

“A Twen Stroll through Berlin” (1960)

Abstract

Published in the influential teen magazine *Twen*, this account of cultural, culinary, and leisure-time offerings in 1960 Berlin shows how far the city had come since the immediate postwar period. The “economic miracle” of the 1950s had brought espresso bars, elegant cafes and drinking establishments, live music, first-rate theater, and shopping to Berlin. In this article, Berlin emerges as a cosmopolitan city with an active nightlife and ample opportunities for consumption.

Source

When I came to Berlin, I knew that Berlin was a city without a curfew and the city with the highest suicide rate in the world. Now I also know that there are still a lot of pubs in Berlin that I haven't seen yet. And I'll probably never get to see them, since I am plenty busy frequenting the joints I know. But I can name the watering holes where you will always meet people who know all the other watering holes.

If it happens to be the afternoon, it is best to start by taking a seat at a sidewalk table in front of a café on Kurfürstendamm. The Berlin of old – so I have been told – was famous for its vaudeville theater shows. I can hardly imagine that the show was more exciting than the parade of girls that now marches past as you take your coffee break. For good effect, you pick the table outside Café Kranzler that stands precisely on the sharp angle of the left corner. There you'll have the full enjoyment of all the knockouts coming from Bahnhof Zoo and also of the regular Ku-Damm strollers. Don't say you already know. A new age cohort has just joined in, the skirts got shorter, the blouses tighter, the price of the coffee has stayed the same, and so it is worth the while. Another tip: sit down alone. If you are already in the company of the opposite sex, it will prevent your full enjoyment. You can then no longer imagine so readily that you are accompanying every object of your thirty-second burst of interest down the Ku-Damm for a little stretch. But if someone joins you at the table and suggests accompanying her to the “Old Vienna,” “Ricci,” “Paris Bar,” or the “Eden Saloon,” go right ahead and accept. “Old Vienna” is one of the few espresso bars in Berlin. The great espresso wave has not quite made its way yet to the Havel and the Spree. This is a free tip for enterprising entrepreneurs. I ended up at “Old Vienna” on the very first evening. Next to me a movie guy was in the process of building up the star career of a blouse-conscious Juliet. Her Romeo, meanwhile, was standing on the side and was starting to accept the fact that he would be part of the future stardom of his party-fairy only from a middle seat in the back. He did the right thing, since the movie guy left with Juliet and left Romeo behind with gloomy thoughts and a higher whiskey bill. Juliet consoled him – and presumably herself, too – with the remark that this was necessary for her future. Toward morning, I saw Juliet again, this time having a lonely hangover breakfast in the waiting hall of the train station. She had eyes red from crying and a tear in her blouse. Now she was looking truly photogenic. How flat you make your bed – sometimes that's how flat the future falls on its face.

It doesn't have to be Hollywood right away. Perhaps you are content to fortify your stomach and throat in “Old Vienna” for ambitions that are closer by. A substantial bite to eat – for example, a plate of spaghetti – can be had here for around two Marks. The interior decorator had a soft spot for shy people: the swivel seats at the bar are close enough together to ensure that you will make contact with your future fifteen-minute neighbor when mounting your chair. Silent gourmets immerse themselves in the mirror; the acoustically interested must content themselves with eavesdropping on their neighbors' conversations – juke box, sorry, out of luck.

One likes to impress five-minute-old conquests with a change of scenery. The scenery at “Ricci” is well

suited for this. The “Ricci” is made up of three parts: in front of the door, behind the door, and above the door. If you go up the stairs and sit above the door in the Café Salon, you’ll have a great opportunity to finish up your usual introductory spiel. Be careful, though, if you brag about having celebrities among your acquaintances. You see, they’ll manage to walk in. The other day I met Freddy Quinn there. He was playing piggy-back with Carsten from the *Null-acht-fünfzehn* movie. I found it silly, but at least it was better than if he had sung. And so I could stay comfortably seated and chat with the barmaid about French chansonniers, all of whom are much better than the German crooners. Still, Freddy Quinn did not do the piggy-back with me, from which you can gather that a tolerant tone prevails at the “Ricci.”

You now have to ponder whether you feel like raucous music, a piano concert by Tchaikovsky, a vibration massage, or a shoe shine. If you have opted for one of these four choices, you’ll head to the “Eden Saloon.” For you’ll find all of those there – and more. Rolf Eden has a total of nineteen machines in his place, and a rule that you will only be served if you order something. Which serves you well at the Eden, even if you don’t want to be served. Rolf Eden is one of those rare restaurateurs who give you the impression that they consider their profession a hobby and are not all that intent on making money. But by not fleecing his guests, he makes the most money. This is how, within three years, he went from worn shoes to a white Porsche, Kai Fischer, and considerable local fame. Kai Fischer he lost again, but when I went to the hospital to visit Rolf Eden, who was suffering from jaundice, the white Porsche stood there in front of it. A strange combination of colors, his girlfriends thought, and they called every hour to ask how the nuances were developing. That’s worth doing with Rolf Eden, with whom something new happens every hour. At any rate, he has what it takes to be a millionaire: you see, he’s worked as a dishwasher once. It was in Paris. An American couple hired him as a guide. They abandoned him in Berlin. To figure out his situation, he sat himself down at a nearby bar with his last ten mark bill and thought. He did it in French and out loud. A gentleman on the bar stool next to him also had problems to ponder, so the two fell into a conversation. That gentleman was sick of his restaurant – Rolf was looking for an opportunity. Voilà, the opportunity was sitting next to him. Rolf painted the place with Parisian motifs and waited for customers. Today, the customers wait for him, and when he is not in his saloon, a dark melancholy settles on their spirits, and Mozart’s concerto in C Minor from the juke box sounds even more minor than usual.

Twice a week there are rock ‘n’ roll championships; twice every fifteen minutes a projector casts classical works from Gauguin onto the screen for Rolf Eden to see. Other sights to recommend include a hand-operated ventilator once owned by Napoleon, a frying pan for children from the cannibals, a cable railway that transports drinks, and the bar hostess Evi. Prices: beer, 70 Pfennigs, brandy, 80 Pfennigs, whiskey, two Marks. For ten Pfennigs you can draw hot water from the appropriate machine and shave. For we are now heading into a refined establishment: the “Badewanne” [bath tub]. Yes, it has now become posh. The only thing that still reminds one of the old days is Johannes Rediske, who plays music here just as he has done since the day it opened. But he, too, is now wearing fine custom-made suits. Everything is very clean, very bright, and very restaurantish. If you are out with strict parents, they will not conceal their delight at the many sweet little children there. The atmosphere that used to live at the Badewanne has fled to the Eden Saloon. At the same time, much of the casual Dixieland happiness has transplanted itself to the “Eierschale.” To be sure, the “Eierschale” was hatched a little far off the beaten track, in Dahlem. But Berlin is not so jealous that it offers all of its attractions bunched together in the center, as is the case in smaller cities. There is always a dense crowd in the “Eierschale,” the Spree City Stompers really heat things up, and those who don’t have their glasses steamed up by this can enjoy the collection of signs and sayings on the wall. And since we are on the jazz street: the “New Orleans” is fairly new and the darkest of all Berlin jazz bars. But that doesn’t matter. The cool jazz that is fabricated here contrary to the label is only for the ear, in any case. If you have an ear for it. If you have no ear for it, you can – while your friends are being cool – do a few rounds on horseback at the hippodrome next door. There, the four-legged animals trot through a sawdust arena. However, the diversion does not seem much appreciated. The horses are mostly without riders. And so they have plenty of leisure to eyeball the

two-legged creatures that have to pass by their ring on their way to the sanitary installations that belong to the New Orleans.

You might feel the need for some quiet now. Quiet without boredom is something you'll find in the "Volle Pulle." This is an establishment that looks like a gigantic wine barrel in the front, and like the interior of a beehive on the inside, that is how many honeycombs it has. I forgot to ask whether the people once got into a fistfight over their checked coats and regretfully did not have enough weapons for hand-to-hand fighting. Now, at any rate, there would be no complaints about a lack of arms: instead of a cloakroom ticket you get a cooking spoon.

When you enter the "Paris Bar," there are two things you should not take offense at: that "Paris Bar" neither is a bar nor has one, and that the *maître* of this very Parisian spot is called Müller. It was established by his uncle, and he was a genuine Frenchman. The style of the "Paris Bar" should be located somewhere between the Parisian Boul' Mich' and St. Germaine des Près. The illusion is perfect, except for a sign to keep an eye on one's belongings. The leather-covered benches along the wall, the mirrored wall above the back rest, the open fireplace, and, finally, the very French menu with onion soup and red wine to go with the beefsteak – this could be exactly between "Deux Magots" and "Café de Flore." Incidentally: the *prix fixe* menu costs around three Marks.

In addition, there are a vast number of French wines, cognacs, and apéritifs. If you want to pour down a few quiet beers to some good jukebox music, you can head for the "Domingo" in Uhlandstraße (but quite a ways up). And if Georgia, the colored bartender is in the right mood, she'll even sing along. The accent is American and coffee brown in the Galerie Bremer as well. Here, a bar sits and pictures are mounted in the middle of the room, modern pictures, some of which can also be inspected in the entry hall without having to come into contact with seductive alcohol. A little chat with Rudi, the colored barkeeper, is always informative. At least you can find out which stage artists are currently in Berlin, for if they are in town, they are at Rudi's.

Theater is a big deal in Berlin. This is one of the few areas in which Berlin has recovered national importance. Berlin offers the unique opportunity to compare theater of Western and Eastern flavor. You see, you can travel into the Eastern Sector without any problems (including by car), and theater tickets are about the only thing you can buy with East money exchanged in the West without having to show your identification card or getting into trouble because of currency fraud. If you go to see nothing else in the East – the Brecht ensemble in East Berlin is worth a trip across the sector. Even if it is one of less "Brechtian," produced pieces, such as "Fear and Misery of the Third Reich" you can still study all kinds of remarkable theater methods. Don't be embarrassed to park your western license-plated car right in front of the theater – you will be joined by others.

One night you could go to bed early for a change in order to get up early the next morning – then you can visit a few second-hand dealers. But you have to be really early. What sets the Berlin antiquarians apart from their colleagues in the rest of Germany is that they don't wait for someone to come to them and offer them some old clothes. They go into houses of mourning and buy up complete widows' apartments. You'll find all kinds of marvelous old bric-a-brac. But you have to be early – others will be, too.

Yes, I know, there's a lot I've left out. For example, that you can sit in the lobby of the Hilton Hotel and pretend you're a big shot. That Carow by the lake and Casa Leon are also nice spots, and that good jazz is played also in the Riverboat. And we haven't even spoken of fashion yet, seeing as Oestergaard is in Berlin, and the fashion stores Horn and Rochlitz on Ku-Damm with their labels move a Berliner living abroad to tears when they scratch his neck.

By the way: if nothing else tempts you to Berlin, perhaps this tip will – in Berlin you can drive like

nowhere else in West Germany. Because Berliners have fewer cars percentagewise than West Germans. Because most Berliners wouldn't even know where to drive with their car. There is no lack of parking spaces.

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