

# Archipuncture and new qualities

**Baugruppen** are hot in Berlin. On billboards at many places in the city one can read how holes in the urban fabric are being filled with new residential blocks. Vincent Kompier takes us on a tour of these buildings of joint interest.

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A Baugruppe is a group of people who jointly purchase a plot and, without an architect and developer, arranges for its development. Because they carry out many tasks themselves, they can save costs: the difference can amount to around 900 euros per square metre. The savings are invested in special architecture, sustainability, or community facilities such as a roof terrace, communal kitchen, guest room or sauna. At present there are around 140 active Baugruppen.

Between 2002 and 2008, around 100 projects with a total of 1300 residences were built in Baugruppen. Currently, the construction cranes are working overtime to fill the last holes in Berlin. Although the share of Baugruppen relative to the total housing production appears small, it shows that the demand for something other than the standard quality of housing remains high. This is not entirely surprising in a city where, between 1973 and 1989, over 250,000 uniform slab apartment blocks

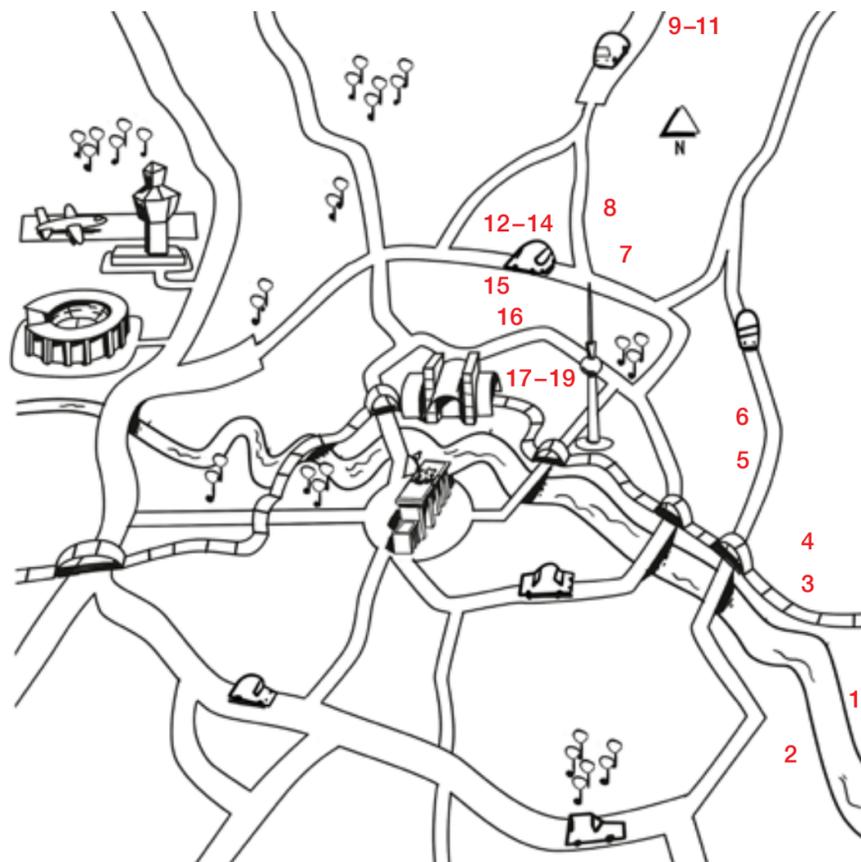
without any sense of architecture were built. The revival of Baugruppen in the last decade has a particularly Berlin origin. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the euphoria for construction is tremendous. The reunited city, with 3.4 million inhabitants at that time, would grow to four and perhaps five million people, believes the city council. Investors from around the world come to Berlin to build housing. The main question: what direction should the new urbanism take? Many top international architects design new buildings: Sir Norman Foster (Reichstag), Arata Isozaki and Renzo Piano (Potsdamer Platz), Philip Johnson (Friedrichstrasse) and Frank Gehry (Pariser Platz). Meanwhile, the city explodes in all directions after years of division that had led to Berlin's almost medieval, citadel-like character. Outside Berlin, construction is cheaper and, for the Berliner, it is an attractive place to live. The division of the city made suburbanization impossible, but after the fall of the Wall it is well under way.

Around the year 2000, the economy collapses and thus also the construction industry. Developers reverse their steps and leave the half-finished city behind. The tax benefits for construction projects are stopped and subsidies for social housing eliminated. Architects are left without work. Since then, the city has seen a peculiar housing market, because much is vacant; more than 50,000 homes remain unoccupied. Despite that (or because) it is under pressure, the demand for quality and new forms of living remains. The concern is not taken on by traditional developers. They continue to think up and build homes of maximum 80 m<sup>2</sup> that lack sufficient outdoor space.

Architects have since taken matters into their own hands. Indeed, there are still enough places in the city to build. In East Berlin, especially, are numerous empty lots between the existing buildings that remained vacant after the Second World War – the DDR government found building in the suburbs more important than old buildings in the city.

This is not a new phenomenon in Germany; in towns like Tübingen and Freiburg, Baugruppen already exist and comprise a part of the official urban development. In Berlin, Baugruppen have a purely pragmatic reason: the lack →

**'Baugruppen bring strikingly innovative architecture into the city.'**



**1 ARTIST VILLAGE (2008)**  
Architect: Beyer-Schubert Architekten  
Address: Alice-und-Hella-Hirsch-Ring Rummelsburg und Glasbläserallee Alt-Stralau



**2 STADTRÜN GBR (2009 & 2011)**  
Architect: Keinert Büsching Architekten  
Address: Hoffmannstrasse 2-5-7 Alt-Treptow



**3 WEITSICHT (2010)**  
Architect: Arnold und Gladisch Architekten  
Address: Scharnweberstrasse 39



**4 K20 (2008)**  
Architect: Roedig Schop Architekten  
Address: Kreuziger Strasse 20



**5 KLIMASOLARHAUS (2009)**  
Architect: Dittert & Reumshüssel  
Address: Bänischstrasse 10



**6 BAUGRUPPE ZUR BÖRSE (2010)**  
Architect: Müllers büro  
Address: Thaerstrasse 27



**7 E3 (2008)**  
Architect: Kaden Klingbeil Architekten  
Address: Esmarchstrasse 3



**8 WOHNEN AN DER MARIE (2007)**  
Architect: Arnold und Gladisch Architekten  
Address: Marienburger Strasse 40



**9 ZE5 (2010)**  
Architect: Zanderroth Architekten  
Address: Zelterstrasse 5



**14 RUSC (2007)**  
Architect: Zanderroth Architekten  
Address: Corner of Ruppiner and Schönholzer Strasse



**10 TRAINSPOTTING (2009)**  
Architect: Roedig Schop Architekten  
Address: Greifenhagener Strasse 19



**11 LEUCHTTURM (2009)**  
Architect: Mohr+Winterer Architekten  
Address: Pappelallee 43



**12 BÜRGERSTADT PAPPELALLEE (2009)**  
Architect: Stefan Tebroke & Carlo Calderan  
Address: Pappelallee 19-20



**13 SC11 (2008)**  
Architect: Zanderroth Architekten  
Address: Schönholzer Strasse 11



**18 AUGUSTSTRASSE 51 (2008)**  
Architect: Grüntuch & Ernst Architekten  
Address: Auguststrasse 51



**15 STRELITZER STRASSE (2007)**  
Architect: FAT KOEHL Architekten  
Address: Strelitzer Strasse 53



**16 TEN IN ONE (2005)**  
Architect: Roedig Schop Architekten  
Address: Anklamer Strasse 52



**17 WOHNETAGEN (2004)**  
Architect: carpaneto.schönigh. architekten  
Address: Steinstrasse 26-28



**19 LINIEN 23 (2011)**  
Architect: bco Architekten  
Address: Linienstrasse 23

## (Archipuncture and new qualities)

of work for architectural firms, combined with a growing dissatisfaction in the architectural variety of the city. Many Berlin architecture bureaux are picking up building for and upon the city once again.

Baugruppen provide for architectural intervention in the city, but on a small scale. They bring strikingly innovative architecture to the city and they link living and working. In social terms, they are significant because the involvement of Baugruppen in neighbourhoods is great. Where in Hamburg municipal policy actively encourages Baugruppen, Berlin (still) stays on the sidelines. There is a central register of empty lots, but Berlin is without special land prices for the city's own lots, in contrast to Hamburg. At present there are more than 500 empty lots available in Berlin.

Remarkably, or perhaps not surprisingly, one aspect that characterizes many Baugruppen is sustainability. This is not expressed visually in the form of timber partitions or clay walls. Although the architecture itself remains an important aspect, sustainability is also high on a group's wish list. Many projects are typological and organizationally well thought out, having a timeless quality. Because of the open possibilities in Berlin, many Baugruppen projects contribute significantly to the attractiveness and diversity of the city, because many projects include non-residential functions, such as a physiotherapy practice, a day care centre or a café. Baugruppen are the reason for a (modest) return of families to the city. Not in a quantitative, large-scale way, but smaller and close to the wishes of the people. With this, Baugruppen demonstrate that a new way of development and living is emerging. Not the saleability of the property nor risk avoidance is paramount, but rather, the living enjoyment of the occupant is the starting point, combined with architecture that delivers a contribution to the city. Residential buildings are often equipped with communal gardens where children can play; the roof is also common and thus belongs to everyone. Baugruppen meet the growing demands for living from households in the city after having had children, and do not 'suburbanize' them in a family house with a garden in a poorly accessible suburb without attractive urban facilities.

In Berlin, the 'starchitecture' from the 1990s is over; 'archipuncture' has become the norm. In that sense, Baugruppen projects fit better with Berlin than the major projects of the '90s. Cultural critic Hans Ulrich Obrist once said: 'Berlin is dangerous, it's a trap. The character of the city wins without any effort from all the international star architects.' Baugruppen architects in Berlin are not bothered by that. Their projects are Berlin itself – unruly, sometimes a bit stiff, smartly designed, and ultimately very friendly and therefore perfectly appropriate to the city.

This tour guide presents a selection of projects by Baugruppen, especially ones in the former East Berlin districts of Friedrichshain, Treptow, Prenzlauer Berg and Mitte. This is not surprising; it is the part of the city where the greatest portion of (free) space was available and where the fate of lot owners was often unclear after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The tour begins at the former industrial area Rummelsburg, just outside the S-Bahn railway ring. Here the Berlin-based office of **Beyer-Schubert Architekten** designed the **Artists Village (1)**. This highly polluted former industrial area was intended to host the Olympic Village in 2000, but Berlin was not awarded the Games in the end. Reconsideration

of the urban plan for Rummelsburg was necessary because of the changing economic situation around 2000. In an international architecture workshop, several architects developed the concept of the Berlin Terrace, a 120 to 295 m<sup>2</sup> house with three to five storeys less than two metres wide, with garden and roof terrace. Elaboration of this concept has led to the Artist Village: a couple of friendly, black and white housing blocks with huge atelier rooms of three to six metres in height. There are several of these blocks on both sides of the Rummelsburger See. Don't miss the (non-Baugruppe) block called Fischzug, by Herman Hertzberger, at the end of the street!

Crossing the bridge over the Spree, we reach the part of Berlin called Treptow, an area in which the Berlin Wall was quite present, but also one with beautiful urban villas from the end of the 19th century. On this strange spot **Keinert Büsching Architekten (2)** took their chances and bought a former DDR building, demolished it and replaced it with modern urban villas. Each villa houses eight four-room apartments and the floor plans are made flexible for future changes. The villas have an enormous garden, mostly for common use.

On this side of the Spree, consider taking a dive in the Badeschiff, a floating public swimming pool. The Badeschiff ('bathing ship') opened in 2004, created by local artist Susanne Lorenz, together with the Spanish AMP Arquitectos and Gil Wilk. In winter, the pool is covered and transformed into a sauna. It's one of the famous temporary places that really characterize the city.

Returning to the other side of the Spree, the busy, bustling Friedrichshain district is where **'Weitsicht' (3)** by **Arnold und Gladisch Architekten** is located. Weitsicht means 'far view' and lives up to its name with large glass doors on the south side of the building, facing the inner courtyard. The north facade is much more closed. The building has a high sustainability standard and contains twelve apartments.

In the nearby Kreuziger Strasse, **K20 (4)** was built by **Roedig Schop Architekten**. The facade is not to be missed: the alternately coloured panels suits the neighbourhood well. The building hosts a small pension called Lohwasser. The beautiful back facade can be seen by sneaking into the graveyard, which can be reached through the Boxhagener Strasse, close to the old chapel.

Another project in which sustainability standards are high is the so-called **Klimasolarhaus (5)** ('climate solar house') which has very low energy costs. The project, designed by **Dittert & Reumschüssel**, faces the park in front with a rather closed facade, due to its orientation to the north.

Caring for the environment can have different looks, as seen in the 'passivhaus' at the **Thaerstrasse 27 (6)**. Here, three blocks containing ten households each demonstrate that a building which uses virtually no energy doesn't have to look very architecturally modern. The more classic facade is reminiscent of late 19th-century urban villas, but with the technical standards of the 21st century.

After a short trip through the not-so-trendy area of Prenzlauer Berg, we arrive at **Esmarchstrasse 3 (7)**. This project by **Kaden Klingbeil Architekten** is famous because it is the first high-rise building in Berlin (and Europe) constructed with wood. Kaden Klingbeil are specialized in building in wood, which is why this Baugruppe asked them to design a housing block for seven young families. Build-

ing in wood, especially multiple floors, has an impact on fire safety. By disconnecting the concrete staircase from the rest of the building, Kaden Klingbeil reinterpreted the necessary fire safety regulations. Although one may look in vain for any wood on the facade – like nearly all housing projects in Berlin, it is plastered – the structure is nearly 100% wooden construction. The disconnected staircase allows views into the communal garden.

How to develop a housing complex built against a blind wall which measures 64 metres long and 25 metres high? **Arnold und Gladisch Architekten (8)** solves this tricky problem by situating all living and sleeping rooms at the outside facade. Staircases and service rooms are on the block's interior. The block houses 23 apartments and an office. Originally stemming from a fire regulation, the design uses the in-between spaces for storing bikes and strollers. This project shows the real value of Baugruppen architects: they combine interesting design with ordinary needs from residents, such as suitable storage space.

Just outside the S-Bahn Ring is the **Zelter Strasse (9)**, where a project by **Zanderroth Architekten** is located. With nearly identical spatially difficult conditions as in the Marienburger Strasse, Zanderroth succeeded in turning the spatial disadvantages into a high-quality housing and environmental standard. They created three different typologies: on the street level are the very narrow (3.65 m) single-family houses with high ceilings. Despite the narrowness, these houses have a very good spatial quality and three different outdoor spaces; one at the inside garden, one at the backside – a patio-type balcony – and a roof terrace. On the project's interior is a communal garden with smooth and securely designed transitions from communal to private. In all, 23 townhouses, ten garden houses and twelve penthouses have been realized. On the roof is a communal terrace with an outdoor kitchen and barbecue.

Returning to inside the ring, **Trainspotting (10)** by **Roedig Schop Architekten** really suits its name: the S-Bahn trains run only fifteen metres' distance from the building. This is an architecturally 'classic' Berlin Baugruppe building – it doesn't scream for attention. At a first glance, the building looks ordinary. But a closer look reveals that the refinement here is quite intelligent. The six apartments house eleven adults and nine children, all of whom enjoy a communal roof terrace and garden. Each apartment has a view on the tracks from three sides. The building is linked with the city through the facilities on the ground floor; a shop and an office.

The **Leuchtturm (11)** ('lighthouse') at Pappelallee 43 by **Mohr+Winterer Architekten** is typical for urban Berlin – it looks like a stand-alone, but is the first effort to close the existing housing block in a new way, with large apartments and a huge communal garden behind the building.

On the same street is a project by the Baugruppe development company **Bürgerstadt A.G. (12)** that has six 120 m<sup>2</sup> apartments and one 74 m<sup>2</sup> office/retail space. The facade displays scattered windows, due to the split-level character of the building. Each apartment has a 3x3-metre window which can be opened and used as an art loggia with a view on the busy Pappelallee.

Another interesting and intelligent project by **Zanderroth Architekten** is **Sc11 (13)**. The facade of the building changes with every step closer to the building. Made of concrete, the facade was poured into a mould in which

bamboo is processed. This gives the facade a kind of comforting quality, despite the hard surface. The eleven apartments have interior/exterior balconies. Notably, the housing block is built adjacent to the former 'death strip' of the Berlin Wall.

**Zanderroth (14)** also designed the building opposite to Sc11. The complex spatial urban situation – the north-east side of an urban block – is turned into an intimate location. It belongs to the private owners of the building, but is made public. This allowed the designer the opportunity to give the apartments views on three sides.

One might not suspect it, especially considering the amount of graffiti on the buildings, but some streets in Berlin have a special monumental protection, for instance, **Strelitzer Strasse (15)**. **FAT KOEHL Architekten** had to adapt to these conditions, solving a restriction on balconies by creating ones that unfold when a homeowner opens the balcony door. It seems as if the building is made of two parts, which is not the case, but creating a cut in the facade gives it a unique appearance while making it an ordinary part of the street.

Walking through the gate leads one to the single-family housing behind the Strelitzer Strasse. These so-called individual town houses are located at a dead-end street, which terminates at the former 'death strip'.

The building at Anklamerstrasse 52, designed by **Roedig Schop Architekten**, is called **Ten in One (16)**. Ten different small households got together and built a project with ten individual apartments. The roof is designed as a 25 m<sup>2</sup> 'holiday' apartment, owned by all ten households, and gives them the opportunity to vacation within their own building. The 100 m<sup>2</sup> roof terrace has a beautiful view over Berlin.

**Carpaneto.schöningh.architekten** created a special Baugruppe in the Steinstrasse 26–28 **(17)**. Special, because the block looks like a three-dimensional puzzle comprising several coloured elements. These elements are invisible from the street side. Crossing the gate, one sees the rear facade with the parts which protrude. The project incorporates five non-housing units for offices and shops, and is distinctive because it also includes a swimming pool and sauna.

**Auguststrasse 51 (18)** can't be missed. The large glass facade contrasts with the surrounding buildings, which are nearly all plastered. The block houses an architecture office – that of **Gruntlich & Ernst**, who also designed the building – and apartments. In the inner courtyard is a double apartment that nearly has the feeling of a free-standing, single-family house.

The project **Linienstrasse 23 (19)**, by **bco Architekten**, is also a 'Passivhaus', meaning it has been built following the highest energy saving standards. From the outside, one can hardly distinguish the small windows, close to the pavement. These windows belong to the ZINK gallery. Due to building regulations, the free-standing block has two blind facades. Perhaps in the future Linienstrasse 23 will be accompanied by new neighbours.

The Linienstrasse is one of those easy streets in Berlin-Mitte to stroll along. Don't forget to visit the Berlin Architectural and Art Book store, ProQM, at Almstadtstrasse 48–50, on the corner of Linienstrasse. This is where the tour ends. Of course, it's not possible to highlight each of the 150 Baugruppen projects in the city here, so take a look for yourself and discover Berlin's vibrant and interesting 'archipuncture'. With projects such as these, Berlin is a laboratory for discovering new qualities in urban housing. ←