

By Billy Gray

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

**B**ERLIN — “That feeling never goes away,” Ashkan said outside Lab.Oratory, a fetish venue nestled beneath Berghain, Berlin’s most notorious nightclub.

Ashkan, a friend who’s lived in Berlin for seven years, referred to the anxious thrill that has, since 2004, enveloped hundreds of thousands of supplicants who’ve lined up at the door of this former East Berlin power plant. Berghain’s gatekeepers guard what dance-music heads refer to, with a rare absence of critical irony, as “the church.”

But Berlin’s status as debauched night life nirvana — long the envy of 24-hour party people from London to Los Angeles — is being dragged earth-bound. The German capital’s modern club culture is threatened by capitalism’s purest distillation: real estate.

Four years ago, on my first trip here, I stayed at the Eastern Comfort “swimming hostel,” a houseboat docked on the Spree River. Berghain was a short, dark walk away. The sleek Watergate and antic Bar25 were even closer. But the most raucous, idiosyncratic party I saw was a techno flotilla unts-unts-unts-ing down the river in a four-to-the-floor battle cry against Mediaspree.

Mediaspree is the ambitious 440-acre development project converting the eastern banks of the Spree from a forlorn squatter’s and club kid’s paradise to a gleaming Riviera of new media headquarters. And the city’s finest clubs are square on its target.

Even in Berlin, which Mayor Klaus Wowereit described as “poor, but sexy,” gentrification is a cocktail party topic. Mitte, where artist communes flourished post-Wall, is chockablock with polished galleries and chain stores. And once-anarchic Prenzlauer Berg has become Europe’s most fashionable stroller capital.

Still, Mediaspree prompted a protracted round of soul searching among Berliners who want things to stay as they are in a city generally eager to pave over its traumatic past. The psychology of place has been center stage in Berlin’s history. But the Mediaspree controversy is less about the city’s distinct politics than the delayed intrusion of the 21st-century global economy’s interchangeable glass condos and Web startups.

And though the threat to dance clubs might seem trivial, Berlin is one of the few great cities in which night life remains vital — to the culture and the bottom line. Indeed, it’s no big stretch to say that Berlin’s staunch bohemianism is its own worst enemy and a driver of the real estate gold rush.

“There’s been a big bang, expanding universe trend,” said Daniel Wang, an American DJ who moved here in 2003. “When I started playing here in 2000 there were about five clubs that made the focal point of the scene.”

Although several clubs in the Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg nexus have closed recently, today’s roster still pulsates, exhausting the traveling night owl. Bar25, a Swiss family tree house on hallucinogens, shuttered in 2010 in what many considered a coda to Berlin’s decade atop the dance music subculture. Its alums quickly roared back with KaterHolzig, a hulking party complex carved from the ruins of a soap factory. KaterHolzig recently closed. Management expects to open Holzmarkt on the old Bar25 grounds this spring.

In June, during my fourth trip to



NAMY NOSRATIFARD

## Eros, exuberance stir Berlin’s nocturnal spell

Berlin, I was heartened by this resiliency. Sure, more construction cranes loomed over the river. Double-decker buses shuttled tourists by the East Side Gallery’s murals (painted on the longest extant stretch of the Berlin Wall). Giant iPad billboards jostled with street art for real estate.

“It’s definitely happening,” Wang said when I asked about the sort of gentrification that made him flee New York. (In a recent win for capitalism, construction workers razed part of the East Side Gallery to make way for a luxury apartment building.)

Yet on the day I arrived, a Butt magazine party at the no-frills Prince Charles surged at 9 a.m. as an international contingent of (shockingly fresh-faced) revelers chain-smoked and guzzled Berliner Pilsners in the narrow courtyard. Club der Visionaere, a charmingly ramshackle dockside haunt that lists atop a Kreuzberg canal, has endured despite rumors of its closure swirling since 2009.

And Berghain still reeled in a euphoric mix of heads, leather daddies, and cool kids, although the veterans had ceded Friday and Saturday nights to the Easy Jet set that each weekend descends on the city. “It’s quite cool now to show up on Sunday at 8 p.m.

**The dance club, restaurant, and arts space KaterHolzig recently closed. Management plans to open a new venue, Holzmarkt, this spring.**

and stay until Monday at 8 a.m.,” Wang said.

Even if I’d had the stamina to follow Wang’s Sunday itinerary, shortsighted flight booking foiled that possibility. Although I haven’t experienced this new prime time, the Berlin nocturne’s spell on me hasn’t waned since my initial, tentative dive into the scene. I spent my first solo trip as a shy traveler in Berlin, and recall steeling myself for that inaugural Berghain visit (and likely rejection) at a nearby punk dive.

I’ve always been struck by how dark the Berlin sidewalks are at night, another trait of the city that, in my mind, makes beacons of its strobe-lighted clubs. That’s not to say that many clubbers on the scruffy east side crave flattering lighting. Widespread no-photo policies codify the mindset of going out to get lost in the party, not to stage Instagram photo shoots. You can’t

even find a mirror at Berghain, a wise concession to the effects of 18-hour dance parties on one’s looks.

Night life, like the fresh faces it ravages, is famously ephemeral. But the Berlin club circuit in many ways feels timeless. Its nonstop hours and sexual freedoms recall an era long gone in buttoned-up New York and moneyed London. DJs and club runners chalk up this enduring hedonism to Berlin’s perpetual poverty relative to other world capitals and to its inherent libertinism.

Florian Hetz, the manager of Berghain’s upstairs Panorama Bar, said nocturnal rebellion is “part of our history. We had two oppressive systems and people don’t want that again. People fight for these things here.”

“Berlin was never really the German center of industry,” Wang said. “It’s traditionally the home — even in Hitler’s time — of intellectuals, homosexuals, artists, and politicians.”

For better or worse, Berlin’s chronically high unemployment and low cost of living mean that so-called techno tourism is an economic life raft. For that reason, the government keeps its hands off the all-hours clubland.

“The city realizes what an economic factor Berghain and the other clubs

### IF YOU GO . . .

#### Where to stay

**Casa Camper**  
Weinmeisterstrasse 1  
011-49-30-2000-3410  
www.casacamper.com/berlin/default-en.html

A favorite of the young-ish and fashionable since opening in 2009. Brings sleek design and the esteemed Dos Palillos restaurant to the heart of Mitte. From \$223.

**Michelberger Hotel**  
Warschauer Strasse 39/40  
011-49-30-2977-8590  
www.michelbergerhotel.com  
Creatively designed rooms in the middle of clubland. Rooms from \$95.

#### Where to eat

**Il Casolare**  
Grimmstrasse 30  
011-49-30-6950-6610  
Puckish pizzeria with a loyal following and charming location just off a Kreuzberg canal, from \$16.

**Horvath**  
Paul-Lincke-Ufer 44a  
011-49-30-6128-9992  
www.restaurant-horvath.de  
Traditional and “New German” cuisine is served prix fixe in chef Sebastian Frank’s Michelin-starred Kreuzberg restaurant, from \$78.

are,” Hetz said. “It’s a big business branch and it would be stupid to interfere with that. But smaller clubs have closed after people moved to new areas. That’s a bigger problem than the government.”

Indeed, night life in Berlin could be a victim of its own success as canny developers cash in on the flood of comparatively affluent out-of-towners the scene attracts.

“In a funny way, it correlates to EU politics,” Wang said. “All the talented, unemployed European youth dream of coming to Berlin. Berlin has become not only the art and party center but also the center of the erotic imagination. In that sense, it’s become an economic center, just without the bankers.”

As for Berlin’s underground scene, Wang thinks it “could put itself out of business. But I think it will take much longer than in hypercapitalized cities. And I suspect there’ll always be a free-wheeling attitude.”

Hetz also doesn’t “see an end to [Berlin’s] freedom and opening hours. At one point it will probably happen. But not in the next five years.” He’s also loath to condemn the nomadic clubbers who’ve made Berghain a bona fide tourist attraction.

“Easy Jet tourists are a big part of this scene,” he said. “People dis tourists, but it’s arrogant to say, ‘Oh, we don’t want them.’ Many of them are annoying or rude, but many are stunning people who queue up outside Berghain for two hours and are ecstatic once they pass the mighty door.”

And Hetz had some advice for getting by that door: “Be sober. Don’t bring attitude. And please tip once inside.” As for the prospect of Friedrichshain and Kreuzberg becoming so popular that no one but condo owners goes there anymore, he suggested future visitors dig for the next unlikely night-life hotbed.

“The east was deserted after the Wall came down,” he said, “making way for all these clubs. Now, there’s a chance that things could even move west again.”

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## Cologne’s famed 4711 scented with history

By Claudia Capos

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

**C**OLOGNE, Germany — The first sweet whiff of 4711 Eau de Cologne wafts by us as we leave the Café Reichard terrace overlooking the city’s Gothic cathedral and stroll down Hohe Strasse. At the next corner we see tourists milling around 4711 displays at the Raphael Cologne store and ask directions to the House of 4711, birthplace of the world-famous perfume.

Over the past 220 years 4711 has become Cologne’s signature scent and a brand name in the perfume industry. Embraced by 19th-century high society, the fabled fragrance prevailed through the city’s near-total destruction in World War II and postwar reconstruction to gain an international following for its original and contemporary products.

Spurred by curiosity about the creation of Kolnisch Wasser and the prospect of a shopping spree, my partner, Doug, and I zigzag four blocks to Glockengasse, where the perfumery’s flagship store stands like a golden castle. Colorful banners fly from turrets,

and stylistic 4711 emblems hang beneath colonnade arches. The 20th-century building, across from the Cologne Opera, was inaugurated in 1964, two decades after Allied bombers leveled the company’s headquarters at Glockengasse No. 4711 and manufacturing plant in Cologne Ehrenfeld.

The decorative glass entry door releases a softly scented plume of fragrance as it opens. Inside, lights illuminate a two-story glass wall of 4711 Molan-style bottles behind the paneled counter where saleswomen in navy-blue outfits wait expectantly. Brightly colored packages of 4711 brand fragrances and handy tester bottles nestle in shelves. We ascend a spiral staircase to a small museum displaying gold medal awards and historical artifacts, including an 1850 traveling toilet “casket” and a 1913 gentleman’s pocket bottle. A vintage photo shows a 4711 bottle recovered from a sunken World War II German submarine.

The story behind 4711 Eau de Cologne is somewhat mercurial. According to legend, a Carthusian monk gave Wilhelm Muelhens the secret recipe for “aqua mirabilis” as a wedding gift in 1792. The young merchant began



CLAUDIA CAPOS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

**A Gobel tapestry (rear) in the House of 4711 depicts a French soldier scrawling the street number 4711 on the house gate during the 18th- and 19th-century occupation of Cologne by the French Army.**

producing “miracle water” — initially, as a health drink and revitalizing elixir — in a small factory on Glockengasse, but the French conquest crimped his plans. In 1810, Napoleon decreed that all formulas for internal medications be publically disclosed, so Muelhens started selling Kolnisch Wasser as a fragrance to avoid revealing its ingredients. The origin of the famous 4711 brand name also dates to the French occupation of the city. In 1796 General

Charles Daurier ordered the sequential numbering of Cologne houses so they could be used to billet soldiers. Muelhens’s building was designated No. 4711, which became the trademark for Eau de Cologne in 1875. The family-owned company changed hands several times after 1994, and the 4711 brand is now owned by Maurer and Wirtz.

We return to the showroom where an elegant Gobel tapestry depicts a mounted French corporal scrawling 4711 on the building’s gate. We begin spraying tester strips with fragrances, including the original 4711 and newer aromatic combinations, such as blood orange-basil and pink pepper-grapefruit. Jennifer Carman, of Great Yarmouth in Norfolk, England, who is browsing through the Acqua Colonia section, remembers her mother buying bottles of 4711. “I’ve known about 4711 since I was a teenager,” she says.

After much spritzing and sniffing, we purchase 4711 Nouveau Cologne and turn to leave. Doug stops briefly to wash residual perfume off his hands in what he assumes is water flowing from a spigot into a gold basin. It turns out to be the store’s 4711 Eau de Cologne fragrance fountain.

**HOUSE OF 4711** Glockengasse 4, Cologne, Germany. 011-49-221-270999-10, www.4711.com

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