



CLOCKWISE FROM MAIN: Fernsehturm tower, Berlin's tallest building; Elke, left, with the writer; the old Tempelhof airport is now a community hub; Elke's apartment; Neukölln's buzzing nightlife; Jane, left, and Elke don antique kimonos.



ELKE, ME AND BERLIN

INSTEAD OF MERELY SCRATCHING THE SURFACE OF THE GERMAN CAPITAL, **JANE CORNWELL** GETS THE INSIDE RUNNING WITH HER OWN UNOFFICIAL GUIDE.

A sunny afternoon in Neukölln, and I'm cycling along a former airport runway with the wind in my hair; my new pal Elke pedalling by my side. Around us, Berliners are making the most of Tempelhofer Feld, a vast multi-community space that was once one of the world's busiest transport hubs. Rollerbladers zigzag down the park's runways. An allotment garden buzzes with activity. A kite skater overtakes us, sinews straining, his sail a perfect arc.

Dogs gambol in designated "hund" fields.

Children swing from state-of-the-art climbing frames. In the distance, the red-and-white spire of the Fernsehturm, the television tower that is the tallest building in Berlin (pictured), pokes into the blue through wisps of cloud. Hearing music, we follow it: a guitar band is playing on the back of a truck parked next to a huge wall covered in bright graffiti and painted with a single giant word: FRIEDEN. Peace.

"Coffee?" suggests Elke, who is blonde and bright and full of good ideas. We bump along the cobbled streets of Neukölln, the latest Berlin borough to be hailed as uber-hip, until we reach Pappelreihe, a former stationery shop turned cafe, and grab an outside table in the sunshine. Much of old Neukölln, Elke tells me, is being transformed into something else: a laundrette is now an Italian restaurant and a car park has become an exhibition space and nightclub.

Elke has lived here in Berlin's south-east since 2009, the year after Tempelhof airport and its noisy flight path closed for good, turning a gritty multi-ethnic hub into a trendsetter's paradise. She tells me this in her Australian-tinged English (she grew up in Sydney) as we share a slice of carrot cake and sip tea crammed with sprigs of mint.

"Cheers," we say, clinking mugs. Though we've only met in person this morning, I already know that Elke loves travelling, wine, reading, films, architecture, live music and wandering through markets, because it says so on her Airbnb profile. All of which is great, because so do I. She also really knows Berlin, which is also great, because I don't.

There are two separate U-Bahn lines near Elke's apartment, a cosy bohemian affair tastefully decorated with reclaimed furniture (she's a carpenter), artwork by local creatives and a large chilled-out cat named Rambo.

But over the course of my stay I don't use public transport once. With Neukölln's cherry blossoms in bloom and a wealth of vintage boutiques, quirky hangouts and late-night bars to explore, there's little incentive to leave this buzzing area.

A saunter along the nearby Landwehr canal, with its white swans, willow branches and red geraniums in wrought-iron boxes, brings us to the Turkish Market, a sprawl of stalls selling everything from fruit and veg to haberdashery and hummus – not for nothing is Neukölln sometimes referred to as "Little Istanbul".

Elke points out the grand apartment buildings that line the avenue across the strip of water. "See the lovely art deco fresco?" she asks, pointing, and we look up and marvel; I so would have missed it without her.

I meet some of her friends, who feel like my friends too: artists, performers and singer-songwriters, some German, many of them British and antipodean. Berlin has long been a magnet for creatives seeking an affordable standard of living and a sea of like minds.

"The greatest cultural extravaganza one could imagine," said David Bowie of 1970s Berlin. Post-Wall, a new generation is stoking the avant-garde embers.

We jump in Elke's mini-van, Maxi Taxi (which is indeed a former Berlin taxi), and take a short drive to Görlitzer Park in neighbouring, nearly-as-cool Kreuzberg to check out some free jazz at Das Edelweiss, an all-day cafe attracting an international crowd. Then it's up the road to the riverside Club de Visionäre, where we stand on a wooden terrace under greenery and fairy lights, chatting over an electro lounge soundtrack.

The next day finds us back in Maxi Taxi for an impromptu drive around East Berlin: Checkpoint Charlie. Brandenburg Gate.



Komische Oper, the opera house currently helmed by Australian director Barrie Kosky. Not to mention a nearby luxury chocolate shop with a model of Berlin done in praline.

"There's a Frank Gehry sculpture in that bank not many people know about," Elke remarks as we cruise towards Museum Island, an ensemble of five museums in the middle of the River Spree. The Pergamon Museum apparently houses the gates to Babylon. B.E. (Before Elke) I didn't know that either.

We zoom over to the smart gallery district of Mitte to peek inside Clärchens Ballhaus, a 1913-built dance hall with tinsel wallpaper and staff serving oversized chicken schnitzel. A tango class is taking place on the wooden dance floor; an instructor beckons us in. We hoof it back to Neukölln and drink several imaginatively named cocktails instead.

Still, it was me who found the kimonos. A daytime meander around the neighbourhood's tiny shops and boutiques took us past Aura (auraberlin.com), a vintage boutique with a rose-patterned silk dress in its window (I bought it) and a back room stocked with antique kimonos imported from Japanese villages. Encouraged by the staff, we play dress-ups. "You are best friends, I think," says the store's owner, watching us giggle and carry on. "We weren't before," I say.

"But we are now," says Elke.

Jane Cornwell was a guest of Airbnb. Her memoir *The Whirl: Men, Music, Misadventures* (HarperCollins, 2015) is available on Amazon. For a list of Elke's top Neukölln bars, go to afr.com/sophisticated-traveller.



LEFT: Paris' rooftops are dominated by Opéra Bastille, Notre Dame and the Eiffel Tower.

TASTEFUL SOUVENIRS

Former *Vogue* editor Marion Hume shares some Parisian secrets.

It's taken me three decades to track it down: the best croque-monsieur in Paris is served at La Réserve hotel, located on the posh Avenue Gabriel, 8th arrondissement. Just a word of advice, though – don't wear anything resembling a sneaker, you won't get past the doorman. Even my Hermès flats raise an eyebrow; I only just make it in.

Served as a square cut into cubes with the precision of a master, this sandwich is the best bread, cheese and ham – and I don't even order the one with truffle oil.

Work takes me to Paris many times each year. And every trip, I phone the ultimate local American in Paris; the sauciest gentleman I know and a dear friend. That he happens to know the city's every maître d' means we can duck in anywhere. But usually it's Café de Flore, where we both know that it's chic to sit upstairs. But damn it, we like the "tourist" view from the terrace.

He's introduced me to many great venues over the years. But it was Chanel who led me to La Réserve's gourmet treats: the fashion house often takes me there after Karl Lagerfeld's annual show-stopping extravaganzas.

On my first visit to Paris as a young fashion writer, a grand fashion dame of inestimable chic instructed: "We'll meet for champagne at La Coupole"

in Montparnasse. Today, my Paris places are the little "boîtes" (small restaurants) that friends swear by and the cosy neighbourhood places around Bastille where I like to stay. This is not "grand Paris" although there is one swanky brasserie, Café Français, to which I lure people during Fashion Week because it's private and out of the way. I recently caught up there with Australian designer Dion Lee. And it was to Café Français' terrace, ringed with jasmine, that I retreated to drink a celebratory chablis (chilled to perfection) after interviewing Karl Lagerfeld.

Paris is now so full of fashion memories for me, including glorious shows staged at the Palais Garnier with its ceilings by Chagall. Then there's the "other Opéra". Two decades ago, Yves Saint Laurent – the man, not the label – held his 30th Year in Fashion show at Opéra Bastille. I was there working on a documentary, in the wings with the film crew, when he came off stage and Catherine Deneuve whipped a hanky from some secret pocket in her sea-green gown and wiped the lipstick kisses of the models from his face.

RIGHT: Supermodel Linda Evangelista struts the catwalk in John Galliano's 1994 Pin-Up show in a rundown warehouse.

October 1994 is a stand-out for John Galliano's famous Pin-Up show, held in a rundown warehouse. Below is supermodel Linda Evangelista from that show. I'm seated behind all the tulle (right), with Ines de la Fressange in front of me with her hand to her face.

During a recent Paris jaunt I was feeling nostalgic, so revisited La Coupole for its soupe à l'oignon, then dashed across Boulevard du Montparnasse for coffee at the historic Le Select. The barman wasn't chatty, this is Paris, but he was affable as I sat solo, sipping a little "tasse" of pure engine fluid. He told me Scarlett Johansson does the same thing sometimes. If it's true, the girl has taste.

Marion Hume is *The AFR Magazine's* fashion editor.

