

# PROPERTY REPORT

Issue 133  
December-January 2016  
S\$8, RM21.20, IDR64,000,  
THB200, HK\$48, PHP280

KDN FPS 1662/10/2012 (022863)  
MCI (P) 092/06/2015  
ISSN 17934237  
9 471793 473003

LUXURY REAL ESTATE, ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN IN ASIA

## ZEN AND THE ART OF LANDSCAPE GARDENING



- Thailand's top landscaped properties • Regional roundup: the winners and losers from 2015 • Why Berlin's new wave of expats may not be welcome • Inside a Viet vet's custom-built home • Is Ubud Bali's latest affluent enclave?

# PUBLISHING EDITORIAL

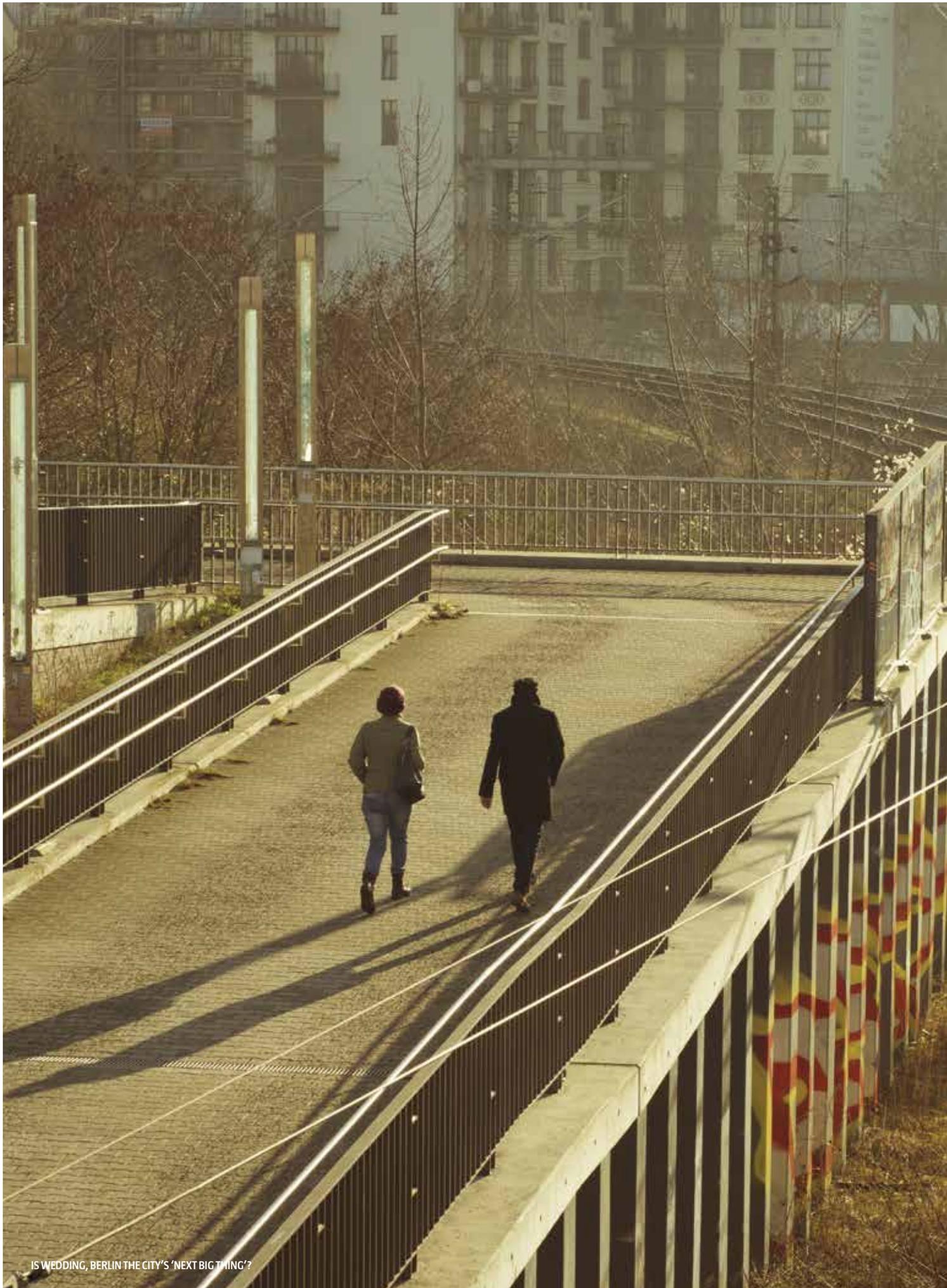
Issue 133 DECEMBER-JANUARY 2016

TERRY BLACKBURN	<b>CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER</b> <i>terry@ensign-media.com</i>
LIAM ARAN BARNES	<b>EDITOR-IN-CHIEF</b> <i>liam@ensign-media.com</i>
DUNCAN FORGAN	<b>EDITOR</b> <i>duncan@ensign-media.com</i>
RICHARD ALLAN AQUINO	<b>DEPUTY EDITOR</b> <i>allan@ensign-media.com</i>
AUSANEE DEJTANASOONTORN	<b>ART DIRECTOR</b> <i>ausanee@ensign-media.com</i>
PORAMIN LEELASATJARANA	<b>GRAPHIC DESIGNER</b> <i>min@ensign-media.com</i>
ALVA HORGAN	<b>SALES DIRECTOR</b> <i>alva@ensign-media.com</i>
UDOMLUK SUWAN	<b>SALES MANAGER</b> <i>udomluk@ensign-media.com</i>
SUNNIYA KWATRA	<b>ASSISTANT SALES MANAGER</b> <i>sunniya@ensign-media.com</i>
PRAWRAPAT ATTHARATCHATANAN	<b>SENIOR SALES EXECUTIVE</b> <i>prawrapat@ensign-media.com</i>
KAORU KAWAHARA	<b>SALES EXECUTIVES</b> <i>kaoru@ensign-media.com</i>
PLOYPILIN THAMCHANALERT	<i>ploypilin@ensign-media.com</i>
SUPHATRA PAKDEEWIROJ	<b>SALES AND MARKETING EXECUTIVE PHUKET, PHANG NGA, SAMUI AND KRABI</b> <i>suphatra@ensign-media.com</i>
BHAWADHOL POOWASUNPETCH	<b>EVENTS MANAGER</b> <i>bhawadhhol@ensign-media.com</i>
PREAW RUNGRUENGRAYUPKUL	<b>AWARDS ENTRIES MANAGER</b> <i>preaw@ensign-media.com</i>
TANATTHA SAENGMORAKOT	<b>AWARDS MARKETING MANAGER</b> <i>tanattha@ensign-media.com</i>
RATCHAMON MAISUEB	<b>INTERNATIONAL DISTRIBUTION MANAGER</b> <i>Mint@ensign-media.com</i>
	<b>ENQUIRIES, COMMENT, LETTERS, EDITORIAL SUBMISSIONS</b> <i>editorial@property-report.com</i>
	<b>GENERAL</b> <i>info@property-report.com</i>
	<b>SUBSCRIPTION</b> <i>subscription@property-report.com</i>

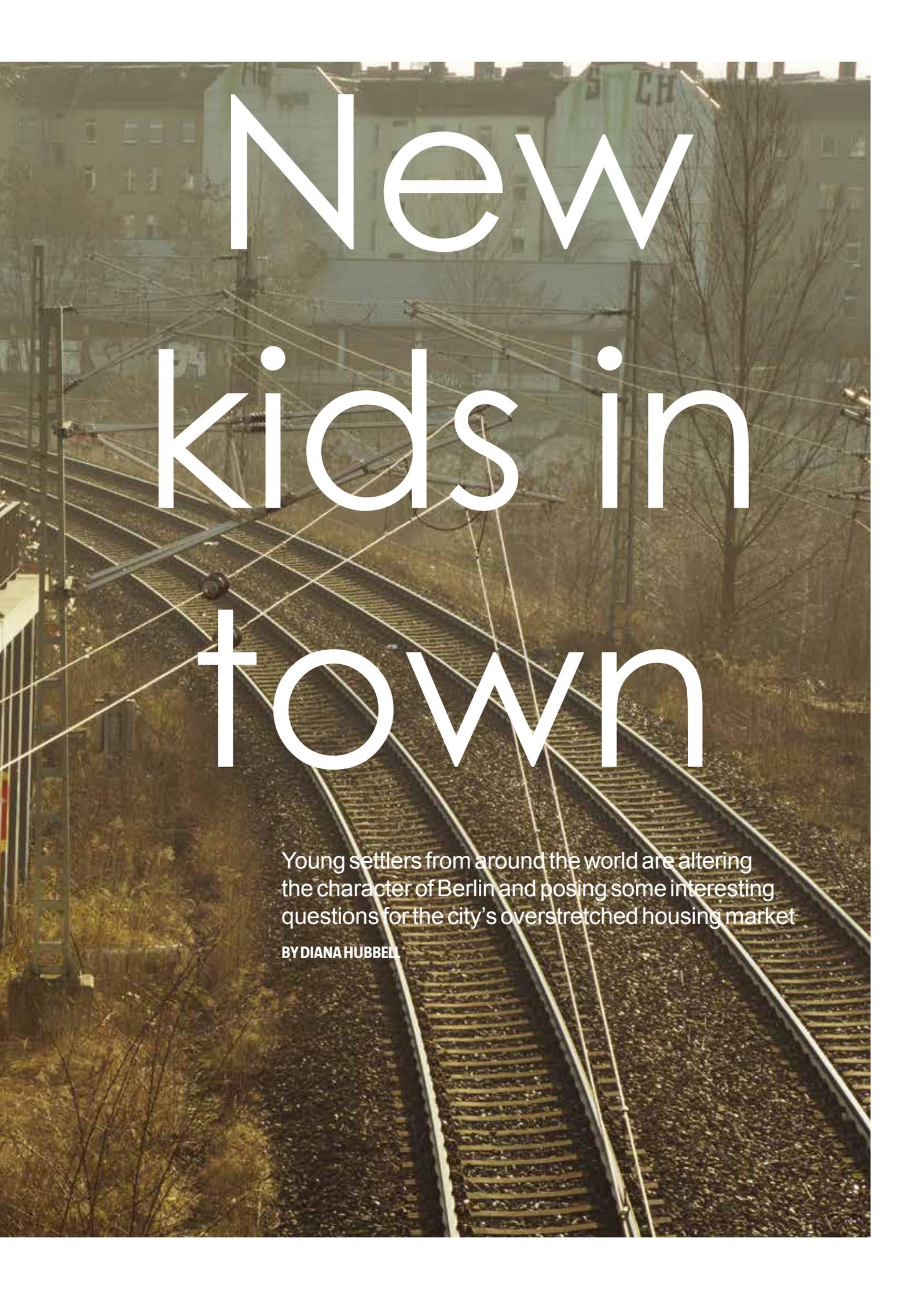
**Ensign Media Co. Ltd.**  
**SINGAPORE** : 120 Telok Ayer Street  
Singapore 068589

**BANGKOK**: 55 BIO HOUSE BLDG, 5th Fl., Sukhumvit Soi 39,  
Klongton Nua, Wattana Bangkok 10110.  
t: +66 (0) 2662 5195; f: +66 (0) 2662 5198  
[www.ensign-media.com](http://www.ensign-media.com)

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IS WEDDING, BERLIN THE CITY'S 'NEXT BIG THING'?



# New kids in town

Young settlers from around the world are altering the character of Berlin and posing some interesting questions for the city's overstretched housing market

BY DIANA HUBBEL





## IT'S THE BEST CITY FOR YOUNG, CREATIVE PEOPLE IN EUROPE. IT'S AFFORDABLE AND FAR CHEAPER THAN CITIES SUCH AS LONDON, FOR INSTANCE

**A**T THE end of 2010, after five years of living in London, writer James Glazebrook and photographer Zoë Noble took the plunge and bought one-way tickets to Berlin. “It was cheap and seemed very chill, creative and collaborative, especially in comparison with the competitiveness and stress of London,” recalls Glazebrook.

The pair launched *überlin*, a popular blog about expat life, and later established a co-working space in the hip enclave of Kreuzberg. The room is reliably packed with journalists, designers, photographers and other freelancers chatting over their MacBook Airs. “It is no secret that creative professionals are flocking here,” adds Glazebrook. “Now that there’s good coffee, co-working spaces, an established English-speaking international community – and people like us broadcasting these things – Berlin seems like a viable alternative to other major cities.”

Glazebrook is just one of many émigrés bewitched by Berlin’s unique atmosphere. The city’s population has been swelling at a brisk rate of 40,000 per year for the past decade. These incomers hail primarily from European or North American nations, due to minimal or non-existent visa requirements.

Thelise Stene Hansteen, a Norwegian photographer, Eleonora Yenn Castellari, an Italian jewellery designer and Zana Fejzic, an American graphic designer, belly-dance instructor and blogger, all pitched up in Berlin within the last year, despite not having anything resembling a solid job contract. Newcomers such as these have become so ubiquitous that *Exberliner*, a local city magazine, coined the term “yuki” (Young Urban Kreative International) as an alternative to “yuppie.”

“In my opinion, it’s the best city for young, creative people in Europe. It’s affordable and far cheaper than cities such as London for instance,” says Roman Heidrich, national director at Jones Lang LaSalle and a specialist in residential valuation.

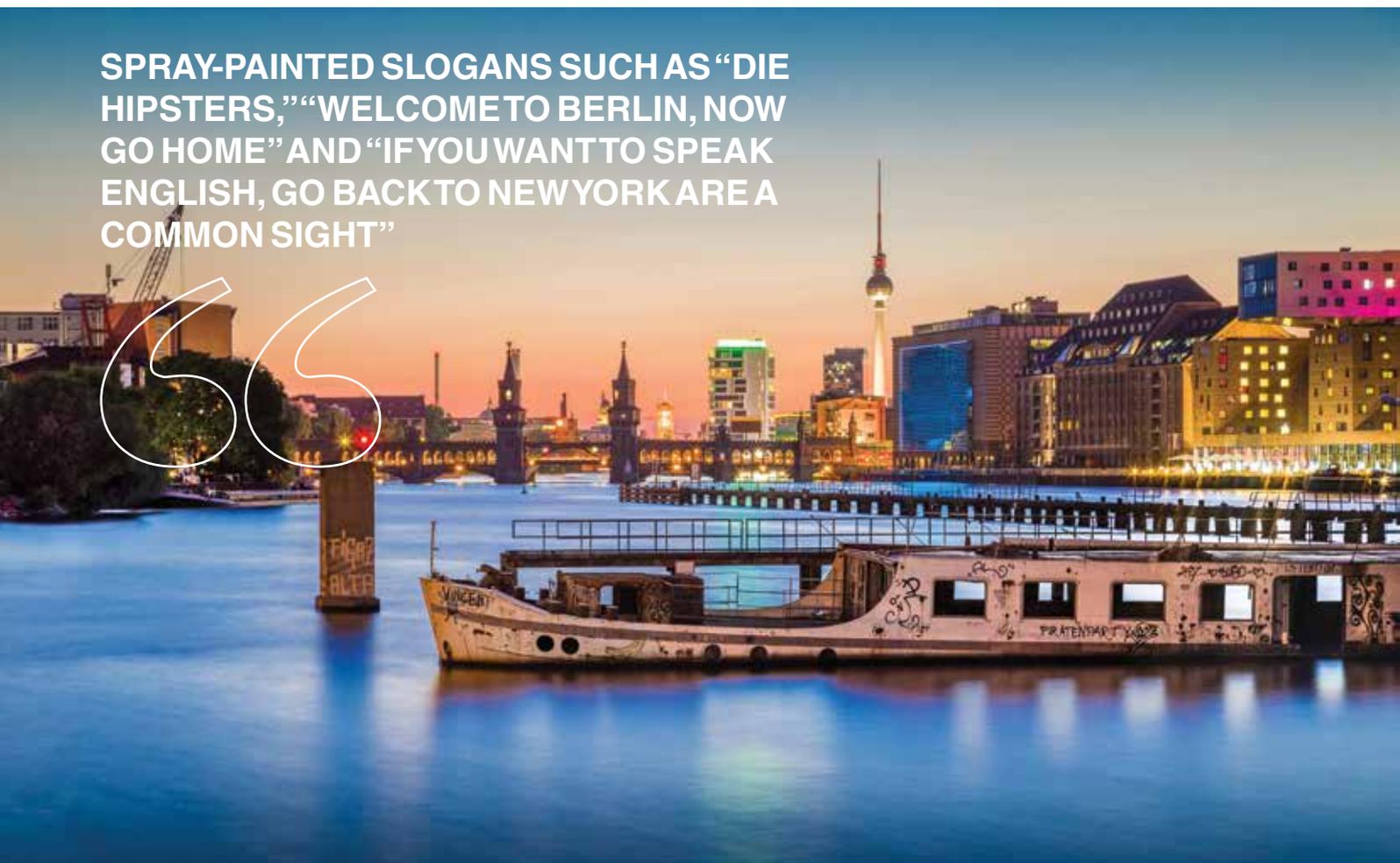
Cheaper than the British capital it may be, but the influx of arrivals, combined with a skyrocketing tourism industry – the city witnessed 28.7 million overnight stays in 2014 – and an above-average economic growth rate, are driving the prices up. Unemployment, though still above 10 percent, is at an all-time low and expected to continue to fall. Once derelict warehouses in formerly gritty, industrial neighbourhoods such as Kreuzberg and Friedrichshain now house fashionable restaurants and cocktail bars, while residential property sells for prices approaching those of historically desirable addresses in Mitte or Prenzlauer Berg. Even working-class Neukölln now boasts co-working spaces, yoga studios, farmers’ markets and coffee shops like Melbourne Canteen where a portion of toast with avocado costs EUR5.90 (USD6.65) and the staff speak little or no German. These rapid changes have Berliners worried and real estate investors eagerly clamouring for a piece of the action.

“It’s crazy if you’re looking for a new apartment,” adds Heidrich. “When I moved here end of 2007, I rented a flat in Mitte for around EUR5.50 (USD6.20) per square metre. Now it would be upwards of EUR10 (USD11.20). “The prices have increased very sharply in recent years and that’s a trend we expect to continue.”

Unsurprisingly, this dramatic shift isn’t pleasing everyone. In a city where 85 percent of the population are tenants, the

OPPOSITE PHOTO:  
BERLIN IS WELCOMING A  
NEW WAVE OF CREATIVE  
TALENT IN FROM THE  
COLD

SPRAY-PAINTED SLOGANS SUCH AS “DIE HIPSTERS,” “WELCOME TO BERLIN, NOW GO HOME” AND “IF YOU WANT TO SPEAK ENGLISH, GO BACK TO NEW YORK ARE A COMMON SIGHT”



rent spike has caused considerable alarm. In addition, the increasing gentrification has raised questions about how a city that former mayor Klaus Wowereit characterised as “poor, but sexy” will maintain its identity.

Spray-painted graffiti slogans such as “die hipsters,” “welcome to Berlin, now go home” and “if you want to speak English, go back to New York” are a common sight. Meanwhile, plans to build a luxury condominium where part of the Berlin Wall once stood several years ago drew more than 6,000 in protest.

“The fact that wealth creation and development were effectively halted by the Cold War has meant that the city has always been a haven for poor artists working outside the mainstream,” explains Glazebrook. “Tourism and a promising tech scene are offering a real chance for Berlin to compete on an international scale. They also risk damaging the rawness and creativity that make the city what it is.”

KREUZBERG AND  
FRIEDRICHSHAIN ARE  
POPULAR RESIDENTIAL  
NEIGHBOURHOODS

In June 2015, a rent cap was introduced in Berlin, but some experts are sceptical as to how effective such measures will be. “We think that the enforcement for this very complicated law will be very difficult as long as there’s no specific body to enforce it,” says Konstantin Kortmann of Jones Lang LaSalle. “It’s a lot of PR for the public.”

Both as a response to rising rents and Berlin’s projected economic growth, more and more investors are choosing to purchase property. “Condominium sales doubled from around 12,000 units in 2012 to more than 24,000 units in 2014,” says Michael Schlatterer, a director at CBRE Germany. Foreigners purchased approximately half of those units.

“Nowadays prices are comparable to some other European cities, if you want to live in a cool location,” says Erwin de Buijzer, a Dutch national who moved to Berlin in 2012. “If you are less focused on location, you can still find a bargain here.”



THE FAMOUS  
FRIEDRICHSTRASSE  
SHOPPING STREET WAS  
ONCE DIVIDED BY THE  
BERLIN WALL

However, if current trends are anything to go by these bargains will become thinner on the ground. According to a recent report by JLL, condominium prices rose by an average 10 percent in 2014 and are expected to continue rising. Notable new upscale developments include Living Levels, yoo berlin and The Mile. Around 6,000 new units were built in 2014 and 8,500 in 2015, but demand far outstrips supply, driving property values up still higher.

Not everyone sees rising rents and property prices as the end of Berlin's free-spirited culture. Though it is acknowledged that the city is in flux, experts are quick to point to the upside of recent developments.

"I see a very positive future for Berlin," says Heidrich. "It will still stay cheaper than many other cities. Rents are increasing, but the economic situation is also getting better."

Whereas two decades ago Berlin was a conflict-shattered ruin with daunting levels of unemployment, it now boasts flourishing art,

culinary, tech and music scenes. Foreign creatives are behind popular events such as Street Food Thursdays, a weekly market where trucks sell everything from German dumplings to Korean bibimbap and Colombian arepas, as well as the semi-annual Bread & Butter, a tradeshow that draws top independent design brands from around the globe.

"The restaurants here are better now, the shops are nicer, everything has cleaned up quite a bit," says Giulia Pines, a writer originally from New York who offers advice to thousands of aspiring Berliners in her book *Finding Your Feet in Berlin: A Guide to Making a Home in the Hauptstadt*. "On the other hand, that Berlin spirit of adventure, the empty spaces that used to be here, ready to be turned into anything, all that is disappearing now."

Though the Berlin of today is vastly different from the city she moved to in 2007 Pines has no plans to leave. "Berlin is evolving," she says. And growing pains, it seems, are an unavoidable part of that process. ■



# HIP HOODS

**Berlin is still a city divided. In lieu of a cultural centre, the city's districts boast their own attractions and character. Here are some of the most sought after spots.**

## **Charlottenburg**

Landmarks in this posh area such as Ku'damm, Berlin's ritziest shopping street and KaDeWe, an upscale department store, have been augmented by stylish boutiques including Hotel Zoo Berlin, as well as revitalised icons like the Zoo Palast theatre.

## **Mitte**

Rosenthalerplatz and Torstrasse play host to the city's burgeoning startup scene and a bevy of upscale boutique stores. Many of the city's most ambitious building projects are located here, which is why a 2015 report by CBRE named it "the most important location for residential development."

## **Kreuzberg-Friedrichshain**

Technically separate neighbourhoods, the two are nevertheless often lumped together. Formerly blue-collar, Kreuzberg's working class days are long over and it is in high demand. Certain areas, especially those

near the Friedrichshain border, are nightlife hubs, while the areas surrounding Bergmannstrasse and Graefestrasse are filled with families.

## **Neukölln**

The Turkish kebab outlets that once characterised this neighbourhood are rapidly being replaced by blonde-wood-bedecked coffee shops, coworking spaces and bars. The northern areas are in high demand, particularly the area bordering Kreuzberg, which is known affectionately as "Kreuzkölln."

## **Wedding**

Once a backwater, this district was heralded as "the next big thing" by The New York Times in August 2015 and is becoming increasingly attractive to investors. The areas along the Mitte border are a currently an attractive option to investors looking to commute between the two.

TORSTRASSE IN MITTE PLAYS HOSTS TO A BURGEONING STARTUP SCENE AND A NUMBER OF UPSCALE BOUTIQUE STORES