

FAVOURITE PLACES

Insel

BERLIN

BETTINA RUST



insel taschenbuch 4763
Bettina Rust
Berlin – Favourite Places



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WITH PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR

TRANSLATED BY
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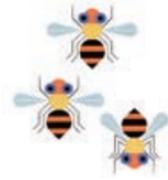
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Mitte



BETWEEN S-/U-BAHNHOF FRIEDRICHSTRASSE AND HACKESCHER MARKT

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 barbeques, 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

CLÄRCHENS BALLHAUS
AUGUSTSTRASSE 24
10117 BERLIN
OPEN DAILY FROM 11AM UNTIL END
WEEKENDS UNTIL 4AM
WWW.BALLHAUS.DE

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.



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.

Regional Delicacies

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

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-



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.