

BIKINI BERLIN: MERGING THE PAST AND THE FUTURE

**BIKINI BERLIN:
THE ARCHITECTURE**



BIKINI
BERLIN

LIVING HISTORY

As a historical testimony to Berlin's eventful past, BIKINI BERLIN, in the heart of the city, is now shining in new splendour. But for a long time, it was a different story. Although the ensemble of historically significant buildings experienced a heyday in the prospering 1950s, they almost ended up fading into oblivion. Thanks to the keen architectural eye of its investor, Bayerische Hausbau, BIKINI BERLIN has been completely redeveloped and restored to its former glory in its original significance as a fashion hub: for the urban, style-conscious audience of today.

BACKGROUND

Ever since the 18th century, the City West (as it is now known) has been a popular attraction among both locals and tourists, all thanks to its combination of unique architecture and varied entertainment. At the beginning of the 20th century it was home to Germany's most important premiere cinemas, including the famous Ufa-Palast am Zoo and the Capitol Filmtheater. Alongside these, the Gourmenia-Palast by architect Leo Nachtlicht housed some of the most spectacular restaurants in the city and featured an open rooftop garden, cascading water features and lots of glass.

During WWII, large parts of Berlin were destroyed, including many of the bustling shops and restaurants around Breitscheidplatz in Charlottenburg. Afterwards, many of them were left in ruins.



1. A new beginning for war-damaged buildings: The destroyed Ufa-Palast am Zoo cinema on Hardenbergstrasse in 1952.

1955–1961 CENTRE AT THE ZOO

As part of the Marshall Plan, the architects Paul Schwebes and Hans Schoszberger were commissioned to build a new centre for the production of ladies' outerwear. The architects (who shared an office for 12 years) were two of the most definitive talents of the post-war period in West Berlin, and what started life as the "Zentrum am Zoo" (Centre at the Zoo) is now today's BIKINI BERLIN.

2. The building site in 1956: View of the rear of the elongated building (which would eventually become the Bikini building).





3. The flâneur's playground and streetscape at the Zentrum am Zoo in 1957: View through the walkway from the large high-rise to the east.

4. From 1957 to 1999, the Zoo Palast was the main venue of the Berlin International Film Festival (also known as the Berlinale) and was later used to show premieres. But following renovation work, it was reinstated as a Berlinale location again in 2014.



CINEMA

In cooperation with Paul Schwebes and Hans Schoszberger, the architect Gerhard Fritsche designed a new-build cinema: the Zoo Palast became renowned far beyond the city's borders and attracted film stars from all over the world to Berlin.

For many cinema enthusiasts, the Zoo Palast represents the cinematic centre of Berlin. And it still conveys a sense of glitz and glamour to this day – also thanks to the cutting-edge technology concealed behind the renovated façade and grand, plush interior.

POST-WAR MODERNISM

The BIKINI BERLIN complex is regarded as a particularly fine example of the light and functional architecture of the 1950s. Its bright, modern design reflected the forward-looking period of new beginnings after the war years.

Like no other Berlin architects, Schwebes and Schoszberger utilised all materials available to them at the time. They designed lightweight window frames made from gold-anodised aluminium and a rhythmic use of space with façades broken up by projections and recesses.

Lots of exposed concrete, coloured wall sections and expansive glass panels on the façades underline the ensemble's materiality and also reflect the style of the surrounding buildings: the Kranzler Eck, Hotel Kempinski and Amerika Haus on Hardenbergstrasse (which today houses the photo gallery C/O Berlin).



5. Large high-rise building with main entrance from the western forecourt of the cinema in 1960.

FASHION EPICENTRE

West Berlin needed a new location for the fashion industry, which was once based at Hausvogteiplatz in the east of the city. Offices, boutiques, sophisticated cafés, ateliers and production facilities opened in the new Zentrum am Zoo. Around 50 fashion companies worked here and presented their collections to a discerning target group.

6. Small high-rise (front right) and the Bikini building with Christmas lights in 1960 (view from the south-east).





7. The street façade of the long rectangular building (view to the east, 1956): the open, second storey is plain to see here. It divided the Bikini building horizontally into one “upper” and one “lower” part, which inspired the people of Berlin to give it an affectionate new nickname.

NAME

The Berliners have a tradition of giving eye-catching buildings nicknames: “Schwangere Auster” (pregnant oyster) for the Congress Hall (today the House of World Cultures), “Waschmaschine” (washing machine) for the Federal Chancellery, “Wasserklops” (water ball) for the fountain on Breitscheidplatz or “Bikinihaus” (Bikini building) for the central building in the Zentrum am Zoo in the 1950s.

An open-sided storey framed by columns once divided the building into one upper and one lower area. This separation into two parts reminded the Berliners of the revolutionary new swimwear for women that was causing a stir in the 1950s, the bikini.

Older Berliners will remember the large high-rise as the Huthmacher building that used to house Café Huthmacher, one of the complex’s exclusive culinary establishments.

1961–2008 DECLINE AND NEW START

After the construction of the Berlin Wall, the seamstresses who had previously crossed the border to work at the Zentrum am Zoo no longer came. A lot of fashion companies relocated to West Germany. The centre lost its significance and visitor numbers dwindled, the splendour of a bygone era giving way to indifference and a certain lack of orientation in the surrounding area. Berlin’s economy fell into stagnation.

In 1977/78, the famous “Bikini storey” in the main building of the ensemble was closed: the State Art Gallery was located between the former “bikini top” and “bottoms” until 1993.

Long after reunification, the listed building had all but faded into oblivion, masked by a wild mix of shops, offices and restaurants.

In 2008, specific plans started being made for the new BIKINI BERLIN.



8. The large blue sphere on the forecourt of the small high-rise was originally built as a 360° cinema, but from 1998 it became renowned as the venue for a successful TV show: political talk show “Christiansen” was broadcast from the studio here.

Image sources

1. Berlin State Archive, F Rep. 290 (01) No. 0019653 / Photographer: Wetzell, W. 2. Berlin State Archive, F Rep. 290 (01) No. 0050918 / Photographer: Sass, Bert 3. ullstein Image / Photographer: Eschen, Fritz 4. Berlin State Archive, F Rep. 290 (05) No. 0054762 / Photographer: Schütz, Gert 5. Berlin State Archive, F Rep. 290 (01) No. 0057266 / Photographer: Siegmann, Horst 6. Berlin State Archive, F Rep. 290 (01) No. 0311397 / Photographer: Huschke, Willi 7. Berlin State Archive, F Rep. 290 (01) No. 0170676 / Photographer: Hagemann, Otto 8. Berlin State Archive, F Rep. 290-02-15 No. 0017810_C / Photographer: Schneider, Günter

LIVING ARCHITECTURE

The reunification of East and West galvanised Berlin back into action. After all eyes being on the newly refurbished districts of Mitte and Prenzlauer Berg, the allure of the tradition-steeped parts of western Berlin was rediscovered and it finally started receiving the attention it deserves. Like a flagship of this development, BIKINI BERLIN lies harmoniously embedded in the centre of Charlottenburg. The elongated main building is as open, inviting and elegant as it once was, the Bikini storey has been architecturally updated. And once again, the ensemble defines the cityscape: as an architectural witness to West Berlin's eventful post-war history.

REOPENING

In 1997, the whole of BIKINI BERLIN was declared a listed building ensemble. It was purchased by the Munich-based Bayerische Hausbau in 2002 and the revitalisation was completed in 2013 after a construction period of around three years. The name BIKINI BERLIN is a reference to the architectural history of the complex and emphasises its position as a fashion hub and hive of cultural activity – just like in the past.

SAQ Architects (Brussels) honoured this basic idea with their master-plan. Their interpretation and its structural implementation was carried out by the architects' office Hild und K (Munich/Berlin), renowned specialists in the redevelopment of pre-existing buildings.

BIKINI BERLIN is synonymous with a culturally-aware, urban lifestyle, exclusive shopping and a relaxed atmosphere.



UNIQUE FEATURES

Today the partly redeveloped, partly reconstructed architecture of post-war modernism boasts a new, functional urbanity. The cinema has undergone an elegant modernisation, the lettering on the outer façade has been preserved, as well as parts of the interior – and the technology updated to the latest standards.





↑ The panoramic window made of tempered glass reveals the views from the main area directly into the monkey enclosure. Thanks to the cosy seating, this is the perfect place to take a break from shopping, as well as being a popular meeting point.

The use of Berlin's familiar paving stones as flooring make the inside and outside merge seamlessly into one another; for the interior of the Bikini building, they were simply polished.

↓ Shredded glass panels from the original façades were added to the plaster of the ensemble's new-build elements, such as the "folding façade" next to the hotel forecourt, and glitter in the sunshine just like the fashions of the past: the "folding façade" is supposed to be reminiscent of the folds of a skirt or dress.





↑ The wide staircase, clad in oak parquet, offers a sense of spaciousness and an unobstructed, wide view of the Bikini building's interior. The step treads are made of raw, waxed steel. And the BIKINI BERLIN green might seem familiar: the design and colour of the steel girders on the ground floor are a reference to Berlin's bridges.

AWARD-WINNING

BIKINI BERLIN is LEED-certified and has won the FIABCI Award in Gold (national) and Silver (international).

The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design classification programme is regarded as one of the world's most important non-compulsory quality classifications in architecture. With LEED, BIKINI BERLIN is setting new benchmarks in ecologically efficient building in Germany.

In 2015, BIKINI BERLIN also won the Oscar of the real-estate world: the FIABCI Prix d'Excellence Germany (in the Commercial category) in Gold, and, in an international context, the World Silver Award in the 'Heritage' category at the 2016 FIABCI World Prix d'Excellence Awards.

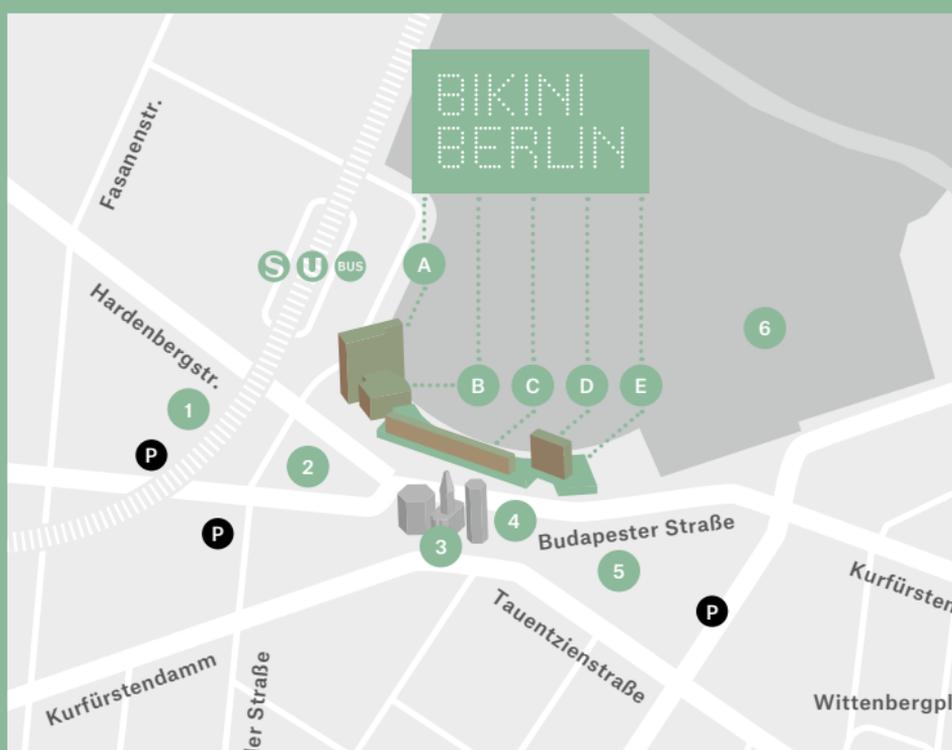
↓ The large rooftop terrace, covering an area of 7000sqm (behind the Bikini building), is a popular spot for local Berliners and tourists alike. They come here to enjoy the peace and quiet of this urban oasis and the views directly into the neighbouring zoo.



Today, the BIKINI BERLIN building complex consists of the Zoo Palast cinema, the large high-rise and the small high-rise, the car park and of course the central Bikini building, the namesake of the entire ensemble, with the popular rooftop terrace that offers views into the zoo below.

The complete BIKINI BERLIN ensemble

- A Large high-rise | Offices
- B Zoo Palast cinema
- C Bikini building with new rooftop terrace | Mall and offices
- D Small high-rise | 25hours Hotel
- E Multi-storey car park



- 1 Amerikahaus | C/O Berlin
- 2 Waldorf Astoria Hotel
- 3 Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church
- 4 Breitscheidplatz
- 5 Europa Center
- 6 Zoo

BIKINI BERLIN

   Zoologischer Garten

www.bikiniberlin.de