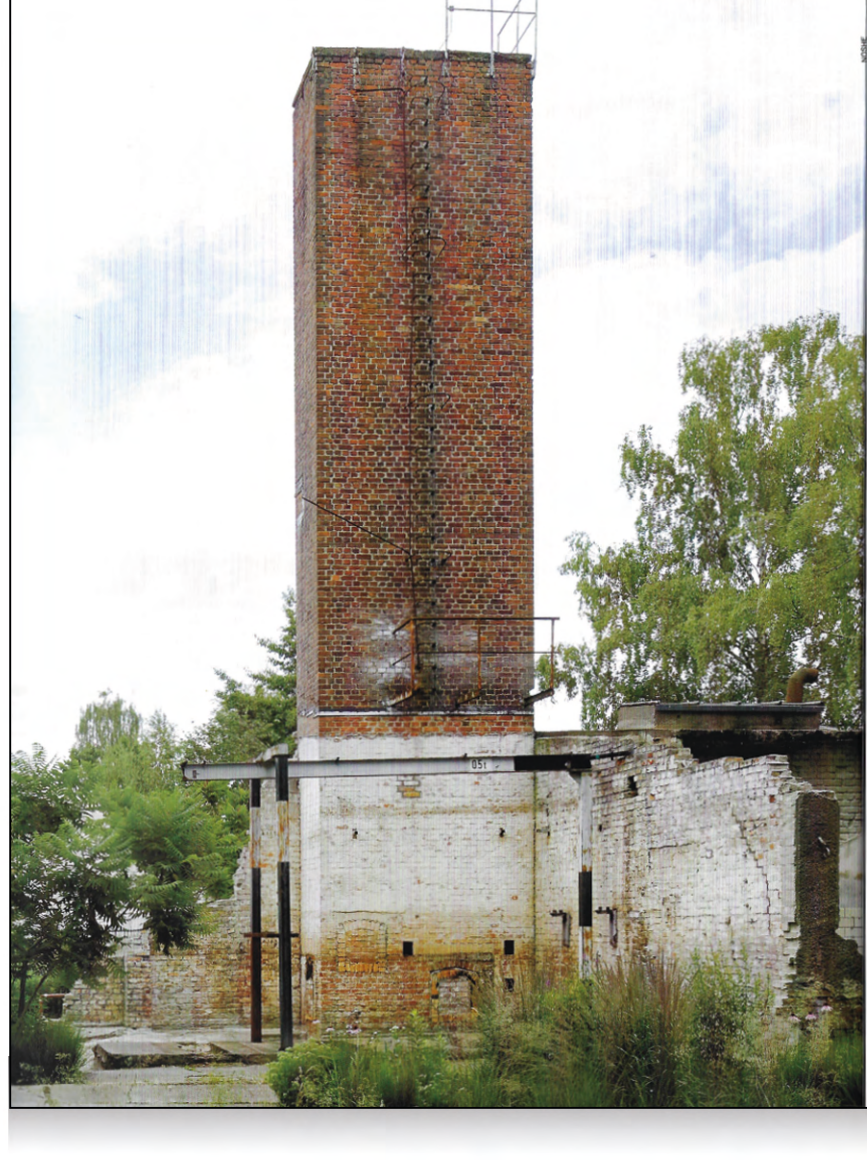


Reclaiming the ruins

Despite building anew at the Ruin Garden in Berlin, Tanja Lincke and Anselm Reyle preserve its wild character, bearing witness to an uneasy past, writes Fiona Shipwright



Standing in the middle of the Ruin Garden created by architect Tanja Lincke and her artistic husband Anselm Reyle on the banks of the Spree in Berlin, brings to mind a walled garden, but one with the country house tradition. Few of these are likely to feature a metal sign reading *Landesrat* (the category of hardy pioneer species is typically the first to move into post-industrial wasteland, unperturbed by thin, poor quality soil. 'Provisionally completed' in 2014, the garden is described by its creators as 'a reference to so many places in Berlin which are nearly all gone now - some not, but they will be. That refers to an aesthetic associated with the city - particularly that of the post-Wall 'Neuers' - but also a sense of being able to perceive the complex layers of history and memory that Berlin has variously borne witness to and endured. 'If somebody takes over a place but they don't like the atmosphere and try to make something completely new... then you have nothing,' explains Lincke. 'You don't have any sense of what was here and work with this substance.' Looking to relocate his studio, Reyle acquired the overgrown plot in 2008, when vacant sites previously owned by the East German state were being auctioned off. The ruins that give the garden its name are the leftovers of a post-war bombhouse that belonged to the GDR's *Ministerpräsident* (leader police) which was still fully intact at time of auction, (if seriously dilapidated). Unlike the other buildings here, the extent of not in the bombhouse structure meant it couldn't be removed. However, enclosing it completely ran counter to the architect's approach: instead the building transpired into the idiosyncratic walled garden at the heart of the site, surrounded by the ensemble of buildings Lincke has now constructed or transformed here, the most recent being the family home completed in 2017.

Entering from the south-east via the site's main access path, abetted by mature oak and beech trees overgrown by just-above-tanned undergrowth, you pass through a pair of the several ornamental stagers some trees that call the garden home, a species that typically thrives in ruderal sites such as roadsides. A fully intact chimney stack in the south-east corner looms over the still flood remains of what were once enclosed rooms underneath. Now exposed to the elements, the partitioned but still present original light switches, fittings and pipes seem to have transcended their own mundanity and now command attention,

slightly jarring with any sense of ye olde, ivy-covered ruins.

The remains of concrete floor then give way to the lawn, where the four corners of the partly demolished building tend to shape the area, but there is no feeling of a bird's-eye view symmetry weighing down on the experience at ground level. It's interesting what happens inside this area, because you still really feel the space (of the original building) but then you look up and: sky,' says Lincke. The lawn itself cuts through the ruins at a diagonal, again offsetting any hint of a really boxed-in garden, with blocks of tall grasses and plants such as echinacea and phlox (both chosen for their pioneer qualities) intersecting along its edges.

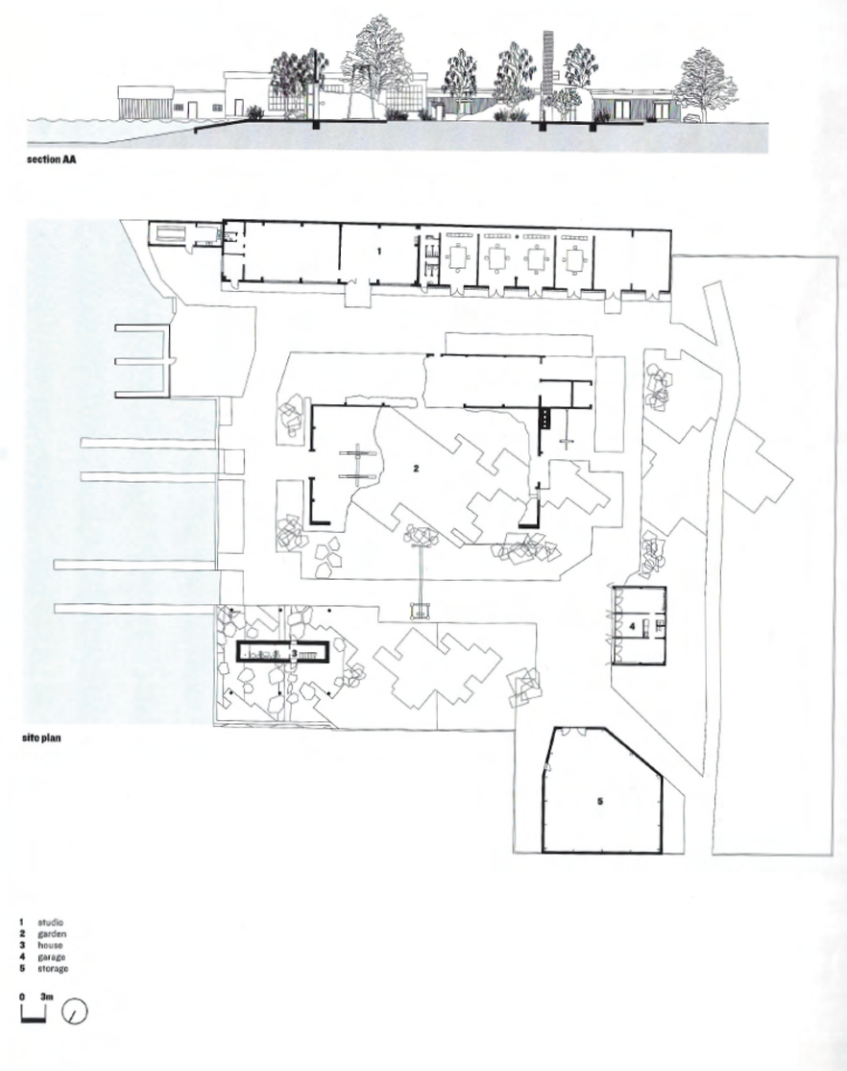
Where the garden meets the river, the largest section of the bombhouse has been preserved. An old boat hoist salvaged from the building sits in front of the original concertina doors, creating a proscenium that frames the river view; the still-visible rails the boats would launch from providing additional vantage lines from below. Nearby is one of several mounds of concrete dotted in and around the site. In some places partly overgrown by orange firethorn, these mounds, sculptural piles of rubble, were once used to pre-emptively cover the entire site. A way Industriemuseum reference to the natural Romanticism of Caspar David Friedrich's painting *The Sea of Ice* (1824), Lincke and Reyle also try to reconcile the seriousness with an euphoric that engages the past with the kitchen - fully, even, in every sense of the word - of creating ruins in reverse. The plot's spirit of renewal and its past requires ongoing tending to ensure that

The door to the former bombhouse (opening towards the river) is the entrance to the Ruin Garden as the architect and his wife have preserved. The chimney stack (opposite) still stands tall over the garden. The chimney stack (opposite) still stands tall over the garden. The chimney stack (opposite) still stands tall over the garden. The chimney stack (opposite) still stands tall over the garden.

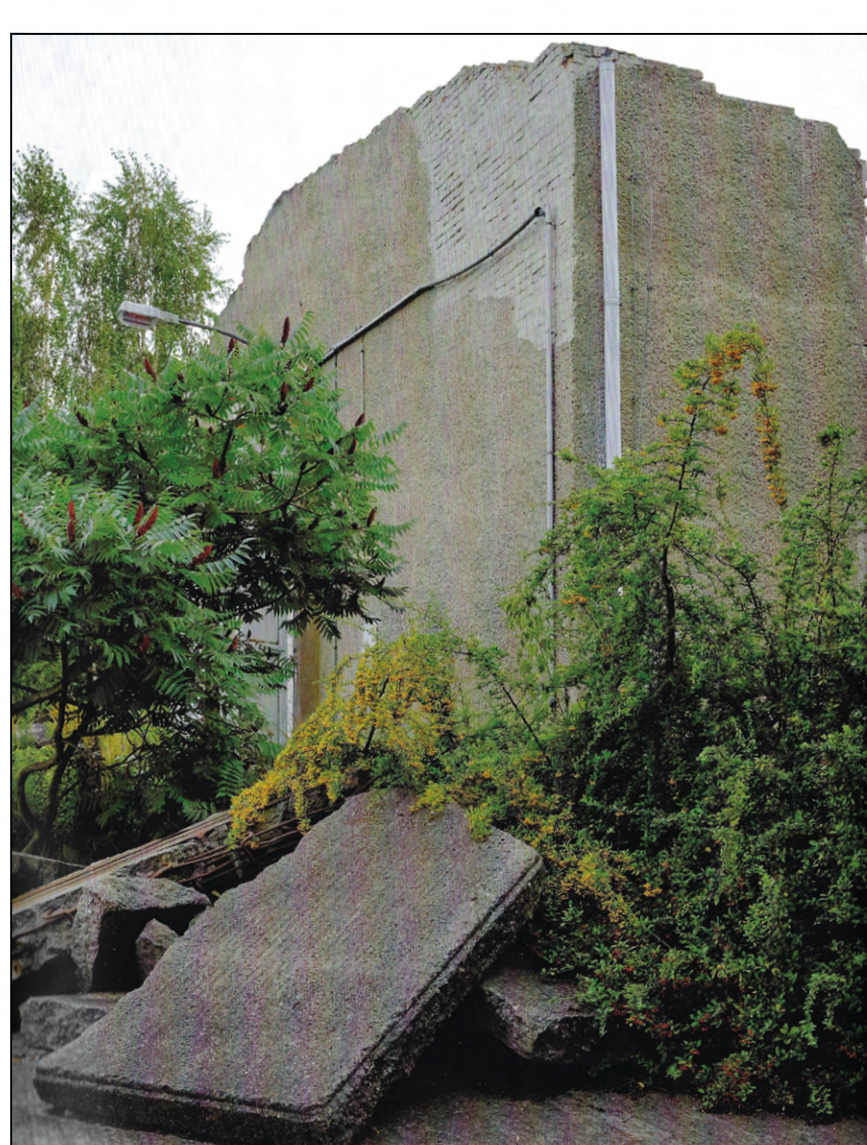
'The garden's power lies in its functionless nature, adaptable for a rotating menu of temporary uses, as the site and its occupants change over time'



The site is enclosed by Lincke and Reyle's newly constructed family home (shown) as well as each of their workspaces (right). Lincke reintroduced the industrial sheds adjacent to the former destroyed building on the larger, right elevation.



1 studio
2 garden
3 house
4 garage



nature does not reclaim the land - or the architecture. The ruins were carefully planned through experiments with modeling, when the demolition company turned up, they were surprised to be tasked with chipping only that which lay above a hand-drawn purple line circumventing the walls of the bombhouse. The results were not intended to be merely a backdrop for the plants, nor are the plants regarded as decorative flourishes for more dominant sculptural elements. 'We take care to prime back the same trees, for example,' Lincke explains, 'we don't want a fairly tall situation where the plants are completely taking over the walls.'

Notions of entanglement over time and of some plants vying for space over others have parallels with the garden's wider context, too. The complexity of the entangled histories Berlin has accumulated is readable not just through its current architecture but also through that which is now absent, despite attempts to start anew - the newly opened Humboldt Forum in the city centre, a partial reconstruction of the city's former Prussian palace on the site of the demolished GDR's Palast der Republik is only the most recent instalment in an ongoing debate about not just what gets built, but what remains.

In the Ruin Garden, just as effort is taken to avoid any one plant dominating, Lincke was keen for the garden to balance the intersecting temporal cycles and histories that coalesce here. There is a way in which light moves through the ruins over the course of a day, along with the shifting halos of the garden's hues over the course of a year - the vibrant greens of the grasses pop against the brick and rust of the ruins in spring, later following their lead and turning copper in autumn. There are the rhythms of the family and colleagues who live and work here - at present, a set of sculptures from Reyle's studio stand, more than a little precariously, within the radius of a pair of miniature football positions in the lawn. And there is the timeline of the surrounding city - its future perhaps signposted by the legions of cranes working on waterfront developments upriver, the physical leftovers at the site the residues of its past.

As for the next six years and beyond, this garden's stewards have some rough plans, reasserting the geometric shape of the lawn is on the to-do list, and they are keen to show more art here. Otherwise, the only requirement is to preserve as much of the character of the site as it was found - without trapping it in amber. They are happy for time to take on the role of hand gardener in this respect, with no end point on the horizon. 'It's constantly changing', says Lincke, before Reyle adds: 'Somehow, we're still in the middle of it.'



Rubble remains on site (opposite) to reveal the economy of a former use and a former city. The brick structure of the former bombhouse (left) still next to some still intact walls (below left). Preserved tall grasses include the garden all year round, while hardy species of flowering plants (right) add colour to the summer months.

'The intention was for the garden to balance the intersecting temporal cycles and histories that coalesce here'

