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Leseprobe



Rust, Bettina

Berlin – Favourite Places

With colour photographs and illustrations. Translated by Alexander Booth.

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Bettina Rust
Berlin – Favourite Places



FAVOURITE PLACES
Insel

BERLIN

BETTINA RUST

WITH PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR

TRANSLATED BY
ALEXANDER BOOTH



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Mitte



Such a Beautiful City

MONBIJOU BRIDGE
BETWEEN AM KUPFERGRABEN
AND MONBIJOUSTRASSE
10117 BERLIN

Life is constant change. Hardly have you got into a groove when all of a sudden something calls for readjustment. You have to come up with new strategies, set out on new paths, employ new systems. We recognise this on a global scale, but sometimes the local changes are what really seem to turn everything upside down. Small things: a construction site, for example, right outside your door. Somehow life already feels different. For one whole year constant hammering, digging, dust whirling through the air, wobbling cranes, half-detached tarpaulins whipping angrily through windy nights, no more parking spaces, no bird-song, and not a single open win-

dow, just two Dixi-toilets out on the pavement. The small everyday changes we all have to put up with, gnashing our teeth. But what would happen if through some stupid circumstance, some twist of fate, your job ended and in order to keep working you had to move to Bad Godesberg? Of all places! Or you fell head-over-heels for someone from Papua New Guinea? This is all purely hypothetical, of course, but I've given a lot of thought to what it would take for me to turn my back on my city. Love might be the only reason. Bad Godesberg, for whatever it's worth, would never happen. And so, just like how when we're feeling down we sometimes consciously rub salt in our wounds by listening to really really sad songs that just make everything seem worse, before saying goodbye I would make my way to a place that makes my heart take flight every time, a place I can depend on, and I'd say: Berlin, you endearing city, I'm so happy I get to live here.

I'd take the Monbijou Bridge across the Spree to the Kupfergraben. Like a strong arm, the bridge touches the tip of Museum Island, which has the Pergamon Museum, the Alte Na-

tionalgalerie, the Neues and Alte Museums, and the proud cathedral, as if it was built just to support the star-struck tourist gazing at the majestic Bode Museum with its large dome, their eyes moving left towards Alexanderplatz and then further still towards the Monbijou Theatre with its adjoining park, where in summer Berliners and tourists alike have barbecues, sit at the beach bar and look out onto the water that is constantly decorated by barges, little boats, and countless tourist steamers with names like "Mirth" or "Sanssouci", and on certain nights you can see people tango beneath colourful string lights. And further still your eyes take in the Ebert Bridge crossing Friedrichstrasse, in the direction of the Berliner Ensemble, the Friedrichstadtpalast, the Deutsches Theater. An aesthetically pleasing and lively 360-degree panorama full of variety, history, and a certain kind of elegance which, truth be told, isn't all that easy to find in Berlin, unless you're willing to make a few compromises. I wouldn't be doing myself any favours and, in the end, I'd suffer like a dog, but this is where I would say goodbye to Berlin, if I had to say goodbye to Berlin.



Over a 100 and Still Timeless

If Clärchens Ballhaus were a person, you'd want to sit next to her on the train. She could tell you some incredible stories. And I know I'm not the only one who feels that this is one of the few places where, at least tentatively, you can take a nostalgic trip to a Berlin that has nothing to do with today's. A last witness of sorts, one who went through two fins de siècle, survived two world wars and more than two systems of government. And she's still there, noble, pretty in her old get-up, surrounded by coffee shops, chic stores, and galleries. If Clärchens Ballhaus were a person, she'd be rather surprised. But she'd take it all with a sense of humour.

CLÄRCHENS BALLHAUS
AUGUSTSTRASSE 24
10117 BERLIN

OPEN DAILY FROM 11AM UNTIL END
WEEKENDS UNTIL 4AM
WWW.BALLHAUS.DE



Back in 1913, in a building constructed in 1895, husband-and-wife team Fritz and Clara Bühler opened Bühler's Ballhaus. There were close to 900 such places in Imperial Berlin, and this was one – and to get it out of the way right at the start: it's the only one where people still go to dance and have fun almost every day. With its large, ground-floor dance hall and 120-square-metre hall of mirrors, the establishment quickly found its audience. Often seen drawing at the bar, painter Heinrich Zille was a regular. As was his artist colleague Otto Dix, who designed the Ballhaus' poster, still in use today. After Fritz gave up the ghost in 1929, his fearless wife Clara, who would marry two times more, took over and continued using the same name. After the world wars, there was a notable surplus of women, so Clärchen (Clara's nickname) organised widows' balls and kept the people dancing. Even in the GDR. The Ballhaus was a meeting point for a diverse crowd from both East and West, which, naturally, did not go unnoticed. As it was taken for granted that an innocent turn

on the dance floor might lead to a markedly less-than-innocent epilogue, the Stasi referred to the ballroom as the 'gonorrhoea den'. Up through 2004 the ballroom was run by the same family. Then the new owner expanded the programme and breathed new life into the first-floor hall of mirrors, which had lately been used as a storage room. This jewel is now used for events as well as for their Sunday series of classical music concerts. There is a dance tea downstairs on Sundays from 3pm to 9pm. Events are always packed. You can also find a disco Tuesday (free entry), swing nights with dance-partner placement, and various courses throughout the week (for example, Standard/Latin, West Coast Swing). And if dancing isn't quite your thing, you still have your pick of the restaurant as well as the attractive beer garden out front. Order yourself a mug of beer, gaze out at the string lights, trees, and flowers, and at the charming grey façade. Imagine what it was like a hundred years ago and allow yourself to fall out of a time for a spell.

3

TRAMS 12 / M8 / PAPPELPLATZ, U8 ROSENTHALER PLATZ

Regional Delicacies

I first got to know former minister Renate Künast in 2009, when she was a guest on my radio show. Years later when we made plans to get together for a shoot, she suggested we meet at Invalidenstrasse 155: 'Make sure you're hungry.'

And so I found myself waiting out in front of a small shop with a table and chairs on the pavement. 'The best of the simple' was written on the window, impressively overflowing with delicious-looking bread, wine, cheese, ham, and dried sausages hanging from a line. The painterly arranged goods reminded me of drawings in old fairy-tale books of a castle banquet.

She arrived on her bicycle. Step-

VOM EINFACHEN DAS GUTE
INVALIDENSTRASSE 155
10115 BERLIN
TEL. 030 288 64 849
TUE. - SUN. 10AM - 8PM



ping inside, it was clear that Künast is a familiar face here. 'Hello! How nice of you to stop by.' 'Yes, I'm expecting company and wanted to pick up a few things first. And I brought someone else along.' That someone else was me, and it was absolutely amazing inside. The man behind the counter laughed. 'Where do we want to start?' Künast pointed to a brightly coloured cheese. 'Oh yes, goat cheese, mild, with honey.' We were allowed to try. We were handed a slice of sausage, then wonderfully fragrant bread. And then some ham that was so tender it melted in my mouth. 'Everything organic', Künast says. As if there was any doubt. 'Try some. They

simply don't make this kind of *Leberwurst* any more.'

And that was clearly the incentive and the aspiration of the owners, who opened up shop in 2013. The two of them wanted to find and share the good things: unadulterated, natural, traditionally prepared food. Of its 45-square metres of retail space, a good portion is taken up by the counter. Toward the back there is another large table with chairs, while up on high wooden shelves oil, wine bottles, and various jars are filled with delicacies.

Our bags full (paper, naturally), we left the shop. 'They also do culinary evenings, with wine tastings and all the rest. It's always

lovely.' The dates can be found on their website. We walked to nearby Weinbergspark and spread our delicatessen out on the lawn for our impromptu picnic. The grass was damp, but by the time we noticed, we had already sat down. Künast, the former federal minister for food, agriculture, and consumer protection, who is passionate about appro-

priate livestock farming, pesticide-free fertiliser, and fair trade, happily put a slice of cheese into her mouth. Ms Turbo, the warrior and true believer, sat in the afternoon sun and simply enjoyed the moment. And immediately something rather soft, almost girlish, appeared in that bright-eyed face. It suited her. Man, is this good.

Back to the Future



One of the best-kept secrets of the communications field is that there is always a lack of information. And that would be enough to make you bend over laughing if it weren't often so frustrating, its effects so serious. Both professional and personal messages are often conveyed incorrectly, unclearly, or simply not at all. And what comes out in the end is not infrequently incomplete and distorted. At this point, a knowing nod to whoever first came up with the game of Chinese Whispers: you knew it all along. In the end, most communication issues affect all aspects of society. And it's not just the daily multitude of information that makes us inattentive, but the multitude

of channels through which these messages arrive and in which they get caught up. Speaking of getting caught up: on top of everything there are all the classic miscommunications that thrive on the fertile ground of any old relationship like merry mushrooms in damp moss: 'But just a minute ago you thought ...', 'Why don't you say what ...', 'Hadn't we agreed that ...' From time to time it might be helpful to come back down to earth. There's a good reason why terms like authenticity and mindfulness are enjoying a comeback (you can now even get them from the local chemist's shop as wall stickers). Coming down can help, no matter

how you define it: unplugging from it all, everything, for two whole days (which no one does, of course); going to a silent monastery (which very few do); deactivating all your alerts and ring-tones (reasonable, if not for firemen, police officers, midwives, mothers, fathers, etc.). Or you can choose the exposure-therapy method and head off for the impressive Museum for Communication, which with its exhibition pieces, explanations, and experiments may be educational, but can also be viewed as a playground. What was it like for people in the past? Who used which channels and when? Mail coach, carrier pigeon, message in a bottle, the distant ancestors of email. 'What is that?' – 'That, my dear child, is an answering machine, but yes, it looks a lot like a cassette player, ha.' 'What's a cassette player?' Or: 'There were little houses, dear, with thick books hanging in them and a handset with an earpiece ('What's an earpiece?'), you had to toss change into a slit to make a call. Not infrequently there would be a queue of people standing out in front of this little yellow box, which looked a bit like a shower stall, and they'd roll their eyes and angrily tap their feet whenever the person inside put in more money.'

MUSEUM FOR COMMUNICATION BERLIN

LEIPZIGER STRASSE 16

10117 BERLIN

TEL. 030 202 940

TUE. 9AM - 8PM, WED. - FRI. 9AM - 5PM,

SAT. - SUN. 10AM - 6PM

WWW.MFK-BERLIN.DE

How far away that all is now. Or two cans with a wire pulled taut between them – who still remembers? Telegrams. Signing off: a colourful image, a nasty noise, and that was that. An extensive permanent exhibition considers the past, which every day ends anew, a past that took place bit by bit for centuries but since the middle of the last one

has been leaping forward at a clip. There are temporary exhibitions, performances, and special events. Generally speaking, it's fun to occupy yourself with communication, but it's also a bit humbling. Even if you don't need any of this to keep your head on straight, you will still be informed and entertained.



5

S-/U-BAHNHOF POTSDAMER PLATZ, BUSES M48 / M85 KULTURFORUM

Lovely Chaos

FOOD STAND AT THE KULTURFORUM
POTSDAMER STRASSE / KULTURFORUM
DAILY FROM 9.30AM

Esteemed ladies and gentlemen, I have been eagerly following every episode of your before-and-after show in which you point your subjects to examples of their most unbecoming and incongruous outfits. Today I finally got up the nerve to ask you for help myself. In a way, with me, it's got to do with urban planning. My name is the Kulturforum. I am happy with my position and size; I'm referring more to the arrangement, the composition of all of my buildings, which causes a certain amount of confusion. I do not want to complain about the architects whatsoever. Hans Scharoun, for example, was responsible for the Philharmonie, and Mies van der



Rohe designed my Neue Nationalgalerie. All very successfully, I might add, no question. The Gemäldegalerie, the museums, and the new Staatsbibliothek (Berlin State Library) – I like them all. But they seem like an order that hasn't been picked up yet. Or consider delicate St.-Matthäus Church, which has been here since 1844; it's the only historical building left. Surrounded by her modern neighbours, she feels a bit out of place, almost like she's just been spit out of a 3D printer. And yet, she's so beautiful. Well, what do you say to a church? Come on, we've already made it through some very different times. Be a bit more patient. Perhaps you will like one of

your new neighbours: a 'Museum of the Modern' for 20th-century art, for example, is just being built. Indeed! Please understand – it all may not work out. I'm running out of ideas, and this is why I am turning to you.

Oh, you poor, interesting Kulturforum. As long as no one invents an immense gripper able to lift up buildings and put them somewhere else, you will just have to live with this unique and lovely form of chaos. In spite of, or perhaps because of, its inconsistency, this is a very inspiring place; in the end, the individual institutions here keep their promises. A concert in the Philharmonie? Unique. The paintings in the Gemäldegalerie? Impressive.

The atmosphere of the area alone is special. To warm up to it all it's best to start off at Ahmed's Imbiss, right next to the Neue Nationalgalerie, which at the moment is a giant construction site. 'We've got great sandwiches, currywurst, chips. And my coffee is the real thing. It's really good coffee', he says. Who have you always wanted to serve here, Ahmed? 'Angela Merkel. She's driven by in her car before but

never stepped out.' Why Angela Merkel? 'I love her. She's a bit... hmm, I don't know, strong and all.' Perhaps one day she will indeed make a stop on a nice mid-day in fall. The Chancellor would grab two plastic chairs and place them in the late afternoon sun, put up her legs, bite into a warm sandwich, and at long last have a cup of Ahmed's coffee. Chaos or not!

Kreuzberg



The Flâneur Traipses off to the Waterfall

For years I have moderated a show on Radio Eins called “Audible Rust” where I invite musicians, authors, actors, and politicians to bring their favourite songs with them. Ultimately, every one of us has their own musical photo-album of sorts: my first record, the song of my first kiss, my first flat, the song you associate with a particular holiday, plaster cast, or new job. But it's not only songs. Our brains continuously dispense colourful little pins across our interior city maps: we first met each other on this corner; I ate bad mussels at that restaurant; here they towed my car; around the corner I wanted to get a place at one point. Naturally, my Berlin is chock full of

VIKTORIAPARK
KREUZBERGSTRASSE 15
10965 BERLIN

THE FLÂNEUR TRAIPSES OFF TO THE WATERFALL / 30



pins, and one of them is in Kreuzberg's Viktoriapark.

For many Berliners this park is the coolest among all the inner-city greenspaces. Most of all this has to do, of course, with the Kreuzbergers themselves, their non-conformity and general craziness long a symbol of wild Berlin. As to how wild it is today, I don't want to guess. Suffice it to say that the mix of people living there is still pretty heterogeneous – despite the horrendous cost of housing. The latter has a huge influence on the former, and the 13-hectare large Viktoria-park increases this area's quality of life. Right at the park there is a laid-back beer garden, the Golgotha, opposite the w restaurant; there's a small petting zoo for kids; and, last but not least, the site that gives its name to the whole: the Kreuzberg at its heart, which in winter turns into a sledding hill. At the top of the – vertigo-inducing, for Berliners – 66-metre-tall hill, King Friedrich Wilhelm III in 1818 laid the foundation stone for an imposing neo-Gothic national monument which was to remind people of the important battles, defeats, and victories of 1813's Wars of Liberation. Topping it off is a cross that according to various sources gave the area its name.

It was only about 70 years later that they decided to build a park around it and, while they were at it, okayed the proposal for an artificial, 24-metre-high waterfall. The views across the city, particularly the northward view over the waterfall, are uplifting. And whenever I'm up here, my inner pin begins to sting me a bit, and I remember a New Year's morning many years before. While the city was busy sleeping off its New Year's hangover, I walked up the Kreuzberg with a heavy heart, past bare winter trees and the remains of fireworks. I was stuck in a messy love affair, as we all sometimes are. Encouraged by the freshness of the year, I made up my mind to rouse myself from my self-pity without delay. When I found a keychain in the form of a heart lying in the snow next to my car on my way back, I naturally took it as a sign. It couldn't be any more clear-cut! Half a year later I lost it again, but by that time I was long out of the woods. Nothing to do with magic, I know; time is an amazing healer. But maybe it really was a kind of talisman. And if so, I'd give a whole lot to know whether its mojo is still working, regardless of who it ended up with.

7

U1 GÖRLITZER BAHNHOF

The First Supermarket Without Packaging

Once upon a time, hotel rooms were advertised as having running water and colour TV. That was classy. There were walking and talking dolls with little plastic records you could slip in their backs, skipping ropes, naughty boys in short lederhosen, and gold-edged curtains. Snickers packets were red, taxis were black, telephone cabins yellow. Relatives were referred to as Uncle and Auntie, and out in the courtyard was a single rubbish bin, one grey rubbish bin where you tossed everything without a second thought. When I take out the trash today, I look like an octopus. I sure wish I had multiple arms, one for my keys, one to open all the doors, the others

ORIGINAL UNVERPACKT
WIENER STRASSE 16
10999 BERLIN
MON. - SAT. 11AM - 7PM
WWW.ORIGINAL-UNVERPACKT.DE



to take care of the paper, regular rubbish, glass, packaging, and organic waste. Absolute madness. Though by now I can block it out, I always feel bad when I stand in front of all the bins, as it becomes undeniably clear just how much trash each and every one of us produces every day. Separating rubbish may help the problem somewhat, but it certainly will not solve it. Isn't it a bit misleading to try and make ourselves feel better by dutifully sorting our cheese packaging, newspapers, and juice bottles and leaving it up to the recycling plants? As if they didn't need to use monstrous amounts of energy and water too.

Milena Glimbovski had a better

idea. What would it be like to open a shop that only offers unpackaged and predominately organic groceries and household goods? Together with her team she came up with a concept, started a crowdfunding campaign, and in 2014 opened the first Original Unverpackt store on Wiener Strasse in Kreuzberg. Here shoppers can choose completely unpackaged groceries and then go and weigh them. The procedure is surprisingly uncomplicated and hygienic – there are tongs, gloves, and spigots. You can bring whatever tins, jars, bottles, and bags you need from home, buy them onsite, or order them from their well-organised website, which also pro-

vides more information on the whole zero-waste idea in general. There are numerous links and tips on the mantra of 'refuse, reduce, reuse, recycle'.

Not that I drive over to Kreuzberg every few days with a bag full of jars, no. But when I'm in the area, I always stop by. Their products are tasty and fresh, and

the idea is without a doubt worthy of support. And even if people like Milena and ideas like Original Unverpackt are still too small to provide the deathblow to all of our wasteful rituals – once they get a foot in the door of our comfortable routines, things will already be underway.

Multi-coloured, Green, and Red Garden Plots

PRINZESSINNENGÄRTEN
PRINZENSTRASSE 35-38
10969 BERLIN
15 APRIL - OCTOBER,
DAILY FROM 10AM - 10PM
WWW.PRINZESSINNENGARTEN.NET

I know Addi from back when I still lived in Hannover. He was a director. Once he filmed a man walking backwards through the city. Then he played the film back normally so that the man seemed to be the only one walking forwards. In his early 20s, he moved to Berlin like so many others who were different, more imaginative, less conformist. During my holidays I would visit him, he was living in the building behind Café M. In *Zitty* magazine one day I read about a flea market at Moritzplatz, not far from the Wall. I grabbed a bicycle and rode over. The day was grey and so was the empty lot by the roundabout that the traffic was nervously circling. Dust,



stones, dried puddles. The sheets and trestle tables were full of forlorn things, linty wool tights, a few Russian fur hats, some single gloves next to dried garlic sausages. Pretty different. Today it's hard to believe it ever looked like that. After being ignored for more than half a century, this place has become an immense and wild city garden, the wasteland vanished in a burst of green blooms and vines. Walking the small paths past the many stands and garden plots on the some 6,000-square-metre space, it seems incredible that this refuge has only existed since 2009. Local residents and engaged citizens came together to form a non-profit they named Nomad-

ic Green and freed the area from two tons of rubbish. And even though the usage rights were only extended provisionally, they took action: planting garden plots, harvesting home-grown vegetables, and establishing bee colonies. They started a garden café and a restaurant. They began to sell seeds, saplings, and plants from their stands, advice included. Like with so many other unconventional projects in this city, the temporary rental agreement hangs over the Prinzessinnengärten's metaphorical head like the sword of Damocles. The land belongs to the city, and in this time of limited living space and privatisation politics, the only option open to all

those connected to the project is to apply for a further extension – which might not come. We all know how important it is to protect ecological spaces for the wellbeing of all, especially when the place matches its use so well. A perfect combination. You no longer even want to imagine the one without the other; like naked feet and sand, hot pancakes and maple syrup, and Steffi Graf and André Agassi, Moritzplatz and the Prinzessinnengärten belong together.

An article in *Die Zeit* magazine once said that the Prinzessinnengärten understood itself to be a biotope as well as a sociotope, and this is probably the best description you will

find. Here, bicycles are repaired, things get recycled and upcycled, hardcore eco-Kreuzbergers meet neophyte balcony-enjoying Charlottenburgers, school classes learn that sunflower seeds grow in the face of those big, yellow flowers and that the jack-o-lantern with its carved grimace is actually known as a pumpkin and can even be eaten. Here, people harvest vegetables, fix meals and give advice, drink coffee, eat, and talk. A blooming microcosm bedded down in the midst of all that loud traffic like the hole at the centre of the donut. And though this might not be the place to find stillness, it's ideal for finding peace.

9

U8 MORITZPLATZ

A Temple for Creative Types and Artists

Over the course of evolutionary fine-tuning, we are increasingly turning away from the luxury of owning our own cars. This is by all means a positive thing for the environment. But it would be a real shame for the staging of any self-respecting success story: no car means no garage. Indeed, in the future we'll probably have to do without inventions completely, seeing as legend has it that so many were cooked up in garages (just think of Hewlett Packard, Google, or Microsoft, for starters). Modulor is no different: two architecture students from Berlin, brothers Christoph and Ulrich Struhk, were annoyed by the fact that the materials they needed to build their models could

MODULOR: SUPPLIES FOR ARCHITECTS
AND ARTISTS
PRINZENSTRASSE 85
10969 BERLIN
TEL. 030 690 360

MON. - FRI. 9AM - 8PM, SAT. 10AM - 6PM
WWW.MODULOR.DE/FILIALE-BERLIN