

Post-War Detached Houses ⁱⁿ Berlin

and their Conservation

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In Berlin there are at present approximately fifty post-war detached family homes of outstanding quality. Of these only a few have the status of protected monuments.

Due to the strong pressure of ground speculation in the Berlin villa-areas since German reunification in 1990, many have already been demolished or are highly endangered. The only possibility to protect these detached-houses against unconsidered demolition in the long-term, is by listing them. A revision of the perception and the acceptance of this architectural genre, which has until now hardly been noticed, is therefore an urgent necessity.

Fig. 1: Map of the city with its distribution of districts. Dahlem, Wannsee and Nikolassee are parts of Zehlendorf



Fig. 2: House Mocken in Berlin-Dahlem, built by Franz Mocken in 1965-1966



Fig. 3: House Mocken, inner courtyard.

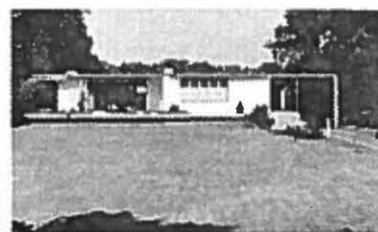


Fig. 4: House R. built by Sobotka & Müller at Berlin-Wannsee 1960.

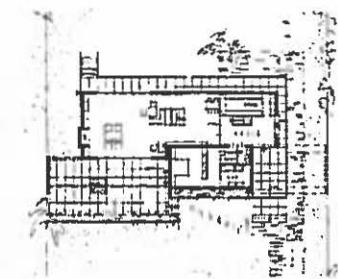


Fig. 5: Ground plan of House R.

The heyday for individually designed detached houses in Germany was the first third of the 20th century. Berlin was at that time the centre of avant-garde architecture and nearly all significant architects also built detached family homes.¹ Even though Berlin was never again to become a centre of the avant-garde, after the Second World War, buildings of an admirable quality emerged in the fifties and sixties.

Paul Baumgarten, Werner Düttmann, Georg Heinrichs, Günther Hönow and Eduard Ludwig were the most important Berlin architects designing detached houses at that time. Many of their buildings tie up with the classical modernism of the twenties and early thirties. Nevertheless, the most significant influences came from America. Along with Marcel Breuer and his groundbreaking work,² architects like Mies van der Rohe and Richard Neutra were highly influential. Other important sources of inspiration came from Scandinavian and British architecture, such as that of Arne Jacobsen, and the 'New Brutalism'.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, one of the largest connected villa-districts in Europe emerged in the Southwest of Berlin (Fig. 1). The plan and architectural structure of these districts is characterised, up to the present day, by the buildings of the pre-war period. It was here that a large number of the significant post-war detached houses were built.³ Many of them were erected on large sites which often had already borne an earlier villa, either destroyed in the war or demolished for a new building.

Whereas most of the office buildings of the 1950s have at least been listed,⁴ the situation regarding the preservation of Berlin's post-war detached houses is even more dramatic as, up to now, they have rarely been perceived as an important part of architectural history and, moreover, only very few of them have been classified as historic monuments. In other cities such as Munich, Hamburg or Hanover, the situation is hardly different from Berlin. In the capital, however, the problems appear more dramatic – since there has been huge pressure for change and speculation on the Berlin villa-districts with the political changes of 1990. As a result, a whole genre of architecture is threatened with demolition.

The first example of two that illustrates this endangerment is located in Berlin-Zehlendorf and has already been released for demolition. Figs. 2 and 3 show one of the few atrium houses in Berlin, erected in 1964 by Franz Mocken. He directed, amongst other things, the construction of the Berlin Congress Hall (1956-57) as one of the contact architects to Hugh Stubbins, and of the Steglitz-Hospital by Curtis & Davis (1961-68).⁵

The second example, also located in Berlin-Zehlendorf and released for demolition, is a villa by Sobotka & Müller (Fig. 4), the most commercially successful architectural firm based in Berlin in the fifties and early sixties. It is situated on a huge, prime site at Kleiner Wannsee in Berlin-Zehlendorf. The generously constructed living area was conceived as one room and opens out on both sides to the landscape. The bedroom wing, bathroom and kitchen were kept functionally compact (Fig. 5). The house could be called a 'Richard Neutra' of Berlin as motives like the shaping of the supports certainly have contemporary

Californian architecture as their model (Fig. 6).⁶

As many of the villas erected before the Second World War are today neither listed buildings nor enjoy protection on the basis of secure tenure, it is just the family homes of the post-war period which are extremely sought after as construction sites.⁷ Since the beginning of the 1990s, a wave of densification has struck, which, in spite of the recession, continues undaunted. It is mostly multiple dwellings, so called 'town villas', which are being erected and strewn a thousand-fold and in similar architectural triviality throughout the whole city. Their overpowering architecture and over-dimensional cubage impairs the general image of the unique villa districts of Berlin, even more than the demolition and new construction waves of the sixties and seventies (Fig. 7).

THE PROJECT

Two years ago, a fellow art historian, Alexander Hoff, and the author started working out a comprehensive documentation with the objective of at least limiting the damage. The main aim is, of course, to preserve the most significant buildings from unconsidered demolition, but also to draw attention to a problem that concerns the whole of Germany and possibly also other countries in Europe. Namely the fact that, in spite of their outstanding architectural quality, these individually planned family homes have scarcely been taken into consideration in writing about the history of art.

The first step was to work out a general view of the complete stock. At the same time, criteria had to be developed as to how preservation values can be established at all; on the basis of their historical and art-historical significance or due to their preserved state of maintenance. Contemporary publications and architecture periodicals were the main source for the research.⁸ However, often there was no other choice than to explore the important villa districts of Berlin systematically. Interviews with architects and house-owners were also helpful.

The result is a collection of approximately one hundred and fifty, systematically recorded, remarkable buildings, certainly without any claim to completeness. Of these one hundred and fifty buildings, in the end only one third was classified as being "absolutely worthy" of preservation. That is about fifty family homes altogether – a very manageable number. This is less than one percent if one assumes a total of approximately 5,000 to 10,000 detached houses erected between 1945 and 1970 altogether.

A comparison with Berlin's listed buildings showed that only about ten of these fifty buildings have been listed to date.

It is now a matter of convincing the responsible preservation authorities, and, above all, the general public and politicians, of the necessity of protecting the remaining forty buildings. This is a difficult undertaking as Berlin's construction policies have, in recent years, increasingly disregarded the interests of preserving historic monuments.⁹ Nevertheless, protection still remains the only way of making preservation or restoration at least probable. The urgency for protecting further buildings certainly becomes clear considering the fact that the total stock of potential monuments in family home construction has been reduced by more than a quarter since the beginning of the nineties.

BUILDING TYPES AND MAIN ARCHITECTURAL INFLUENCES

As research is still at the infant stage, it is particularly important, alongside mere registration and documentation, to develop a system that demonstrates the architectural tendencies of these years. Simplified considerably, there are three main directions:

The first is a traditional one, which, with certain modernisation tendencies,¹⁰ takes up the formal style of the thirties. A family home, which Kurt Kurfiss built in 1957 in Berlin-Dahlem, is one such example (Fig. 8). Its representatively designed central entrance area, which is emphasised additionally by the decorative wooden supports above, is one of the characteristics representative of the thirties and the so-called 'Heimatstil' – approximately translated as 'local style'. Most of the post-war detached houses belong to this category, but only a few of them are worthy of being listed.

The second architectural direction is the so-called 'organic architecture', which, in Berlin, derives its name 'Scharoun School' from its main representative, Hans Scharoun. He built the Philharmonic Hall and the State Library in Berlin, and, in the late twenties and early thirties, some significant detached family homes which had a genre-forming effect.¹¹ Heinz Schudnagies, whose house for the architectural critic and editor of the *Bauwelt*, Ulrich

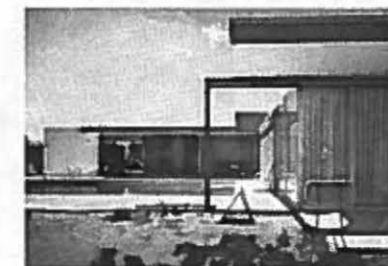


Fig. 6: Richard Neutra's House Ninneman in Clearmont, California



Fig. 7: One of such "town villas" of the late 1990s at am Schwarzen Grund in Berlin-Dahlem.



Fig. 8: House W. in Berlin-Dahlem, Kurt Kurfiss 1957.



Fig. 9: House Conrads at Berlin-Frohnau, Heinz Schudnagies 1964.



Fig. 10: House of the architect Wassily Luckhardt in Berlin-Dahlem, built 1957.



Fig. 11: House Weber at Berlin Wannsee, Architect: Hans Schaeffers 1959-1960.



Fig. 12: House Karsch, built by Georg Heinrichs in 1960.



Fig. 13: House Schmitt/ von Winterfeld, Eduard Ludwig 1959-60.

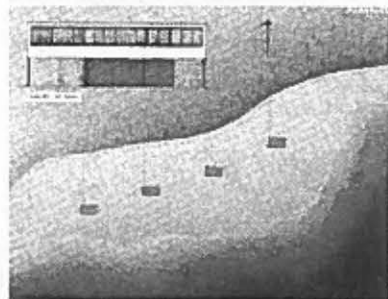


Fig. 14: Eduard Ludwig's bauhaus-drawing from 1931.

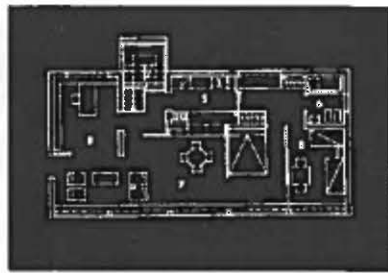


Fig. 15: House Schmitt/ von Winterfeld, ground plan of the upper floor.



Fig. 16: House Schmitt/ von Winterfeld, western part of the upper floor.

Conrads, is seen in Fig. 9, built most of these 'organic' houses. For more than twenty years he hardly ever changed the style which he developed in the fifties.

The third and, in terms of art history, most important branch is the continuation and further development of the classical modernism. Most of the houses worth protecting belong to this group. A comparison between the Kurfiss house (Fig. 8) and another villa located in Berlin-Dahlem, built by Wassily Luckhardt in the same year (Fig. 10), gives an impression of the tremendous variety that characterised family-home construction after the war. It shows the large range of architectural design possibilities between the 'local style' and the modern, innovation and tradition, quotation and original new creation. The Luckhardt-villa avoids any representative gesture and, covered by a flat roof, the entrance area is pushed to the narrow side. The surface on the street front is almost completely of glass.¹² The antagonism which determined the architectural discussion since the beginning of the twenties was also continued during the fifties and the sixties, typified by such considerations as saddle-back roof against the flat roof and local style against the international modern.

For better differentiation of this third direction, another division is meaningful:

The horizontally positioned flat construction to which also the classic bungalow belongs (Fig. 10).

The upright cube on a base, with a usually projecting upper floor (Fig. 11 and Fig. 13).

Finally, cubic structures interlocking variously (Fig. 12).¹³

These boundaries are, of course, overlapping. In the end, this classification is meant only to convey orientation and to focus the view on the specific characteristics of the buildings presented.

THE HOUSE SCHMITT/VON WINTERFELD

Because of its outstanding architectural quality, one house belonging to the third category will be presented in greater detail, and its preservation worthiness discussed at greater length. Although the house Schmitt/von Winterfeld (Fig. 13), which the architect Eduard Ludwig built in 1960 in Berlin-Westend, is not listed, it definitely fulfils the protection-criteria as it is both in artistic and in city-historic respects of significance, and, in addition, it has been preserved almost unaltered.

Eduard Ludwig studied from 1928-32 in the Bauhaus in Dessau, and in Berlin. He was amongst the closest student group of Mies van der Rohe and took a decisive part in the development of the courtyard-house. Terence Riley has shown that Eduard Ludwig can possibly be regarded, in fact, as one of the 'inventors' of this house-type by Mies.¹⁴ This is an idea which Ludwig took up again in 1957, in the Berlin Hansaviertel, and in 1958 at the World Exhibition in Brussels. Both projects brought him international recognition.

The House Schmitt/von Winterfeld is another example of how strongly Eduard Ludwig's architecture was influenced by his Bauhaus years, as the design of the house reverts to the work of Ludwig in Mies van der Rohe's master class – as proved by a draft from 1931 for a group of four houses at a lakeside near Berlin (Fig. 14).¹⁵ He designed an upstanding, right-angled box opened up completely to the landscape with the drawn-through window belt on the southern side. This is an idea which Le Corbusier had implemented in his Villa Savoy a few years before in full consequence for the first time.

Many basic ideas, which characterise the detached family home construction of the fifties and the sixties, go back to the ideas of the 'big four', namely Frank Lloyd Wright, Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe. For example, we may cite the principle of open-plan building which Eduard Ludwig applied quite individually to the needs of the client in his house Schmitt/von Winterfeld. The individual functions – sleeping, living and working – are intertwined, but are also separable by means of sliding doors. Only towards the north is a kitchen and a sanitary block, and at the eastern end, a small children's room (Fig. 15 and Fig. 16).

The house Schmitt/von Winterfeld is Eduard Ludwig's last work. Ludwig was one of the most encouraging artists of the post war German architecture scene who died in a car accident shortly before the house was completed.

As the house is situated on a big site, once more the typical problems with non-listed buildings become obvious. It is highly endangered because, without the building, the ground could be subdivided and developed with at least two or even four 'town villas'. In the neighbourhood there are several examples

of subsequent densification. In this example, the owner is still alive. In such cases, usually the change of generation means the loss of a monument. The only possibility to protect further buildings is, once more, by listing them.

NOTES

1. In the twenties amongst others Walter Gropius, Erich Mendelsohn, Hans and Wassily Luckhardt and Mies van der Rohe.
2. For example his highly influencing (demonstration house) at the exhibition of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in 1949 or House Tompkins in Hewlett Harbour, N.Y. 1945 and Haus Geller in Lawrence, Long Island 1945. See Marcel Breuer, *Marcel Breuer 1921-1962*. Stuttgart 1962.
3. During the Cold War, these districts belonged to West Berlin. In the former East Berlin, no significant villas were built.
4. See the essay of Dirk Dorsemagen. Obviously, the status of a listed monument in Berlin is no longer a guarantee for the preservation of such buildings, resp. a state of the art conservation. Redecoration is eminent in most cases after two generations of use. Nevertheless listing is, in the author's opinion, the only adequate means of making protection at least a possibility.
5. The inadequacy of conservation procedures is especially obvious in the case of Haus Mocken. It is one of the few detached houses mentioned in the Architectural Guide to Berlin, yet nonetheless officials have taken no notice. See Martin Wörner, *Architekturführer Berlin*. Berlin 1994, No. 669. Not only the small number of listed detached homes is a problem, but also the different criteria and valuations of the responsible preservationists. While in Frohnau nearly every, even second-rate house was listed, in Zehlendorf, the district with the highest density of exceptional detached houses, only a few houses are protected. Not even the architects' houses of Bernhard Hermkes, Peter Pöhlzig, Günther Hönow, Klaus Müller-Rehm or Franz Mocken are listed.
6. The fact that in Germany the architecture of the 1950s has long been recognised as being worth preservation, while buildings of the 1960s on the other hand have hardly been the object of the same esteem up to now, even amongst architectural historians. This essay wants to contribute to the rehabilitation of an underrated period.
7. The problems with buildings of the 1930s is similar. Most are not important, yet criteria have to be developed, which are worth preserving.
8. Architekten- und Ingenieurverein zu Berlin (ed.), *Berlin und seine Bauten, Teil IV, Band C, Die Wohngebäude - Einfamilienhäuser*. Berlin 1975; Rolf Rave & Hans-Joachim Knöfel, *Bauen seit 1900 in Berlin*. Berlin 1968.
9. The recently contemplated destruction of the so called Bergbau und Hüttenwesen - Gebäude of Willy Kreuer at Ernst Reuter Platz and the cinema-building in the Western centre, both listed buildings of the 1950s, are only two examples of that vandalism. See www.nachkriegsmodern.de
10. In the more conservative buildings, more or less far reaching concessions to the contemporary modern can be observed such as the "flower-window" (window for keeping flowers and plants). Also, the range of materials is extended and becomes nobler: marble, bronze, chrome and glass appear frequently.
11. Especially house Schminke in Löbau from 1932-33 and the houses Mattern and Bacnsch in Berlin from 1934 and 1935.
12. This building is listed by the way. Certainly also because Luckhardt is a long recognized main representative of the avant-garde in the twenties.
13. As an exception, the courtyard- and atrium-houses must also be mentioned. They are mostly found in clusters in urban settlements.
14. See Terence Riley, 'Vom Bauhaus zum Hofhaus' in: Terence Riley, & Berry Bergdoll (Eds.), *Mies in Berlin*. München 2001, pp. 330-337.
15. This was discovered by my colleague Alexander Hoff at an exhibition at the bauhaus-archiv in Berlin where the drawing was shown. See Bauhaus-Archiv (Eds.), *Mehr als der blosse Zweck. Mies van der Rohe am bauhaus 1930-1933*, Berlin 2001, fig. 52.