



HISTORY OF BIKINI BERLIN

CONTINUITY AND TRANSFORMATION IN THE CITY WEST: THE LOCATION'S HISTORY

The building ensemble of BIKINI BERLIN has a prime location in the city. Situated between the Zoological Garden, the Memorial Church and the busy shopping street Kurfürstendamm, this part of Berlin is a place of special historical significance: few places in the city bear the hallmarks of the urban transformation and tumultuous political events of past decades as clearly. BIKINI BERLIN, which was revitalised by Munich-based project development company Bayerische Hausbau for completion until the end of 2013, continues to celebrate its heritage while contributing contemporary facets to the site at the same time. With respect for its illustrious past, BIKINI BERLIN is writing a new, self-confident chapter in the development and future of this part of the city.

EMERGENCE OF THE CITY WEST

The history of BIKINI BERLIN is also the history of its connection to the Zoological Garden. In the mid-18th century King Friedrich II. gave his permission for the park to be created – and just a short time later the grounds, with animal enclosures, beer gardens and restaurants, became one of the main attractions for the people of the Berlin and its surrounding area. In the first half of the 19th century Berlin developed into a European metropolis. As the population grew, simpler residential areas were created in the eastern part of the city, while at the south-western edge of the Tiergarten elegant villas, country houses and later upscale residential properties for rent were built. The emerging City West also profited from Berlin's ascent to the capital city of the German Reich in 1871: municipal horse tram lines ended at the Zoological Garden, and the new city railway with its Bahnhof Zoo train station connected tourists, day-trippers and the residents of the new West with the old centre of Berlin.

ASCENT TO A PLEASURE MILE

In 1896 the neo-Romanesque Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church on the Breitscheidplatz square was consecrated. This not only gave the City West a new landmark; the building was also regarded as the initial impetus for additional prestigious buildings in the area, including the Romanisches Café (Romanesque Café) – a meeting point for literati and artists – countless popular restaurants, exhibition buildings, café houses, ateliers and theatres. In the first three decades of the 20th century the City West increasingly became Berlin's pleasure mile and began

outstripping the old East around the Friedrichstraße and the grand boulevard Unter den Linden. And the medium of cinema, which was still in its infancy, played an important part in this. Next to the existing Ufa-Palast, which was roughly located on the site of today's large high-rise, a row of commercial buildings with the Capitol cinema in the centre was built on the site of the Bikinihaus in 1925/26. This building was designed by the architect Hans Poelzig in the form of an elongated two-storey row of shops in the style of *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) with a clear architectural contrast to the building of the *Romanisches Forum* (Romanesque Forum), as the square was known. With its organ and orchestra pit that could be automatically lowered, the Capitol was one of the most impressive cinemas of its time. It was destroyed during an air raid in 1943.

THE GOURMENIA-PALAST: AN EARLY OASIS

A few years after the construction of Poelzig's Capitol movie theatre on the grounds of the later Zoo Palast in 1929, the Gourmenia-Palast by Jewish architect Leo Nachtlicht opened its doors. It consisted of several, very different dining rooms grouped behind a homogenous façade. Both on the outside and the inside the building took on the dynamic design of *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity). A special attraction was the three-storey Traube wine restaurant: it faced the zoo and was designed as a large garden with trees, large-leafed plants, blossoming flowers and colourful birds. In addition to this was the high, multi-storey hall with a huge spiral staircase and a glass tubular water sculpture. The highlight of Café Berlin right next door was a rooftop garden, the roofing of which could be drawn back to afford an unobstructed view of the sky above. In this way, the legendary temple of entertainment integrated its natural surroundings and proximity to the Zoo into its design concept. The Gourmenia-Palast was one of the biggest restaurants to open at the end of the 1920s in Berlin. But after just a few years in business the building was destroyed during the Second World War.

A SYMBOL OF RECONSTRUCTION

The bleak wartime period with its devastating consequences for the City West was followed in the 1950s by the construction of the "Zentrum am Zoo" building complex by the architects Hans Schoszberger and Paul Schwebes - and with it began the period of reconstruction. The two architects designed complex buildings of different sizes with an ingenious staggered structure. By spring 1957 a sixteen-storey high-rise next to the square in front of the railway station and the Zoo Palast cinema by Gerhard Fritsche were completed. This was followed by the six-storey building, which was quickly termed "Bikinihaus" ("Bikini House") by the locals of Berlin because of its open-sided storey, which was reminiscent of a bare midriff in a bikini, the daring swimwear fashion causing a stir at the time, as well as a smaller high-rise with an adjoining multi-storey car park. Essentially designed as the headquarters of the Berlin centre for ladies' clothing together with its production sites and representative offices, the whole ensemble has a length of 400 metres. Due to this dimension, during the following years it garnered attention beyond the city's borders as a symbol of Berlin's reconstruction. The lightweight, light-coloured design and the

materiality of the façade design of exposed concrete, coloured wall sections, gold anodised aluminium and large glass surfaces also caused a stir in architectural circles.

BIKINI BERLIN - COMING FULL CIRCLE

With the Cold War, the building of the Berlin Wall and the migration of sectors of Berlin's economy, from the seventies the City West started to lose its shine and the buildings at the "Zentrum am Zoo" building complex became less attractive and significant. Only with the reunification of Germany did the focus return to this part of town. After a generation of investors who focused on the city's lucrative eastern districts like Mitte and Prenzlauer Berg, the neighbourhood of Charlottenburg has now entered a phase of revitalisation. Especially with the redesign and redevelopment of the BIKINI BERLIN complex, the City West is once again asserting itself as an attractive commercial and social destination. While the Bikinihaus of post-War Berlin was a hub for the city's sophisticated and stylish residents, the modern utilisation concept also places a focus on fashion. And the connection to the zoo, which defines the architectural concept of the urban oasis, is also leading the arch of continuity from the past into the future. The newly created rooftop terrace forms a vibrant visual connection to the animal enclosures. And with the redevelopment and renovation of the Zoo Palast cinema, the film theatre tradition is also being preserved. Ultimately, the history of the location is repeating itself: with its newly constructed BIKINI BERLIN, the City West is once again turning the spotlight back on itself – and outdoing the East of Berlin for the second time.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

BIKINI BERLIN
Katrín Schneider | Communication & Marketing
Hardenbergplatz 2 | 10623 Berlin
Fon +49 30 554964-11 | Fax +49 30 554964-99
ka.schneider@hausbau.de

Press Factory
Thomas Erhardt
Karl-Marx-Allee 81 | 10243 Berlin
Fon +49 30 2887-9007 | Fax +49 30 2887-9003
thomas.erhardt@press-factory.de