

Susanne Leimstoll

ENGLISH
VERSION

Urban Oases

in BERLIN

The most beautiful garden cafés,
beer gardens and outdoor restaurants

BeBra Verlag



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Restaurant Insel Lindwerder

INTRODUCTION

My first discovery of an urban oasis took place between Mitte and Kreuzberg at the end of the 1990s. I was working as a journalist and had just moved to Berlin from rural Baden-Württemberg in South Germany. The German capital was confusing for newcomers with its districts, neighbourhoods and suburbs. How was I supposed to find my bearings here, how was I going to survive with all the street noise, the speed and the metropolitan hustle and bustle? And where could I find some peace and quiet?

The first editorial party was in the chicken pub “Zur Kleinen Markthalle” not far from the Engelbecken. I started from noisy Alexanderplatz in the city centre, crossed Oranienplatz, well-known for its May riots and demonstrations, and ended up in a neighbourhood with historic cobblestones and lit by gas lanterns, on a green site that used to be the Luisenstädtische Kanal. From the small Waldemar Bridge, I could see the Engelbecken, which until the fall of the Berlin Wall had been enclosed by the death strip and which is now a renatured area surrounded by Wilhelminian-style houses – a place where you could escape to during your lunch break, after work or at the weekend. I was happy to find that Berlin could be like this, too.

Only newcomers can think so naively. Anyone who lives here for a while realises that Berlin is everything at once: a hectic metropolis and a city with green lungs, a monster and a restored residential area, a concrete jungle and a beautiful waterfront. No district is without surprises, no neighbourhood without quality leisure. The city’s diverse gastronomy has long since capitalised on this. Where better to sit and enjoy yourself than in a park or with a view of the Spree, in a beer garden or by a lake, in a hidden courtyard or with a museum as a neighbour?

This book is about such urban oases. They are right in the centre or just around the corner or on the outskirts. Pubs, cafés, beer gardens, and restaurant boats that are all worth discovering. Places where you can relax and eat and drink well. They are for anyone who wants a change of scene or a breath of country air and for those who believe that there is no such thing on a boat or expect more than just coffee in a café or are in the mood for a beer garden.



Café Benjamine

I'm sure there are more. I have selected my favourites here, a colourful mix – and I've also left out some that are restructuring or temporarily closed, for example due to construction work. What mattered to me was that each address has its very own charm, whether it offers delicious snack food or outstanding fine dining, good patisserie or pasta and basta, vegetable dishes or meat dishes. And because all these places thrive on ideas and commitment, their creators are also introduced. Each chapter is a story.

Incidentally, I have now lived in the neighbourhood near the Engelbecken for a long time. It is rarely completely still and not always tranquil. But from my living room window I can look directly into the tops of tall lime, chestnut and birch trees. And in three minutes I can reach one of my urban oases; the terrace of the café by the Engelbecken, watching the swans or the metre-high water fountains, breathing in the scent of the espaliered roses in a green space that used to be a shipping canal – just one of 37 recommendations in this book. Why not try them all!



HOSPITAL AND HOSPITALITY

1

3 SCHWESTERN CAFÉ

Others may change their restaurant concepts, but in this place it's not necessary. The café-restaurant "3 Sisters" has been quietly doing business in the centre of Kreuzberg's notorious neighbourhood of SO36 since 2010. It's an institution; a restaurant in the historic cross-vaulted hall of the former Bethanien deaconess hospital, built in 1845 and once a dining hall for nuns. Even better: outside is an idyllic courtyard garden with garden tables on gravel under old trees, protected by the walls of Haus Bethanien, a strangely confusing, horseshoe-shaped building with a yellow brick façade, arched windows, two 35-metre-high turrets and mighty columns and vaults inside.

There is seating for 120 indoors and another 120 outdoors, just down the stairs behind the dining hall. It's such a cosy place. Singing wafts over from the music school in the neighbouring wing of the building; a tenor is rehearsing, later it will be the choirs' turn. Haus Bethanien is home to contemporary culture, a centre for a wide variety of artists' groups, a workshop for visual arts, media, theatre, dance, dramaturgy, performance and costume. In summer when darkness falls, people gather to watch feature films on the big screen in the open-air cinema on the adjoining meadow.

Owners Michael Böhl and Wolfgang Sinhart, together with long-standing head chef Patrick Becker, have created a restaurant that suits the location perfectly: modern Alpine cuisine with Mediterranean touches and sumptuous breakfast platters. There are beers on tap, homemade lemonade and fair-trade coffee from the local roastery "19grams". The seasonal menu changes every six weeks, but the classics remain: the veal Wiener schnitzel with potato and cucumber salad, the crusted roast Havelland apple pork with beer sauce and buttermilk dumplings, the homemade cheese spaetzle with three types of cheese. Every now and then a diversion: the risotto balls come with pak choi, the pike-perch starter as ceviche. You can feel as if you're in the mountains, because the Alpine breakfast sparkles with specialities from Berlin's cheese



aficionado Fritz Blomeyer and homemade jam with hearty bread. Or on a road trip, because the “Kamener Kreuz” trucker’s breakfast has everything. Or on a health kick, because the vegan version whets the appetite with dried tomato cream cheese, beetroot hummus, lentil curry spread and fruit. Instead of the usual pancakes you’d find elsewhere, there’s the sweet Austrian version of Kaiserschmarrn. It’s a perfect place for late risers too, as breakfast is served until 2 pm.



Michael Böhl (l.) and Wolfgang Sinhart

Who do you meet here? Naturally, artists and people interested in culture, employees from the neighbouring offices, city tourists and about once every couple of weeks there are groups celebrating weddings, birthdays and anniversaries. The restaurant is now more of a family venue and the weekend jazz and swing concerts, which were a fixture some years back, are now the exception.

A pity, really. The two managers are event professionals, both from the arts scene. Michael Böhl was production manager at the Admiralspalast theatre in Mitte, while Munich-based Wolfgang Sinhart is an actor and co-founder of the “White Trash Fastfood Club” on Hackescher Markt. Following the Covid pandemic, the “3 Schwestern” has been open all day again since June 2021 – including the self-service café “Kleine Schwester” with takeaway service. Those who prefer to take their meals outside can sit on one of the benches or on the lawn under the trees that surround this monumental, listed building on Mariannenplatz. Behind it is the St Thomas’ Church and on the other side the green area of

the Luisenstadt Canal to whose history Bethanien is linked – the legacy of the pious Prussian King Frederick William IV.

When it was first built, Luisenstadt was still bordered by gardens and fields, but just half a century later it was surrounded by a sea of houses. Berlin's population had quickly quintupled to 1.7 million and the Bethanien was a hospital and institute for training nurses. When it was closed in 1870, the tussle over the property began: citizens' initiatives, preservationists and squatters prevented its demolition and forced it to be put to social and cultural use. The Künstlerhaus Bethanien association moved to another historic Kreuzberg neighbourhood, but the state-run studio programme and the performing arts replaced it.

A relic of the early history lives on in the building: the historic Theodor Fontane pharmacy, which has been largely preserved in its original state. The novelist and writer worked as a pharmacist in the hospital in 1948/49. A small museum is open on Tuesdays and Thursdays, a quirky remnant in the labyrinthine building of umpteen corridors and a hundred doors. If you enter it up the outside stairs past the "Kleine Schwester" and just want to look in, you should turn left after the columned foyer in the vaulted corridor and turn right through the old, glazed entrance doors. Then you won't have to search long for the "3 Schwestern".

3 Schwestern Kreuzberg, Mariannenplatz 2, 10997 Berlin-Kreuzberg,
www.3schwestern.com





WELCOME TO THE CEMETERY

2

21 GRAMM NEUKÖLLN

Cars bumper to bumper, bulky BVG buses, pedestrians squeezed between red and white barriers and annoying kamikaze cyclists. The air is filled with noise and exhaust fumes. The sun is blazing, the street is dusty, but people take it in their stride. Everyday life on Hermannstraße in Neukölln.

The silence begins behind a graffiti-smeared brick wall that leads to St Thomas' Churchyard, a listed cemetery laid out in 1865 with plane tree avenues and taxus hedging and paths lined with spruce and lime trees. Just a few metres from Leinestraße underground station you can escape the noise and immerse yourself in the quiet of the churchyard through the baroque sandstone portal. Or take the entrance next door to the former funeral parlour, a brick building with a domed ceiling, and enjoy a long breakfast or cake in the cosy courtyard of the brunch café "21 Gramm".

Jeremias Stüer and Daniel Kalthoff, friends since schooldays, both professionals in the catering and event industry, came up with the idea of a café in the cemetery chapel annexe. The church had a rethink a few years ago and began to lease out unused buildings. The former mortuary, which had been used as a workshop for 15 years, and the courtyard in front of it were to be repurposed. The friends' concept met with approval. Major remodelling work followed in coordination with the Historic Monuments Office: carports in the concrete courtyard were removed, walls were torn down, columns were allowed to stand free again, new wall paint, rustic furnishings, plant-covered lights and verses from the Bible on the interior walls.

And outside, dark wooden planks instead of concrete. A triangular sail covers the corner bench between the brick walls, with a string of lights dangling above it. Around it there are tables made of wood and steel and chairs that invite you to sit for a long time. There's also an open-air dining area, surrounded by brick walls entwined with wild vines and clematis. "We wanted to create a space that looks like it has always been there," says Jeremias Stüer. Nothing seems artificial; everyone feels completely at home here: hipsters and afternoon tea lovers, locals and tourists, cemetery visitors and wedding



guests. This also makes the church – as landlord – happy.

There's no dinner at "21 Gramm", but brunch, lunch and coffee. It opens at 9.30am and closes at 5pm. Swedish chef Albin Adolfsson, who is also responsible for the public canteen of the Publix media centre across the street due to open in September 2023, serves comfort food in line with the current trend: down-to-earth cuisine with a modern twist. Vegetarian options are also available, and every dish is deliciously filling. A signature dish is "Croque Madame", a French brunch classic with ham, Gruyère and fried egg on brioche plus a green salad, a proper meal. The mushroom toast with portobello mushroom, tarragon mayo and roasted almonds is served on sourdough bread. Of course there are scrambled eggs, but with sour cream, parmesan and leek oil. And instead of the eternal hipster café pancakes, grandma's French toast is on the menu, served in a very hygge style with apple compôte, vanilla mascarpone, lemon ginger syrup and cinnamon.

The dishes cost between 9 and 15 euros, so not cheap, but you get a generous, particularly tasty portion of food for the money. Some dishes are easily enough for two. In the afternoon, there are delicious fruit crumbles, classic cheesecakes or chocolate cake. And to celebrate the brunch day, why not try a breakfast drink: "Birniini", for example, Cremant d'Alsace with puréed pear. Or a



Daniel Kalthoff (l.) and Jeremias Stieler

vanilla espresso martini made from a vodka infusion, coffee liqueur and vanilla syrup. Most of the young, dynamic team are newcomers to the business, only one trained barista among them. “We look forward to every day,” is the spirit.

Jeremias Stüer and Daniel Kalthoff are passionate about this neighbourhood full of contrasts. Until recently, they also ran the restaurant “Terz” nearby on Herrfurthplatz in the Schillerkiez neighbourhood. That’s now history, but they have just moved across the street into the canteen of the 5,000 square metre “Publix” media building, which was built with bold architecture. The location is the antithesis of “21 Gramm”: exposed concrete, screed floors, sheet zinc and light-coloured wood on the walls and windows, cool designer furniture and a sharply contoured serving counter. There’s nostalgia outside the doors though, as the terrace extends into the old St. Thomas churchyard, giving the canteen a garden and a green setting. Chef Adolffson only ever creates one predominantly vegetarian dish a day, with fish and meat on the menu from time to time, and Lasagne on Fridays. The restaurant is located on the ground floor of the new 25 million euro building. It is home to a project supported by various socially engaged foundations, and includes offices and co-working spaces, sound and video studios for independent, socially relevant journalism

The canteen also complements the concept of the “21 Gramm Café”. On both sides of the street there is something for every guest’s taste: delicious, healthy and fast cuisine.

21 Gramm Neukölln, Herrmannstr. 179, 12049 Berlin-Neukölln, www.21gramm.berlin

Publix, Hermannstr. 90, 12049 Berlin-Neukölln, www.publix.de



Eis

Hausgemacht



15€ / kgel

home
made



TARTLETS AND FIELD STUDIES

3

180 GRAD CAFÉ

One of the highlights of this bistro-café is its location directly on Berlin's "Tempelhofer Feld"; the largest undeveloped inner-city area in the world, the most extensive park area in the city and a site with history. From 1924 it opened as Tempelhof airport with passenger and freight operations, a lifeline during the Berlin Blockade, then it was closed in 2008 after massive protests. Today the greenbelt land between Hasenheide and the Ringbahn railway line, whose development is the subject of constant dispute, offers 877 acres of recreational area, accessible until sunset. An expanse of grass criss-crossed by tarmac tracks, it's an arena for recreational fun, concerts and kite festivals, for garden projects and skate and cycle tours.

The "180 Grad Café" nestles right next to Tempelhofer Feld on the Neukölln side. The name of the small café gives a clue. It's worth stopping by for an after-work aperitif for a 180-degree view of the sunset. Fancy a port wine tonic with flamed rosemary or a strong gin and pear sour? This address is also recommended for an extended lunch break with modern vegetarian cuisine: pumpkin hummus with aubergine and black Venere rice, pointed cabbage and potato salad with grilled carrot and horseradish cream, Italian savoy cabbage and tomato stew with fregola sarda. Perhaps also for a delicate dessert: a semolina flummery with strawberry and basil compôte or a rhubarb and almond tartlet with lemon sour cream butter or homemade ice cream: sorrel and white chocolate strawberry sorbet, lemon and thyme sorbet combined with creamy citrus milk ice cream. No dish is ever ordinary, everything is classic, but a touch eccentric.

This is especially true for coffee breaks. Owner Sarah Klausen, 37, a trained chef and certified master chef, has a penchant for elaborate patisserie. This also explains the name she has given her café-restaurant in the Oderstraßen neighbourhood. She says: "I usually bake at 180 degrees."

Sweets have always been her passion. As a child, she was "a sugar freak" and hoarded sweets everywhere. Later, she turned this little addiction into a love of



baking. At 16, the Munich native decided she needed a change of scenery after graduating from high school. It had to be Berlin and a solid profession. Klausen completed her apprenticeship as a chef in two years, toured Asia for six months for training purposes and then cooked in various good Berlin restaurants. She then went on to study nutritional science and completed internships in Colombia and Peru before returning to Berlin to provide culinary advice for restaurants such as “Kater-schmaus” on Holzmarkt and increasingly specialising in patisserie from her own food manufactory. She opened her restaurant in July 2021 after months of renovation during Covid: she did the work herself, renovated with her own hands and received help from friends and neighbours. An ambitious project.

Anyone who gets to know Sarah Klausen understands this: assertiveness and creativity, spread over a petite 1.56 metres in height. From the dining room, covered with mirror-like parquet flooring and furnished in industrial style, you can watch her at work in the 60 square metre kitchen through huge leaded upcycled windows. Right now, she is powdering a tiramisu cheesecake: boudoir biscuits covered in chocolate cream and soaked in fair trade coffee, covered with a layer of lemon mousse and mascarpone dots, which are now coloured chocolate brown by a small drizzle of 70 per cent cocoa. It has to be done quickly – the canelés for a new dessert dish are just about to come out of the oven.

Sarah Klausen fits in well with this ambience: black shirt over black jeans, Birkenstock slings. Her blonde hair is pinned back at the back of her head and her ear jewellery is made from silverware dessert spoons. What she loves about patisserie is playing with subtle flavours and textures: crunchiness, creaminess, acidity, sweetness and “sometimes a salty edge”. Her creations are designed to create confusion in the mouth. Just nothing straightforward. Her white chocolate and pumpernickel tartlet is adorned with a topping of Granny Smith slices. Her mini carrot cake rests on raw marinated carrot slices with lemon gel and cinnamon crumble. Her apple and almond tart hides roasted almonds in the pastry with a hint of salt, lots of fruit and vanilla cream on top.

During the week, Klausen offers four tartlet and cake menus every day, changing seasonally, many of which are vegan; that’s what the neighbourhood likes. Outside on the pavement, guests sit under sun umbrellas until the evening for aperitif time. It’s not a walking area, but Tempelhofer Feld sends people over: strolling tourists, people tired after work, leisure-seekers, regulars from the neighbourhood and lots of children, who come for the homemade ice cream. It’s self-service, and all dishes are also available as take-away. But when they come to pick up their ordered meals or order them “to go”, they look around – and much prefer to stay. Because here at Bistro-Café am Tempelhofer Feld, as much passion goes into everything as into Sarah Klausen’s culinary creations.

180 Grad Café, Oderstraße 52, 12049 Berlin-Neukölln, www.180gradcafe.com





TANK BEER, NO SCHOOL SPORTS

4

ALTES GYMNASIUM FRIEDRICHSHAIN

The tourist and hipster neighbourhood of Simon-Dach-Straße and the thoroughly gentrified Boxhagener Platz are just a stone's throw away. Here, however, a leisurely calm prevails. The area around Holteistraße could be any middle-class neighbourhood in family-friendly Pankow. The area does look a little rundown. The Max Kreutzinger Secondary School complex has been renovated and now houses condominiums. And the school's gymnasium, an elongated building built in the 1950s in the neoclassical style and a small nod to the wedding cake style of Stalinallee, the GDR's main thoroughfare, is now a restaurant and event location. It has a huge hall whose seven-metre high barrel vault is not apparent from the outside, and in the middle of the ceiling hangs a gigantic chandelier from the ceiling. With its listed façade, lattice windows and columns, the building looks rather playful and delicate behind so much green hedgerow.

The stark contrast between the inside and outside is not the only surprise. If you are looking for a beer garden that is rather atypical for Berlin, the "Alte Turnhalle" in Friedrichshain is the place for you. In addition to Urquell, they also serve Tankbier Pilsener from a copper kettle and uncomplicated, down-to-earth, modern and tastefully prepared dishes.

The outdoor restaurant surrounding the gymnasium seats around 300. No beer benches and tables here, but modern furniture made of old scaffolding planks and steel, formed into sturdy seating groups and interspersed with lighting columns and an expansive terrace under a tent roof. Everywhere, carefully chosen greenery in plant pots: espalier apple, cherry and fig trees, and shrubs with blackcurrants, raspberries and blackberries. Small herb and vegetable gardens with thyme, lavender, cucumbers and tomatoes border each seating area. Picking and smelling is allowed which is a delight for children.

The planting is entirely the work of Christian Otto, 41. He calls it a "small-scale nature experience in the city". Together with his business partner Axel



Endler – both have their own companies and come from the event industry – he has been the manager and tenant of the Turnhalle for eight years. Prior to that, they helped develop the industrial site of the Alte Münze and established “The Greens”, a place for coffee and plant lovers covered in greenery. Green gastronomy is their shared passion; even inside the Turnhalle where it has been realised as a green work of art in the form of vertical moss gardens above the counter, in the middle of the hall and all the way to the toilets. For the owners, it is not just a gimmick, but a commitment to nature.



Christian Otto (l.) and Axel Endler

The dishes created by head chef Stefan Schäfer are the perfect match for the restaurant's style, because they achieve the transition to modern pub cuisine. Examples? As a starter: roasted cauliflower and wild broccoli with homemade tahini sauce, hummus and roasted cashews or the meaty version: Havelland beef sausage, red onions and egg yolk. Fresh sourdough bread is also provided, which also serves as the fragrant base for lavish “Berlin platters” for two. The taste is quite different from the way your mother makes it: beef burgers with wild berry mustard, currywurst with apple curry sauce, marinated baked plum pork, baked potato. In fact, the whole thing is also available as a vegan option with kale and parsnip balls, beetroot falafel, seasonal greens and, of course, plant-based “currywurst”.

More of a schnitzel person? Then maybe a breaded veal schnitzel with cucumber salad and cranberry chutney. Even the burger is pleasantly different, with wild garlic and onion beef smash, balsamic braised onions, Spreewald pickles, homemade sauce and chips. For children, there is currywurst on a skewer with apple curry ketchup or chicken nuggets with chips in a red and white sauce. The portions are huge, the prices are reasonable, and everything tastes delicious. Then at weekends there's also the brunch buffet with 30 to 50 hot and cold dishes, ranging from Havelland apple pork roast to game ragout, from pikeperch on braised cucumber to three kinds of meatballs, from roasted vegetables to salad, to waffles, soft ice cream, crêpes... Good heavens! Sitting outside and feasting is even more fun at the weekend when there is live jazz, poetry slams and cabaret on the wooden stage. Open house until midnight.

Christian Otto and Axel Endler have fully immersed themselves into the "Alte Turnhalle" project, repeatedly tweaking the concept and redesigning much of it during the first two years. "We want to open up this place even more. The best examples of this are plant and flea markets, but above all the family-focused brunch," says Otto. "We want to be an integral part of the neighbourhood." They have that well under control.

Alte Turnhalle Friedrichshain, Holteistraße 6–9, 10245 Berlin-Friedrichshain,
www.alte-turnhalle-berlin.de





HIDDEN AMONG THE MANSIONS

5

BIERGARTEN AM HERTHASEE

There is probably no more elegant beer garden in Berlin. Nor any quieter. It's tucked away in the heart of the wealthy Grunewald residential district by an overgrown lake (which you can't tell was originally only intended to drain the landscape) below the Bismarck Bridge, a massive steel bar construction supported by neo-baroque stone arches.

Before you even start looking for the entrance to the beer garden, which – damn it! – must be here somewhere, you are irresistibly drawn to the stone heads on the bridge, created by sculptor Max Klein in 1891. He had lion-headed obelisks and neo-baroque vases hoisted on to the sandstone parapets with the most striking feature being the sphinxes; gigantic mythical creatures, half animal, half naked woman, whose faces gaze down Königsallee under stone-braided hairstyles with wide-open eyes and, stoically ignoring visitors, glance down past the Wilhelminian splendour of their surroundings to the lake below. Around the corner is Villa Walther, home to a science college with spacious rental apartments in its large annexe and impressive statues on its parapets. The front façade of the main building is a veritable picture gallery, opulently decorated with reliefs and gable mosaics. A representative building of Wilhelmine architecture from 1912, it was planned as a huge “detached house” and was the boastful calling card of the Royal Building Councillor Wilhelm Walther.

From here you can take a stroll and marvel at this opulent neighbourhood of Berlin before thirst and appetite drive you in search of the beer garden. All you have to do is venture through the wrought-iron gate of St. Michaels-Heim, a youth hostel and hotel with conference facilities and consulting rooms run by the Johannesches Sozialwerk, a church social welfare organisation. The building's centrepiece is the former mansion of the Mendelssohn family in the style of an English country house, now with a large modern extension.

Cross the forecourt, take the steps down to the left and then turn right and go around the corner. There it is, below the stone terrace of the home: the small



Biergarten am Herthasee with around 150 seats at simple garden tables set among wrought-iron lanterns. From the balustrade you can see into the extensive park which belongs to the Michaels-Heim and is full of giant trees and over to the vale whose meadows lead to the thick weeping willow on the lakeshore. It's a perfect spot for relaxed breaks and small gatherings. Take a seat on this sunny mid-day – the restaurant is not yet buzzing with activity. Birds are chirping, a toad is croaking and a blackbird is chasing sparrows over the tables. Roses in white, pink and dark red bloom on the embankment. The bells begin to ring. This beer garden is an insider tip, simple, cosy and beautifully hidden. It is a great place to visit even when it is raining; there is room for 100 guests inside.



Manager Karsten Brose arrives in his estate car from his native neighbourhood of Neukölln. He also runs the “Seestern” restaurant in Britzer Garten on a pontoon in the water, a pub buzzing with visitors and a complete contrast to the Herthasee Biergarten. Brose secured the location on Lake Hertha as a leasehold years ago. He thought that the location with its connection to a social-welfare organisation was a good fit for his portfolio. Brose has a company that trains skilled workers for the catering industry and focuses on the social integration of people with disabilities, refugees and people in socially difficult situations.

He is actually a construction materials export specialist who was contracted to fit out catering establishments. But he didn't stop there: he found the usual