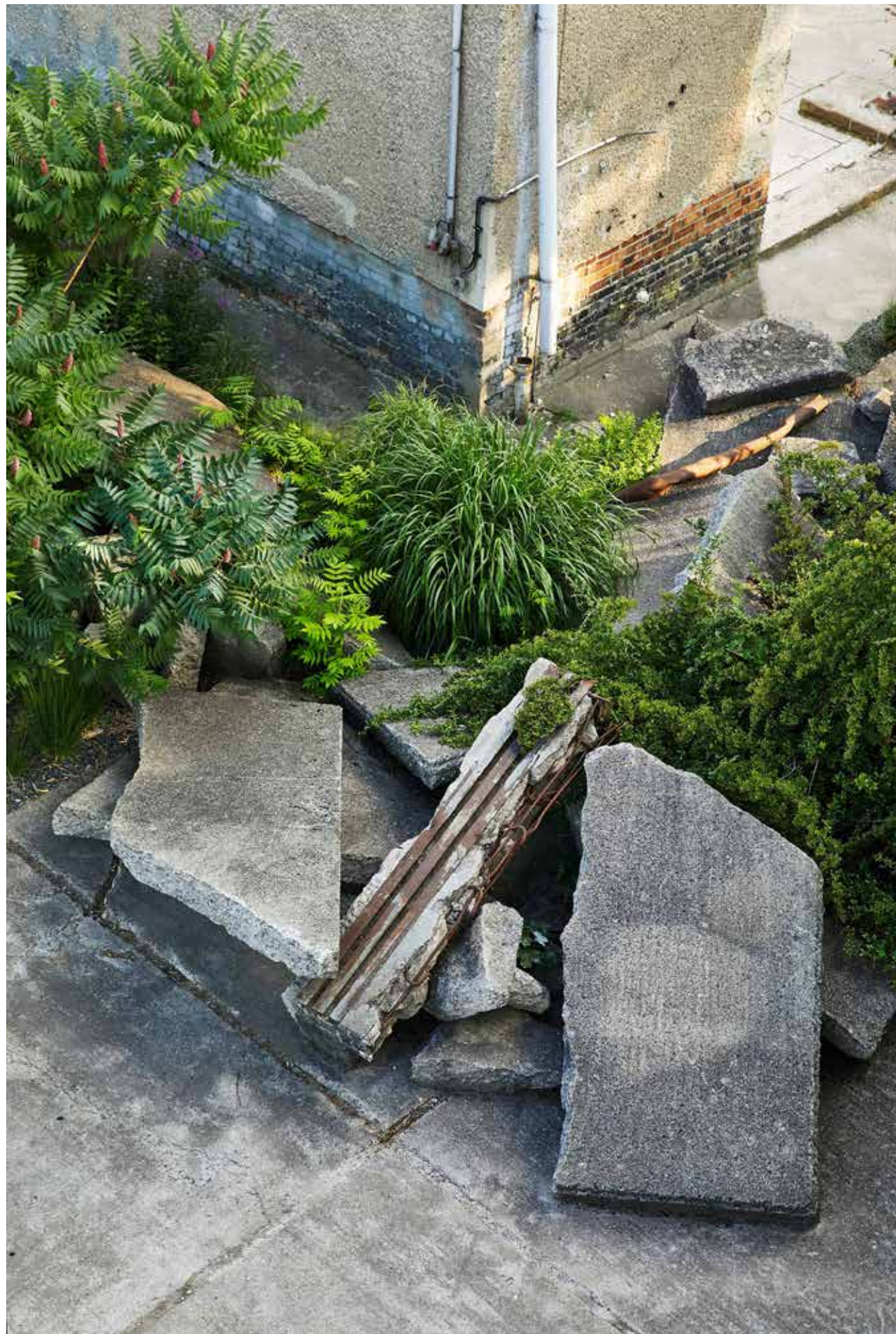


The Ruin Garden

Sweet-smelling purple *phlox*, grasses and sumac trees conceal the roughness of the ruin in full summer.

An architect and her artist partner have turned a decrepit former shipyard in Berlin into a garden as unique as it is picturesque.

text: Zoe Deleuil
photography: Andreas Gehrke (NOSHE Photography)



top A frayed wall contrasts with the clean lines of the family home, a 1960s-style concrete and glass box balanced on pillars. **bottom** Anselm Reyle's oversized vases, inspired by 1960s Fat Lava ceramics, appear to float on their mirrored plinths. **opposite** Concrete salvaged from the shipyard floor now recreates *Das Eismeer*, a 19th-century German landscape painting.



● The atmospheric Ruin Garden, which rises from the remains of a dilapidated warehouse in East Berlin, was created through a process of 'curated decay.' A collaboration between architect Tanja Lincke and her partner, artist Anselm Reyle, the garden honours the site's history while making something new.

The couple bought the two-acre former shipyard from the Berlin state in 2008. Once occupied by the East German harbour police, this unloved industrial site on the banks of the Spree River in Treptow-Köpenick had been more or less abandoned since the overnight collapse of East Germany in 1989.

Formerly used for boat repairs, the crumbling warehouse sat in the middle of the site. Accelerating its collapse and transforming it into a walled garden was a bold yet logical solution to introduce light and link the family home, designed by Tanja, with the renovated police buildings that now house the couple's side-by-side studios.

"We didn't need such a huge volume in the centre of the block, but we wanted to preserve it in some way, to shape something new out of the existing building rather than replacing it completely," says Tanja.

The follies and overgrown ruins of romantic English gardens were the inspiration behind the design. Although the building's decomposition appears artless, it involved a considered process of working out exactly what to keep and what to take away. Tanja modelled the design before Anselm climbed up a huge ladder and outlined the desired form of the 'ruin' onto the walls with a paintbrush. Demolition workers then removed the roof, much of the concrete flooring and parts of the walls, following his line to the brick. >



A huge doorway now stands permanently open to the Spree river, while the rails that were once used to bring patrol boats in for repairs remain in place. **opposite top** The hall-sized Ruin Garden separates the family home from the couple's side-by-side studios and offices. **bottom left** Autumnal rowan berries and golden grasses beneath the family home. **right** Many of the building's original features, including washroom tiles and a chimney tower, have been left as they were found.

What remains is a garden defined by walls instead of fences or hedges, generous enough for summer barbecues, a game of football, and even the family's caravan. It provides shelter and traps warmth on cooler days, yet feels open and light all year-round. An oversized 'doorway' frames a view of the Spree, while a pile of concrete shards left over from the warehouse floor has been transformed into a riverside sculpture, recreating *Das Eismeer*, or *The Sea of Ice*, a painting by the nineteenth-century German landscape artist, Caspar David Friedrich.

Like many a gardener before them, the couple started off by growing everything they liked the look of. A few years later, they pared the planting back to fewer varieties in repeating patterns, choosing the most beautiful colours and textures for each of Berlin's distinct seasons, along with local natives. A gardener now visits regularly to maintain the balance and keep the self-seeding plants in check. >



“We wanted to include plants that are the first to take over these abandoned areas,” says Tanja. “So we have birch and staghorn sumac trees, and masses of tall grasses.”

In winter, the white-trunked birches, twisting sumac branches and red rosehips cast a gothic spell, dramatised by the white walls and grey skies. Spring brings masses of pale cream *narcissus* and *phlox*, followed by the dark green shade of summer, with tall grasses and pink *echinacea* flowers thriving in the sheltered warmth. Come September, brilliant autumn colours take hold, with yellow birch and red sumac leaves, orange rowan berries and feathery golden grasses. And all year-round, the precisely cut geometry of the lawn provides a counterpoint to the wild plant life and roughness of the ruin.

“In Berlin there are not many lost places left, as nature gradually takes over or new buildings replace them,” says Tanja. “For us, it was important to leave something of the site’s history and preserve the building’s industrial elements, even as we gave it a new dimension.”



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More than a work of art, the garden is a playground and football field for the couple’s children, a summer gathering place for staff, and a location for photo shoots and other events, including a short film by Wim Wenders for fashion designer Jil Sander.

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