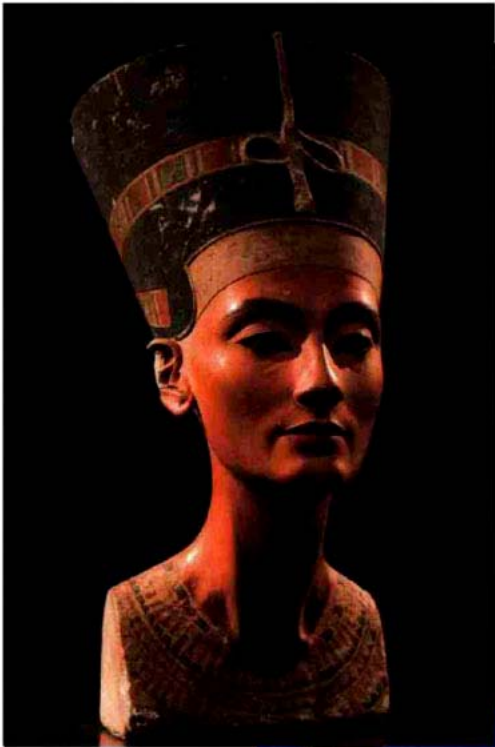


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I was 14—the age when dreams are your best friends and an uninhibited excitement about the possibilities of the world courses through each vein and guides your every step—when I was first enchanted by the streets of Berlin. It was on a visit familiar to most young girls: a trip to my oma's new urban haven. Overcome by dull life in a small town she too, was summoned by the siren that is this cosmopolitan city, even after 65 years. We walked, she and I, down every street in the former West Berlin, filling every corner of our minds' eye with the dramatic energy and lights of the theatre and the historic and cultural mystique offered by museum shows and the safety and anonymity of the crowds. Guided by the shadowy, exciting promises of old films and phonographs, I longed to find a magic door or a time tunnel to the Berlin of the 1920s to meet the artists, writers and dancers who celebrated culture and life at the clubs and cafés.

Throughout the following years I hitchhiked to Berlin to visit famous clubs such as Dschungel or SO 36 (at that time run by the artist Martin Kippenberger). But because my passion was for the world of dance, I also spent hours hypnotized by the sublime flight of ballet dancers performing at the Deutsche Staatsoper. Just the slight chance of catching a concert conducted by Herbert von Karajan at the Philharmonie, built by Hans Scharoun, was the sole mission of many journeys. It was not a matter of if, but only when I would land up here.

Life led me down many paths, but in 2004 I moved from Los Angeles to Berlin and I am often overcome with raw emotion: There is no other city where the metaphor of the phoenix rising from the ashes is so appropriate. In only one hundred years the city was reborn several times—through the Empire of the Roaring Twenties, the Weimar Republic, the rise and fall of the Third Reich, the complete destruction of World War II, rebuilding in the 1950s, the rise of the Wall and finally the reunification. It's the scars, still visible and perceptible, that make it such an outstanding and interesting city. Many of my friends moved here just after the Wall came down, and they were part of the dynamic process of East and West Berlin growing together. But I was lucky enough to arrive before everything had been completed—so that I wouldn't be just a witness but a participant in the new cityscape.

When I return from my travels, I always come home to new shops, cafés, restaurants and galleries that have blossomed in the once deathly-grey streets of the former East Berlin. With just pennies in their pockets, a new generation's creative spirit enriches the city's cultural life with outstanding architecture, exquisite museums and a devotion to pursuing meaningful questions—and it's this level and diversity of culture that is the deciding element regarding where I chose to live.

The choices in Berlin are tremendous. I am especially proud of the absolutely beautiful, subtle and timeless reconstruction of the Museumsinsel (Museum Island), completed last year with the opening of the Neues Museum, rebuilt by David Chipperfield, as well as Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum, another masterpiece. Of course there is also the elegant Neue Nationalgalerie by Mies van der Rohe, as well as our Gemäldegalerie, which boasts a refined art collection. But one of my favorites, not often trafficked by tourists, is The Helmut Newton Foundation. It is a beautiful expression of the spirit of the photographer, who loved Berlin despite the fact that he had to flee from the Nazis in 1938. He never lived in Germany again, but he still brought his life's work back to the city just before he died.



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As most of the world knows, Berlin has a lively gallery scene. The more established Contemporary Fine Arts gallery (across the river from the Museumsinsel) and cutting edge venues maintain a unique intellectual and artistic presence. Every month a new space pops up—just recently the already-notable Isabella Bortolozzi gallery opened its doors to stand proudly among my old favorites, Galerie Neu, Daniel Buchholz, Neugerriemschneider and Capitain Petzel, located in a former department store of the GDR on Karl-Marx-Allee.

The intermingling of art and artifice is profound, but when I am at my favorite haunts for a quick bite or coffee and cake, I feel just as alive. In between my frequent dinners at my three Berlin favorites, Borchardt's, Grill Royal and Paris Bar, I spend every free hour finding a new sweet or savory. In Berlin, it's not only haute cuisine or a world-class chef that offers a tasteful dining experience—it's the history, special scents and sounds—that create the dining culture. After collecting my guests from The Hotel de Rome, sitting on the historic Bebelplatz or the Savoy Hotel in the former West Berlin—the home away from home of German cultural heroes such as Thomas Mann, Helmut Newton and Romy Schrieder—I always usher them to Konnopke. This cury wurst stand (in front of my home) is where I offer them the signature dish of Berlin, served underneath the tramway so it feels like the movie set of *Der Himmel über Berlin* by Wim Wenders. Behind my house is the Prater, the oldest beer garden in Berlin. Since 1837 this rustic inn has served fresh German fare, such as *Königsberger Klopse*.

But the café I have visited most since my first trip to Berlin in 1974 is the Einstein, on Kurfürstenstraße. Now it's own legendary institution, it was once the home of silent movie star Henny Porten (Babelsberg was the Hollywood of the 1920s). The spacious Berlin rooms in the 1920s villa are beautiful and the service, coffee and Apfelstrudel are divine—especially after browsing through its miles of books to find your new favorite novel at the Bücherbogen Spangenberg. In the afternoons you can also find me in the tiny coffee shop Bonanza that sits just around the corner in the hip and young district of Prenzlauer Berg, were coffee is prepared to perfection and is sipped sitting on empty lemonade crates covered with a piece of wood. These intimate spaces are where I pen letters on hand-made papers and notecards from the shop R.S.V.P. that are just as unique as my beloved friends.

When I manage to find time to wander, I choose places that embrace history, such as Chocolatier Erich Hamann. This off-the-trook treasure—designed by Bauhaus teacher and architect Johannes Ippen—is still in original condition. But in addition to the sublime flavor of their chocolates, the package design makes me swoon—it's exceptional; very graphic, so a chocolate bar becomes an exquisite little present. If you are in the former East, Veld Schokoladen, on the atmospheric Helmholtz Platz, should be your destination. This purveyor of international treats will win your adoration for their signature goat milk chocolate with sea salt—a strange, but titillating combination.

My cupboard is filled with porcelain vases designed by Friedrich Schinkel and manufactured by KPM (Königliche Porzellan Manufaktur), purchased from their showroom in Tiergarten. Since I am not a big fan of mainstream fashion, I take my time browsing through every rack at Andreas Murkudis, who has the best selection of cutting-edge labels such as Margiela, Lutz, Y's and Pulver. In the picturesque Mulackstrasse there is a flurry of great small boutiques, such as Bless, A.P.C., Nicole Hogerzell and Lolo Berlin, among others.

At every intersection, down every street and out of the corner of your eye, Berlin never fails to reveal just a bit more of itself. In this place there is life and boundless wonder—so much that I may just be able to forget about that time machine ■ *Taschen's Berlin*, by Angelika Taschen, Taschen, taschen.com

