

The Generator hostel in Berlin offers a sharply designed and affordable place to set down a pack.

In this column, we ask **Ben Pundole**, founder of the website *A Hotel Life*, to pick a new hotel that offers the best of hospitality design today.

BY ALLIE WEISS

The concept behind the hostel chain Generator, which recently opened its eighth location in Berlin's Mitte neighborhood, stemmed from the realization that backpackers across Europe were starting to show interest in more than just a cheap bed for the night. "It was always about typical young travelers being ready and more appreciative of design items," says Anwar

Mekhayech, the design lead for all Generator properties and a partner of Toronto-based firm Design Agency, which does the chain's interiors. "They're so design-savvy when it comes to everything that they use, whether it be a laptop or their iPhone or their clothing."

Keeping that sensibility in mind, the hotel group invites local designers and artists to infuse each new property with the feel of its host city. For Berlin Mitte, the brand's second outpost in the city, Generator teamed up with interior architect Ester Bruzkus. "We wanted her to have free rein to bring in the ideas she was using in her other designs in Berlin," Mekhayech says. Mark Asipowicz from WAF Architects served as the architecture lead, helping to join two existing office buildings around a central courtyard. The three-team design collaboration produced a space that reflects Berlin's vibrant culture, while honoring the aesthetic of the other Generator properties in cities including Barcelona, Copenhagen, and Dublin. "It's got the Generator style in all the raw materials [we use], like reclaimed wood, exposed concrete, and steel," Mekhayech says. "That very strong material palette works really well in Berlin—Berlin's a very strong, forward kind of city."

Lobby, Courtyard, and Gallery

The hostel is positioned around a central courtyard, a hangout space equipped with café tables, trees laced with string lights, bicycle racks, and a wire-embroidered stainless-steel sculpture in the shape of a "G" by British artist Bella Leonard. The reception area features an alcove where laptop-wielding visitors can lounge on cubes upholstered in denim and fluorescent pink or orange fabric. Flashes of these bright colors, juxtaposed with dark and neutral tones, reappear throughout the hotel. "That's what I see in Berlin a lot: a clash of different styles," says Mekhayech of the hostel's color scheme. "It relates to the artist culture. There's gentrification in Berlin, but there's also a very

affordable, funky art side to it." The city's art scene comes to life in the hostel's subterranean gallery space, a skylit venue that hosts concerts and showcases rotating exhibitions by young local artists. "It's so 'Berlin' to have this raw, concrete, natural-lit art space in the back of the hotel," Mekhayech says, adding, "It's a space to party in as well."

Café, Canteen, and Bar

Next to the reception area is a café lined with reclaimed-wood wall panels. "We left all the ceilings exposed, so there are concrete ceilings and you can see all the ducts wrapped in silver," Mekhayech says. String "drawings" by French artist Sébastien Preschoux hang from the pipes, and café tables with lavender- and black-painted chairs provide perches for sipping coffee and surfing the Internet. A canteen for casual meals features wooden picnic tables and white walls that British artist Luke Embden covered in a mural of notable Berlin sites and scenes. The ground floor is also home to a library and a bar adorned with dark purple wool drapes, tube light fixtures by Toronto-based firm Castor, and car headlights by Beirut's PSLAB.

Rooms

Upstairs, Berlin-based street artist Thierry Noir decorated the guestroom hallways with bright, floor-to-ceiling murals of faces in the style of work he did on the Berlin Wall during the 1980s. The dorm-style rooms, fitting from four to 10 guests, have vinyl wood flooring, en-suite bathrooms, and white-painted bunk beds, each equipped with a lockable storage compartment and a light. "We kept the rooms very simple and plain," Mekhayech says. Twin rooms with wood-clad walls offer the option of more privacy. "There's more furniture in the private rooms so it feels like a hotel room," he says. "But it's still a hostel at hostel prices."

Generator's low cost means that the team had to come up with efficient design solutions. "We don't have huge budgets, but we are focusing on the common spaces and collaborations [with local talent]," Mekhayech says. "People want to go somewhere that's got a cool vibe and cool DJs and cool events. Design is just one part of it."

BEN PUNDOLE'S TAKE ON GENERATOR:

This is a hostel done Mitte style, with an aesthetic that fits the trendy neighborhood of the former East Berlin. The communal space is as cool as it comes, with a slew of colorful guests to match: The characters here include Scandinavian nomads, raving Brits, and design school debutantes. The hostel boasts a courtyard, a lively bar, a chilled-out café space, and wonderful design throughout. Generator, you deserve all the love you've been getting as new locations launch in different cities: You're like a good old friend storming through puberty trying to figure it all out—and having a load of fun doing it.



