



TWO DESIGN VISIONS FOR BERLIN APARTMENTS

IN A NEW DEVELOPMENT IN BERLIN, TWO HOMEOWNERS TAKE DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO INTERPRETING THE ARCHITECT'S DRAMATIC DESIGN. BERLIN HAS A REPUTATION AS A HIP TOWN, BUT MUCH OF ITS RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURE, MARKED BY SQUAT PREWAR APARTMENT HOUSES AND POSTWAR CONCRETE BLOCKS, IS ANYTHING BUT. A GLIMMERING EXCEPTION CAN BE FOUND ON JOHANNISSTRASSE, IN THE HEART OF THE HISTORIC MITTE DISTRICT.

Veröffentlichung im Wall Street Journal Online, 8. November 2013
von J. S. Marcus

Jürgen Mayer H., one of Berlin's best-known experimental architects, has designed a seven-story apartment building with an attention-grabbing, aluminum-shaft facade and an interior with unconventional angles. No two apartments in the building, completed in 2012, are alike, and no two rooms in any apartment are quite alike. Two couples who own homes there have taken different routes to domesticating Mr. Mayer's vision. On the fifth floor, Daniel and Ala Glasner, transplanted Austrians in their mid-30s, have devised a layout to create cozy spaces from their large, open-plan, 2,044-square-foot apartment, which includes a master bedroom, a guest bedroom, an office and two bathrooms.

On the same floor, Stefan Höglmaier and Oscar Loya, a couple who divide their time between Munich and Berlin, use bold colors and strategic placement of furniture to maximize space in their 1,151-square-foot apartment. Their home has two small bedrooms and two baths in an open plan that includes a galley kitchen and a small dining area. The focal point of both apartments is a sunken, rounded lounge area, with a built-in sofa. Each lounge has different dimensions and different placement, says Hans Schneider, an associate of Mr. Mayer's who acted as the building's supervising architect.

"The idea was to have one floating space," he says, with "different zones" instead of rooms with walls. The lounges, which flow into living and dining areas, posed decorative hurdles. "The lounge is not that big, but you still have a very big sofa," says Mr. Höglmaier, the 38-year-old founder and managing director of Euroboden, the Munich real-estate company that developed the project. He and his husband, Mr. Loya, a 34-year-old singer born in Southern California, used textiles to give a feeling of intimacy.

They decided on iridescent bluish-brown upholstery from Kvadrat, the Danish firm, then offset the two-tone look with clashing throw pillows, also featuring Kvadrat materials. "If you take away the pillows, it's kind of stiff," says Mr. Höglmaier. For the lounge floor, they picked out a wall-to-wall carpet, which Mr. Höglmaier says added warmth and contrast. Their sofa was custom-built by COR, a German furniture company. Euroboden recommended other building residents also use COR—advice the Glasners decided not to take. "We started all over," says Mr. Glasner, an entrepreneur. The couple spent months on the sofa alone, pulling together their interior—looking at fabric swatches in Vienna and then ordering the fabric through a Munich distributor. Their apartment has dark oak floors, so they decided to contrast their lounge floor with a colder variation—a gray, concrete-like surface rendered from volcanic stone. Mr. Höglmaier says he has spent about \$162,000 on his apartment's interior. The average initial selling price of the building's apartments was about \$740 per square foot, he adds, but he declined to disclose the purchase price of his apartment. The Glasners wouldn't say how much they paid for their apartment or how much they spent on the interior.

The building had 21 residential units at its completion last year, and several remain unsold. The Berlin office of Engel & Völkers, the German real-estate brokerage firm, currently has listings for six apartments there, ranging from about \$627 to \$965 per square foot. The most expensive is a 3,325-square-foot apartment on the sixth floor that is selling for \$3.1 million. Birke Baller, the agent handling the homes, says the building is a luxury property in Berlin, but isn't priced as high as some newly built apartments nearby on Gendarmenmarkt, one of Berlin's best-known historic squares, where prices run as high as \$1,254 per square foot. The building's two penthouses, each at about 2,150 square feet, feature rooftop terraces. The two were combined by a single owner, who customized the interior, says Nina Plaat, a spokeswoman for Euroboden. All of the apartments came with off-white walls, which seemed like a blank slate for Mr. Loya, who represented Germany in the 2009 Eurovision song contest. "I wanted there to be graffiti on the walls," he says, alluding to the building's urban setting a few blocks from a major Berlin train station. But Mr. Höglmaier thought that would be "a little too much." So they compromised by getting what Mr. Loya calls "a really funky kitchen"—a turquoise galley kitchen that subtly picks up the bluish tone of the sofa fabric. Neither man regularly cooks, so they wanted the kitchen to register as a decorative element rather than as a separate functional space. "I didn't want to have the feeling that I'm living in a kitchen," says Mr. Höglmaier. The kitchen has "cool, secret doors" that disguise appliances and storage areas, says Mr. Loya. The couple set their Minotti kitchen table in a spot that wouldn't clutter up the area. They use a light sculpture from Berlin-based Nordic artist Olafur Eliasson as the dining-area fixture. In the Glasner home, on the other hand, the kitchen and dining area is the heart of the apartment. "We always wanted to have a space where you can live, cook and eat," says Mr. Glasner. The kitchen was custom made by Radaschitz, a joinery with principals in Austria and the U.K., with a stove from Bora, a German manufacturer, and a pair of Gaggenau ovens. It includes a prominent bar area with an expansive view over the apartment, where Ms. Glasner, an art curator, often works. A geometric-shaped dining table was also custom-designed for the space.

The outdoor areas of the building are made up of vertical aluminum shafts with distinctive, pond-shaped cutouts that alter the appearance of windows. Mr. Höglmaier and Mr. Loya echoed the architecture in their master bedroom by installing leather drapes with perforated shapes. In their bedroom, the Glasners have put up orange drapes that filter out the building's facade. Both couples have been bold with their guest bathrooms. The two men have put in psychedelic yellow tiles that suggest a 1970s record jacket. The Glasners have given theirs rich purple walls, a departure from the minimalist approach elsewhere. The intense variation of the apartment took some getting used to for Ms. Glasner when the couple relocated in fall 2012 from a nearby 19th-century building. "It took me a while to adapt," she says, of her home's array of irregular shapes, "but now I love it." Mr. Loya never had doubts: "I didn't want someplace easy, comfortable and cute," he says.